According to The National Longitudinal Transition Study (1988-1993) commissioned by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), the national dropout rate for students with disabilities is 32%, and fewer than 17% of these students enter formal post-secondary training upon completion of their high school programs. These types of statistics have prompted local, state, and federal governments to enact laws regarding transition for students with disabilities.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (PL 101-476), IDEA, is a federal law that contains specific language about transition. It states that the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) address needed transition services for students with disabilities no later than age 16 and, if appropriate for an individual student, beginning at age 14 or younger. The outcomes for transition must be documented in a transition plan that accompanies a student's IEP. Transition planning requires that the school district must:

- Invite the student and family to the team meeting
- Consider student's needs preferences, and interests
- Include future oriented outcomes, goals and objectives in instruction, community experiences, employment and post-school adult living
- Invite the liaison from the appropriate

human service agency if applicable
- Describe interagency responsibilities or linkages before the student leaves the school setting.

Transition from school to adult life is an exciting time filled with many hopes and dreams. It is also a time of uncertainty and sometimes turmoil. All students must think about where they want to live, whether they want to work or go to school, and what to do for fun. These decisions are hard for all students, but they can be especially difficult for students with disabilities. Often, students have not had practice making decisions, trying new things, or independently seeking support and assistance. Students should be encouraged to take the lead in a transition process that will enable them to develop decision-making and problem solving skills they will need to succeed in life. The types of planning required is good practice for all students leaving high school as they prepare for the work force and become a part of the community.

Transition involves, among other things, the kind of work a person does, where and with whom one lives, what one does during leisure time and the type of learning, training, and experiences one may need or want.

Schools are responsible for providing a wide range of coordinated activities that lead to employment, community living, and post-secondary education outcomes. When appropriate, transition planning documents can include the acquisition of daily living skills and a functional vocational evaluation. Transition planning is a cooperative process which involves student choice, parent

involvement, informal supports and use of community resources, as well as more formal procedures and interagency collaboration. Recent trends on both state and national levels encourage this kind of of integrated, cooperative approach.

Linking initiatives can reallocate resources, create forums for sharing a broad range of expertise, assist in bridging the gap between regular and special education and ultimately result in mobilizing the entire community to build the capacity of the local school to address the transition needs of all students. Initiatives related to the overall improvement of education include school reform, School to Work Opportunities Act, Goals 2000, family and school partnerships, school and business partnerships, and the development of inclusive schools.

Defining Transition

Transition is an outcome-oriented process that involves the collaboration of many individuals and results in the student taking control of his/ her own life. Outcomes include having a place to live, friends with whom to hang out, a lover, a job, community involvement and a means to financially support oneself.

Transition means different things to different people. Students who are interested in college have to make plans to leave home, learn a new set of school "rules" and norms, often have to deal with being away from home for the first time, etc. Students who choose to work after school must decide where satisfying jobs exist, think about whether or not to live at home, decide if the job can pay the bills if one chooses to live on one's own...there are many new decisions to make. Students may choose other options like volunteer work, travel, or other non-work related options. Making these choices will impact financial situations and perhaps one's living arrangements.

Students must be encouraged from a very early age to explore ideas and take chances. Their decisions must be supported by families, friends, teachers, and others to assist them in realizing their dreams.

The following vignettes illustrate some the many choices and possibilities that exist for life after high school:

For **Lakeesha**, getting accepted into a post-secondary school, attending classes, making new friends and living in a dorm is her dream. In addition, she would like to pursue a career in fashion design, live in her own apartment and take regular vacations. These are the outcomes of her successful transition. To realize these dreams, Lakeesha must make sure her grades are good; investigate and apply to colleges offering programs in design; learn the skills to live on her own, and find supports to make accommodations that she may need.

Juan dreams about leaving school and getting an office job that pays well enough to share an apartment with a friend, go to baseball games, shop, and go to clubs most Saturday nights. He hopes to meet a future wife with whom he can share his life and begin a family.

Fiona's outcomes of successful transition include living in an apartment with one or two housemates of her choosing, arranging for personal care assistance, working part-time with some supports, Friday night movies and many evenings spent going out and dining with good friends.

David would enjoy living with with a family in a foster home, where family members assist him in coordinating his medical needs (assistance with eating, monitoring gastrointestinal tubes, administering medications intravenously). He wants to participate in family activities like camping, boating, and fishing. David also loves weekend trips with friends and family members to pick up bargains at yard sales in their area. David's van,

which is equipped with a lift and a ramp, is large enough to pick up most of the items found on their travels.

