It's More Than Just the Law

PEOPLE MAKE IT HAPPEN

Revised, 2009, the Transition Coalition at the University of Kansas, Department of Special Education.

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www.transitioncoalition.org.

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed it's the only thing that ever has.

—Margaret Mead

Introduction

"What do you want to do after you graduate from high school?" is a question asked of millions of young adults each year. This question is not always asked of young adults with disabilities. All students have dreams about the future including going to college, having a job and career, having friends, and living a lifestyle that they enjoy. Students with disabilities may need support to make decisions and take the steps necessary to accomplish their goals and reach their dreams.

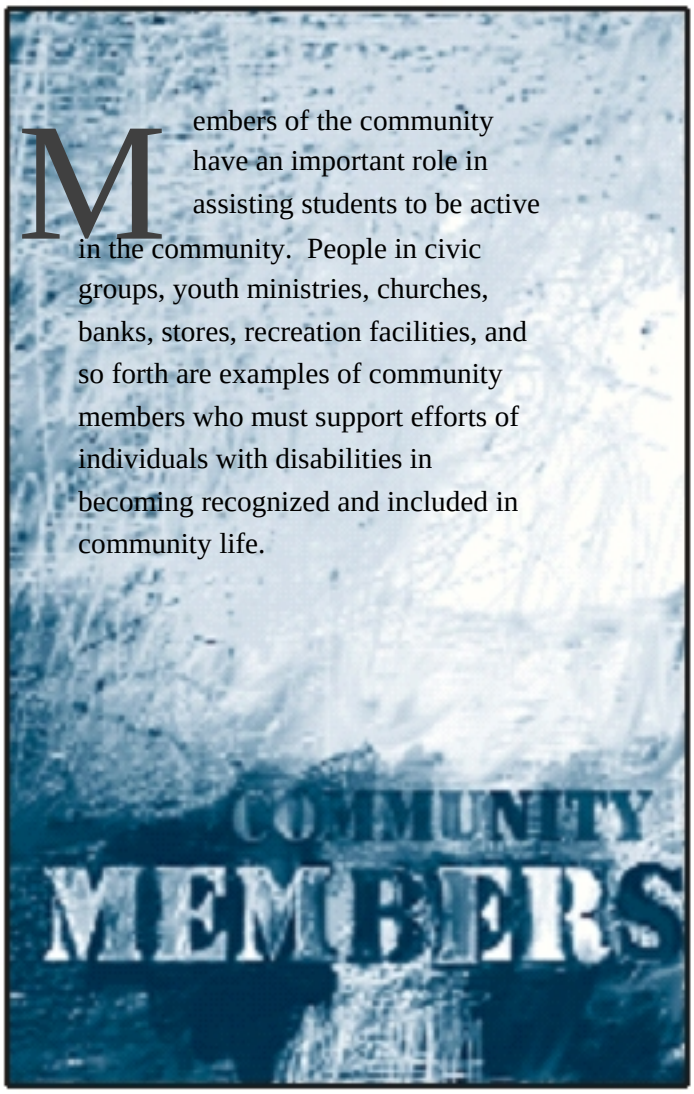
Successful transition planning is a lifelong process in which the student, family members, friends, and professionals come together to develop and act upon a plan that will lead to a successful adult life. For this reason, transition planning has become a part of several federal laws. The most encompassing of these laws, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), focuses on transition as a way to ensure successful postsecondary results.

The law certainly is an important part of helping students prepare for life after high school, yet it is not effective without people who can put it into action. Families, education personnel, adult service providers, and friends are the driving force in ensuring that students reach their dreams. Laws don't make things happen, people do.

Five Major Transition Requirements of IDEA 2004

1. By the age of 16, a student's IEP must include: a) measureable postsecondary goals focusing on future employment, education, and, if needed, independent living; and b) identified transition services.
2. The measureable postsecondary goals must be based upon age-appropriate transition assessments and should incorporate the student's needs, strengths, preferences and interests.
3. The transition services section must include a course of study for the student, and must describe how instruction, related services, community experiences, and employment will be provided.
4. Families, the student, school staff, adult services agencies, and other community members should be involved in developing the IEP for transition.
5. Each student must be notified one year before reaching the age of majority that he/she will reach age of majority and what that change may mean for the IEP process.

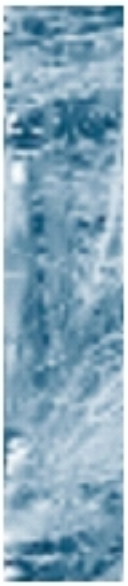
What is transition and how can people make it happen? This booklet provides you with information about roles in transition so that you can make it happen. It describes several specific roles for each member of a transition team. We hope that you can gain insight and suggestions from this document to improve and expand your role in transition planning.



Members of the community have an important role in assisting students to be active in the community. People in civic groups, youth ministries, churches, banks, stores, recreation facilities, and so forth are examples of community members who must support efforts of individuals with disabilities in becoming recognized and included in community life.

