

The Transition-Focused IEP Process

Suggested Activities for Before, During, and After the IEP Meeting



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THE TRANSITION-FOCUSED IEP PROCESS

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES FOR BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE IEP MEETING

Many districts and educators have had difficulty in the development, writing and implementation of the transition provisions in IEPs for students with exceptionalities. The purpose of this document is to increase the understanding of exactly “what” must be done, as well as to provide a clear understanding of “how” transition planning can be done through the IEP process.

The transition IEP process is intended to result in a comprehensive, coordinated plan of activities to be implemented during the term of the IEP. The plan should reflect the IEP team’s response to the student’s post-school vision beyond one year and beyond just preparing the student for graduation. The IEP is the public education agency’s commitment to providing the student with needed supports and services for the term of the IEP within the context of a longer view and planning for adulthood. The IEP team takes a longitudinal view of where the student would like to end up and then backtracks to see what will be needed along the way. This perspective will likely make the IEP a more dynamic, useful tool.

IEP teams should consider making changes in the steps and sequence of the IEP meeting (i.e., what is discussed and decided and the flow of those discussions and the decision making). Generally, this sequence has been one where, after introductions, reports were shared and tests or other assessment goals were presented. The reports were summarized and the discussions made up the bulk of the information referred to as the student’s present levels of educational performance (PLEP). Much of this discussion focused on the student’s deficits or problems. Following this discussion, the IEP team would then focus on developing annual goals and short-term objectives. The annual goals and short-term objectives typically responded directly to the problems or deficits identified in the PLEP. Often, transition was something discussed after the PLEP, annual goals, and short-term objectives. In many instances, transition was seen and presented as a separate event and considered something “in addition” or “an attachment” to the IEP.

All components of the IEP - the present levels of educational performance (PLEP), transition statements, least restrictive environment, special education and related services, participation in

general curriculum, annual goals, short-term objectives/benchmarks, etc. must be interrelated and connected. Beginning at least by 14 years of age, the IEP should be heavily influenced by transition planning to prepare the student for post-school life. If transition planning is to be effective, all of the discussion and decision-making in the IEP meeting must result in a comprehensive, coordinated plan that brings all parts of the IEP together to prepare young people for life after high school.

Described in this way, transition becomes an “outcome-oriented process.” The IEP for every student, beginning at least by 14 years of age, should be future-directed, goal-oriented and based upon the student’s preferences, interests and needs. The IEP team should take a longitudinal view of where the student would like to end up and then build an IEP that will help the student get there.



= Denotes legal requirement.

Before the IEP meeting

1. Assist the student and parents to determine needs, preferences and interests related to life after high school. The desired post-school goals or visions are based upon the student’s preferences, needs and interests—what he or she wants to do and how he or she wants to live after high school. These may not be the desired goals or visions that the educational professionals hold for the student, but rather are those goals, dreams, interests and aspirations held by the student.
 - Determine who from the school is responsible for gathering this information.
 - Explore with the student and family required courses and opportunities for electives relevant to the student’s preferences and interests
 - Those responsible gather the information needed to understand student needs and take into account preferences and interests through career awareness and exploration activities and a variety of formal and

informal transition assessments. These measures should seek to answer questions such as:

- a. What does the student want to do beyond school (e.g., further education or training, employment, military, continuing or adult education, etc.)?
 - b. Where and how does the student want to live (e.g., dorm, apartment, family home, group home, supported or independent)?
 - c. How does the student want to take part in the community (e.g., transportation, recreation, community activities, etc.)?
 - Summarize the information into a format that will tell the team how the student's needs, preferences and interests relate to his/her post-school outcomes and what needs the student has relative to achieving those outcomes.
- a. The summary provides the "so what" explanation to how the information will be used in developing the IEP.
 - b. The summary information should ultimately be evidenced in the present levels of educational performance section of the IEP that should guide the rest of the IEP team's decisions.

