

Parent Tips for Transition Planning



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A truly successful and meaningful transition process is the result of comprehensive team planning that is driven by the dreams, desires, and abilities of the youth. Such planning enhances not only the youth's participation in school but in his or her home and community living, as well.

A transition plan provides the basic structure for preparing an individual to live, work, and play in the community, as fully and independently as possible. As in all aspects of life, the more transition planning that takes place while still in school, the better prepared youth and their families will be when decisions need to be made and action must be taken.

Transition and the IEP plan

Since 1987, a transition plan has been a required component of the individualized education program (IEP) for Minnesota students no later than age 14, or 9th grade. Federal legislation now requires transition planning in all states for students 16 and older, and encourages planning as early as age 14 if the planning benefits the student.

Transition services must be based on the student's needs, taking into account his or her preferences and interests. The services should include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives, and, if needed, training in daily living skills and access to functional vocational evaluations.

All of these services must be provided in a manner that recognizes the student's cultural background and is sensitive to his or her native language, if other than English.

Schools are required to invite students to participate in their IEP meetings whenever transition services are considered. Transition services are a required component of IEPs for students during their transition years,

and, therefore, those services are routinely discussed at IEP meetings for students age 14 and older.

If the student does not attend the IEP meeting, school personnel must take steps to ensure the student's preferences and interests are considered.

The best transition plans are those that help the student achieve his or her dreams and aspirations. To ensure this, the student should be included in all aspects of planning and goal setting, and encouraged to participate at IEP meetings. This participation helps keep all team members focused on the student's individual needs and desires. It also helps the student develop his or her own decision-making abilities and self-advocacy skills.

Advance preparation assists students and their parents throughout the transition process and contributes to a comprehensive transition plan by providing a direction for goals and objectives. By being proactive and expanding their knowledge and awareness of transition issues, parents and students can become powerful members of the transition team.

Meeting a student's transition needs

In order for the IEP to appropriately meet the student's transition needs, both parents and school personnel must assess the student's abilities, skills, and interests. The school accomplishes this through diagnostic assessments, evaluations, and informal observations. Parents can do it through their day-to-day knowledge of their son or daughter and conversations with him or her about future goals.

Parents and students should consider the following points when beginning the transition process and preparing for or participating in an IEP transition meeting or staffing:

- Ask your teenager what he or she would like to do with his or her life. What are his or her dreams, goals, etc? Incorporate the responses into all aspects of transition planning. If your son or daughter is non-verbal or has difficulty communicating these thoughts, use your knowledge of him or her to make sure transition plans reflect likes, dislikes, etc.
- Know your son's or daughter's needs, abilities, and skills. Be familiar with how much assistance he or she needs or does not need to accomplish tasks.
- Know what outcomes you and your teenager want. Bring suggestions to meetings on what actions you feel are needed to meet or move toward goals in the transition plan.
- Encourage your son or daughter to attend the IEP meeting. He or she will be invited. Together, prepare for the meeting.
- Encourage self-advocacy skills for your son or daughter. Have the staff direct questions to your teenager.
- Know what programs, services, accommodations, or modifications you and your teenager want. Be clear on the transition needs or issues of your son or daughter.
- Determine who will be responsible for what on the transition plan. Ask for specific timelines.
- Decide whether educational and transition programs should emphasize practical or academic goals or a combination of both.
- Become aware of community-based training opportunities your school provides. Parents and their son or daughter should decide how much the student should participate in those activities currently, as well as in the future.
- Request a copy of your son or daughter's daily schedule each quarter or semester.
- Request information on all classes available to students so your son or daughter can participate in the class selection and scheduling process.
- Determine how your son's or daughter's educational and transition program could be more integrated into regular programs.
- Learn who will attend the IEP meeting. Become familiar with the roles and functions of team members.
- Arrange for a family member, friend, or advocate to accompany you and your son or daughter to planning meetings for support or note taking, if needed.

In general, becoming familiar with adult service systems or agencies now will help your son or daughter in making decisions that will affect the future.

A final tip: Start thinking about your teenager's legal status before he or she turns 18. If your son or daughter is not able to make informed decisions about major issues (medical treatment, living accommodations, financial arrangements, etc.), your family may want to learn more about guardianship or conservatorship.

By learning as much as possible about these options, your family can ensure that your son's or daughter's rights are protected, while allowing him or her to retain as much independence as possible.