Specific Roles of Community Members

Supporting Equal Access



Members of the community must support efforts of individuals with disabilities in getting and maintaining jobs, paying taxes, accessing services, and using public facilities as freely and openly as all people. Speaking against any type of injustice or act of discrimination against an individual with a dis-ability is an essential aspect of being an active member of society. Students with disabilities need support and acceptance from other community members in order to feel they are valuable members of the world around them.

EducatingOthers

Members of the community who recognize individuals with disabilities as "people first" are valuable resources. They are the people who must be involved in educating the general public about disability issues. In addition, these members of the community can serve as role models for others by accepting, including, and accommodating people with disabilities.

Being a Member of the Team

The involvement of community members in the transition planning team is not only beneficial to the student, but it allows the community member an opportunity to learn more about transition and disability issues. Community members such as store clerks, bank tellers, ministers, and neighbors are involved on a daily basis with students with disabilities. These people must take an active role in meetings focusing on the student's full inclusion into the community.

Friendsareanimportantpartoftransition. Withoutfriendspeople becomeisolatedandhavenoplace toturnwhentheyneedsupport,or someonewithwhomtosharehappiness,sadness,and successes. Peers can also play an importantroleinthetransitionprocess. Peersarenotnecessarilyfriends,butarefrom thesameagegroup,havesimilarinterests,or areleaders. Itisimportantthat a student's peers and friends are invitedtoparticipate onthetransitionteam. Friendsandpeersare valuabletothetransitionprocessbecause theycanprovideinsightsandinformation aboutthestudentandaboutexperiencesthe student'speersshare.

Specific Roles of Friends

Being a Confidant

Having someone with whom we can share our dreams, feelings, and thoughts in a nonjudgemental way is important. Students often feel much more comfortable telling a friend something that they might be less inclined to tell an "authority figure." Friends may know a great deal about a student that is different from anyone else in the student's life. For example, a student may tell her best friend that she wants to work for a year before she goes to college. She may be afraid to tell her parents and teachers because they want and expect her to go to college right after she graduates. By having a friend at a transition planning meeting, the student may feel more comfortable addressing the issue because she has a special advocate in her friend who will help her make her point.

Being a Special Advocate

Like personnel from advocacy organizations, friends can provide a student with a sense of having an ally. Having a friend who can advocate a point of view similar to their own will be a source of support for the student. Friends should attend any and all meetings as requested. They should be allowed to have a voice and share with the team members what the student's vision for the future is.

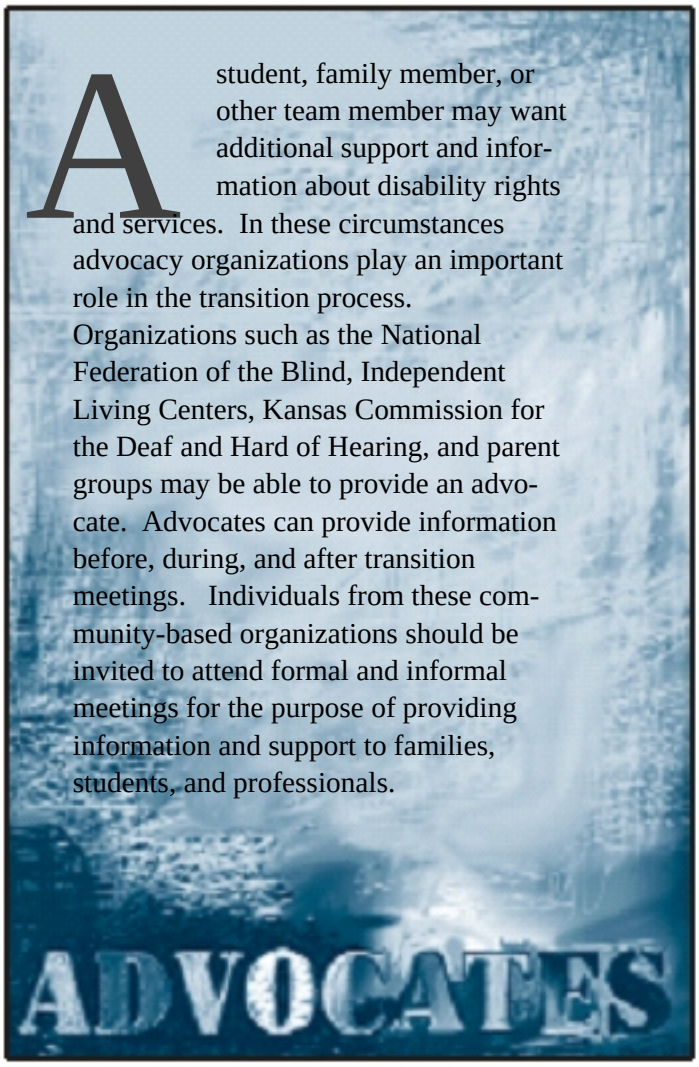
Specific Roles of Peers

Being a Role Model

Peers are often in a position of influence. They are visible and active community members who impact society. In the school setting they have the power to influence what and how students think about other students. It is essential then, that students have experiences with disability issues as well as with students with disabilities. It is even more critical that friendships are established among all students regardless of disability, and that they are positive, equal partnerships where no one is perceived as an outsider.

