

Charting an Inclusive Journey through School, Work, and Life:

Successful Transition Planning for All Students



National Inclusive Schools Week™ highlights and celebrates the progress of our nation's schools in providing a supportive and quality education to an increasingly diverse student population, including students with disabilities, those from low socio-economic backgrounds, and English language learners. The *Week* also provides an important opportunity for educators, students, and parents to discuss what else needs to be done in order to ensure that their schools continue to improve their ability to successfully educate all children. The *Week* is being organized by the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative and Education Development Center, Inc. as a way of acknowledging the hard work and commitment of teachers, administrators, students, and parents in making their schools more inclusive, and, thereby, significantly contributing to the development of a more inclusive society.

Introduction

Jordan is a 21-year-old student with disabilities who is getting ready for his high school graduation. Like the other students in his class, he is excited to enter the adult world. Working, living on his own, and experiencing the freedoms of adulthood are foremost in his mind. How successful will Jordan be in attaining his goals?

Maria celebrates her sixth birthday with candles, a cake, and noisy party favors—a new custom that she and her family adopted since moving here from El Salvador six months ago. She is excited about turning six, but knows that she must now go to the school in her new neighborhood where her friends will only speak English. Maria has learned some English, though she feels most comfortable with her native Spanish. Her parents are also worried about their daughter's transition and how they will be able to communicate their concerns to the school team. What will Maria's family experience be like? Will they find acceptance in their new community?

Tanasha is a two-and-half-year-old girl who has received special education supports at home through early intervention services. Tanasha's parents have grown to depend on the staff of competent and caring individuals who they welcome into their home each week. As Tanasha gets closer to her third birthday, her parents know that this support network that they have depended on since Tanasha's birth will be taken away and they will need to enter and navigate a new system of services and professionals. Will Tanasha's family be able to welcome the beginning of their daughter's school career with eagerness and anticipation like other families?

The answers to the questions posed in the above scenarios likely depend upon the supports that are in place for the families and young people who are facing these various changes. Inclusive schools and communities, those that strive to guide all children and youth along a personalized and supportive path, will be better prepared to help meet these individuals' needs. In other words, inclusive schools are well designed to ensure a smoother transition planning process for children and youth and their families.

We must look at transition more broadly for students with disabilities, who often face the most challenges as they move from one stage or program to the next. Too frequently students with disabilities journey from inclusive settings to those that are segregated. The following are still common occurrences:

- Parents who have tried to fully involve their very young children in their family and community life, with support of professionals, may find that early intervention programs are embedded in a medical and therapeutic system that ensures the separation of their child from other normally developing children.

- Families who have experienced an inclusive early childhood program, such as those in Head Start, find that their children is slated to be in segregated special education classes as the child moves into elementary school.
- Children who were fully included throughout elementary school are confronted with a middle school where educators are convinced that students with special needs must be in separate programs.
- Teenagers who were included in general education classes and programs in a middle school implementing a true middle school design based on building a sense of community move into the impersonal 60-minute periods of the local high school where only special education classes are available to them.
- Youth who were fully included throughout their schooling may find their local community offering largely segregated services and assuming that they do not intend to lead full lives in the community.

We also must look at transition planning more broadly and inclusively for Jordan, Maria, and Tanasha; the student who is gifted and talented; the child who has or is perceived to have emotional or behavioral challenges; and the youth who has moved to a new city or town and is nervous about entering an unfamiliar school system. When we provide this individualized support and attention, we are more likely to meet each student wherever he or she is both developmentally and emotionally.

The term "transition planning" is traditionally associated with the period of time between age 14 and graduation from high school when a student with disability and his or her family, school, and community come together to develop a strategy for the student's entrance into adulthood. As you prepare to celebrate the *6th Annual National Inclusive Schools Week,* December 4-8, 2006, we challenge you to look at transition planning more broadly to include all students throughout their school careers and beyond. In reality, each student—those with or without disabilities—will face several points of transition throughout their lives. Empowering them to make their own choices and be their own best advocates will allow them to gain valuable experience in managing life's challenges, while helping them to realize their goals and dreams.

