M50 MATHEMATICA CENTER FOR STUDYING DISABILITY POLICY

REPORT

Promoting Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income (PROMISE): PROMISE Programs' Use of Effective Transition Practices in Serving Youth with Disabilities

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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TABLES

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ABLE	Achieving a Better Life Experience
ASPIRE	Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment
DB101	Disability Benefits 101
DOL	U.S. Department of Labor
ED	U.S. Department of Education
IEP	Individualized education program
ILC	Independent living center
LEA	Local education agency
MIS	Management information system
MOU	Memorandum of understanding
NASET	National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition
NTACT	National Technical Assistance Center on Transition
PROMISE	Promoting Readiness of Minors in SSI
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
VR	Vocational rehabilitation
WIPA	Work Incentives Planning and Assistance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Improving the educational and employment outcomes of youth with disabilities—and reducing their dependence on Supplemental Security Income (SSI)—are high priorities for federal policymakers. To address these issues, the U.S. Department of Education, the Social Security Administration, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Labor launched a joint initiative known as Promoting Readiness of Minors in SSI (PROMISE). The PROMISE initiative funds and evaluates model demonstration projects that promote positive changes for SSI youth, starting at ages 14 through 16, and their families.

In this report, we use information collected as part of the national evaluation of PROMISE to describe services offered by the six PROMISE projects. Specifically, we look at services that reflect what are considered to be best practices in assisting transition-age youth with disabilities.

All of the PROMISE projects offer a range of services and activities that have been deemed by third-party organizations as effective in helping youth with disabilities make a successful transition to adulthood. Key services include interagency collaboration; connections to local programs and service providers through case management, benefits counseling, and financial literacy training; career awareness and paid work experiences; and parent training and information. But only one of these services (paid work experiences) has strong evidence supporting its effectiveness. The level of evidence for other PROMISE services and practices is weaker because none has been rigorously tested. The evaluation of the PROMISE projects could increase the evidence base on what works in helping SSI youth make the transition to adulthood.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Improving educational and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities and reducing Supplemental Security Income (SSI) dependency are high priorities for federal policymakers. Youth with disabilities—and youth who receive SSI, in particular—face individual, family, and systemic barriers to a successful transition to adulthood. Youth receiving SSI have lower rates of competitive employment and lower wages relative to the general youth population (Honeycutt et al. 2017a, 2017b) and to youth enrolled in employment programs (Fabian 2007; Hemmeter et al. 2015). Nearly one-third of youth SSI recipients drop out of high school before reaching age 18, whereas 43 percent have problems in school that result in suspension or expulsion (Hemmeter et al. 2009). Compared with other young adults, former child SSI recipients are substantially more likely to be inactive in employment, school, or service programs; to have substantially higher rates of arrests; and to have higher high school dropout rates (Loprest and Wittenburg 2007; Wittenburg and Loprest 2007; Wittenburg 2011). Moreover, with more than 1.2 million children with disabilities who received SSI in 2016 (Social Security Administration 2017), policymakers have long-term concerns about current and future SSI program costs because many of these children will continue to receive SSI as adults.

Promoting Readiness of Minors in SSI (PROMISE) is a joint initiative of the U.S. Department of Education (ED), the Social Security Administration (SSA), the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) to fund and evaluate programs that promote positive changes for SSI youth, starting at ages 14 through 16, and their families. Broadly, the objectives of the PROMISE initiative are to (1) fund model demonstration projects (hereafter referred to as programs) to improve the educational and employment outcomes of youth who receive SSI, (2) provide rigorous findings on program effectiveness to inform policy decisions, and (3) generate knowledge regarding program delivery and outcomes (ED 2013). ED, which is responsible for program implementation and performance monitoring, awarded five-year cooperative agreements in September 2013 for six programs across 11 states. All PROMISE programs received extensions into 2019, though the end dates of their activities with youth and families varied.

In this report, we use information from the PROMISE initiative to describe the services offered by the six programs that are consistent with best practices in serving transition-age youth with disabilities. We draw on data collected as part of Mathematica's implementation and outcome evaluation for SSA, including interviews, site visits, federal partner meetings, and program documents (Fraker et al. 2014). We first describe the core PROMISE service offerings—that is, what the programs were expected to provide to participants and their families. Next, we summarize two sources of information for the transition process that are commonly used to document and promote best practices and describe the level of evidence supporting those practices. We then identify the services from the PROMISE programs that correspond to those best practices. We conclude with a summary of these practices and how the PROMISE national evaluation could provide additional evidence of effective transition services for youth who receive SSI.

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II. PROMISE CORE SERVICE OFFERINGS

Under the cooperative agreements with ED, the six PROMISE programs are being implemented in (1) Arkansas, (2) California, (3) Maryland, (4) New York State, (5) Wisconsin, and (6) a consortium of six western states known collectively as Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment (ASPIRE).[1] Each program created a logic model and a service model that reflected the state's (or consortium's) experience in working with youth who receive SSI, understanding of best practices to serve youth with disabilities, and transition environments. ED expected each program to provide the following services (ED 2013):

- **Agency-level partnerships** to include state agencies that provide vocational rehabilitation (VR) services, special education and related services, workforce development services, Medicaid services, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, developmental and intellectual disabilities services, and mental health services

- **Case management** that involves transition planning and helping participants plan and coordinate services to navigate the broader service delivery system

- **Benefits counseling and financial literacy training** for youth participants and their families to address SSA work incentives and the eligibility requirements of various public assistance programs

- **Career and work-based learning experiences** that include at least one paid work experience in an integrated setting while enrolled in high school, along with other career preparation and work-based experiences provided in integrated settings

- **Parent training and information** on (1) how to support and advocate for the youth so that they may achieve their education and employment goals, and (2) how to improve the education and employment outcomes of the parents or guardians, and achieve economic self-sufficiency for the family

All PROMISE programs provided the services described. However, the implementation of these services varied by program; ED gave the programs wide latitude in designing their service models. All programs began enrolling families in 2014 and planned to continue delivering services to them until their cooperative agreements ended. Table 1 summarizes how each PROMISE program implemented the above components (as of the drafting of this report), along with two additional components: (1) education services and (2) other services. The table also notes the partners that the programs employed to deliver PROMISE-specific services. The table provides a simplified view of each program and focuses on the programs' transition services; more detailed information about the programs can be found in the national evaluation's process analysis reports (Anderson et al. 2018; Honeycutt et al. 2018; Kauff et al. 2018; Matulewicz et al. 2018; McCutcheon et al. 2018; and Selekman et al. 2018).

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[1] The six western states that make up the consortium are (1) Arizona, (2) Colorado, (3) Montana, (4) North Dakota, (5) South Dakota, and (6) Utah.

Table 1. Selected PROMISE program features

PROMISE program	Lead agency	Partners delivering PROMISE-specific services	Case management	Benefits counseling and financial literacy training	Career and work-based learning experiences	Parent training and information	Education	Other services
Arkansas	Arkansas Department of Education	VR, workforce investment boards, ILC, postsecondary education, and University of Arkansas College of Education and Health Professions	Program staff provide case management services to participants and families; local monthly group training sessions for participants and families; participants develop plans for employment and education	Benefits counseling offered through ILC; financial training offered by program staff	Program staff provide employment supports and referrals to VR; participants receive two summer work experiences of 200 hours each with job coaching services (as needed)	Program staff offer case management, training, and other services, including referrals to parents; parents develop plans for employment and education	Program staff provide school supports, including attendance at IEP meetings and visits to postsecondary institutions	Self-determination and self-advocacy training offered by program staff through monthly group trainings; summer camp at college campus
ASPIRE	Utah State Office of Rehabilitation	*Arizona*: Governor's Office of Youth, Faith, and Families; education; and program service providers *Colorado*: VR and program service providers *Montana*: Division of Disability Employment and Transitions, education, and program service providers *North Dakota:* Minot State University and program service providers *South Dakota:* VR, Black Hills Special Services Cooperative, and program service providers *Utah:* VR and program service providers	Program staff, typically employed by the lead agency in each state, provide case management to participants and families, help participants set goals, and connect families to resources and employment opportunities	Benefits counseling offered mainly through WIPA programs; financial literacy training offered by program service providers	Program staff help participants access work experiences through existing resources, typically VR or school-based programs, assist with job applications, and arrange volunteer opportunities	Parent Training and Information Centers deliver parent training; program staff offer case management and linkages to resources to assist with parent education and employment goals	Program staff provide school supports, including attendance at IEP meetings, and assistance with postsecondary education exploration and support	Program staff or program service providers offer self-determination training to participants; program staff support other activities to build youth self-determination, leadership, and social skills

Table 1. (*continued*)

PROMISE program	Lead agency	Partners delivering PROMISE-specific services	Case management	Benefits counseling and financial literacy training	Career and work-based learning experiences	Parent training and information	Education	Other services
California	California Department of Rehabilitation	San Diego State University Interwork Institute, LEAs, state universities, family resource centers, and ILCs	Program staff provide case management to participants and families; participants create a person-driven plan for services and an individual career action plan	Program staff hired by LEAs and trained as certified work incentives counselors provide benefits counseling and financial literacy training; use of DB 101 online tool	Employment services, including paid and unpaid work experiences and targeted training activities, provided by program staff directly as well as by VR counselors dedicated to PROMISE; additional supports provided through specialized program staff (such as job developers and job coaches)	Program staff provide support to parents, including resources and referrals to VR and other programs; ILCs and family resource centers offer training and referrals	Program staff make referrals or provide school supports, including attendance at IEP meetings, advocacy for participants' needs, and drop-out prevention; postsecondary education linkages	Program staff make referrals for or provide (1) youth development and leadership training, including self-advocacy skills; (2) health behavior management and wellness services; (3) access to assistive technology assessments and devices; (4) training in independent living skills
Maryland	Maryland Department of Disabilities	Program service providers	Program staff and family employment specialists hired by a program service provider deliver case management services for participants and family members, develop plans describing participants and family members' goals, and outline the steps to achieve them	Benefits and financial counseling and education offered by program service providers	Program staff hired by program service provider deliver employer outreach and job seeker services and arrange paid and unpaid work experiences	Program staff deliver case management and employment services to parents	Program staff provide secondary school supports, including attendance at IEP meetings, and postsecondary education linkages	None

