



# Transition: An Overview

The transition from high school to college or employment can be a stressful period for any young person. The process can be compared to a road trip: timely and thorough preparation can result in a smooth journey to one's destination, whereas poor planning or lack of direction may result in delays or cancellations. This is especially the case for students with learning disabilities (LD) as they leave behind the guaranteed structures and supports of high school. Early identification of postsecondary career and education goals, coupled with the appropriate preparation and resources to meet those goals, are essential to successful transition. Otherwise, the student may face significant delays or modifications to their college or career plans. Fortunately, the transition process can be anticipated and planned for by students, parents, and schools.

## Postsecondary Outcomes for Students with LD

Postsecondary education is an important transition outcome because of its associations with employment and earnings. Young adults with disabilities who complete a postsecondary degree or certificate are significantly more likely to be employed, experience higher earnings, live independently, have checking and savings accounts, and register to vote than non-completers.

Young adults with LD who graduate from high school are enrolling in postsecondary education at approximately the same rate as students in the general population (67% within 8 years of high school graduation). However, enrollment alone does not indicate successful transition. Young adults with LD are more likely to enroll in a 2-year or vocational school (49.9% and 35.8%, respectively) than a 4-year college (21.2%). This enrollment pattern contrasts with that of students in the general population, who are more likely to attend a 4-year college (40%) than a 2-year or vocational school (21% and 20%). In addition, young adults with LD are less likely to complete a postsecondary degree or certificate than young adults in the general population. These differences indicate room for improvement in the areas of transition planning and services.

## What is the Purpose of Transition Planning?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 1997) is a key piece of legislation designed to ensure that students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) start the transition planning at the age of 14 and receive services specifically related to transition at the age of 16. As part of the free appropriate public education (FAPE), emphasis on services that prepare the students for further education,

employment, and independent living, were included in the reauthorization. Transition planning should involve assessments of student interests, strengths, and postsecondary goals, and it should involve providing services – including appropriate courses of study - to assist the student in achieving those goals. The student, his or her parents, and the IEP team should all be actively involved in the development of the student’s transition plan.

## Requirements

Results-oriented

Improves academic achievement

Improves functional achievement

Based on individual needs

Instruction

Related services

Community experiences

Development of employment

Development of post-school living objectives

## Participants

Students

Parent or Guardian

Special Education Teacher

General Education Teacher

LEA Representative

Individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results

Other (at discretion of parent/agency)

## Transition Challenges

A number of potential challenges face students as they transition out of high school:

### Less structure and guidance

Students who could once rely on teachers, parents, and IEP team members to ensure they met deadlines and received accommodations must now assume full responsibility for the requirements of their college or place employment. Students who

are unprepared for this shift may find themselves overwhelmed.

### **Changes in legal policies**

After high school, the mandates of IDEA no longer apply to young adults with LD.

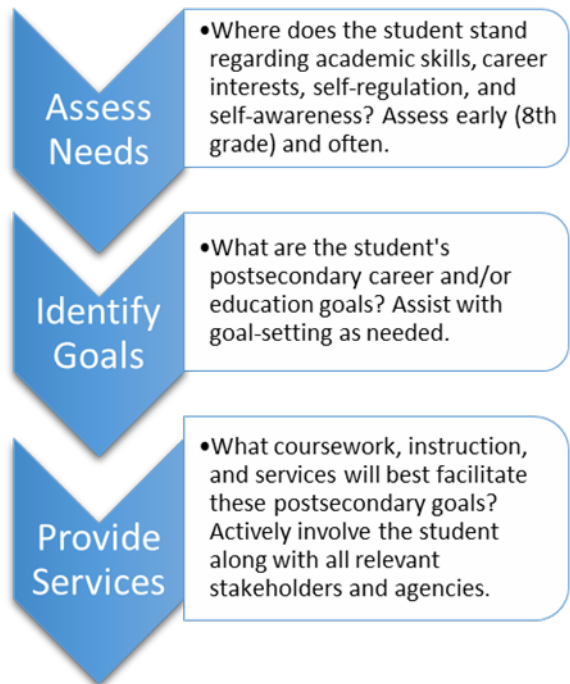
Rather, colleges and employers must adhere to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which follows a different set of guidelines that can make decisions about eligibility for accommodations more subjective and variable in young adults with LD. A young adult who qualified for disability services under IDEA may or may not qualify for services under ADA, depending on what kind of documentation the student is able to provide.