"Charting an Inclusive Journey Through School, Work, and Life: Successful Transition Planning for All Students" is a collection of inclusive strategies and resources focused on the critical transitions that all students encounter, while also addressing the experiences of students with disabilities and those of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The goal of this publication is to help students, families, educators, advocates, and others strengthen a sense of belonging and contributions for all learners in their school communities. It is organized by the major transition periods of a student's life:

1) The Early Years: Early Intervention to Preschool and from Preschool to Elementary School
2) The Middle Years: Transitions During the Elementary and Middle School Years
3) Beyond the School Years: Looking Toward Post-School Options

Each section offers a variety of practical ideas and tools to help students manage and embrace change and develop self-advocacy and self-determination skills that will benefit them throughout their lives. As you plan your celebration of the *6th Annual National Inclusive Schools Week* this December, consider incorporating some of these ideas into your educational program and discussing with the school community what else can be done to support thoughtful transition planning for all students.

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The Early Years: Early Intervention to Preschool and from Preschool to Elementary School

Strategies for Schools and Families

The following are ideas for schools, families, and communities who want to ease the transition within early childhood programs and from preschool to elementary school for young children, including students with disabilities and those from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Ideas for Schools

- Arrange an Open House Day for all incoming children and families. Have faculty present, including related service staff, to welcome parents and their children. Make sure that all sessions are wheelchair accessible and that there are foreign language translators and sign language interpreters available.
- Host a professional transition day to increase communication between early intervention and early childhood programs. Develop shared ideas and commitments that will enhance the transition experience for families. Meetings pertaining to individual students can also be set up during this time.
- Join forces with your partner early intervention or early childhood programs to develop a family friendly brochure outlining the steps involved in the transition to preschool. Include local resources, tips from parents, questions to ask, and contact information for all programs.
- Collaborate with other early childhood programs to host a Preschool Awareness Day. Families of children eligible for preschool can evaluate their options during one afternoon by talking to representatives from various programs. Each program should have an informational brochure available for families to take home.
- Work with local early childhood programs to set up a field trip to the kindergarten. Allow students to explore the classrooms and meet the teachers.
- Develop a portfolio of students' work to send along with them to kindergarten.
- Create excitement about the transition to kindergarten. Host a "Moving Up" party for students and their families. Invite the kindergarten teachers and principal to attend.
- Arrange home visits for preschool staff to meet the families of incoming students. Time these visits to coincide with early intervention services so that service providers have a chance to exchange ideas.
- Make all printed information about early intervention, preschool, and kindergarten programs available in the languages that are reflected in the community.
- Create a warm and inviting atmosphere in the preschool or kindergarten program. Set up a comfortable area for parents to sit with coffee available.

Ideas for Families

- Identify and prioritize the components of a preschool program that are most important to your family. Keep a written list to refer to when making a final decision about a program.
- Talk to local families about their experiences in preschool programs. Keep notes on highlights and concerns to discuss during your visit to these programs.
- Look out for forums, information sessions, and open houses relating to preschool in your area. Local parents organizations and other nonprofit organizations host informational events for free or a nominal fee.
- Develop a portfolio about your child. Highlight the strategies that were successful in early intervention. List the child's likes and dislikes, strengths and challenges, and some special attributes of your child. Include a photo on the front cover. Present this portfolio to your child's preschool teacher prior to the beginning of school.
- Ask your early intervention professionals about the preschool programs in the area. They may have an idea what schools have the best resources to meet the needs of your child.
- Don't assume that schools with a higher tuition cost are higher quality than public programs or other more moderately priced programs. Focus on the specific needs of your child and what program can best meet those needs.
- Arrange a visit to several local preschool programs. Have a list of questions prepared and write down the answers from each school. Review your notes when making a final decision about the placement.
- Ask about inclusive or integrated preschool options for your child. Many school districts have these programs available.
- Arrange some visits to the preschool prior to the child's first day. Call the school to find out if there is a protocol for these visits. If there aren't structured opportunities to participate

in the classrooms, drive to the school with your child and show them the outside of the building while discussing the upcoming transition.

- Take photographs of the new school and classroom. Develop a story with photos of the upcoming move to preschool to share with your child during the days prior to the start of school.

Resources for Schools and Families

The following is a selection of online resources including articles, research reports, guidebooks, and tip sheets for families and schools that highlight issues and opportunities associated with the transition between service and educational settings for young children and their families.