Providing Unique Information

Peers are in a position to provide information related to age issues that adults are often unable to provide. Especially for a student with a significant disability, peers can tell the transition team how the student can be included in classes, extracurricular activities, and social events. They can provide information about trends, what is "in" or "cool," and what is not. Peers can assist students with disabilities in becoming part of the group. For example, a student with a significant disability was fully included into the general education curriculum. He could not communicate verbally, so he used an electronic communication board. The board was programmed to say, "Hello. How are you? My name is David." His classmates decided that this message was not something kids their age would say, so they changed it to say, "Hey, what's up?"



Specific Rolesof Advocates

Mediating Differences

If a team member anticipates a conflict between team members, it is vital that an advocate from an appropriate advocacy organization be contacted and asked to attend the meeting. An advocate may act as mediator between members of the team whose opinions and visions may not be consistent. The advocate can facilitate a process whereby problem-solving leads to clear understanding and consensus among team members.

Being a Special Advocate

To create an environment that is productive and satisfying, everyone must have an opportunity to express his or her opinions. Advocates have expertise in assisting people with disabilities and their family members get their point across to others. A special advocate should always be requested to a part of the transition team if a student has a significant disability which hinders him or her from effectively exercising choices, rights, and responsibilities. Representatives from advocacy organizations are well versed in disability rights issues and can represent and interpret a student's wishes.

An advocate may also be a special advocate for a family. If a family member thinks that his or her preferences or opinions are not being heard by other members of the transition team, that family member can seek a special advocate for assistance and support.

Being a Liaison

Advocacy organizations provide information to anyone who requests it. Along with this service, professional advocates usually have contacts with other organizations. Advocacy organizations can play a vital role in being the link among different organizations. They have a broad view of all of the services and supports available within a community and can provide information, resources, and referrals.

Specific Roles of School Support Staff

Counseling and Advising Students

The school social worker and guidance counselor may be responsible for helping a student identify interests and strengths. They may also assist the student in learning ways to express his or her thoughts to others. Counseling may involve helping the student adjust to changes throughout the school years. It may mean helping student and family work together to solve problems and move toward common goals. The social worker and counselor should be actively engaged in the transition process and should meet formally and informally with students.

Making Referrals

The school social worker and guidance counselor are often responsible for making referrals within the school system and to outside agencies. If a student expresses interest in a class that traditionally might not be available to him or her, the guidance counselor should take an active role in ensuring equal access and helping to make accommodations. Likewise, if a student needs some support outside of school, the social worker must be ready to make referrals and provide follow-along support to ensure that community resources and services are assisting the student.

Assessing Interests and Matching Student Needs

Social workers and guidance counselors can assist the student in identifying career strengths and interests. To achieve this, they may administer interest and aptitude tests. They will also meet with the student to discuss his or her career and education goals and ensure that the student is taking the classes that will lead to attaining these goals.

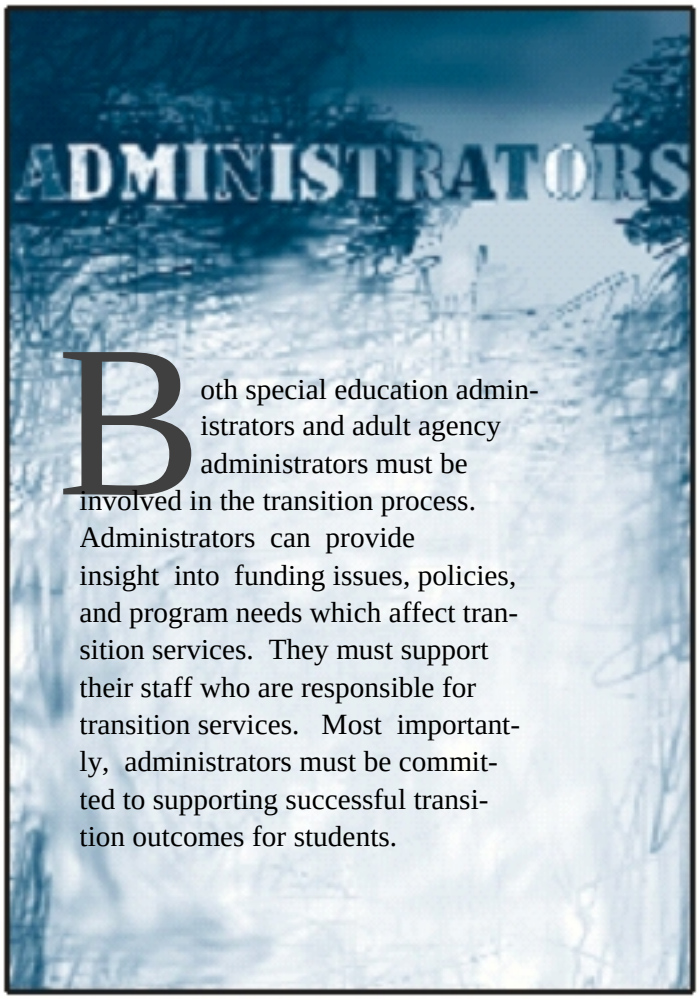
The school psychologist administers specific assessments and reports the findings to the team. He or she interprets scores and presents the student's strengths and learning needs. The psychologist should track progress of the student and identify specific learning styles. He or she can be involved in sharing information about a student's strengths and needs to members of the transition team.

