Skagit County Public Health
Developmental Disabilities Program

Transition
Resource Guide

A guide for students with disabilities transitioning from high school to post-secondary opportunities

2017
Dear Skagit County residents,

Welcome to the Skagit County Developmental Disabilities Transition guide, designed to provide you information to navigate the phase of life called transitions (age 14-21). This is a critical time for youth and their families: a time of planning, exploration, and dreaming about the future.

This guide was created to make transition planning easier and help you approach this time with your student one step at a time.

Use this guide to gain an overview of the transition process and the specific resources on individual topics that may help your son or daughter. *This information is general in nature and not legal advice.* Since services and the law are evolving rapidly, we recommend checking the listed sources to make sure information is current. At the end of this guide, we’ve provided resources for you to dig much more deeply into the law and special concerns. However, if you need specific advice, we’d refer you to PAVE or OSPI for information and support.

Wishing you and your student an inspired high school and transition career.

Sincerely,

Skagit County Public Health
Developmental Disabilities Program Staff
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What is Transition?

By sending their children to school, parents hope their child will take advantage of the educational opportunities provided and make the most of his or herself to become a productive adult and valued member of the community. During school years children learn academic and social skills that can help them build a satisfying and independent life. For youth with disabilities, additional planning is needed as they prepare to leave school, move into adulthood, and meet their employment, educational, or independent living goals. This process is often referred to as “transition.” Think of it as preparing students who receive special education services for life after graduation while they are still in school.

As students enter transition age and prepare to exit school, parents often find it difficult to adjust to the fact that the activities, supervision and services the student received during the day will no longer be available as the student enters adulthood. Transition is about planning for what your child’s life will look like after graduation. The main opportunities during these transition years are to prepare students for the world of employment, independent living skills and advocacy. Regardless of disability, there are opportunities and expectations for your child to work and participate fully in your community. Planning is critical.

Transition-age students in special education have the right to learn more than traditional classroom subjects at school. They have the right to study social skills, job skills, and independent-living skills. There is a federal law that requires schools to provide these “transition services” to students with disabilities between the ages of 14 and 21. This law is called Individual with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA and ensures that children with disabilities have the opportunity to receive a free and appropriate education (FAPE) just like other children.
You will read more about IDEA and transition services in the following pages. As you do so, keep in mind that there are evidence-based transition practices that predict positive post-school outcomes for students. Researchers know that the following items are predictors of post-school success:
• Inclusion in general education
• Exit Exam requirements
• Program of Study
• Transition programs with evidence-based practices
• Career awareness
• Vocational education/occupational courses
• Community experiences
• Paid work experiences
• Work study
• Self-care/Independent living skills
• Self-determination and self-advocacy skills
• Social skills
• Student support
• Parental involvement and expectations
• Interagency collaboration

(Adapted from MN Secondary Transition Toolkit for Families)

Another indicator of positive transition outcomes is parents’ expectations for their student. When parents have a child with a disability, goals might need to be modified. This doesn’t mean expecting less of your child, but it may mean expecting something different than what you had envisioned. It’s important to understand the critical influence of having “high expectations” and instill those expectations in your youth and advocate for those expectations throughout the transition process. Families that consistently set high expectations have a better chance of creating that same vision in the people who educate, employ, and socialize with their child. Research has shown that families of youth with disabilities who maintain higher expectations will see their child achieve greater academic success. Higher academic achievement is correlated with better outcomes in postsecondary education, employment, and financial self-sufficiency. High expectations are a valuable tool! (Adapted from MN Secondary Transition Toolkit for Families)

Transition Services and the law- IDEA

IDEA is the most important Special Education law to understand if you are a parent or guardian of a student with disabilities who needs special education services.
The purpose of the IDEA is "to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living." IDEA also ensures that the rights of children with disabilities and their parents are protected.

Many parents find it beneficial to learn about their rights as a parent or guardian under IDEA so that they can help their student get the help he or she needs at school. If you are interested in learning more about IDEA, we encourage you to explore the law in more depth using the resources listed at the end of the guide. Please keep in mind that the law has been revised many times over the years- the most recent amendment was passed in 2004- so it’s important to stay up to date with resources like PAVE and OSPI.

“Transition services” is a term used by IDEA that means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that:

- Is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

- Is based on the individual child’s needs; taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests. That includes:
  - Instruction
  - Related services
  - Community experiences
The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives
If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation

It’s important to note that Transition services are part of, and not separate from, a school district’s responsibility to provide a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) under IDEA.