Transitions to Preschool

"Planning Your Child's Transition to Preschool: A Step-by-Step Guide for Families" is a family friendly resource developed to assist families in navigating the transition from the early intervention to preschool setting. The guide offers a variety of information including federal and state laws, options for services and program placements, and planning strategies. Case studies are included to enhance the reader's understanding of the critical steps involved in the transition process. You will find this guide at the FACTS/LRE Web site of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign at http://facts.crc.uiuc.edu/facts4/facts4.html

Support for Parents of Students Entering Kindergarten

This resource from the National Education Association will assist parents in promoting a successful transition from preschool to kindergarten and includes information for parents of children with disabilities. It offers information on preparation, questions to ask, and other resources. "A Parent's Guide to a Successful Kindergarten Transition" (2005) in Student Achievement is available from http://www.achievementgaps.org/articleDetail_sitesContent.php?recid=248

Transforming Transitions to Kindergarten for Children with Emotional and Behavioral Challenges

Transforming Transitions to Kindergarten is a project offered through the Research and Training Center on Family Support and Children's Mental Health. The project focuses on the transition from preschool to kindergarten for children with emotional and behavioral challenges. The goal of the project is to increase the capacity of early childhood and kindergarten classrooms to meet the needs of this population of children and their families. Find out more about these new resources at http://www.rtc.pdx.edu/pgProjT2K.php#activities.

Enhancing School Readiness for Hispanic Children

This resource for advocates and policy makers addresses issues related to school readiness for Hispanic children. Although it is geared toward the reauthorization of the Head Start program, it also provides information that is useful for all early childhood programs who are seeking to improve services to children and families. You can access this document through the National Council for La Raza's Web site at http://www.nclr.org/content/publications/detail/31454/

Tools for a Smooth Transition to Kindergarten

The Florida Center for Parent Involvement hosts a Web site with resources for parents, service providers, and children who are facing an upcoming transition to kindergarten. "Transition to Kindergarten" provides information about planning for the transition, ideas for the first day of school, and a variety of other useful topics. Many links are accessible in Spanish. To find this resource go to http://www.fmhi.usf.edu/institute/pubs/pdf/cfs/fcpi/transition.htm.

Transitions to Inclusive Classrooms

"Me, Too!" edited by Marci J. Hanson, Ph.D, and Paula Beckman, Ph.D., is a series of six booklets that provide information on topics that families should consider when planning transitions to inclusive settings. Topics include identifying programs, planning, and strategies for preventing challenging behaviors. The research-based practices are presented in a family friendly manner. To find out more, go to http://www.brookespublishing.com/store/books/hanson-5087/index.htm.

Getting Parents Ready for Kindergarten

The Harvard Family Research Project developed a research brief to assist school administrators and teachers in involving families in their young child's education, including the transition into kindergarten. "Getting Parents Ready for Kindergarten: The Role of Early Childhood Education" (2002), by Holly Kreider provides a synthesis of information relating to the transition to kindergarten, including literature in transition, research based practices in early childhood education, and the School Transition Study conducted by the Harvard Family Research Project. This resource is available on the Web at http://www.gse.harvard.edu/~hfrp/content/projects/fine/resources/research/kreider.pdf.

A Guide for School Teams

"Planning for Terrific Transitions: A Guide for Transition-to-School Teams" is a set of training materials developed by the Regional Educational Laboratory for the Southeast (SERVE) to address the needs of administrators, teachers, and family members who are involved in the transition process. This guide is intended for use by staff development trainers to ensure that school teams are equipped with effective strategies to smooth the transition from early childhood programs to public schools. To access this curriculum guide, go to http://www.fpg.unc.edu/%7Encedl/index.cfm

Meeting the Diverse Needs of Young Children

This publication by the North Central Regional Education Laboratory provides valuable information for administrators, teachers, families, and community members about the challenges and opportunities that an increasingly diverse population brings to early childhood education. If communities are to welcome an increasingly diverse student population into their schools, they must implement curricula and instruction that meets the needs of all students. This online publication provides a wealth of information related to early childhood education and transition, including an overview of the issues and effective practices and information on inclusive curricula, with links to a variety of other Web-based resources. This useful resource is available from http://www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/issues/students/earlycld/ea400.htm

A Journey to Kindergarten

"Collaborative Steps: Paving the Way to Kindergarten for Young Children with Disabilities" is a wonderful resource from the National Association for the Education of Young Children for schools and families of children with disabilities entering kindergarten. The publication highlights strategies for developing and enhancing a collaborative process to achieve successful transition outcomes for young children with disabilities. You can find this resource at http://www.journal.naeyc.org.

Tell Your Transition Story

The National Early Childhood Transition Center is interested in personal transition stories for their Early Childhood Transition Critical Incidents Study. Through analysis of these stories, the center hopes to identify both effective and ineffective early childhood transition practices. Stories can be from the perspective of the child's family, service providers, or others who were observing the process from outside of the immediate circle.

