
SPECIAL EDUCATION: Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities

What is transition planning?

Transition planning is a coordinated set of activities focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of a student with disabilities to promote the student's movement from school to post-school activities. Post-school activities can include college, vocational training, employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation. Good transition planning is outcome oriented and focuses on results that help the student reach his or her post-school goals. For students with disabilities, transition planning occurs during an Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting.

At what age does transition planning occur?

In Ohio, schools must begin transition planning when the student turns 14. (Prior to July 1, 2005, transition planning at age 14 was also required by federal law, which now requires it at age 16. This requirement was deleted from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) when it was re-authorized in late 2004.) If appropriate, transition planning can begin prior to a student's 14th birthday. The focus of transition planning at age 14 is on the student's courses of study and what classes will best prepare the student for his or her transition goals. For example, a student who plans to go to college may participate in advanced-placement or college preparatory classes in high school. A student who plans to go to a vocational school may focus on a vocational education program.

At age 16, the school must address transition planning again. At this age, the focus of transition planning is on the provision of transition services that will assist the student in achieving transition goals. Other agencies that can provide transition services to the student should be invited to participate in this transition planning process. (Outside agency representatives that could be invited to the IEP meeting may include: rehabilitation counselor, county social worker, employment agency staff (day training and habilitation), independent living center staff, county board of developmental disabilities staff, disability support staff from a postsecondary educational or technical school, person knowledgeable about assistive technology, person knowledgeable about financial benefits such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Medicaid or Medical Assistance (MA), personal care or health care providers, including mental health care providers, probation officer or teacher from a juvenile justice center, community park and recreation staff, and transportation agency staff.)

These outside agencies or service providers generally have their own criteria for eligibility and may have a waiting list for services. However, if the service provider can not provide needed services, the district must make other arrangements and ensure that the services are provided at no cost to the parent.

There will be an application process that may require follow-up. Transition planning should address how applications for services will be completed and who will follow-up. Identifying one person as the single point of contact and as service coordinator for the team helps to facilitate good transition services.

Who is responsible for transition planning?

The student's school district of residence is responsible for transition planning and the provision of transition services. (School district of residence means the school district in which the child's parents reside, a community school if the child is enrolled in a community school, the last school district in which the child's parents are known to have resided if the parents' whereabouts are unknown, or a school district of residence as determined by a court.) The school must schedule an IEP meeting to discuss transition and notify the student and his or her parents about the meeting. If outside agencies will participate in the meeting, the school must invite those agencies to the meeting.

How does transition planning work?

Transition planning is done by the student's IEP team. At age 14, the IEP team develops a statement of the transition service needs of the student. Transition service needs are those things that help the student make a successful transition from high school to post-school activities. This generally includes courses that are relevant to the student's future goals and motivating to the student to complete high school.

At age 16, the IEP team develops a statement of needed transition services and a statement of the inter-agency responsibilities or any needed linkages for transition services. This transition planning is more comprehensive and generally involves the provision of transition services.

Students with disabilities are entitled to attend school until they graduate or turn 22. When a student with disabilities turns 18, the rights as a student with disabilities transfer to the student. This includes the right to transition planning and services. Beginning at least one year before the student turns 18, the school must inform the student that the rights will transfer to the student at age 18.

What transition services are available?

Transition services are based on the individual student's needs, interests and preferences and can include teacher instruction, related services, experience in the community, development of employment and other post-school goals, assistance with learning daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (A related service is any supportive service that is required to assist a student to benefit from his or her education. In transition, related services may be necessary to assist the student in the transition process.

Services can include, but are not limited to, necessary transportation, attendant services, rehabilitation counseling, social work services and therapeutic recreation services.)

For students who have not developed transition goals, the team can consider vocational exploration services to determine if the student will work or pursue some other post-school opportunity. The team should also discuss whether the student needs training in advocacy skills in order to address disability issues with employers, college staff and others.

Who provides transition services?

Transition services must be provided by individuals with the knowledge, training and experience necessary to meet the transition needs of the student. Providers may include job training coordinators, vocational special education coordinators, career assessment specialists, work-study coordinators and related service personnel.

Where are transition services provided?

Because transition is based on the student's individual needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, transition services can be provided in a wide variety of places. Services are generally provided in the school setting for students who are not yet 16. This is because transition focuses on course of study at this age. Once the student turns 16, the focus of transition is on post-school activities and services are more likely to be provided outside of school.

For example, a student whose goal is to be employed after high school may have vocational training as part of the high school day. The student may be at school in the mornings to complete course work and at a job site in the afternoon. A student whose transition goal is community participation can likewise participate in community activities as part of the school day.

Should a student participate in transition planning?

The school is required to invite the student if the purpose of the meeting will be transition. If the student does not attend the IEP meeting, the school must ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered in the transition planning. This can be accomplished by having the student write down his or her goals and interests and share the information with the IEP team, or the student's parent(s) can provide the information to the team.

Transition planning is more effective when the student is involved in the process. A student who is involved in the planning is more likely to take responsibility for carrying out the transition plan. Involvement in planning gives the student a sense of control over the outcome of the plan.

When students are involved, they have opportunities to learn about their strengths and skills, as well as their disability and its impact on learning, work, and independence. Students can also learn about the accommodations they will need at a job, in further education, or in the community.

What can be done if a student is not receiving transition services?

If an outside agency fails to provide transition services described in the IEP, the school must reconvene the IEP team to identify alternative strategies to meet the transition goals for the student set out in the IEP. Alternative strategies can include having another agency or knowledgeable school personnel provide the service.

If the school fails to provide transition planning or services to an eligible student, the school has violated the law. (See the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004*, 20 United States Code Section 1400; and *Operating Standards for Ohio's Schools Serving Children with Disabilities*, Ohio Administrative Code Chapter 3301.) Students and parents should request an IEP meeting to ask that the transition planning and services be provided. Contact the school special education director to request the IEP meeting. If the school does not provide an IEP meeting a complaint can be made or an impartial due process hearing can be requested. Both the complaint and request for hearing must be in writing.

If there are disagreements about transition planning and services that cannot be resolved through the IEP process, parents and students can request an impartial due process hearing or file a complaint. For information about filing a complaint and impartial due process requests, you can contact:

- **Ohio Department of Education, Office of Exceptional Children:** 1-877-644-6338
- **Your special education director** for a copy of your rights
- **Disability Rights Ohio Intake Department:** 614-466-7264