Table 1. (*continued*)

PROMISE program	Lead agency	Partners delivering PROMISE-specific services	Case management	Benefits counseling and financial literacy training	Career and work-based learning experiences	Parent training and information	Education	Other services
New York State	New York State Office of Mental Health and Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene	LEAs, parent centers, program service providers, and Cornell University K. Lisa Yang and Hock E. Tan Institute on Employment and Disability	Program staff, typically employed by LEAs, provide case management to youth, develop intervention plans, and make referrals for services	Benefits counseling and financial literacy training offered by program service providers	Community-based workplace assessments, career planning and preparation, and unpaid and paid work experiences and employment supports delivered by program service providers and employment specialists employed by the Research Foundation for Mental Hygiene	Parent centers provide case management to parents, develop intervention plans, make referrals, and deliver parent training	Program staff offer secondary school supports, including attendance at IEP meetings, and postsecondary school supports	Program maintains a website with resources related to self-determination and self-advocacy, and offers day habilitation specialist services to address the independent living skills of youth with more severe disabilities
Wisconsin	Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation	Program service providers	VR counselors develop individualized plans for employment for youth, refer participants and parents to program services, and help participants develop resource teams	Work incentives counselors through multiple program service providers deliver benefits counseling; program service provider delivers financial literacy training and opens matched individual development accounts	Work experiences and employment supports offered through VR	Program service provider delivers parent training and refers parents to community resources	VR counselors provide school supports, including attendance at IEP meetings	VR counselors help participants complete health promotion and literacy training; program service providers deliver social skills training

ASPIRE = Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment; DB101 = Disability Benefits 101; IEP = individualized education program; ILC = independent living center; LEA = local education agency; VR = vocational rehabilitation; WIPA = Work Incentives Planning and Assistance.

III. EFFECTIVE TRANSITION SERVICES

In this chapter, we describe two primary sources of information about effective transition services and supports: (1) *Guideposts for Success,* developed by the the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (2009); and (2) the Effective Practices and Predictors matrix maintained by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT) (2017). Both sources are intended for use by youth and families to select programs and services; by practitioners to develop and implement programs; and by state and local policymakers to establish funding, priorities, and evaluation decisions involving transitioning youth with disabilities.

We considered other sources of information about effective transition practices for this report but did not include a detailed discussion of them. One relevant source is Kohler's taxonomy for transition programming (Kohler 1995; Kohler et al. 2016), which contains a set of guidelines for best transition practices in five categories: student-focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, family engagement, and program structure. Kohler's taxonomy is supported by the evidence identified by NTACT; because of its overlap with NTACT, we did include a detailed discussion of it in this review. We also reviewed ED's What Works Clearinghouse for studies assessing interventions for children and youth with disabilities. We identified one study in the database related to the path to graduation for youth with disabilities: Check and Connect, a dropout prevention program for youth with emotional disabilities (included as a practice in the NTACT matrix). Similarly, the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research listed several studies related to youth with disabilities and employment; nearly all were based on SSA's Youth Transition Demonstration (including Hemmeter 2014 and Fraker et al. 2012). One additional study cited by the Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research, assessed as having low causal evidence, examined career technical education for high school students with learning or intellectual disabilities (Rabren et al. 2014).

A. *Guideposts for Success*

Guideposts for Success offers recommendations for effective transition practices based on an extensive review of the research evidence on the factors that help youth succeed in the transition process. *Guideposts for Success* was used in the development of the outcome goals of the Federal Partners in Transition Workgroup (2015) and in the design of the service components of SSA's Youth Transition Demonstration programs (Rangarajan et al. 2009). There are five key guideposts for developing programs and activities to improve the postsecondary education and employment outcomes for students:

1. **School-based preparatory experiences**, including access to high quality, standards-based education for all students

2. **Career preparation and work-based learning experiences**, including classroom and community-based experiences as well as information about career options

3. **Youth development and leadership**, through mentoring and other engagement opportunities

4. **Connecting activities** to post-school programs, services, activities, and supports from both formal and informal sources

5. **Family involvement and supports** that promote the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth

Each guidepost represents high quality, effective transition practices based on the opinions of experts in disability, education, and employment, and supported by the literature (National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition 2005). The standards and indicators that make up the guideposts were derived from a consensus-building process among expert members of the National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (NASET). The level of evidence supporting the NASET standards ranges from anecdotal to rigorous scientific evaluations. Although the initial *Guideposts for Success* and NASET documentation developed in the early 2000s recommended updating the evidence base periodically, to our knowledge there has been no systematic effort to do so.

Guideposts for Success includes a list of practices suggested for youth in their transition to adulthood, as well as additional practices specific to youth with disabilities (Appendix Table A.1).[2] *Guideposts for Success* recommends additional practices for youth with disabilities because of the increased challenges they face and their poor education and employment outcomes relative to youth without disabilities. For example, the career preparation guidepost identifies four practices needed for all youths: (1) career assessments, (2) exposure to postsecondary education, (3) exposure to career opportunities, and (4) training to improve job skills. Youth with disabilities require four additional career preparation practices for successful transition: (1) work-based exploration activities, (2) on-the-job training experiences, (3) opportunities to learn and practice soft skills, and (4) opportunities to learn about career pathways.

B. NTACT's effective practices and predictors matrix

NTACT's Effective Practices and Predictors matrix uses a more dynamic approach than *Guideposts for Success* to assess and catalog effective transition practices. Rather than present a model of transition practices based on available evidence at a single point in time, NTACT maintains and updates lists of effective practices for students with disabilities for use by education and rehabilitation professionals. The lists document the level of evidence supporting the effectiveness of a practice in improving postsecondary education and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities—a feature that distinguishes it from *Guideposts for Success*. The ratings range from evidence based (defined as practices and predictors with strong records of success in improving outcomes based on rigorous research designs and adhering to indicators of quality research) to unestablished (practices and predictors having limited demonstrated success based on unpublished research, anecdotal evidence, or professional judgment).

For each practice or predictor, NTACT describes its essential characteristics, level of evidence for its effectiveness, and sources of information.[3] The practices and predictors are organized into two dimensions: (1) the type of practice or predictor and (2) the transition

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[2] More details about the *Guideposts for Success* can be found at http://www.ncwd-youth.info/guideposts.

[3] More information about NTACT practices and predictors can be found at https://www.transitionta.org/effective practices.

outcomes that are affected by a practice or predictor. The practice and predictor types are listed below:

- **Secondary school practices** that are largely school or curriculum based, categorized into one of the following three academic or graduation areas: (1) student-focused planning practices; (2) student development (academic, employment, and life skills); and (3) school completion

- **VR practices** involving collaboration, employment, professional training, service delivery, and environmental and cultural factors

- **Predictors of postsecondary outcomes** that are derived from rigorous correlational studies

These practices and predictors are further classified by their effectiveness with respect to three postsecondary transition outcomes: (1) education, (2) employment, and (3) independent living. A practice or predictor could be rated as evidence based for one outcome but be rated as having a lower level of evidence, or even as unestablished, for another outcome. Appendix Table A.2 provides a list of the practices and predictors, along with their evidence ratings for education and employment outcomes. The predictors of postsecondary outcomes are not organized around service areas or topics (such as family practices, secondary or postsecondary education practices, or vocational services), which might be a drawback compared with how practices are organized in the *Guideposts for Success* and NTACT's secondary school and VR practices.

C. PROMISE services in the context of *Guideposts for Success* and the NTACT matrix

We use the *Guideposts for Success* and NTACT classification systems to consider which PROMISE program services correspond to transition services that are considered effective for improving education and employment outcomes. In Table 2, we show the correspondence between the PROMISE core service offerings and the practices and predictors identified by either the *Guideposts for Success* or NTACT. For NTACT, the practices and predictors selected are exclusively of the third type identified above: predictors of postsecondary outcomes. We omitted secondary school and VR practices from consideration because both are generally outside of the purview of the PROMISE programs.[4,5] We also excluded predictors that NTACT

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[4] All PROMISE programs involve state departments of education and frequently involve local education agencies (LEAs). PROMISE staff provide services related to youth's secondary school involvement and their goals related to high school graduation. However, PROMISE services themselves were generally not targeted as school-based interventions. The PROMISE programs in California and New York State were embedded within LEAs. The LEA staff served in case management roles. Because the PROMISE programs do not target LEA practices, it is unlikely that either classroom curricula or the LEA practices encompassed by the *Guideposts for Success* and NTACT changed significantly in response to LEA involvement in these states.

[5] In many ways, PROMISE programs functioned similarly to VR agencies, in that they provided a range of services and supports to youth and family participants to further their employment outcomes. Two PROMISE programs (California PROMISE and Wisconsin PROMISE) and the ASPIRE programs in two consortium states (Colorado and Utah) operated within the state VR agency; other programs partnered with the VR agencies in their states. All varied in how they involved VR agency services in their PROMISE service delivery models, but none changed how VR agencies fundamentally delivered services.

had not yet fully assessed, such as youth autonomy and parent expectations. For the NTACT predictors, Table 2 also shows the corresponding level of evidence and postsecondary outcome: either education or employment, because these were the primary focus of the PROMISE initiative. All of the NTACT evidence presented for these predictors is based on correlational research; hence, the practices and predictors corresponding to the PROMISE service offerings are classified as either promising or research based, rather than the more rigorous classification of evidence based.[6]

It is worth noting that not all services and practices identified as effective in the *Guideposts for Success* or NTACT matrix are required components under PROMISE. Some—such as small and safe learning environments; math, reading, or science curricula; and occupational coursework—are school based and involve classroom instruction. Though relevant to the goals of the PROMISE initiative, they are outside the scope of PROMISE program requirements. Practices such as graduation standards, exit requirements, and inclusion in general education relate to state and local education policies, which are also outside of the programs' scope. Other services and practices that were not required are being implemented by some PROMISE programs, either as a formal part of the service model or on a case-by-case basis, depending on a youth's needs. Such services include (1) using curricula to teach student involvement in the transition planning process, (2) ensuring access to reasonable accommodations in the classroom, (3) developing knowledge about reasonable classroom accommodations, (4) promoting travel skills, (5) offering school-based opportunities for work study or vocational education, and (6) implementing dropout prevention strategies.

