

TRANSITION PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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TRANSITION PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

What Educators and Service Providers Can Do

By

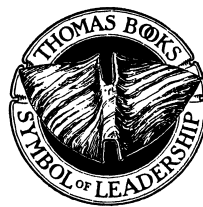
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To my wife, Heidi, and children, Jared and Emma. Your encouragement, love, patience, and support have helped me to maximize my potential as a teacher, scholar, professional, and leader.

To my wife, Pauline, and children, Charles, Gina, Kristen, and Alicia. I cannot imagine where I would be today as a teacher, scholar, professional, and leader without your patience, love, and support.

FOREWORD

In the *Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary* (2005), transition is defined as a “passage from one state, stage, subject, or place to another; a movement, development, or evolution from one form, stage, or style to another; a musical modulation; a musical passage leading from one section of a piece to another; and an abrupt change in energy state or level (as of an atomic nucleus or a molecule) usually accompanied by loss or gain of a single quantum of energy.” Clearly, these definitions, as different as they may seem, touch on some form of stage-by-stage movement, change, or advancement. A logical extension is that transition from school to adult life for students with disabilities represents a passage from one stage in life to the next or represents an abrupt change, despite the planning that might be provided as they move from a mandated system of *programs* to a system of services based on eligibility. It is common knowledge that leaving high school can be a critical point in everyone’s life! It is a time when important decisions are made that will impact the rest of a young adult’s life creating the intricate possibilities for postsecondary education, career development, and relationship building with people outside the school system. Put another way, the transition period can definitely be rewarding, hectic, and challenging for a young adult or anyone for that matter.

In writing the Foreword of this book, I began to think about my own transition from school to adult life. While it was almost 30 years ago, the memories still remain vivid! As with many of us, I had *good* teachers and *not-so-good* teachers. It was the *not-so-good* teachers who tried to negatively influence my high school career. I still remember the chemistry teacher who told us that if we did not understand a particular concept, that eventually the “gods” would come down and bestow knowledge on us. In addition, I remember the geometry teacher who told us that “some day the light bulb would go on.” Instead of engaging me in the experience of learning for my future, these teachers, inadvertent-

ly, tried to kill my spirit by suggesting that I just was not smart enough –because the gods never came down and the light bulb never did go on. Needless to say, being a class clown was much more comfortable for me at that point. When the time came for high school graduation and all my friends were meeting with the school counselor to apply for college, I did the same. I met with this counselor only to be told that I was “not college material and should just get married and have a family.” While I do not see anything wrong with getting married and having a family, it was not motivating to hear such statements. I never forgot those statements that could have negatively impacted my future had I let them. Instead, I chose my own path! I found a way to get into college on my own; and graduate with degrees! Today, I am a college professor. Like many students, my future could have been determined by that school counselor, that chemistry teacher, and that geometry teacher. Maybe, it was my naiveté or stubbornness; but I believed the only challenge I had were the limitations I put on myself. But, not every student is that fortunate to have that kind of resiliency and self-determination. More often than not, I remember my own experiences when I work with young adults during their final years of high school as we prepare and plan for their future.

Realizing successful postschool outcomes for students with disabilities is a goal we all strive for as educators and service providers. In *Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities: What Educators and Service Providers Can Do*, Dr. Jeffrey P. Bakken and Dr. Festus E. Obiakor provide an expansive discussion about each area of transition impacting the lives of students with disabilities. Consider the wonderfully organized chapters and themes of the book. Chapters 1 and 2 provide the reader with a foundation of transition services and a historical overview of models and practices; Chapter 3 offers a critical look at transition with students from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds; Chapter 4 presents an in-depth look at assistive technology to assist students in fully participating in the planning for their future beyond high school; Chapters 5 and 6 describe the process for planning and the importance of family collaboration; Chapters 7, 8, and 9 discuss career development and the importance of work experiences; Chapters 9 and 10 provide a review of social skills and leisure options; Chapter 11 looks at independent living options and the fundamental skills needed for living independently; and Chapter 12 identifies successful postsecondary education programs.