To share your story, visit http://www.ihdi.uky.edu/NECTC/ts_SubmitStory.asp

A Guide for Early Childhood Administrators and Teachers

"Easing the Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten: A Guide for Early Childhood Teachers and Administrators," a comprehensive guide from Head Start, includes valuable transition information for early childhood program administrators and teachers. Topics include components of a successful transition, maintaining program continuity, preparing children for transition, and working with families. This resource can assist help early childhood providers develop a network of support for children and their families as they move to other educational settings. Go to http://www.headstartinfo.org/recruitment/trans_hs.htm to download this helpful resource.

The Middle Years: Transitions During the Elementary and Middle School Years

Strategies for Schools, Families, and Students

The following are strategies for schools, families, and students who want to ease the transition into a middle or high school program.

Ideas for Schools

- Provide teachers with time to review the records of incoming students including IEPs, behavior plans, and other individual services that students require. Encourage special education, bilingual and general education teachers to develop a plan to best support incoming students with special needs.
- Encourage the inclusion of students with disabilities and those from culturally diverse backgrounds in extracurricular activities. Meet with the faculty that lead sports teams, clubs, art and music programs, and so on. to convey the importance of an inclusive environment and what supports are available for students who may need extra planning to participate.
- Plan trips for students entering a new school to visit the school and meet some of the faculty before the transition occurs.
- Host an Orientation Day for all incoming students before returning students arrive. The orientation should include a review of the schedule, discussion about academics, expectations about homework, support services, extracurricular activities, and a complete tour including instruction on opening lockers.
- Institute a student mentor system. Ask upper grade students to volunteer to be a mentor to a new student entering the school. The mentor should be available several times during the first week to answer questions and support the incoming student in a variety of ways.
- Convey information about support services to all students, not only those students with disabilities. This develops an understanding of the special needs of some students across the school community.
- Set up a Learning Center in the school. The Learning Center can be accessed by any student requiring academic support before or after school or during lunch hours.
- Send welcome letters and a school handbook to all incoming students prior to the beginning of school. Provide contact numbers for important school personnel. List all support services available to students. Make sure these documents are available in the languages reflected in the community.
- Host a meeting for the sending and receiving school personnel to meet and exchange curriculum and individual student information.
- Ask students who are preparing for an upcoming transition to develop a portfolio highlighting their strengths, challenges, likes, dislikes, and learning styles. Send these to the receiving institution prior to the opening of school.
- Make all families feel included by inviting them to several events at the school during the early part of the school year. Events can be informal or structured but should include time for families to meet faculty, support staff, and administrators.
- Host a workshop for students on the topics of self-advocacy and self- determination. Be sure to highlight the differences between the elementary school and secondary school environments, including the need for students to take individual responsibility for learning. Reinforce the support services available at the school and in the community.
- Invite representatives from community programs to address incoming and returning students to provide information about additional learning and extracurricular opportunities outside of school. Make sure that the community programs represented convey the inclusiveness of their programs and that they are available for all students to access.

Ideas for Families

- Provide opportunities for your child to convey their feelings about their upcoming transition to a new school environment. These conversations can happen during a preferred family activity when your child is at ease and feels comfortable sharing their fears and concerns.
- Make sure that your child understands his or her rights in a secondary school environment. If the child has an IEP, review the document with your child prior to the start of school. You may want to role play scenarios that depict situations where your child may need to advocate for his or herself. Share with your child ways to have positive relationships with support staff and teachers.
- Develop a "pocket list" of accommodations that are reflected on your child's IEP. Instruct your child to keep this list in a place where it can be easily accessed during classes and testing

situations. Plan to review it with him or her from time to time.

- Ask a relative or family friend who attends the receiving institution to give your child a private tour of the new school. Information from a peer is often perceived as more valuable than from an adult because it will often include topics that are perceived as more important to the student "fitting in" to the new environment.
- Encourage your child to complete a learning style assessment if they haven't already done so in school. The information gleaned from these types of assessments can provide your child with specific strategies that will support their academic achievement.
- Plan well for the beginning of school with your child. Write a list of supports that will need to be in place for your child to be most successful. Purchase school items in advance so that your child has time to familiarize herself with new notebooks, planners, and so on. Review the process of certain daily tasks with your child such as writing down homework assignments, taking class notes, and so on.
- Work with your child to identify supports that will help her to be successful in school. These items may not be reflected in an IEP or other official document. Talk with your child about advocating for these supports at her new school. Offer to go with her to talk to teachers about her individual needs. Supports may include preferential seating, scheduled extra help times, help with recording assignments, etc.
- Discuss time management with your child prior to the beginning of school. Put in place supports that will help her manage time more effectively in order to keep up with academics while maintaining time for extracurricular activities and friendships.
- Encourage your child to set his own goals at the beginning of the school year. Provide guidance in setting realistic goals and outlining steps and strategies to attain the goals. Having your child take ownership of goals creates a more positive environment for learning.
- Attend school events that are open to families. Involvement in school activities by families increases the inclusive nature of the educational environment. Share information about your family background, culture, or other qualities that make you a unique and contributing member of the community.
- Offer to meet individually with teachers and support staff to provide information about your child who may not be able to independently communicate his needs. Bring information about your child's vision and hearing, motor abilities, medical needs, communication abilities, preferences and dislikes, and learning style. Discuss how your child will be included in the general education program and extracurricular activities.

