

Special Edition Part 6

Virginia's NEXT STEPS Transition Program for Families, Youth and Professionals

Building Effective Partnerships & Accessing Resources

PEATC is launching a multifaceted NEXT STEPS Transition program designed to help families, youth with disabilities, and professionals develop effective partnerships while learning how to tap into valuable community resources. Armed with knowledge and tooled with partnership development skills, youth with disabilities and their families have an opportunity to plan a future of their own design.

Intended outcomes for individuals served by the program:

Self-advocates

- *Increased knowledge of rights*
- *Information about available options*
- *Opportunity to make informed decisions*
- *Leadership in the design of own future plan*
- *Practice person-centered planning, self-determination and self-advocacy skills*
- *Feelings of ownership for own future*
- *Certificate of completion for training*
- *Positive transition outcomes and increased opportunities*

Family Members

- *Opportunity to plan for transfer of rights and responsibilities to child*
- *Clearer idea of what is needed for successful transition*
- *Realization that special education will end*
- *Opportunity to get to know key players*
- *Ideas about how to be an asset during transition and how to help child find and keep a job*
- *Certificate of completion for training*

Educators

- *Understanding of the adult services world and how to help students plan and leverage assets*
- *Meaningful opportunities to collaborate with adult services professionals*
- *Better understanding of their role in preparing students for transition*
- *Improved skills in working with diverse families and students*
- *Opportunity to earn CEUs*

Adult Service Professionals

- *Ideas about how to leverage assets of education and other key players*
- *Opportunity to help better prepare students to they leave school and transfer to adult services*
- *Improved skills in working with diverse families and students*
- *Understanding of the value of families as partners*
- *Opportunity to earn CRCs*

Offering: Telephone, electronic and print information, workshops and a webinar series to reach students with disabilities, their families, educators and adult service providers.

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The TOP 10 Ideas Families, Professionals and Self Advocates

Need to Know about Transition by Cathy Healy and Catherine Burzio

Life is full of transitions. Families who have children with disabilities are often overwhelmed and may not want to look too far into the future. However the lack of long term planning may create unneeded additional stress.

The following suggestions are the top ten ideas PEATC and a panel of experts have developed in response to the question “What is the most important thing people need to know about transition?”

We hope this list will encourage families, students, and transition professionals as they work toward the successful transition of youth with disabilities.

Start Early

 As soon as students are identified as having a need for services, people need to look ahead. As young children, how many times were we asked, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” The dreaming begins early. “But wait!” you say, “My child doesn’t talk, sit or move on his own... what dreams can he have?” At the moment, he may have none of his own; this is where our dreams, as families and caregivers begin, until our children dream their own futures. Establishing good relationships with caring adults early on will aid in more effective transitions down the road.

To accomplish great things we must not only act but also dream, not only plan but also believe - Anatole

Use a Common Language

In a job interview, an employer asked a young adult about his diploma. The applicant replied, “Yes, I received a diploma.” Not convinced, the employer asked to see it. Upon

review, the document inside the leather diploma cover was a “certificate of completion” and not a true diploma. So what is a diploma? What is an assessment? For different agencies, these mean different things. When looking at the maze of transition possibilities, it is confusing enough without the “language barrier.” Building a foundation of common language and making sure that all understand the words being used will help to ease understanding of roles, reviews and responsibilities.

Two monologues do not make a dialogue - Jeff Daly



Ask questions. Then ask them again! (Continual Self Assessments)

While IDEA requires that a formal organized approach to transition be put into place by age 16, it is important to remember there are a number of diploma options. Decisions about diplomas are often made before a student goes to high school. Yet, the discussion about where a student is headed is not a one time deal. Though students may not know where they want to go in the future, the adults in their world need to help direct them to academic outcomes that are both ambitious and realistic. On an ongoing basis, key adults support students

as they conduct their own reality checks about their futures. Encourage the student to take the lead on this discussion. These continual assessments empower students to build self determination skills, enabling them to move forward with confidence. *Great things are only possible with outrageous requests - Thea Alexander*

Be clear on entitlement vs. eligibility

The lines between *entitlement* and *eligibility* can be confusing. Students who are eligible for services under IDEA, are entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). This is the most profound entitlement afforded to children in our nation. However, once students leave the safety net of IDEA-funded services, accessing publicly funded adult services may be elusive. Though young adults may be found eligible for services under the requirements of adult serving agencies, there is no entitlement provision mandating those services be provided. “Eligibility” does not equate actual “availability” of service. Many services have waiting lists and limited funding streams.

