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Introduction

I am one of those people who never considered a career other than teaching. I have always loved working with children and knew early on it was my life's calling. When I started my professional career, quite unlike today, there was a tremendous teacher glut. So to be marketable, I took a double major in special and in elementary education. My first job was, as a third grade teacher in a regular education class and I hated it. I had five to six students in my class who needed specialized instruction but was so busy with the other twenty-five that I couldn't have the kind of impact I wanted. It was deeply frustrating and I lasted only one semester. The next semester I found my first job as a special education teacher and have been one ever since. It's hard to believe that was thirty years ago.

For seven years I worked with elementary aged children, while the remaining portion has been spent at the high school level. I've seen many trends come and go and come back around again. I've seen the number of students identified as having special needs mushroom. I've worked in self-contained settings and pullout settings, and partial inclusion as well as full inclusion settings. No matter the setting or the age, basic academics are important but my main goal has always been to prepare students to fit in and to function in their environments. At the high school level, this task includes helping the students fit into the role of being an adult. In the terminology of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) this vital process is called "transition," and is the subject of this book.

Transition Defined

IDEA defines transition as, "A coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation."

In addition, IDEA mandates that every student in a special program must include transition goals in the IEP in effect when the student is 16. These transition goals must address each of the areas enumerated in the definition or provide a statement detailing why they are not needed.

No matter the setting or the age, basic academics are important but my main goal has always been to prepare students to fit in and to function in their environments. At the high school level, this task includes helping the students fit into the role of being an adult.

For many years, my colleagues and I believed Learning Disabilities were really a school disability; i.e., they only meant something in the context of school performance.



A Fresh Look at Transition Needs

I work with students with mild disabilities, including Learning Disabilities. For many years, my colleagues and I believed Learning Disabilities were really a school disability; i.e., they only meant something in the context of school performance. We were convinced that once the students graduated they would blend into the community and no one would ever suspect they had had a disability while in school.

We now realize we were very wrong! The research shows that students who have been identified as having a disability, and that includes students with LD, are much more likely to be underemployed and unemployed than their peers. (Of course, at first we still clung to the belief that this probably occurred only at those other schools that didn't do as good a job as we did.) That was before I decided to do a survey of our students with disabilities who had graduated five years earlier.

If you doubt the need for transition goals for students who only have mild disabilities, what I found was a real eye-opener. The students I surveyed were underemployed or unemployed. Several of the girls were already parents but were not married and not working. At best, some of the students had continued their educations at the local technical college but hadn't been able to finish their programs because they could not pass a required English composition class. One student, who otherwise was a relative success story, had trained and was working as a dental assistant. As we talked she explained that she had Wednesdays off and she couldn't figure out how other people paid their bills, since she used her day off to travel to the offices where payments were due and then settled her bills in cash. My informal survey wasn't intended to do anything other than describe how the students who graduated from our high school that year were doing. But it taught me much more than that.

I learned that we can't assume our students will fade into the community seamlessly. More significantly, I learned that if transition, especially at the high school level, is not the main goal of special education, then special education is irrelevant. We can't delude ourselves into thinking that students with mild disabilities will learn all the splinter skills a person needs to be able to function independently. (For the record, most nondisabled students fail to make this hurdle unscathed as well, but they do seem to hit fewer obstacles or have more and better supports to help them.)



Research shows that students who have been identified as having a disability, and that includes LD students, are much more likely to be underemployed and unemployed than their peers.

I've heard special education teachers say, "Where does our role end? How can we be expected to do all of this?" What I've come to think is that our role is continuous and our students never fully complete "transition." Transition is a process. And it needs to be a joint process with the student, the family, outside agencies when appropriate and the rest of the school. In addition, transition cannot be the sole responsibility of the special education teacher. While the special educator should be able to help the IEP team identify deficits in transition skills, beyond that the team needs to prioritize the needed skills and develop a joint plan of action.

Transition is a process. And it needs to be a joint process with the student, the family, outside agencies when appropriate and the rest of the school.

Teaching Functional Life Skills

When we think of all the skills a person needs to be able to function in our society, the list is daunting. We simply can't cover every life skill that includes, but we can be more inclusive and precise in identifying areas of transition that need work. It is not enough to ask, "Do you do things with friends outside of school?" and satisfy ourselves that we don't need further work on community skills. It's not enough to think if a student dresses and grooms herself, reports doing her own laundry, and makes great chocolate cookies, we therefore don't need to be concerned about daily living skills. Just because a student has been successfully employed at McDonald's for two years does not mean he has no further employment skill needs. Because a student says she wants to go to a four-year college doesn't mean she will be prepared to go.

