

Chapter 3

Transition

Students with disabilities should graduate from high school with the skills they need to achieve their life dreams, whether those dreams involve further education or training, a job, living in the community, hanging around with friends, taking part in recreation activities or attending worship services - in other words, the very things that students without disabilities dream of doing.

Effective transition planning ensures that after graduation, no child or family ever has to ask the question: "What's next?"





“Transition is about planning for life! It includes planning for academic and non-academic courses and learning experiences, employment and related training opportunities, choices about where to live in the community, and what to do for fun and socialization. One of the goals of transition is to help youth have an understanding of their disability and choices to determine their future. One of the ways transition does this is by connecting youth to teachers and other caring adults, support services, and experiences that build skills and help them reach their goals. Transition is based on family values, priorities, and culture, and is focused on an individual youth’s interests, preferences, and needs.”

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition
<http://www.ncset.org>

What are transition services?

IDEA transition services are coordinated activities that focus on improving your child’s academic and functional skills so she will be able to achieve her post-school goals.

The post-school goals she might be preparing for include:

- further education
- employment (including supported employment)
- adult services
- independent living
- community participation

Transition services include:

- instruction
- related services
- community experiences
- the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives
- the acquisition of daily living skills and the provision of functional vocational evaluations, if appropriate.

When must my child’s IEP Team start doing transition planning?

At a minimum, transition services must be included in the first IEP that will be in effect when your child turns 16.

However, if your child’s IEP Team believes it’s appropriate, transition planning may start earlier than age 16.

Carefully consider whether you should start transition planning earlier than the age of 16. Do you think it’s realistic that your child is going to be able to receive all the transition services she’s going to need to reach her post-school goals if she starts getting these services only starting at age 16? If you are unsure, maximize the amount of time your child receives transition services by starting earlier.

What does a “transition” IEP look like?

In addition to all the required IEP elements noted in Chapter 2, a transition IEP must include measurable post-school goals related to:

- education/training
- employment/career
- community/independent living (where needed by your child)

The IEP must also list the transition services your child needs to help her reach these goals.

How do we start transition planning?

By talking with your child! Talk with her about her ideas for further education, employment, and where appropriate, her community living plans upon graduation. Consider questions like these:

- What does your child want to do after high school? Does she want to pursue further education or training or employment? If so, in what field? What skills will she need to be able to continue on with her education or to get a job?
- Where and how does your child want to live? Will she continue to live at home or in some other supported arrangement? Or, will she live independently? How will she arrange for housing? What does she need to know in order to live successfully in her chosen home?
- What kind of community or daily activities will she need or want to do - things like accessing health care, managing money, using transportation, doing recreation activities, being an effective self-advocate?

You need to know the answers to questions like these if you're going to identify your child's post-school goals and the transition services she needs to attain them.

Your child's IEP Team must consider what kind of age-appropriate transition assessments need to be done to collect further information to help you, your child, and the Team identify your child's post-school goals. Some of these assessments might address vocational needs and strengths, behavior issues, learning styles, assistive technology, and interest inventories.

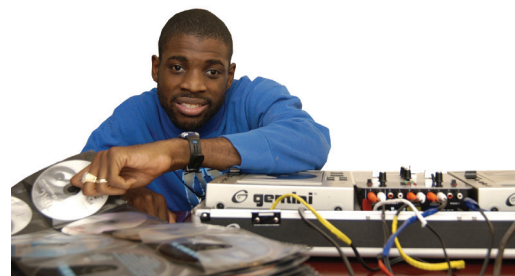
We've identified my child's post-school goals; what's the next step?

Each school year, your child's IEP Team must develop annual, measurable IEP goals that will move her towards her post-school goals. Each set of annual IEP goals builds on the ones that come before it in time, moving your child closer and closer to being ready for her life after school and the post-school goals she's set for herself.

We've identified the annual IEP goals my child will be working on in the coming school year; what's the next step?

Once your child's annual IEP goals are identified, her IEP Team will consider the transition services she requires to achieve those goals. Any, or all, of the following transition services might be used:

- **Instruction**, including the course of study she will pursue and any remedial help or accommodations she needs.
- **Related services** your child needs to benefit from special education while in school. The IEP Team also should identify, as appropriate, linkages to adult agencies or providers before your child leaves the school system.
- **Community experiences** that are provided outside the school setting. Examples include community-based job exploration, job-site training, banking, shopping, transportation, counseling and recreation activities. Community-based job opportunities are especially effective in preparing youth for employment after graduation.



Start transition planning by talking with your child about her hopes and dreams!