Enrolling in Classes

The guidance counselor can provide information on courses offered through the regular curriculum. He or she may suggest teachers who work well with diverse learners. The guidance counselor should have a thorough knowledge of a student's IEP in order to match IEP goals and objectives with the courses that might best meet the student's needs. The guidance counselor may also hold conferences with students regarding attendance and grades.

Monitoring Progress

Guidance counselors have an additional role of tracking student progress toward graduation. The guidance counselor may monitor a student's grades and identify academic areas in which the student needs additional support. The guidance counselor may also monitor a student's attendance records to ensure that he or she is attending classes. The counselor should also identify students who are at-risk of dropping out of high school and encourage or work with these students so that they complete their educational goals.



Specific Roles of Administrators

Networking

Administrators should participate in and encourage regional, state, and national networking of students, families, educators, and service providers. They should be knowledgeable about state and national organizations and encourage their staff to join and attend conferences which would enhance their knowledge of transition programs and services. Administrators should also network and collaborate with other policy makers regarding training and policies that affect transition.

Developing and Implementing Policies

Administrators develop policies and procedures to ensure programs and services meet the needs the people using them. A primary role of an administrator is to solicit input and ideas from constituency groups most affected by the policies (e.g., staff, individuals with disabilities, and families). To receive this input, administrators should provide information and assistance about transition-related laws and the impact on the agency's services and funding. Through this process, administrators will be able to change and adapt existing policies and practices to better meet the needs of consumers.

Three Mechanisms to Accelerate Systems Change:

1. **Collaboration:** Participatory processes using all major constituencies, including people with disabilities and their families...balancing participation in the process in order to ensure that people outside of the formal system have substantial representation;

2. **Quality Assurance**: Continuous quality improvement and enhancement; and

3. **Legislative process and regulatory change:** Bring about broad-based reform. Change ways federal and state funding streams can be reshaped to support new paradigm system change.

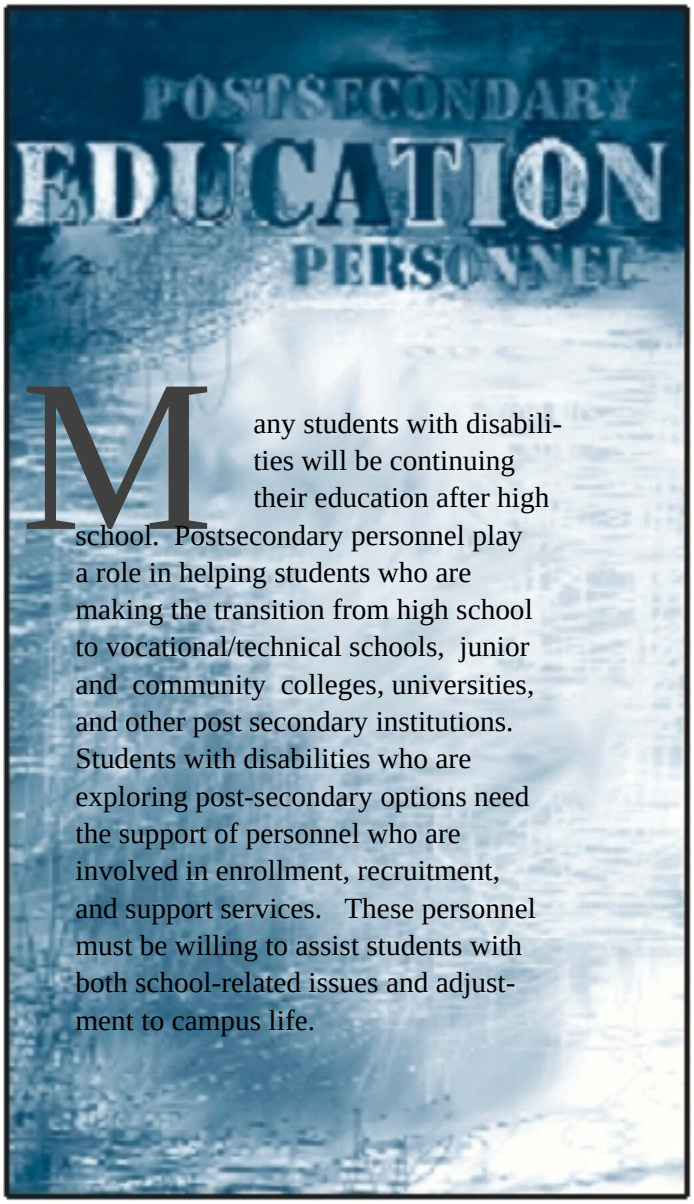
In Bradley, Ashbaugh, Blaney (Eds.)(1994). Creating Individual Supports for People with Developmental Disabilities: A Mandate for Change at Many Levels. Baltimore: Brookes.

