



Seven Steps of a Well-Designed Transition Plan

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A transition plan is intended to help a student be successful in education after high school or at work, and in independent living. IDEA law (2004) states that the transition plan should include “instruction, related services, community experiences, and the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.” (Section 602, Article 34).

After reading many different documents and resources, seven steps can be identified as part of a well-designed transition plan. The steps, and special considerations for students with ASD, are described in detail below.

1. Assessment
2. Statement of individual preferences
3. Develop measurable post-secondary and annual goals
4. Instruction in academic, vocational and independent living skills
5. Community experiences and skills
6. Exploration of service/provider organizations
7. Methods to evaluate the success of the plan

STEP ONE. Assessment

Assessment is the foundation of the ITP. Assessment in the transition process is an “...ongoing process of collecting data on the individual’s needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future working, educational, living, and personal and social environments. Assessment data serve as the common thread in the transition process and form the basis for defining goals and services to be included in the Individualized Education Program

(IEP)” (The Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) of the Council for Exceptional Children, 1997).

The four main categories of assessment for transition are Training, Education, Employment and Independent Living Skills. Assessment in each of these areas will drive outcome-oriented goals for adult life. Assessment results indicate the student’s present level of performance, including skills that they have, and areas where skill building or development is needed. Assessments identify what skills need to be worked on before the student graduates with a diploma or leaves school at the 22nd birthday, whichever comes first.

Work or vocational skills should be assessed for everyone in transition, including career interests, aptitude tests, workplace skills and on-the-job evaluations that lead to goals for skill development. Practical skills such as self-advocacy, study skills, organization, and time management should be included for those who intend to continue their education after high school, and are also apply to those who will go straight to work. Independent living skills and life skills include nutrition/eating, self-care/hygiene, health/wellness, finances, household management, transportation, and practical/personal safety. Assistive technology needs can be considered within each of these areas.

It is essential to assess students with ASD in all areas of need related to their disability. This is something that many explanations about transition assessment leave out! In addition to the “usual” areas to assess, students with ASD also need to be assessed for needs related to the core areas of autism: social skills (that can include relationship skills, social understanding and social boundaries), communication (including social language and a way to express himself) and behavior (problem behaviors, adaptive behaviors, and safe behaviors).

Students with ASD also need to be assessed in other less obvious areas related to autism to determine where goals and skill building is needed. These areas can include but are not limited to self-control, self-regulation of emotions, self-esteem and mental health, self-management of sensory needs, and problem solving and conflict resolution.

Assessments can include formal, standardized tests. Curriculum-based measures assess a student’s progress in the material presented in class. Assessment can also include the use of inventories and checklists to see what skills are and are not in place. Task analysis, interest inventories tests are other common measures.

Assessment of students with ASD should include observation of the student in multiple natural settings, and in situations that include peers and even in work environments. The gathering of information in assessment must ALWAYS include parental concerns and input, and should include input from the student to the extent possible.

Because the transition plan must be in place no later than on a student’s 16th birthday, assessments clearly need to begin much sooner. Assessment results reveal the student’s needs.

These needs are translated into goals for the student. Services and transition activities will be tied to the goals.

BOTTOM LINE: Good assessments mean that needs in all areas are adequately identified, appropriate goals are developed in all areas of need, and services and transition activities are selected to help the student develop skills and reach their goals. This can make the difference between being well-prepared and poorly-prepared for LIFE!

CAUTION: Assessment plans for students who are on the diploma track or in general education courses often focus only on academics. Unfortunately, many districts resist the notion of assessing in all areas of need related to the disability for students who are “high functioning,” and parents (and the student) may have to advocate in this area. For example, many educators do not think that diploma bound students should be assessed for independent living skills or even vocational skills. Do you agree? Yet law says that transition services include, “where appropriate, independent living skills.” There may be different opinions about whether they are appropriate for some individuals with autism, but the reality is that this is a place where young adults on the spectrum, particularly those who did not get instruction and support in this area, are falling apart.

Parents should read the assessment plan before signing and agreeing to it. Parents (or the student age 18 and up) have the right to ask for a full and comprehensive assessment in all areas of need. What happens if no assessment is done in a particular area? There will be no goals or services (and no plan to make progress or develop skills).