While a special education teacher who sees a particular student one period a day for resource help can't be held responsible for assuring that the student has mastered all these skills, the educator must at the very least be able to identify the areas of need with which to help develop a plan.

Here's the paradigm as I see it: While a special education teacher who sees a particular student one period a day for resource help can't be held responsible for assuring that the student has mastered all these skills, the educator must at the very least be able to identify the areas of need with which to help develop a plan.

The goal of this book is to provide you with a basis to begin probing the transition needs of students. I suggest that the instructor, the student and the parents assess the student before writing an IEP. The goals listed cannot be addressed in a year or two.

Transition needs to be a process that begins no later than the point at which the student begins high school. And it needs to be the main focus of course selection, as well as to include remediation of basic skills. In addition, the IEP team must decide which skills should be addressed at school vs. at home or with other agencies.



Working With Outside Agencies

In fact, it's working with the outside agencies that's the part I've found to be the most frustrating of all. They all seem to have their own very specific guidelines about which populations they will work with and when. And, these agencies appear and vanish as if by magic. Keeping current with them is an endless task. When a new tax credit that could help students I work with is instituted, they don't let me know. When a new agency opens that will work with rural kids who don't have transportation, it's not on the evening news. The best way I've found to keep current is through other special educators interested in transition. I have worked for more than 15 years with a group of special educators who teach in the same county I do. We meet once a month, share the newest transition issues, host a transition fair, and bring in speakers to explain changing developments in the field. Besides the valuable information I get from this group, the camaraderie and dedication to the transition process is infectious.

We then go back and share our information with the other teachers in our schools. If you don't have a county transition team, try to start one.



PROBLEM:

These agencies appear and vanish as if by magic. Keeping current with them is an endless task.

When a new tax credit that could help students I work with is instituted, they don't let me know.

When a new agency opens that will work with rural kids who don't have transportation, it's not on the evening news.

SOLUTION:

I have worked for more than 15 years with a group of special educators who teach in the same county I do. We meet once a month, share the newest transition issues, host a transition fair, and bring in speakers to explain changing developments in the field.

Who Should Use This Program?

This program is intended to be used by all teachers of students with special educational needs who are at the high school level. IDEA 2004 mandates that a statement of needed transition services be delineated “beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child is 16.” This is a change from IDEA ‘97. IDEA ‘97 required the IEP for students who were 14 to include the courses a student would likely take and the expected graduation date. At 16 years of age the more comprehensive statement of needed transition services was required. IDEA 04 removed the statement of transition service needs for students 14 years of age but requires that transition be fully addressed in the IEP that will be in effect when the student has his sixteenth birthday. Some states are requiring the transition service needs for all students by the age of 14.

The purpose of this program is to give the student, the teacher and the parent a fairly inclusive framework with which to address many of the tasks high school students need to master to be able to function adequately as an adult.

The case study example given (pgs. 49-109) is of a student with minimal disabilities, about whom many teachers wouldn’t bother to recommend transition planning. Nonetheless, through transition planning this student was able to focus on high school as a preparation for adulthood. And he was able to learn to thoughtfully make important life decisions. It should be noted that this student did not use all the goals listed in the program, as will be the case with most of your students. (The goals listed are meant as a guide. Goals for a specific student could be similar to those presented here).

The purpose of this program is to give the student, the teacher and the parent an inclusive framework with which to address many of the tasks high school students need to master to be able to function adequately as an adult. By including the student and parents in the evolution of the IEP, by thoughtfully addressing the many diverse skills needed, and by focusing the high school experience on preparation for adulthood, students with special needs — with your help and by using this book — will be able to confidently and independently embrace their futures.

For ages 16 and older, and younger when appropriate, the IEP must address each of the seven areas specifically listed in the definition of their individual transition plans or have a statement why these are not needed.

The Seven Transition Areas:

- 1. Instruction**
- 2. Related Services**
- 3. Community Experiences**
- 4. Development of Employment**
- 5. Post High School Adult Living**
- 6. Daily Living Skills**
- 7. Functional Assessment**



How to Use this Program

The transition process needs to be student-driven whenever possible, and the IEP is probably the best way to define and give structure to it.

Here's what to do when using this program: Begin by assessing the perceived areas of student and parent concern. Using your knowledge of the student, select the skills from each transition activity that you suspect need further inquiry. I think of this as being like the method I use when administering the Woodcock Johnson. Start where you think the student is functioning and assess skills at this level. Be aware of age constraints. For example, you would not assess the driver's license activities for a student too young to get a learner's permit.

