

Transition Services for Students With Disabilities: Helping Handout for School and Home

DEVADRITA TALAPATRA, PETER Z. GLADSTONE, & LAUREL A. SNIDER

INTRODUCTION

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) of 2004, schools must have a formalized transition plan for students with a disability by age 16. Appropriate transition planning should begin early, before students begin high school, to help them achieve positive postschool outcomes. Throughout the transition process, the student, family, and school staff should review graduation requirements, diploma tracks (e.g., standard diploma, certification of completion), and personal goals.

This handout is meant to help educators and families understand priorities of transition, such as learning academic, vocational, or functional life skills. For example, if the primary goal is employment after high school, vocational assessment and planning plus community job placement will be an important aspect of the student's high school experience. If postsecondary education is a viable goal, it is important to explore postsecondary institutional resources, and ensure that the student can attain the appropriate prerequisite skills and requirements for available programs. If independent living is the priority, then activities of daily living must be practiced and housing options must be explored. The purpose of this handout is to provide the school and the home with practical recommendations to help guide the transition of students with disabilities from secondary school to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living. Further, federal legislation requires that transition planning be individualized to students' strengths, preferences, and needs. In light of this, this document describes specific recommendations that

can be implemented both at home and at school to support growth in daily living, vocational, academic, and self-determination skills; selection of appropriate strategies should be tailored to the individual student.

WHAT TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING SUPPORTS AND INTERVENTIONS

Adults involved in choosing intervention strategies to transition students with a disability into their lives after high school should first understand the legal mandate for transition services. Minimum legal requirements for transition planning as identified by IDEA 2004 are outlined below:

- Begin transition planning by the time the student turns 16 years old.
- Individualize transition planning activities based on the strengths, preferences, and interests of the student.
- Develop the transition plan with a team of stakeholders, including the student, the student's parents, members of their Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, and community partners.
- Identify goals that are age-appropriate and measurable; describe activities and specify team members who will be responsible for helping the student meet these goals.
- Plan transition activities so that they provide opportunities to develop skills for postsecondary employment, education, and independent living.

For individualizing the student's transition plan, additional topics must be considered, such as severity

of impairment, developmental trajectory, and specific student goals. Comprehensive transition planning should also identify available supports in the student's family system and community.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SCHOOL AND HOME

This handout offers recommendations for teachers and families to consider and implement to help guide the transition of students with disabilities from secondary school to postsecondary education, employment, and independent living, with brief descriptions of key areas that are critical to students' success. More detailed descriptions, checklists, and resources are available at the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT). NTACT also provides reviews of research that has shown successful outcomes for many of the following suggestions.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE SCHOOL

The following recommendations are intended for teachers and support staff. However, parents and other caregivers would participate in the implementation of many of the interventions. The recommendations are divided loosely into categories aligned with IDEA 2004 transition guidelines: (a) fostering self-determination; (b) facilitating family, school, and community partnerships; (c) supporting academic achievement; and (d) planning for postsecondary outcomes.

Interventions to Foster Student Self-Determination

Self-determination refers to individuals' capacity to make decisions for themselves, initiate actions of their choosing, and set and pursue personal goals. Self-determination has long been identified as a critical component of students' social and emotional development. The following recommendations help teachers and parents foster students' self-determination by explicitly helping students identify and advocate for their own preferences, interests, and wishes.

1. **Use a planning approach that emphasizes person-centered techniques.** The approach should ensure that students' individual goals, strengths, and areas for growth are at the center of planning their transition out of high school. Two common and seminal approaches include the McGill Action Planning System (MAPS; Vandercook, York, & Forest, 1989) and Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH; Forest & O'Brien, 1993). As emphasized

in MAPS, parents and teachers might develop a narrative that identifies students' goals and lists concrete practices to support those goals. Or, as emphasized in PATH, they might first identify the final outcome desired by the student, then engage all team members in a backwards planning process to identify action steps and the team members who will complete them. Inclusion Press offers additional resources for implementing MAPS and PATH.

2. **Incorporate interventions in the student's curriculum that teach choice-making, problem-solving, decision-making, and goal-attainment skills.** Teachers might use the ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Curriculum and Lesson Packages (Martin & Marshall, 1995), which is supported by the U.S. Department of Education and is freely available, for this purpose.
3. **Determine the student's long-term transition goals.** Even if students' primary goal is to attend postsecondary education, they should have an employment goal in mind. A checklist that may help students determine their employment interests can be found in Timmons, Podmostko, Bremer, Lavin, & Wills (2004, pp. 1–20).
4. **Implement student-led IEP meetings that build advocacy and leadership skills.** The following recommendations may help teachers increase students' participation in IEP meetings and support their self-efficacy:
 - Focus on the student's strengths and needs when thinking of ways the student can lead his or her IEP meetings.
 - Strategize with the student about the roles and responsibilities of the team members at the IEP meeting, including which team members will lead the agenda, introduce team members, describe past goals, reflect on progress, and suggest new IEP goals. The ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Curriculum has a Self-Directed IEP section for additional reference.
 - Before the IEP meeting, review topic areas that the student may cover in the meeting, such as personal interests, current strengths and areas for improvement, description of the student's disability and its impact on academic and nonacademic functioning, description of the student's current academic supports, future aspirations, and progress toward meeting the goals outlined in the student's IEP.
 - Facilitate the student-led IEP meeting, and provide guidance, reminders, and other

supports before and during the meeting, such as practicing phrases, preparing PowerPoint slides before the meeting, and creating openings in the discussion to address the student's topics of interest.