Ideas for Students

- Talk to family members, friends, teachers, or other important people in your life about your hopes, fears, and expectations of your upcoming transition to secondary school. You may want to write down your thoughts in a journal.
- Sign up for a summer program at your new school. This will give you the opportunity to become familiar with the campus and meet some of the students in the school.
- Identify the challenges that you experienced in prior school years. Discuss these challenges with your family and school personnel. Ask for help to identify strategies that will help you overcome these challenges in your new school environment.
- Prepare for your new school experience by taking a tour of the new school, reading literature about secondary school, and talking with family members and friends who are students in secondary school.
- Become familiar with the supports that are available to you in your new school. If you have an IEP, make sure that you understand the content of the document, especially what accommodations and modifications you are entitled to. Write down the name of the teachers who are available to support your learning needs and know how to contact them if needed.
- Set up a meeting with your teachers to discuss how you learn best and what supports you might need to succeed during the year.
- Join extracurricular activities such as sports teams, interest clubs, art and music groups, etc. If you are concerned about how you are able to participate, discuss your concerns and ideas with the teacher who is leading the group.
- Start the year on the right foot. On the first day, make sure you have all of your homework assignments written down and all of your books with you before leaving school. Make a checklist for your locker to remind you of the things you should prepare before leaving for the day.
- If you use a wheelchair, a walker, an augmentative communication device, or other support devices that require some advanced planning to manage, contact the receiving school in advance to request an orientation. Trying out your gear in the new setting before other students arrive will give you extra confidence on the first day of school. You can also identify potential barriers in time for them to be addressed before your arrival.

- Offer to share information about your culture and language with your teachers and peers. Your unique contributions to the school culture will enhance the celebration of diversity in your school community.
- Be open to meeting new friends of all backgrounds, cultures, and abilities. Secondary school is the bridge to adult life where you will be exposed to a variety of different people and experiences. Use the time in middle and high school to expand your friendships and contacts with people who may be different from you.
- Know how to advocate for your rights and needs. In secondary school you are responsible for your own learning. Ask family members, friends, teachers, and guidance counselors for ideas about how you can be an advocate for yourself and others.

Resources for Schools, Families, and Students

The following is a selection of online resources, including articles, research reports, and interactive Web sites for students that highlight issues and opportunities associated with the transition to middle school and high school.

Supporting Students in Their Transition to Middle School

This document includes ideas for school leaders, teachers, and parents on supporting students through a successful transition to middle school. The paper is a joint effort by the National Association of Elementary School Principals and the National Middle School Association. To find this useful resource, go to http://www.nclr.org/content/publications/detail/31454/

It's My Life

"It's My Life" is an online resource by PBS Kids for adolescents who are transitioning to middle school. The site hosts a variety of age appropriate materials, including a section titled "What's different about middle school?", a journal page to record feelings about the experience, and lists of literature about the subject. Written in a youth friendly tone, the site is a wonderful resource to guide students as they face the challenges of change: http://pbskids.org/itsmylife/school/middleschool/

Are Swirlies for Real?

In this clever product from the National Education Association, retired principal Peter Lorain explores students' fears of transition from elementary to middle school and then offers strategies schools can use to address these common concerns. You can find this resource at http://www.nea.org/teachexperience/msk030408.html

The Elementary to Middle School Transition: Five Helpful Hints for Parents

The National Middle School Association has compiled a short, but informative, tip sheet for families of elementary school students getting ready to enter middle school. A list of five helpful hints offers parents guidance and family members through what can be a tumultuous time. Download this document at http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/WebExclusive/HelpfulHints/tabid/649/Default.aspx.

