

**SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSITION
SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES**

ADVANCES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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ADVANCES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION VOLUME 35

SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSITION SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

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PREFACE

Students with disabilities face many challenges and have continued to do so over numerous decades in our educational system. One area of focus that has been challenging to address is that of transition. Although we know transition within school and especially post-school is important for students with disabilities, many times services are not provided optimally to all students. Legislation has mandated transition services for students with disabilities, but school systems, teachers, and other professionals are slow to implement changes that will positively impact these students. Providing transitional services is definitely an area that has not been addressed to the level it should for students with disabilities. This journey to improve transition needs has not been easy for these students and their families. Transition services for students with disabilities need to be a primary focus in the future so students have positive post-school outcomes that will make them positive contributors for themselves and society.

This volume of *Advances in Special Education* focuses on *Special Education Transition Services for Students with Disabilities*. It begins with an introduction to the topic of Special Education and Transition Services for Students with Disabilities. In the remaining chapters of this book, leaders in the field of students with disabilities present their ideas and research support for a variety of disability topics. Chapters include: (1) Special Education Transition Services for Students with Learning Disabilities; (2) Transition Services for Students with Learning Disabilities; (3) Memories of Warmth: Transition for Students with Emotional and/or Behavioral Disorders; (4) Special Education Transition Services for Students with Intellectual Disabilities; (5) Special Education Transition Services for Students Who Are Deaf/Hard of Hearing; (6) Special Education Transition Services for Students with Visual Impairments; (7) Special Education Transition Services for Students with Autism; (8) Special Education Transition Services for Students with Extensive Support Needs; (9) Special Education Transition Services for Students with Traumatic Brain Injuries; (10) Speech-Language Pathologists' Role in Promoting Student Participation in Interprofessional Transition Planning Teams; (11) Transitioning Students with Physical Disabilities and Other Health Impairments; and finally (12), a concluding chapter on Foundational Assumptions for Successful Transition: Examining Alternatively Certified Special Educator Perceptions.

Volume 35 is composed of 12 chapters, which are written by well-known and respected university professors who are actively involved in teaching undergraduate and graduate special education courses and engaged in research on transition services for students with disabilities. *Special Education Transition Services for Students with Disabilities* is an excellent supplementary text for advanced

undergraduate special education majors and graduate students who are looking for detailed, comprehensive, and current information for their research papers or theses. We are also hoping that special education practitioners in the field will find this book useful.

Festus E. Obiakor
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Series Editors

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SPECIAL EDUCATION TRANSITION SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: AN INTRODUCTION

Jeffrey P. Bakken

ABSTRACT

Students with disabilities have many obstacles to overcome and challenges to address as they go through the educational system. Besides challenges with academics, behavior, and social situations, these students also need to be able to transition throughout their educational careers from different grade levels to post-school outcomes. Transition for students with disabilities should include input from classroom teachers, school psychologists and other related school personnel, families, the community, and, of course, the student. Specifically, the student should be an integral part of the transition process and planning. This chapter focuses on transition in general, discusses data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, and sets the stage for the rest of this volume.

Keywords: Transition; transition planning; teachers; families; community; postsecondary education

Students with disabilities have many obstacles to overcome and challenges to address as they go through educational systems. Besides challenges with academics, behavior, and social situations, these students also need to be able to transition throughout their educational careers from different grade levels to post-school outcomes. With regard to education, “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). Involving students with disabilities in their own transition planning is crucial for them to

take ownership of the transition process within school and after school is completed. Overall, however, “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” (Bakken & Obiakor, 2008, p. 5). When all is said and done, transition services assist students with disabilities to have the needed skills, become capable to leave the school environment, enter the working environment after high school, show the ability to hold a job, and function in society actively and independently.

Transitions for students with disabilities should be frequent and ongoing throughout their entire school experience as well as preparing them for after high school. There are numerous options after high school, and all should be considered for students with disabilities:

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. (Bakken & Obiakor, 2008, p. 3)

Specifically:

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. (Bakken & Obiakor, 2008, pp. 4–5)

In order for this to happen, teachers, parents, and the students need to be integral parts of the transition process.

NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL TRANSITION STUDY-2

One measure of the effectiveness of a student’s individual transition plan is to examine the student’s outcomes after exiting school. Unfortunately, the post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities are significantly lower than those of their nondisabled peers in virtually every single category as measured by the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2). This study is one of the best sources currently available for information related to the transition of students with disabilities. The 10-year NLTS-2 study of the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of youth with disabilities who had received special education services found that these youth were less likely than their peers in the general population to: (1) enroll in postsecondary programs (60 vs 67 percent), (2) earn an income comparable to the general population (an average of US\$10.40 per hour vs US\$11.40 per hour), (3) live independently (45 vs 59 percent), and (4) have a checking account (59 vs 74 percent). These data suggest that more work deserves to be done in the area of transition, and as educators and practitioners, we should change our focus on how we design instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities. In addition, trends from 2003 to

2012 for youth aged 15–18 years with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) suggest several key points.

