

Ask the Advocate... by Desiree Vandelac

Question: What services should a child receive as they transition out of high school? When should we begin transition planning?

Answer: Post high school transition planning should be a very extensive and thoughtful process. As each child is unique and differs in their needs, it is impossible to give a general guideline of the transitional services a child should receive. There are such a myriad of services available that it is impossible to even begin to scratch the surface of that topic within the limited context of this article. Transition planning needs to begin very early. Currently in Colorado, transition planning is supposed to begin when a child turns 14 years old. However, there are discussions currently being held at the state level to increase the age of transition planning from 14 to 16 years old. Many transition/adult services have very long waiting lists; some as long as 5 years or longer. Unfortunately, many parents do not begin to think of transition planning until a child is in high school. If the child will need continued services as an adult, this often puts parents behind the eight ball and feeling as if it may be too late to receive services for their child. The sooner you begin transition planning the better. As a parent, start to think about services your child may need as an adult from when you first learn of your child's disability and special needs. Just as many parents begin saving for college while their child is still an infant, begin transition planning early with regards to the help and services your special needs child may need as a young adult. What are your plans for your child in their adult life? Will your child be going to college? Will your child need a work assistance program? A semi-independent group living facility? As a parent you begin to understand what your child's adult needs may be while they are still in elementary school. Start researching services while your child is still at a very young age. The more you understand what your child may need and what services are available, the more you will be able to guide the transition process when the time comes. The National Association of Parents with Children in Special Education (NAPCSE) website, www.NAPCSE.org, has a wealth of information about transition planning.

Question: If I move to a different state how can I guarantee that my child will receive the same services he is currently receiving?

Answer: IDEA mandates that when a child moves, a new placement/school must implement the IEP from the previous school until an IEP meeting is held for the new IEP team to determine the child's needs. It is impossible to *guarantee* your child will receive the same services; however, you can increase the probability if you ensure that your child's IEP is well written and clearly documents the services your child is receiving and the importance of your child receiving those services. The more information and documentation you can share with the new IEP team the greater your chances are of receiving necessary services. This information is not limited to IEPs but should also include any private evaluations such as neuropsychological evaluations, occupational therapy evaluations, recommendations from psychologists, etc. It is important to understand that not all states are created equal when it comes to special education services. You must also understand that programming varies widely from state to state. It is very possible that while your child's IEP from one state provided 20 hours of 1-on-1 ABA within your home and it is clearly documented through multiple sources that your child truly requires that service, your new IEP team may disagree with this service and refuse to provide for it in your child's new IEP. I recommend that parents thoroughly research any state they are considering moving to prior to the move. Do not simply rely on possible hospitals and private

programs available. Contact a special education advocate in the new state and talk to them about their experience working with the school districts and obtaining services for their clients. Join parent support groups (such as the local autism society) in the new state and join listservs specific to special education or your child's special needs; other parents who are receiving special education services are typically your best source for information regarding services in their state.

Question: My child is transitioning from preschool to elementary school but the date of her annual IEP meeting is not at the beginning of the new school year. What should I do?

Answer: IDEA mandates that an IEP meeting be held at least once a year to review the child's present level of performance, goals and objectives, and how the child is doing in the current placement. This does not mean that the IEP team can only meet once a year, nor does it mean that other meetings of the IEP team are not IEP meetings. Any time the IEP team meets it is an IEP meeting. Furthermore, a parent can request an IEP meeting at any time to discuss questions or concerns they have with regards to their child's IEP and special education services. If your child will be transitioning from preschool to elementary school, elementary school to middle school, middle school to high school, or for that fact any change in placement, ideally, the initial transition meeting should be held several months prior to the actual transition so that the new IEP team can plan and be prepared for the child. Typically, the more time and thought that is taken with a transition, the smoother the transition is for the child. If a

child is currently in preschool and will be transitioning to kindergarten in the fall, optimally the IEP team should meet the prior January or February to begin planning for his transition to kindergarten. Then the formal transition meeting, when the current IEP team and the new IEP team meet, should happen a few months later in the spring. I prefer having meetings in April or early May and not waiting until the end of the school year when school staff are already

overwhelmed with end of year tasks. The transition meeting should include all of the members and service providers of the child's current IEP team (typically the regular education teacher, the special education teacher, and any of your child's other service providers such as the speech pathologist, occupational therapist, school psychologist, etc.) and all of the same service providers from child's new placement. Generally paraprofessionals do not attend IEP meetings but if the child has a paraprofessional with whom they have worked well with, it is a good idea to ask that paraprofessional (as well the paraprofessional at the new placement) to participate in the meeting as well.

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