Transition Planning & the IEP

Prior to ninth grade, the Individualized Education Program (IEP) of a student with a disability focuses mainly on the student’s educational and functional needs and what services the school will provide to help the student make educational progress. At age 16
(or earlier if the IEP team decides it is necessary), a student’s IEP changes to focus more intently on preparing a student for life after graduation. This requires long-range planning to meet goals for school completion and increase the likelihood of a student’s success after high school as an adult.

This process is what is commonly called “transition planning,” and is required under IDEA to begin no later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, and updated annually thereafter. A transition plan is added to a student’s IEP as the student prepares to ‘transition’ out of the district’s special education program and into the adult world. The IEP will also continue to include a focus on education and functional needs.

The first transition plan for your student’s IEP is a time to do thoughtful planning about your student’s goals and what it will take to achieve them. As part of this discussion, the student’s expected graduation date will be determined. This is a critical part of planning based on the student and his or her needs. Expected graduation date is based on the date a student enters 9th grade. If a student needs to change the expected graduation date, it should be documented on the IEP transition plan in the year in which the student turns 16 (WAC 180-51-035).

The process is important in bringing together schools, students, families, and community agencies in a joint effort to plan the most appropriate path to adult life.

“The transition plan drives your student’s IEP & successful transition to life as an adult.”
Six Essential Steps to take when creating a Transition Plan for your student’s IEP:

1. Conduct transition assessments (formal and/or informal) to identify your student’s:
   - Strengths (talents/skills)
   - Interests (desired career/line of work)
   - Preferences (desired work/school or living environment)
   - Needs (accommodations, modifications, and other support(s) to minimize limitations resulting from a disability)

2. Develop appropriate and measureable post-secondary goals based on transition assessments data related to:
   - Education/Training (required goals area)
   - Employment (required goal area)
   - Independent Living (required if determined appropriate by the IEP team)

3. Identify individualized transition services in the areas related to supporting your student’s achievement of post-secondary goals and/or meeting graduation requirements. Some key example areas to consider are:
   - Instruction
   - Related Services
   - Community Experiences
   - Development of adult living objectives

4. Write a relevant course of study that takes into consideration what types of classes your student should plan to take during the remainder of their time in the school to support her/his identified post-secondary goals. Multi-year planning may be necessary.

5. Coordinate services with Adult Service agencies that your student might utilize after he/she is no longer eligible for education services.

6. Write IEP goals to support the post-secondary goals identified for your student.
   (OSPI – http://www.k12.wa.us/SpecialEd/Families/Transition.aspx)
Self-Determination

Self-determination is believing you can control the outcomes of your life. Self-determination is a combination of attitudes and abilities, such as self-awareness, problem-solving and self-advocacy skills, that leads people to set goals for themselves, and to take the action to reach these goals. It is about being in charge, but is not necessarily the same thing as self-sufficiency or independence. It means making your own choices, learning to effectively solve problems, and taking control and responsibility for one’s life.

Developing self-determination skills is a process that begins in childhood and continues throughout one’s life. Parents can help prepare their young adults with disabilities by giving them a growing number of opportunities to make their own decisions. Self-determination is important for all people, but it is especially important, and often more difficult to learn, for young people with disabilities. Well-meaning individuals sometimes “protect” children with disabilities by making all their decisions for them. Also, sometimes people assume that people with disabilities can’t think for themselves.

Since self-determination skills are most effectively learned and developed by practicing them, students with disabilities should be given ample opportunity in their home life and in school to use their self-advocacy, decision-making and socialization skills well before they leave high school to prepare themselves for working and living in their community.

(Adapted from Oakland Schools Transition Planning guide)
Components of the Transition plan in the IEP

Please note: The information in this guide’s IEP sections gives you a general overview and does not fully cover the whole IEP process. Because it may not answer all your questions, consider contacting PAVE or OSPI if you have questions or concerns regarding your student’s IEP.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP), in general, is a written document used by the schools that describes the educational program that’s been created to meet a student’s individual needs. It is considered a legal agreement between a parent or guardian and the child’s school where the school agrees to provide certain types of instruction, services and/or accommodations for the student.

According to IDEA 2004, the IEP must include:

- a statement of the youth’s present level of educational and functional performance, including how the student’s disability affects his/her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum
- a statement of measurable annual goals including academic and functional goals, designed to
  - Meet the his or her needs that result from the student’s disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum
  - Meet each of the child’s other educational needs that result from the child’s disability.

