

Transition Planning: What – Why – How

Planning – Start Early

Growing up is not easy! It is even more complicated for young adults with disabilities. Far too many students with disabilities leave school lacking the academic, technical, and social skills necessary to find and/or maintain employment, and often the jobs they do find are low paying and offer no health benefits.

As students prepare to move from school to community living and employment, good program planning can help them become independent, productive adults. Identifying the challenges students will face as adults, and preparing and assisting them to meet those demands successfully requires careful transition planning beginning at the earliest age possible.

Why Start Early?

It is important to begin the transition planning process early to allow time for planning and accessing the support services needed in the future.

Both Congress and the U.S. Department of Education recognized that early transition planning is important because:

- Transition from special education services and its entitlements is complicated.
- For students with severe disabilities and complex needs it will take time to put post-school services and supports in place.
- Some students will likely be using the services of many agencies and time will be needed to figure out who can do what and who will pay for what.

Early and long-range planning are critical in order for the student to receive many post-school programs or services whether they include support services in college or residential services from an adult provider. Students and families are often faced with much paperwork to meet eligibility requirements and some adult services have long waiting lists.

Early, thoughtful planning will help ensure that the student will receive needed services in a timely manner when he or she exits the school system.

Definition

Transition Services are defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) section 300.18 as a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promote movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.

The coordinated set of activities must be based on individual student's needs taking into account the student's preferences and interests and shall include:

- instruction;
- community experiences;
- the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives;
- when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills;
- when appropriate, a functional vocational evaluation.

Services should be based on current assessments of the student's academic, vocational, and daily living skills. The student's native language (if other than English) and cultural background must be considered in evaluations and planning. Transition services should emphasize skills needed to live and work in an integrated community setting.

What Should the Transition Plan Include?

The transition plan provides the framework for identifying, planning, and carrying out activities that will help the student make a successful transition to adult life. It includes the long-range post-school outcomes identified by the student, a statement of a projected course of study (at age 14), and specific transition services that the student will need (at age 16), including agency services with plans for:

- What agencies will be involved;
- What services each agency will provide; and
- How all of the services will be coordinated.

How Do You Plan?

Transition planning involves a team of people drawn from different parts of the student's school and community life. The specific needs of the student for post-secondary services should determine who is invited to the IEP transition planning meeting. It is important that students be linked to various adult agencies and organizations, such as mental health agencies, vocational rehabilitation, community colleges, housing, and employment and training agencies. If representatives from the agencies do not attend the meeting, the school is required to "take other steps to obtain participation" in planning the student's transition services, such as separate meetings, phone calls or written correspondence.

Transition goals cannot be achieved in one year. Transition planning, services, and activities should be approached as a multi-year process. Young adults themselves, along with their parents, play an important role in the transition process. While involving the student in his/her own transition planning is required by law, perhaps the most important reason for student involvement is to facilitate the development of his/her self-determination skills. These are essential for the student to develop the ability to manage his or her own life.

The Transition Concept

The concept of transition is simple and generally has three major components:

- 1) Coach every student, along with his or her family, to think about goals after high school and to develop a long-range plan that will get there.
- 2) Design high school experiences to ensure that the student gains the skills needed to reach his or her desired post-school goals.
- 3) Identify and link students and families to any needed post-school services, supports or programs before the student exits the school system.

To begin with, examine the family's values as well as the young adult's interests, skills, and desires for the

future. Encourage the student to talk about their preferences for the future. These preferences should guide the transition planning process while involving students in planning activities that help him/her become a good decision maker and develop self-advocacy skills.

Transition services can and should be delivered through curricular and extracurricular activities in many settings -- in academic and vocational classrooms, at home, and throughout the community -- to practice and reinforce newly acquired skills. The more young adults with disabilities have opportunities to practice their skills in real-life situations, the more comfortable and natural they will feel in those settings.

Beginning at 14

IDEA contains detailed requirements for planning the education of individual students including a statement of what must be included in the IEP. Students 14 and over must be invited to attend the IEP meeting. The invitation should be documented. If the student does not attend, the district or BOCES must document how the student's interests and preferences were considered.

“(b)(1) For each student with disabilities beginning at age 14 (or younger, if determined appropriate by the IEP team), and updated annually, a “statement of the transition service needs” of the student under the applicable components of the IEP that focuses on the student’s courses of study (such as participation in advance-placement courses or a vocational education program); ...”

The focus of the IEP should be framed to identify the projected course of study related to the student's post-school outcomes. Consider core courses required for graduation or acceptance into a post-secondary program, any courses and experiences that are modified or specially designed for this student and elective courses. The concept is to think about, plan for and ensure that all courses and educational experiences offered to the student will help them achieve their desired post-school goals or outcomes. Basically, the plan becomes a road map for this student.

In the student's IEP, this requirement can be met in several ways. For example;

- List the anticipated courses and experiences that the student will have by grade level or year.
- Include a narrative statement that outlines the steps the student should take to reach the identified post school outcome.
- Attach a four-year plan that has been developed for the student as part of a general education, school-to-career, planning process.

To Illustrate the Transition Planning Process

Consider the educational planning generally engaged in with college freshman. Typically, each freshman meets with an adviser to develop a four-year educational plan. This plan is an attempt to help the student select required core courses and those needed for completing a major. If college students did not develop a long-range educational plan early, or if they simply plan courses they will take on a yearly basis, they may never complete a program of study, never graduate, or at best, graduate on an extended five or six-year plan.

