

The term “transition,” as used in this toolkit, refers to a passage or a change that occurs in any student’s life, such as passage to a new school, job, or adulthood. It is also a term that we often associate with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and one defined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004). The IDEA describes transition as “... a coordinated set of activities for a student designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living or community participation.”

IDEA describes “transition services” as activities designed to help students accomplish future goals. For students in special education, transition services must be part of their IEP, and they are entitled to these services. Postsecondary education is one path a student can pursue as part of a transition plan, developed with input by the student, his or her parents, and other IEP team members when the student turns 16.

“Transition” is a term that also applies to students with disabilities protected by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and [Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#). These federal laws prohibit discrimination based on a disability and provide equal access to education. Often, students with disabilities to receive education services in a variety of ways. For example, some students may be eligible for an IEP and others may qualify for a 504 plan. Students who were eligible for an IEP may no longer qualify after being re-evaluated and may move to becoming eligible for Section 504 services, which allow for equal access to their education.

Understanding the differences between special education and Section 504 is important for students and their parents. There is no entitlement for transition planning and services for students on 504 plans, although the 504 team may take transition planning and services into consideration. This distinction is important because the responsibility for planning and carrying out transition goals may fall more heavily on the shoulders of parents and students.

Start early

Starting in middle school, families can begin to think about planning for their student’s transition to postsecondary education and the needs that may arise early in his or her school experience. Successful transition planning involves many things, including identifying support services for students with disabilities, involving adult service agencies, thinking and planning, and being proactive in anticipating needs

that may arise. In thinking about high school, students should consider the most rigorous courses of study possible in order to prepare for college. It is also important to look at whether the student may need adaptive or assistive technology to increase independent work in high school. Beginning the process early gives students time to sharpen self-advocacy skills, to think about interests, and to identify goals for the future.

Planning Tips for Families

BEGINNING TRANSITION PLANNING

To begin preparing for the transition to postsecondary education, here are suggestions for students and families to think about and to include as part of a student's IEP transition goals and activities.

- Identify goals for the future, strengths, and challenges.
- Learn to lead IEP or 504 meetings and practice self-advocacy skills.
- Identify activities that promote personal growth and development.
- Encourage job shadowing and career exploration.
- Get extra support to prepare for college entrance exams, such as the SAT or ACT. Be aware of important dates and apply for accommodations as early as 9th grade.
- Develop a resume freshman year and add to it as time goes on, including all volunteer work and extracurricular activities.
- Develop goals for writing quality essays for postsecondary school applications.
- Learn and role-play interviewing skills necessary in the admission process.
- Identify the supports and agencies that can help in moving smoothly to college.
- Make sure education records and other information are up to date. (Note: Students on IEPs are required to be re-evaluated every 3 years. OCR (Office of Civil Rights) recommends that students with 504 plans are re-evaluated every three years.) Up to date information is necessary for getting accommodations in colleges.
- Think about the social aspects of transitioning to adulthood; identify needs and incorporate them into the transition plan.
- Discuss goals for assistive technology starting in middle school, and have the student learn how to use appropriate software and devices.