### **Insufficient documentation**

Postsecondary schools can vary widely in the amount and type of documentation required to demonstrate the need for “reasonable accommodations”. If the student has not obtained the necessary documentation while in high school, he or she may need to pay out of pocket for updated evaluations. In the meantime, lack of services may impact first-year academic performance, increasing the risk of dropout.

### **Lack of understanding**

A large proportion of young adults with LD (69%) do not consider themselves to have a disability. Subsequently, they are less likely report to disability services or request accommodations. In fact, only 24% of college students with LD both consider themselves to have a disability and informed their school of the disability.



### **Insufficient academic preparation**

If transition planning does not begin early enough or if it fails to consider postsecondary goals as a possibility, students may graduate unprepared for college admission, college coursework, or workplace duties. For example, a student's college of choice may require four years of math, including Calculus. However, if the student and his or her IEP team have not begun transition services until the age of 16 and the student has not taken the prerequisites for Calculus, it may be too late to catch up.

### **Who should be involved in the process?**

Students	Parents/Guardians
Special Ed. teacher	LEA representative
General Ed. teacher	Assessment specialist
Others (as needed):	
Employers, college faculty, mental health professionals, human services, etc.	

## Strategies for Better Transition Planning

The following strategies have been recommended for improved postsecondary transition planning:

### **Promote self-regulation skills**

The student should be encouraged to gradually build the self-regulation skills that will be needed for when external sources of accountability are no longer available. Study skills, time management skills, note-taking, writing, and the use of assistive technology can help prepare the student for when modifications, extensions, and reminders will no longer be provided by professors or employers.

### **Get familiar with available services**

Families, IEP team members, and special education faculty should be familiarized with the disability support services provided by the student's prospective college, as well as the limitations that may be placed on accommodations. For example, parents and students should be aware that although all colleges are required to provide basic disability services and accommodations, they are contingent upon proper documentation of disability. Even then, some accommodations may not be possible. For instance, a student might not be allowed to use a calculator for certain assignments or waive a required course.

### **Teach self-advocacy skills**

With no IEP team after high school, students should become familiarized with their strengths, weaknesses, and needs so that they can clearly articulate them to disability services staff members. They should be able to 1) find and contact

disability services, 2) explain the nature of their disability, 3) describe how it impacts their ability to succeed in the college environment, giving specific examples, 4) list services they received in high school and explain how they were helpful, and 5) request relevant accommodations. One way to accomplish this would be to encourage the student to lead his or her own IEP meetings, with guidance as needed.

### **Provide the necessary documentation**

Ensure that the student has recent and up-to-date copies of whatever disability documentation will be required to meet criteria for services. Some colleges may require cognitive assessments, achievement tests, and formal psychological evaluations. Others may only require a Summary of Performance (SOP). The SOP should be as detailed as possible, and provide explanations of the nature of the disability, how it impacts performance, and what accommodations have been shown to be the most useful.

### **Begin transition planning early**

The earlier transition planning begins, the better. Become familiar with your state's college and career readiness standards, and ensure that students take a sequence of courses in high school that will enable them to enter college or employment without the need for remediation. This process will depend on determining the student's strengths, needs, and postsecondary goals early – preferably by 8<sup>th</sup> grade – so that there are no surprises when applying to colleges or jobs.

## Recommended Resources

- Foss, D. (2013). *Your complete guide to college success: How to study smart, achieve your goals, and enjoy campus life*. APA, Washington, DC
- Supporting Accommodation Requests  
<https://www.ahead.org/learn/resources/documentation-guidance>
- Writing a Summary of Performance  
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/trans.sop.htm>
- Wrights Law  
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/>
- IDEA: Building the Legacy  
<http://idea.ed.gov/explore/home>

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- Cameto, R., Knokey, A. M., & Sanford, C. (2011). Participation in Postsecondary Education of Young Adults with Learning Disabilities: Findings from NLTS2. *Learning Disabilities: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 17(2), 45-54.
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- Madaus, J. W., & Shaw, S. F. (2006). The impact of the IDEA 2004 on transition to college for students with learning disabilities. *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice*, 21(4), 273-281.
- Newman, L., Wagner, M., Knokey, A. M., Marder, C., Nagle, K., Shaver, D., & Wei, X. (2011). The Post-High School Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities up to 8 Years after High School: A Report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). NCSER 2011-3005. *National Center for Special Education Research*.

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