There is no one formula for a successful transition. The path through and out of high school is rarely a straight line, in great part because learning and growing are synonymous with change—changing minds, discovering new goals, altering preferences, and developing new understanding and strengths. So while transition efforts do involve a process, include a plan, and entail some very specific requirements that are defined by law, they also present puzzles to be solved and paths to be uncovered. Within the context of an educational system that is responsive to each child and to the whole child, transition can be flexible, developmentally appropriate, and reflective of each child’s individuality—respecting evolving dreams and creating an environment where those dreams can become reality. This guide lists many of the activities and considerations that may be part of the transition process for students with disabilities as they leave K–12 education and enter adulthood—college, technical training, career, and community living.

Context

Transition for students with disabilities consists in general of three interconnecting parts:

1. Beginning as early as possible, students and their family members are part of Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams that work collaboratively to develop immediate- and long-range goals mapped to employment, along with plans to achieve those goals.

2. Students’ high school experiences are shaped to ensure that the students acquire the skills and knowledge they need to realize their goals and dreams for success in adult life.

3. The resources, post-school supports, and programs that students need for adult success are put in place before the student graduates from high school or turns 22, whichever comes first.

The Role of All Adults

From birth, parents, caregivers, and teachers can contribute to each child’s eventual success in adult life by remembering that career development starts young—and then:

- Helping the child develop communication skills
- Promoting social-emotional competence
- Supporting self-advocacy skills
- Encouraging positive behaviors
- Having conversations with the child about
  - what the child likes to do
  - what the child’s strengths are
  - what supports the child needs
  - what the child might like to do for work as an adult
- Advocating for inclusive settings in schools
Transition Planning Checklist

Before the student turns 16—but ideally as early as possible—transition planning is initiated and integrated into the student’s IEP.

Essential parts of transition planning include:

- Student invitation to the meetings
- Transition assessments
- Measurable annual goals
- Postsecondary goals
- Postsecondary goals updated annually
- Transition services and activities
- Collaboration with adult agencies, where appropriate
- Course of study to support goals
- Summary of Performance (SOP) completed before the student leaves high school

Resources in Schools

Local educational agencies (LEAs) have some flexibility in the way they use their education dollars to address the needs of the students they serve. As a result, the transition programs, resources, and supports often differ from one LEA or school to the next. Within each local context, however, parents and educators will want to find ways to ensure person-centered plans, career interests surveys, knowledge and awareness of postsecondary education options, and training and connections with agencies that provide job-readiness skills and support.

The infographic on the next two pages was designed to give students, parents, educators, and service providers a sense of the elements involved in transition, the options that may be available, and the language they may need to ask questions, advocate for more or different services, and ultimately secure the best possible postschool outcomes for California’s students.
The journey to adult life begins at birth, with many factors contributing to a child’s successful transition from high school to independent living, further education, and living-wage employment. Most important among these factors are high expectations for the child from the very beginning and ongoing family engagement in the child’s growth and development. For children who are identified as having a disability at birth or during their earliest years, the early intervention and family support services provided through Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are also critical contributors to optimal outcomes.

Several agencies are specifically designed to support infants and young children with disabilities and their families: Regional Centers through California’s Department of Developmental Services, Parent Training and Information Centers and Family Resource Centers, Early Head Start and Head Start programs, Mental Health services, and inclusive child care services. Parents, child care and service providers, and educators will want to take advantage of the services these agencies provide.

As soon as it is appropriate, these same adults will also want to support children to become aware of and develop the skills that are essential for success in adult life: communication, appropriate behavior, self-advocacy, self-determination, and...
social-emotional health. And it’s never too early for family members and teachers to encourage in children the development of essential career-readiness skills: collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, communication, and job-search strategies as the children get older.

When children enter preschool and Part B IDEA services begin, these services are typically delivered through the schools themselves. Throughout the child’s life, however, ongoing family engagement in the child’s learning and development and high expectations for the child remain important contributing factors to successful transitions and optimal lifespan outcomes.

During their school years, children with disabilities should be actively involved in their own Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). As they get older, most of these students can also manage and direct parts of—and then lead—their own IEP meetings. An important guiding principle for each adult involved in the process is always to listen to the voice of the child, and for the child to advocate for “Nothing about me without me.” Students should also continually be held to high academic standards as they move from preschool, to elementary school, to junior high school, and into high school.

Asking children about what they want to do for employment as adults and talking with them should be a regularly recurring conversation. Students also should be given opportunities to explore different career options in ways that are developmentally and age appropriate.

