

RSA program helps parent centers help families with transition

[Parent Training and Information Centers](#) get most of their money from [OSEP](#). But under the 1992 amendments to the Rehabilitation Act, the [Rehabilitation Services Administration](#) also helps selected centers provide transition counseling to students who are leaving the special ed system.

RSA's [Parent Information and Training Program](#) provides \$100,000 per year, much less than the average grant from OSEP, to only seven centers at a time.

But the RSA grants are crucial because teaching parents about transition and forging links to adult social service agencies is only one of the many things that parent centers are expected to do, according to Deborah Leuchovius, director of the [technical assistance center](#) for the RSA grantees at PACER.

"Many families are turning to parent centers, expecting them to have this expertise [on transition], and not all of them do," she said.

Every parent center should get the kind of dedicated transition funding the RSA program provides, according to Donna Fluke, coordinator of the [National Coalition of Parent Centers](#) and former project officer for the OSEP-funded parent centers.

"It definitely would be an asset," she said of a universal RSA program. "I worked on it a number of times and tried to make it happen." In fact, there was "a conversation even about transferring that particular component over to OSEP," she said, but nothing came of it.

Helping families with the transition process is about capitalizing on everything that has come before, Fluke said.

Transition is "the end result of all these years that we have worked to try to get the kids in the educational program and [the right] curriculum, and develop all their skills to the best of their ability, and yet when they reach that end, so often, it's an end," she said. "It doesn't make any sense to not develop [transition services] more fully and work harder to make those connections happen because they're not going to happen on their own."

At the [Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center](#) in Virginia, Cathy Healy is using her RSA grant to develop a set of transition webcasts.

"Traditionally, the way that we've been reaching parents is to go out in the community and mount these full-scale workshops," she said. "Unfortunately, it's very expensive to mount a workshop."

Healy is getting help with the webcasts from the [Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Workplace Supports and Job Retention](#) at Virginia Commonwealth University, where Valerie Brooke is director of [training](#).

"What we see with family members -- all of a sudden, at the end of this eligibility for educational services, they sort of fall off this cliff into this crazy world of adult services, where if they haven't been hooked into [what's available, they get] kind of lost," she said.

Brooke's center is part of a network funded by [National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research](#), meaning Healy is benefiting directly or indirectly from all three arms of [OSERS](#).

It's precisely the kind of synergy all parent centers could create if they had additional funds, according to Leuchovius.

"I have been promoting parent centers as the logical choice for this, to be the one-stop shop for parents of transitioning youth with disabilities," she said. "And in some sense, parent centers are, but ... they're funded to provide information about education -- educational rights, educational involvement in the context of the IDEA."

That's why a separate funding stream, dedicated to transition issues, is so helpful, she said. But the RSA grants -- seven each year, for up to five years -- are competitive, meaning the grant for any particular center eventually

runs out.

"Sometimes these really excellent projects are stopped in their tracks," she said. "It's very hard, once parent centers lose that funding, to maintain that expertise in-house."

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