This Final Executive Report is based on the Career and Transition Services Program Final Evaluation Report. Please contact the Office of Program Evaluation (571-423-1430) to request the comprehensive report.
The Career and Transition Services (CTS) program is overseen by Fairfax County Public Schools’ (FCPS) Department of Special Services. As stated in the Fairfax County Public Schools’ Program Profile for Career and Transition Services (CTS), the purpose of the program is “to prepare youth with disabilities for the challenges and expectations that await them upon graduation from high school.” The range of transition services offered to special education students is critical to meeting the aim of transition services as stated in the IDEA reauthorization of the Act in 2004, "ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate education that . . . prepare[s] them for further education, employment and independent living." (See the full CTS Final Evaluation Report for a detailed program description.)

Evaluation Purpose and Design

The CTS program was recommended for evaluation through a process that included input from departments, school-based administrators, and FCPS’ Leadership Team. When the evaluation began, the interest was in understanding program outcomes in light of the changing disability status of students in FCPS.

The purpose of the CTS comprehensive evaluation is to provide the FCPS School Board, Leadership Team, and program staff with evidence-based judgments about the effectiveness of the program based on two years of data and to make a summative recommendation to continue the program as is, continue it with modifications, or discontinue the program.

Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) staff collaborated with a team composed of representatives from Central Office, school and cluster-based staff (cluster director, elementary school principals, middle school staff, and program management) to identify specific research questions for the CTS program:

Program Definition
- To what extent is the program designed to reflect research-based Best Practices?

Fidelity of Implementation
- To what extent is the delivery of the program services occurring as intended and with consistency across sites?
- To what extent is fidelity of implementation impacted by communication, staffing, staff expertise, and policies and practices that place constraints on the delivery of program services?

Outcomes
- To what extent is post-secondary engagement as defined by the Leaver Survey associated with fidelity of implementation and specific student pathways through CTS?

Program Costs
- To what extent has CTS staff attempted to minimize or contain program costs?
• How cost-effective is the program?

To answer the questions listed above, data were collected from a variety of sources including an extensive review of the literature; information from focus groups with Employment Transition Representatives (ETRs); surveys of special education chairs, ETRs, and students; meetings with program management; and data from special education services. It should be noted that data about program definition, implementation, and outcomes reflect how the program operated between SY 2009-10 and SY 2011-12. Only the Program Costs section of the report includes SY 2012-13 information.

Conclusions

This section of the report highlights major program strengths and challenges based on the findings from the questions that guided the evaluation. (See the full CTS Final Evaluation Report for the detailed discussion of findings that led to the following conclusions).

Program Strengths

• CTS is a well-designed program that incorporates the necessary elements described by relevant literature as important for meeting the transition needs of most special education students.

• CTS program staff regularly engage in continuous improvement and planning efforts to improve implementation and increase impact of the program. One of these efforts is the development of strong Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that involve both Central Office staff and site-based ETRs. The PLC shares strategies among staff for what works in providing appropriate services to students. A second effort is the development of a mentorship program for new ETRs to share expertise and learning about how to negotiate within schools to advocate for appropriate services for students.

• The program is associated with positive results as demonstrated by the high degree of transition success among participating students.

Program Challenges

• The intended involvement of ETRs is inconsistent across schools. While ETRs have been defined by Central Office as a necessary voice in decisions about which services shall be provided to students to support their transition, ETRs are not consistently invited into Individual Education Program (IEP) meetings or other communications where these decisions are made. The result may be limited access to the full array of available services for some students at those sites.

• Communication between program staff and schools needs to be strengthened to ensure clearer understanding and implementation of Central Office expectation. These communications should clarify loose and tight expectations expressed in written documents, in training, and verbally at meetings. For example, there is limited communication between Central Office and individual school sites about how to integrate ETRs into the schools, which leads to inconsistency of implementation of CTS across sites and IEP teams.

• Some schools still seem unclear of Best Practices in transition planning – that is, the need to address educational, vocational, social, and independent living needs of students. The absence of any one of these practices at a site could decrease a student’s chances for a successful transition to post-graduation opportunities.
• The lack of congruence between some CTS goals and division or state requirements will likely inhibit the program’s success in reaching all of its goals. These incongruences are primarily in two areas: (a) FCPS’ practice that requires a minimum number of students to provide bus transportation to an academy, which may misalign with transition placements for individual students, and (b) state requirements for graduation rates that influence decisions about course taking, limiting the courses students have available to allocate to transition course work.

• Lastly, budget constraints will impact this program in ways similar to other programs. The evaluation indicates that with the current cuts to the program, the program will need to decrease the current level of services. This means that some or all students may not receive the full array of program opportunities that were available in the past. While planned budgets cuts will not likely cause the program to fall out of compliance with regulatory expectations, parents and community groups may desire systematic communications about how specific groups of students will be impacted.

