

Clarifying the Meaning of Transition Services for Students with Disabilities

If you have worked with students with disabilities, particularly those students in middle and high school, you have heard “transition” services being discussed. Are you clear on exactly what is meant by the term “transition” and what services are offered to students related to transition?

In general, transition refers to the process of change. We have many transitions throughout our day, as we move from one task to another. In the morning, many of us transition from the responsibilities of parenting to the responsibilities we have in our role in the workplace. We have many transitions throughout our life, as well. We may transition to a new job, welcome a new member to our family, move to a new area, or experience any number of life events that equate to a change in how we function. For students with disabilities, transition services support them through specific life-changing events by helping them develop the skills and plans necessary to be successful during and after the event.

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) is an important source of information on transition services. The specific link to this area of the site is: <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/sped/transition/VITC>. The VDOE recognizes transition services as a coordinated set of activities for youth with disabilities that promotes movement from school to post-school activities including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. Such services are based on individual student needs, preferences, and interests. It includes instruction, related services, community experiences, development of employment skills, other post-school living objectives, and acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

Beginning at age 14, each student with a disability in Virginia must have a statement in their IEP of transition service needs that relate to the student’s course of study. Beginning at age 16, each student’s IEP must

have a statement of transition services that includes, if appropriate, a statement of interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages, as determined by the IEP team. The transition service statement should describe how the student will develop the skills and plans to make use of important resources prior to graduation from high school. Services and supports might include assessments that evaluate vocational interests, functional behavior, learning styles, personal interests and preferences, and needs such as assistive technology. Services and supports might also include specialized instruction or training, community-based work experience, and on-the-job training.

When planning for a student’s transition services, the following questions must be considered:

- What are the student’s needs, interests, and preferences?
- What are the student’s hopes, goals, and dreams for the future, particularly in terms of their independence after leaving high school? What activities and services are needed to prepare the student to reach those goals?
- Who should be involved in the IEP transition planning?
- When should adult services and agencies be included in IEP transition planning?
- Are specialized supports needed to achieve desired results?

Learn more about transition services in Virginia by logging onto the VDOE web site, <http://www.doe.virginia.gov/VDOE/sped/transition/VITC>, talking with the special educator with whom you work, and/or using your school division parent resource center, if you have one. There are also a number of local and state agencies and organizations that are involved in transition services for students with disabilities. You can link to them through the VDOE web site.