The rude awakening comes when our kids turn 21 and age out of the school system. Mandated services come to a screeching halt. Most of our children don’t drive. All of a sudden we wish we had ANY kind of bus available to get our young adults from here to there or anywhere - Linda Picci

Find out what exists and what doesn’t exist

Parents need to be savvy about what help will be there when IDEA services end. When they look honestly at services to help facilitate a smooth transition into life for their children, there may be gaps. There is not much they can do individually to ensure community services are funded. So they need to make sure the student is acquiring skills that will carry into adulthood, while still in school. *If you don’t ask, you don’t get - Mahatma Gandhi*

This article is available in Spanish on pages 2 & 3 of this edition of the PEATC Press !

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Is transition a time of crisis or opportunity?

Transitioning from high school is a time of great opportunity for a young person. It is a time to explore strengths and interests and begin to piece together a life that enhances personal fulfillment while contributing to the greater good of society. Transition is a time of terrific change and growth for the whole family. Fear of the unknown may make parents reluctant participants in the process, but transitioning youth with disabilities need encouragement to seek post secondary education, or apply for a job, or even dream of a future that is independent from their family. It can be a period where old dreams are retooled and new dreams are imagined.

When written in Chinese, the word "crisis" is composed of two characters -- one represents danger, and the other represents opportunity - John F. Kennedy

Take a look at what has worked (and what hasn't)

Met with the obstacle of providing positive experiences for their children in transition, many parents and educators have created incredible opportunities for skill acquisition and life preparation. Matching what has worked in the students school career and what has worked for adults with disabilities currently living in the community may be the key to opening doors for successful transitions to adult life. What is the recipe for success? Thomas Edison once said, "Success is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration." What makes the student tick? What successes has he or she accomplished in school and life? How can we blend those successes with practical experiences to create a foundation of knowledge and skill development to successfully transition to adult life?

The aim of education should be to teach us rather how to think, than what to think -- rather to improve our minds, so as to enable us to think for ourselves, than to load the memory with the thoughts of other men - John Dewey

Redefine the concept of seamless transitions

The ability to transfer experience and information from one place to another without any "hitches" seems unachievable. For students with disabilities who are in the transition process, there are some things that can be done to ease the way. An effective transition team will support a student in developing strong self-advocacy skills. They can ensure that the student enjoys a rich learning environment based on state standards, with continual and measurable assessments that guide the student's progress. Though a seamless transition may be impossible, ensuring students are prepared is not. *Great thoughts reduced to action become great acts - William Hazlitt*

View families as assets

Families are valuable members of the team having the most fundamental information about their youth with disabilities. Families

motivate and encourage their children to become self-advocates and directors of their own futures.

They tap into their own personal and professional networks, expanding the opportunities for learning and employment. Until the youth with disabilities

learns how to take the lead, families are THE experts on their youth with disabilities. Their active involvement can make the difference between success and failure.

The family is the nucleus of civilization - William J. Durant

Youth with disabilities are not the only ones who are in transition

As I stood at my oldest son's high school graduation, a film reel of flash backs ran rampant through my mind. *Didn't I just enroll him in preschool? Where did the time go?* As the student takes the reigns, parents and professionals need to learn how to let go. Parents may only see a child though they are peering into the face of a young adult. Though acceptance may come easily to some parents, it may take a lifetime for others.

Transition is a time of change for the whole family.

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced - James Baldwin

SAVE THE DATES! TRANSITION WEBINARS!

PEATC has developed tools specific to the needs of families who have students transitioning from high school to adult life. Our acclaimed **NEXT STEPS** trainings have been enriched by a webinar series designed to expand and promote effective partnership development. Join PEATC for **Virginia's NEXT STEPS Transition Program for Families, Youth and Professionals: Building Effective Partnerships and Accessing Resources** for 3 one-hour webinars streaming on March 3, 10 and 17, 2008. To register and learn more about the series please visit www.peatc.org. We look forward to helping you to build more seamless transitions for you and your student.



PEATC Partners with HSC Foundation to provide grants to youth with disabilities

PEATC in partnership with the Hospital for Sick Children (HSC) Foundation will be offering monetary grants for youth and young adults of transitional age (14 to 25) to purchase goods and services directly linked to youth transition planning and implementation. The *Life Enrichment Awards Program* (LEAP) is intended to enrich the lives of youth and young adults with disabilities and chronic illnesses and at-risk youth in the Washington, DC metropolitan area, reaching up to Baltimore, MD and down to Richmond, VA. Goods and services include those usually not available from public service and government agencies. Please see the PEATC website to download an application and review the rules at www.peatc.org.