During the later grades, junior high, and high school, every youth and young adult should be given the option to work toward earning a diploma by taking A–G courses (the school courses that students must complete with a grade of C or better to be eligible for admission to a University of California school or a California State University school), following a Career Technical Education pathway (CTE) pathway, or pursuing an alternate pathway that may involve training and lead to supported/customized employment, when appropriate. Every individual with a disability should be allowed to choose a path to college, community college, or employment training at any point along the schooling pathway, with the option of changing course if and when desired or warranted.

As children grow and assume appropriate levels of independence, they and their families will want to be aware of and use the services provided by agencies that support the transition of youth and young adults out of high school and into the world of independent living, employment, and further education: the Social Security Administration, Independent Living Centers, the Employment Development Department, the Department of Rehabilitation, One-Stop Career centers, and probation departments.

During the later grades, junior high, and high school, students should be made aware of the full range of post-high school options they might pursue, including adult school, apprenticeships, trade school, industry certification, associate of arts (AA) degrees, transfer degrees, and four-year college degrees.

The destination for every individual with a disability, including those with developmental and significant cognitive disabilities, is living-wage employment in a competitive, integrated setting.

**Always listening to the voice of the child:**
“Nothing about me without me.”
Laws Guiding Transition Services

IDEA makes schools and their local educational agencies (LEAs) responsible for preparing students with disabilities for adult life through a post-school transition plan that is updated annually [34 CFR §300.320(b)]. Students must be invited to the IEP meetings where these plans are discussed as well as representatives from the agencies that are part of the transition plan [34 CFR §300.321(b)]. The transition plan must address the following areas:

- The student's goals for employment, independent living, community engagement, and continued learning [34 CFR §300.43]
- Employment [34 CFR §300.320]
- Transition plans must be in place and integrated with the student's IEP no later that the student's sixteenth birthday [34 CFR §300.320(b)]
- Instruction, related services, and community experiences [34 CFR §300.43]
- If appropriate, independent living skills [34 CFR §300.320]
- Measurable postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments [34 CFR §300.320]
- A coordinated set of services and activities that are selected to support each student’s successful transition from school to adult life. These services must be based on the student's interests, strengths, and preferences [34 CFR §300.43]
- A Summary of Performance (SOP)—a summary of the student’s academic achievement and functional performance when the student is no longer eligible for services under IDEA [34 CFR §300.305(e)(3)]

Federal Performance Indicators

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires each state to develop a state performance plan/annual performance report (SPP/APR) that evaluates the state's efforts to implement the requirements and purposes of the IDEA. The SPP/APRs include indicators that measure child and family outcomes and other indicators that measure compliance with the requirements of the IDEA. Two of these indicators are designed to reflect how the state and its local educational agencies are preparing students with disabilities for adult life. California reports annually on the following:

**Indicator 13: Secondary Transition Goals and Services**

The percent of youth with IEPs aged 16 and above with an IEP that includes appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that are annually updated and based upon an age appropriate transition assessment, transition services,

- including courses of study that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals,
- and annual IEP goals related to the student’s transition services needs.

There also must be evidence that the student was

- invited to the IEP Team meeting where transition services are to be discussed and
- evidence that, if appropriate, a representative of any participating agency was invited to the IEP Team meeting with the prior consent of the parent or student who has reached the age of majority.

**Indicator 14: Post-School Outcomes**

Percent of youth who are no longer in secondary school, had IEPs in effect at the time they left school, and were:

A. Enrolled in higher education within one year of leaving high school.
B. Enrolled in higher education or competitively employed within one year of leaving high school.
C. Enrolled in higher education or in some other postsecondary education or training program; or competitively employed or in some other employment within one year of leaving high school.
Ideas for Activities Along the Transition Path

**Gaining Work Experience: Job-Skills Development**
- Starting in preschool, a focus through the grades on taking responsibility, working cooperatively, solving problems, managing time, etc.
- Work-based learning, e.g., *WorkAbility*
- *Career-Technical Education*
- *Regional Occupational Programs* (ROP)
- *Transition Partnership Program*
- *Workplace readiness training*
- *Career One-Stop*
- *Here to Career*
- *California Adult Education*
- Get a job

**Learning What’s Possible: Career Preparation**
- Career fairs
- Job shadowing
- Work-based learning
- Internships
- Field trips to and interviews with possible employers
- Resource fairs
- Job exploration activities
- Field trips to local schools
- Guided career development
- Job and career counseling

**Learning Strengths & Preferences**
- *Person-centered planning*
- Career/interest assessments
- Student organizations

**Developing Essential Knowledge**
- Financial literacy
- Benefits planning
- Self-determination coaching
- Self-advocacy training
- Self-awareness

**Connecting and Engaging**
- Family chores
- Hobbies
- Extracurricular activities
- Volunteer work
- Summer jobs
- Public transportation
- Parks & recreation
- Community events
- Libraries
- Sports