These examples seem quite ordinary, but may take years of thinking, talking, and planning to be realized. To begin to accomplish these goals, students and their support teams must look at both non-traditional as well as traditional resources in a community. Very often, it is the community-based, generic programs that provide the best information and assistance in achieving community outcomes. To rely solely on adult human services agencies who often maintain a "slot mentality" is often a dead end and may result in less than inclusive outcomes. Successful transition means that the outcomes for the student with the disability are the least restrictive, most community inclusive situation based on the student's own dreams and choices. Successful transition is not entering a work program and a living situation where there is a spot available that the student has not chosen, seen or is interested in.

What Is "Good Transition?"

It is difficult to define what "good" transition planning will look like for schools. It will vary from each district based on the needs and individual makeup of the schools in that area. What is most important is that transition planning and information about transition become integral parts of schools' general information for all educators. Like any new program or requirement in a school, making sure that someone from the school take responsibility for disseminating information and educating the school community is essential. To facilitate change, it is important that administrators, including principals, department heads and superintendents, send the message that transition planning and documentation become routine in their school communities.

Outcomes of Transition Planning

The following outcome areas highlight issues and areas of concern when planning for transition.

Housing

Finding a place to live is a very important and often one of the most difficult outcomes in transition planning. There are very few living arrangements that are accessible for people with disabilities and that are integrated into the community. In addition, there is a general lack of affordable housing and individualized supported housing options. It is necessary to become familiar with the various kinds of housing that exist and with the supports that are available. Resources in the community of choice must be considered as well. Proximity to work, recreation and shopping facilities all play a part in deciding where individuals choose to live. Often, individuals are concerned about the cost of living in independent housing due to un- or under-employment. (But, living in more independent situations can increase social security benefits because the amount of the benefit is partially based on an individual's living situation. In addition, an individual may become eligible for benefits like food stamps, fuel assistance, lower electric rates and a discounted phone bill.)—is this true??

Supported living may be another approach an individual may wish to pursue. A person can request services that are sensitive to individual preferences from agencies who provide living services, or be eligible for vouchers that will enable the purchase of the needed services and supports.

Employment

In order to prepare for the world of work, students must develop skills before they leave school. These skills include: resume writing, interviewing, how to dress for work and interviews, physical stamina, promptness, problem

solving, personal hygiene, following directions, accepting criticism, completing tasks in a timely fashion, working cooperatively and independently, developing social relationships and understanding how job accommodations can assist them. This is a large list of skills to master, however, the better a student is at these individual areas, the more employable she/he can be. Students can get involved in high school in school-based work programs, talk to guidance counselors about career exploration, or secure paid work experiences like afterschool jobs in order to begin to prepare for the world of work and begin to make choices based on these experiences.

Post-Secondary Education
Since the passage of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), many colleges and universities have developed programs, supports and/or special services for students with disabilities. Services offered vary among schools. Some colleges recruit individuals with disabilities or with specific kinds of disabilities. Supports for students with cognitive disabilities are generally more difficult to find. Students must be able to advocate for the accommodations that they need. It is up to the student to know what accommodation is needed and make it known to the administration and/or individual instructors. Students must learn their rights and responsibilities under the different laws, such as the ADA, Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973, before they leave high school and begin college.

Gathering information that is pertinent to college prior to leaving high school is a great help in the admissions process and while in school. In a student's personal file, there may be information that verifies a disability, which is what most schools require prior to providing accommodations. Other items in a personal file might be a student's most recent IEP, a doctor's letter verifying disability, school transcripts, portfolio of previous work, transition plans, learning style inventory and immunization records. Post secondary institutions are only legally obligated to provide accommodations to students with disabilities when the accommodations are requested and documented. Students must know which academic tasks are difficult and then ask for assistance.

Community Living
Living in and participating in one's community is an important part of adult life. Individuals with disabilities must realize that they have the same rights and responsibilities as do all law abiding citizens. Participation in the community can take many forms. Voting, helping out a neighbor, participating in a town sports league, and shopping are but a few activities we take for granted in our community. It is necessary that students leaving high school become aware of the activities available in their community of choice and seek out the places/activities that interest them. Since the passage of the ADA, all options that are available to individuals without disabilities are available to individuals with disabilities. One need not consider only the "special" activities, but rather consider the array of available community options.

It is ideal for someone or a group of people from a school to become "information brokers" to the school community about transition and planning for life after high school for students with disabilities — brokering between students and schools; families and schools; and schools and the adult service community.

Some schools are communicating the importance of transition planning in school. There is not one approach that dictates how transition planning information should be disseminated throughout the school community. Each school has unique characteristics and the person(s) responsible for sharing the information must adapt to their schools' own needs.

Although transition planning is mandated by federal law for students with disabilities, this kind of planning makes sense for all students. The more that the whole school takes on the

issues of transition planning for all students, the better likelihood that good transition planning will occur for students with disabilities.