Post High School Goals

- What the student wants to do after high school in the following areas:
 - Education /Training
 - Employment
 - Community/ Independent Living

Annual Goals

- What the student can reasonably be expected to accomplish in one school year that leads to the post-high school goals.



If your child has not attended IEP meetings before, this is the time for her to start attending them. If her transition plan is to address her dreams and be responsive to her needs, she must be a key player in the planning process.

- **Employment or other adult living activities** your child needs to achieve desired post-school outcomes. These could be experiences leading to a job or career or those that support activities done occasionally such as registering to vote, filing taxes, renting a home, accessing medical services, filing for insurance or accessing adult services such as Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Medicaid waiver services.
- **If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills.** Daily living skills are those activities that adults do every day (ex. preparing meals, budgeting, maintaining a home, paying bills, caring for clothes, grooming, etc.).
- **If appropriate, functional vocational evaluation.** This is an assessment process that provides information about career interests, aptitudes, and skills. Information may be gathered through situational assessments, observations, or formal measures.

This discussion and planning should result in an IEP that:

- is based on your child's strengths, needs, and interests
- will help your child achieve her desired post-school goals
- contains measurable annual IEP goals
- identifies who will provide, be responsible for, and pay for each transition service
- ensures that you and your child are aware of, and linked to, needed post-school services, programs and supports before your child exits school

What role does my child play in transition planning and at transition IEP meetings?

If your child has not attended IEP meetings before, this is the time for her to start attending them. If her transition plan is to address her dreams and be responsive to her needs, she must be a key player in the planning process.

Whenever your child's post-school goals and transition plans are to be considered by her IEP Team, your child's school must invite her to attend the meeting.

If your child does not attend the IEP Team meeting, her school must take other steps to ensure that her preferences and interests are considered.

When your child reaches the age of 18, her IEP must include a statement that she has been informed of the special education rights that will transfer to her when she reaches the age of majority in Alabama - 19 years of age.

What role should I play in transition planning?

As a parent, you should:

- encourage your child to be an active participant in transition planning. This is her life. She needs to be engaged in the process and may need support from you and other members of the IEP Team to participate effectively.

- make sure that transition planning starts early enough for adequate preparation. Remember that you can start earlier than age 16 if appropriate for your child.
- provide information to the IEP Team about your child's strengths, interests, and needs and the help your child may require in order to achieve her desired post-high school outcomes
- be actively engaged as a partner in all aspects of IEP planning, discussion and decision-making. Remember that teenagers can have a shortsighted view of the future. Your child may not be interested in attending college after high school, but this could change in the future. No matter which path she takes, help her create a path that leaves options open.

How can school staff support transition planning?

School staff should:

- provide information on your child's strengths, past achievements and progress on her current IEP
- provide strategies for effectively teaching your child, including appropriate accommodations and/or modifications so she can successfully access the general curriculum.
- suggest courses of study and educational experiences that relate to her post-school goals
- identify needed related services
- provide recommendations regarding post-high school agencies, services and/or supports
- coordinate all the people, agencies, services or programs in the transition plan

What other agencies may become involved in my child's IEP during transition planning?

When it's likely that an agency other than your child's school will provide or pay for transition services she receives during her high school years or for services she will receive after she graduates, your child's school should invite representatives from those agencies to your child's transition IEP meetings.

Outside agency representatives who could be invited to your child's transition IEP meetings include:

- vocational rehabilitation counselors, including ones from the Alabama Department of Rehabilitation Services
- admission or disability support staff from post-secondary or vocational schools
- Independent Living Center staff
- persons knowledgeable about financial benefits such as Social Security, Ticket-to-Work programs, or Medicaid
- personal care or health care providers, including mental health care providers
- Department of Human Resources social workers
- guidance counselors
- therapists



When your child reaches the age of 18, her IEP must include a statement that she has been informed of the special education rights that will transfer to her when she reaches the age of majority in Alabama - 19 years of age.



Because of issues related to the confidential nature of IEP meetings, you (or your child if he has reached the age of 19) must give prior written consent for the school to invite a representative from these agencies to an IEP meeting.

These agencies may:

- provide information about eligibility criteria for post-school adult services (ex., college support services and financial aid, vocational rehabilitation services, family services, Social Security work incentives)
- assist in the application process for post-school services
- provide transition services to your child prior to her exiting the school system

Because of issues related to the confidential nature of IEP meetings, you (or your child if she has reached the age of 19) must give prior written consent for the school to invite a representative from these agencies to an IEP meeting.

If your child's school is not inviting outside agency representatives to her IEP meetings, let the school know you'd like to have them invited. If these representatives are not coming to meetings after being invited, approach the agencies directly and advocate for their active participation.

What if an outside agency agreed to provide or pay for transition services that are written in my child's IEP and it does not?

