

# WHAT SCHOOL COUNSELORS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSITION AND IEP PLANNING



## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR IN TRANSITION PLANNING?

**You are Important!** School Counselors can provide many valuable insights at an IEP meeting, from knowledge of postsecondary education programs to school classes and preparations that lead to successful post-school entry. Counselors can help IEP team members think ahead and prepare students in their course of study so they have the scope and sequence of classes needed for admission to postsecondary programs or entry into high quality employment following high school exit.



## PLANNING THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO ADULT LIFE – AN INTRODUCTION

Transition planning is important because it provides a framework for identifying long-range goals and the services and strategies that will help students as they make the shift from school to adult life.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that guarantees students with disabilities the right to a free, appropriate education. For every student eligible for services under IDEA, the local school district must develop and implement an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) describing the unique set of services and supports needed. When IDEA was reauthorized in 1997, Congress put a major focus on improving adult outcomes. In 2004, the purpose of the Act was further expanded to ensure that students with disabilities have access to special education and related services designed to prepare them for employment and independent living.

## WHAT IS TRANSITION?

**Transition services** are defined as educational activities and supports designed to assist students with disabilities to reach measurable postsecondary goals. The determination of specific transition service needs stems from individual results of various age-appropriate transition assessments.

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WI DPI) promotes the objective of educational services for all students as preparation for College and Career. Academic Career Planning has been added as a requirement for students in grades 6-12. In addition, the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) includes the collaborative responsibility of school, vocational rehabilitation services and long term support to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to students.

## WHEN DO TRANSITION PLANNING AND SERVICES BEGIN?

In Wisconsin, students aged 14 and above must have 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 service needs. The IEP must include a plan for **transition services** that allows the IEP team to consider other educational experiences in the school or in the community that can help the student achieve his/her desired post-school goals or outcomes (college, employment, military, technical training, independent living). This statement must be based on the student's needs, preferences and goals and be reviewed every year as part of the IEP process.

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## WHO IS INVOLVED IN TRANSITION PLANNING?

Many individuals should come together to form a team to help the student plan for transition. In addition to the student and his or her family, other members include special education and general education teachers, related service, providers and administrators. Some schools have transition specialists who may be well-informed about resources and adult services in the community. School counselors are always welcome to attend and may be invited.

Representatives from agencies that provide post high school services should be involved, including the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Services, the Department of Human Services - Aging and Disabilities Resource Center (ARDC) and Disability Specialists from Institutes of Higher Education. Others may serve as one-time or ongoing consultants to the team, sharing expertise or insight to help the team plan and make decisions.

## HOW ARE THE ACP AND PTP COMPLEMENTARY?

Transition must be based on the student’s needs, taking into account his/her strengths, preferences, and interests. It includes: job exploration, work based learning experiences, higher education counseling, social and independent living skills, and instruction in self-advocacy. These transition services should be identified after age appropriate assessments have been provided for the student to identify their preferences, interests, strengths, and needs. This can and should start with the assessments that all students are participating in through the Academic and Career Planning process and Reviewing the Transition Services will allow you to see a connection between the Academic and Career Plan activities and instruction as well as additional services that can be put into place to help the students meet their post-secondary goals.

Postsecondary Transition Plan (PTP)	Academic Career Plan (ACP)
<b>Age Appropriate Transition Assessment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Selected assessments to fill in gaps of information that the team has on the student to identify their Preferences, Interests, Needs, and Strengths.</li> <li>Assessments in the area of: College Readiness, Employment, Independent Living, Self-Advocacy, Learning Style, etc.</li> </ul>	<b>Academic Career Planning Tool</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Discuss with special education case managers appropriate accommodations and modifications to make assessments appropriate for all students.</li> <li>Work with special education case managers to identify to allow access to review career planning assessments.</li> </ul>
<b>Post-Secondary Goals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education and Training</li> <li>Employment</li> <li>Where appropriate, Independent Living</li> </ul>	<b>Discussion about Post-Secondary Goals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Education and Training: Discuss details of programs and outcomes with students.</li> <li>Employment: Use of Wisconsin Career Pathways to identify career choices.</li> </ul>
<b>Pre-Employment Transition Services</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job Exploration Counseling Services</li> <li>Work Based Learning Experiences</li> <li>Post-Secondary and Higher Education Related Services</li> <li>Social and Independent Living Skills for Home</li> <li>Social and Independent Living Skills for Community</li> <li>Instruction in Self-Advocacy</li> </ul>	<b>Academic and Career Plan Process</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify direct links between Pre-Employment Transition Services</li> <li>Work as a part of the IEP Team to identify opportunities present in the district and community (extracurricular activities, job shadows, youth apprenticeship, etc.) that would aide in the student meeting their postsecondary goals. Suggest as a transition service.</li> </ul>
<b>Course of Study</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development of a list of specific courses that the student will take in school.</li> <li>Align to student’s postsecondary goals.</li> </ul>	<b>Course of Study Development</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Align to courses in the PTP, make adjustments as necessary</li> <li>Discussion of High School Pathways aligned to student’s goals.</li> </ul>