Youth with an IEP are more likely than a decade ago to live in households that face economic challenges. The proportion of parents of youth with an IEP who reported that neither they nor their spouses had a paid job increased by nearly 5 percentage points, from 15 percent in 2003 to 20 percent in 2012. It is difficult enough to have a disability, but the fact that the home might be at an economic disadvantage intensifies this situation. Compared to those in 2003, parents of youth with an IEP in 2012 were twice as likely to report that their household received federal food benefits in the previous two years (16 vs 33 percent). The proportion of youth with an IEP who received Supplemental Security Income benefits during that same period also increased from 16 to 21 percent, according to parents, because they live in low-income households and have a disability. The data clearly show that things are not getting better even as families of students with disabilities are facing more challenges than 10 years ago.

Engagement in school and extracurricular activities among youth with an IEP increased in the past decade, whereas the prevalence of negative events such as grade retention, suspensions, and expulsions did not quite change. From 2003 to 2012, the proportion of youth with an IEP “agreed a lot” that they felt a part of their school rose by more than 20 percentage points (from 31 to 52 percent). This increase was huge as students with disabilities reported that they felt a part of the school culture. The increase of reported inclusion in the school by students with disabilities was a big step forward as compared to 10 years ago. In addition, the students with disabilities participation rate in school clubs and sports increased by 14 percentage points (from 48 to 62 percent), a trend consistent with Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 regulations that emphasize ensuring access to extracurricular activities. Thus, implementations of these regulations have had an impact on this aspect regarding students with disabilities. Similar proportions of parents in 2003 and 2012 reported their children with an IEP had ever repeated a grade (35 and 37 percent), been suspended (34 and 32 percent), or been expelled from school (7 and 9 percent). Although these numbers have really not changed, we would like to see them to be lower over time.

With regard to youth with an IEP, they are more likely than in the past to receive supports at school but less likely to get them at home. Receiving supports in school is essential; however, sometimes those supports need to be extended to the home environment. According to parents, the receipt of different types of school-based special education services grew by 21 percentage points from 2003 to 2012 (44 vs 65 percent); this change occurred during a period when the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act and subsequent IDEA 2004 raised expectations that schools improve the academic proficiency of youth with an IEP. Obviously, legislation helped in getting the needed services for students with disabilities. The supports with the largest growth were services from a tutor, reader, or interpreter (from 18 to 33 percent) and psychological counseling (from 13 to 28 percent), each of which rose by 15 percentage points. However, the proportion of parents who indicated that they helped their children with homework at least weekly declined by 7 percentage points, from 62 percent in 2003 to

55 percent in 2012. This could be due to the fact that parents are busier these days or may be not as familiar with the curriculum that students with disabilities encounter. Nonetheless, parents were 16 percentage points more likely than in the past to report that they attended a parent–teacher conference (67 vs 83 percent) which showed that parents did want to be involved in the schooling of their child with disabilities.

As it appeared, the participation in key transition activities by youth with an IEP and their parents had declined, although they may have attended an IEP meeting. Although most youth (aged 17 and 18 years) continued to report having gone to an IEP meeting in the past two years (74 percent in 2003 and 81 percent in 2012), the proportion who reported ever meeting with school staff to discuss their post-high school transition plans decreased (from 79 to 70 percent). This means that all students with disabilities should be attending transition meetings and be involved with discussing their plans after high school. That percentages of students involved in these meetings went down over the last 10 years are a bit alarming. Similarly, while the proportion of parents who reported going to an IEP meeting in the past two years was stable (89 percent in 2003 and 91 percent in 2012), the proportion of parents who reported ever meeting with school staff to discuss transition issues declined (from 79 to 60 percent in 2012). This statistic is also alarming as parents are less involved in the transition process than they had been 10 years ago. Working for pay while in high school, which some research links to better postsecondary employment and education success (Baer et al., 2003; Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; McDonnall & Mally, 2012; Simonsen & Neubert, 2013; Wagner, Newman, & Javitz, 2014), declined for jobs not sponsored by schools (from 27 to 19 percent). This decline may have partly reflected the lingering effects of the recession from 2007 to 2009. The decline in paid work did not extend to school-sponsored work activities, in which participation was similar over the decade (14 percent in 2003 and 13 percent in 2012). The logical extension is that school-sponsored and paid work opportunities for students with disabilities need to be more of an emphasis for students with disabilities. These opportunities can help with a successful transition after high school.

Considering the different categories of disability under IDEA, progress has been greatest for youth with emotional disturbance and intellectual disability, including increased participation in extracurricular activities and use of school services. These two groups demonstrated upward trends in the greatest number of key experiences linked to post-high school outcomes. From 2003 to 2012, youth with emotional disturbance reported growth in school sports and club participation (from 40 to 56 percent). The proportion of youth in this group who received services from a tutor, reader, or interpreter also increased from 15 to 29 percent, according to their parents. In addition, a growing proportion of parents of youth with emotional disturbance indicated that their children could perform five typical teenage tasks independently (from 5 to 12 percent). Youth with intellectual disability also increased their participation in school sports and clubs (from 36 to 56 percent) and their receipt of services from a tutor, reader, or interpreter (from 14 to 36 percent). Their suspension rates also fell (from 38 to 25 percent), but a smaller proportion of their parents indicated that they provided weekly

homework help (from 70 to 59 percent). For both of these groups of students, the progress that has been made, in most cases, is substantial.

