

Transition Planning: Students Taking the Lead



Garrett Shows, a senior at ConVal High School in Peterborough, NH, leads his own IEP meeting. He started the meeting by discussing his strengths and challenges. Garrett's support network—including his parents, teachers, and related service providers—meet to make sure that the IEP is focused on Garrett's goals.

What is Transition?

Transitions are a normal part of everyone's life. As students, we transition from one grade or school to the next. As older students and adults, we also experience transitions as we enter the workforce, change doctors, move to a new location, and when major family situations or relationship changes occur.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act reauthorization requires that transition planning for students with disabilities must be in place by the student's 16th birthday. Approximately half of states require that transition planning begin earlier—at ages 13, 14, or 15.

Why is it important?

Transition planning is about connecting an individual's strengths and interests to future environments and endeavors beyond high school and should be guided by the individual. Sometimes this leadership role needs to be taught, modeled, and developed over time. Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams can begin involving the student in goal planning and self-monitoring as early as elementary or middle school. Several years of involvement in collaborative planning increases a student's ability to make decisions and experience better outcomes in higher education, employment, and independent

living. During transition planning, it is important that any providers from agencies, organizations, or other people involved with a student work together so that they can meet the individual's needs. They may then identify and deliver efficient and cost-effective transition services, and identify any gaps or overlaps in these services.

How do we do it?

Having individuals with disabilities lead (or help lead) their own IEP meetings is an effective way for them to learn about being in control of their own life transitions. In the video *Garrett Shows: I'm in Charge*, Garrett is seen running his own IEP meeting with a goal of transitioning to college. His school support network—including his parents, teachers, and therapists—meet together to make sure that the IEP is focused on Garrett's goals.

The *Garrett* film provides a strong model for a student-led IEP/transition meeting. Garrett worked closely with his special education coordinator on his presentation in the days leading up to his IEP/transition planning meeting. First, Garrett identified his own strengths and weaknesses. If a student needs help with this, people in the support network can ask questions such as, "What are you really good at?" and "What is hard for you to do?" Building these skills through small, daily reflections will help the student when it comes time to lead their IEP meeting. We can help students build this skill by asking them to critique their own work such as, "Which problem are you most proud of solving?" or "What is the hardest thing you did today?" Transition assessment data—gathered from multiple sources including the student, family members, educators, service providers, and employers—should be shared with the student's IEP team as part of this process.

Next, Garrett identified his goals. Questions such as, "What kind of job do you want?" or "What do you want from college?" can help students think about their transition



Scenes from the film *Jamia and Peyton: I Can Work*.

Top: Jamia Davis (center) works with her PROMISE Connector Renisha Rivers (left) and her mother Karen Green to identify her career interests and goals.

Bottom: Peyton Denzer grooms a dog during her summer job at Dig My Dog in Springdale, Arkansas.

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goals. Once the individual identifies their goal(s), he or she should develop a plan to achieve the goal(s). Guiding questions such as, "What class(es) will help you get a job like that?" or "Who can help you with college applications?" will help the student.

Not every opportunity for student-led transition planning needs to occur within a

large meeting setting. In the video *Jamia and Peyton: I Can Work*, both Jamia and Peyton work individually with several members of their support networks, including case managers, parents, school guidance counselors, and rehabilitation counselors. Both young women reflect on how their community job placements influence their strengths, weaknesses, and career goals. Students who have experiences in a variety of work and community settings have a better

sense of what they like, where they excel, new skills they need to develop, and their long-term goals for the future.

The transition process is ongoing. After the first planning stage is implemented, the individual and the support network should continue to meet on a regular basis to check in and revisit the student's goals. The same process outlined in the previous paragraphs can help the individual conduct these ongoing meetings.

Writer

Deborah Taub, Ph.D., OTL Education Solutions

Contributors

Catherine Fowler, Ph.D., Project Coordinator,
National Technical Assistance Center
on Transition

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