Recommendations to Decision Makers

Information in the Conclusions section guided the development of a summative recommendation for the evaluation team, as well as recommended actions for various stakeholder groups to improve the program.

Summative Recommendation for Leadership Team:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Continue program as is</th>
<th>Continue program with modifications</th>
<th>Discontinue program</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Action Recommendations for FCPS Staffs (Modifications)

Leadership Team

• Decide whether FCPS should formally challenge state and federal accountability requirements (new graduation requirements and Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)) that may limit special education students’ ability to engage in the full range of CTS services that could be of benefit.

• Direct staff to explore strategies to expand special education students’ ability to access relevant CTS services located offsite from their assigned schools.

Program Staff

• Create a decision tree to guide IEP teams in selecting the most appropriate types of CTS services provided to students.

• Catalog and publish model approaches used in FCPS schools to offer needed services across four areas — educational, vocational, social, and independent living.
• Strengthen communications to schools to heighten school-based staff’s awareness that special education students are expected to have a role in writing their transition plan goals and monitoring their own progress towards achieving them.

• Develop a systematic monitoring framework to assess program implementation at schools.

**School-based Staff**

• Establish schoolwide procedures to ensure that all IEP meetings involve ETRs either directly or indirectly.

• Adopt one of the model approaches established by the program to ensure consideration of services across the four areas described above.

**Note:** The Office of Program Evaluation (OPE) invites program managers to respond to recommendations presented in evaluation reports in order to gauge the level of understanding of, agreement with, and commitment to proposed next steps. Program management responses are written by, and represent the perspective of, the program management office and/or parent department. Department of Special Services’ (DSS) program management response to the final evaluation findings and recommendations for the OPE is available as Appendix I to the *Career and Transition Services Program Final Year Evaluation Report, SY 2009-10 to SY 2012-13.*
APPENDIX A

BOX SCORE
THE BOX SCORE REPORT: PROGRAM PERFORMANCE AT A GLANCE
Career and Transition Services Program
Final Evaluation

This Box Score Report summarizes the ratings of the program at the end of this evaluation period. See the Career and Transition Services Final Evaluation Report SY 2009-10 to SY 2012-13 for the detailed justifications for these ratings.

### CORE Components

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Below Benchmark</th>
<th>Benchmark</th>
<th>Above Benchmark</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Definition</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidelity of Implementation</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Costs</td>
<td>Final</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PROGRAM QUALITY

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Final</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Program Definition</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fidelity of Implementation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program Costs</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PROGRAM COSTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Cost</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Cost Per Participant</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FY 2010</td>
<td>$18,065,755</td>
<td>2,980</td>
<td>$6,062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FY 2011</td>
<td>$17,939,573</td>
<td>3,004</td>
<td>$5,972</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

See Program Costs section of Career and Transition Services Program Final Report SY 2009-10 to 2012-13 for detailed cost information.

### Decision Rules for Making Overall Recommendation in Program Evaluation Reports

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Interim Year</th>
<th>Final Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continue As Is</td>
<td>Rating of 4 on Program Definition, Fidelity of Implementation, Outcomes, and Program Cost.</td>
<td>Rating of 4 on Program Definition, Fidelity of Implementation, Outcomes, and Program Cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continue with Modifications</td>
<td>Rating below 4 on Program Definition, Fidelity of Implementation, Outcomes, or Program Cost.</td>
<td>One rating of less than 4, but at least 3 on Program Definition, Fidelity of Implementation and Outcomes, and at least 2 on Program Cost.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discontinue</td>
<td>Irreparable adverse effects observed at any point during the evaluation year.</td>
<td>Irreparable adverse effects observed at any point during the evaluation year. Or, rating of 2 or below on Program Definition, Fidelity of Implementation, or Outcomes. Or, rating of 1 on Program Cost.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Report Recommendation: ____ Continue As Is  ✔ Continue With Modifications¹  ____ Discontinue