One NTACT predictor of postsecondary outcomes—transition programs—is not included in Table 2 as applicable to the PROMISE initiative. This predictor is defined as programs to assist students from school to adulthood through a range of services, including transition planning and instruction in natural environments, along with interagency collaboration and family training. The NTACT ratings for transition programs are research based for education outcomes and promising for employment outcomes. The PROMISE programs likely qualify as transition programs based on NTACT's criteria. We did not include this predictor in Table 2 because we are focusing on the specific services provided by the programs, and the definition of this predictor is too broad for our purposes.

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[6] Additional studies (for example, Fraker et al. 2018; Hemmeter 2014; Luecking et al. 2017; Mamun et al. 2017) have been submitted to NTACT as evidence of the effect of transition programs and work-based experiences on employment outcomes.

Table 2. PROMISE program components, corresponding effective practice definitions, and level of evidence supporting practices

PROMISE program service or component	Guideposts for Success	NTACT matrix	NTACT level of evidence[a]
Interagency collaboration			
Interagency collaboration	*No practices correspond to PROMISE services*	Interagency collaboration: A clear, purposeful, and carefully designed process that promotes cross-agency, cross-program, and cross-disciplinary collaborative efforts leading to tangible transition outcomes for youth	Promising practice (postsecondary education and employment outcome)
Case management			
Student support	Connections to programs, services, activities, and supports to gain access to post-school options, such as mental and physical health services, tutoring, transportation, housing, post-program supports through structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies, and other services and opportunities Exposure to post-program supports such as ILCs and other consumer-driven, community-based support service agencies	Student support: A network of people who provide services and resources in multiple environments to prepare students to obtain their annual transition and postsecondary goals	Promising practice (postsecondary education and employment outcome)
Benefits counseling and financial literacy training			
Benefits counseling	Understand the relationships between benefits planning and career choices Benefits counseling, including information regarding the myriad benefits available and their interrelationships so that participants may maximize those benefits in transitioning from public assistance to self-sufficiency	*Benefits counseling is not listed by NTACT as a postsecondary outcome predictor, but it is included as a VR service delivery practice with a promising level of evidence*	n.a.
Financial planning	Connections to financial planning and management	*No predictors or practices correspond to PROMISE services*	n.a.
Career and work-based learning experiences			
Career assessments	Career assessments to help identify students' school and post-school preferences and interests	*No predictors or practices correspond to PROMISE services*	n.a.
Career awareness	Exposure to career opportunities that ultimately lead to a living wage, including information about educational requirements, entry requirements, income and benefits potential, and asset accumulation Opportunities to learn firsthand about specific occupational skills related to a career pathway	Career awareness: Learning about opportunities, education, and skills needed in various occupational pathways	Promising practice (postsecondary education and employment outcome)

Table 2. (*continued*)

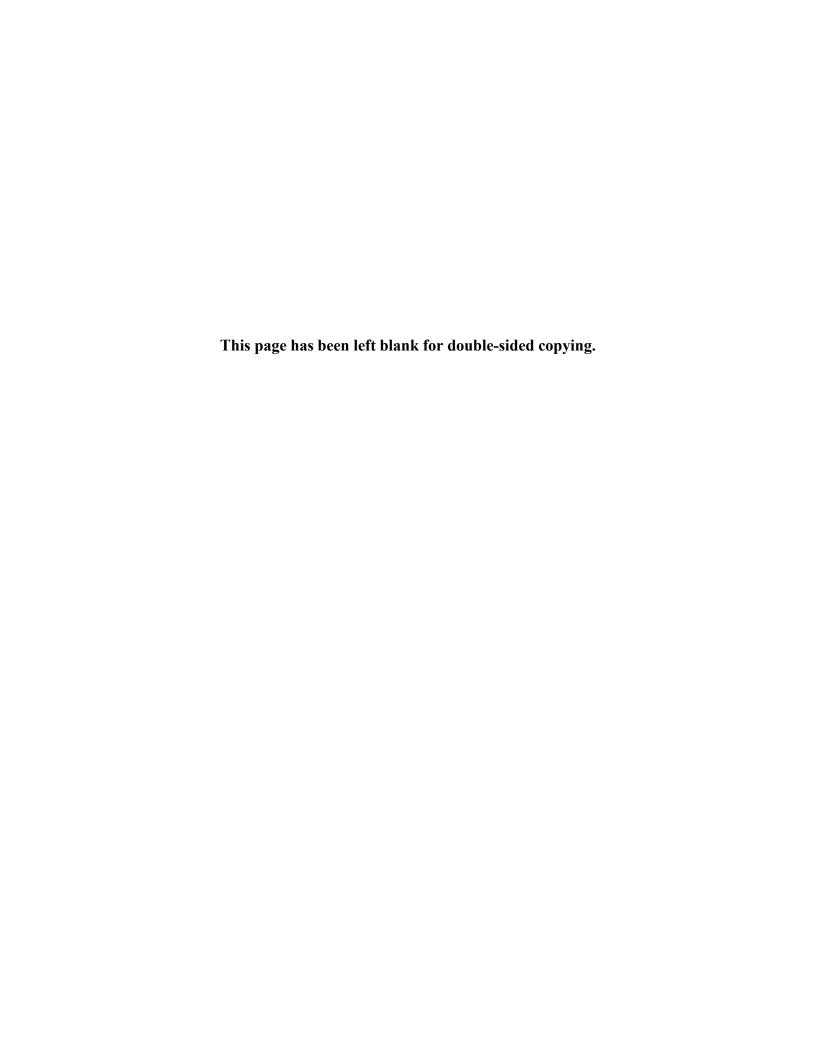| PROMISE program service or component	Guideposts for Success	NTACT matrix	NTACT level of evidence[a]
Work-based exploration activities	Opportunities to engage in a range of work-based exploration activities such as site visits and job shadowing Multiple on-the-job training experiences, including community service (paid or unpaid) that is linked to the content of a program of study and school credit	Paid employment and work experience: Any activity that places the student in an authentic workplace (such as work sampling, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment) and includes existing jobs or customized work assignments negotiated with the employer for competitive pay (for example, minimum wage) paid directly to the student by the employer	Research-based (postsecondary education and employment outcomes)
Soft skills training	Training designed to improve job-seeking skills and workplace basic skills (sometimes called soft skills) Opportunities to learn and practice their work skills (soft skills)	*Soft skills training is not listed by NTACT as a postsecondary outcome predictor, but it is included as a VR service delivery practice with a promising level of evidence*	n.a.
Postsecondary education	Structured exposure to postsecondary education and other lifelong learning opportunities	*No predictors or practices correspond to PROMISE services*	n.a.
Parent training and information			
Access to information and services	Parents, families, and other caring adults have access to information about employment, further education, and community resources Parents, families, and other caring adults have access to medical, professional, and peer support networks	*No predictors or practices correspond to PROMISE services*	n.a.
Parent and family involvement in transition planning	Parents, families, and other caring adults take an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners Parents, families, and other caring adults have an understanding of how individualized planning tools can assist youth in achieving transition goals and objectives Parents, families, and other caring adults have access to programs, services, supports, and accommodations available for young people with disabilities Parents, families, and other caring adults have an understanding of their youth's disability and how it affects his or her education, employment, and daily living options	Parent and family involvement: Parents, families, and guardians are active and knowledgeable participants in all aspects of transition planning (for example, decision making, providing support, attending meetings, and advocating for their child)	Promising practice (employment outcome)
Education			
Individual transition plans	Using students' individual transition plans to drive their personal instruction and strategies to continue the transition process post-schooling	*No predictors or practices correspond to PROMISE services*	n.a.

Table 2. (*continued*)

PROMISE program service or component	*Guideposts for Success*	NTACT matrix	NTACT level of evidence[a]
Other services			
Self-advocacy	Training in skills such as self-advocacy and conflict resolution	Self-advocacy and self-determination: The ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, evaluate options, take initiative to reach one's goals, and accept consequences of one's actions	Promising practice (postsecondary education and employment outcome)
Independent living skills	*No practices correspond to PROMISE services*	Self-care and independent living skills: Skills necessary for management of one's personal self-care and daily independent living, including skills needed to interact with others, financial management skills, and the self-management of health care and wellness needs	Promising practice (postsecondary education and employment outcome)
Youth development	Exposure to personal leadership and youth development activities, including community service Opportunities that allow youth to exercise leadership and build self-esteem	Social skills: Behaviors and attitudes that facilitate communication and cooperation	Promising practice (postsecondary education and employment outcome)
Transitional support staff	Supported by highly qualified transitional support staff, who may or may not be school staff	*No predictors or practices correspond to PROMISE services*	n.a.

Source: National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (2009), NTACT (2017).

[a]Evidence-based practices are the highest level of evidence for NTACT. The assessment is based on research that used a rigorous research design, demonstrated a strong record of success for improving outcomes, underwent a systematic review process, and adhered to quality indicators related to a specific research design. None of the components in the table were assessed at this effectiveness level. Research-based practices are based on research that used a rigorous research design, demonstrated a sufficient record of success for improving outcomes, may or may not have undergone a systematic review process, and may or may not adhere to quality indicators related to specific research design. Promising practices are based on research that demonstrates limited success for improving outcomes, may or may not have undergone a systematic review process, and may or may not adhere to quality indicators related to a specific research design.

