

# ***What School Counselors Need to Know About Transition for Students with Disabilities***

School counselors are essential in guiding students with disabilities through transition planning. They offer critical information and insights to the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, covering areas such as postsecondary education options and required coursework for success after high school. Counselors assist in developing students' course plans to ensure they meet the requirements for college admission, apprenticeship programs, or high-demand careers, effectively preparing them for life after graduation.

## **PLANNING THE TRANSITION FROM SCHOOL TO ADULT LIFE**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) guarantees that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education and mandates the creation of an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) customized to each eligible student's needs. Transition planning within the IEP aims to prepare students for life after high school, covering aspects such as employment, further education or training, and independent living. This plan involves setting long-term goals and detailing the services and strategies required during high school to reach those goals. Schools use the Postsecondary Transition Plan (PTP), which is included in the IEP, to support this process.

## **WHAT ARE TRANSITION SERVICES?**

Transition services help students with disabilities reach specific postsecondary goals related to education or training, employment, and independent living. Detailed in the Postsecondary Transition Plan (PTP), these services include Job Exploration Counseling, Work-Based Learning Experiences, Postsecondary and Higher Education Support, Work Readiness and Independent Living Skills for Home, Community-Based Work Readiness and Independent Living Skills, and Instruction in Self-Advocacy. The IEP team assesses the suitability of independent living goals. Information on activities for each component can be found in the Transition Services outlined in the PTP resource.

## **HOW ARE TRANSITION SERVICES IDENTIFIED FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS?**

Transition service needs are identified through age-appropriate assessments that focus on the student's preferences, interests, needs, and strengths. These assessments inform the Postsecondary Transition Plan, which sets measurable goals for employment, education or training, and, if relevant, independent living.

According to the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WI DPI), students in grades 6-12 must have an Academic and Career Plan (ACP). Most students will have an ACP in place before their first transition plan is developed. The ACP helps students explore career options, set personal, social, and career goals, and engage in activities that promote lifelong learning skills. The insights

gained from the ACP assessments are valuable for transition planning and should be shared and discussed during transition planning meetings. For more information on Academic and Career Planning, visit the WI DPI website.

## **WHEN DO TRANSITION PLANNING AND TRANSITION SERVICES BEGIN?**

In Wisconsin, students aged 14 and older must have an IEP with measurable postsecondary goals, updated annually based on transition assessments. Transition services and coursework should support these goals, with annual IEP goals addressing transition needs. A Postsecondary Transition Plan (PTP) is essential for documenting and personalizing plans for life after high school. The IEP must include a transition services plan that considers educational experiences aligned with the student's preferences, interests, and strengths to achieve post-school goals like higher education, employment, or independent living. This plan is reviewed annually as part of the IEP process.

## **WHO IS INVOLVED IN TRANSITION PLANNING?**

The IEP Team, which includes the student, their family, special and general education teachers, CTE teachers, school counselors, related service providers, administrators, and external agency representatives, works together on transition planning. Some schools also have transition specialists or coordinators who are familiar with community resources. During transition-focused meetings, representatives from agencies like the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR), the Department of Human Services - Aging and Disabilities Resource Center (ARDC), and Disability Specialists from higher education institutions should attend. Other consultants may also provide expertise to support the planning and decision-making process.

## **HOW ARE THE ACP AND PTP COMPLEMENTARY?**

Students with disabilities participate in Academic and Career Planning (ACP) alongside their peers to explore careers and access additional staff expertise, enhancing their transition process. While ACP complements rather than replaces the Postsecondary Transition Plan (PTP), transition planning should be customized based on the student's strengths, preferences, and interests. Transition services are identified through age-appropriate assessments, which can start with those from the ACP process. Understanding these services helps link ACP activities to the transition services needed to achieve post-secondary goals. For details on activities and their connection to ACP, refer to the Transition Services outlined in the PTP.

## **COLLABORATION BETWEEN SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS AND SCHOOL COUNSELORS**

Collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers is critical and creates a seamless transition to adult life for students with disabilities. Discover detailed strategies to enhance the crucial collaboration between school counselors and special education teachers by exploring [Collaboration Tips Between School Counselors & Special Education Teachers](#).

