

Transitions for High School Seniors Focused on Students with Disabilities

With school buildings closed for the remainder of the school year, district and site teams around the country are finding creative ways to address end-of-year planning. One of the essential planning elements for students with disabilities is transition planning, as this helps students, families and their receiving teams prepare for transitions between schools, programs and large life events. This document is intended to provide school level teams guidance and inspiration to implement transition activities and instruction, with specific focus on high school seniors with disabilities. Additional guidance and recommendations are offered that may benefit all high school seniors and their families to prepare for plans beyond high school.

In this guide, you will find:

- **Guidance** for covering site or district level core teams to problem solve network and individual student challenges for transition
- **Practical reminders and resources** for continuing plans with high school seniors
- **Recommendations and inspiration** for activities to engage students and families
- **Ideas** for students to learn and practice transition skills at home or in a virtual setting

Audience: Special Education Teams, Administrators, Students and Families

Start by Convening the School Level Core Team

To better serve individuals and whole groups of students, coordinate with your site and district teams to convene the core group supporting students with postsecondary transition planning, including high school seniors, juniors and students with IEPs. This core group may include school counselors, career and vocational coaches, grade level leaders and Special Education staff, as well as targeted district or community based organization staff members. While transition planning and instruction may operate differently during school building closures, the purpose and value of transition teams and planning remain as important as ever. Bringing together a core team of cross-functional collaborators to plan for and problem solve common needs can help to respond effectively to issues as they arise. Teams may need to devise ways to educate families about vocational programs or financial aid outside of traditional in-person education nights, engage students in career and college fairs virtually, or address individual student transition plans that have been interrupted with school and organizational closures. Leaning on a team to approach and tackle these matters will allow sites to communicate and respond quickly to students and their families around general, group and individual matters arising for transition plans.

When Creating Site/Department Level Transition Teams, Ask...

- ❖ What student population is this group targeting, and who are the site and district team members involved with this population (e.g. Seniors, Juniors, Students with IEPs)?
- ❖ Who is required to participate on these transition teams, and what is each member's capacity for participation, planning and follow up?
- ❖ Where are our needs, and how can we connect with members of our school, district or community to fill needs our team does not have the capacity to address?
- ❖ What community based organizations are we currently partnering with, and what other organizations are available to support us at this time? (Note: many county and state level organizations, including community colleges, universities and Departments of Vocational Rehabilitation have specialized supports and resources available to address student, family and educator needs.)
- ❖ Are there pressing topics of interest for our community to address in a virtual forum or video update (financial aid, changes in enrollment requirements, etc)
- ❖ Do the tools and events currently available meet student needs, or do we need to explore additional and alternative community based resources for students?
- ❖ Where and how are we communicating information with families to support transition plans?
- ❖ What school events are aligned with student transition plans (e.g. Career Day, volunteering at school events, participating in electives)?

Planning for Seniors with IEPs

High school seniors with IEPs should have established transition plans in place and are likely well on their way to completion of those plans. When supporting high school students with IEPs, continue to offer opportunities to work on postsecondary goal progress, including instruction on career planning and vocational skill development. Review current transition plans and work with families and transition teams to adjust plans as needed. Educate students and families about community based organizations and college and university resources available to support transitions. Most importantly, recognize that many people are working through questions around transition planning at local, state and national levels to support your work with students.

Prepare Students with Targeted Instructional Opportunities.

Schools can provide learning opportunities to individuals and groups of students to prepare for transitions, while also matching students to available online learning options.

School-led instructional opportunities can include:

- ❖ Seminars / Webinars for transition skills: completing a job application, preparing for an interview, applying to college, responding to college acceptance, completing enrollment for college.