If an identified agency fails to provide the transition services described in the IEP, your child's school must reconvene the IEP Team to identify other ways for those services to be provided.

Does the school have to reevaluate my child when she graduates from high school?

If your child graduates from high school with the Alabama High School Diploma or leaves high school because she has aged out, the school does not have to reevaluate her before terminating her eligibility for special education services.

When your child leaves school, the school must provide your child a summary of her academic and functional achievement. In Alabama, this is called a Summary of Progress (SOP). This summary must include recommendations on how to assist your child in meeting her post-school goals.

This summary is important. It's the last special education planning obligation done for your child before she leaves school. If written thoughtfully, the summary should position your child to smoothly access post-school services and move forward on her life goals.

As your child's graduation approaches, her IEP Team should discuss what needs to be included in her SOP. Ensure that the information provided in the summary will satisfy any requirements connected with your child's post-school goals. Depending on your child's needs, here's information you may want included in her summary:

- transcript information
- career and technical education achievement profiles
- information from your child, you and other agency personnel regarding your child's abilities, strengths, skills, needs and limitations

- school supports, accommodations, environmental modifications and compensatory strategies that have been provided to your child
- assistive technology devices and assistive services that have been helpful to your child
- challenges your child might encounter in post-secondary school, employment or independent living
- community agencies and adult service providers with whom your child may already be connected, including notes about the status of those connections, such as applications that have been completed, or where your child has already been accepted into a program
- adaptive behavior assessment results
- strength-based assessment results

What diploma will my child receive when she graduates?

Upon completion of all graduation requirements, she will receive the Alabama High School Diploma.

Prior to 2013, Alabama students with disabilities could be awarded one of three exit documents upon graduation, depending on the course of study they pursued: the Alabama Regular High School Diploma, the Alabama Occupational Diploma (AOD), or the Certificate of Attendance.

In 2013, Alabama changed its diploma plan, doing away with the AOD and the Certificate. Now, only one exit document - the Alabama High School Diploma - will be awarded to all students who fulfill state and local graduation requirements.

What are the state's graduation requirements?

Effective for 9th grade students in the 2013-14 school year, all students must earn the following 24 credits in order to graduate:

Note: Individual boards of education may have their own requirements on top of the state minimum requirements described below.



16 Credits Four years each of English, Math, Science and Social Studies	1 Credit Physical Education	1/2 Credit Health Education
1 Credit Career Preparedness	3 Credits CTE/Foreign Language/Art	2 1/2 Credits Electives

- A student earns these 24 credits by taking courses in one (or more) of the following Pathways:
 - General Education Pathway
 - Essentials/Life Skills Pathways



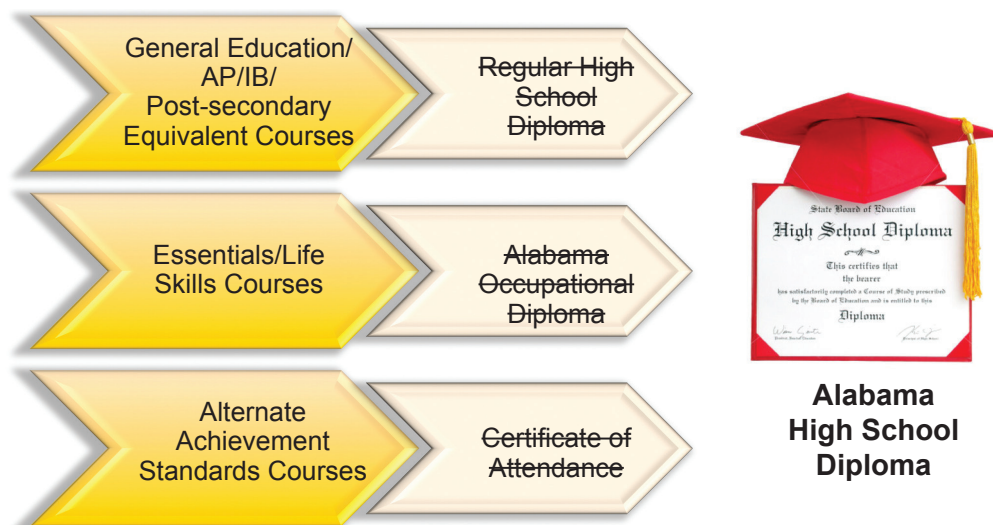
When your child leaves school, the school must provide your child a summary of her academic and functional achievement. In Alabama, this is called a Summary of Progress (SOP). This summary must include recommendations on how to assist your child in meeting her post-high school goals.

- Alternate Achievement Standards (AAS) Pathway - limited to students with significant cognitive disabilities who meet the criteria for the Alabama Alternate Assessment.