Changing Systems

Changing service delivery systems takes a great deal of effort and attention from administrators. Administrators must examine and change existing services, supports, and procedures so that they reflect person-centered service delivery models. In other words, they should look beyond what the system has available and develop supports that meet individual preferences and needs.

Supporting In-service Training

Administrators should be willing to support ongoing in-service training related to transition. Training is critical because the legislation and practices concerning transition have evolved and changed. Administrators should be fully informed and willing to share in-service activities and information to any and all who are involved and interested in transition issues. They can collaborate with other service providers to offer in-service training and information to individuals with disabilities, families, educators, professionals, and community members.



Many students with disabilities will be continuing their education after high school. Postsecondary personnel play a role in helping students who are making the transition from high school to vocational/technical schools, junior and community colleges, universities, and other post secondary institutions. Students with disabilities who are exploring post-secondary options need the support of personnel who are involved in enrollment, recruitment, and support services. These personnel must be willing to assist students with both school-related issues and adjustment to campus life.

Specific Roles of Postsecondary Personnel

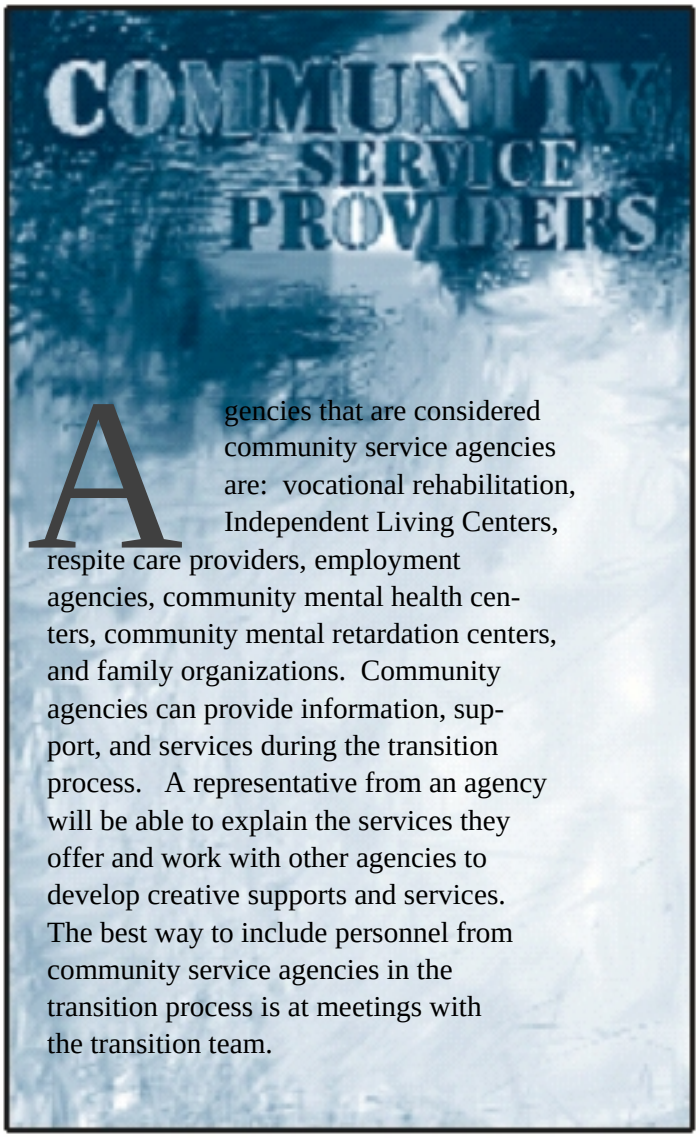
Advising and Informing Students

Personnel from postsecondary institutions advise students on the types of high school classes they need in order to be prepared for postsecondary curriculum. In addition, they can describe the type of classes a student might be taking at the postsecondary level and provide examples of the requirements for those classes. Personnel from postsecondary institutions can also provide information about campus activities that are available to enhance a student's area of study. Finally, they can pose questions to the student and the transition team about other issues to consider prior to the student enrolling in a postsecondary school. Some of these issues might include transportation, accommodations, mobility, housing, fraternities and sororities, and other clubs and organizations.