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TRANSITION: A TEAM EFFORT

Teen's transition to adulthood brings many questions with many possibilities. Future options for students are plentiful and might include any or all of the following:

- an academic career
- competitive or supported employment
- independent or supported living

Many parents are surprised to find their children might not be entitled to services once special education ends. After leaving special education, a young adult may want or need case management, personal attendant services, assistive technology devices, medical care, transportation, job coaching, and higher education. These services might be available within the community; however, the services may or may not be free. Identifying the agencies and the key players while a student is still in school can help families in the transition process.

It is important to begin asking questions early. What will the student be doing once high school ends? What options and opportunities are available or possible? What needs to happen between now and then? Who are the people who can help a student prepare for transition?

The student: Students' strengths, wants, needs and interests are at the center of all planning efforts. As students look ahead, they can begin to identify hopes and dreams for their futures. What is on their list of likes and dislikes with respect to higher education and career training? How will they fill their days once school is "let out"?

School professionals: Special education case managers and special education teachers can offer advice on developing goals to pursue academic dreams. High school guidance counselors can identify college or other continuing education options, testing deadlines, and potential financial resources. For students not planning to go to college, high school employment coordinators, transition coordinators, and community based instruction teachers can also help prepare for life once special education ends.

Family and personal networks: Families have rich resources available through their personal and professional networks. Extended family members, religious and civic organizations, community recreation programs,

social clubs and neighbors all are potential members of the transition team, as they can help to support linkages to community based activities.

Local employers: Regional and local employers can potentially be members of the transition team, especially if the student or family has a personal relationship. In addition to regular employment, employers might offer mentoring, internships, volunteer opportunities or cooperative learning experiences.

Other state and local public agencies may also offer guidance and support in developing goals and supports to help carry the goals to completion.

Department of Rehabilitative Services (DRS) (<http://www.vadrs.org>): DRS assists persons with disabilities in reaching employment goals depending on the unique needs of the individual and whether or not the individual meets the state criteria for eligibility. Funded by federal and state money, DRS has regional and local offices. In many cases, services can begin during high school. DRS counselors may provide vocational guidance and counseling, vocational assessments, rehabilitative and assistive technology.

Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, Substance Abuse Services (DMHMRSAS) (<http://www.dmhmrzas.virginia.gov/DMHMRSAS>) at the regional or local level is known as the Community Services Board (CSB). The CSB is an umbrella agency serving individuals with mental illness or intellectual disabilities. CSB services are provided through federal, state, and local funding and sliding payment scale. Services might include employment services, case management, and independent living. Once students turn 18, eligibility is based on their own income – not family income.

Independent Living Centers help people with disabilities to achieve and maintain self-sufficient lives within the community. These centers are nonprofit organizations and go by different names in different areas. You can find a center for your area by linking to <http://www.ilusa.com/links/ilcenters.htm>. There may be a charge for classes, but advocacy services are typically free. Some centers may have staff who can attend IEP meetings for a fee.

Department of Labor - One Stop Career Centers (<http://www.servicelocator.org>) are regional and local agencies providing employment services for eligible youth and adults. One Stop Career Centers often do not have a disability focus, but will not turn a student away from services because of a disability. In fact, many house Disability Navigators who have specialized training and expertise to assist job seekers with disabilities. They might be available to help transitioning youth with disabilities.

Social Security Administration (SSA) (www.ssa.gov): SSA operates the federally funded program providing benefits for people of any age who are unable to do substantial work and have a severe mental or physical disability. Several programs are offered for people with disabilities, including Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Plans to Achieve Self-Support (PASS), Medicaid, and Medicare. Once a student turns 18, family income is not considered when determining eligibility for SSI. Application information may be found on the SSA website.

Learning all you can and having determination and persistence is key. Some agencies may have limited involvement with students while they are still in high school or be limited to working only with adults. Either way, it is a good idea for families or students with disabilities to know the agencies, the central point of contact, the eligibility requirements, and (what, if any) support can be expected from these agencies.

For a complete listing of selected web sites with transition information please visit www.peatc.org

To get you started the PEATC staff's top picks are as follows.

<http://www.ttaonline.org/>
Virginia universities sponsored by the Virginia Department of Education provide technical assistance to teachers and parents in supporting and educating children with disabilities.

<http://www.pacer.org/tatra>
The Pacer Center in Minnesota is funded by the Rehabilitative Services Administration to provide technical assistance to state parent training and information centers that are providing transitional training and education to families and youth with disabilities.

www.nichcy.org
NICHCY, the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities, serves the nation as a central source of research-based information on effective educational practices for youth with disabilities and their families.