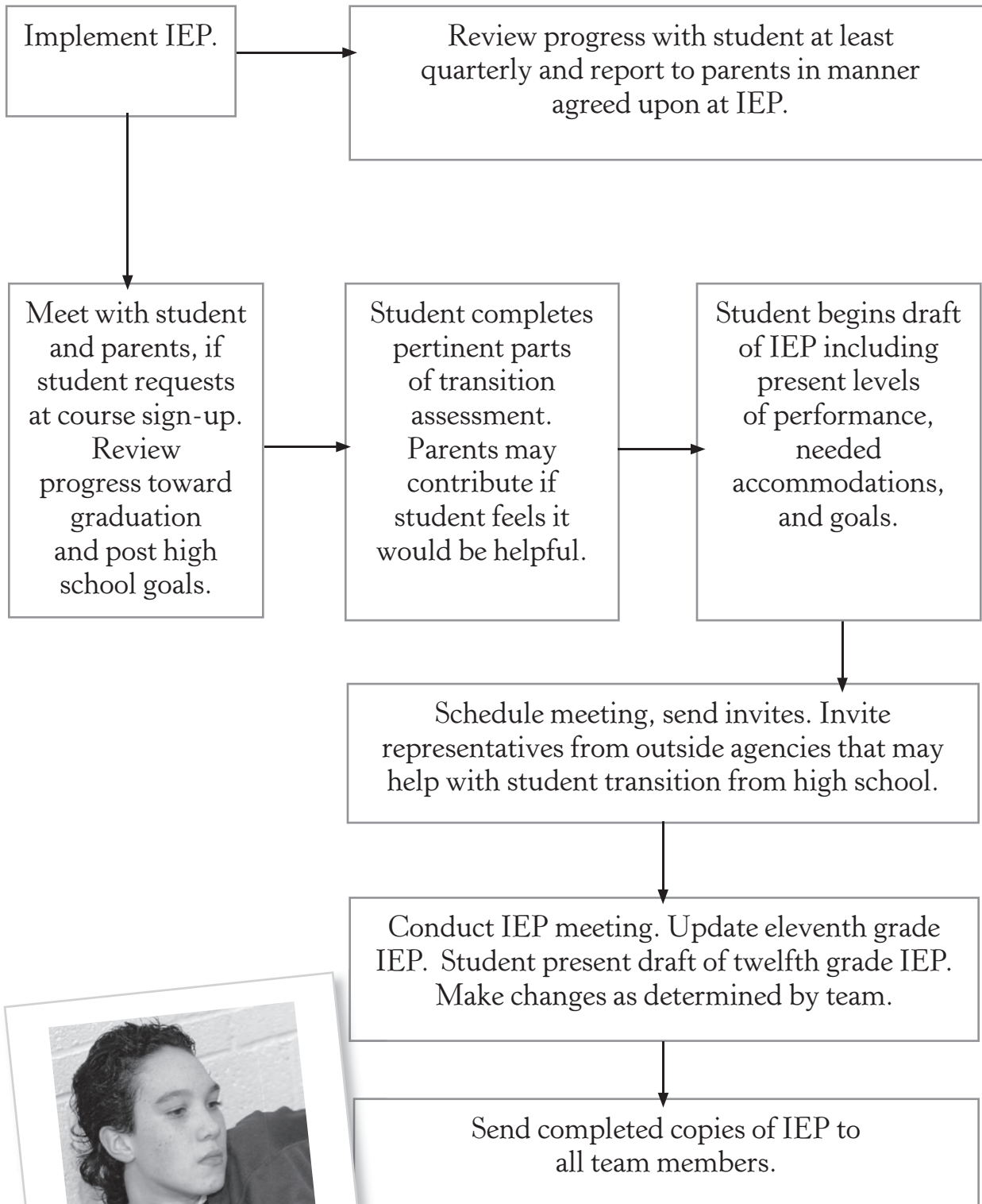
Ask students and parents to complete the pre-IEP assessments to determine which areas need further investigation. Once the pre-assessments have been completed you can focus on areas of need and identify specific skills that need to be taught.

