

### **What are transition services?**

School transition services focus on improving your child's academic and functional skills so your child will be prepared for life after high school. To be effective, transition services have to be coordinated from year to year. They must plan for your child's involvement with relevant outside-of-school services like those provided by the **Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services** (ADRS) or the **Social Security**

**Administration**. Effective transition services are results-oriented; they aren't just about providing your child with a lot of services but providing your child with the services and supports that lead to the outcome that your child wants after high school.

The post-high school activities your child might prepare for include:

- Further education (including college, vocational, trade, or adult/ continuing education)
- Employment (including supported employment)
- Independent living
- Community participation

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### **When and how does transition planning begin??**

At a minimum, transition services must be included in the first IEP that will be in effect when your child turns 16. However, if your child's IEP Team believes it to be appropriate, transition planning may be started at a younger age.

Carefully consider whether you should start transition planning earlier than the age of 16. Do you think it's realistic that your child is going to be able to receive all the transition services she's going to need to reach her post-high school goals if she starts getting these services only at age 16? If you are unsure, maximize the amount of time your child receives transition services by starting earlier, as allowed in the **IDEA**. Early and long-range planning is **critical** for your child to be prepared for life after high school.

Evaluating your child's transition needs and planning for them is not a one-time event. During your child's transition years, you should continually reassess whether her transition plans reflect her hopes, goals and needs.

Transition planning begins by talking with your child! Discuss his/her ideas about further education/training, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills. Consider questions like these:

- Does your child want to continue her education after she graduates? If so, what does she want to study? What does she need to be prepared for that further study?

- Does your child want to go right into the workforce? If so, in what field? What skills will she need to be able to get a job in her chosen field? Consider both “hard” skills – ones that are unique to her chosen field – and “soft” skills – general employment skills like punctuality, following directions, etc. that are common to any employment situation.
- Where and how does your child want to live? Will she continue to live at home or in some other supported arrangement? Or, will she live independently? How will she arrange for housing? What does she need to know in order to live successfully in her chosen home?
- What kind of community or daily activities will she need or want to do — things like accessing health care, managing money, using transportation, doing recreation activities, being an effective self-advocate?

Your child, starting at an early age, should be encouraged to talk about these matters.

The IEP Team will use information from conversations like these to help develop measurable postsecondary goals for your child in the areas of education/training, employment, and, when appropriate, independent living. In addition to using input from your child and you, the IEP Team will use age-appropriate transition assessments to develop these postsecondary goals. The transition assessments used for your child will depend on her individual needs. Some of these assessments might include: vocational, behavioral, learning styles, assistive technology, and interest inventories.

Identifying post-secondary goals is the vital first step in developing IEP transition services that reflect your child's needs, strengths, and desires.

Think of it as backward planning: You start with the proposed outcomes (post school goals) and then develop annual IEP goals and transition services that will support her in meeting those outcomes.

### **What does a transition plan look like?**

In addition to all the standard IEP requirements, a transition IEP must include:

- Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals (based upon age-appropriate transition assessments) related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills, and
- The transition services (including courses of study) that your child needs to assist her in reaching those goals.

Identifying post-secondary goals is the vital first step in developing IEP transition services that reflect your child's needs, strengths, and desires.

Think of it as backward planning: You start with the proposed outcomes (post school goals) and then develop annual IEP goals and transition services that will support her in meeting those outcomes.

- A measurable postsecondary goal is a goal that can be counted.
- It is a goal that provides an outcome for the student, not just a process.
- There should be at least one goal for education/training, employment for all students.
- Some students based on assessment information may require a goal for independent living in the areas of education/training, employment and, where needed, independent living.

Here's a formula that can help you and your child understand and develop appropriate

After high school, I will _____ (Behavior) _____ (Where and how)
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- After high school, John will participate in weekly instruction on independent living skills at the local Independent Living Center in her community

Employment:

- After high school, John will work on-campus part-time in the food court at the college with supports from Vocational Rehabilitation and the staff at the college.

This helpful tip was developed by the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC), a project funded by the U.S. Dept. of Education/Office of Special Education Program (OSEP) to support state and local education agencies implement effective transition services to improve post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities. **See more of NSTTAC's materials on transition here.**

Here is part of a checklist that NSTTAC provides about what "measurable postsecondary goals" should look like.

1. Are there goals in the areas of training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living?
2. Can those goals be counted?
3. Will the goals occur after your child graduates from school?
4. Based on the information available about this student, do the postsecondary goals seem appropriate for this student?
5. Are the postsecondary goals updated annually?

6. Were the postsecondary goals addressed/ updated in conjunction with the development of the current IEP?
7. Is there evidence that the measurable postsecondary goals were based on age appropriate transition assessment(s)? Is the use of transition assessment(s) for the postsecondary goals mentioned in the IEP or evident in the student's file?