2.  Formally invite the student to participate in the IEP process and meeting.
3. Prepare the student for participation in the IEP meeting.
 - Discuss the purpose of the IEP with the student.
 - Work with the student to explore different ways the student can participate in the IEP meeting. Student participation can range from conducting an interview with the student, if he/she will not be attending the

meeting, to having the student leading/facilitating the meeting.

- It is important to begin early to assist the student in developing self-determination skills. The student needs to understand how his/her exceptionality affects the ability to achieve desired post-school outcomes, and should be able to describe the combination of supports that are needed to assist the student in reaching his/her goals. Active student participation in the IEP meeting is an excellent opportunity for the student to practice self-determination skills.

4.  Be certain all required team members are invited to the IEP meeting by providing a written 10 day notice of the IEP meeting. Include appropriate individuals from outside of the school system at the IEP meeting: *“at the discretion of the parent or the agency, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child, including related services personnel as appropriate.” (34 CFR §300.344 (a)(6))* Further, *“the public agency also shall invite a representative of any other agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services.” (34 CFR §300.344 (b)(3)(i))*. Be sure the parents (and the student if age) are provided written 10-day notice of the IEP planning meeting that will include a discussion of transition. Provide a copy of Parents Rights along with the notice of the meeting.
- If the student chooses not to attend the IEP meeting, use other means to gather and share information about his or her needs, interests and preferences, and post-school goals. (Note: Make sure there is documentation that the student was invited even if it is known the student will be unable to attend).
 - If a representative from an invited agency is unable to attend the IEP meeting, use other means to ensure their participation in the planning and decision-making regarding

transition services. Document these efforts in the IEP or student file.

5. Prepare an IEP meeting agenda that sets an expectation that the student and family will be encouraged to address each area of discussion before the other team members speak. The IEP meeting facilitator should be prepared to ask questions of the student and family that will help them to provide their ideas, suggestions, and concerns prior to the input of the rest of the IEP team.
 - Assemble necessary IEP meeting materials and skeleton IEP. Skeleton IEP may include any summary information that is known about the student and not subject to input or discussion, e.g., demographics, assessments, etc. Other materials might include graduation requirements, descriptions of available courses, etc.

During the IEP meeting

1. Structure the meeting in a way that requires active participation of the student and parents to develop the student's present levels of performance (PLEP). Focus on the student's strengths, needs, interests and preferences to guide the development of:
 - An outcome-oriented post-school vision statement. If the information referenced in #1 Before the Meeting section is collected prior to the meeting, this information should already be available so that this can be developed.
 - The development of PLEPs can be framed around the areas of consideration for transition: instruction, related services, community experiences, employment or other post-school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate,

daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

2.  **At least by age 14**, develop the Statement of Transition Service Needs addressing the courses of study in which the student will be involved. The Statement of Transition Service Needs focusing on the student's courses of study includes the following concepts:

- The IEP team identifies the required courses leading to graduation or completion of a school program, and helps the student select courses and other educational experiences that are most likely to move the student toward his or her desired post-school goals (e.g., employment, further education, training, independent living, etc.). (Note: If this is done through the guidance counselor, the IEP should review to determine that the courses identified support the student's post-school goals. Other school experiences need to be considered as well. The guidance counselor may be involved in the IEP meeting should there be changes to the coursework.)
- Long range educational planning for the courses of study and educational experiences is conducted for ALL students with exceptionalities beginning no later than 14 years of age and reviewed annually. Each year a student's IEP team reconsiders the student's desired post-school goals and aligns the statement of needed transition services that focuses on the courses of study with those desired goals.
- The context for the statement of transition service needs is the relationship between the student's post-school vision and the student's present levels of performance. The decisions regarding the courses of study should relate directly to where the student is functioning and what he or she wants to do post-school.
- The discussion about the courses of study will be the basis of the age 14 Statement of Transition Service Needs.

Steps for developing the age 14 Statement of Transition Service Needs:

- a. Review standard graduation requirements and determine if they are appropriate for the student.
- b. Consider whether adaptations or modifications will be needed in the:
 - General Curriculum
 - General Curriculum with Accommodations
 - General Curriculum with Modification
 - General Curriculum with Functional Application
- c. Review elective courses available and identify courses of study based on student's needs, taking into account preferences and interests.
- d. Consider other educational experiences: work study, community-based instruction, independent living, self-determination
- e. Consider whether any prioritization is necessary.
- f. Draft a narrative statement for the IEP that outlines courses of study that should help the student prepare for desired post-school outcomes. This is the Statement of Transition Services Needs.