High School Student Orientation Program

The National Association of Secondary School Principals offers this comprehensive student orientation program to assist schools in welcoming incoming high school students. The program is based on the belief that the first few hours and days of the high school experience are critical in shaping a positive attitude toward academics and extracurricular activities. The kit includes a workbook, tools, CD, and a DVD. Find out more at http://www.principals.org/s_nassp/store_interior.asp?TrackID=&SID=1&DID=20495&CID=3&VID=115&RTID=0&CIDQS=&Taxonomy=False&specialSearch=False

From Student to Student

In "Transition Advice from a High School Student to Middle School Students," a high school graduate from Michigan offers advice for students making the transition from middle to high school with an IEP. Topics include gathering resources, securing support, and self-advocacy. This youth friendly paper is a wonderful resource to share with students receiving special education support in middle school. You will find this document at http://www.wash.k12.mi.us/perform/Documents/Transition_Advice_HS_Student.pdf

Students' vs. Parents' Perceptions

"Similarities and Differences in Students' and Parents' Perceptions of the Transition from Middle School to High School" (2006) highlights the results of a study conducted at a large urban high school in the Midwest revealing the disparity between adolescent and adult perspective on the transition experience. This report from the National Middle School Association is a wonderful resource for families and schools as they plan for and evaluate their transition programming. Go to http://www.nmsa.org/Publications/RMLEOnline/Articles/Vol29No10/tabid/810/Default.aspx for more information.

Research Summary on the Transition from Middle School to High School

Attention to this period of time is critical. Research tells us that 9th grade course failures and high school dropout rates exceed all other grade levels. This 2006 research summary from the National Middle School Association examines what effective programs look like and how to reframe the transition construct. For more information http://www.nmsa.org/Research/ResearchSummaries/TransitionfromMStoHS/tabid/1087/Default.aspx

Helping Middle School Students Make the Transition Into High School

This resource from KidSource provides a brief overview of selected research findings and strategies relating to the transition from middle to high school. The digest includes information on how educators can support students' transition into high school by committing to a quality middle school environment and developing a comprehensive transition program http://www.kidsource.com/education/middlehigh.html

Success in Ninth Grade

"Easing the Transition to High School: An Investigation to Inform Practices to Promote Ninth Grade Success" is a report from the Harvard University Civil Rights Project. In this era of high school reform much attention has been focused on effective strategies to ease the transition to high school. This report outlines the nature of these reforms and their impact on students. Find the full report at http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/dropouts/legters.pdf

The Next Step Plan

In New Mexico, beginning in the eighth grade, it is required that all students complete a next step plan to help them make informed choices about what they will do post-high school. Students update the plans each year prior to their graduation. According to the New Mexico Public Education Department, "The Next Step Plan is not a compliance document meant to be locked away in the principal's office. The Next Step Plan is a living document that is developed and owned by the student, with assistance from parents, school officials, and the community." For more information about this successful program, visit http://www.nmlites.org/programs/nextstep/index.html

Youthhood

Youthhood is an online resource for high school students who are navigating their secondary education experience and thinking about their future plans. The site also offers interactive planning tools, academic resources, and information for students with disabilities. Check it out at http://www.youthhood.org

Beyond the School Years: Looking Toward Post-School Options

The following are strategies for schools, families, and students who are preparing for a transition from school to adult life.

Strategies for Schools, Families, and Students

Ideas for Schools

- Embed course work on self-advocacy and self-determination into the high school curriculum. Allow students to investigate their rights and responsibilities as they plan for their transition to adult life. See the resources section for links related to developing self-advocacy and self-determination skills.
- Provide students who have significant disabilities with opportunities to reach age-appropriate milestones and rights-of-passage. For example, if a student is not able to obtain a driver license, help facilitate the acquisition of an identification card while teaching other independent mobility and transportation skills.
- Offer a variety of information sessions to students and parents on post-school opportunities, including higher education, vocational training programs, entry to the workforce, adult disability services options, etc. Provide opportunities for students and families to discuss these options with a counselor in a 1:1 session.
- Teach college application and résumé writing skills.
- Encourage students to gain employment opportunities while in high school. Host a "Help Wanted" job board in the school lobby for local businesses that are looking to hire student employees or interns.
- Encourage students to dream. Many students are steered toward certain post-school options by their families and teachers instead of by their own hopes and desires. Provide students with opportunities to explore their strengths, preferences, and future aspirations. Use these ideas as a guide for future planning explorations of realistic options.
- Teach organizational skills within the high school curriculum.
- Encourage students with disabilities to be involved in the IEP process by participating in their IEP meetings and advocating for their needs. See the Resources section for a guide that helps students become involved in their IEP.
- Offer field trips to local two- and four-year colleges and vocational training schools in the area. The field trips can include a tour of the facility, an overview of programs, and a meeting with some current students.
- Develop a transition handbook for students and families who are facing the transition from high school to adult life. Include information about transition laws, family preparation, community resources, timelines, post-school options, and so forth.

