

CHAPTER 14: TRANSITION

OVERVIEW OF TRANSITION SERVICES

For students who receive special education supports and services, it is important to plan for the time when those supports and services will end and they will transition into adulthood. Transition planning is a process that guides students to consider the types of jobs, educational programs, and living options they might want to pursue after high school. During this process, adolescents work with the IEP team to identify the specific postsecondary goals they want to work on and the services and activities they will need to support their progress toward achieving their identified outcomes. The transition plan does not replace any of the other sections in the IEP that have already been discussed, but is recorded in a separate section of the IEP specifically designated for transition planning ([Lee, n.d.](#)).

According to IDEA:

(a) Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that—

(1) Is designed to be within 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 postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

(2) Is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and includes—

(i) Instruction;

- (ii) Related services;
- (iii) Community experiences;
- (iv) The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and
- (v) If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation.

(b) Transition services for children with disabilities may be special education, if provided as specially designed instruction, or a related service, if required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education ([IDEA, 2017](#)).



TRANSITION ASSESSMENT AND GOALS

The first time that the IEP team is required under IDEA law to include transition goals and services in the student's program is when designing the IEP that will be in place the year the student turns 16. However, many states and school districts feel 16 is too late and they require that this process be started by the time the student turns 14. In states where

transition planning is not required until age 16, it is still strongly recommended that transition goals and needs at least be considered and discussed as part of the IEP process by the time the student is 14 even though the team may choose not to put a formal plan in place at that time. The purpose of transition planning is to identify areas which should be addressed in the student's program to enable the student to make a successful transition to adult life. Broadly speaking, areas that are typically considered include needs related to future employment, housing, and social interactions. After identifying the needs, the team specifies goals and instructional activities to aid the student in developing the skills to meet these challenges ([Lee, n.d.](#); [NASET, 2024](#))

Students must be invited to their IEP meetings whenever one of the purposes of the meeting is to consider their postsecondary goals and the transitions services needed to meet those goals. Ensuring that the student attends the meeting is important because the IEP team must take into account the preferences and interests of the learner and it is easier to do this if the learner is present. If the student does not attend the meeting, the school must take steps to ensure the child's interests and preferences are considered. If a public agency will be providing or paying for any transition service, a representative of that agency must also be invited. Interestingly, even though a representative of the agency must be invited to the meeting, schools still have a responsibility to get parent consent for that person to attend the meeting ([Lee, n.d.](#); [NASET, 2024](#); [Lee, n.d.](#))

IDEA requires that transition services

- (b) Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, and updated annually, thereafter, the IEP must include—

- (1) Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills; and
- (2) The transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals ([IDEA, 2017](#)).

As noted above, the IEP must include transition related goals that are based on appropriate assessments. The assessments used for this purpose may include formal testing as well as informal measures such as student interviews, parent and teacher surveys, observations, and work assessments. The law does not specify a particular assessment or type of assessment that must be used; however, a student interview alone is not sufficient to meet the requirement. Several transition assessments that have been designed specifically for use with students with disabilities are available for teacher use. The team may also decide to refer the student for a functional vocation evaluation to identify the student's strengths and needs in the work setting. Other evaluative data that can be used for transition planning include ACT or SAT scores, academic achievement scores, and evaluations of communication and motor skills ([NASET, 2024](#)).

Because transition assessment often involves more informal assessment tools and may be embedded into curricular activities and community experiences, it is not always necessary to get parent consent before conducting these types of assessment measures. For example, if the purpose of the transition assessment is to develop appropriate IEP goals, parent consent is not necessary. However, if the transition assessment is part of the assessment process being used to determine eligibility or is part of the reevaluation process, then parent consent is required. If in doubt

about whether parent consent is necessary, it is best to err on the side of caution and obtain consent ([Lee, n.d.](#)).

Information from the transition assessment may be included in the present level of performance on the IEP and used to develop goals and make instructional decisions. It will also be used to develop transition specific goals for the transition portion of the IEP. Transition goals must address the areas of education, training, and employment given the learner's individual needs in light of their postsecondary goals and interests. While the law specifies that education and training be addressed in the goals, it is acceptable to write one combined goal for training and education if the team determines that separate goals are not necessary for a particular student. However, every student must have an employment goal, even those learners with the most significant impairments. Goals related to independent living skills should also be included if appropriate, but these are not required for all learners. Just like other annual goals, transition goals must have a baseline and identify how progress will be monitored toward the learner's post-school objectives ([Lee, n.d.](#); [NASET, 2024](#)).