## WHAT TRANSITION TOPICS SHOULD THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR BE FAMILIAR?

### When should a student with disabilities graduate?

IDEA-eligible students are entitled to receive special education services through the year in which they turn 21 years old. Although many students with disabilities will complete their diploma requirements before that time and graduate with age peers, some will continue to need services. Once a student accepts a diploma the district is no longer required to continue services under IDEA. The IEP team must work together to carefully consider if the student requires services beyond the traditional “senior year”.

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## **Can a student with disabilities participate in commencement ceremonies, even if he/she is not accepting a diploma?**

There is an important distinction between participation in commencement ceremonies and accepting a diploma. There is nothing in statute or regulation that prohibits a school district from allowing a special education student who will not receive a diploma to participate in the graduation ceremony with his or her classmates.

## **Are there special considerations for students who plan to attend college?**

At the college level, education is no longer a right or an entitlement, but a matter of eligibility. Students with disabilities are admitted to college the same way as all other students. Students research the schools that interest them, go visit, meet other students and staff, and ask questions. For students who plan to attend college, a waiver of challenging high school courses such as advanced math and foreign language is not recommended. Colleges are not required to waive courses deemed essential to the curriculum.

It is important to understand that all colleges are different and policies and procedures vary from one college to the next. Ask about admission requirements including SAT or ACT exam scores. Community colleges or other junior colleges may not require a high school diploma for admissions; some offer high school equivalency diploma programs or dual enrollment. Students are not required to tell the college Admissions Office about a disability, but doing so will allow the college to provide information about services for students with disabilities.

Many colleges allow students with disabilities to ask for special consideration during the admissions process, if needed. Ensure students with disabilities attend college fairs and meaningfully participate in activities. Meeting and working with a Disability Specialist on campus will help ensure a pathway for success.

## **Are there post-secondary programs for students who are involved in an alternate curriculum?**

Yes, there are inclusive college programs available for students who have an intellectual or developmental disability. [Think College](#) is a national organization dedicated to developing, expanding, and improving inclusive higher education opportunities for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Visiting this website can help you learn about inclusive programs in this state and around the country. In addition, there are resources available to help in learning more about programs and aid in preparation for students and families.

### **Wisconsin Transition APP <https://www.witig.org/witransition-app.html>**

The Wisconsin Transition Improvement Grant (TIG) The Transition Improvement Grant has designed a transition app to increase self-direction and self-advocacy for all Wisconsin youth in the transition planning process. This app is designed to help Wisconsin students and family members participate in the transition planning process. The questions in the app help students give input into the requirements of the state and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). As a side note, this app can be used with students who are not receiving Special Education Services as a part of the ACP process.

### **Postsecondary Transition Plan (PTP) Demo at <http://www2.dpi.state.wi.us/PTPDemo/Pages/DistrictMenu.aspx>.**

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has developed a web-based Postsecondary Transition Plan (PTP) IEP teams in documenting the post high school transition requirements while meeting individual student needs. To prepare for the PTP portion of the IEP meeting, please visit the **PTP Demonstration Site**. As you progress through the document, you will see blue "Learn More" buttons which provide definitions, examples and resources that will help you plan and prepare for each step of transition planning before the IEP meeting. As a member of the IEP team, you can help select career cluster(s) and pathway(s) that describe the student's preferences, interests, and strengths.