ILC = independent living center; n.a. = not applicable; NTACT = National Technical Assistance Center on Transition; VR = vocational rehabilitation.

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IV. EFFECTIVE TRANSITION SERVICES OFFERED BY THE PROMISE PROGRAMS

The PROMISE programs offer a range of services consistent with the practices and predictors deemed effective by *Guideposts for Success* or the NTACT matrix, as shown in Table 2. We refer to these as "effective PROMISE services." The services identified in that table represent the foundational offerings of each PROMISE program—that is, what each participant might be expected to receive as a result of participating in the program. In this chapter, we provide examples of the specific services offered by each individual PROMISE program. The information presented reflects the PROMISE evaluation team's assessment of each program's practices, based on information gathered from the programs' logic models, applications for funding, staff interviews, and other documents related to the evaluation.

A. Interagency collaboration

All PROMISE programs, per ED's specifications, involve interagency collaboration—an NTACT predictor that emphasizes efforts to cut across agencies, programs, and disciplines to promote outcomes for youth (Table 3). PROMISE programs exhibit three aspects of interagency collaboration: (1) an advisory or steering committee, (2) paid partnerships for services, and (3) broader state or local involvement to improve youth transitions.

First, each program has an advisory or steering committee composed mainly of representatives from stakeholder state agencies, such as education, labor, VR, and health. These stakeholders advise on program development; address implementation challenges; and offer support, information, and connections throughout the state. The programs varied in the level of their collaborations before the PROMISE program. It remains to be seen whether these collaborations will lead to greater cooperation at the state level and whether such collaboration will lead to better local services for transition-age youth with disabilities.

Second, all programs use collaborative, paid partnerships through formal agreements for varying levels of service. For example, in addition to providing case management services directly, Arkansas PROMISE obtains services and resources through formal, paid agreements with local workforce boards, the state VR agency, an independent living center (ILC), and the University of Arkansas. The program also connects participants and families to existing services outside these formal partners, as needed. In contrast, California PROMISE primarily relies on paid partnerships with local education providers for case management and benefits planning services. The program has additional contracts with ILCs and others for targeted services. Maryland PROMISE employs a single community behavioral health organization for case management and employment services, which is supplemented by contracts with two agencies for benefits counseling and financial education.

Third, PROMISE programs engage in broader transition efforts at the state and local levels, though these are not necessarily formal components of the program designs. For example, the New York State PROMISE Steering Committee serves as the Transition Subcommittee of the state's Employment First Commission, which focuses on the statewide application of the transition partnerships and practices that PROMISE has implemented in the regions where it operates. The program also integrates existing transition service providers in the communities in

which it operates. In Maryland, the lead agency for PROMISE is a distinct entity within the governor's cabinet that has responsibility for facilitating relationships among and coordinating the efforts of disparate government bodies serving individuals with disabilities. Wisconsin PROMISE staff attend transition-themed conferences for professionals at the local level. These events are intended to facilitate collaboration among service providers and thus could promote better outcomes for PROMISE participants; however, they may also result in an improved transition environment for all youths in the state.

Table 3. Effective interagency collaboration of the PROMISE programs

Evidence-based practice	Arkansas	ASPIRE	California	Maryland	New York State	Wisconsin
Interagency collaboration	Multi-agency advisory council; paid service partnerships with postsecondary education, VR agency, workforce boards, ILC; hired liaison to connect program staff with state/local education agencies	Each state developed agency-level partnerships; had paid service partnerships with service providers; sought to leverage and improve the offerings and capacities of existing service providers to enrich the service environment for youth with disabilities in ways that will remain after ASPIRE concludes	Multiagency advisory council; partnership with five other state agencies; local programs that mirrored these partnerships; paid service partnerships with VR, secondary education, postsecondary education, family resource centers, and ILCs	Representatives from several state agencies participate on steering committee, which supported and worked collaboratively with the program; MOU executed between three agencies to create a digital service tracker that all agencies could access; paid service partnerships with program service providers	Program has a nine-agency steering committee; paid service partnerships with secondary education, parent centers, and program service providers	Executive and steering committees involve administrative staff from six agencies; paid service partnerships with VR and program service providers

ASPIRE = Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment; ILC = independent living center; MOU = memorandum of understanding; VR = vocational rehabilitation.

B. Case management

Case management—working with program participants and their families to identify needs, and connecting them to services to address those needs—is a cornerstone of all PROMISE programs. Though case management encompasses a range of practices, *Guideposts for Success* and the NTACT matrix include only one aspect of it as an effective practice in the transition area: student support. Through student support, youths are connected to relevant programs, resources, and activities that address post-school and post-program needs across a range of life areas—which should result in access to a network of transition supports.

Case management staff are typically a PROMISE program's focal point of contact for participants and the face of the program for families because they coordinate the efforts of program staff, contracting agencies, and outside providers. These staff, who exclusively serve PROMISE program youth and families, provide intensive, person-centered counseling, including

crisis management. They reach out to and meet with youth and families regularly (as specified by their programs' service models), and record information about their interactions with families in their programs' management information systems (MIS). The staff of all PROMISE programs conduct needs assessments, develop plans with youth and families that describe goals and services, and educate them about and connect them to needed supports through referrals to program-associated and other providers.

Each program differs with respect to the provider organization responsible for the case management function, the expectations for the function, and the title of the position (Table 4). California PROMISE relies on its local sites (LEAs) to employ case management staff that the program refers to as "career service coordinators" to emphasize their role in promoting employment. With a few exceptions, the program in New York State uses a similar model to serve youth. This program also contracts with parent centers to employ family coaches, who provide case management to the parents and guardians of participating youth—a service addressed in Section IV.E. Maryland PROMISE contracts with a behavioral health organization to be its case management service provider. The programs in Wisconsin and two ASPIRE states use staff from their VR agencies (who are not necessarily VR counselors), whereas programs in other ASPIRE states rely on staff from other organizations or a mix of staff from a VR agency and other organizations. Arkansas PROMISE funds a new staff position for case management directly through the University of Arkansas, which directly manages the program for the Arkansas Department of Education.

In connecting families to services, the programs leverage existing community service networks to different degrees and also rely on formal (but unpaid) partnerships. Program staff from California PROMISE, for example, leverage existing resources from LEAs, workforce boards, VR, and other community providers to optimize service delivery for youth and families. Many of these providers are formal program partners, but the program does not pay for the services they provide to participants. Its program staff conduct resource mapping activities to understand existing resources in their local service areas and log these resources in their MIS for other staff to access. The program's relationships with these providers are noncontractual; program staff can refer participants to these local providers for work experiences, provision of assistive technology, or other services to help the youth and family address needs or meet goals. An advantage of relying on existing community service networks for PROMISE programs is that it offers broader connections to resources—resources potentially accessible after the PROMISE program ends. Another advantage is that it encourages local providers to deliver services to youth more broadly. A potential disadvantage that some PROMISE programs encounter, however, is that local providers might not have the capacity to accommodate a large number of new referrals, potentially delaying the receipt of services by program participants. In response to this disadvantage, programs worked with providers to improve their capacities to serve youth with disabilities broadly, and program participants specifically.

Some PROMISE programs ensure the timely delivery of essential program services through contracts and direct payments to providers. For example, though Arkansas PROMISE staff work with participants and families to identify and build on families' existing personal and service networks, the program service model primarily relies on contracts for important service components, such as with the VR agency for education and career services, and with local workforce agencies for the provision of summer work experiences. ASPIRE has contractual

relationships with new and existing providers for various program services, such as benefits counseling, self-determination training, and parent training, and leverages existing providers for employment services and work experiences.

Table 4. Effective case management services of the PROMISE programs

Evidence-based practice	Arkansas	ASPIRE	California	Maryland	New York State	Wisconsin
Student support	Program directly employs and oversees case managers; leverages existing personal and service networks of participants; refers participants to health, employment, education, and other services and supports specific to their needs	Lead agencies in three states employ case managers directly; lead agencies in two states contract case managers through other state agencies; lead agency in one state has a mix of within-agency and other-agency case managers; refers participants to program service providers and other existing resources in the community	Local sites employ case managers; connect participants to existing network of local providers, with an emphasis on warm handoffs	Community provider employs case managers; refers participants to existing local providers	Local sites employ case managers for youth; program hired additional case managers directly for youth in New York City; refers participants to program service providers and other existing resources in the community	Program directly employs and oversees case managers; promotes connections to youth services through resource teams (formal and informal network of providers)

ASPIRE = Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment.

C. Benefits counseling and financial literacy training

Effective practices to promote better financial decision making and economic well-being include two distinct services: benefits counseling and financial planning and management. Both involve linking youth and families to appropriate resources to ensure that they have correct and sufficient information about their benefits and finances to make informed transition choices about employment. Each of these practices is included in *Guideposts for Success*. Benefits counseling is listed by NTACT as a VR practice, but not as a predictor of postsecondary outcomes.

All PROMISE programs offer benefit counseling services, mainly through existing providers within their states, such as the community work incentives counselors affiliated with SSA Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) organizations (Table 5). These services often involve referring participants and families for initial benefit assessments and comprehensive benefit analyses as well as for consultations on specific benefit issues, such as wage reporting to SSA, disability benefit overpayments, and the redetermination process for SSI recipients who reach the age of 18. The PROMISE programs use three approaches to connect participants to benefits counseling: (1) relying on contracts with providers for WIPA services (as in Arkansas PROMISE and ASPIRE), (2) contracting with existing providers to deliver program-specific services (as with the programs in Maryland, New York State, and Wisconsin), and (3) offering the services directly (as in California and in one ASPIRE state). For the latter approach, California PROMISE requires its case manager staffs to become certified as work incentives

counselors and provide benefit counseling services directly; they also are trained in the use of Disability Benefits 101 (DB101) as a benefit planning tool.[7] ASPIRE program staff in South Dakota are also certified work incentives counselors, although requiring staff to have this qualification is not a feature of ASPIRE's service model. In addition to receiving referrals from the program, the benefit counseling provider for Arkansas PROMISE prepares participants for summer work experiences by speaking with them twice annually during local monthly group trainings on topics such as how employment affects earnings.