Schools must be sure that there is a place where students can get information about transition planning, where they can learn about their rights and responsibiltiies and feel empowered to make their own decisions about what they want to do as they prepare for the adult world. Schools must try to disseminate information — schedule information sessions for students and families in order to help them understand the transition process. Someone from the school who may have contact with outside adult service agencies and know who to call with specific questions is also important. People in the business community who can be available for students as they begin to make linkages in the local community for jobs, places to live and other community activities is helpful for students as well. Having parents and students who are knowledgeable about transition lends the "consumer voice" to the issue — parents talking to other parents, students with other students.

Outreach
It is important that a school conduct outreach to as many people as possible, especially students. The more information students have, the more they are encouraged to attend their IEP and transition planning meetings, and the more they are encouraged to speak up for their choices and preferences will they become active participants in deciding their futures. They must feel comfortable to articulate their dreams and vision. Students who are empowered and feel good about themselves will, in turn, become citizens who can advocate for themselves and become responsible adults after high school. A school must look at the students they serve and determine what kinds of outreach will work best to reach the largest population of the student body.

How will the topic of transition and transition planning sustain itself? One answer is that it must become as integral to the IEP process as the

IEP is now. Different schools have interpreted this responsibility in different ways:

One school put together a manual — a how-to guide for transition planning in an attempt to institutionalize various policies and procedures regarding transition planning in the school. This guide was incorporated into the school's policy manual that is disseminated to the entire school community.

Another school linked transition planning into an already existing committee that deals with the School to Work Opportunities Act. The kinds of linkages they make in the work world for the "non-disabled" students can also assist students with disabilities in finding work in the community. The more integrated transition planning is into larger school initiatives, the better likelihood of it continuing .

All students require assistance and support when leaving high school. By linking all students into transition planning processes, more students can access resources. School wide activities to keep students, parents, and teachers informed is crucial. Again, committment on the part of a school's principal and other school personnel will also sustain transition planning as a viable resource in a school.

Students, parents, and teachers must know who and where to go for information. They must be aware of the adult service agencies in their local areas, and at the least, know who to call when they do not have the information they or someone else may need. Transition planning documentation requires that there be linkages to appropriate adult service agencies in order to assist the student in reaching their goals and vision. Networking to find resources (on local and regional levels if necessary) that consumers need is important in order to get good transition outcomes.

Success Stories

Jim, a 17 year old boy with Tourette's Syndrome, is on his way to plan for life after high school. Jim has attended his education planning meetings for the last 2 years and is an active participant in writing his transition plan. At his last meeting, Jim stressed that he would really like to live out of his home after he graduates from high school. Currently, Jim has chosen to work at a pet store, where he is exploring whether he wants to pursue a career working with animals. He realizes that he will probably have to make more money if he wants to live out of his parents' home, and will begin to explore creating a budget and learn about banking and money management in school. He will enroll in an accounting class in school, both for money management and career possibilities. He intends on graduating at next year when he's 18.

Chris is a 25 year old man who works as a custodian at a local high school. Chris has a significant seizure disorder and is labeled as mentally retarded. He is a client of the Department of Mental Retardation. His transition plan is a success because many people, including Chris, participated in his planning process. Chris was involved in a process called "person centered planning" where he gathered a group of family and friends and he explored many areas of his life, such as his living situation, his work situation and the kinds of community experiences he wanted to have. Chris was mainly intererested in making money and didn't care a lot aout what he did for a living, as long as he made at least $100.00 a week. He found the custodian job where he works four days a week, 7 hours a day. He needed a job coach for the first 6 months of the job, but was gradually faded until apoint where he can now work independently. He spends other time during the week doing activities like banking and shopping. A worker from a local community agency coordinates his work schedule and serves as liason between the job and Chris. Chris has an active social life, he plays softball in the summer in a men's league, with his personal care attendant (PCA), and enjoys "hanging out" in local restaurants and shops in his town. He lives with a friend and a PCA in an apartment near the high school. Chris considers his planning process as very successful — he received a great deal of support from his high school teachers and his caseworker from DMR, who knew about Chris and some of his needs prior to Chris' graduation from high school when Chris was 21.

Have You Thought About...?

Below are 4 checklists that can help students prioritize and think about what they want to do with their lives after high school. These questions may be a starting point for students as they begin to think about what is important to them and how they can make informed choices about their future.

Housing Checklist

☐ Do you want to live alone or with other people?

☐ Do you want to live close to family? friends?

☐ What kind of housing do you want? (unit in apartment complex; multi- / single family home; etc.)

☐ How will you pay for housing?

☐ Do you need financial assistance to live where you choose?

☐ Do you need accessible parking?

☐ Do you want to live near work? school?

☐ Where will you shop, do laundry, socialize?

☐ Do you want to live in a rural, urban or suburban setting?

☐ What kinds of support will you need to live in youer place of choice?(person care assistant, financial, modification to dweeling?)

☐ Will your living situation need any accommodations on the inside or outside?

Employment Checklist

☐ What are your interests?

☐ What kinds of work/activities do you enjoy?