- The [Center for Transition Innovations](#) offers lesson plans, videos, interactive activities and other resources, including financial education topics and self assessment tools educators can use with students to support transition exploration and planning.
 - [Money Smart for Young People](#) provides a series of curriculums for grades Pre-K to 12 that include lesson plans for teachers and resources for parents and caregivers, including [The Computer-Based Instruction \(CBI\)](#) for students 13 years and older.
- ❖ Teach self-advocacy skills around disabilities and learning accommodations. Students can learn to draft emails to professors or vocational case managers to introduce themselves, discuss support for learning and development, and ask for help solving problems as they arise. Creating tools and templates with students can prepare them to navigate new learning and working environments on their own in the future. This can include copies of students' accommodations and modifications in student friendly language.
- [Sample letter of introduction to an Instructor in a College Setting](#) is a template created by Cheryl Theis, Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
 - [Sample Reasonable Accommodation request letter - higher education](#) provides advice and a template, provided by Transition to Adulthood
 - [How to Request an Accommodation: Accommodation Form Letter](#) is a template and information on requesting an accommodation for employment
 - [ME! Lessons for Teaching Self Awareness and Self Advocacy](#) The Zarrow Center for Learning Enrichment at the University of California has developed lessons to support teaching students self advocacy. These tools include templates and sample materials, such as [Worksheet 5-2: My Disability Information Form](#) that helps students describe their disability.
 - [Using the Vocational Profile for Students with Disabilities](#) The New Jersey Department of Education has a profile template to help students determine what they need to support their future.
- ❖ Network with students. Help them to connect with agencies, counselors or friends to have a safety net of resources available to them following graduation.
- Host “Senior Work Parties” for students to come together to work on applications and have a space to ask each other questions and share thoughts, concerns and information with one another.

- ❖ Involve diverse voices. Involve students and adults in the community who have recently made transitions by asking them to share lessons learned by email or short videos to post for students. Host student panels on postsecondary pathway options, including college, trade programs, deferred enrollment, and workforce.
- ❖ Connect students with virtual summer opportunities to support their transition planning. CollegeWise is collecting a [list of summer opportunities](#) in academic and life skill areas.

Online instruction available for students:

- ❖ [Get Ready for College](#) is a free series of online lessons, each focusing on a different aspect in the college preparation, selection, and disability services process.
- ❖ [Work-Based Learning](#) is a free self-paced course comprising three online lessons, each focusing on a different aspect in the development and implementation of work-based learning activities for students with disabilities.
- ❖ [My Next Move](#) offers online career research and education options. Students can browse careers by interests, fields or specific keywords. The website is also available in [Spanish](#) and houses resources for other options like the US Department of Labor’s site to find [apprenticeships](#).
- ❖ [Cents and Sensibility](#) online curriculum aims to teach money management to individuals with disabilities and the greater community.
- ❖ [Explore Work](#) from WINTAC and [Going to College](#) by Virginia Commonwealth University both offer online modules for student learning relating to transitions.
- ❖ [LinkedIn](#) offers a “Learning LinkedIn for Students” training to teach students how to create their own LinkedIn page to start networking

Be Proactive with IEP Teams about Changes

For students with IEPs, Case Managers, School Counselors and IEP Team Members should review plans with the student and the transition team, inviting outside agencies as appropriate, to support each student’s projected path. Consider site level and network level team members to fill needs for transition team planning and ongoing operational roles. For most high school seniors with IEPs, students can continue the transition plan with little to no variation. Where changes may need to be made, such as revisions to vocational training or Department of Vocation and Rehabilitation intake services for students, case managers can work with students and families to problem solve and adapt plans for postsecondary pathways.

When Creating Transition Teams for Individual Students, Ask...

- ❖ What are the goals (academic/post-secondary, functional life, employment!) of this student?
- ❖ What skills and knowledge does the student require to prepare for these goals?

- ❖ Who does this student need to contact and collaborate with to accomplish this goal outside of our school?
- ❖ How will our team coordinate these plans with the student, and who is responsible for each of the parts?

Educate Students and Families

Help students and families to understand the rights of students in special education, as well as eligibility requirements for community services and programs. Many families may require introductions to college resource centers or benefit from education on how to self-advocate in postsecondary programs. If you are working with students who are 18 or older, request permission from them before sharing any information with their families. Reflect upon practices and assumptions that might not be culturally responsive or equitable when working with students and families on transition planning. This Virginia DOE's Fast Facts document provides guidance on [Culturally Responsive Transition Planning](#) for students with IEPs.