Table 5. Effective benefits counseling and financial literacy training services of the PROMISE programs

Evidence-based practice	Arkansas	ASPIRE	California	Maryland	New York State	Wisconsin
Benefits counseling	Through referrals to WIPA provider and through WIPA and program staff-led monthly trainings	Through referrals to WIPA providers and by some program staff trained as community work incentives coordinators	Delivered directly by case managers trained as certified benefits planners; participant access to DB101	By WIPA provider as a contracted service	By existing providers as a contracted service	By WIPA provider as a contracted service
Financial planning	By program staff in group monthly trainings	Through contracted providers	By program staff	Through contracted provider	Through contracted providers	Through contracted provider

ASPIRE = Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment; DB101 = Disability Benefits 101; WIPA = Work Incentives Planning and Assistance.

Financial planning is an important aspect of the PROMISE programs that often includes training on budgeting, bank accounts, self-sufficiency, and consumer credit (Table 5). Program staff in the Arkansas and California programs provide financial training to participants directly. For example, Arkansas PROMISE provides financial literacy training annually during one of its monthly group trainings. The other PROMISE programs contract with financial education providers for such training. The ASPIRE and Maryland programs use local organizations that provide financial education services generally to deliver similar services to PROMISE families. Initially, these organizations delivered the services through group classes. However, fewer families attended the classes than anticipated, so they began providing individual financial counseling and, in Maryland PROMISE, financial coaching. The program in New York State contracts with multiple providers to deliver financial literacy services to program participants and their families on an individual basis. Wisconsin PROMISE contracts for financial literacy services with a community provider that employs financial coaches to serve program families through both individual meetings and group trainings. In addition to financial training and counseling, staff and contractors for ASPIRE and the California and Wisconsin programs assist some participants and families with opportunities to increase their savings through individual

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[7] DB101 is a web-based tool developed by the World Institute on Disability. It is designed to help people with disabilities become informed about the public health insurance and income assistance benefits for which they are eligible, and understand how those benefits are affected when they go to work and attain different levels of earnings.

development accounts, Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) accounts, and state-matched college savings plans.

D. Career and work-based learning experiences

All of the PROMISE programs incorporate five effective practices related to employment, as identified by either *Guideposts for Success* or NTACT (Table 6): (1) career assessments, (2) career awareness, (3) work-based exploration activities, (4) soft skills training, and (5) postsecondary education.

All of the programs conduct career assessments to evaluate participants' vocational and educational goals, needs, and interests. These assessments are frequently integral to the programs' case management services and the development of individualized service delivery plans. In addition, the community employment providers to which participants are referred conduct their own career assessments. For example, the New York State program staff develop an individualized intervention plan that lists needed services. They refer participants to employment service providers for workplace assessments to identify their employment-related strengths, capabilities, needs, skills, and experiences through community-based observations and interviews.

All of the programs also provide career awareness learning opportunities for participants, such as through career exploration, job shadowing, and career planning. For example, ASPIRE and Maryland program staff assist participants with a range of unpaid career and work-based learning experiences, such as job interviews, worksite tours, job shadowing, work sampling, and volunteer or service learning opportunities. Maryland's program has a goal of one such unpaid experience for each participant, whereas ASPIRE's goal is one paid or unpaid career exploration activity per year of enrollment. Because the VR agency is the lead agency for Wisconsin PROMISE, it relies on existing contracts with employment service providers to connect participants to job training and career exploration activities. In ASPIRE and California PROMISE, career awareness learning opportunities also are provided by program staff and through referrals to local service providers.

Work-based exploration activities are important aspects of the career services that all of the PROMISE programs provide to their participants. The NTACT predictor definition for paid work experience emphasizes that wages for these experiences should be paid directly by employers. The PROMISE programs vary in the extent to which they facilitate employer-paid work experiences. Arkansas PROMISE engages its workforce partners to provide summer employment experiences for all participants, with all wages paid by the program. In contrast, Maryland PROMISE staff first try to find work experiences with employers that will pay participants' wages. If unsuccessful, they access existing subsidized work experience programs through partner agencies. As a last resort, they arrange work experiences that are paid for directly with PROMISE funds. Attempting to leverage existing LEA, labor, or VR subsidized work experience programs is common across the PROMISE programs. Consequently, these PROMISE programs provide their participants with a mix of work experiences in which the wages may be paid by the employers, the PROMISE program, or other agencies or programs.

All of the PROMISE programs offer some form of soft skills training, either directly by program staff or through contracted community service providers. This training usually accompanies or is in preparation for participants' work experiences. Soft skills training includes information on work preparation and the development of workplace skills. The New York State program contracts with multiple community service providers to offer participants a set of activities centered on career planning and preparation, which include job interviewing practice; resume writing; and skill development for job attendance, punctuality, and conflict resolution. Wisconsin PROMISE employs a formal curriculum, *Skills to Pay the Bills*, to train participants on the soft skills needed to secure and maintain employment.[8] California PROMISE incorporates soft skills training into job clubs, one-on-one counseling by program staff, training offered by ILCs, and support provided by job developers.

Support for postsecondary education is a service component of all PROMISE programs. This support includes identifying postsecondary education goals related to career aspirations, encouraging participants to attend college fairs, and facilitating campus tours. For example, New York State PROMISE contracts with multiple community service providers to offer supported education services to participants who are enrolled in postsecondary education. As part of its effort to introduce participants to the college environment, the Arkansas program relies on postsecondary institutions throughout the state for office and meeting spaces. Consequently, the participants and their families are repeatedly present on college campuses for meetings with program staff and monthly trainings. In addition, Arkansas PROMISE holds its weeklong summer camps on a college campus.

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[8] *Skills to Pay the Bills* is a curriculum developed by the DOL Office of Disability Employment Policy to promote soft skills, such as communication and networking (DOL 2018).

Table 6. Effective career and work-based learning experience services of the PROMISE programs

Guideposts for Success or NTACT effective practice	Arkansas	ASPIRE	California	Maryland	New York State	Wisconsin
Career assessments	Administers vocational evaluations and interest and career assessments; individual plans identify career and educational goals and steps to achieve them	Initial program assessments identify goals and services; employment programs and providers administer further assessments	Develops person-driven plan and individual career action plan; administers vocational evaluations and interest and career assessments; facilitates plans for employment postsecondary education, and training through VR	Develops employment-specific plans, including interests and skills inventories, individual plans for employment, and workplace support plans	Develops initial case service plan, with community-based workplace assessments conducted by program service providers	Develops vocational assessments and evaluations; all participants have individualized plans for employment
Career awareness	Offers career exploration and job shadowing	Arranged by case managers and through referrals to employment programs and providers	Program provides directly in one-on-one and group sessions, and through referrals to employment programs and providers, as needed	Offers job shadowing, informational interviews, worksite tours, work sampling, apprenticeships, and internships	Program service providers deliver career planning and preparation	Pursues vocational counseling and job shadowing experiences
Work-based exploration activities	Two paid summer work experiences (including job coaching) of up to 200 hours; wages for paid experiences paid by the program	At least one career exploration activity per year and one paid employment opportunity while in high school leveraged through existing employment programs (such as VR or secondary schools)	Program connects participants to specialized programs and VR, in addition to arranging for work experiences; participants expected to receive one paid and one unpaid work experience; wages for some paid experiences paid by the program	Program service provider arranges paid and unpaid work experiences; wages for some paid experiences paid by the program	Program service providers arrange paid and unpaid work experiences; participants expected to complete at least one paid work experience; wages for some paid experiences paid by the program;	Work experiences and employment supports offered through VR and its job coaching or job development providers; participants expected to complete at least one paid work experience; wages for some paid experiences paid by the program

Table 6. (*continued*)

Guideposts for Success or NTACT effective practice	Arkansas	ASPIRE	California	Maryland	New York State	Wisconsin
Soft skills training	Pre-employment training required before summer work experiences	Through existing employment services, as needed, and through self-determination training	Provided by program staff through one-on-one meetings, group trainings, ILCs, and employment providers	Program staff provide informal training on soft skills and appropriate workplace behavior	Career planning and preparation activities delivered by program service providers	Provided as part of VR-contracted employment services through standardized curriculum
Postsecondary education	Exposes participants to college campuses through monthly group trainings and summer camp; helps participants set postsecondary goals and prepare for postsecondary programs	Assists participants with postsecondary education goals, as needed; connects participants to postsecondary education opportunities	Facilitates participant involvement in postsecondary education activities, including college fairs, campus tours, and college entrance exams	Provides postsecondary linkages, such as college fairs, applications, and campus tours	Program service providers offer postsecondary-supported education services, such as assistance with class scheduling, campus navigation, and study habits	Assists participants with postsecondary education goals, as needed; connects participants to postsecondary education opportunities

ASPIRE = Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment; ILC = independent living center; NTACT = National Technical Assistance Center on Transition; VR = vocational rehabilitation.

E. Parent training and information

A unique aspect of PROMISE as a program for transitioning youth is its provision of certain services designed specifically for participants' families. These services take two forms: (1) access to information and services for the employment, education, and other needs of family members; and (2) promotion of parent and family involvement in the youth's transition planning.

