



Transition to Adulthood:

Using the school years to the maximum

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These last few years of school are crucial for preparing for life after graduation. Collaborate with school staff, your child, your community and other parents to ensure that the life your child pursues after graduation is full of opportunities for meaningful work, health, fun and friendship.

First the facts: Public school is the last mandated service that a person with a disability can access. After graduation, a person must apply to get services and supports and prove eligibility through income as well as disability. There is certainly not an equivalent to IDEA for any other area of services, whereby parent participation is required and parent opinion is solicited. Public school is the last opportunity for free education, with a wide range of modifications. So families should make the most of public school services as they plan for their child's transition to adulthood.

The first thing to do is learn about **IDEA regarding the school transition process**. There is a wealth of information on school and transition at <http://www.wrights law.com/info/trans.index.htm>

Here is what IDEA says about transition:

Section 1400(c)(14) of IDEA describes the need to provide "effective transition services to promote successful post-school employment and/or education.

Congress made significant changes in the legal definition of "transition services" in IDEA 2004: (34) Transition Services - The term `transition services' means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that –

(A) is designed to be a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

(B) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests;

(C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (See "Definitions" in Section 1401, [Wrights law: Special Education Law, 2nd Edition](#), page 56)

Transition goals should be addressed in the IEP by the time a child is 14; like all IEP goals, they should be updated annually and be measurable, based on appropriate assessments, and provide appropriate services. The goals may

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cover a wide range of learning areas including independent living and community participation. Also note that goals should be based on a student's strengths, preferences and interests. That means that schools should provide ways to learn what a student is good at and wants to do!

Here is an IDEA 2004 Transition Check List:

<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/trans.plan.graham.htm>

Next find out when and how your child will graduate. All students must successfully complete the courses required for graduation. Remember that your child can walk across the stage with his or her graduating peers but not actually graduate and then continue to be eligible for special ed services up to age 22. The following websites explain the 4 graduation plans. Talk to your child's teacher to get the details.

<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/special.ed/guidance/graduation.html>

<http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter089/ch089aa.html#89.1070>

Work with your ARD team to decide when and how a student will graduate.

Get involved in the planning process. What are your child's goals for life after graduation? Request that the school initiate a planning process where your child is present; talk about all areas of life but get specific about what your child wants to do for work, a place to live, and what services will be needed, etc. Look at all aspects of life, not just work, but also life-long learning, independent living skills and recreation. IEP goals should flow from this planning session. Include academic, functional, and social goals in the IEP, along with vocational goals. Then be sure that your child's teachers are aware of these long-term goals and helping your child to accomplish them.

How can you use school time to prepare your child to fulfill these goals? Make all decisions in secondary school based on whether or not a given option will help your child after graduation. Most schools use some kind of student/family questionnaire to find out about a student's strengths, preferences and interests; if these tools aren't being used, ask for them. If you feel that your school is not aware of your child's transition goals or not focused on carrying them out, call a meeting (not an ARD) to talk about the need for specific steps, including who will do what by when! Better yet, have your child talk about his or her goals at the meeting.

Build a team with your school staff to work on your child's goals for the future. Learn who does what in your district regarding transition: is there a transition coordinator? A VAC or vocational adjustment counselor? A planning team? A supported employment team? What are the options for 19+ programs? Ask that key people attend your planning sessions and get involved in carrying out your child's goals for the future.

Be sure your son or daughter is learning how to be involved in the ARD/IEP process so that eventually he or she can lead the ARD meeting and help write goals. The ARD meeting is a perfect opportunity for your child to develop

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self-advocacy skills. See below for information on student-led ARDs:

<http://www.pacer.org/tatra/resources/POD/studentlediep.asp>

<http://hawbaker.pls.iowapages.org/id2.html>

<http://extraordinarystudents.schools.officelive.com/studentledIEP.aspx>

Be sure that your child is gaining vocational skills and experience. Ideally vocational training follows this sequence: (1) vocational training and work experience on-campus, (2) a chance to sample different work environments and kinds of work off-campus, (3) experience as a volunteer or intern off-campus, and (4) paid employment by the time he or she graduates.

The biggest obstacle to off-campus work experience is sometimes transportation; can your student learn to ride the city bus? Find sites near enough to walk to? Can the staff drive the student there? Or use a school bus?

Help the school staff to connect with businesses and non-profits in the community that you know about where students could get work experience; share your connections in the community with school staff.

If your child will stay in school after age 18, find out what your school district provides for students between ages 18 and 22. There are creative 19+ programs for students in some school districts, with classrooms in settings outside the high school campus or with a majority of time spent in the community. If your district doesn't have such a program, talk to the Special Ed Director about expanding options for students between 19 and 22. Be sure that the 19+ program is truly focused on what a person will do after graduation, not just a re-hash of what he or she has been doing for the last 4 years of high school. Use this opportunity so that your child is ready for the day after graduation.

If your child plans to go to college, learn about the requirements to get in and what assistance is available at the college level. Start planning for college by 9th grade so that your child is taking classes appropriate for college-bound students. Talk to your high school registrar and visit college campuses; check on campus supports and services; learn about Section 504, since IDEA only applies to public school. Helpful websites are:

<http://www.ncld.org/college-aamp-work/post-high-school-options/transitioning-to-college/planning-for-college-success-for-students-with-learning-disabilities>

https://www.disability.gov/education/student_resources/preparing_for_college

As your child approaches graduation, obtain the most up-to-date evaluation or Summary of Performance to use as proof of disability in applying for services, going to college, or adapting future programs to accommodate your child.

Here is information on Summary of Performance from a very helpful article at: <http://www.ncld.org/at-school/your-childs-rights/iep-aamp-504-plan/idea-2004-improving-transition-planning-and-results>

IDEA '04 creates a new requirement for schools that is sure to help students with learning disabilities. Now, schools

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must provide a "Summary of Performance" to students whose special education eligibility is terminating. This new "summary" must include information on the student's academic achievement and functional performance and include recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting his/her postsecondary goals. Congress intended for this "summary" to provide specific, meaningful, and understandable information to the student, the student's family, and any agency, including postsecondary schools, which may provide services to the student upon transition. While schools are not required to conduct any new assessments or evaluations in order to provide the "summary," students and their parents should expect that the information provided in the summary is adequate to satisfy the disability documentation requires under other federal laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Start building a team of people for support and friendship for your child in the community: Don't depend on school for everything--begin to look beyond public school for services and connections. Start forming alliances outside of school with service providers, advocates, parent groups and other organizations that you have replaced school supports by the time your child graduates. Find a way for your child to continue friendships made at school, so that your child will have peers to enjoy after everyone scatters at graduation.

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