☐ What are your skills?

☐ How much money do you need to earn to support your lifestyle?

☐ Where do you want to work?

☐ Where is work located in relation to transportation and where you live?

☐ Do you need further education and training?

☐ How many hours are you willing to work?

☐ What does the job pay?

☐ Does the job have benefits?

☐ Will having a job affect social security benefits?

☐ Will the job provide flexibility for ongoing medical needs?

☐ How flexible are the hours?

☐ Does the job fit your work style? (noisy, quiet, casual, formal)

☐ Is the job challeging enough?

☐ Is there room for advancement?

☐ What kind of supervision is needed?

☐ Does the job offer any staff development opportunities?

☐ Do you have any physical requirements? (need to sit for periods of time, etc..)

Post-Secondary Education Checklist

☐ What kind of college/university do you want to attend?

☐ Do you need an admission test? (SAT, ACT)

☐ Are there other requirements for admission? interviews, GPA)

☐ Do you have alternative admissions policies for students with disabilities?

☐ How will you pay for tuition?

☐ Do you want to live on campus?

☐ What kind of assistance do you need to meet college requirements?(reading, note taking, getting to & from classes, personal care, recreation)

☐ Will you be able to complete college work in given amount of time?

☐ Are there support groups/services available for students with disabilities throughout the duration of college?

☐ Does the school have tutoring services? is tutoring available?

☐ Are note takers available?

☐ What special equipment is available?

Community Living And Recreation/Leisure Checklist

☐ What kind of social situations do you prefer?) large groups, small groups, one to one, nightclubs, sports)

☐ Do you enjoy certain activities more than others?

☐ What type of budget do you have?

☐ If there were no financial restrictions, what would you choose to do?

☐ Have you tried a wide array of activities such as organized groups(aerobics/ drama class), informal groups(going to the mall with friends), inpendent activities (music lesson, gardening…)

☐ Do you need accommodations, or specialized equipment?

☐ Do you need assistance in registering for certain activities?

☐ Do you know where to register to vote?

☐ Are you able to vote independently?

☐ Will you need assistance to vote?

☐ Do you know where your polling place is?

☐ Is there someone to explain issues to you when they are not clear?

☐ Do you know where local stores are for food and clothing?

☐ Do you know where public transportation is if you need it?

☐ How do you prefer to meet people? (recreation activities, work, being introduced, want ads in the newspaper)

Massachusetts Transition Initiative

In Massachusetts and in 36 states across the country, schools are participating in federally funded grants aimed at assisting schools in getting information and learning about transition planning. In this state, the Massachusetts Transition Initiative (MTI), conducts training and technical assistance to schools on topics related to transition such as relevant laws, forming effective committees, person centered planning, data collection, linking with adult service agencies, resource gathering and how to fill out the Statement of Needed Transition Services that accompany the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This is sponsored by the MA Department of Education in conjunction with the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission and the Institute for Community Inclusion.

The Massachusetts Transition Initiative (MTI) is a five year systems change grant in conjunction with the Department of Education (DOE) and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC). Other participating agencies include the Department of Employment and Training, the Federation for Children with Special Needs, the Service Delivery Areas of the JTPA and the Institute for Community Inclusion. The purpose of the grant is to assist school districts, students, families, adult service agencies, and community-based providers to develop strategies that support youth with disabilities as they move from school to meaningful outcomes in adult life. The MTI provides training and technical assistance to schools across Massachusetts on issues of transition including person centered planning, student empowerment, organizing local transition planning committees, finding and sharing resources and facilitating linkages on local and regional levels for schools and human service agencies.

Resources

Various state and local agencies in Massachusetts can be resources for transition related issues and transition planning. The MA Department of Education provides information on how schools can participate in the grant and information on the new IEP and its accompanying document, The Statement of Needed Transition Services. Staff from the DOE conduct trainings and information sessions in these areas throughout the state.

The MA Rehab Commission (MRC) can provide information on adult service agencies and how to best contact certain area offices for information. All agencies in the state are receiving training and information about transition in the hopes of anticipating consumer concerns and questions.

The Federation for Children with special needs is an advocacy organization who can assist students, their parents and others with information on advocacy, the laws and other issues related to transition.

Community colleges throughout the state have disability services there to assist students with disabilities get the supports and services they need to be successful in post secondary school. They can help with information on figuring out what students need before they go to school.

Other state and local agencies can give help and information:
The Department of Employment and Training (DET)
The Department of Mental Health (DMH)
The Department of Mental Retardation (DMR)
MA Commission for the Blind (MCB)
MA Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH)
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This publication is available in alternative formats upon request

The mission of the Institute for Community Inclusion is to work to create and preserve a quality life for people with disabilities and their families through training, research, information sharing, and service with and for individuals with disabilities and their family members, community members, service providers, and policy makers. For further information, please contact:

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