¹ Modifications described as recommendations
APPENDIX B

BOX SCORE RATINGS AND JUSTIFICATION
CORE PROGRAM QUALITY COMPONENTS:
RATINGS AND JUSTIFICATION

This section of the report provides a formal rating for each of the core program components considered in this evaluation, along with the evidence that justifies it. The ratings use a four-point scale where “3” is considered the minimum level (Benchmark) that a program should achieve on each component.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Below Basic</td>
<td>Basic</td>
<td>Benchmark</td>
<td>Above Benchmark</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program does not</td>
<td>Program meets</td>
<td>Program meets</td>
<td>Program meets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meet some</td>
<td>Prerequisites of the</td>
<td>Prerequisites and</td>
<td>Prerequisites and</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prerequisites of</td>
<td>component.</td>
<td>at least one Standard</td>
<td>Standard Elements of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>component.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Element of the</td>
<td>component.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>component.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Program Definition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Justification:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Career and Transition Services (CTS) Program meets benchmark criteria for the Program Definition component. The following paragraphs highlight strengths and challenges in the program’s definition, provide justification for the rating, and discuss areas for improvement.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The primary strengths of the program are that it: (1) aligns fully with the eight characteristics of high quality transition programs identified in the literature; (2) contributes uniquely to Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) by providing targeted transition services to special education students—as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004)—including career assessment, college and career planning, supported work experience, job placement, life skills training, and transition to adult services (if needed); (3) has clear and explicit description of the activities expected of Central Office and the Employment and Transition Representatives (ETRs) at the sites; and (4) has articulated measurable short-, intermediate and long-term outcomes that align to program services, though it only systematically measures its intermediate outcome (post-secondary engagement in college or work).

The primary challenge for the program’s definition is that it has not generated sufficiently deep understanding among school-based staff of the role of each program activity toward meeting students’ academic, vocational, social and independent living needs to prepare them for a successful post-secondary transition. The program also could improve its definition by more explicitly including activities that engage students in both setting goals and reviewing their progress toward their transition goals. The above improvements would allow the program to fully meet all of the characteristics of effective transition programs.

In sum, the program meets benchmark based on its alignment with the literature, unique contribution to providing mandated transition services to special education students, documentation of Central Office activities and expectations of Employment Transition Representatives (ETRs), and its ability to describe the logical linkages among its resources, activities, and outcomes. It could strengthen its definition by providing detailed guidance to school sites about how the program should be implemented, how specific program activities are tied toward meeting the goal of successfully transitioning students to college or career after high school, and more directly involving students in the review of their progress toward their transition goals.
## Fidelity of Implementation

**Justification:**
CTS minimally meets the prerequisites and at least one standard element for fidelity of implementation, thus earning a rating of 3. However, the program faces several barriers to consistent implementation across sites as described below.

The primary strength of the program is that it is implemented at all sites with a clear sense of the program’s intention to provide transition services to all special education students. Additionally, focus groups with ETRs and surveys of special education chairs indicated that Individual Education Program teams (IEP teams) broadly understand program goals and activities. However, IEP teams across sites do not have a deep understanding of transition planning, specifically that the plans should address educational, vocational, social skills, and independent living. Without this full understanding, IEP teams may not consider the full range of services that would benefit a student.

As described in the report, there were additional barriers to consistent implementation across sites. Among the barriers are policies and practices that place constraints on the selection/delivery of program activities: excluding the ETR from the transition planning process; demands for high SOL pass rates and graduation rates that lead IEP decisions away from skill training; transportation policies for off-site programs; and master schedules that constrain students’ ability to take courses off site. As a result of these factors, students may experience the program differently based on their IEP team and their school site.

The program could strengthen the Fidelity of Implementation component by providing specific guidance to schools to improve their understanding of the need to address the full range of student transition needs—educational, vocational, social, and independent living skills—and to adopt practices that embed the ETR in the IEP process. In addition, changes to the transportation policies and master schedules at schools, as well as addressing SOL and graduation rates, reduce students’ ability to access the full range of program services.

## Outcomes

**Justification:**
The CTS program met the benchmark level for the outcomes under consideration by demonstrating high rates of engagement in post-secondary education or work among special education students. The remainder of this section will provide summary details about areas of strength and challenge, as well as a discussion of areas for improvement.

A strength of the program is that a large majority (89 percent) of special education students who receive CTS services are engaged in education or work one year after leaving high school. Participating in CTS was associated with higher levels of engagement among students with cognitive disabilities. To receive a “4” on outcomes, the program would need to develop benchmark expectations for student engagement in education or work so that annual performance could be compared to a benchmark. The benchmark expectation should be aligned to a standard in the field for quality transition programs.

In sum, the program was rated as “3” on outcomes based on the fact that overall, engagement rates are high and meet the program’s expectations.

## Program Costs

**Justification:**
The CTS program met the benchmark level for costs. The remainder of this section describes program costs and justifies the cost rating.
The program budget was clearly linked to program activities as reflected in expenditures. Funds are primarily used to support staff at each school. The program provided per participant costs of $6,062 in FY 2010 and $5,972 in FY 2011 (the years reflecting when students in the study were in Grade 12). Additional cost information is available for subsequent years. The program has made cuts in response to decreased funds by eliminating two assessment coaches during the years of the study and eliminating professional development funds. Additional personnel cuts will occur over the next year which may impact program services. Assuming these were necessary positions, the cuts represent a loss of services.

Overall, the program demonstrates close alignment between expenditures and program goals; however, it is threatened in maintaining services in light of decreased funds.