While transition services have been mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) since 1990, bridging the gap between school and adult services continues to be a challenge for all stakeholders. In this book, Bakken and Obiakor discuss bridge-building ideas through the collaboration, consultation, and cooperation of all. This book is written for today's researchers, scholars, and practitioners. No doubt, educators, service providers, related professionals, and parents will find it useful as they work together to enhance postschool outcomes for young adults with disabilities.

Laura Owens, Ph.D.
University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

REFERENCE

Merriam-Webster's Online Dictionary. (2005). Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster Inc.
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PREFACE

The need for transition services for students with exceptionalities is apparent and critical for their success after high school. While still in school, general and special education teachers, parents, students, administrators, and other service providers need to provide the proper assessment, instruction, and guidance for these students to be successful. *Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities: What Educators and Service Providers Can Do* is an important book that focuses on all aspects of transition planning from school to postschool levels. We believe it is essential for school professionals, parents, and students to work collaboratively and consultively to determine each student's future goals and develop an effective plan to meet those goals successfully.

Transition Planning for Students with Disabilities discusses critical transition topics for this day and age. In this book, Chapter 1 discusses "Transitioning Students with Disabilities: Preparing for Life;" Chapter 2 focuses on "Transition Models and Practices;" Chapter 3 addresses "Transition and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Learners;" Chapter 4 explains "Selecting Appropriate Assistive Technology for Student Transition;" Chapter 5 provides information on "Planning and Developing Student-focused Individualized Transition Plans;" Chapter 6 explores "Collaborating with Families in the Transition Process;" Chapter 7 discusses "Job and Career Development: Understanding the Nature and Types of Jobs;" Chapter 8 focuses on "Employment Training, Support, and Vocational/Technical Education;" Chapter 9 addresses "Social Outcomes and Community Resources;" Chapter 10 provides information on "Transportation Education and Leisure/Recreation Outcomes;" Chapter 11 explains "Independent Living Outcomes, Residential Opportunities, Group Homes and Intermediate Care;" and finally, Chapter 12 discusses "Post-Secondary Education Outcomes." Each chapter describes a part of the transition plan-

ning process, as well as offers suggestions for effective planning and additional resources that can be useful when working with individuals with exceptionalities.

Although the content of this book addresses topics that are commonly found in other books, the format and other aspects are unique. The text is written in a style that all readers can comprehend and understand; and the information can be easily applied to classroom and transition programs. In this book, we wanted to explain a comprehensive structure of transition programming using real cases to captivate the reader's attention. Put another way, we wanted to provide the rationale for transition programming in schools. On the whole, this book will be an excellent resource to researchers, scholars, educators, and service providers. We are confident that its readers will find it helpful and useful in their efforts to transition students with exceptionalities into a world of work. Hopefully, this book will be a required or supplementary text for undergraduate and graduate transition courses in special education.

This book would not have been possible without the support of family, friends, and colleagues. We thoroughly appreciate every feedback that we received. Finally, we thank Dr. Laura Owens of the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee for writing the Foreword of this book.

J. P. B.
F. E. O.

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TRANSITION PLANNING FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Chapter 1

TRANSITIONING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: PREPARING FOR LIFE

Joe is a sophomore in high school and beginning to think about what he would like to do after graduation. Joe has a learning disability and has some difficulties with reading comprehension and written expression, but is very strong in mathematics and has very good communication skills. It will be important to consider Joe's abilities when developing his transition plan. His parents are very involved with his schooling and want what's best for him after high school, given his abilities. His case manager, Mr. Johnson, understands how critical transition is to positive outcomes after graduation and wants to get Joe and his parents involved in the transition process as soon as possible. Mr. Johnson realizes it is important to work with Joe and his parents and get their input on a transition plan to help prepare Joe for life after high school.

What happens to students like Joe above when their parents are unaware of the possibilities of different transition services as well as the transition process? This chapter answers this critical question. Students are involved with many transitions throughout their educational careers, such as moving from elementary school to junior high or from junior high to high school. These transitions are important in the students' lives; however, the transition from the secondary level to postsecondary education or the world of work is the most critical for all students, especially those with disabilities. The preparation for this transition begins early in a student's life and continues throughout his or her educational career and beyond. This transition from school to work is essential to ensure positive postschool out-

comes for students with disabilities. “Transition and person-centered planning approaches can improve outcomes by making education more relevant, by giving students more control over their lives, and by focusing on goals important to them (Flexer, Simmons, Luft, & Baer, 2005, p. 9). Research (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996) involving the post-school outcomes for students with disabilities sheds light on the fact that their outcomes were less successful than their peers without disabilities. The federal requirements for transition services grew out of a perceived need based on this research regarding postschool outcomes of students with disabilities.

Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study have shown that, compared to students without disabilities, students with disabilities had lower rates of competitive employment, residential independence, and postsecondary degrees (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). In addition, the study found that school factors contributed significantly to postschool outcomes of students with disabilities. For example, students who had vocational education and work experience in high school had a higher probability of finding competitive employment after high school. The findings also showed that “postschool paths of youth with disabilities reflected their transition goals” (NLTS, 1993, p. 16). This finding supports the fact that transition planning is critical to ensuring positive outcomes for students with disabilities after graduation. As a result of the National Longitudinal Transition Study, as well as other research involving postschool outcomes and quality-of-life of students with disabilities, federal legislation has required that Individualized Education Programs include statements of transition service needs for students ages 16 and older (IDEIA, 2004). This focus on transition planning and services has led to more research in best practices in the field of transition to improve students’ life activities after school.

TRANSITION SERVICES: CONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND MEANINGS

Transition can be defined as moving from one place to another. With regards to students, especially students with disabilities, the meaning of the word *transition* is much more focused. This type of transition is the movement from secondary school to postsecondary

education, work, and community involvement. *Transition services*, then, are the vehicles that help to ensure that each student with a disability makes that important step as successfully as possible. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA 2004), transition services are defined as “a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that (a) is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to postschool activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation; (b) is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests; and (c) includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.” Some of the important aspects of the federal definition are that transition services need to be coordinated and results-oriented for each student with a disability. In addition, these services must be individualized to each student’s strengths and interests, and not just a “checklist” of typical transition-related activities and skills (McAfee & Greenawalt, 2001). Finally, the federal definition also includes the integration of a variety of service delivery types (i.e., direct instruction, work programs, and community experiences) and the involvement of agencies (i.e., independent living, supported employment, and Medicaid) that can assist the student after graduation.

The goal of transition services is to assist students with disabilities to achieve their career and life goals, as well as become active members of their communities. The goal, then, of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team should be to effectively and accurately evaluate the students’ strengths, interests, preferences, and needs, and create a plan that successfully addresses and incorporates as many of these as possible. In doing this, the IEP teams can help to ensure that students with disabilities are productive workers and members of their communities. As it appears, the legal mandates for transition in IDEIA 2004 have expanded the transition requirements laid out in IDEA 1997. According to IDEIA 2004, a transition plan must be incorporated into a student’s IEP “beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect

when the child is 16, and updated annually thereafter.” The plan must include “appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills, [and] the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals.” These requirements focus more on the need for postsecondary goals that are based on data from various assessments of the student’s strengths and needs. This data must drive the creation of appropriate goals for each student that must, in turn, be measurable so that the IEP team can determine the student’s progress toward each goal. IDEIA requirements continue to involve the use of a variety of service delivery styles and linkages to other agencies that can benefit the student after graduation. Additionally, these requirements include reporting students’ progress toward all IEP goals to parents, and postsecondary goals concurrent with their report cards. Parents and students must be informed of their rights. In other words, when a student reaches 17 years old, he/she and his/her parents must be informed that at age 18 rights to special education will transfer to the student alone. For some students with severe and multiple disabilities, this provision may not be applicable. However, for most students with disabilities this transfer of rights must be clearly explained to both the student and his/her parents, to ensure understanding of the law.

TRANSITION SERVICES PLANNING

IDEIA 2004 sets out the legal mandates for what must be included in the IEP of each student with a disability as they relate to transition services and when those services must begin. However, the process of transition planning is much more complex than the brief statement in the law. Many different factors come into play and should be examined while planning for successful transitions. All of these factors may not be applicable for all students, but they should at least be considered when developing a student’s transition plan. First, the diversity among students with disabilities makes it necessary for IEP teams to be culturally sensitive and aware of individual differences and values when planning for transition. These differences may be related to culture, language, or family background. Collaborating with families is essential to understanding the background and goals of the student, as