The connection between the student's post-secondary goals and the IEP Statement of Transition Service Needs should be obvious. The age 14 Statement of Transition Service Needs must have two parts: (1) reference to the student's post-school goals and (2) reference to coursework and/or educational experiences that are related to the post-school goals.

Examples:

- For a student interested in a computer technology career, the statement of transition service needs could reference computer technology courses.

"Jake will meet the general education graduation requirements with electives focusing in the area of computer technology as Jake plans to study computer technology for his post-secondary education."

- For a student who has transition needs around independence in the community, the statement of transition service needs could describe daily living skills.

“Mary’s graduation requirements will be modified according to the IEP and will focus on self-help and community work opportunities to prepare her to live independently after graduation.”

- For a student who has employment goals, the statement of transition service needs could address needed math courses for the desired work, or required education and training.

In the student’s IEP, this requirement can be met in various ways. For example:

- By grade level or year, list the anticipated courses and experiences related to the student’s identified post-school goals.
- Include a narrative statement that describes the types of courses the student should take to reach the identified post school outcomes.

Note: Due to language in the Kansas regulations for Special Education, be advised that if the IEP lists specific courses as part of the Statement of Transition Service Needs, the school may be required to provide all of those classes for a student who is suspended or expelled.

3.  **At least by age 16**, develop the Statement of Needed Transition Services to achieve the student’s desired post-school goals.

In developing the age 16 Statement of Needed Transition Services that is a coordinated set of activities, the IEP team will build from the PLEP that describes where the student is currently performing in relationship to his post-school goal. With that as the starting point, the team needs to determine what skills, services, or supports the student will need in order to successfully transition from where (s)he is now to his/

her desired post-school outcomes. The team must develop a set of activities that will support the student in achieving desired post-school outcomes. The LEA may also include the multi-year plan for activities and transition services in the IEP as part of the Statement of Needed Transition Services. The LEA should make clear the distinction between those activities that are being provided for the current IEP year and those anticipated activities or services that are being planned for the future.

The IEP team, including the student and parent as key members, may find it helpful to answer the following questions as the Statement of Needed Transition Services is developed:

- What services, supports or programs does this student currently need? (For example, specially designed instruction, accommodations and modifications, related services, job coaching, special transportation etc.)
- Then, based on what the student currently needs:
 - ◇ What services, supports or programs will this student need in order to achieve his or her desired post-school goals and lead to success as the student leaves high school?
 - ◇ Are linkages being made to the needed post-school services, supports or programs before the student leaves the school setting?
 - ◇ Does the Statement of Needed Transition Services include strategies to ensure students and parents are aware of, and connected to, needed post-school services, programs and supports before the student exits the school system?

Steps in Developing the Statement of Needed Transition Services:

- Design the coordinated set of activities by addressing each of the following areas. While it is NO LONGER required to write a statement justifying why any of the domains below

(i.e., instruction, community experiences, employment, or other post-school adult living objectives) is NOT addressed in the IEP, the IEP team will need to consider each of these areas when developing the statement of needed transition services. Consideration for each of these areas helps ensure that the statement is comprehensive and that students will be linked to the post-school services, supports and programs they need.

Instruction the student needs to receive in specific areas to complete needed courses, succeed in the general curriculum and gain needed skills post high school.

Related services the student may need to benefit from special education while in school. Generally, the IEP team should also begin to consider related service needs the student may have as he or she enters the adult world. If related services will be needed beyond school, the IEP should identify, as appropriate, linkages to adult agencies or providers before the student leaves the school system.

Community experiences that are provided outside the school building or in community settings. Examples may include community-based work experiences and/or exploration, job site training, banking, shopping, transportation, counseling and recreation activities.

