Transition Planning at a Glance

A practical introduction to planning for life after high school.

A Note for Families

High school goes by quickly, and planning for what comes next should start well before graduation. Transition planning helps students with IEPs prepare for further education, work, and independent living. This guide is a starting point, not a substitute for individualized guidance.

What Is Transition Planning?

Transition planning is the part of the IEP that focuses on life after high school. Federal requirements say it must begin by the IEP in effect when a student turns 16, and many states start earlier. Timing varies by state, so ask your school when planning begins.

> DEA PERSPECTIVE
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> **Start with the student.**
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> The best transition plans are built around the student's own interests, strengths, and goals. Students should be invited to their IEP meetings and encouraged to speak up about what they want for their future.

What the Plan Includes

Postsecondary Goals	Measurable goals for education or training, employment, and, when appropriate, independent living.
Transition Assessments	Information about the student's interests, skills, and preferences that guides the goals.
Transition Services	Activities and instruction that help the student reach those goals, such as job skills or college preparation.
Course of Study	The classes the student will take to support their goals and diploma path.
Agency Connections	Links to outside agencies, such as vocational rehabilitation, that can support the student after high school.

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Key Milestones

Transfer of Rights	In most states, educational rights transfer from parent to student at age 18. Families must be told at least one year before.
Diploma Decisions	Course choices and supports can affect which diploma a student earns. Ask early.
Summary of Performance	When special education ends, the school provides a summary of the student's skills and recommendations for next steps.

Common Misconceptions

MYTH	WHAT PARENTS SHOULD KNOW
Transition planning is only for students who aren't going to college.	Every student with an IEP needs a transition plan, including those headed to college, trade school, or the workforce.
It can wait until senior year.	Good planning takes years. Starting early gives students time to build skills and explore options.
IEP supports continue automatically in college.	College disability services work differently. Students must request accommodations and provide documentation.

Planning for What Comes Next?

Every student is different, and no guide can replace individualized support. If you would like help reviewing a transition plan, preparing for an IEP meeting, or planning ahead, schedule a consultation with Distributed Education Advocacy.

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