

Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities

This fact sheet describes the key requirements for transition services for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Transition services help to prepare a student to move from school to post-secondary school, from school to work, and from living dependently to living more independently.

A student with a disability, age 14 to 22, is eligible for transition services as part of his IEP, so long as that student is enrolled in a public school, which includes charter schools.

Key Requirements of Transition Plans in IEPs

Begin at Age 14: Transition plans are required in IEPs for students age 14 to 22. Once a student turns 16, transition plans must include measurable goals and the transition services needed to meet those goals in the areas of employment, education, training, and, where appropriate, independent living skills.

Teach Skills: Transition services must help students with disabilities learn skills necessary to move from life in school to life after school. These services should address goals for work or further education and goals for living independently or more independently.

Transition services may focus on any of the following:

- Developing self-advocacy skills;
- Gaining important independent living skills;
- Developing essential skills for a career or job that matches the student's interests;
- Improving social and peer interaction skills;
- Accessing educational opportunities after high school; and
- Any other skills the student needs to ensure a successful transition into the community.

Provide Services: The school and the local Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) office should provide transition services. A parent or school staff member can invite VR to the student's IEP meeting to participate in creating the transition plan.

It is not appropriate for a transition plan to require the student or parent to be solely responsible for providing the services or implementing goals. Students, parents, school

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staff, and VR should work together to ensure that goals are reached, and the school and VR should be responsible for providing the necessary services.

Address Individual Needs and Interests: Transition services must be individualized and tailored to meet the student's specific needs, abilities, and interests. Transition services that prioritize the needs of the school over the needs of the student are not permitted. For example, work opportunities where all or nearly all students with disabilities go to one workplace for the entire school year with no opportunities to work in settings that match their individual career goals are not permitted.

Specific Requirements by Age

At age 14, a student's IEP must include a **transition statement** that details the student's needs, preferences, interests, and course(s) of study.

The school must invite the student to his or her IEP meeting if the IEP team plans to discuss transition goals and services. The notice of the meeting should say that a purpose of the meeting is to develop a transition statement and that the student is invited. The parent decides whether the student attends the meeting. If the student does not attend the IEP meeting, the school must take steps to ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered.

At age 16, a student's IEP must include **transition goals** and the **transition services** needed to reach those goals. **Transition goals** are measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills.

To the extent appropriate, and with the consent of the parents, the school must invite a representative of any agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services, such as VR. The notice of the meeting must say that a purpose of the meeting will be to consider postsecondary goals and transition services. The notice also should say that the student is invited and identify any other agencies that are invited.

The IEP must include a **statement of interagency responsibilities**. This statement generally outlines which agencies will provide which transition services.

At age 17, the IEP must include a **transfer of rights statement**. This is to make sure the student and parents understand that the student's right to make educational decisions for the IEP will transfer to the student when he or she turns 18. The student and parents should consider the range of options available to give the parents an opportunity for continued input into the student's educational path.

The school should not tell the student or parents what steps to take regarding the transfer of rights. Instead, the school should simply inform them that, unless the parent takes legal

action, the parent's rights to participate in the IEP meeting and make decisions about the IEP will transfer to the student when he or she turns 18.

Transition Assessments

A student should complete age-appropriate and disability-appropriate **transition assessments** to drive the development of IEP transition goals and services. These assessments should be completed regularly—not just once in the month before the student turns 14—to ensure the goals and services continue to be relevant to the student's needs and interests.

These assessments provide meaningful information to help the IEP team make appropriate decisions related to transition planning. An assessment may be formal or informal. Examples include academic/curriculum-based assessments, self-determination assessments, vocational interest surveys and job exploration, adaptive behavior and independent living skills assessments, interviews and dreams sheets, job shadowing, and informal observational reports.

It is important for the assessments to ask meaningful questions. For example, where does the student want to live? Work? Go to school? What academic, communication, social, emotional, and behavioral skills does a student need to achieve those goals? What living skills does the student need to be as independent as possible? What post-secondary education and training programs could help prepare this student to transition to adult life?