- ❖ Provide explicit information on how to connect with Disability Coordinators at post-secondary education settings and identify accommodation and modification needs, especially those needed for remote learning since they may not currently be reflected on IEPs.
- ❖ Collaborate with the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to support students with disabilities. Many are offering virtual career exploration workshops, virtual job shadows, virtual job coaching, virtual job fairs.
- ❖ Direct students to request transition checklists from their chosen program. [Examples](#) of Washington state college transition checklists are available from PSCCN for reference. A [general checklist](#) offered by FAME Education is available online, as well as [ThinkCollege!'s transition checklist](#) focused on individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- ❖ Look for “Virtual Transition Fairs” or activities offered by community organizations and share these opportunities with families and students. If one does not exist, consider organizing one in collaboration with neighboring schools and organizations.
- ❖ Encourage students to look at community based organizations and resources to support their transition to independence. [ABLEnow](#) helps individuals with disabilities save money for qualified expenses without being taxed on them. The website provides financial education, resources and options for ambassadors or advisors to support eligible members.

For all Seniors, Continue Course!

Whatever the case may be for students, continue plans to support submission of applications, enrollment and engagement in postsecondary plans. This will keep students invested in moving forward with decisions despite current uncertainty, thus possibly reducing the “summer melt”

drop off of student enrollment. All students, regardless of special education status, will benefit from targeted information and activities to support their chosen post-graduation plan.

Be aware of changes to enrollment requirements.

Stay informed about updates and changes to policies for student enrollment to colleges and vocational programs. The [National Association For College Admission Counseling](#) website is tracking changes to admissions requirements at colleges nationally and internationally to centralize information for college requirements. In other cases, states have been providing policy updates and changes on school guidelines. The [Education Commission of the States](#) has an updated resource page on state policy changes and executive actions, including information postsecondary updates nationally and by select states.

Make sure all students have a plan.

For students who do not have a postsecondary plan, make use of [checklists](#) and tools ([example materials](#)) to help students create a personalized plan and track progress meeting their goals. Many schools are using online surveys or 1:1 phone calls to confirm where each student is in their process of applications and enrollment. Consider having information or data sharing agreements in place to help get students to the finish line with application and enrollment requirements. If students appear to have fallen off-track, act as a bridge to reconnect students with the organization. Offer to sit in on calls with students to provide encouragement and guidance on calls.

- ❖ Incorporate surveys in senior advisories. This can inform decisions about needing to go back to previous checkpoints, confirm which students need help to make or recreate a plan, or indicate which students need support to remove barriers in their plan. The National College Attainment Network (NCAN) [guidance document](#) offers immediate guidance for supporting seniors with transition to 2-/4-year colleges. Key questions include:
 - What is your plan after high school?
 - Have you submitted an application?
 - Have you completed financial aid applications?
 - Have you received any letters from programs on your application status?
 - Have you made any decisions about your next steps?

Communicate widely about opportunities and resources for all students.

Offer opportunities for students and their families to attend school meetings, online webinars or watch videos with information on hot topics. Encourage students to request communication from their intended fall placements in order to increase their knowledge and access to updates and learn about upcoming events. They can sign up for newsletters or email alerts, follow social media accounts, or directly contact a college / career counselor to request regular communication.

- ❖ Host Family Education Night or Town Hall events across a school district or network to educate students and families on common topics:

- Financial Education
 - Applying to and Enrolling in College
 - Changes to Enrollment Requirements
- ❖ Provide information about next steps between acceptance and starting at college. The [College Knowledge Resources from WCAN](#) offers a great handout on orientation information for colleges.
 - ❖ Have students search for webinars or virtual open house opportunities for their chosen college, trade school or community organization. Many schools are offering options to communicate and connect with students, including webinars for prospective students. Use this [compilation](#) of college virtual tour resources, statistics and videos.
 - ❖ Prepare students for potential changes to summer course enrollment. This [article](#) provides some initial information about changes anticipated with summer courses.
 - ❖ Provide students and families the [Summer Planning Guide](#) by CollegeWise for additional ideas and information on transition activities to complete over the summer.

Plan activities to support students with transitions.