[Understood](#) is an organization that provides resources and information to support learners with disabilities. Visit their site to see an example transition plan focused on [career exploration](#) and an example plan for a student planning to go on to study at the [university](#) level after graduation

TRANSITION SERVICES

The IEP must also identify the courses of study and transition services that are needed to meet the learner's goals. The plan for transition services must be individualized and based on the unique needs, strengths, preferences, and interests of the student. As is the case in other areas of special education, these services do not need to be designed to maximize a student's potential; however, they must provide meaningful benefit to the learner. The plan should include a combination of instruction focused on transition and post-school related topics, community-based experiences, and the development of employment skills. For some students, the plan will also address the acquisition of daily living skills. If a learner requires related services to benefit from these activities, that must be included in the plan as well ([Lee, n.d.](#); [NASET, 2024](#)).

Transition services can include a wide variety of activities, depending on the interests and needs of the learner. Some typical ones include:

- Exploration of career interests
- Participation in vocational instruction programs
- Work experiences
- Exploration of college programs
- Instruction in independent living skills

Different learners will also have different postschool outcomes and interests. Some learners will transition to some type of postsecondary education. This

could be a vocational education program, continuing or adult education, or a university program. Other learners will transition to integrated or supported employment opportunities. Many learners will be able to live and work independently, while others will require supported living services. Most communities have adult services programs which provide services to support adults with disabilities to participate in community activities and events ([Lee, n.d.](#); [NASET, 2024](#)).

TRANSFER OF RIGHTS

The IEP must contain information regarding the transfer of rights that will happen when a student reaches the age of majority, which in most states is age 18 ([NASET, 2024](#)):

(c) Transfer of rights at age of majority. Beginning not later than one year before the child reaches the age of majority under State law, the IEP must include a statement that the child has been informed of the child's rights under Part B of the Act, if any, that will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority under §300.520 ([IDEA, 2017](#)).

The age of majority is the age at which a student is considered an adult. While this is age 18 in most U.S. states, in Alabama and Nebraska the age of majority is 19 and in Mississippi the age of majority is 21. When learners reach the age of majority, they assume all legal rights and responsibilities for their choices, including the right to make their own decisions about their educational program. States can set legal ages for their residents for other activities such as driving, voting, and marriage which may be different than the age of majority in that state ([Interstate Commission for Juveniles, 2024](#)).



GRADUATION

Graduation from high school with a regular diploma ends a learner's access to special education services under IDEA.

- (a) The obligation to make FAPE available to all children with disabilities does not apply with respect to the following:
- (i) Children with disabilities who have graduated from high school with a regular high school diploma.
 - (ii) The exception in paragraph (a)(3)(i) of this section does not apply to children who have graduated from high school but have not been awarded a regular high school diploma.
 - (iii) Graduation from high school with a regular high school diploma constitutes a change in placement, requiring written prior notice in accordance with §300.503.
 - (iv) As used in paragraphs (a)(3)(i) through (iii) of this section, the term regular high school diploma means the standard high school diploma awarded to the preponderance of students in the

State that is fully aligned with State standards, or a higher diploma, except that a regular high school diploma shall not be aligned to the alternate academic achievement standards described in section 1111(b)(1)(E) of the ESEA. A regular high school diploma does not include a recognized equivalent of a diploma, such as a general equivalency diploma, certificate of completion, certificate of attendance, or similar lesser credential ([IDEA, 2017](#)).

According to IDEA law, a learner with a disability has a right to a Free and Appropriate Public Education until age 21. States may not choose to provide less than this requirement, but they can choose to go beyond it. For example, the state of Michigan provides FAPE to learners with disabilities until age 26. Nevertheless, the school's obligation to provide FAPE ends once a learner has met the requirements to graduate with a standard diploma. It should be noted that diploma equivalents based solely on the completion of IEP goals such as certificates of attendance or certificates of completion do not end the requirements for FAPE ([Understood, n.d.](#); [NASSET, 2024](#)).

Decisions on whether a child should graduate are made by the IEP team and must be based on assessment data. It is acceptable for the team to determine that the student's needs will be best met by continuing to receive services until age 21; however, if the team recommends the student receive continued services but also recommend a shortened schedule, the team must have good data and a clear, logical, and convincing explanation to support any decisions for a shortened day or a shortened week. Graduation is considered a change in placement, so schools need to send Prior Written Notice and Procedural Safeguards to parents prior to graduation indicating this change in placement. Schools also need to provide a Summary of Performance which includes the team's recommendations on how best to

assist the learner in meeting their postsecondary goals after graduation ([Understood, n.d.](#); [NASET, 2024](#)).



