

TRANSITION BASICS



A Transition Story: *The Dream*

As John starts to pull the door to his apartment closed, he looks around one last time. Not bad, he thinks, I still want better furniture, and a really hot stereo system, but at least it's all mine, and no little sister to hassle me.

As he rides the bus to work he checks his schedule. Good. No work on Saturday. The workload at the garage really picks up on Saturday and I just can't keep up with all customers wanting batteries and new tires. I'm glad my counselor helped me talk to the boss about just working during the week.

John's mother remembers how scared she was when John reached high school. Thank goodness they planned. John was able to get into the auto mechanic's class and his teachers were willing to change some requirements so John could learn the skills he needed for his auto mechanic career. It was a lot of work learning about adult agencies, letting John takes risks or seeing him as someone with strengths and abilities rather than disabilities.

When John moved to his own apartment, his mother was so worried it would not work out. She kept thinking about, "What if he has an accident, forgets to turn the stove off or is late for work?" But the experience was important for John. His mother still worries and still checks on him a little more than she should but his parents are learning to let go.

John's father really enjoys the time they spend together working on John's budget, household tasks or just hanging out. John will always need support, but he has come much further than was ever expected.

TRANSITION: A RESULTS-ORIENTED PROCESS

Transition¹ is the successful movement from schools to productive adult life. An effective transition process is based on individual needs and consists of *coordinated activities* in the following domains:

- **Education** is the process of obtaining and developing knowledge and skills, specifically through formal experiences. Education participation refers to the ability to access and engage in appropriate programs, and/or courses, for life-long learning.
- **Career** is a person's progress in any trade, profession or occupation. Career participation refers to the ability to achieve a satisfactory level of suitable and meaningful work that will provide income and/or personal satisfaction.
- **Community / Independent Living** are the places where people live, work and interact. Community participation refers to the ability to access resources including people, places, services and activities and contributing to the maximum extent possible.
- **Communication** and interaction skills are the processes of giving and receiving information used effectively in appropriate settings.
- **Social Interaction** is the ability to competently relate to others, exchange information and accomplish tasks.
- **Recreation and Leisure** activities are the ways people spend their free time. Recreation and leisure participation refers to the ability to access and participate in activities related to sports, hobbies, special interests and/or relaxation activities.

Case Studies

Fred expresses an interest in pursuing postsecondary education upon graduation from high school. He will need to determine entrance requirements for the colleges he is considering and complete courses required. Fred should enroll in the college preparatory course in his high school along with programs providing support in the areas of study skills, time management, organizational skills and self-advocacy skills.

Sarah expresses an interest in seeking full-time competitive employment or technical skills training upon graduation from high school. She should investigate the program options at the regional vocational-technical school and determine necessary prerequisites. If this is not feasible, Sarah should address how she will begin career exploration, job training and community-based work experience as part of her high school program. **THE TRANSITION CONCEPT**²

¹ JeffCo (1997) *Transition Resource Notebook*. Denver, CO: Jefferson County Schools.

The concept of transition is simple and generally has three major components:

1. *Coach* every student, along with his or her family, to think about goals for life after high school and to develop a long-range plan to get there.
2. *Design* a high school experience to ensure that the student gains the skills and competencies needed to achieve his or her desired postsecondary goals.
3. *Identify* and *link* students and families to any needed postsecondary services, supports or programs before the student exits the school system.

The student's high school program should thoroughly prepare him or her for achieving his or her desired postsecondary goals. The Individualized Education Program, IEP, is the legal document reflecting the commitment made by the educational agency to provide a free appropriate public education designed to meet the unique needs of the student with a disability. It should reflect the services and supports needed to assist the student in gaining the skills, experiences and connections to make the student's postsecondary goals a reality.

WHY IS THE CONCEPT OF TRANSITION IMPORTANT?³

Madeline Will, Former Assistant Secretary, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services [OSERS], indicated the need for transition:

"We have done a lot for students with disabilities. In fact, we have created a compelling problem. We have assisted students with disabilities in becoming young adults who are self-sufficient, better educated and independent with higher expectations of life, but with no place to go."