Employment or other post-school adult living objectives the student needs to achieve desired post-school goals. These could be services leading to a job or career or those that support activities done occasionally such as registering to vote, filing taxes, renting a home, accessing medical services, filing for insurance or accessing adult services such as Social Security Income (SSI).

Acquisition of daily living skills. Daily living skills are those activities that adults do every day (e.g., preparing meals, budgeting, maintaining a home, paying bills, caring for clothes, grooming, etc.).

Functional vocational evaluation. This is an assessment process that provides information about job or career interests, aptitudes and skills. Information may be gathered through situational assessment, observation, or formal measures and should be practical. The IEP team could use this information to refine services outlined in the IEP.

- Identify, in broad terms, those long range activities in each of the transition planning areas that will be necessary to help the student achieve his or her post-school goals.
- Identify who will provide, be responsible for and pay for each activity, specifying, if appropriate, interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages to access and acquire services or supports needed to provide needed transition services in the IEP.
- Identify the dates or school year in which each activity will be addressed and prioritize those activities to be addressed for the current IEP year.
- Demonstrate how, when all of the activities are combined, there is coordination among all responsible parties. The activities written in the IEP should indicate what the agencies are doing to assist the student and family in making the linkages necessary for post-school services, programs, and supports before the student exits school.
- The Statement of Needed Transition Services that develops from this long-range planning discussion must include, at a minimum, activities and transition services for the current IEP year and responsible agencies.

Examples:

- For a student who has accelerated through coursework and is graduating after two years of high school, the statement of needed transition services could address investigating university admission requirements for younger students, ACT testing options, and identifying contacts on campus

- For the student who wants to attend college but hasn't chosen an area of interest, the statement of needed transition services could address college entrance requirements and exploratory opportunities for various careers.

When appropriate, the Statement of Needed Transition Services must also include a Statement of Interagency Responsibilities and Linkages. Exactly which agencies have which responsibilities will depend on the services, supports or programs that will be necessary and appropriate to help the student achieve what it is he or she wants to do. The activities identified will clearly be the responsibility of the school or adult service agencies, though some of the activities might be completed by the student and parents (e.g., contacting and scheduling visits to colleges, community colleges, post-secondary training programs, adult service providers, group homes, etc.). Remember that, if a participating agency other than the LEA fails to provide a transition service as specified in the student's IEP, the LEA must reconvene the IEP team to identify alternative strategies to meet the transition objectives set out for the student (34 C.F.R., Sec. 300.348).

Once the Statement of Needed Transition Services is written, ask the team the following questions:

- Is there agreement about who will provide and/or pay for the activities outlined in the coordinated set of transition activities?
- Are the activities and services documented within the coordinated set of activities in a way that everyone understands what is to be done, when, and by whom?

4. Determining Annual Goals and Short-term Objectives or Benchmarks



In addition to the other elements, IDEA '97 requires that the IEP include:

(2) A statement of measurable annual goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives, related to-

(i) Meeting the student's needs that result from the student's disability to enable the student to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for non-disabled students), or for preschool students, as appropriate, to participate in appropriate activities; and

(ii) Meeting each of the student's other educational needs that result from the student's disability." (34 CFR §300.347(a))

Measurable annual goals must be related to meeting the student's needs that result from the student's exceptionality (KSA 72-987(b)(2)), to enable the student to be involved and progress in the general or advanced curriculum. In addition, for students over age 14, they should be framed or considered in the context of the student's post-school goals. The annual goals included in every student's IEP should be individually selected to meet the unique needs of the student.

The number of goals addressed in the IEP depends on the student's needs. Prerequisite skills, immediate needs, general applicability, and the student's desired post-school outcomes are all factors to consider when establishing priorities for students age 14 and over. Parents, general education teachers, and students are also essential sources of information when setting priorities. Each IEP must have at least one measurable annual goal. Each measurable annual goal must have benchmarks, short-term objectives, or a combination of both. Objectives/benchmarks should enable the student's teacher(s), parents, and others involved in developing and implementing the student's IEP to gauge, at intermediate times during the year, how well the student is progressing toward achievement of the annual goal (34 C.F.R., Part 300, Appendix A, Q. 4, Figure 4-1, p. 12471).

