

Transition Planning: Setting Lifelong Goals by Jennifer Graham and Peter Wright, Esq.

As we enter the second half of the school year, many parents hear the clock ticking louder and louder as graduation nears.

We hope you have been working closely with your child's IEP team through high school to ensure that appropriate transition goals have been established and your child's progress toward these goals has been measured and documented.

IDEA 2004 requires Transition Services to be "results-oriented" to "facilitate the child's movement from school to post school activities . . ." [1] The law requires that the IEP Transition Services be in place by (before) the child's 16th birthday.[2]

In this article, we provide you with two checklists and some advice to help your child make a successful transition from school to employment or further education.

IDEA 2004 Transition Checklist

IDEA 2004 describes the required components of the transition plan. During your child's high school years, it is essential that the IEP team adhere to these requirements.

- The student must be invited to participate in IEP meetings to discuss his/her goals for life after high school.
- You may request several IEP/Transition Planning meetings during the school year.
- You may invite representatives of local agencies to these IEP meetings to discuss transition goals and services to support those goals.
- The IEP, including the transition plan, should be based on person-centered planning, and reflect the student's interests and skills.
 - The work experiences or "community based work assessments" (CBWAs) chosen should be based on the student's interests and abilities. Students should NOT be placed in a community based work assessment simply because it is available.
 - Any placement should help the student develop skills in a setting that is of personal interest to him/ her and where his/her unique abilities can be successfully utilized and improved with job coaching.
- Annual transition goals in the IEP should lead to successful post- high school outcomes.
- Progress should be documented and measurable.
 - Ask for progress reports about your child's community based work experience. Discuss with the IEP team how your child will meet the goal of being employed after graduation, without a lapse in supports and services.
 - Maintain a portfolio and resume of your child's experiences, progress reports, and favorable reviews from your child's supervisors.

Transition Planning Checklist

While IDEA 2004 provides the legal requirements for transition services to support your child's goal of employment in the community or further education, there are several things that parents and students must do to prepare for life after high school.

- Confirm the date of your child's graduation. Federal law states that your child's eligibility for special education ends when s/he graduates from high school **with a regular diploma** or until the child reaches the age of eligibility for a free appropriate education under State law.
- Clarify whether your child will receive a regular high school diploma or a certificate of attendance.
- Clarify that your child will be able to fully participate in the graduation ceremony.
- Find out what local agencies provide job coaching for transitioning youth. Contacting adult provider agencies before your child graduates or "ages out" will help to ensure that your child will continue to receive services after graduation. This may also prevent your child from being placed on a long waiting list for adult services.
 - You are entitled to invite representatives from other agencies to your child's IEP meetings.
 - If the IEP Team, which includes the parents and the child, determine that your child's transition needs can be met by participating in transition programs on college campuses or in community based settings, these services should be included in the child's IEP.[3]
- If appropriate, invite the child's supports coordinator from your local Office of Mental Retardation to IEP meetings during the last year of high school. This person can help to coordinate post-high school support services.
- If your child will be eligible for services through Vocational Rehabilitation, schedule an appointment for an intake interview and file the necessary paperwork with the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation ahead of time. Request that a Vocational Rehabilitation counselor attend the IEP meeting no later than spring of the your child's last year in high school.
- Discuss your child's transportation needs. If s/he will need assistance getting to and from work, request and fill out applications for public transportation services.
- Request information about social/recreational opportunities for young adults with disabilities in your community. Ask for their contact information.
- Request information about post-high school training programs at local vocational schools, community colleges, business schools, and state-affiliated training schools.

When your child graduates from high school, you and your graduate should celebrate accomplishments -- and the transition to adulthood.

With the new emphasis on transition planning in IDEA 2004, and online resources such as www.wrightslaw.com and www.transitionmap.org, more students with disabilities are preparing for further education, employment and independent living as productive, active members of their communities.

About the Authors

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