All of the PROMISE programs offer access to information and services to family members, either through program staff or referrals (Table 7). This access includes information and services that would benefit family members directly and would likely benefit the participating youth indirectly. Parents and guardians of PROMISE participants in California receive information and services through family resource centers. As noted previously, the program in New York State assigns a family coach, who is employed by a parent center, to the parents and guardians of participating youth. The coach provides case management services and makes referrals to community service providers for other services. In ASPIRE and the programs in Arkansas and Maryland, families receive case management, employment services, and referrals similar to those of the youth participants. In contrast, Wisconsin PROMISE uses a blended model: core program staff provide employment services to families, whereas family advocates assist families with their non-employment needs. Parent- and guardian-specific services include assistance with the development of goals and plans for employment and education (as with the programs in Arkansas, New York State, and Wisconsin) and the dispensing of funds for families to use in emergency situations (as with the programs in Arkansas and Maryland).

All of the PROMISE programs include components that align with parent and family involvement in transition planning. All but one (Maryland PROMISE) had implemented such components at the time of this report (Table 7). The PROMISE programs offer training for parents on disability issues, such as the SSI redetermination process at age 18, ABLE accounts, and guardianship after age 18; advocating for their youth; involvement in the transition planning process; and preparations for youth employment. All of the programs offering this service also encourage family members to participate in the individualized education program (IEP) process. Program staff reported attending IEP meetings in part to facilitate youth advocacy by parents and guardians. California PROMISE provides parent training both directly and in partnership with local family resource centers, whereas the ASPIRE, New York State, and Wisconsin programs contract with community-based parent organizations for such training. In New York State PROMISE, the parent training encompasses four topics: (1) transition, (2) child advocacy, (3) parent advocacy, and (4) SSI work incentives. The program supplemented the original in-person group format for parent training with in-person individual and online formats to promote greater participation. Wisconsin PROMISE also originally planned to provide parent training through group meetings. However, after experiencing low participation, it contracted with an organization to hire family advocates to deliver this training and related services to families on an individual basis. The core program staff of Arkansas PROMISE deliver these types of services directly during their monthly group training sessions with participating youth and their families. Although the design for Maryland PROMISE includes structured parent training and information services, those services had not been implemented as of this writing.

Table 7. Effective parent training and information services of the PROMISE programs

Evidence-based practice	Arkansas	ASPIRE	California	Maryland	New York State	Wisconsin
Access to information and services	Parents receive case management, employment and education services and referrals, and discretionary funds from the program, as well as individual plans for career and education goals; peer networking opportunities through monthly trainings	Program staff assess family needs, provide information and referrals to existing resources, and use discretionary funds to address some needs	Program staff identify family needs, provide relevant information and refer families to providers for services	Program offers the same services to family members as it does to youth participants	Parent-centered providers deliver case management to parents and referrals to other services	Parents receive case counseling, benefits counseling, financial literacy services, and employment services
Parent and family involvement in transition planning	Program provides advocacy and empowerment training through monthly trainings and employment training related to their youth	Parent training delivered through parent-centered providers and potentially through case management	Program provides services directly and refers families to family-specific providers for parenting and transition planning services	Services specific to family members were intended, but not delivered (as of the third implementation year)	Parent-centered providers deliver transition and child and parent advocacy training	Parents receive advocacy and employment training related to their youth

ASPIRE = Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment.

F. Education

Guideposts for Success and the NTACT matrix list multiple academic practices and predictors related to transition, but the PROMISE programs emphasize only one school-based practice deemed effective by those publications: involvement by service providers with individual transition plans in schools (Table 8). When invited by families, PROMISE program staff attend IEP meetings to help parents or guardians advocate for their youth. In addition, program staff consult with LEA staff regarding student supports. The provision of these services and activities by core PROMISE program staff in California and New York State is facilitated by a formal affiliation with LEAs.

Table 8. Effective education services of the PROMISE programs

Evidence-based practice	Arkansas	ASPIRE	California	Maryland	New York State	Wisconsin
Individual transition plans	Program staff attend IEP meetings and work with LEA staff	Program staff interact with LEA staff on issues relevant to participants' education process and attend IEP meetings	Program staff collaborate with teachers and transition staff, attend IEP meetings, and connect participants to student support services	Program staff develop relationships with LEA staff to support IEP goals and identify student supports needed by participants; participants access online service portfolios with information from LEAs and program	Program staff attend IEP meetings	Program staff attend IEP meetings and meet with school resource team members

ASPIRE = Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment; IEP = individualized education program; LEA = local education agency.

G. Other services

The PROMISE programs engage participants in additional services that are considered by either *Guideposts for Success* or the NTACT matrix to be effective in improving transition outcomes for youth with disabilities (Table 9)—including services to promote self-advocacy, acquisition of independent living skills, and youth development. The programs also work to ensure that their transition staff are highly qualified and trained.

- Five of the PROMISE programs (ASPIRE and the programs in Arkansas, California, New York State, and Wisconsin) offer services to promote youth self-advocacy. Wisconsin PROMISE contracts with the developer of a group-based self-advocacy curriculum so that participants can access the curriculum in the format of a self-directed module. The participants can complete the curriculum on their own or work through it with a program staff member or family advocate. Training in self-determination—a concept that includes setting goals, making choices, having self-awareness, and performing self-advocacy—is a core feature of ASPIRE's program design. This training is designed to help ASPIRE participants develop a vision of working and being more independent. New York State PROMISE developed a website where youth and parents may access resources related to self-determination and self-advocacy.

- The five PROMISE programs noted above also offer services to promote the development of independent living skills. In its final year of operation, Arkansas PROMISE is promoting the development of independent living skills through its monthly group trainings. The objective is to ensure that participating youth have the skills needed for a successful transition after the program ends. Participants in Wisconsin PROMISE have access to health promotion and health literacy skills courses. ASPIRE promotes the development of independent living skills through case management services; self-determination training; and discretionary

funds to help participants obtain needed services, supports, and supplies not otherwise available (such as state identification cards or drivers' licenses, tuition, and work clothing). California PROMISE refers participants and families to ILCs for independent living training. NYS PROMISE uses day habilitation specialists to provide independent living and other skills to youth with more severe disabilities.

- Some of the programs offer youth development opportunities to their participants, with varying degrees of formality. Arkansas PROMISE offers all of its participants the opportunity to participate in a weeklong summer camp held on a college campus. The camp includes activities and training to promote the development of social skills, leadership, and self-advocacy. California PROMISE encourages its participants to apply for a weeklong leadership training program, participate in the program's job clubs, and engage in training offered by ILCs.

- Along with the additional effective services noted above, all of the PROMISE programs ensure that they have effective transition support staff by devoting significant resources to staff training and technical assistance. For example, a contractor for Maryland PROMISE provides technical assistance to the program staff, assists in staff training activities, and is an important partner in all aspects of program management and implementation. ASPIRE employs two full-time staff trainers, who conduct biannual all-staff training events, monthly group trainings, and individualized support to promote staff development and ensure consistent service provision across the six consortium states. Staff at the Maryland, New York State, and Wisconsin programs receive training in motivational interviewing; staff at the latter two programs also receive training in trauma-informed care. California PROMISE provides its staff with an online tool kit of resources; periodic group trainings at the local, regional, and state levels; and access to mentors who deliver customized individual and small group training and support.

Table 9. Other effective services of the PROMISE programs

Guideposts for Success or NTACT effective practice	Arkansas	ASPIRE	California	Maryland	New York State	Wisconsin
Self-advocacy	Self-advocacy curriculum delivered in monthly group trainings and reinforced by program staff	Self-determination training to promote autonomy, decision making, and self-awareness	Family referrals to ILCs for self-advocacy skills; skills also developed through workshops and job club sessions held by local programs	n.a.	Website with resources related to self-determination and self-advocacy	Offers self-advocacy classes
Independent living skills	Provided through monthly group trainings during the last program year	Provided though case management, self-determination training, and financial education	Family referrals to ILCs for independent living skills and information about housing resources	n.a.	Provided by day habilitation specialists to youth with more severe disabilities	Program staff help youth complete health promotion and health literacy training
Youth development	Weeklong summer camp opportunities involving leadership and social skills	Potentially through case management, self-determination training, and other opportunities to interact with others	Provided by program staff through one-on-one meetings, group trainings, and work experiences; participant referrals to five-day leadership training program	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Transition support staff	Biannual professional development trainings, staff training on program activities, webinars	Standardized initial and ongoing training across ASPIRE states, monthly all-staff conference calls and webinars, and biannual all-staff trainings	Customized site training, online tool kits, annual all-staff meetings, weekly teleconferences, quarterly regional meetings	Rigorous initial and ongoing staff training; technical assistance on employment service delivery and program fidelity	Webinars, biannual learning community meetings, community of practice training series, and weekly and monthly emails	Training and technical assistance for select program staff

ASPIRE = Achieving Success by Promoting Readiness for Education and Employment; ILC = independent living center; n.a. = not applicable; NTACT = National Technical Assistance Center on Transition.

V. CONCLUSIONS

All of the PROMISE programs offer a range of services and activities that have been deemed by third-party organizations to be effective in helping youth with disabilities successfully transition to adulthood. Interagency collaboration; connections to local programs and service providers through case management, benefits counseling, and financial literacy training; career awareness and paid work experiences; and parent training and information are key features of the PROMISE programs.

This report is part of the national evaluation of PROMISE. SSA funds the national evaluation to document the implementation, impacts, and costs of the six PROMISE programs. This report, along with a companion report on how PROMISE programs fit into the national landscape of federal transition programs (Honeycutt and Livermore 2018), offers an introduction to the programs' services and how they reflect best transition practices. Upcoming evaluation reports will document more completely (1) the services that each youth and family received, and lessons learned regarding enrollment, service delivery, and program implementation; and (2) the impacts of PROMISE on service receipt, employment, education, and other outcomes 18 months after youth enrolled. The PROMISE evaluation will continue to track youth and families for five years after their enrollment in the study to document the programs' longer-term impacts on key outcomes. The information that the evaluation collects will eventually provide insights about the effectiveness of the PROMISE programs; successes and challenges in delivering specific services; characteristics of youth served and of those youth who experience better outcomes; and other questions of interest to federal, state, and local policymakers.