The same need for long-range educational planning exists for all students with disabilities, beginning at 14 years of age. If a long-range educational plan is not developed early, the student could end up not graduating or graduating without the courses and experiences needed for independent living, further training or employment. Actively involving students in the planning process could motivate them to remain at school. Involving students in the discussion and decision-making may help students understand that the courses they are taking in school have a direct relationship to achieving what they want to do beyond school.

Beginning at 16

When the student reaches age 16, (or earlier if appropriate), planning begins to focus on specific transition services, including interagency linkages.

“(b)(2) for each student beginning at age 16 (or younger, if determined appropriate by the IEP team), a statement of needed transition services for the student, including, if appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages...”

Identify and describe the specific transition services, including related services, required in each domain area to move the student toward his/her identified post-school outcome. Indicate services provided through general education such as school-to-career activities, applied academics, and adult living objectives that fulfill the student's transition needs. Specify services from other agencies and referrals made, as appropriate to the student's needs.

When appropriate and feasible, a representative from another agency may participate in the school district's planning meeting. A primary role of the agency representative is that of consultation and technical assistance to the schools in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities. Agency service plans should be developed before the student leaves high school and coordinated with the student's IEP. Sometimes, services and resources can be shared between agencies.

What To Do

Include the student in all planning meetings!

There are several key components to ensure successful transition. First and foremost, include the student in all planning meetings! Engage the student and parents in thinking about the student's goals for the future. Outline the activities, supports and services needed to move the student towards his/her identified post-school outcome. And, link the student and family with the appropriate adult agencies that can provide continuing supports.

In transition planning consider:

- Employment/career planning
- Living arrangements/housing for the future
- Social and leisure activities
- Security, health, and safety needs
- Post-secondary education and training.
- What kind of supports may be necessary

The IEP and Transition Planning

Follow-up studies of students with disabilities have found that a large number of these students do not go on for further training; they do not receive needed supports and services as adults; and are not as successful when compared with the general population. These findings have led to the conclusion that in order to improve the post-school results of these students, the educational program must be integrated with the student's community living, working and social environments. The transition requirements of IDEA '97 challenge education to improve the post-school results of students with disabilities by doing a better job of planning and preparing students and families for the challenges and complexities of the adult world.

Some material in this publication adapted from:
Storms, J., O'Leary, E., and Williams, J. (2000). *Transition Requirements: A Guide for States, Districts, Schools, Universities and Families*. Minneapolis, MN: National Transition Network, University of Minnesota.

Transition Checklist

The following is a checklist of transition activities that students, parents, and school personnel may wish to consider when preparing transition plans with the IEP team. The student's skills and interests will determine which items on the checklist are relevant. Use this checklist to determine whether or not these transition issues should be addressed at IEP transition meetings. The checklist can also help identify who should be part of the IEP transition team. Responsibility for carrying out the specific transition activities should be determined at the IEP transition meetings.

Four to Five Years Before Leaving School

- Identify student learning styles and the necessary accommodations to be a successful learner and worker.
- Identify career interests and skills, complete interest and career inventories, and identify additional education or training requirements.
- Explore options for post-secondary education and training including admission criteria.
- Identify interests and options for future living arrangements, including supports.
- Learn to communicate effectively student interests, preferences, and needs.
- Be able to explain student disabilities and the accommodations he or she needs.
- Learn and practice informed decision-making skills.
- Investigate assistive technology tools that can increase community involvement and employment opportunities.
- Broaden student experiences with community activities and expand friendships.
- Pursue and use local transportation options *outside of family*.
- Acquire an identification card and the ability to communicate personal information.
- Identify and begin learning skills necessary for independent living including money management.
- Learn and practice personal health care.
- Identify health care providers and become informed about sexuality and family planning issues.
- Determine the need for financial support (Supplemental Security Income, state financial supplemental programs, medicare).
- Learn and practice appropriate interpersonal, communication, and social skills for different settings (employment, school, recreation, with peers, etc.).
- Explore legal status about decision-making prior to the age of maturity and consider the need for guardianship.
- Begin a resume and update it as needed.
- Practice independent living skills, e.g., budgeting, shopping, cooking, and housekeeping.
- Identify needed personal assistant services, and if appropriate, learn to direct and manage these services.

One Year Before Leaving School

Two to Three Years Before Leaving School

- Identify community support services and programs (Vocational Rehabilitation, Centers for Independent Living, Community Centered Board, etc.)
- Coordinate with adult service providers and ensure that appropriate referrals have been made.
- Match career interests and skills with academic course work and community work experiences.
- Gather more information on post-secondary programs and the support services offered; and make arrangements for accommodations to take college entrance exams.
- Apply for financial support programs. (Supplemental Security Income, Independent Living Services, Vocational Rehabilitation, and Personal Assistant Services).
- Identify the post-secondary school the student plans to attend and arrange for accommodations.
- Practice effective communication by developing interview skills, asking for help, and identifying necessary accommodations at post-secondary and work environments.
- Specify desired job and obtain paid employment with supports as needed.
- Take responsibility for arriving on time to work, appointments, and social activities including transportation needs.
- Assume responsibility for health care needs (making appointments, filling and taking prescriptions etc.).
- Register to vote and for selective service (if a male).