## **COLLABORATION WITH DVR**

The federal [Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act \(WIOA\)](#) mandates collaboration between schools, vocational rehabilitation services (DVR), and long-term support to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities. WIOA aligns with the WI DPI's agenda for College and Career Readiness, enhancing transition planning and fostering partnerships beyond school boundaries. Teachers, counselors, and school staff can enhance collaboration with DVR, families, and students by:

- Informing students and families about DVR services.
- Facilitating regular meetings between DVR counselors and students/families.
- Assisting students in applying for DVR services online.
- Engaging students and families to understand their needs and aspirations.
- Encouraging high expectations for students' future plans.
- Identifying students' strengths, interests, and relationships within their community.
- Continuously promoting self-advocacy, self-awareness, and self-determination skills among all students.

Note: Students with a 504 Plan or documented disability may be eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services through DVR if found Potentially Eligible. Refer to the Potentially Eligible Guidance [Potentially Eligible Guidance and Process](#) and Process Department of Workforce Development webpage for more details.

## **WHEN SHOULD STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES GRADUATE?**

IDEA-eligible students can receive special education services until they turn 21 years old. While many will graduate alongside their peers, some may need additional time to complete diploma requirements or build transition skills. Once a student accepts a diploma, the district is no longer obligated to provide IDEA services. The IEP team should carefully assess whether a student requires services beyond the traditional "senior year." Explore [Transition Programming Beyond 18](#).

## **LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PTP**

The Transition Improvement Grant has developed an app aimed at enhancing self-determination and self-advocacy for Wisconsin youth during the transition planning process. Aligned with the Postsecondary Transition Plan, this app empowers students and families to actively participate in transition planning by prioritizing their preferences, interests, strengths, and needs. It serves as a valuable tool to increase engagement in transition discussions and helps students provide input into their postsecondary transition plan, meeting state and IDEA requirements. The [WiTransition App](#) is accessible online or via download on mobile devices, allowing educators to become more acquainted with the components of the PTP.

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

Special education students who won't receive a diploma can still participate in graduation ceremonies alongside their classmates. Statutes or regulations don't prevent school districts from allowing this distinction between participation in ceremonies and accepting a diploma.

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

At the college level, education transitions from a right to a matter of eligibility. Students with disabilities go through the same admission process as other students: researching schools, visiting campuses, and meeting staff and students. It's not advisable to request waivers for challenging high school courses like advanced math or foreign language, as colleges aren't obligated to grant them.

Each college has its own policies and procedures, so it's essential to inquire about admission requirements, including SAT or ACT scores. Some colleges, like community or junior colleges, may have alternative admissions pathways or dual enrollment programs. While disclosure of disability to the Admissions Office isn't mandatory, it enables colleges to provide information on disability services.

Many colleges offer special considerations for students with disabilities during the admissions process if necessary. Attending college fairs and actively participating in activities is encouraged. Collaborating with a Disability Specialist on campus can ensure a successful pathway through college.

## **Are there postsecondary programs for students who are involved in an alternate curriculum?**

Yes, inclusive college programs exist for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities. [Think College](#) is a national organization committed to enhancing inclusive higher education opportunities for this demographic. Their website provides information about inclusive programs nationwide. Additional resources are available to aid students and families in learning more about these programs and preparing for college.

## **Can students with disabilities be involved in Youth Apprenticeship programming?**

Youth Apprenticeship blends school-based and work-based learning, fostering life and work readiness skills. Unfortunately, students with disabilities may not participate in this program as extensively as their peers. School counselors can utilize resources to encourage inclusion in Youth Apprenticeship discussions. Another option, either alongside Youth Apprenticeship or independently, is the Wisconsin State-Certified Employability Skills Program. This program acknowledges students' proficiency in employability skills sought by employers across different workplace environments while aiding in career exploration.

### [Recruiting Students with Disabilities for Youth Apprenticeships](#)

- [Your 5 Steps in Youth Apprenticeship Program](#)
- [WI State Certified Employability Skills Program](#)

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