Transition Services

A solid transition plan focuses on what transition services and activities will help the child reach the IEP transition goals. It also identifies who is responsible for providing each service or ensuring each activity happens. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act prohibits a school from making the parent and student responsible for all transition activities. Including a timeline for when these activities will occur in the IEP will help the student make meaningful progress toward meeting his or her transition goals.

Job shadowing and coaching services are available through VR. That means a student does not have to be able to perform a job independently at first to pursue that job as a transition goal. A job coach can help him or her learn the necessary skills. If a student needs job support indefinitely, that service is called Supported Employment and is provided through the Innovations Waiver.

Additional transition services are available through VR and the Division of Services for the Blind (DSB). VR and DSB services include Pre-employment Transition Services (PeTS), for students ages 16 to 21 who are enrolled in an education program, and services for people with disabilities who need help finding or keeping a job, regardless of their age.

Quality Transition Goals

Once the IEP team has identified a student's needs, it is important to write strong transition goals. The goals should be clear, specific, and measurable. Here are some examples of how to improve vaguely written goals.

Vague goal: "Joe will work with animals."

Clear goal: "Joe will volunteer in a position that allows him to care for, treat, and groom pets during the 2017-18 school year."

Vague goal: "Jane will tell others what she needs."

Specific goal: "Jane will be able to verbally communicate her accommodation needs to employers, service providers, and others by age 22."

Vague goal: "John will live independently."

Measurable goal: "John will learn how to budget, tell time, and make and follow a calendar to keep track of events and deadlines by age 21."

Here are some examples of questions to ask when creating transition goals:

Transportation: Does the student need to learn how to use local transportation options? Does he need to enroll in driver's education or need special assistance learning to drive? VR will provide transportation to and from a job while VR is providing services, if necessary, and can provide special driver training.

Timekeeping skills and scheduling: Can she adequately tell time and keep track of deadlines? Does she need to learn to punch a time clock?

Household skills: Does he know how to do his or her own laundry? Wash the dishes appropriately? Cook and prepare meals? Clean the home?

Social interactions: Can she understand and follow directions? Does she interact well with peers? Does she do well in groups? Is she shy or overly trusting?

Self-advocacy: Does he know when and how to ask for help? Does he know what to do in an emergency? Does he have emergency contacts?

Finance and budgeting: Does she know what to do with a paycheck? Does she know how to open a bank account? Does she make responsible financial decisions?

Government assistance: Does he need assistance applying for government benefits? Does he understand what services he is entitled to? Has he applied for or obtained an identification card?

Resolving Disputes over IEP Transition Goals

If a parent or student disagrees with the final decision of the IEP team about a transition issue, that decision can be appealed informally, formally, or both.

First, the parent or student should be sure that the disagreement is described on the DEC 5 document, also called the Prior Written Notice, prepared at the end of the each IEP meeting. The DEC 5 must list the decisions made at the IEP meeting, including the final decision made by the head of the IEP team when individual members of the team, including the parent or student, disagree about a decision.

Informal options for resolving the dispute include asking for another IEP meeting to reconsider the decision and contacting the school district's Exceptional Children's (EC) Director. (The EC Director's contact information can be found on the school website or by asking school staff.) A parent can also contact the NC Department of Public Instruction (DPI) and ask them to send a facilitator to the next IEP meeting or to appoint a mediator to help resolve the issue. Information about facilitated IEP meetings and mediation is on DPI's website at ec.ncpublicschools.gov/parent-resources/dispute-resolution.

Formal options for resolving the dispute include filing a State Complaint or a Due Process Petition. Information about those options is available on DPI's website at ec.ncpublicschools.gov/parent-resources/dispute-resolution. For information about State Complaint, look under the tab on the left, called Formal Written Complaints. For information about Due Process Petitions, look under the tab on the left, called Due Process Hearings.

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Its team of attorneys, advocates, paralegals and support staff provide advocacy and legal services at no charge for people with disabilities across North Carolina to protect them from discrimination on the basis of their disability. All people with disabilities living in North Carolina are eligible to receive assistance from Disability Rights NC.

Contact us for assistance or to request this information in an alternate format.

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