

## **High School Transition**

### **Summary of the Issue:**

One of the most significant milestones in the lives of all young adults is the transition from school to adult life. High school transition is the ongoing process by which a high school student with disabilities, their family members, and school personnel work together with representatives of government and community agencies to plan and prepare for the student's future beyond high school. When young people with developmental disabilities leave public school, they leave behind an entitlement to services and an integrated provider system. They often enter a confusing maze of service systems and providers with differing eligibility criteria and unclear entitlements. The challenge is getting education programs, governmental services and community-based agencies to collaborate with each other and work with families and youth with developmental disabilities to assure a successful transition to adult life.

### **Council Position:**

Youth with developmental disabilities must be prepared to successfully navigate living in the community of their choice. This includes the opportunity to develop relationships; the supports needed to engage in meaningful activities, including employment and recreation of their choice; access to routine and specialty health care; and the opportunity to pursue life long learning opportunities.

In order to accomplish this goal, schools must work together with families and others to adequately prepare students for successful transition well in advance of graduation. Ideally, this process begins before the age of 16. Schools should assure that educational staff are educated in the laws, philosophies and values of self-determination, and recognize their students' capacities and strengths and their

potential for employment. Other agencies, including local offices of Vocational Rehabilitation Services, community Developmental Disability Programs and Support Services Brokerages must be full partners in the transition of youth with developmental disabilities to employment and other post school opportunities, providing a continuous system of services as the student transitions to adulthood.

Families and youth with disabilities must have access to accurate and up-to-date information, the opportunity to be active participants in the transition process and the support necessary to create a successful transition from school to adult life,, including employment. Schools, Personal Agents and other support systems must assist families and youth with disabilities during this critical time to facilitate a successful transition.

### **Background:**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires the consideration of transition needs for students beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the student is 16, and updated annually thereafter. Transition services are integral parts of the student's education, taking into account the student's strengths, preferences, and interests and preparing them for further training, education, employment and independent living. Students are eligible for transition services through the age of 21 or until graduation with a regular high school diploma. Students receiving a GED, modified diploma or certificate of completion remain eligible for transition services through the age of 21.

High School transition services to youth with developmental disabilities have often been difficult to access and are frequently inadequate. Problems with transition services have included limited post-school adult supports and poor coordination and collaboration on the part of critical partners. While many districts offer extensive transition services, effective transition has yet to be realized for a significant number of students with developmental disabilities in Oregon.

From age 16, youth with disabilities, their families, schools, vocational rehabilitation programs and other agencies must be identifying individual needs, preferences, and transition goals needed to achieve employment, post secondary education and independent living. This should include work experience that develops job skills and informed choice about employment options. Schools must be delivering services that support the transition goals and objectives and those services should be focused on building bridges to adult life with support from both education and non-education partners, including health care programs.

IDEA 2004 defines high school transition services as a “coordinated set of activities designed 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 post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation.”<sup>1</sup>

According to the law, the key components of the transition process include:

- The Transition Plan as determined by the IEP must include one or more of the following: instruction, related services, community experiences, and the development and support of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; if appropriate, the plan will include acquisition of daily living skills and a functional vocational assessment.
- The IEP must include appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills.
- Transition planning should include members of the student’s IEP team and representatives of other non-school service-providing agencies when appropriate (e.g. Vocational Rehabilitation, Developmental Disabilities, Mental Health, Community College) and must invite a representative of any other agency likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services.
- The student must be invited to participate, and when that is not feasible, the student's strengths, preferences and interests must be considered. The IEP team must consider what the student wants to do upon completion of school, how they want to live and how they want to participate in the community.
- At the age of majority, age 18 in Oregon, the law provides for the transfer of parental rights to the student. If the student is not able to provide informed consent, there are procedures for appointing the parent (or other appropriate person) as a representative for educational decision making.

When schools fail to prepare students adequately and when government programs for adults, such as Vocational Rehabilitation and Developmental Disability Services do not participate in transition planning or provide post-school supports, students and families are left adrift.

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<sup>1</sup> 20 USC 1401(34)

### **Some transition related issues may include:**

- The lack of vision and current information about the potential of people with developmental disabilities to live full lives in the community and the many opportunities that now exist for people with disabilities, including real employment;
- The lack of school resources and trained staff in many parts of the state;
- The lack of accurate information on community options, including supports and services available from other State and Federal agencies for students with developmental disabilities after they leave school;
- The lack of involvement by some families. It is important for families to play an active role in transition planning, but many families find it difficult to be involved or may chose not to be involved. There are many reasons for the lack of participation including exhaustion by years of advocacy on behalf of their children or a feeling that their participation is not welcomed. Schools, Personal Agents and other support systems must assist families and youth with disabilities during this critical time to facilitate a successful transition.
- The lack of xperience working as partners. Schools, Vocational Rehabilitation, DD Services, families and other possible partners frequently shift responsibility to each other rather than working together as a team. Changing this dynamic will require time, commitment, and leadership.
- The lack of community capacity to provide adult supports for individuals with developmental disabilities. As per the Staley Settlement Agreement, anyone who seeks and is eligible for supports will be served within 90 days. Despite this entitlement, there continues to be insufficient resources to provide individuals with everything they need or want to live and participate in their chosen community.
- The lack of State agency leadership and strategic planning to assure collaboration and partnership in transition services.

### **Future Activities:**

#### ***Legislative/Administrative Policy Advocacy:***

- Advocate for involvement of all partners, including schools, agencies, youth, families, and advocates, in the creation of a statewide strategic plan for transition.
- Advocate for interagency agreements between the Department of Education and the Department of Human Services to provide current information and inservice opportunities for transition staff to learn about self-advocacy, self-determination,

employment and the supports available to individuals with developmental disabilities.

- Review the collection of relevant transition outcome data from the Department of Education, Seniors and People with Disabilities, and Oregon Vocational Rehabilitation.
- Collaborate with the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) on the issue of dropout prevention for students with developmental disabilities, including students from minority populations.
- Seek out and highlight model programs and individual successes.
- Collaborate with others to offer training designed to increase utilization of successful transition strategies targeted to parents, youth and professionals early in the transition process.
- Promote the involvement of self-advocates in training youth, families, and professionals.
- Assist families and youth with disabilities to advocate for meaningful transition services through local school districts.

*Training and Technical Assistance:*

- Collaborate with the ODE on the promotion of web-based transition information
- Support the engagement of health care providers and public health in providing information about routine and specialty care for transition age youth.