Once these measurable goals are defined, the IEP Team must identify the transition services (including courses of study) that are needed to assist your child in reaching her goals, addressing each of the following areas as necessary:

- **Instruction** your child needs to receive in specific areas to complete needed courses, succeed in the general curriculum and gain needed skills. Your child may also require specialized training in a specific skill related to job development.
- **Related services** your child may need to benefit from special education while in school. The IEP Team also should begin to consider related service needs your child may have as she enters the adult world. If related services will be needed beyond school, the IEP should identify, as appropriate, linkages to adult agencies or providers before your child leaves the school system.
- **Community experiences** that are provided outside the school building or in community settings. Examples could include community-based work experiences and/or exploration, job site training, banking, shopping, transportation, counseling and recreation activities.
- **Employment or other adult living activities** your child needs to achieve desired post-high school outcomes. These could be experiences or services leading to a job or career or those that support activities done occasionally such as registering to vote, filing taxes, renting a home, accessing medical services, filing for insurance or accessing adult services such as Social Security Income (SSI).
- **If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills.** Daily living skills are those activities that adults do every day (e.g., preparing meals, budgeting, maintaining a home, paying bills, caring for clothes, grooming, etc.).
- **If appropriate, functional vocational evaluation.** This is an assessment process that provides information about job or career interests, aptitudes and skills. Information may be gathered through situational assessment, observation, or formal measures and should be practical. The IEP Team may use this information to refine services outlined in the IEP.

This discussion and planning should result in an IEP that:

- Leads toward your child's desired post-school outcomes
- Is based on your child's needs, interests and preferences
- Identifies who will provide, be responsible for, and pay for each activity
- Ensures that you and your child are aware of, and linked to, needed post-school services, programs and supports before your child exits school.

### **Your Transition IEP Checklist:**

NSTTAC's materials include a checklist of questions to ask, which are adapted here for use by IEP teams as they plan a student's transition services and craft statements to include in the student's IEP.

- Is there a measurable postsecondary goal or goals for the student?
- Can the goal(s) be counted?
- Does the goal(s) occur after the student graduates from school?
- Are the postsecondary goals based on an age-appropriate transition assessment?
- Are there annual IEP goals that reasonably enable the child to meet the postsecondary goal(s) or make progress toward meeting the goal(s)?
- Are there transition services (including courses of study) in the IEP that focus on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child to facilitate his or her movement from school to post-school?
- Do the transition services listed in the IEP relate to a type of instruction, related service, community experience, development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives (and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills), and provision of a functional vocational evaluation?
- Are representatives of other agencies invited (with parent consent or the student's) to IEP meetings when transition services are being discussed that are likely to be provided or paid for by these other agencies?

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### **Does the student participate in transition planning?**

If your child has not attended IEP meetings before, this is the time for her to start attending them. If her transition plan is to address her dreams and be responsive to her needs, she must be a key player in the planning process.

Whenever your child's post-high school goals and transition plans are to be considered by her IEP Team, your child's school must invite her to attend the meeting.

If your child does not attend the IEP Team meeting, her school must take other steps to ensure that her preferences and interests are considered.

When your child reaches the age of 18, her IEP must include a statement that she has been informed of the special education rights that will transfer to her when she reaches the age of majority in Alabama — 19 years of age.

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### **How do parents and school staff participate in transition planning?**

#### **As a parent, you should:**

- Encourage your child to be an active participant in transition planning. This is her life. She needs to be engaged in the process and may need support from you and other members of the IEP Team to participate effectively.
- Make sure that transition planning starts early enough for adequate preparation. Remember that you can start earlier than age 16 if appropriate for your child.
- Provide information to the IEP Team about your child's strengths, interests and needs and the help your child may require in order to achieve her desired post-high school outcomes.
- Be actively engaged as a partner in all aspects of IEP planning, discussion and decision-making. Remember that teenagers can have a shortsighted view of the future. Your child may not be interested in attending college after high school, but this could change in the future. No matter which path they take, help them create a path that leaves as many options down the road open as possible.

#### **School staff should:**

- Provide information on your child's strengths, past achievements and progress on her current IEP.
- Provide strategies for effectively teaching your child, including appropriate accommodations and/or modifications so she can successfully access the general curriculum.
- Suggest courses of study and educational experiences that relate to your child's interests and that provide the skills she needs to help her reach her desired post-high school goals.
- Identify needed related services.

- Provide recommendations regarding post-high school agencies, services and/or supports.
  - Coordinate all the people, agencies, services or programs in the transition plan.
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### **What other agencies participate in transition planning?**

When it's likely that an agency other than your child's school will provide or pay for transition services she receives during her high school years or services she will receive after she graduates, your child's school must invite representatives from those agencies to your child's transition IEP meetings.

Outside agency representatives who could be invited to your child's transition IEP meetings include:

- Vocational rehabilitation counselors, including ones from the **Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services**
- Admission or disability support staff from postsecondary or vocational schools
- Independent Living Center staff
- Persons knowledgeable about financial benefits such as **Social Security**, **Ticket-to-Work programs** or **Medicaid**
- Personal care or health care providers, including mental health care providers
- **Department of Human Resources** social workers
- Guidance counselors
- Therapists

These agencies may:

- Provide information about services and eligibility criteria for community or adult services and supports (e.g., college support services and financial aid, vocational rehabilitation services, family services, Social Security work incentives).
- Assist in identifying community or adult services that may assist your child in achieving her post-high school goals.

- Assist your child and family in application processes for supports and services at colleges, training institutions, or adult services, as appropriate.
- As appropriate to your child's needs, provide transition services to her prior to her exiting the school system.

Because of issues related to the confidential nature of IEP meetings, you (or your child if she has reached the age of 19) must give prior written consent for the school to invite a representative from these agencies to an IEP meeting.

If your child's school is not inviting necessary outside agency representatives to your child's IEP meetings, let the school know. If these representatives are not coming to meetings after being invited, approach the agencies directly and advocate for their active participation.

If an identified agency fails to provide the transition services described in the IEP, your child's school must reconvene the IEP Team to identify other ways for those services to be provided.