Interventions to Build Partnerships Between Families, Schools, and Communities

Strong collaborative partnerships between families, schools, and communities are essential in planning successful postgraduation outcomes for students. The recommendations below involve first developing a multidisciplinary transition team and then designing practices that support that team.

5. ***Develop a transition team that includes multiple parties.*** In addition to the student, the team should include diverse school professionals, family members, and representatives from community agencies:
 - School professionals might include school psychologists, special educators, speech–language pathologists, physical therapists, and social workers. Such professionals can help other team members better understand the student's broader needs related to disability, resources available in the district, and strategies for writing transition goals and measuring transition-related outcomes.
 - Representatives from community agencies might come from employment sites, vocational rehabilitation services, and institutes of higher education. They can support the student by preventing breaks in services, developing relationships with organizations outside of the school system, and matching the student with community resources that relate to the student's goals. For example, if the student is interested in working in food service, they may set up supported internships at restaurants to give the student relevant experience.
 - Family members or primary caregivers can provide input about goals and interventions that will best represent the student's personal values and help identify practices that will result in a sustainable transition plan for the student and family after graduation (see Talapatra, Miller, & Schumacher-Martinez, in press).
6. ***Incorporate short- and long-term objectives into the transition plan that consider school, home,***

and community requirements and resources.

The student's multidisciplinary team should identify activities that will maximize the student's opportunities for learning across different settings. The plan can include ambitious and achievable goals that align with the student's academic and functional expectations. Exemplars of checklists for measuring annual IEP goals can be found at the website for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

Interventions to Support Academic Achievement During Transition Planning

Transition-age students are tasked with completing degree requirements and IEP goals. The following recommendations discuss strategies to help students achieve academic requirements for high school in ways that foster motivation, meet their learning needs, and allow them to learn alongside typically developing peers.

7. ***Identify specific academic classes the student must complete that correspond with the student's postsecondary goals.*** Such courses may be part of technical programs, extracurricular programs, specialized classes, or part of the general education program. Special educators, general educators, and school psychologists can work together to determine the appropriateness of the course and ensure that the necessary accommodations and modifications are provided.
8. ***Implement a framework for instruction that is inclusive and effective for all learners.*** Educators should use strategies such as the following to help transition-age students continue to achieve academic objectives and engage in desired behaviors in an inclusive setting with same-age peers: (a) multimodal methods for presenting instruction and demonstrating knowledge; (b) small group instruction, including peer-assisted learning; (c) experiential learning, including hands-on projects or service learning opportunities; and (d) systematic positive reinforcement, including use of tangible rewards, as developmentally appropriate.

Interventions to Support Planning for Postsecondary Activities

Employment and further education constitute the two most commonly cited postsecondary goals for students. Both goals are often set as benchmarks

for the student's transition plan. The following recommendations provide guidelines to support career and college readiness:

9. **Contact the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) at least 18 months before the student graduates.** The DVR helps students enroll in and receive vocational training, job training, and employment supports. Representatives should be included in transition planning to help prepare for vocational services after graduation and maximize the student's amount of paid employment.
10. **Determine whether the student will qualify for supports outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA).** The WIOA better connects the existing programs that have traditionally met the needs of individuals with disabilities who are seeking employment. Students who qualify for these services may access one-stop shops that have programs and resources for disability-related research, assistive technology, vocational services, and independent living programming.
11. **Identify practices that support continuous skill development throughout the transition process.** Students working to achieve their goals should focus on job-specific skills such as computer skills, organizational strategies, and applied skill development, such as through supported internships, community-based instruction, integrated employment opportunities, or financial education.
12. **Determine whether the student qualifies for supports through the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 (HEOA).** HEOA provides increased funding opportunities for students with disabilities who are interested in continuing their higher education, including the Federal Work Study Program, Pell grants, and 20 other supplemental educational opportunity grants.
13. **Arrange to visit postsecondary institutions the student may want to attend.** The visit should include discussion of the student's independent living skills (e.g., time management, organization, cooking, personal hygiene); sensory issues (e.g., noise level, taste, smell, light); and self-determination skills (e.g., knowledge of healthy relationships, ability to send e-mails and use the phone, self-advocacy) that could affect the student's success in the postsecondary setting.
14. **Contact the Office of Disability Services at the postsecondary institution that the student will**

be attending. Students or their transition team should contact the office before graduation from high school to ensure appropriate services in the classroom and dormitory settings. Disability services offices at these institutions provide academic accommodations and modifications, supportive counseling as students face increased challenges, and advocacy support within higher education.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE HOME

The following recommendations are for families of transition-age students with disabilities. Which are appropriate and feasible will depend on the characteristics and needs of the student and family.

