

Transition to Adult Living

An Information and Resource Guide

These four pages provide an overview of the effects of the newly reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) on transition services. They are excerpted from California's newly published resource for transition, *Transition to Adult Living*, and offer a glimpse of the wide range of information and supports contained in the guide for students, parents, and teachers involved in transition. To download an interactive version of the complete, 270-page guide, go to www.calstat.org/transitionGuide.html. To request a free hard copy, email donna.lee@calstat.org or fax your order to 707-206-9176.

Legal Requirements

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The IDEA of 1990 required planning for post-school transition at IEP meetings for all students with disabilities. The law required that students be invited to attend the IEP meeting and that transition services and planning be addressed in the following areas:

- Instruction
- Employment and other post-school adult living objectives
- Community experiences
- If appropriate, daily living skills
- Functional vocational evaluation

The IDEA of 1997 further expanded transition planning in the IEP to include related services necessary to achieve the activities stated in the transition plan and required procedures for the transfer of legal rights from the parent to the student upon reaching the age of majority under state law.



Q. Are education agencies responsible for preparing students for their futures?

A. Yes. IDEA '04 continues to reinforce the intention that education agencies will assist students to successfully transition from school to adult living. Its purpose clearly states the legislative intent that education agencies prepare students for life after leaving school:

(d) PURPOSES.—The purposes of this title are—

(1)(A) to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. (Section 601, emphasis added)

What It Means

The primary purpose of the IDEA is to ensure that children and youth with disabilities have a right to a free appropriate public education; but it also means that education agencies will prepare them for activities after leaving school. These activities include attending college, training for employment, getting a job, living independently, and participating in the life of the community.

Q. What is the definition of “transition services”?

The definition of transition services in the IDEA '04 explains how improving a student's academic and functional achievement will improve the transition from school to adult living:

A. (34) **TRANSITION SERVICES.**

—The term “transition services” means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that—

(A) is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.
(Section 602, emphasis added)

Q. What is the coordinated set of activities designed to help students move from school to adult living?

The definition of transition services is a coordinated set of activities. The activities to which the IDEA refers have a concerted purpose: to help students move successfully from school to adult living. Improving a student's academic and functional performance while in school increases the student's chances for a better future. Best practices involve helping the student understand the connection between school and careers, coordinating all stakeholders—the student, the family, the school, and other service providers—and having the student's goals for the future as the focus of all activities.

The definition further clarifies that transition services are based on the student's interests and include the areas of instruction, community experiences, the development of employment or other goals (such as further education), and any other related services the student may need to achieve his or her long-term goals.

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What It Means

The IDEA expects that local education agencies, community and state agencies, and families will work together to design educational programs that prepare students with disabilities for life after leaving school. The IDEA lists specific results: improved academic and functional achievement that will offer youth choices in adult life. These choices include continued education, employment, and the ability to assume adult roles.

What It Means

General and special educators coordinate activities with the student to assist the student in identifying his or her strengths, interests, and preferences for post-school activities—such as further education, training, or employment—and to help the student achieve those goals.

General and special educators coordinate activities to ensure that students with disabilities receive a standards-based or functional education, individually determined according to student need, with appropriate supports, services, accommodations, and modifications to be successful in school and beyond school. Additionally, students receive instruction and engage in activities that prepare them for the world of work and life in their community.

Local education agencies coordinate with community and state agencies involved with higher education, employment training, and services for adults with disabilities to *(continued)*

(B) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and

(C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

(Section 602)

Q. What is the required transition services language in the IEP?

A. The definition of transition services in the IDEA '04 further explains that transition planning is student-centered and focused on the student's goals. Specific areas must be addressed in transition planning in the IEP. Transition services refer to a set of activities that:

(B) is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and

(C) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (Section 602, Article 34)

better inform students about the options available after leaving school.

Local education agencies work with families to develop transition plans designed to help students reach their future goals and, ideally, provide information to families about post-school options and adult services for their children.

