



TRANSITIONS: *Preparing for Life After School*

Things to consider when planning for the future

[by Jeremy Holbert]

Although we do not necessarily think of it this way, we are all preparing for transition throughout much of our formative years...transitioning to the next grade level, the next level in sports or scouts, moving to a new town, preparing for that transition to college, etc. The same is true for children with special needs. As a SPED Teacher/Transition Coordinator in a local district, one of my goals each year is to help prepare students, with the assistance of their families, transition from elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school and then after high school. It should be looked at as a process where teachers, school personnel, parents and outside agencies (when necessary) work together with the student to help prepare him or her for the next step whether it be additional school, training or a job...and it is a process.

When working with your district, you want to make a transition plan to help guide your child from school to life. Most schools begin a plan when preparing to enter high school from middle school, but keep in mind that the Individual with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) suggests that a transition plan be included with your student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) by the time he or she is 16 years old. By including a plan of transition in your child's IEP, you are setting them up for success!

It is never too early to begin planning for life as a young adult, whether we are talking about a child who has special needs or does not. As a teacher, my goal is to help each of my students prepare for this awesome transition, to help him or her become a success...understanding that success is different for each of us. A transition plan put in place with your school does just this.

A transition plan will help define what is best for your child. It is tailored to each student's abilities and goals. Developing a plan of transition in the early years of high school will determine what classes will help your child achieve his or her after high school goals, whether going to college, working or maintaining a household. It's important that we work together as students, parents and educators for the same goal: your child achieving his or her goals, ones appropriate to the student's abilities and desires.

As a transition coordinator, I feel the four keys to a successful transition plan are set a goal, communication, start at the end and determine VIP's.

1. Set a long-term goal.

This may change. That's okay, and sometimes change is good! Be willing to adapt to a change of the long-term goal if and when necessary. Remember, we want to help your child achieve success, whatever that means for him or her.

2. Communication is key!

It is important that communication remain open between family members and your student's educators, work supervisors, coaches or anyone else involved.

3. Start at the end.

An education plan should be put in place with transition goals in mind. Be as specific as possible and list the classes that will help your child achieve his or her after school goals.

4. Determine VIPs.

Who will continue to be involved in helping with transition? Prepare a list of people who will help support your child after the transition begins, including supporting your child after high school. A good example would be Vocational Rehabilitation, a state agency through DESE.

Successful transition preparation and application must be student-concentrated. Things that the student does at school should be identified in a student's transition plan and must be directly linked to each student's post-secondary goals. The plan must reflect a student's individual choices, abilities and necessities in the areas of education and training, job skills, full-grown living arrangements and experiences they have with the public. Independence, encouragement and support are vital skills that help guarantee planning and application based upon the student.

As you consider a plan of transition, I would also encourage you to consider the abilities of your child...is he or she able to make informed decisions regarding living arrangements, finances, regarding medical treatments? Answer these questions as honestly as possible and if not, please consider who will make these decisions for them. At age 18 children are considered adults and these responsibilities may be turned over to them if proper steps have not been taken to ensure that someone is legally designated to make decisions in their best interest.

Transition is a vital part of life for everyone, it's something we are all required to do. Let's make it easier by planning ahead and preparing. *