Ideas for Families

- Get involved in your child's high school experience. Attend IEP meetings, participate in parent meetings, and encourage your child to take advantage of the many opportunities that high school presents.
- Know your rights as a parent. Encourage your child to become familiar with his or her rights as a citizen, student, and consumer of special education services.
- Connect with other families who are facing the transition from school to adult life and those who have already made the transition.
- Talk to your child about his future goals and aspirations. Help him develop a plan to achieve his goals.
- Make sure that you understand the transition process. Meet with your student's transition coordinator, teacher, or guidance counselor to develop a transition timeline so that you know what to expect at specific points during their high school experience. Transition planning is addressed in the special education law called the "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act" (IDEA). Ask your school contact for a copy of the law, or go to the U.S. Department of Education's Web site to find a copy and other pertinent information: http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html
- Explore Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs. Your child with a disability may be eligible for financial assistance relating to the transition from school to work. A program called PASS (Plan for Achieving Self-Support) may provide financial support for options such as educational or vocational training, supported employment, starting a business, or purchasing a vehicle to commute to work. Information on SSI and PASS is available at http://www.ssa.gov/work/ResourcesToolkit/resourcestoolkit.html.
- Encourage your child to find summer and after school jobs that offer opportunities to explore future career options. Talk

to friends, family, and community members for ideas. Help your child develop a résumé or portfolio that highlights his or her interests and skills.

- Become informed about health care coverage once your child is no longer in school. Planning for health care needs is an important component in preparing for the transition from school to work.

Ideas for Students

- Know your rights as a student and a citizen. Self-advocacy begins with taking responsibility for your direction in life.
- Be prepared when you attend your IEP meetings. Ask a family member, teacher, or guidance counselor to explain the IEP process to you. Write down your thoughts and ideas before entering the meeting to help you articulate the items that are important to you.
- Know what accommodations and supports you are entitled to on your IEP. Communicate these needs to your teachers and while in testing situations.
- Find summer and after school jobs in fields that interest you. Look at local job posting boards, talk to a guidance counselor, or contact a local youth organization for ideas.
- Prepare for standardized college tests (SAT, ACT, etc.) by participating in a preparation class, taking sample classes, or accessing online test preparation supports. If you are entitled to testing accommodations, make sure that you indicate that on your application, remind your guidance counselor, and alert the test officials on the day of the test.
- Visit local colleges, universities, and vocational schools. Call the admissions office to find out about campus tours, support services, financial aid, and other details that interest you. During the visit, ask to talk with someone in Support Services to find out what supports are available to students.
- Talk with people who have jobs that interest you. Find out what skills and training are necessary for that job and other similar jobs.
- Participate in extracurricular activities that build new skills and that help you explore career options. Taking photographs for the school newspaper, joining a multicultural club, or taking additional computer courses are ways to explore vocational possibilities while having fun and meeting friends.
- Know your learning style and what supports that you need to be successful. Ask your teacher or guidance counselor for a learning style assessment. Write down your perceptions of how you learn best.
- Find online communities to share your thoughts about your upcoming transition experience with peers who are going through the same thing. Go to the resources section for ideas.
- Develop a résumé or portfolio to highlight your interests and skills. Ask your guidance counselor, teacher, or family member to help you.

Resources for Schools, Families, and Students

The following is a selection of online resources including articles, research reports, guidebooks, tip sheets for families, and resources for students that highlight issues and opportunities associated with the transition between high school and post-school options including higher education and employment.

State Transition Resources

The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition provides information about the transition resources available in the United States by state, district, or territory. Go to http://www.ncset.org/stateresources/ for more information.

A Student's Guide to the IEP

Students' participation in the IEP process is an important step in building skills for the transition to adult life. This student friendly document guides students through important topics including: how the IEP is developed, disability specific information, identifying strengths and challenges, advocating for accommodations, communicating with faculty, and setting goals for the school year and beyond. This guide can be downloaded at http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/stuguide/st1book.htm.

Transition Toolkit

"National Standards and Quality Indicators: Transition Toolkit for Systems Improvement" (2005) is a publication developed by the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition and National Alliance for Secondary Education Transition that includes national standards and quality indicators, research findings, information on effective practices, and tools that are designed to help facilitate interagency planning. An assessment tool developed to assist state and local needs is also included. Go to http://www.nasetalliance.org for more information.