ADULT EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMING

Most larger communities offer a choice of educational programs for adults with disabilities, with options generally based on the interests and needs of the individual. In the past, these were often restricted to community-based instructional experiences and vocational training programs; however, now colleges and universities also have programs designed specifically to support adult learners with disabilities.

However, while most colleges and universities are prepared to support students with learning disabilities, [Noorthoek Academy](#) has been successfully providing educational experiences for adults with intellectual disabilities for more than 30 years. Noorthoek Academy is just one example of what a college-based program for adults with intellectual disabilities could look like. Lyn VanTol is the parent of an adult daughter with a disability and the executive director of Noorthoek Academy. In the following section, she shares the history and mission of this exciting program.

NOORTHOEK ACADEMY'S STORY: SERVING ADULTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES



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DAILY LIVING

Just as there are different education options available for learners with disabilities, there also are a variety of housing options in the United States for adults with disabilities. Most adults with disabilities are able to live independently; however, others may require some level of support. For those who cannot live independently, there are several possibilities including supported housing, group homes, assisted living facilities and residential programs.

Benjamin's Hope is just one example of one of the types of housing that is available. Benjamin's Hope is a residential program for adults with disabilities that has strong ties to the local community. At Ben's Hope, the leadership team has prioritized creating a campus that is as inviting to their residents as it is to the many community members who enjoy gathering there. In the following section, Krista Mason shares her concerns about the

future for her son, who has autism, and explains the program she was able to create at [Benjamin's Hope](#) for adults with disabilities including her son Ben.

[BENJAMIN'S HOPE: DIGNITY IN ACTION](#)



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PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

As we wrap up our overview of special education, it is important to consider where we've been historically in our understanding, acceptance, and support for those with disabilities and what our goals should be to continue improving in these areas in the future. Earlier chapters covered historical aspects of treatment and education for those with disabilities and the legal challenges that have brought about many changes in what special education looks like today. [The Arc](#) has been at the forefront of making these changes happen since the 1950s. While the Arc doesn't claim to specifically represent the needs and interests of the entire scope of persons with disabilities, it is an important advocacy and service organization that has supported those

with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD) and their families for more than 70 years. However, the Arc's advocacy efforts go beyond supporting only those with I/DD. The Arc has been instrumental in bringing about policy changes at the local, state, and federal level to help all those with disabilities to lead fulfilling lives ([Arc, 2024](#)).

A comprehensive study of education and transition outcomes for individuals with I/DD was completed by the Arc several years ago. The study found that less than 30% of students with I/DD had been fully included in school and almost 40% of parents were dissatisfied with the quality of the education their child had received. They also found that the majority of adults with I/DD expressed a desire to be employed; however, only 15% actually had paid employment and only about half of those employed earned at least minimum wage. On the other hand, 98% of individuals with I/DD were living in small community-based settings, a huge improvement over the large state institutions of the past. However, families do face challenges in finding the supports they need to provide care in a community setting for their adult loved ones with disabilities. More than 75% of families reported difficulties in finding providers for home and residential care. In addition, approximately 1/3 of individuals with I/DD were on a waitlist for government funded services such as personal assistance, housing, employment supports, and transportation. The average wait time on these lists was more than 5 years. These issues create huge barriers for some families in being able to support their loved ones in community-based settings ([Arc, 2011](#)).



The Arc continues to advocate for progress in better meeting the needs of those with I/DD. Many of the program changes that result from their advocacy also benefit those with other types of disabilities. The Arc ends their report on educational and transition outcomes with this call to action:

A New and Reinvigorated Movement for People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities and Their Families.

It is up to all of us!

Can we make quality inclusive education a reality for children with intellectual and developmental disabilities?

Can we make supported and independent housing readily available for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities?

Can we make employment and small business entrepreneurship a real possibility for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities?

Can we open up the hearts and minds of the American people so they see the need to fully include people with intellectual disabilities in schools, the marketplace, places of worship, our clubs and recreational programs?

Can we go beyond mere inclusion to achieve meaningful participation in all aspects of society, to achieve true acceptance and respect?

Together, we can.

([Arc, 2011](#))



CHAPTER 14: SOURCES

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