The national PROMISE evaluation will use the programs' own administrative data, along with survey and federal administrative data, to document the receipt of services and outcomes by program participants. By using these data, the national evaluation will analyze differences in the receipt of services between two groups of evaluation enrollees in each of the six programs. The program group consists of enrollees who were randomly selected to be eligible for PROMISE services. The usual service group consists of enrollees who were randomly selected to be ineligible for PROMISE services; they could instead receive other services available in their communities. These analyses will provide information about the types of services received and assess the extent that programs delivered the services they intended to provide. For example, did youth participants receive more of one or another type of service? Was employment emphasized more for some youth participants than others? How did service receipt differ between youth in the program group and youth in the usual services group? How successful were programs in leveraging services from existing federal and state programs, and what specifically did they provide to youth and families that represented an addition to the existing transition service landscape? The answers to these questions will help us understand how the PROMISE programs affected the service experiences of youth with disabilities and their families, and the services that might be added at the state and local levels. That understanding in turn will provide us with insights into the service basis for possible program impacts on the educational attainment and employment outcomes of the youth who enrolled in the PROMISE evaluation.

It is important to remember that the PROMISE services presented in this report as being effective are so classified based on reviews of research on what works in youth transition, as summarized in *Guideposts for Success* and by NTACT. The findings from the PROMISE

evaluation will shed light on whether the package of services offered by a PROMISE program is effective in improving education, employment, and other outcomes for SSI youth and their families. However, the current plan for the national evaluation does not include assessing the effectiveness of specific components of a program's service package, nor will it allow an assessment of the relative returns on investment of providing one type of service or another.

The evaluation of the PROMISE programs can potentially add to the level of evidence on what works in the transition of youth who receive SSI, although with the limitations described in the preceding paragraph. Of the services consistently offered by the PROMISE programs, only one (paid employment and work experience) has a level of evidence that NTACT categorizes as more than promising. That service was assessed as research based (the second-highest level). The level of evidence for other PROMISE services and practices is weaker because none has been rigorously tested. Many school-based practices have been assessed by NTACT at higher levels of evidence (as documented in Appendix Table A.2), yet it is striking that no predictors of postsecondary outcomes have been assessed through evaluations based on random assignment or quasi-experimental evaluation designs. A further issue is that both *Guideposts for Success* and NTACT practices reflect those applied to youth with disabilities broadly, whereas the receipt of SSI is a key eligibility criterion for the PROMISE programs. Youth who receive SSI face additional challenges and barriers to transition success. Therefore, services and practices assessed as effective for youth with disabilities might not be appropriate or sufficient for the population targeted by the PROMISE programs. The PROMISE initiative can contribute further evidence on how specific services delivered by PROMISE programs relate to the successful transition of youth who receive SSI. This evidence can potentially provide policymakers with information on service strengths, challenges, and gaps to direct their limited resources in ways that better help youth with disabilities broadly, and youth receiving SSI specifically, in their transition efforts.

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APPENDIX

**EFFECTIVE TRANSITION SERVICES LISTED BY *GUIDEPOSTS FOR SUCCESS*
AND NTACT**

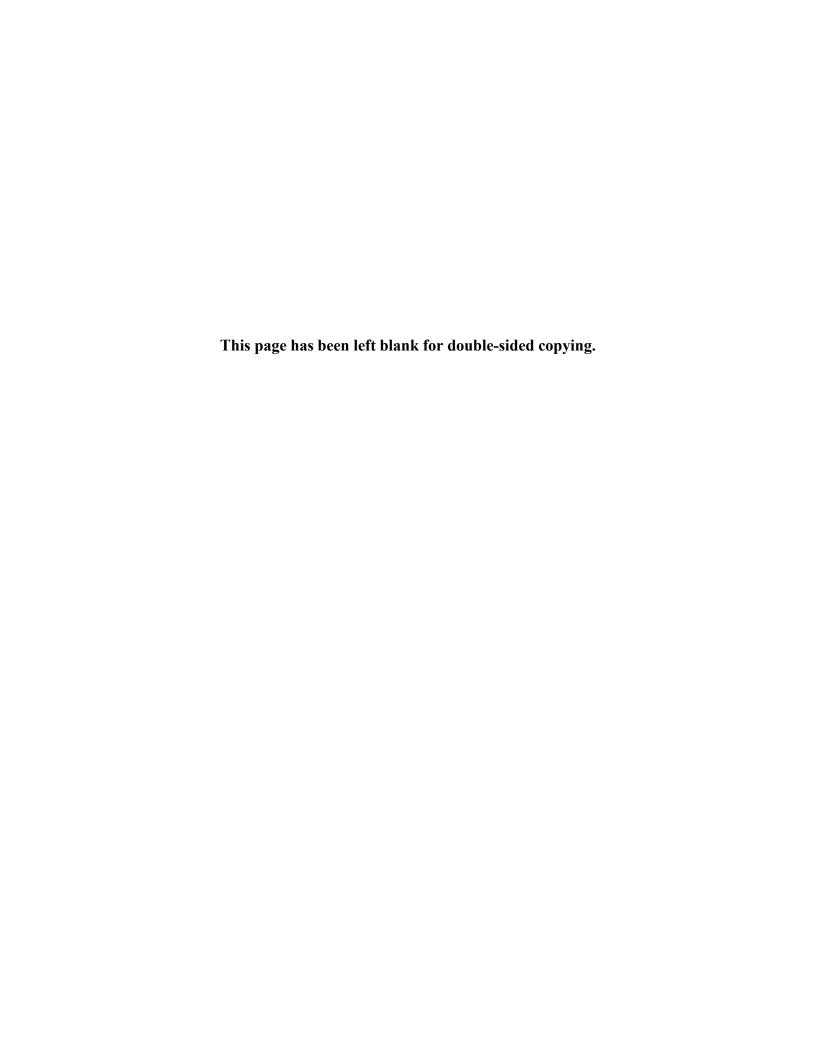This page has been left blank for double-sided copying.

Table A.1. *Guideposts for Success* policies and practices

Guidepost	Policies and practices
School-based preparatory experiences	To perform at optimal levels in all education settings, all youth need to participate in educational programs grounded in standards, clear performance expectations, and graduation exit options based upon meaningful, accurate, and relevant indicators of student learning and skills. These should include the following: • Academic programs that are based on clear state standards • Career and technical education programs that are based on professional and industry standards • Curricular and program options based on universal design of school, work, and community-based learning experiences • Learning environments that are small and safe, including extra supports such as tutoring, as necessary • Supports from and by highly qualified staff • Access to an assessment system that includes multiple measures • Graduation standards that include options In addition, youth with disabilities need to do the following: • Use their individual transition plans to drive their personal instruction and use strategies to continue the transition process post-schooling • Have access to specific and individual learning accommodations while they are in school • Develop knowledge of reasonable accommodations that they can request and control in educational settings, including assessment accommodations • Be supported by highly qualified transitional support staff who may or may not be school staff
Career preparation and work-based learning experiences	Career preparation and work-based learning experiences are essential in order for youth to form and develop aspirations and to make informed choices about careers. These experiences can be provided during the school day or through after-school programs, and will require collaborations with other organizations. All youth need information on career options, including the following: • Career assessments to help identify students' school and post-school preferences and interests • Structured exposure to postsecondary education and other lifelong learning opportunities • Exposure to career opportunities that ultimately lead to a living wage, including information about educational requirements, entry requirements, income and benefits potential, and asset accumulation • Training designed to improve job-seeking skills and workplace basic skills (sometimes called soft skills) To identify and attain career goals, youth need to be exposed to a range of experiences, including the following: • Opportunities to engage in a range of work-based exploration activities, such as site visits and job shadowing • Multiple on-the-job training experiences (paid or unpaid), including community service, that are specifically linked to the content of a program of study and school credit • Opportunities to learn and practice their work skills (soft skills) • Opportunities to learn firsthand about specific occupational skills related to a career pathway In addition, youth with disabilities may need to do one or more of the following: • Understand the relationships between benefits planning and career choices • Learn to communicate their disability-related work support and accommodation needs • Learn to find, formally request, and secure appropriate supports and reasonable accommodations in education, training, and employment settings
Youth development and leadership	Youth development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences that help them gain skills and competencies. Youth leadership is part of that process. To control and direct their own lives based on informed decisions, all youth need the following: • Mentoring activities designed to establish strong relationships with adults through formal and informal settings • Peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities • Exposure to role models in a variety of contexts • Training in skills such as self-advocacy and conflict resolution • Exposure to personal leadership and youth development activities, including community service • Opportunities that allow youth to exercise leadership and build self-esteem Youth with disabilities also need the following: • Mentors and role models, including persons with and without disabilities • An understanding of disability history, culture, and public policy issues, as well as rights and responsibilities

Table A.1. (*continued*)

Guidepost	Policies and practices
Connecting activities	Young people need to be connected to programs, services, activities, and supports that help them gain access to chosen post-school options. All youth may need one or more of the following: • Mental and physical health services • Transportation • Housing • Tutoring • Financial planning and management • Post-program supports through structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies • Connection to other services and opportunities (e.g., recreation) Youth with disabilities may need one or more of the following: • Acquisition of appropriate assistive technologies • Community orientation and mobility/travel training (e.g., accessible transportation, bus routes, housing, health clinics) • Exposure to post-program supports such as ILCs and other consumer-driven, community-based support service agencies • Personal assistance services, including attendants, readers, interpreters, or other such services • Benefits-planning counseling, including information regarding the myriad of benefits available and their interrelationships so that youth may maximize those benefits in transitioning from public assistance to self-sufficiency
Family involvement and supports	Participation and involvement of parents, family members, and other caring adults promotes the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth, which leads to better post-school outcomes. All youth need parents, families, and other caring adults who do the following: • Have high expectations that build upon the young person's strengths, interests, and needs and that foster each youth's ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency • Remain involved in their lives and assist them toward adulthood • Have access to information about employment, further education, and community resources • Take an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners • Have access to medical, professional, and peer support networks In addition, youth with disabilities need parents, families, and other caring adults who have the following: • An understanding of the youth's disability and how it may affect his or her education, employment, and daily living options • Knowledge of rights and responsibilities under various disability-related legislation • Knowledge of and access to programs, services, supports, and accommodations available for young people with disabilities • An understanding of how individualized planning tools can assist youth in achieving transition goals and objectives

Source: National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (2009).

