



## CLD INFOSHEETS

# Transition and Individuals with Learning Disabilities

### What Is Transition?

The term transition refers to passing from one state or condition to another. Many important transitions occur throughout each person's life, and many of them are associated with predictable life events, such as beginning preschool, leaving elementary school, and entering middle adulthood. One of the most critical transition periods for students with learning disabilities (LD) is the transition from school to young adulthood.

The 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defined transition services for this particular transition as:

a coordinated set of activities for a student, with a disability, that: (a) is designed within an outcome oriented process, that promotes movement from school to postschool activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (b) is based on the student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests; (c) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (§ 602).

This concept is straightforward and fairly simple, including three major components (Storms, O'Leary, & Williams, 2000). First, every student and his or her family should be coached to (a) think about post-high school goals and (b) develop a plan for how to achieve those goals. Second, a high school experience should be designed so that the student acquires the skills and competencies necessary to obtain his or her desired post-high school goals. Finally, the linkages to post-high school services, supports, and programs need to be identified and made before the student exits high school.

### Why Is Transition Planning Important for Individuals with LD?

Even though transition planning has been mandated for all students with disabilities for more than 10 years, transition planning for individuals with LD has lagged behind that of other groups. A major reason for this lack of attention has been an assumption that individuals with LD have a mild disability that primarily affects academic achievement; therefore, they have the ability to move from secondary to postsecondary environments without a lot of difficulty. Unfortunately, this is not the case for many students with LD. The results of a number of recent studies have suggested that many adolescents with LD do encounter difficulties in making the transition to adult life, including problems related to unemployment, underemployment, job changes, participation in community

and leisure activities, pay, dependency on parents and others, satisfaction with employment, postsecondary academics, and functional skills.

### **Who Is Involved in the Transition Process and What Are Their Roles?**

Numerous individuals should be involved in the transition process, with the most important being the student and his or her family. Key participants and their roles in the transition planning and program implementation process follow:

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#### **Student**

Communicate preferences, interests, strengths, areas of need, types of support, how progressing

Participate actively in discussions, decisions, planning activities, IEP development, IEP meetings, and IEP implementation

#### **Parent/Guardian**

Support the student

Provide information about the student's strengths, interests, needs, independent living skills, and kinds of support needed to achieve desired post-high school outcomes

Be actively engaged as equal partners in planning, discussions, and decision making

Participate in making referrals to adult service agencies and training programs

Provide opportunities for the child to practice adult roles and responsibilities

#### **Special education teacher**

Provide information about the student's strengths, achievements, progress on IEP goals, and strategies for teaching student

Assist student in identifying postsecondary goals

Prepare student and family for their leadership role in the transition process

Suggest courses of study and educational experiences

Identify needed personnel from school, related services, and community agencies

Provide input and incorporate into IEP transition service needs and postschool agencies, services, and/or supports

Link student and parents to post-high school services/supports

Coordinate all people, agencies, services, or programs

Monitor student progress

**LEA representative**

Support special and general education staff

Provide information about programs in the school system and community

Allocate necessary resources, including technology, accommodations, and supports

**General education teacher**

Assist student in identifying postsecondary goals

Assist in planning courses of study in general education curriculum; identify and provide modifications, adaptations, and supports; and identify and provide positive behavioral strategies and interventions

Monitor student progress

**Individual who can interpret evaluation information**

Provide assessment information about student needs, interests, preferences, strengths, and aptitudes

Interpret assessment information for student and family

**Other, as appropriate (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, MR/DD services, mental health, Social Security, employers, postsecondary educators, human services)**

Provide information about services and eligibility criteria

Assist in identification of community and adult services and in the application process for services

Alert families and school to potential waiting lists for services

Provide services (e.g., functional vocational evaluation, technology and accommodations, counseling, independent living) to student during school, as appropriate

Note. Adapted from Storms, J., O'Leary, E., & Williams, J. (2000). Adapted with permission.

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**What Are IDEA's Requirements Concerning Transition Planning?**

The IDEA 1997 amendments outlined regulations concerning transition. Final regulations for IDEA were published in the March 11, 1999, Federal Register and took effect on May 11, 1999. Highlights of the major requirements of IDEA that relate to transition and a brief explanation follow.

**Purpose**

The Act's purpose includes ensuring that students with disabilities are provided with a free, appropriate education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living

### **Content of the IEP**

The IEP must include:

- (a) beginning at age 14 (or younger, if appropriate), a statement of transition service needs that focuses on the course of study (e.g., required, elective, other educational experiences) the student needs to help move him or her toward the desired post-high school goals
- (b) beginning at age 16, a statement of needed transition services

### **Transition services**

Transition services must:

- (a) be based on the individual student's needs, taking into account his or her preferences and interests
- (b) include
  - ?instruction
  - ?related services (if needed beyond school, should identify and make linkages)
  - ?community experiences (provided outside of school building or in community settings)
  - ?development of employment and other post-high school adult living objectives (related to desired post-high school goals), and
  - ?acquisition of daily living skills (things do every day such as cooking, budgeting, and grooming) and functional vocational evaluation (assessment process providing information about interests, aptitudes, and skills), if appropriate

### **Agency notification, participation, and responsibilities**

The school shall:

- (a) invite to transition meetings representatives of other agencies who are likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services
- (b) take steps to obtain the participation of agency personnel who have been invited to transition meetings but do not attend

The IEP shall include:

- (a) if appropriate, a statement of interagency responsibilities and/or needed linkages
- (b) the commitment by a participating agency to meet the financial responsibility associated with the provision of services

### **Parent notification**

Parent notification of the IEP transition meeting must:

- (a) indicate the purpose of the meeting (i.e., development of a statement of transition service needs or consideration of needed transition services)
- (b) indicate that the student will be invited to the meeting
- (c) identify any other agencies that will be invited to send a representative to the meeting

### **Student notification and participation**

Beginning no later than age 14 (or earlier if appropriate):

- (a) a student must be invited to attend his or her IEP meetings that consider transition service needs, needed transition services, or both
- (b) schools must take steps to ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered in transition planning if the student does not attend his or her IEP meeting

### **Transfer of rights**

At least 1 year before a student reaches the age of majority under state law:

- (a) the IEP must include a statement that the student has been informed of his or her rights under Part B of IDEA that will transfer to the student at age of majority
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### **What Are Transition Planning Areas or Domains?**

Clark and Patton (1997) examined the transition guides of 17 states in order to identify core transition planning areas. They noted that although there was interstate variation in transition planning areas, a common core of important planning areas emerged. Transition planning domains that were included in more than half of the state guides they examined were:

- community participation
- daily living
- employment
- financial/income management
- health
- independent living (include living arrangements)
- leisure/recreation
- postsecondary education
- relationship/social skills
- transportation/mobility
- vocational training

### **What Is the Timeline for Transition Planning and Preparation?**

Even though transition planning does not have to be addressed in the IEP until a student is 14 years old, teachers and families must begin providing experiences and instruction to help students develop critical knowledge and skills during the elementary years that will help lay the foundation for the process. Examples of goals, objectives, and activities that can be considered at different age and grade levels follow.

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#### **Level**

Primary level: Grades 1-4

#### **Goals and objectives**

Employability and independent living skills and attitudes

Obj. 1: To develop positive work habits

Obj. 2: To appreciate all types of work

Obj. 3: To develop disability awareness

**Possible activities**

- career field trips
- discussions of interests and aptitudes
- decision-making and problem-solving activities

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