What It Means

The definition of transition services clarifies that when education agencies and families develop transition services language in the IEP, it must be based on the student's strengths, interests, and ideas about what he/she wants to do when finished with school. Students may not know what they want to do after leaving school or they may not have realistic goals; so the transition services language should include activities that help students make informed decisions to formulate realistic goals that match their unique personalities, interests, and preferences. Once student interest and preference have been identified, the IDEA identifies the areas to be addressed in transition services language in the IEP (see below):

Areas to Be Addressed . . . in transition services language in the IEP

Instruction

The IEP is an individualized instructional and support plan for students with disabilities. The transition planning, activities, and services detailed in the IEP align instruction with the student's post-school goals. For most students, participation in a standards-based instructional program will provide them the requisite skills to enter college, further training, or employment. Many students benefit from seeing the connection between school and career by participating in school- and work-based instructional experiences, while others may need more intensive functional skills training to enter the world of work.

Related services

The plan must describe any related services the student may need—such as transportation to a work experience or career counseling—to help the student prepare for his or her future goals.

Community experiences

Instructional activities may take place in the community, such as community-based instruction, to help students generalize the skills learned in the classroom to the real world.

Employment

All students should have employment-related language in their IEP. For some students this may be a goal to enter higher education; for others it may mean job training or supported employment; and for others still, going to work right after leaving school may be the goal. Regardless of what the goals are, schools should help students identify their goals and develop plans that prepare the students to achieve them.

Daily living skills and functional evaluation, if appropriate

Some students need specific instruction and activities in order to learn to take care of themselves and live as independently as possible. Some students may need a functional evaluation to determine which skills they will need to develop so that they are able to enter employment or live independently.

Q. When must transition service language be included in the IEP?

A. Not later than the student's sixteenth birthday. The point in time when transition language must be added to the IEP for students with disabilities was raised from the age of 14 in the IDEA of '97 to the age of 16 in the IDEA '04. However, for many students, beginning transition services earlier than 16 may be appropriate. And the IDEA '04 allows for it:

(VIII) beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child is 16, and updated annually thereafter.

[Section 614(d)(1)(A)(i)]

Q. What are measurable postsecondary goals?

A. The IDEA '04 adds a new requirement for transition services language in the IEP, the development of measurable postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments. The IEP for students 16 years old or younger, if appropriate, must contain:

(aa) appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills;

(bb) the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals. [Section 614(d)(1)(A)(i)(VIII)]

student in high school, or earlier if appropriate, to achieve long-term goals. The annual goals are still included under the headings described in the definition of transition services above, which include instruction, employment, community experiences, and related services, and, if appropriate, daily living skills and functional evaluation. The annual goals must be based on age-appropriate transition assessments in the areas of training, education, and, if appropriate, independent living. They must also support the student's postsecondary or long-term goals for the future.

Additionally, the transition services language must include any needed transition services, including a course of study that a student may need in order to accomplish his or her post-school goals. Some examples of needed transition services may include participation in career exploration and preparation experiences, career guidance counseling, and establishing connections with adult service providers.

What It Means

The IEP that is developed on or before the student's sixteenth birthday must contain transition service language.

If the student turns 16 before the next scheduled IEP meeting, the IEP team is required to develop transition services language and identify needed services during the IEP when the student is 15 years old, so that the plan is in effect when the student turns 16. However, it may be appropriate for many students to begin discussing the connection between school and careers as early as elementary school. For other students it may be appropriate to include transition services language in the IEP during middle school or when the student moves from middle to high school in order to identify appropriate courses of study that support the student's post-school goals.

What It Means

The use of the term "goal" to describe both what students want to happen once they leave school and also to describe what schools must do to help students achieve their long-term objectives can be confusing. The IDEA '04 requires transition services language in the IEP to include postsecondary goals, or the student's aspirations for his or her future. The IDEA '04 also requires annual goals in the IEP to help students achieve their goals for the future. Annual, measurable goals in the IEP should be written each year to help the student achieve his or her post-school goals. The annual goals must be designed and reasonably calculated to assist students to achieve their long-term goals and must be included in the IEP no later than the student's sixteenth birthday, or earlier if appropriate. The postsecondary goal is what the student wants and hopes for his or her future in terms of higher education, employment, and independent living. The annual, measurable goals in the IEP are what schools will do to help the