DEFINING THE COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION ALLIANCE:
OUTCOMES, VALUES, PURPOSES, AND OPERATING MODEL

by

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An executive position paper submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Spring 2009

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the stakeholder values, desired student outcomes, organizational purposes, and operating model of the Community-based Education Alliance (CBEA), a transition program operated by a partnership between the Center for Disabilities Studies of the University of Delaware, and two school districts in New Castle County, Delaware.

The conceptual framework for this evaluation assumes the following dynamics. Stakeholders share some of their personal values relevant to an interest area with other stakeholders. Shared values lead to common opinions about desired student outcomes. Desired outcomes drive formulation of purposes for an organization like CBEA. An operating model that supports the purposes and cultures of the involved entities develops. The operating model of a transition program includes descriptions of features, flows, and structure.

Using eight focus-group interviews with 28 CBEA stakeholders, I studied relationships among desired outcomes, purposes, and the operating model of CBEA. I compared the CBEA operating model with those found at three programs operating at Violet State University, the University of the Southeast, and the University of Technology and Engineering (all names disguised). Using this data, I surveyed stakeholders (N=92) of CBEA to validate the opinions
expressed by the focus groups and to determine their thoughts on the differences between the CBEA operating model and those at the other three universities.

In this paper, outcomes are defined as "states of being" for participants in the CBEA program. Purposes are reasons why CBEA exists, expressed in this paper as activities in which CBEA engages in order to help participants achieve desired outcomes.

Outcomes mentioned most often by focus group participants were those related to independence, employment, and socialization. In general, the 14 responses to the survey were consistent with the focus group results. Development of skills for job acquisition and self-determination and assembly of collaborative teams were the organizational purposes most frequently mentioned by the focus groups. Job acquisition and self-determination were also the two most-often mentioned purposes by survey respondents.

Each of the three comparable programs I visited between April and August provided insights through their differences in structure, features, and areas of emphasis. For example, none of the other programs involved a university interacting with more than one school entity, whereas CBEA had three separate contracts in the 2007-08 school year and two in 2008-09. One program required students to take college courses as a condition of participation, whereas CBEA students don't take courses except on occasion. Structurally, the four programs are dissimilar, showing that there is no formulaic approach.
A presentation at the CBEA Advisory Committee meeting in October and the survey (conducted in November and December) provided a means for validating focus group results and sharing information about the operating models of the other three universities. In the survey I asked respondents to indicate their willingness to consider having CBEA adopt six practices that one or more of the other programs employs but that CBEA does not. The number of individuals who said that CBEA should *definitely* or *maybe* consider these six practices ranged between 10 and 14 (n=14).

Based on the results of the study and discussion of preliminary recommendations with Center for Disabilities Studies administrators, I offer 10 key recommendations, including strengthening the IEP process; increasing support for job development, academic engagement, and independent living skills; and enhancing collaboration among stakeholders. I also discuss four alternative operating structures—referred to as the single-district, charter-school, external private-school, and university-operated private-school models.