Transition Planning for Adolescents with Health Care Needs and Disabilities

The Institute for Community Inclusion offers a booklet for families of adolescents who have health care needs and those with disabilities to assist them in planning for the transition from school to adult life. Included in the booklet are ideas, strategies, tools, and resources for both parents and teens. To access the resource "Transition Planning for Adolescents with Special Health Care Needs and Disabilities: Information for Families and Teens" (2000), go to http://archives.communityinclusion.org/transition/familyguide.html

Guideposts for Success

"Guideposts for Success," a product of the Youth Division of the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability, is a synthesis of information about transition from youth to adulthood. The result is a product that provides educators, vocational specialists, families, and individuals with information about common trends, lessons learned, and the most widely used effective practices in transition planning. This document can be downloaded at http://www.ncwd-youth.info

Working with Students who are Culturally and Linguistically Diverse

"Cultural and Linguistic Diversity: Implications for Transition Personnel" (2005), part of the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition's (NCSET) Essential Tools series, provides current information and research focused on students with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. The document provides advice on how the transition team can support youth who are preparing for adult life by identifying student strengths and using natural supports in the community. Other Essential Tools publications from NCSET include: "Community Resource Mapping," "Handbook for Implementing a Comprehensive Work-Based Learning Program According to the Fair Labor Standards Act," "Interagency Transition Team Development and Facilitation," "In Their Own Words: Employer Perspectives on Youth with Disabilities in the Workplace," and "Increasing Rates of School Completion-Moving from Policy and Research to Practice." To download one or more of these important handbooks, go to http://www.ncset.org/publications/essentialtools/diversity/default.asp

Tips for Families

The PACER Center, Inc. has developed a brief outline of ideas and strategies to help families build a successful transition plan for their child with disabilities. "Ten Tips That May Help Ease Your Child's Transition to Adulthood" can be found at http://www.pacer.org/parent/php/PHP-c107.pdf

Europe Anyone?

Experiencing different cultures and landscapes is what excites many high school students about the idea of studying abroad. Learning a second language, gaining travel experience, and acquiring cross-cultural skills are building blocks to successful post-school outcomes. Students with disabilities and their families can explore the options of studying abroad by reading "Transition Planning Tips for Parents" published by Mobility International, USA. You can find this document and other information about educational travel experiences for youth with disabilities at http://www.miusa.org

IEP Guide in Spanish

Resputas a las Preguntas mas Comunes sobre los Servicios de Transicion y el Programa de Educacion Especializada (IEP) is a guide for students and families who are facing the transition from high school to adult services. Written in Spanish, the guide answers frequently asked questions about transition services and the IEP. Download this document at http://www.transitioncoalition.org/cgiwrap/tcacs/new/resources/publications/index.php

Autism and Transition

The National Association of Special Education Directors offers a document to assist administrators, adult service personnel, educators, and families to address the needs of transition-aged students with autism. "Autism: Challenges Relating to Secondary Transition" highlights the barriers to providing transition services to students exiting high school and offers recommendations for policy reform and systems change. You can find this useful document at http://www.nasdse.org/publications/autism_secondary_transition.pdf

Transition Timeline

"The Transition Timeline for Children and Adolescents with Special Health Care Needs" provides ideas and strategies for families who want to encourage their child with special health care needs to become more independent. Developed by the

adolescent health transition project of the Center on Human Development and Disability at the University of Washington, this tool can be found at http://depts.washington.edu/healthtr/Timeline/timeline.htm

Youth Fact Sheets

The Wisconsin Healthy and Ready to Work Project of the Waisman Center has developed a series of six fact sheets on a variety of transition topics including planning for technical or four-year college, getting supports in the workplace, and how to be involved in the IEP process. These fact sheets were developed by youth with special health care needs for their peers with similar challenges. Some of the resources are geared toward Wisconsin residents but most of the information can be used by students in any state. Visit http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/hrtw/Publications.html for more information.

Relating to Parents Feelings

"A Word to Education Professionals about Parents, Transitions, Feelings, and Dreams: A Teacher Reaches Out to Ease a Parent's Transition Worries" is a concise article that addresses the importance of understanding the feelings of parents. You can find this article at http://www.danceofpartnership.com/books.htm#journal

Preparing for College

LD Online hosts a Web-based Q & A resource for students who are planning to attend college. Each commonly asked question is followed by a brief answer and links to several online resources that can provide additional information. Topics include choosing a college that supports students with learning disabilities and ADHD, on-campus supports, SAT testing accommodations, knowing your rights, among many others. Visit this Web site to learn more: http://www.ldonline.org/questions/college

Notes



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