15. **Consider financial planning for the student's future.** Financial planning might include estate planning or the development of a special needs trust (SNT). Although estate planning anticipates the distribution of assets upon the caregiver's death, an SNT can be arranged to specifically ensure that the needs of family members with disabilities are met. For example, an SNT can ensure that the individual with disabilities remains eligible for needs-based government benefits such as Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income. Denzinger (2005) provides a succinct overview of SNTs.
16. **Plan how academic, daily living, vocational, and social skills will continue to be developed or refined after completion of public schooling.** As required under IDEA 2004, long-term goals should be included in the transition plan as part of the IEP. As such, the student's transition plan does not stop being effective following graduation and should carry the student into adulthood. Sharing a copy of the student's transition plan with providers in vocational rehabilitation, higher education, or other settings will help ensure that long-term transition goals are carried over after graduation. Longer-term programming might include social skills interventions that are provided in counseling centers or day homes; community-based instruction, such as job shadowing, integrated or supported employment, and internships; and community engagement opportunities set up through agencies' volunteer programs.
17. **Plan for a network of committed family friends, relatives, and others who will take responsibility for aspects of the young adult's future.** Ensuring a

combination of informal and formal supports will maximize the chances of long-term success. The network can serve as a communication medium that will continue to connect the young adult with assistance in several areas of living (e.g., financial planning, self-care, self-monitoring, employment, and organization of postsecondary coursework). Transition teams should review long-term supports as appropriate and encourage families to check eligibility and planning resources available through their region's Aging and Disability Resource Center (ADRC) and the federal No Wrong Door (nwd.acl.gov) initiative.

18. **Complete age-related decision-making and legal requirements.** At the appropriate age (depending on the state of residency), help the student obtain an identification card or driver's license through the state Department of Motor Vehicles. Families are encouraged to review guardianship, power of attorney, power of financial attorney, and medical directives, as appropriate, given each transition-age student's level of ability. When students turn 18, they should be encouraged to register to vote with the appropriate level of assistance. Finally, within 30 days of a male student's 18th birthday, he should be assisted in registering for the selective service.
19. **Apply for government programs for adults with disabilities through the Social Security Administration (www.ssa.gov) office.** These programs include Social Security Income (SSI), medical assistance, and SSI-Exceptional Expense Supplement. Families should reach out to SSI programming prior to the student's 18th birthday to ensure that a gap in coverage does not occur. Families should consider transitioning medical care to adult providers and ask their child's physician to communicate with the new physician.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Websites

<http://www.inclusion.com/inclusionpress.html>

Inclusion Press provides person-centered resources for transition planning, including materials for transition teams that want to implement techniques from the McGill Action Planning System (MAPS) or Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH).

<https://transitionta.org>

NTACT, the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition, website disseminates evidence-based strategies for students with disabilities to ensure that students graduate prepared for success in postsecondary education and employment. Concrete practices are listed.

<http://www.pacer.org/transition/>

PACER's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment website provides technical assistance, workshops and training, and support to parents, youth, and professionals on transition topics such as postsecondary education, employment, and life in the community.

<https://transitioncoalition.org/>

The Transition Coalition website provides professional development opportunities in the areas of secondary transition and college and career readiness of youth with disabilities.

<https://dpi.wi.gov>

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction website has several resources for educators and parents, including examples of checklists for measuring annual IEP goals (<https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/sped/pdf/rda-ccr-iep-measurable-annual-goals-self-check.pdf>) and a center for Universal Design for Learning (<https://dpi.wi.gov/universal-design-learning>).

Books

Hughes, C., & Carter, E. W. (2012). *The new transition handbook: Strategies high school teachers use that work!* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

This book presents strategies for teachers and staff for teaching important skills and developing supports within the school and community.

Pacer Center. (2016). *Mapping dreams: The transition to adulthood.* Minneapolis, MN: PACER Center.

This book provides guidelines for parents or caregivers that help them discuss future aspirations with their child.

Test, D. W. (2012). *Evidence-based instructional strategies for transition.* Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Teachers and staff will find discussions of evidence-based practices that help facilitate transition. The book includes IEP templates and worksheets, checklists, questionnaires, summaries of important research, and vignettes.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Devadrita Talapatra, PhD, is an assistant professor of child, family, and school psychology at the University of Denver's Morgridge College of Education. She explores how to improve postschool outcomes for students with disabilities. There are no financial conflicts of interest regarding the resources suggested for use; no specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors was provided to assist in creating this document.

Peter Z. Gladstone, MA, is a school psychology doctoral student at the University of Denver's Morgridge College of Education.

Laurel A. Snider, MA, is a school psychology doctoral student at the University of Denver's Morgridge College of Education.

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