Through transition planning an organized system for providing instruction and identifying resources is designed. After graduation students will be prepared to live as independently as possible in the community and as productive citizens with the necessary supports.

² Storms, Jane, O'Leary, Ed, Williams, Jane. (2000) *Transition Requirements: A Guide for States, Districts, Schools, Universities and Families*. Stillwater, OK: National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials.

³ CDE, (1991) *Colorado Transition Manual*, Denver, CO: Colorado Department of Education.

TRANSITION- A DEFINITION

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004, and Colorado ECEA Rules 2013, "Transition Services" means a coordinated set of activities for child with a disability that is designed within an 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

The coordinated set of activities "is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, needs and interests; and includes:

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

Case Study

Evan is a 15-year old sophomore who is receiving special education services at his local high school due to his Attention Deficit Disorder and the resulting need for educational accommodations. His parents recently attended a training session on transition planning, where they heard a presentation about the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation's services. Evan's parents asked that the local DVR counselor be invited to his annual IEP meeting. The DVR counselor was able to attend this initial planning meeting. Currently, Evan is a full-time student and his primary focus is academic.

Since Evan has not yet reached a point where his focus has shifted from academic to vocational, and he is not available for employment service provisions due to a full course load, he will not yet be formally referred to the DVR. For now, the primary role of the DVR counselor is to assist the transition team in developing IEP goals and objectives that support successful transition to work and community. The DVR counselor and the transition coordinator will share information on DVR and other community resources with Evan and his parents. In anticipation of referral to the DVR, which will probably occur at the end of Evan's junior year, Evan and his parents will contact the DVR counselor annually, to keep the counselor informed of Evan's vocational activities and readiness.

WHY FOCUS ON TRANSITION?⁴

One of the primary purposes of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] is to "ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living." (34 CFR 300. 1)(a)

The focus of IDEA has shifted from one that only provided children and youth with disabilities access to an education to one that also strives to improve results for all children with disabilities. The IDEA 2004 strengthens the role of parents and students in the educational planning and decision-making process. It focuses the student's educational program on participation and progress in the general curriculum.

At the heart of the IDEA is the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The big ideas in IEP transition planning are that the team:

- Engages the student and parents in thinking about the student's goals for the future.
- Identifies the student's needs, interests and preferences.
- Knows how the student performed today.
- Identifies what the student will learn and do both this year and in the remaining years in school to achieve his or her dreams and goals for the future.
- Identifies the supports and services the student needs for success.
- Ensures that the student learns to the maximum extent appropriate within the general curriculum and environment.

Schools, families and communities must work together to offer effective educational experiences so students with disabilities:

- achieve appropriate participation and progress in the general curriculum;
- attain improved academic results;
- are prepared for postsecondary education, employment and independent living.

In practical terms, the very real challenge is not only to ensure that all students achieve high academic standards but also gain skills needed to achieve their desired postsecondary goals (including postsecondary education, training or employment) and assume adult responsibilities in their communities. Further, the challenge is to keep all students in school and engaged in meaningful educational experiences so they will be prepared for postsecondary education, employment and independent living.

⁴ Storms, Jane, O'Leary, Ed, Williams, Jane. (2000) *Transition Requirements: A Guide for States, Districts, Schools, Universities and Families*. Stillwater, OK: National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials.

WHY START EARLY?

It is important to begin the transition planning process early to allow time for planning and accessing the support services needed in the future.

Both Congress and the U.S. Department of Education recognized that early transition planning is important because:

- Transition from special education services and its entitlements to an eligibility system is complicated.
- For students with severe disabilities and complex needs it will take time to put post-school services and supports in place.
- Some students will likely be using the services of many agencies and time will be needed to figure out who can do what and who will pay for what services.

Early and long-range planning are critical in order for the student to receive many post-school programs or services whether they include support services in college or residential services from an adult provider. Students and families are often faced with much paperwork to meet eligibility requirements and some adult services have long waiting lists.

