

Transition Planning Takes Time

The idea of their child with a disability transitioning from special education services to adult services may seem far in the future for many families, especially if they struggle with day-to-day challenges of caring for their child’s special needs. Nevertheless, change will come, and it is helpful for families to prepare.

What will your young adult do with their day when the school bus no longer comes?

One way that families can think about transition planning is to ask: what will a meaningful day look like for my young adult when they no longer have the same structure they did in school? Access to special education including transition services, ends when a student either graduates from high school or completes their transition program at age 22. Therefore, planning ahead is key. Families can use this transition planning timeline to guide their child’s journey to adulthood.

Young children

Parents of a young child can begin to address the transition process informally by offering their child varied experiences, such as visiting a nature center, watching sports events, reading stories about people in their jobs, creating art, and exploring other community activities. Observing what interests the child and encouraging what they enjoy doing often gives direction to the formal transition process, future occupation, and life skills.

Preteen years

When a child is in late elementary school or early middle school years, parents or guardians (who must be included on the IEP team) can introduce the discussion of transition services at IEP meetings.

This can include learning more about employment support agencies. Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) and State Services for the Blind and Visually Impaired (SSB) serve individuals with disabilities, including students, youth, and adults. Applications for these services begin in ninth grade and continue through high school and into adulthood.

Before a student enters middle or high school, families can help them to become more comfortable talking about their disability, requesting the supports they need to be successful, and making decisions in age-appropriate ways. Other skills to work on include money management, household tasks, managing personal health, hygiene, and health care, and increasing community participation and socializing with their peers. Assistive technology that can support a student with skill acquisition should also be explored. These are much needed components of self-determination and self-advocacy and are tools that will

support a youth throughout their lifetime. Depending upon the student’s interests, a family can also begin to think about opportunities in community and higher education.

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Ninth grade

No later than grade 9, the IEP must address the student's need for transition from secondary services to postsecondary education and training, employment, recreation and leisure, and home living.

Minnesota Statutes, section 125A.08

Federal law requires students with IEPs to begin receiving transition services by age 16. However, Minnesota requires services to begin in grade 9. The student's participation in the transition process, including attending IEP meetings and sharing their hopes and interests, helps guide which transition services are needed. The IEP team will focus services on each of the three transition areas, including:

- Employment
- Post secondary education or training, and
- Independent living or life skills

The IEP will include goals for each area. For example:

Employment:

There may be a goal to learn about VRS, SSB, or CareerForce Center services. The application process for some services can be complex, but a recent program, Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) has a simpler application process with services that focus on employment, are tailored to student needs, and can begin at age 14.

Other goals may include exploring a variety of jobs through volunteer activities or internships, pre-apprenticeships, enrolling in classes at school or in the community that offer hands-on work experience, or creating self-employment, such as babysitting or lawn care. Each can help introduce or expand areas of interest and develop job responsibility.

Postsecondary education or training:

The IEP team can discuss the type of postsecondary options best suited for the student's interests and needs. They may range from an apprenticeship to technical college, a certificate program, community college or university degree. If the student will be pursuing an academic degree, the IEP team needs to make sure that all necessary pre-requisite courses are taken. Post-secondary educational opportunities continue to expand for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities and youth and families are encouraged to explore those options as well.

Pre Employment Transition Services may include:

- **Job exploration counseling**
- **Work-based learning opportunities**
- **Post secondary education counseling**
- **Workplace readiness training**
- **Instruction in self-advocacy**

Post secondary opportunities continue to expand for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

When a student receives a high school diploma, an IEP or 504 plan will not transfer to a postsecondary education program; the information about supports a student received can be shared with the Disability Services Office.

Independent living or life skills

The IEP team will consider what skills the student needs in adulthood. IEP goals may help the student find ways to participate in the community, home management, recreation and leisure activities, and manage their transportation and health care.

High school

The IEP team will continue looking at the three transition areas throughout high school and may design increasingly specific goals as the student advances through grades. If the student will use VRS, SSB, state, or county services after special education services, high school is the time to determine which ones they will use, complete applications for them, and invite representatives to IEP meetings.

The IEP team will continue considering the three transition areas throughout high school and may design increasingly specific goals.

High school students should obtain their Social Security card (if they don't already have one) and a state identification card or a driver's license. Males must register with Selective Service within 30 days of their 18th birthday, regardless of disability.

When a person reaches the age of majority at 18, they are considered an adult. All rights, including educational rights, transfer from parent to student, who will assume the parental rights on the IEP team. Students can invite the parents to the IEP meeting and to support them in decision-making, but the school is no longer required to invite the parents, unless the parents are the adult child's legal guardians. Guardianship is not required at age 18 and families are encouraged to explore the many alternatives available.

At age 18, when a young adult applies for public health and other benefits, such as Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), their financial situation is considered rather than that of their parents. If the student needs financial assistance in adulthood, an IEP goal could be developed to explore SSI, county social services, Medicaid benefits, and other adult resources. If a student will be accessing public benefits, families and the IEP team can explore work incentives that allow a person to work without impacting their benefits and Medicaid. Families may also wish to investigate Special and Supplemental Needs Trusts and ABLE accounts as another way to protect assets.

Special and Supplemental Needs Trusts and ABLE Accounts are tools that can protect assets.

Navigating housing can be a complex process. If this is a goal for a student's future, high school is a good time to begin learning about and exploring options.

Students with special health care needs will navigate another transition — from pediatric to adult health care services. The cut-off age for most pediatric providers is usually 18-21. Medical transition provides an opportunity for youth to continue learning about their medical condition, how to care for themselves, and identify areas where extra assistance might be needed.

Continuing Special Education to age 22

If a student remains in special education past their senior year of high school, the IEP team will continue assessing progress in the three transition areas as well as any additional educational needs until the student's 22nd birthday.

Families can continue investigating adult services that may be applicable for their young adult with disabilities and build upon self-advocacy and self-determination skills.

Summary of Performance

When a student receives a high school diploma or completes their transition programming, their IEP services will end. It is important to ask the IEP case manager for the student's Summary of Performance (SOP), which summarizes academic achievement and functional performance and provides recommendations to help the student meet post high school goals.

Putting it all Together

Youth with disabilities benefit from the additional planning that transition services provide as they prepare to leave school, move into adulthood, and meet their employment, educational, or independent living goals.

Planning for transition can be complex, but there are resources available for students and families wherever they are in the process. Helpful information and resources can be found on [PACER's website](#), including those listed below.

- [Minnesota Secondary Transition Toolkit for Families: A Guide to Preparing Your Child with a Disability for Life Beyond High School \(PACER.org\)](#)
- [Pre-Employment Transition Services \(Pre-ETS\) / Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development \(mn.gov\)](#)
- [Pre-Employment Transition Services for Youth who are Blind or Visually Impaired](#)
- [The Transition to Employment: What Parents Can Do Now](#)
- [The Transition to Postsecondary Education or Training: What Parents Can Do Now](#)
- [The Transition to Independent Living: What Parents Can do Now](#)
- [Consider the Alternatives: The Transfer of Rights at the Age of Majority](#)
- [County and Tribal Directory for Information about Medicaid and Benefits](#)
- [The Supplemental Security Income Application Process](#)
- [Medical Assistance for Employment Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Comparing ABLE Accounts, Special Needs Trusts, and Supplemental Needs Trusts](#)
- [Medical Transition for Youth Child with Special Health Care Needs: A Tip Sheet for Parents](#)
- [Finding Housing for Youth with Disabilities Takes Determination and Creativity](#)