Providing Accommodations and Support Services

All postsecondary institutions have personnel who specialize in assisting students with disabilities. However, different campuses and programs may specialize in different disability groups. One community college may have an abundance of assistive technology, services, and resources for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, while another college may have expertise in the area of learning disabilities.

Personnel from the office that works with students with disabilities can provide information about how accommodations are made for students. Staff will work with each student and family to gather specific information about the student's needs. With this information, the postsecondary personnel can suggest specific accommodations that can be made. Some of these accommodations may be: readers, tutors, notetakers, specialized computers and computer equipment, lift-buses, books on tape, and interpreters.



Agencies that are considered community service agencies are: vocational rehabilitation, Independent Living Centers, respite care providers, employment agencies, community mental health centers, community mental retardation centers, and family organizations. Community agencies can provide information, support, and services during the transition process. A representative from an agency will be able to explain the services they offer and work with other agencies to develop creative supports and services. The best way to include personnel from community service agencies in the transition process is at meetings with the transition team.

Specific Rolesof Community Service Providers

Providing Information

Agency staff should participate in transition planning meetings and provide support to the transition team. Agencies can provide information about their services and can assist in identifying skills and supports the student will need for success in the community. Agencies that provide information and referral services (e.g., Centers for Independent Living, disability advocacy organizations) can offer a broad picture of all of the services available in the community and in the state. This can be valuable if the transition team is not aware of all that might be available to support the student.

Providing a Unique Perspective

Adult agencies can play an important role in helping team members understand adult issues that may not be considered by the school or family. Because these agencies provide services and support for adults, they can identify issues that students should be aware of and skills they should have to be successful adults. Some of these may be transportation, financial, independent living skills, sexuality, and advocacy issues. Personnel from adult agencies can identify issues that may arise in a student's future and can also assist in resolving issues that currently exist in a student's life.

Collaborating on the Team

Community service providers should work in partnership with the student, school, and family to plan and support the student's and family's dream for the future. Agency personnel can act as a bridge of support between home, school, and the community. This could include developing interagency agreements that define the services and responsibilities of each agency so that consistent and comprehensive services are provided. It may also include sharing activities, staff, and resources among agencies.

Being Innovative

Agency staff must be creative in developing supports and services which will lead to students' dreams for the future. The services their agency offers should be flexible to best support an individual in meeting his or her dreams for full inclusion in the community. This may require modifying current services to better meet a particular individual's needs. By doing this, the agency is providing person-centered services rather than only offering services from a menu of programs. An innovative approach should always include promoting inclusion for students on a community-wide level.

FAMILY MEMBERS

Family members who play important roles in transition planning include parents, brothers and sisters, and extended family members (e.g., grandparents, aunts, uncles). People who are not relatives, but who are regarded as "family" by the student such as foster parents, friends, and guardians are also included in this category. Family members have a great deal of insight and information that enhances the transition process. They are the people who will be involved with the student throughout his or her lifetime and know the most about the student's history, strengths, and needs. Because of this, family members are vital members of a transition team; without their support and participation in meetings and informal discussions, a student's transition may not be successful.

Specific Roles of Family Members

Providing Unique Information

Family members have valuable insights about the student which contribute to planning for transition. Family members can provide historical perspectives which are the foundations upon which transition planning is built. The team can create a more comprehensive, complete plan when family members provide their input and perspectives.

Families also offer a point of view of the student that may not be seen by educators and other professionals. An example of this is a young woman who is a role model for her younger sister. Only family members can contribute this knowledge; school personnel may not know this aspect of the student's life. In addition, brothers and sisters, especially those close in age to the individual, can provide information that relates more closely to the individual's peer group.

Family members can also be a valuable source of information for other families who are going through transition. Families are the best resource for teaching other families about advocating for their students. Family members can do this by providing information about their experiences, both positive and negative, and suggestions for changes.

