



Minnesota Transition

Parent Tips for Charting a Course for the Future

Parents of students with disabilities can act early when their son or daughter transitions from high school to adult life. It is important to be ready because public school services for children with disabilities in Minnesota end by age 21 (or 22 at the latest).

“It’s as though your child has been a passenger on a ship for many years, then someone tells you that they 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 your youth to use what they have learned to steer the ship as much as possible and chart their own course, so it’s important that you and your young adult are ready for the transition from high school to adult life.

Here are some suggestions to help you prepare:

Make sure that your youth’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) includes transition planning. The plan should include transition assessments based on academic and functional performance and your youth’s interests, preferences, and needs.

When working with your youth’s IEP team to plan your youth’s transition IEP, consider what transition services they will need in the areas of postsecondary education, employment, and independent living skills. You may also want to include goals for community activities, recreation, and leisure. Each area of need should be addressed in the IEP with an annual, measurable postsecondary goal or other specific services to meet the goal.

Help your youth become an effective self-advocate by engaging in open discussions of how their disability impacts daily life. To help your child understand self-advocacy, you might want to try role playing social interactions and job interviews. It’s important to practice explaining what accommodations are needed. Participating in IEP meetings offers your youth an opportunity to develop and practice to build confidence and self-determination skills.

During your youth’s junior and senior years of high school, begin to identify appropriate adult service providers. It is important to plan ahead because each adult provider has different guidelines and requirements, and some may have waiting lists. Adult service providers you may want to consider include:

- Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS)
- County services
- CareerForce Centers
- Disability service offices in a college or technical school
- Disability Linkage Line
- Centers for Independent Living
- Residential services
- In-home support agencies
- Other employment agencies

For help in knowing who to contact in your situation, call PACER Center and ask to speak to an advocate or transition specialist.

Vocational Rehabilitation Services (VRS) is one example of an adult service provider. This federal program works with agencies in each state. VRS works with individuals who have physical or mental disabilities to help them prepare for, find, or retain employment in meaningful careers. Financing for postsecondary training and education, assistive technology, job placement, and job-seeking skills training may be available through VRS.

Vocational Rehabilitation services may also include career exploration. A VRS counselor is assigned to each high school in Minnesota and may be involved in IEP meetings during the last two years of high school. The counselor might conduct a career assessment or provide career exploration services to help your son or daughter develop future employment goals. You have a role in encouraging your youth to take advantage of, and actively participate in, offered services. While career exploration is a focus for some youth involved with VRS, you may have to request these services. The VRS counselor can work with the IEP transition team to create an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) and connect the student to vocational rehabilitation services upon graduation from high school.

Before your youth turns 18, consider applying for the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. SSI is a federal income support program administered by the Social Security Administration that provides monthly cash assistance to individuals with disabilities who have limited income and resources. Applicants for SSI benefits need to meet both disability and financial criteria. Family income is no longer considered in eligibility determination when a student with a disability reaches age 18, so many students become eligible at that time. There are also excellent incentives to help young adults with disabilities gain work experience, such as the Student Earned Income Exclusion and the Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS). An in-depth look at program rules is highlighted on the Social Security website (ssa.gov). A good resource to help families explore SSI includes the *Supplemental Security Income Application Process* handout, available at PACER.org/transition/resource-library.

When your child receives a high school diploma, their IEP services will end. It is important to ask the IEP case manager for your child's Summary of Performance (SOP). The SOP summarizes academic achievement and functional performance and provides recommendations 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 assessments (interests, aptitude, formal assessments, and situational assessments)
- Career and employment ideas (jobs your youth enjoyed or would like to try)

For more information

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 "Prepare Your Child for Age of Majority and Transfer of Parental Rights in Minnesota" PACER.org/parent/php/PHP-c63.pdf. Many booklets and materials are free for parents of children with disabilities.

To access these resources, parents may:

- Call PACER at (800) 537-2237
- Visit the National Parent Center on Transition and Employment (PACER.org/transition)