The proposed IEP process presented here goes like this:

- 1 Several months before IEPs are due, ask students and parents to complete the pre-IEP assessments (Appendix pg. 114). Choose areas to assess that are appropriate for the student. The entire assessment wouldn't be appropriate for any one student, but it would be best to choose at least one or more skills from each of the seven Transition Activities area.
- 2 This assessment is given through a interview with the student. In which case the teacher would complete the assessment one-on-one with the student.
- 3 Print copies or email to parents and students.
- 4 Review the completed assessments carefully with the student and define more specifically what should be included in his IEP. Also, with the student, identify additional information and research that needs to be done before setting goals. Have the student conduct as much of this research herself as possible.
- 5 Collect the information gathered in the pre-assessment and begin writing rough drafts of present levels of performance (PLOPs) that reflect the data. Start working on possible goals. Share PLOPs and rough goals with the student as you jointly work on them.
- 6 Plan the IEP meeting, jointly decide who should be invited and send out the invitations.
- 7 Conduct the IEP meeting with the student explaining his post-high school plans and how these goals will help move him toward these plans.
- 8 Work on achieving goals through materials in this program as well as other materials.
- 9 Review progress on these goals at least quarterly with the student and parents.
- 10 Modify and rework annual goals as needed.

Note: If you've been in the field long enough, the reason for covering only priority areas of concern is obvious; you don't have time to instruct in all the potential life skill areas and most students are likely to have some, perhaps even many, of these skills already. Typically, we find that students are stronger in some areas than others, but generally need help in at least some areas.

Eleventh Grade Flow Chart



Implementing Ongoing Transition Plans for the IEP

Name: _____ Grade: _____ School: _____

Summary of Transition Services Individualized Education Program (IEP)

A statement of the needed transition services must be developed annually for all students who are 16 or will be 16 during the time frame of this IEP, or who are younger than 16 but who need transition services.

Transfer of rights: Will the student reach his/her 17th birthday during the time frame of the IEP or has the student reached the age of 18?

Yes No

If yes, specify how the student and parents have been informed of the right which will transfer to the student at age 18 if no legal guardian has been appointed:

Measurable Post-Secondary Goals Based on Age-Appropriate Transition Assessments

Education:

Training:

Employment:

Daily Living:

Transition is a coordinated set of activities designed within an outcome-oriented process that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, continuing and adult education services, independent living, or community participation. In the space below, include a statement of needed transition services which addresses each of the following if appropriate. (If the transition services are contained elsewhere in this IEP, you may provide a cross reference.)

1. Instruction Not Applicable

2. Related Services Not Applicable

3. Community Experiences Not Applicable

4. Development of Employment Not Applicable

Individualized Education Program (IEP)

Page 2

5. Other Post-School Adult Living	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
6. Acquisition of Daily Living Skills (if appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
7. Functional Vocational Evaluation (if appropriate)	<input type="checkbox"/> Not Applicable
8. Statement of Coordinated Set of Activities	

Were other agencies invited? Yes No

Invited Agencies	Date & Method of Invitation	If appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages
	Date: <input type="checkbox"/> Conference <input type="checkbox"/> phone call <input type="checkbox"/> written	
	Date: <input type="checkbox"/> Conference <input type="checkbox"/> phone call <input type="checkbox"/> written	
	Date: <input type="checkbox"/> Conference <input type="checkbox"/> phone call <input type="checkbox"/> written	
	Date: <input type="checkbox"/> Conference <input type="checkbox"/> phone call <input type="checkbox"/> written	

If an invited agency representative did not attend the IEP meeting, what other steps were taken to obtain the participation of the agency in the provision and/or payment of transition services?

Goal Sheet

Name: _____ Grade: _____ School: _____

Measurable Annual Goal to enable the student to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum, and to meet other educational needs that result from the student's disability. *Note: Present levels of performance must include information that corresponds with each annual goal.*

Goal Number: _____

--

SHORT TERM OBJECTIVES/BENCHMARKS necessary (1) to allow the student to be involved in and progress in general curriculum and (2) to meet other educational needs that result from the student's disability:

Description

Goal Number: _____

--

Description

Goal Sheet

Name: _____ Grade: _____ School: _____

Measurable Annual Goal to enable the student to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum, and to meet other educational needs that result from the student's disability. *Note: Present levels of performance must include information that corresponds with each annual goal.*

Goal Number: _____

--

SHORT TERM OBJECTIVES/BENCHMARKS necessary (1) to allow the student to be involved in and progress in general curriculum and (2) to meet other educational needs that result from the student's disability:

Description

Goal Number: _____

--

Description

Student: _____ Grade: _____ Date: _____

Statement of Transition Service Needs Age 14 or Younger if Appropriate

School Year-Age 19	
Course	Credit

School Year-Age 21	
Course	Credit

School Year-Age 20	
Course	Credit

- Student will graduate after completing IEP goals.
- Student will exit school at age 21.