For a majority of students, there will be transition activities that are the responsibility of both general education and special education. The IEP team will make decisions about whether a particular activity that is the responsibility of the school requires an annual goal on the IEP and/or a need for special education services. These decisions must be made on an individual basis by the IEP team.

5. Determining and Documenting Services to be Provided

When the IEP team has completed writing and considering the PLEPs, the statements of Transition Service Needs (age 14 requirement) and Needed Transition Services (age 16 requirement), and has developed the measurable annual goals the student will be working on, the team must then determine what services and supports will need to be put into place so that the student is most likely to achieve the IEP goals the team has set. The team must determine what services will be provided (special education, related services, and supplemental aids and services), where the services will be provided (general education, vocational education, community, etc), and the frequency and duration of these services. At this point, the team may find it helpful to ask questions such as:

Based on what we know about this student's needs...

- What specially designed instruction will the student need in order to be able to achieve the goals and outcomes the team has determined? Specially designed instruction means appropriately adapting the content, methodology, or the delivery of instruction so that the unique needs of the student may be met and to ensure the student is able to access the general curriculum.
- Is there a need for related services? Remember that related services are those services that are required to assist the student to benefit from special education. What related services will this student need in order to participate in and benefit from specially designed instruction?
- Are supplementary aids and services needed so that the student may be able to participate in settings with students without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate? Consider aids and services such as in-class support, sign language interpreter services and assistive technology devices and services.
- What accommodations and modifications are necessary so that the student may fully participate in the courses of study selected by the team? Consider not only those things that will be needed in the classroom, but also in other settings such as travel training, work study sites, community based instruction, etc.

It is important to remember that special education, as a whole, is a set of services, not a specific place or person. When considering what services the student will receive, the team should focus on what needs to be provided so that the student will be most likely to progress in the general curriculum and achieve the goals the team has determined – not on making the student’s needs “fit” a given program.

When documenting the services to be provided, teams need to be able to clearly state the frequency, duration, and location of each service. This helps to ensure that the school’s commitment of resources will be clear to parents and other IEP Team members. The amount of time committed to each of the various services to be provided must be (1) appropriate to the specific service, and (2) stated in the IEP in a manner that is clear to all who are involved in both the development and implementation of the IEP.

Documenting frequency means to state how often the service will be provided to the student. Documenting duration means to state how long the service will be provided to the student. Documenting location means to state the environment in which the service will be provided to the student. Let’s assume that an IEP team determines that a student has a need to work at a community work site to learn skills necessary to transition successfully into the work force after leaving high school. Based on the student’s needs, the team decides that the student will need to be at the work site at least 4 days per week working 2 hours per day in order to learn the skills needed. The team also decides that the student will need to have a job coach while at the work site and will need transportation to and from the work site. To address frequency, duration, and location, the statement of services to be provided for this student might look like:

John will be transported to and from a community work site 4 days per week. John will be provided job coaching while at the work site. The job coaching will be provided for the 2 hours per day John is at the work site 4 days per week.

These statements provide a description of the services John will receive in an understandable format and document the frequency, duration, and location of 2 different services (e.g. transportation, job coaching).

After the IEP meeting

1. Provide the instruction, experiences, supports and services outlined in the IEP, assisting the student and family by linking them to any needed post-school adult services, supports or programs. Reconvene the IEP team to plan alternative strategies if the transition services are not provided as planned, or if the student is not making the anticipated progress.
2. Throughout the timeframe of the IEP, you will conduct the following activities with the student to assure that the student is making progress and is on track to complete the IEP:



Regularly assess student's progress in meeting IEP goals and report progress to parents



Assure all IEP services, including those identified within the age 16 Statement of Needed Transition Services are being implemented/provided.

Follow up activities should provide sufficient information to determine if the plan is "on track", or if it is necessary to reconvene the IEP team to address areas where progress is not being made or is not in alignment with changes in student's desired outcomes.



3. Conduct annual review of the student's IEP.

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