

Secondary to Postsecondary Education Transition Planning for Students with Learning Disabilities

By: National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1994)

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) is concerned that many students with learning disabilities do not consider postsecondary education options (2- and 4-year colleges and vocational schools) because they are not encouraged, assisted, or prepared to do so. The NJCLD believes that many students with learning disabilities should select postsecondary education options and that they can succeed in their pursuit of them if transition plans are designed and implemented effectively.

Providing transition plans and services is crucial when assisting youth with disabilities to prepare for adult life. Comprehensive transition planning needs to address several domains, including education, employment, personal responsibility, relationships, home and family, leisure pursuits, community involvement, and physical and emotional health. In this report, the NJCLD will address the rationale for the transition planning process as it applies to the education of students with learning disabilities, specifically the progression from secondary to postsecondary education. The roles and responsibilities of those involved also will be outlined.

Rationale

Transition planning is mandated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), formerly the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142). The transition planning requirements in IDEA, which include development of an individualized transition plan, ensures that planning is initiated in middle school and continued through high school. Transition planning and services focus on a coordinated set of student-centered activities designed to facilitate the student's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education. Transition planning for students with learning disabilities must remain flexible and reflect the developmental and educational needs of the students at different grades and times. It also must reflect a clear understanding of the learning disability, as well as the specific abilities and needs of the student. Planning should link the student's transition goals to effective and efficient services.

Roles and responsibilities

Transition planning is a student-centered activity that requires a collaborative effort. Responsibilities are shared by the student, parents, secondary personnel, and postsecondary personnel, all of whom are members of the transition team.

Student roles and responsibilities

The students' participation, along with support from other team members, is central to transition planning and decision making. This includes asking the student to identify preferences and interests and to attend meetings on transition planning. Success in postsecondary educational settings depends on the student's level of motivation, independence, self-direction, self-advocacy, and academic abilities developed in high school. Student involvement in transition activities must be initiated **as early as possible** and no later than age 16.

To contribute to successful transition planning, the student should

- understand his or her specific learning disability, including its effect on learning and work;
- establish realistic goals;
- present a positive self-image by stressing strengths, while understanding the influence of the learning disability;
- know how, when, and where to discuss and request needed accommodations;
- develop personal qualities, such as realistic self-assessment, willingness to take risks, and ability to sustain efforts;
- develop and use social skills;
- develop and apply effective studying, test-preparation, test-taking, time-management, and note-taking strategies;
- seek instructors and learning environments that are supportive;
- maintain an ongoing personal file that includes school and medical records, individualized education program (IEP), resume, and samples of academic work;
- know rights and responsibilities necessary to prepare for and to access postsecondary education;
- identify and access resources that will provide needed support;
- explore postsecondary education options and entrance requirements;
- select courses that meet postsecondary requirements; and
- prepare for and participate actively in the postsecondary application process.

Parent roles and responsibilities

The primary role of parents during transition planning is to encourage and support students to plan and achieve their educational goals. Parents also should encourage students to develop independent decision-making and self-advocacy skills.

To contribute to successful transition planning, parents should

- be involved in transition planning and ensure that the student is also included;
- help the student develop realistic goals;
- encourage the student to develop future educational plans and to explore realistic postsecondary options;

- help the student select high school courses that meet postsecondary requirements;
- collaborate with secondary and postsecondary staff to make decisions regarding programs, services, and resources;
- help the student collect and maintain an ongoing personal file that includes school and medical records, IEP, resume, and samples of academic work;
- communicate confidence in the student's ability to be successful in a postsecondary setting; and
- encourage the student to develop maximum independence in the learning, study, and living skills critical to success in postsecondary settings

Secondary school personnel responsibilities

Secondary school personnel and administrators, through their own involvement, must show students how to look beyond high school toward postsecondary education. This is accomplished by initiating, designing, and evaluating effective transition plans and coordinating services that are consistent with federal and state statutes, rules, and regulations. An essential role is that of the transition team coordinator, who guides and monitors the implementation of individual student transition plans.