STEP TWO. Statement of individual preferences

The student is the central figure in the transition plan. As part of the preparation for the ITP meeting the student needs to explore and explain what they want for their future, to the greatest extent possible. Don't wait for the meeting and try to figure it out on the spot! Plan in advance to help the students give input, express their preferences, and be involved in making choices in various aspects of transition planning and implementation. This process, called self-determination, can help create a more motivating and self-fulfilling transition plan in the areas of work, future education, adult living, and community involvement.

CONSIDER: Some students do not have the language or communicate skills to express their wants and needs. How can their preferences be taken into account in transition? Parents and teachers often have a pretty good idea about things the student likes and dislikes. The discussion about the person's future should center on what the team believes the student prefers and would like for himself or herself in the future (rather than what the adults want for that person). Consider also focusing on a way for the student to express himself and make choices as a central part of the transition plan, so that every student leaves school with a voice!

CAUTION: Many times a student may say that they want to go into a certain profession but not actually realize what that job entails (astronaut, video game designer). The student's preferences can be noted, and then the team can select activities and opportunities to help the

student understand the realities of the career, or the preparation and training needed for that career (such as job shadowing, interviewing someone who does the job, or finding the educational requirements online). After meaningful exploratory activities, the career goal can be continued, or be modified if needed. If a change is needed, educators and the family can help the student find another job that fits their preferences and capabilities.

STEP THREE: Develop measurable post-secondary goals

Once it is clear what the person wants to do after leaving school, and having defined skills that he or she has and the skills that need to be developed, goals can be developed. Transition goals in the areas of Instruction/Skill Development, Education, Employment, and Independent Living need to define how, when, where and how often the student will gain the skills and experience to meet their goals. Transition goals should move out of the classroom and into the real world.

STEP FOUR: Transition Services

A coordinated set of activities must be included in the individual transition planning process, whether the activities are provided by schools or in coordination with other agencies. For example, instruction and skill development may be provided in schools (e.g., general education classes, academic instruction, tutoring arrangements), but can include instruction or classes from other agencies, adult education, or post-secondary schools.

For example, a goal for self-awareness and self-advocacy for a student who plans to attend community college can be met by helping the student visit the campus, apply for a summer course at the college, and apply to the Center for Students with Disabilities to arrange needed accommodations. The student can also take the college's free placement tests so they can measure their readiness for the academic demands of college.

Connecting steps and activities to meet goals for employment can include job placement opportunities or internships supervised by the school district or with district partners. Services leading to a job or career include paid or volunteer work experience and job site training.

Independent living skills can include training in everyday tasks or activities such as preparing meals, paying bills, etc. This training can be provided by schools or other agencies. This domain can also include important adult activities such as registering to vote, filing taxes, accessing medical services, applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), etc. Goals for community access can be worked on by teaching the student to read bus schedules and use the local bus system.

STEP FIVE: Community experiences and skills

Involving the student in the community as part of transition can help build positive social relationships that will follow them into the future. Recreational opportunities may promote community inclusion and integration, along with feelings of self-worth and confidence that will help students in the future.

Experiences provided in community settings can include community-based work experiences, job site training programs, banking, shopping, transportation, community counseling, recreational services, independent living centers, adult services providers, etc.

STEP SIX: Exploration of service/provider organizations

One of the most important activities of transition is connecting the student and family to different agencies and organizations that serve adults. In fact, these connections should be made long before the “EXIT” IEP at graduation or age 22 (whichever comes first). Navigating the adult service system is one of the most daunting and difficult challenges that families face. For this reason this step is included in transition planning. In reality, it is not always carried out well.

Students and families need to know what resources, agencies and assistance are available, and the eligibility and application processes required. Families need to learn about local service providers so they can take the time to find programs and support staff they need.

STEP SEVEN: Methods to evaluate the success of the plan

The ITP is a changing, working document. The purpose of the plan is to help the person be prepared for life and reach the goals that have been agreed upon that will help the person be successful. Measuring the success of the plan on a regular basis is just as important as creating it. This includes monitoring progress and collecting data to determine how successful the plan is, and how successful the student is becoming.

It is important to stop periodically and check how things are going, so the plan and the related activities can be modified if needed. Just as you may track your progress on a map during a road trip, it is necessary to monitor progress, modify plans, and even change course if needed during the transition years.

If the student is not showing the progress that is expected, the student may require more support to reach the goal. In other cases, the intensity of services or the services themselves might need to be modified. The ITP may also need to be modified if the ultimate goals or outcomes change for some reason. New goals may be added if new needs are identified. New areas for direct instruction may be added to the plan at any time when the team realizes this is needed.