

Tips to Maximize the Parent Role in Transition*

Here are some specific tips that can help you make the most of your role as a parent and partner during secondary transition planning:

- Consider yourself as a **partner**, not an observer, on the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team.
- **Understand your child's disability.** You may know your child, but do you know how your child's disability specifically impacts him or her in the areas of learning, communication, or mobility? During transition planning, seek to better understand your child's disability and how it may affect the pursuit of postsecondary education, employment, or independent living.
- **Encourage your child** to create a vision of his or her future. Help your child research options to realize that vision and to expand his or her base of experiences. This will allow your youth to take ownership of the transition planning process while building in the freedom to change course if necessary.
- Convince your youth that he or she can realize that vision. Youth take cues from parents on what to expect of themselves. Instill in your child that **the IEP is a pathway** to his or her dreams; that it is an opportunity to receive the help needed to reach those dreams.
- Build the belief in **high expectations** for your youth. You may have high expectations that your child can achieve to his or her maximum ability. You need to advocate for an IEP and transition plan that reflects those expectations. If you convey low expectations for your child's future, others may do the same.
- **Share what you know** about your child by communicating strengths, interests, and needs during IEP meetings. Teachers value this type of information from parents because it helps provide details that assessments and school observation cannot. This information may also help the IEP team avoid academic and services decisions that don't address a student's interest or areas of need.
- **Keep essential education records** throughout your child's education. Good record keeping is an essential part of the special education process. Parents should save important records in an organized way to use for special education planning. For example, keep copies of report cards, current and past IEP documents, evaluation summary reports, and district-wide assessment scores.
- **Build self-confidence and self-determination in your youth using the IEP process.** Not all youth will feel comfortable participating in IEP meetings or voicing their goals. Help them find an effective way to express themselves. They might speak at the IEP meeting, construct a PowerPoint or video about themselves, or write a letter to the IEP team.
- **Help your youth develop independence in learning, studying, and living skills.** Positive traits, such as being eager to learn new things, effectively managing time, and taking responsibility for doing a good job, will serve youth well in the adult world, especially when it comes to employment and postsecondary education.
- **Understand the impact of "soft skills"** on employment and educational success, and use activities in the home to build those skills. Soft skills, personal communication, and responsibility are tools everyone needs to be successful. Teach your child how to communicate appropriately with others, maintain personal appearance, take work direction, and resolve conflict.

*Adapted from PACER's "A Guide to Prepare Your Child with a Disability for Life Beyond High School."

- **Help identify potential community supports and work opportunities** for your youth. Many youth will utilize some form of community support that can enable them to live, learn, and work as adults. This may include employment assistance from your state's Vocational Rehabilitation Services, postsecondary education supports obtained through a college's Student Disability Services Office, or independent living skills taught by a community-based organization. Parents should become familiar with available options and ask representatives of these services to be present at the IEP meeting, or to provide information for the team.

Parents can make a big difference in the future employment success of their child when they use some or all of these tips.