The requirements for the content of IEPs relating to transition services must include:

- Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills
- The transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the student in reaching those goals.
How do you develop appropriate and measurable goals? What do those even look like? This can be challenging! To get some help with appropriate and measurable goal writing, please refer to resources at:

The Center for Change in Transition Services at Seattle University
www.seattleu.edu/ccts

The Special Education Survival Guide by Wrightslaw
www.fetaweb.com

A tool that many families and school districts have used to encourage creativity and the voice of students with disabilities in planning for their future goals is called Person-Centered-Planning. It is a structured process for an individual and a team of his/her support network, including school district staff to talk through the dreams, goals, aptitudes and challenges for that person as he/she works toward creating a full life.

Person-Centered Planning:
- Focuses on strengths
- Discovers resources and assets
- Creates a team of support
- Envisions a positive future
- Structures action steps into the plans to create accountability

Best of all, the process lends itself directly to the categories in which you and your student will be writing transition goals. Ask your school district if they will be setting up any group planning processes with Skagit County or contact us directly using the contact information provided in the inside cover of this guide.

Since the IEP is one of the tools used to measure compliance with IDEA, comprehensive and ongoing support is important for teachers and others who are responsible for implementing the IEP. Think of the IEP as not only a document, but a process as well.
A quick note about Entitlement vs Eligibility

It’s important to understand the difference between entitlement and eligibility for services for individuals with disabilities, especially during the Transition years for students preparing for the Adult Services world.

IDEA is considered an ‘entitlement’ because the law states that all children who receive special education services are entitled to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) until age 21 or graduation (whichever comes first).

When your child turns 18, he or she has the option to:

- Graduate and continue in the school district’s high school transition program until age 21. Remaining in a high school transition program until age 21 offers the benefit of a guided transition to adult life, a bridge to adult services, and the development of independent living skills.
- Graduate and exit the K-12 system. Often, individuals who leave high school at age 18 have been discouraged from staying due to level of disability and/or lack of support. Some students choose to seek post-secondary or vocational training independently (or with help from family). However, it is important to note that long-term adult service through DDA do not start until age 21.

All other services systems, including Adult/Community Programs through DDA, operate under the condition of eligibility. Individuals will have to provide documentation or proof that they meet certain requirements in order to be eligible for services like long-term supports and employment. For example, an individual can meet the program requirements and be deemed ‘eligible’ or ‘qualified,’ but that does not mean he/she is entitled to the services of the program.

It’s also important to keep in mind that some programs may have waiting lists which can delay services. Budget cuts and funding limitability may also affect services and may vary from year to year. Look closely at the support available before your student leaves school.
The Long and Short of Employment Services

DVR

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) helps adults with disabilities find and secure stable employment. DVR services are not long-term. Their purpose is to provide the necessary tools and assistance for initial job placement and (if needed) to aid transition to long-term supports outside DVR (such as DDA).

Services may include: counseling & guidance; trial work experience; community-based assessment; benefits planning; assistive technology; job-related services such as completing applications, developing a resume, practicing interview skills, conducting a job search, gaining job skills; and transition to DDA long-term supports.

The Role of DVR in High School Transition

DVR partners with school districts to help students receiving high school transition services prepare for and find employment. This typically happens during the final year of school (age 20-21).

For more information, or to find the DVR Transition Liaison in your school, visit: dshs.wa.gov/dvr and click on the quick link for School Transition; or call: 1-800-637-5627.

DDA

The Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) provides long-term employment services to eligible individuals age 21 and over.

Services may include:

- **Individual Supported Employment**
  Individualized services necessary to help persons with I/DD obtain and continue integrated employment at or above the state’s minimum wage in the general workforce. Includes intake, discovery, assessment, job preparation, job marketing, job supports, record keeping and support to maintain a job.

- **Group Supported Employment**
  Supervised employment for groups of no more than 8 workers with disabilities in the same setting.

It’s important to find out, prior to exiting the school system, how to apply for these services (and if funding will be available).

Although DDA does not provide employment services until age 21, other home & community-based services may be available. Visit dshs.wa.gov/ddd for a full list of services.