ILC = independent living center.

Table A.2. NTACT effective practices and predictors

Level of evidence	Practice
Education outcomes	
Evidence-based practices and predictors	**Secondary school student-focused planning practices** - Published curricula to teach student involvement in the IEP **Secondary school student development (academic, employment, and life skills) practices** - Graphic organizers to teach reading comprehension - Self-determined learning model of instruction to teach goal attainment - Strategy instruction to teach math - Strategy instruction to teach reading comprehension - Time delay to teach science
Research-based practices and predictors	**Secondary school completion practices** - Accelerated middle schools for staying and progressing in school - Assign adult advocate for dropout prevention - Check and connect for staying and progressing in school - High school redirection for school completion - Provide academic support and enrichment for dropout prevention **Secondary school student-focused planning practices** - Self-advocacy strategy to teach student involvement in the IEP meeting - Self-directed IEP to teach student involvement in the IEP meeting **Secondary school student development (academic, employment, and life skills) practices** - Anchored instruction to teach math - Corrective reading to teach reading skills - Graduated sequence of instruction to teach math - Graphic organizers to teach science - Mnemonics to teach math - Mnemonics to teach science content - Peer tutoring to teach reading - Peer tutoring to teach science - Peer tutoring to teach social studies content - Schema-based instruction to teach math - Self-management instruction to teach math - Self-monitoring to teach reading - Structured inquiry to teach science content - Whose Future Is It? to teach self-determination skills **Predictors of postsecondary outcomes** - Inclusion in general education - Occupational courses - Paid employment/work experience - Transition programs - Vocation education - Youth autonomy/decision making

Table A.2. (*continued*)

Level of evidence	Practice
Promising practices and predictors	**Secondary school completion practices** - Career academies for school completion - Job Corps for school completion - JOBSTART for school completion - Social and behavior intervention programs for dropout prevention - Talent search for school completion - Twelve Together for staying in school **Secondary school student-focused planning practices** - Check and connect to promote student participation in the IEP meeting - Computer-assisted instruction to teach participation in the IEP process - Whose Future Is It? to teach student knowledge of transition planning **Secondary school student development practices** - Computerized concept mapping to teach social studies content - Cover, copy, compare to teach math skills - Graphic organizers to teach math - Mnemonics to teach social studies vocabulary - Morphological instruction to teach reading - Peer-assisted instruction to teach math - Simultaneous prompting to teach math - Supplemental materials to teach social studies content - Technology to teach reading comprehension - TouchMath to teach mathematics computation skills **Predictors of postsecondary outcomes** - Career awareness - Interagency collaboration - Parent expectations - Self-advocacy/self-determination - Self-care/independent living - Social skills - Student support
Employment outcomes	
Evidence-based practices and predictors	**Secondary school student-focused planning practices** - Published curricula to teach student involvement in the IEP **Secondary school student development practices** - Self-determined learning model of instruction to teach goal attainment
Research-based practices and predictors	**Secondary school student-focused planning practices** - Self-advocacy strategy to teach student involvement in the IEP meeting - Self-directed IEP to teach student involvement in the IEP meeting **Secondary school student development practices** - Response prompting to teach employment skills - Self-management instruction to teach specific job skills - Simulation to teach social skills - Whose Future Is It? to teach self-determination skills **Vocational rehabilitation collaborative practices** - Counseling and the working alliance between the counselor and the consumer - Interagency collaboration **Vocational rehabilitation employment practices** - Supported employment **Vocational rehabilitation professional training practices** - Impact of counselor education and consumer outcomes **Vocational rehabilitation service delivery practices** - Services to a target group **Predictors of postsecondary outcomes** - Inclusion in general education - Occupational courses - Paid employment/work experience - Vocation education - Work study

Table A.2. (*continued*)

Level of evidence	Practice
Promising practices and predictors	**Secondary school student-focused planning practices** - Check and connect to promote student participation in the IEP meeting - Computer-assisted instruction to teach participation in the IEP process - Whose Future Is It? to teach student knowledge of transition planning **Secondary school student development practices** - Community-based instruction to teach employment skills - Computer-assisted instruction to teach specific job skills - Constant time delay to teach specific job skills - Extended career planning services to teach finance skills - Mnemonics to teach completing a job application - System of least-to-most prompts to teach communication skills - System of least-to-most prompts to teach job specific skills **Vocational rehabilitation organizational practices** - Data driven - Employer relations - Excellent Service, Every Consumer, Every Time (E-3) - Incubator units - Organizational skills enhancement - Rapid response and internal service specialized coordinators, counselors, and caseloads - Share point - Strong business model **Vocational rehabilitation service delivery practices** - Acquired brain injury (ABI) program - Career exploration services - Choose to Work (CTW) - Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) Certification - DARSforce - Embedded training programs (ETP) - Essential elements of service delivery - Individual placement and support (IPS) - Maryland Seamless Transition Collaborative (MSTC) - Soft skills training - Utah Defendant Offender Workforce Development Taskforce (UDOWD) - Valforce - Work incentive planning and benefits counseling **Vocational rehabilitation environmental and cultural factors** - Organizational culture - Increasing visibility and communication/constituent relations - Agency leadership - Partnerships - Rehabilitation counselor and unit autonomy - Resources - Return on investment - Service integration and business model - Staff training and development - Support for innovative and promising practices - Working alliance and client-centered services **Other vocational rehabilitation promising practices** - Empowerment and customer self-concept

Table A.2. (*continued*)

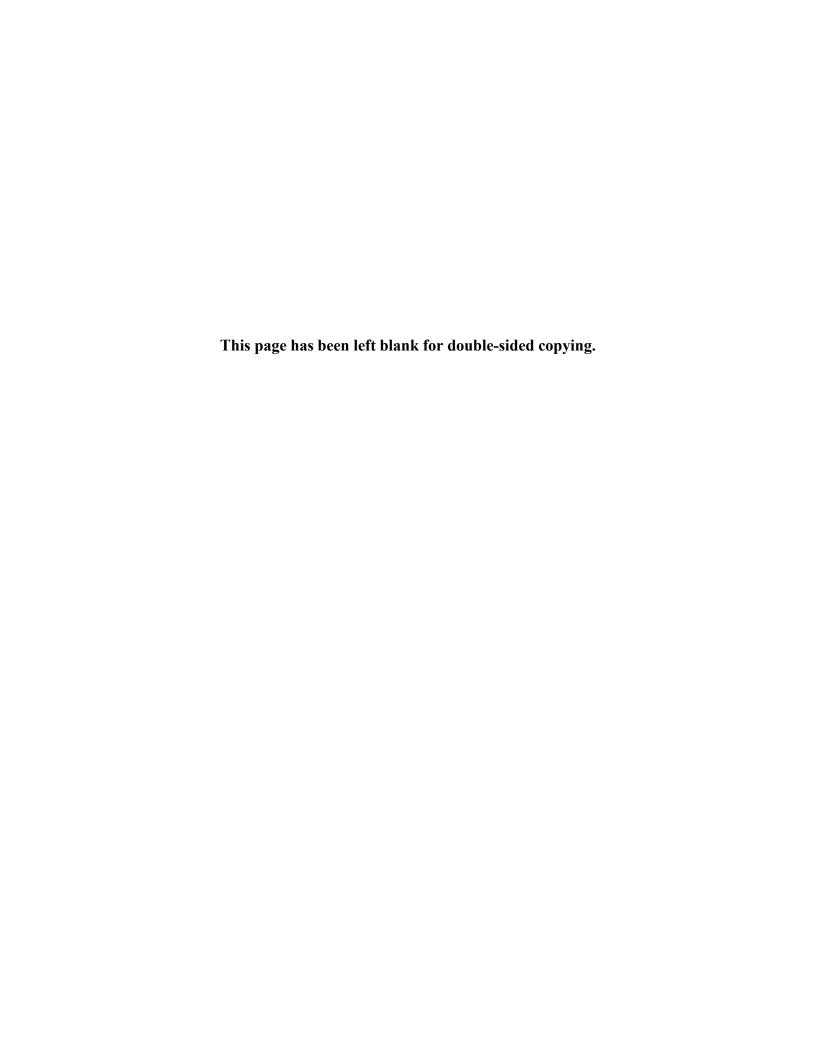| Level of evidence	Practice
Promising practices and predictors (continued)	**Predictors of postsecondary outcomes** - Career awareness - Community experiences - Exit exam requirements/high school diploma status - Interagency collaboration - Parent expectations - Parental involvement - Program of study - Self-advocacy/self-determination - Self-care/independent living - Social skills - Student support - Transition programs - Travel skills - Youth autonomy/decision making

Source: NTACT (2017).

Note: Evidence-based practices are the highest level of evidence for NTACT. The assessment is based on research that used a rigorous research design, demonstrated a strong record of success for improving outcomes, underwent a systematic review process, and adhered to quality indicators related to a specific research design.

Research-based practices are based on research that used a rigorous research design, demonstrated a sufficient record of success for improving outcomes, may or may not have undergone a systematic review process, and may or may not adhere to quality indicators related to a specific research design.

Promising practices are based on research that demonstrates limited success for improving outcomes, may or may not have undergone a systematic review process, and may or may not adhere to quality indicators related to a specific research design.

IEP = individualized education program; NTACT = National Technical Assistance Center on Transition.

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