Schools often have a variety of activities in place to prepare students for transitions toward the end of the school year. Make plans to continue these activities in virtual spaces wherever possible, making use of network and community resources to incorporate learning and streamline processes for student, family and staff interaction. Activities can be planned for advisory classes or targeted small groups of students, including:

- ❖ “Virtual Campus Tours” with student groups. Use the [compilation link](#) mentioned above for group virtual tours and exploration.
- ❖ “Matriculation Office Hours” offered in partnership with community college and university representatives to answer questions and problem solve student needs.
- ❖ Encourage students to do research on their own or with peers. [CollegeWise](#) offers a number of free web-based events focused on college counseling.

Leverage community resources available to students.

Look outside of your site and district network to address lingering needs for students. Many community based organizations, locally and nationally, are gathering tools, resources and personnel to support general education and special education students with postsecondary transitions. For example, some college admissions offices are offering individual online counseling to high school students due to changes in their travel and outreach routines for the spring. Look for resources like these available to students in your schools, particularly those aimed to serve low-income students and address concerns of equity in higher education.

Resources available include:

- ❖ [SwiftStudent](#)'s free financial aid forms and resources for financial aid decisions. The FAQ section provides targeted guidance for subgroups of students, including students who are homeless or in foster care.
- ❖ [CollegeConnect](#) is a free online platform built to connect current high school students with college students to answer questions amid the COVID-19 closures.
- ❖ [Coalition for College](#) is hosting virtual college fairs. The first, scheduled for April 23rd, reached capacity early. Make an online account to get updates on upcoming events available for educators, students and families.
- ❖ [The National Foster Youth Institute](#) has gathered a [growing list of resources](#) to support current and former foster youth with transitional service needs during COVID-19.

Help Students and Families Celebrate

Typically students would share their news about college and vocational program acceptances, new jobs or summer plans at school with friends and school staff. Provide space and time in virtual moments or phone calls to mark celebrations with students individually, and when appropriate, in groups. Invite families and extended staff members to join in where appropriate. Some fun ways to celebrate with students about their next chapter can include:

- Take photos of students holding up their acceptance letters
- Write cards to students on behalf of the staff
- Share student updates at staff meetings to encourage other members of your team to join in the celebrations
- Host virtual parties for students
- Create a cheer, write haikus, play a theme song, make a TikTok video, take a virtual staff photo with a personalized banner or sign

Anything that serves the purpose of building community and sharing joy with students and families is critical during these unknown times. More ideas on how to close out the school year can be found within Marshall's [Closing and Transition Ceremonies](#) document.

Final Word

There are many ways to approach transitions for high school seniors and each student will be in a different place in the process. Remember to take a team approach to educating, informing and preparing students and families. Keep in mind that high school students with IEPs already have a postsecondary transition plan in place to guide instruction and actions for students and their IEP Transition Teams. Make use of personalized transition plans for students, as well as school, district and community resources and connections for postsecondary pathways. Colleges, universities and community based organizations around the country are making adjustments to enrollment and intake processes to better serve students in distance learning.

Check this document and the resources embedded for reference, as information is regularly changing in regards to transition planning as more information is made available.

Additional Resources

CollegeWise maintains a [COVID-19 Resources](#) page that is live-updated with additional information, resources and events for students.

Virginia Center for Transition Innovations: [COVID-19 Resource Page](#) includes the article on [Tips for Transition Planning](#)

The Hunt Institute's COVID-19 [Policy Playbook](#) on Student Transitions

Puget Sound College and Career Network's [College Knowledge Materials](#) has great month-by-month resources for students planning transitions. Some items are Washington state specific, yet many are generally helpful for guiding students. They also offer materials, resources and videos for [Spanish speaking families](#).

The [National Technical Assistance Center on Transition](#) has a [Transition Assessment Toolkit](#) with sample instruments for age-appropriate transition assessments

The Indiana Secondary Transition Resource Center's [Transition Assessment Matrix](#) offers options by transition area (employment, education/training, independent living), grade levels and disability category.

Forbes article, [“The COVID College Choice: How to Pick a College During A Global Pandemic”](#) offers ideas and perspectives to educators and students for approaching decisions in this uncertain time.



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