Each of these Pathways is made up of a set of courses and course substitutes identified by the ALSDE.

Until 2013, each of these course groupings led to the Regular High School Diploma, AOD, or Certificate, as described on page 39. Now, regardless of the courses taken, all students earn the Alabama High School Diploma.

Multiple Pathways to the Same End



Note: Students who were beyond their 9th grade year as of the 2013 diploma changes will be required to meet the graduation requirements for the diploma option they had been pursuing. However, upon graduation, they will be awarded the Alabama High School Diploma since the AOD and Certificate have been eliminated.

How should my child decide which Pathway and courses to pursue?

Your child should pursue the most rigorous courses possible, keeping her post-school goals in mind.

Here are some things to consider as you and your child decide between the General Education, Essentials/Life Skills, and the Alternate Achievement Standards (AAS) courses:

- Essentials/Life Skills courses (formerly AOD courses) would not be appropriate if your child wants to go to a four-year college; these classes are not accepted by such colleges.
- Essentials/Life Skills courses are not recognized by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA).

- Your child might be eligible to attend a community college with Essentials/Life Skills courses if she otherwise meets the community college's admission requirements. Check with the admissions office of the program you think she might attend.
- Students can take both General Education and Essentials/Life Skills courses.
- If your child takes four or more Essentials/Life Skills courses, she must complete the following work components in order to graduate:
 - Community-Based Work Instruction (including a minimum of 270 hours of documented, successful, independent, and paid employment)
 - Two Career and Technical Education Courses in a sequence
 - Workforce Essentials or Transition Services II
 - Cooperative Education/Work Based Experience or Life Skills Occupational Preparation
 - Cooperative Education Seminar
- AAS courses are limited to students with significant cognitive disabilities who are working toward the Alabama Extended Content Standards and who meet the criteria for the Alabama Alternate Assessment.



If my child takes Essentials/Life Skills or AAS courses, will she be instructed in separate classes and not in regular education classes?

Not necessarily. Essentials/Life Skills or AAS coursework may be taught in a regular education classroom or in a stand-alone course and classroom.

Students with disabilities can stay in school until they are 21 or until they receive a regular high school diploma (in other words, the Alabama High School Diploma). Why would my child want to stay in school beyond her senior year?

Some students with disabilities need extra time in school to be adequately prepared for adulthood. They may need further instruction in academics, daily living skills, or behavior management. They might need more opportunities for transition planning and training, particularly in the area of vocation and employment development. The extra years of schooling beyond the traditional senior year can be vital. Don't pass up those additional years without serious consideration. Talk to your child and her IEP Team about whether and how she would benefit from this extra time in school.

Often, many students don't like the idea of staying in school after age 18. After all, their peers and friends have graduated and are moving on to other educational opportunities or employment. They might resist because they think they have to go back to their high school and do more of the same coursework they've been doing for years.

Remember this: all IEP planning must be individualized to the needs of your student. The challenge for you and your child's IEP Team is to a) identify her



needs in relation to her post-school goals; b) devise an IEP that moves her forward to those goals; and c) provide her services in her “least restrictive environment.” For an 18-21 year old, that would likely include many more opportunities for learning to take place in the community.

If my child is going to stay in school after her senior year, does that mean she can’t participate in graduation activities with her class?

No. Your child **CAN** participate in graduation activities with her class even if she’s going to stay in school.

However, at the graduation ceremony she will not be given an Alabama High School Diploma. If she were to receive the Diploma, her right to continued school services would end. Instead, your child’s school will present her with a blank diploma or a locally developed certificate.

In an April 2014 memo, the ALSDE stated: “[a]warding the Alabama High School Diploma prematurely [denies] a student his or her right to receive services until age 21 and would be considered a denial of [a] Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).”

16 Credits
Four years each of
English, Math,
Science
and
Social Studies

General Education
/AP/IB/
Post-secondary
Equivalent Courses

English 9-12, or any AP/
IB/post-secondary
equivalent

Algebra I, Geometry,
and Algebra II with trig
or
Algebra II, or CTE/IB/
post-secondary
equivalent

Biology and a
physical science and
2 more science credits
of the student’s choice

World History,
U.S. History 1 and 2,
Government/Econ

Essential
Life Skills
Courses

English Essentials 9-12

Algebraic Essentials A&B
and Geometry Essentials
A&B

Life Skills Science I-IV

World History for Living,
U.S. History for Living 10
U.S. History for Living 11
Economics for Living/
U.S. Government for
Living

Alternate
Achievement
Standards Courses

AAS English 9-12

AAS Math 9-12

AAS Science 9-12

AAS Socicial Studies
9-12