High school transition programs (for students age 18-21) vary from county to county. Some county DD programs partner with the school district, DVR, and others with the goal of helping students to leave school with a job and make a seamless transition into adult life. Some counties, however, do not have alternative sources of funding to provide this type of wraparound service (beyond what DVR offers). Ask your school district what kinds of activities and support its transition program offers. Contact Parent-to-Parent (arcwa.org/getsupport) or PAVE (wapave.org) for support to help get your child’s transition needs met.
Additional Transition Planning

Along with school-based planning, there are a few other adult considerations and responsibilities to plan for and navigate. Use this checklist to guide you.

### Transition Planning Checklist

**Independent Living**
- Identify skills and abilities that will help your son or daughter be as independent as possible, such as:
  - Money Management and Budgeting
  - Decision-Making
  - Self-Advocacy
  - Registering to Vote
  - Communication
  - Transportation Training
  - Shopping
  - Cooking
  - Housekeeping

**Employment/Post-Secondary Education**
- Identify interests, strengths and needs, and list the types of jobs that would be a good fit.
- Identify personal contacts useful in finding jobs.
- Research college courses and programs (integrated and/or specialized).
- Learn and practice job skills.
- Apply for employment services from DVR and DDA.
- Obtain Assistive Technology and Training.

**Health & Safety**
- Identify needed skills and/or resources to be healthy and safe:
  - Emergency Recognition and Response
  - Personal Care/Hygiene
  - Counseling
  - Physical/Occupational Therapy
  - Adult Medical Care Provider

**Social/Recreational**
- Build friendships outside the family.
- Create a circle of support (family, friends, neighbors).
- Identify and connect with groups that share similar interests:
  - Athletic
  - Faith-Based
  - Creative Arts
  - Humanitarian
  - Civic

**Financial and Legal**
- Apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Arrange for a Representative Payee for SSI (benefits if money management is a concern)
- Benefits Planning (including Social Security Work Incentives, such as PASS and IRWE)
- Establish a Special Needs Trust
- Seek guardianship (if less restrictive alternatives are not appropriate)

**Housing and In-Home Supports**
- Apply for DDA services/supports (e.g., Medicaid Personal Care, Supported Living, Companion Home, Adult Family Home).
- Apply for HUD federal housing assistance. (Contact your local Housing Authority to find out how long the waiting list is.)
- Research home ownership programs for adults with DD: washingtonaccessfund.org/resources/homeownership.php
Transition Tips for parents & guardians

If at any time you start to feel overwhelmed, remember that transition is a process – it doesn’t happen from one day to the next or even month to month, it happens over years. Here are some general pieces of advice that might help you and your student.

**Keep the focus on your student.** The special education and transition process is about meeting the unique goals and needs of your student. IDEA mandates that youth be invited to their IEP meetings each time transition services are discussed. Make sure that his or her desires, goals, and interests are at the center of the educational plan and think of ways to ensure your student’s voice is heard in the planning process in a way most appropriate for you and your family.

What might be other ways to include your student’s voice? Your student could present a “dream map” or other pictures that represent his or her goals; you could use technology to produce a video of skills, needs, and/or desires in employment; or a video resume format could show the types of jobs that the student does around the house or neighborhood. Use your student’s individual communication skills to present his or her ideas.

**Develop self-determination with your student.** Under WA law, your student is eligible for transition services beginning at the age of 16 at the latest. Before your student reaches this age, you can begin to ask questions about what your student wants to do after high school and what skills he or she may need to become more independent. Developing self-determination is about helping your student be in charge of his or her own life. The basic questions to ask are: What is my dream career? What do I need to learn in high school to find a job in this field? What other skills do I need and how do I get them? There is often a limited amount of time for your student to receive certain services, so the earlier you start the better.
**Keep Records.** You will have many conversations with many different people during the transition planning process. Be sure that you take notes on any conversations you have with your student’s teachers and school administrators and keep a written record of phone calls, requests, etc. Create a binder notebook and keep copies of any documents about your student to help you stay organized and on top of your student’s plan. Put all requests, concerns, and objections in writing and promptly communicate concerns to your child’s school in writing as well. Review all notes from meetings and correct any inaccuracies or the failure to include important points raised at the meeting. Keep record of your objections. Voice concerns that you have at the meeting and make sure someone records those concerns. If not, write a letter after the meeting and follow up about what was agreed upon and why you disagree. This will help you later if you want to challenge portions of the IEP with which you disagree.

