



Features

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Important Dates

- **August 25, 2008:**
Fall Classes Begin
- **September 30, 2008:**
Field Advisory
4:00-4:50pm

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Student Voices in Transition Planning

The word "transition" used in school contexts evokes several images, most usually pictures of students leaving K – 12 education. But students experience numerous transitions during their schooling, which arise from developmental changes based on individual physical, emotional and intellectual growth and structural changes inherent in the systems of schooling. Much of the discussion on transition planning for students with disabilities is about systemic transitions that they go through, such as, moving from preschool to elementary, from middle to high school, and from high school to adulthood. Thoma et al (2001) observe that there is little involvement of students in their own transition planning, and they emphasize the need to invite their participation in their own life planning.

Transition planning is a crucial step in supporting students with disabilities to become successful youth and adults. Leila Kuttner, a CPS special educator, discussed how she works with students moving from elementary to middle school, and middle to high school. She sees similarities in how students handle those times. They are expected to be more independent and in charge of themselves both physically and emotionally as they begin to change teachers and peer groups. They are expected to monitor themselves and not wait for teacher directives. Ms. Kuttner stressed that it is important to talk with general education teachers, parents and students about these changing expectations so everyone is aware of the difficulties of transition. Make sure that the challenges are discussed and can be problem-solved with others' support.

Preparing students for their transitions are key. Ms. Kuttner discusses characteristics of students' current programs and programs they will attend in their new school. She asks

students what they would like in place to help them succeed. If the student says "smaller classes for reading/math" she ensures that this is reflected in a student's IEP. Another resource is from Eileen Ryan available on the STEP=UP Transition to Teaching module online at www.uic.edu/orgs/stepup. Ms. Ryan, a high school special educator, gives students a questionnaire that she calls an "Individual Learning Profile" (ILP). She uses it to facilitate conversations with special education students. The ILP helps get her students to talk about their strengths, concerns, and personal goals, all in a low-pressure setting outside of the IEP meeting. By so doing, Ms. Ryan and the student can be ready to contribute at the meeting.

Meetings to revise transition IEPs are bound to occur due to lack of knowledge of where the students will be transitioning to and what resources and services are available. In such cases, explains Ms. Stalzer in her role as a special educator working with junior high students, she focuses on making revisions to ensure that the IEP remains connected to students' interests as well as academic and social needs in high school. She uses an interest inventory to identify student interests and connect it to the high school curriculum. For example, if a student is interested in computers, one of the IEP goals might be "...will identify, research and describe five computer software in a period of two months." As Ms. Kuttner notes, the guiding thought while writing IEPs for transition needs to be how to support students who are going into a new setting so that they experience success.

References: Thoma, C.A., & Rogan, P. (2001). Student involvement in transition planning: Unheard voices. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 36(1), 16-29.

Partner Corner

Joanna Ross has worked for many years on transition planning at various levels including high school to adult life and middle to high school. Currently, as the Transition Coordinator of Youth Connection Charter Schools, she coordinates transition services for students who have dropped out from CPS schools. She shares her thoughts on transition planning.

What is important for beginning teachers to know about transition planning?

A key aspect is that transition goals should drive the education goals, outcomes and the IEP process for students in transition. Coursework and educational goals should be based on what students want to do in the future. Parents, teachers and administration will have their opinions and say, but student voices should be at the center.

How do you ensure that the student voice is heard during this process?

It depends on the students' abilities, and participation can be at different levels. Self-Directed IEP allows students follow a step-by-step process to participate actively. The ideas from it can be used to encourage participation in the IEP process for a wide range of student populations. For example, one of my students made power point presentations about areas of interest for the IEP meetings while another student introduced all the participants at

the table and said why they were present. There are also person-centered planning processes such as MAPS, and PATH (both acronyms) that can help with the IEP process during transition. The main idea is that students should be able to communicate their needs and wants.

How do you start the transition planning process?

The transition process should start with an assessment. Assessment can happen through a conversation, interviews, or interest inventories. There are several online tools available for doing these assessments (we list some in this newsletter's Digital Corner). The next step is to discuss the results with the students followed by creating measurable post transition goals (educational, training, employment independent living), which then go into the IEP.

How can individual teachers support students who are transitioning?

Transition planning requires coordination between several individuals and organizations. Special education teachers may not have the time and the bandwidth to coordinate the whole process for every child, but they can do their bit. Setting aside time to work on college applications together, doing research on community colleges, asking students to fill out interest surveys; those are examples of meaningful transition-related activities that can be woven into the general education classroom

Book Corner

Integrating Transition Planning into the IEP Process.

By West, Lynda L., Corbey Stephanie, Boyer-Stephens, Arden; Jones, Bonnie; Miller, Robert, Sarkees-Wircenski, Mickey. The Council for Exceptional Children, 1999

The purpose of this guide is to assist those involved in the transition planning process to help students with disabilities achieve a smooth transition from school to adult life. The guide's eight chapters deal with: (1) defining transition and transition planning and outlining relevant legislation; (2) transition and self-advocacy, and the student's rights and responsibilities at the Individualized Education Program (IEP) meeting; (3) identification of needs and student assessment, including methods of collecting data, how to use assessment data, and types of assessment; (4) developing an individual plan for transition, focusing on targeted outcomes and roles and responsibilities of IEP team members; (5) curriculum for successful transition, including functional curriculum, daily living skills, social skills, occupational skills, and other topics; (6) support services in secondary and postsecondary settings; (7) transition planning and interagency cooperation; and (8) program evaluation and follow-up, which emphasizes the need for student follow-up as a necessary part of transition. Appendices provide sample IEP statements, goals and objectives, suggested transition activities, and a sample IEP form.

Digital Corner

We feature several useful websites that provide teacher and student resources for transition planning.

Transition Coalition www.transitioncoalition.org is a great teacher resource with a wealth of transition related information.

Youth Hood www.youthhood.org is a comprehensive, dynamic curriculum-based tool aimed towards helping young adults plan for life after high school.

The following websites provide interest inventories, surveys, questionnaires, and interviews.

www.workforceexplorer.com/cgi/career/?PAGEID=3 has an Interest Profiler and Work Importance Locator.

<http://studentcenter.ja.org/> has three useful assessments— Super's Work Values Inventory, Kuder Skills Assessment and Kuder Career Search with Person Match