

Successful and meaningful transition services are the result of careful planning that is driven by a young person's dreams, desires, and abilities. This planning builds a youth's independence and participation in school, home, and community living and helps to prepare them for their futures. Youth learn important adult decision-making roles when they participate in this school-based planning.

Most transition planning be part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP)?

Transition planning is required in the IEP for students beginning at age 14 in Mississippi. Parents should feel comfortable asking for transition planning to start earlier if they believe it is needed. Transition planning, goals, and services are required to be "individualized." This means each student will have his or her own unique plan, goals, and services.

Transition services include instruction, community experiences, employment skills, goal-setting for post-school adult living, and, if needed, daily living skills training and functional vocational evaluations. All of these services must be provided in a manner that is sensitive to a student's cultural background and native language.

Transition services are based on a student's strengths, needs, preferences, and interests. Activities that are part of transition services must be results-oriented. Which means that they are focused on building specific skills.

Must students be involved in transition planning?

Schools are required to invite students to participate in their IEP meetings whenever transition goals or services are considered.

What if my child does not attend his or her IEP meeting?

If a youth is unable to participate in his or her IEP meeting or chooses not to attend, school personnel must take steps to ensure that the youth's preferences and interests are considered in developing the IEP.

The best transition plans are those that help youth understand their strengths, express their dreams, and set high expectations for work and independent living.

Youth should be included in all aspects of planning and goal setting, and encouraged to participate at IEP meetings. This participation helps keep team members focused on the young person's individual needs and desires and helps the youth develop decision-making and self-advocacy skills. Preparing a young person for his or her role in transition planning helps them to become knowledgeable members of the IEP team.

How can I be sure that the IEP meets my child's transition needs?

Transition services begin with age-appropriate transition assessments. They include student and parent interviews, interest and skill inventories and other tools.

In order for an IEP to meet a student's transition needs, both parents and school personnel participate in the assessment. The school does this through assessments and observations. Parents do it through day-to-day knowledge and talks with their child about their goals and dreams.

Answering the following questions may help guide how parents and students prepare for and participate in an effective IEP meeting that is focused on transition planning:

- *What does the young person want to do with his or her life? What are his or her dreams, aspirations, or goals?* The youth's answers should be incorporated into all aspects of transition planning. If a young person is nonverbal or has difficulty communicating, parents can still use their knowledge of their child to be sure that transition planning and services reflect the youth's preferences and choices.
- *What are the young person's needs, abilities, and skills?* Parents should be familiar with how much assistance their child needs or does not need to accomplish tasks.
- *What outcomes do the youth and parents want?* Parents and youth should bring suggestions to the transition planning meeting which might include the kind of services, actions, or planning they believe is needed to

achieve desired goals in the transition section of the IEP.

- *Will the young person attend the transition IEP conference?* He or she will be invited and parents can help by encouraging them to attend. Together, parents and youth can prepare for the meeting. If the youth does not attend, parents may represent his or her desires and wishes.
- *How do young people develop self-advocacy skills?* Parents and school staff should encourage self-advocacy in young people. Staff should direct questions to the youth, even when it is the parents who may provide answers. It is important to encourage young people to have and state (by any means available to them) their own opinions. It is important for students to understand their disability and have the confidence to ask for the accommodations they may need.
- *What are the programs, services, accommodations, or modifications the young person wants or needs?* Parents and their youth need to think about and be clear on what they want or need. IEP team discussions address these topics, but often parents and young people have had conversations at home that will be useful in planning.
- *What kinds of accommodations will students need when they go on to higher education or employment?* Parents and youth need to consider what accommodations will be needed after high school and how the youth will obtain them.

Parent Tips for Transition Planning

- *Who will be responsible for what part of the transition plan in the IEP?* It is wise for parents and youth to know who is responsible for each transition goal. Each task should have a specific timeline that is included in the IEP.
- *Should the educational and transition programs emphasize practical or academic goals?* Does the young person need a combination of both? This will depend on the goals and hopes of each individual student.
- *What are the community-based training opportunities the school provides?* Parents and their child should decide how much to participate in those activities.

Other Considerations

- *If a student plans on going to college, is he or she taking the courses needed to meet college entrance requirements?*
- *When will the young person graduate? What kind of diploma option is the best choice?*
- *Are work experience classes appropriate to reach employment goals?* Research suggests that youth have more successful employment outcomes after high school if they have had hands-on, work-based learning experiences as students.
- *How could the educational and transition program be more integrated into the regular program?*
- *Who will attend the IEP meeting?* Parents and the youth should become familiar with the roles and functions of team members. They should also know what community agencies might be

present (vocational rehabilitation, etc.).

Parents may request that a specific community agency be invited to the IEP meeting if the youth is or may be using services from that agency. Becoming familiar with adult service systems or agencies now can be helpful in making future decisions. At times parents may want a family member, friend, or advocate to attend planning meetings with them for support or to take notes.

Parents and youth will want to review the daily school schedule for each quarter or semester. It is important to have information on all classes available so that youth can participate in selecting classes and the scheduling process.

A Final Tip: Parents will need to start thinking about their child's legal status before he or she turns 18, which is the age of majority in many states, including Mississippi. If a youth is not able to make informed decisions about major issues (e.g. medical treatment, living accommodations, financial arrangements, etc.), the family may need to learn more about guardianship. IDEA 2004 requires that students and their parents be notified at least one year in advance of the rights that will transfer to the student upon reaching the age of majority, which include being the responsible person for planning and agreeing or disagreeing with services in the IEP. It is important that parents understand what this means for them and their role in planning.