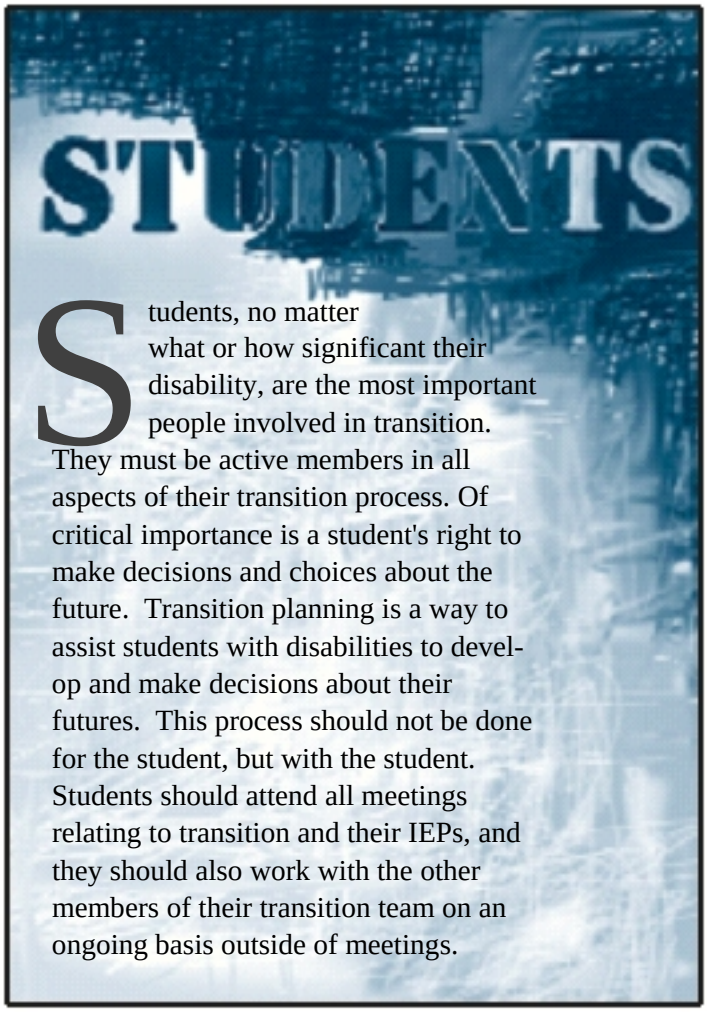
Planning for Financial Security

Making decisions about issues related to financial security is difficult, so being knowledgeable about financial resources and services for individuals with disabilities is a necessary element of family involvement. Families need to consider issues such as wills, trust funds, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), college loans and scholarships, Pell Grants, health insurance, guardianship, and Medicaid waivers. The financial services and resources available to families and individuals with disabilities can be difficult to negotiate, and families must seek accurate information about what is available and appropriate for their student.

Looking Toward the Future

The family is in the best position to help their student create a vision for the future and to determine priorities. They should discuss with their student what he or she wants in life. Issues such as education, career/employment, money, living, socialization, and community involvement should be thoroughly discussed. From this information, the family will be able to identify the skills and experience the student will need to achieve the vision.

In addition to assisting students determine goals and visions for the future, families play an integral part in teaching their students to become good self-advocates. They can encourage self-determination, decision making, and responsibility in their students when the student is away from school.



Students, no matter what or how significant their disability, are the most important people involved in transition. They must be active members in all aspects of their transition process. Of critical importance is a student's right to make decisions and choices about the future. Transition planning is a way to assist students with disabilities to develop and make decisions about their futures. This process should not be done for the student, but with the student. Students should attend all meetings relating to transition and their IEPs, and they should also work with the other members of their transition team on an ongoing basis outside of meetings.

Specific Roles of Students

Understanding Transition

Students must be knowledgeable of what transition is and how the transition planning process works. Teaching students about transition and self-advocacy is necessary for successful student involvement and, ultimately, for successful transitions. Students must understand and be able to exercise their rights and responsibilities with regard to the IEP and the transition planning process. It is essential that a student assumes as much responsibility in transition planning as possible. If a student cannot exercise his or her rights and responsibilities because of a significant disability, a special advocate should be identified to assist the student (See section entitled *Advocates*). Students should identify personal goals and dreams prior to an IEP or transition meeting. They must understand that transition is not just a few meetings, but an entire process.

Being a Self-Advocate

The student must be able to advocate for his or her vision of the future. Self-advocacy is based on the belief that everyone has a right to speak up and make decisions about his or her own future. Being a self-advocate is essential for full participation in the transition planning process. If a student is unable to advocate, then the team must develop a way to enable the student to communicate his or her preferences. A communication device, a special advocate, or a communication expert are possible means to assist a student express his or her opinions. Finally, students need to know that self-advocacy goes beyond a meeting; they may need to talk with individual team members on an informal or ongoing basis. The team should encourage this informal networking and acknowledge that the student is a self-advocate.

Making Decisions

Students should make choices and decisions about their futures. They must be the ones who determine priorities and develop their visions. In order to make informed decisions, students need information about different options. For example, a student may want to try several different jobs before he decides what career he is interested in pursuing, or a student should experience different types of living situations (dorm, apartment, group home, etc.) before deciding upon where he wants to live when he graduates.

In addition to experiencing different options, students need to be informed of services and accommodations available to help them be successful. Students may need to meet and talk with people who provide supports to people with disabilities to find out what is available. It is the responsibility of transition teams to provide options and experiences before expecting students to make decisions about their futures.