To contribute to successful transition, secondary school personnel should

- form a transition team consisting of a coordinator, the student, the parent(s), administrators, teachers, and related service personnel;
- include the student and parents in the entire planning process;
- demonstrate sensitivity to the culture and values of the student and family;
- develop an appropriate packet of materials to document the student's secondary school program and to facilitate service delivery in the postsecondary setting;
- provide administrative support, resources, and time to foster collaboration among team members;
- inform the student about statutes, rules, and regulations that ensure his or her rights;
- provide appropriate course selection, counseling, and academic support services;
- ensure competency in literacy and mathematics;
- ensure that the student learns effective studying, time-management, test-preparation and test-taking strategies;
- help the student use a range of academic accommodations and technological aids, such as electronic date books, videodisc technology, texts on tape, grammar and spell checkers, and word processing programs;
- help the student to evaluate his or her dependence on external supports and adjust the level of assistance when appropriate;
- help the student develop appropriate social skills and interpersonal communication abilities;
- help the student to develop self-advocacy skills, including a realistic understanding of the learning disability and how to use this information for self-understanding and communication with others;

- foster independence through increased responsibility and opportunity for self-management;
- encourage the student to develop extracurricular interests and to participate in community activities;
- promote the student's self-esteem and self-confidence;
- encourage the student to develop extracurricular interests and to participate in community activities;
- inform the student and parent(s) about admission requirements and demands of diverse postsecondary settings;
- inform the student and parent(s) about services that postsecondary settings provide, such as disabilities services, academic services, and computer-based writing services;
- ensure the timely development of documentation and materials in keeping with application time lines;
- help the student and parent(s) select and apply to postsecondary institutions that will offer both the competitive curriculum and the necessary level of learning disability support services; and
- develop ongoing communication with postsecondary personnel.

Postsecondary personnel responsibilities

Postsecondary personnel must network with, and disseminate information to, secondary educators, parents, and prospective students to realistically frame the expectations for the rigors of the postsecondary experience. Providers of services for students with learning disabilities in postsecondary education settings must be prepared to meet the needs of a diverse student population who have a variety of skills, educational backgrounds, and intellectual abilities.

To contribute to successful transition planning, postsecondary personnel should:

- provide linkages to high schools through outreach efforts;
- inform secondary school personnel of the prerequisites for the transition to postsecondary options;
- disseminate information about college/vocational school preparation and the expectations associated with various postsecondary settings;
- offer "LD college nights" at local high schools and at state conferences;
- provide opportunities for campus visits for prospective students and their families, educating them about the unique features of the specific postsecondary program;
- help students to effectively negotiate postsecondary settings;
- offer summer orientation programs on the admissions application process, admissions requirements, and general postsecondary education program survival skills;
- clarify the roles of the student and the service provider in a postsecondary setting;
- offer comprehensive orientation programs to students with learning disabilities who have elected to attend a given institution;
- teach students how to advocate for themselves in the postsecondary setting;

- advocate on behalf of students, when necessary, to ensure that their rights are safeguarded under Section 504 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA);
- negotiate "reasonable academic adjustments" with faculty and administration that will maintain the integrity of the curriculum;
- establish written policies and procedures concerning admissions, diagnosis, accommodation, curriculum requirements, and service delivery to students with learning disabilities;
- work closely with admissions officers to ensure that students with learning disabilities are fairly considered;
- act as a liaison to the greater college/vocational school community, and inform them about serving students with learning disabilities; and
- provide faculty and staff development on learning disabilities.

Summary

For many students with learning disabilities, participation in postsecondary education is appropriate. However, to achieve this goal, comprehensive transition planning is essential. The primary objective of this planning is to help the student select, access, and succeed in a postsecondary education program.

This planning involves contributions from four groups: the student, parent(s), and secondary and postsecondary education professionals. The result of effective transition from a secondary to a postsecondary education program is a student with a learning disability who is confident, independent, self-directed, and in actual pursuit of career goals. A student with a learning disability can succeed in the transition from secondary to postsecondary education settings if the student, parents, and professional personnel work together to design and implement effective transition plans.