

Transition: Charting a Course for the Future

Parents and students with disabilities can take steps early to be ready to take the helm when the student transitions from school to adult life. Public school services for children with disabilities end by the age of 22 at the latest. “It’s like you’ve been a passenger on a ship for many years, then someone tells you that you are being promoted to captain,” said one mother of a young adult with disabilities about this time of change. “It will now be up to you to use what you have learned to steer the ship and chart your own course!”

It can rock the boat if you and your young adult are not prepared for the transition of moving from school to adult life. Here are some ideas:

- Make sure that your child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) includes transition planning. The plan will be based on school-administered transition assessments that include your child’s interests and abilities. In Minnesota, transition assessments, planning, and services begin in the ninth grade or before. The plan must be based on the student’s needs and take into account the student’s interests and preferences.
- When planning your child’s transition IEP, consider what transition services your child will need in the areas of postsecondary education, employment, and, when appropriate, independent living skills. You may also want to encourage the IEP team to include goals for your child’s participation in community activities, recreation, and leisure in the adult world if there are disability-related issues. Each area of need should be addressed in the IEP with an annual, measurable goal or other specific services to meet the goal.
- Help your child become an effective self-advocate by engaging in open discussions of how disability impacts his or her daily life. Knowledge is empowering. Only through the thorough understanding of strengths and limitations will youth be able to advocate for their needs and legal rights. You can promote your child’s self-knowledge through role playing. Social interactions, job interviews, and how to explain accommodation needs can all be practiced with you at home. Parents can also encourage transition-aged youth (and younger children as well) to attend and participate in their own IEP meetings. Attendance at these meetings offers your child an important opportunity to develop and practice needed skills while building confidence and self-determination (finding one’s own path in life).
- During your child’s junior and senior year, begin to evaluate appropriate adult service providers. It is important to plan ahead because each provider has different guidelines and requirements and may have waiting lists. Families and students may want to seek out and interview service providers during this time and report back to the IEP team for additional input and guidance. Adult services to consider include the vocational rehabilitation agency, county services, workforce centers, the disability office of a college or technical school, regional agencies, residential services, in-home support agencies, and employment agencies. Families and youth can find more resources that connect youth to communities and careers at the Project C3 website (c3online.org), including many disability specific and general service organizations listed throughout Minnesota.
- Before your son or daughter turns 18, consider applying for the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. SSI is a

federal income support program administered by the Social Security Administration. SSI provides monthly cash assistance to individuals with disabilities who have limited income and resources. To be eligible for SSI benefits, both disability and financial criteria must be met. The student's family income is no longer considered for financial eligibility when the student is 18, so many students become eligible for this financial help. There are also many excellent "Work Incentives" to take advantage of once a person receives SSI, such as Student Earned Income Exclusion and the Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS). A good resource to help families explore the Supplemental Security Program includes the Parent Brief, *Supplemental Security Income: A Bridge to Work* (PACER.org/publications/ParentBriefs/parentbrief_SSI1.pdf). An in-depth look at program rules is highlighted in the SSI Spotlights (socialsecurity.gov/ssi/links-to-spotlights.htm).

- When your son or daughter receives a high school diploma, IEP services will end. Be sure to ask the IEP case manager for your child's "Summary of Performance (SOP)." The SOP will summarize academic achievement and functional performance, as well as give recommendations on how to help your son or daughter meet postsecondary goals. Topics that might be summarized include information from work experience (school, community, summer jobs, volunteer work); vocational assessment (interests, aptitude, formal assessments, and situational assessments); career and employment ideas (jobs your child enjoyed or would like to try).

The Department of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is one example of an adult service provider. VR is a federal-state program that works with individuals who have physical or mental disabilities so that they can prepare for, find, or retain employment in meaningful careers. VR may also help finance postsecondary training and education when appropriate, as well as assistive technology, job placement, and job-seeking skills training.

VR services can also include activities to explore career options. During high school, a counselor may provide career assessment or exploration services to help students develop their employment goals. Most students have many interests that could be developed into a number of career or employment opportunities. Career exploration is extremely important at this age and career exploration activities and services are a valuable contribution from VR counselors.

The VR counselor works with each student and the IEP transition team to create an *individualized plan for employment (IPE)* and to connect the student to vocational rehabilitation services upon graduation from high school. A VR counselor is assigned to every Minnesota high school and is usually involved in the IEP meetings during the student's last two years. The counselor assigned to your child's high school can be found at: positivelyminnesota.com/JobSeekers/People_with_Disabilities/PDFs/Transition_School_Directory.pdf.

Find more information about Minnesota's vocational rehabilitation services for transition-age youth and adults of all ages at: positivelyminnesota.com/JobSeekers/People_with_Disabilities.

PACER Center has a variety of transition planning resources for families of youth with disabilities. For example, information on what happens when your child becomes 18 is available in the handout *Transfer of Parental Rights at Age of Majority in Minnesota*. To access these resources, parents may call PACER at 800-537-2237 or check PACER's website at PACER.org. Many booklets and materials are free for parents of children with disabilities.