Four Basic Transition Skills Relevant To All Students With Disabilities

Fundamental skills or knowledge students can have that will serve them well in a wide variety of adult situations are the following:

- ability to assess themselves, including their skills and abilities;
- awareness of the accommodations they need because of their disability;
- knowledge of their civil rights through legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973; and
- self-advocacy skills necessary to express their needs in the workplace, in educational institutions, and in community settings.

Adapted from: Wandry, D. and Repetto, J. (1993, March). Transition services as defined by the IDEA. NICHCY, p. 10.

Participating in the Community

Students must be given opportunities for inclusion in school and community activities. These activities include receiving community-based instruction, being included in general education classes, and being actively involved in extracurricular activities. Community activities should include peers with and without disabilities. Students should be given many opportunities for real world experiences so they develop the skills needed for life outside of home and school.

EDUCATION PERSONNEL

Teachers and other education personnel play a key role in preparing a student for full participation in the community. Education personnel actively involved in transition include special education teachers, general education teachers, vocational coordinators, and transition specialists. In the past educators have been primarily involved with academic instruction. Today, however, the focus of education should include all aspects of adult life such as employment, community participation, and independent living. Teachers and other educators must consider what they teach, how they teach, and where they teach so students learn the information and skills needed for successful futures.

Specific Roles of Education Personnel

Understanding Transition

It is essential that all educators understand the transition planning process. Although many school districts are now employing transition specialists, it is important for all teachers to be knowledgeable of transition. As more students are fully included in general education, general as well as special educators should have a working knowledge of the process. All teachers must understand how the transition planning process can be implemented within their classroom or program. This means that all of a student's teachers must be involved in the planning process by attending meetings and informally communicating on a regular basis.

Evaluating Progress

Because teachers spend so much time with students, they are an excellent resource to help identify a student's strengths, preferences and transition needs. There are many methods available to evaluate progress. Teachers can track student progress using traditional approaches such as curriculum-based tests, standardized assessments, and ongoing observations. Another possibility is observing the student in several different job situations to determine which job the student prefers. What is most important is that the evaluation process compiles information that is relevant and functional to transition for each student.

Listening to Students and Families

Listening to students' and families' dreams of the future is critical to an educator's role. The traditional approach to including students and family members as part of the team has been to invite them to meetings, but not fully include them in making decisions. Currently most professionals recognize the importance of student and family involvement in transition planning. Opportunities for planning and listening must happen both formally and informally.

Listening to students and families must be ongoing and involve more than just one IEP meeting. Families need more than one annual IEP meeting to provide indepth information. Partnerships must be established in which family members are active and informed participants, making decisions with professionals. Educators will need to develop a method of ongoing communication with family members throughout the course of a student's transition. This could include home visits, meetings at school, telephone calls, and notes.

Developing creative ways for students to communicate their preferences and dreams is an important part of an educator's job. Some ways educators have received students preferences and interests include: person-centered planning, observations and evaluations by the teacher or paraprofessional, self-evaluations, and interviews with the student.

Facilitating Transition IEP Meetings

Teachers should organize transition IEP meetings that focus on the student's vision for the future. The transition planning meeting should be facilitated so that the student and family actively express their opinions and make decisions. An exciting new approach that ensures active student involvement is to support the student to facilitate his or her own meeting. Using this approach, teachers assist students to prepare for and conduct the IEP meeting. Prior to the meeting, students identify their interests, needs, and preferences. With this information, they develop preliminary goals and objectives. The student invites all IEP team members, and then actually facilitates the meeting.

Modifying Curriculum

A primary responsibility of educators is to plan and implement activities throughout the school day that relate specifically to a student's transition goals and objectives. School personnel are responsible for reviewing programs and curricula to determine if the skills being taught in school will prepare the student for adult life. Some of the areas that must be addressed include: employment, independent living, friendships, recreation, and postsecondary education. Educators should be willing to develop alternative curriculum and instructional procedures in order to address transition goals and outcomes.

Teaching

One of the main responsibilities of education personnel is to ensure successful post-school outcomes for their students. When students exit the school system, they should be prepared for and have the support to be successful in the world beyond the school doors. Teachers have a great deal of influence over how a student's vision for the future is achieved simply by what and how they teach. They provide students with experiences and opportunities that build skills and facilitate progress toward their students' dreams. All teachers are responsible for ensuring that what is taught is relevant to students' future aspirations. Before this can be attained, teachers should develop a specific planning process that helps students and families develop a vision for the future.

Building Bridges

Developing connections between school, community agencies, and families is an important component of successful transition. For many families, teachers are the most critical link to their child. Education personnel must be knowledgeable about community and adult resources in order to provide accurate information to students and families.

One way that teachers can become better acquainted with community agencies is to visit these agencies, even with their students. Teachers should meet the key personnel at each agency with whom a student may be involved. Another way is to gather brochures, resource guides, and other materials about different agencies. This information can then be shared with students and their families. Finally, teachers should invite staff from adult agencies to transition planning meetings.