**Do your Homework:** Always know what you are signing. During IEP meetings you will need to sign a document stating your attendance, but if you disagree with a decision made by the team you can note on the form when you sign that you don’t agree.

**Work cooperatively.** Your student’s well-being is extremely important. There may be times when you feel the school is not doing enough for your student. The best way to advocate for your student is to be cooperative while voicing your concerns in a respectful manner. Collaboration is critical.

**Remember that you, as a parent, are an important part of the process.** The transition planning process can seem overwhelming. There is a lot of information you need to know and many people you will talk to but do not let the process intimidate you. Keep in mind that you are an expert. As the parent or guardian, you know your student better than anyone, so you should always feel comfortable speaking up for your son or daughter. Do not be afraid to ask questions if you don’t understand something.
**Voice your needs.** Transition services should be tailored to your student and driven by his or her interests, preferences and needs. Your thoughts are important, too. You are an equal and invaluable member of the IEP Team. Keep in mind that voicing your concerns and requesting a meeting to discuss the issue with the other members may be all that you need to resolve any issues.

*(Adapted from the Massachusetts Disability Law Center)*

**Additional Tips**

A student’s IEP is a written contract between you and the school district. You should never feel pressured to sign an IEP without having carefully considered it. Regularly review your child’s progress and identify areas where he is excelling and/or struggling. Don’t just accept IEPs in full from year to year without paying attention to changes (or lack thereof) in goals, objectives, and measures of demonstrated effective progress.

The law does not mandate a perfect IEP. Current law is clear that an IEP need not provide maximum benefit to the student. It need only provide some benefit to the student. A FAPE is intended to require Special Education services that provide a ‘basic floor of opportunity’ to allow the student meaningful access to public education.

Be open to change and help your transition team to see the transition plan as a document for growth and development. Your student’s interests, dreams and plans can change over time like all students, and though the idea is to begin to design a career path, it is not etched in stone.
And then what?

You and your student have been working hard to prepare for adulthood. What might that look like for a youth with developmental disabilities? In Washington State, integrated employment is the expectation and the norm.

**Working Age Adult Policy**

Washington State prioritizes employment as the first choice for individuals of working age. All employment is based on an individual’s strengths and interests. Therefore, regardless of your student’s disability, there are opportunities and expectations for him or her to work and fully participate in his or her community.

**Adult Services**

Adult services follow the Washington State Working Age Adult Policy ([https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/DDA/dda/documents/policy/policy4.11.pdf](https://www.dshs.wa.gov/sites/default/files/DDA/dda/documents/policy/policy4.11.pdf)), which promotes gainful employment in integrated settings in the community as the preferred option for working age adults (age 21 through 61). Adult Services provide eligible adults aged 21 and older vocational services.

**Supported Employment**

Supported employment occurs in a variety of typical, integrated business environments. Supported employment includes assistance obtaining and maintaining a job, assistance with promotion and career development and should be minimum wage pay or better. Support is provided to individuals, employers, and/or coworkers through activities such as on-the-job training, job restructuring, and technical assistance to employers and coworkers.

*For more on Adult Services for individuals with disabilities, please see the Skagit County Adult Services Guide at [www.skagitcounty.net/dd](http://www.skagitcounty.net/dd).*
Timeline of Services

**Goal**
Supported employment driven by vision

**Job!**

**High School Transitions Program**

**Functional Skills and knowledge:**
- Reading job applications
- Maps, bus schedules
- Balance checkbook
- Do online research
- Type

**Career exploration**

**Assessments**

**Work experiences**

**Elementary School**

**Middle School**

**High School**

- 5-12
- 12-14
- 14-18
- 18-21
- 21+
Resources

- Center for Change in Transition Services – www.seattleu.edu/cct
- CWU Special Education Technology Center - http://www.specialedtechcenter.org/
- From Emotions to Advocacy – www.fetaweb.com
- Graduation /exemptions/assessments
  - http://k12.wa.us/GraduationRequirements/default.aspx
  - www.k12.wa.us/ESEA/AYP/FAQ.aspx
  - http://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/letters/2009-
- Informing Families - http://informingfamilies.org/ages/ages-14-21/
- Institute for Community Inclusion - www.communityinclusion.org
- National Technical Assistance Center on Transition - www.nsttac.org
- Office of Education Ombuds - http://oeo.wa.gov/
- Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) - www.k12.wa.us
- PAVE - http://wapave.org/
- Wrightslaw - http://www.wrightslaw.com/