Youth with deafness-blindness, multiple disabilities, and visual impairments made less progress. They had fewer positive changes than those with emotional disturbance and intellectual disability in key experiences but did not have any downward trends either. As reported by parents, the proportion of youth in each of these three disability groups who received services from a tutor, reader, or interpreter increased from 2003 to 2012. In addition, the proportion of youth with visual impairments who have been suspended from school declined from 14 to 5 percent in the past decade, according to their parents. As a group, fewer youth with hearing impairments participated in transition planning or paid employment in a non-school-sponsored job. The proportion of youth with hearing impairments who indicated ever having met with school staff to discuss their transition plans decreased from 88 to 71 percent, and the proportion employed in a non-school job declined from 35 to 14 percent. These declines could be due to a lower number of students being served; however, the decreases may not be a good sign regarding transition services for the population of students. Youth with hearing impairments were the only disability group to experience downward trends without growth in at least one of the seven key measures. This is another poor sign of progress that should have been made over a 10-year period for this category of students.

For the other six groups of students with disabilities, progress was mixed on the key experiences linked to post-high school success. Youth with autism, orthopedic impairments, other health impairments, specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, and traumatic brain injuries each experienced a mix of upward and downward trends across the seven key measures. Overall, over the last 10 years, the changes in transition for students with disabilities are not what we would expect. We would expect to see increases in transition services and other things related to transition over this time frame, and these changes should be pretty substantial. The data, however, suggest that not much progress has been made regarding students with disabilities. This is concerning given the number of students with disabilities and that transition services are supposed to be an integral part of the educational process. Maybe, the problem lies with classroom teachers and understanding the entire transition process.

THE ROLE OF CLASSROOM TEACHERS IN TRANSITION

In general, students with disabilities work these days with both general and special education teachers in their schools. Both general education and special education professionals need to know effective strategies, methods, and ideas to teach students with disabilities the skills that they will need in adult life (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Thoma, Nathanson, Baker, & Tamura, 2002). One way that this can be done is through the student's IEP. The IDEA (2006) requires schools to develop transition plans for students with disabilities, beginning at age 16, if not before. The regulations define *transition planning* as a "coordinated set of activities" that help students move from school into post-

school activities (20 U.S.C. §1401[34]). There are five recommended steps to transition planning. These steps are listed in [Table 1](#).

Transition planning for students with disabilities is essential for their success and should be a priority in schools. Proper training for teachers should be implemented so that they acquire the essential knowledge and skills needed to collaborate with other key stakeholders and create transition plans that will prepare students to exit high school and move forward with further education, a job, or some other post-school outcome. All professionals should be trained on the transition processes. One of those individuals should be a school psychologist.

THE ROLE OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN TRANSITION

The ultimate goal for school psychologists, special education practitioners, and other professionals who work with adolescents is to help students acquire the skills and knowledge to live happy, productive, and fulfilling lives after high

Table 1. Steps in Transition Planning.

Step 1: Identify Transition Goals

In designing a transition IEP, the team should begin by considering the student's needs in the areas of postsecondary education, employment, and independent living.

Step 2: Link Postsecondary Goals with IEP Goals

Once the team develops measurable postsecondary goals in education, employment, and independent living areas, annual IEP goals can be written. At least, one IEP goal should align with and support each of the student's postsecondary goals. There should be a clear connection between postsecondary goals (to be achieved after graduation) and IEP goals (to be achieved in an academic year).

Step 3: Troubleshoot and Adjust Transition and IEP Goals

A high-quality transition IEP is built on measurable goals. To be useful after graduation, skills should be generalizable to postsecondary employment, education, or independent living. IEP goals need four key components: (1) the student's name, (2) an observable skill that the student will improve upon, (3) the conditions under which the skill should be performed, and (4) a criterion for reaching the goal.

Step 4: Provide Opportunities to Teach Skills

Once an IEP goal has been developed, careful consideration should be given to where the skill can best be taught within the student's school day. For instance, it may be necessary to add a communications class as an option for students who need individualized instruction in social skills.

Step 5: Evaluate Progress

For example, a student's special education teacher learns that he is forgetting to turn in homework in his biology and history classes. To gain more information about what might be happening, the special education teacher sends out an e-mail to all of his teachers asking them to provide information on his behavior and the frequency with which they gave him reminders. Once data are collected across the school day, including the level of teacher prompting, the special education teacher may find that in all classes, except maybe biology and history, the student's teachers may remind him daily and assist him to turn in his work. His special education teacher may realize that the student is having significant problems with the organization, and he requires instruction and support in completing and turning in assigned work. With more comprehensive data, the IEP teacher and team may design a measurable goal to increase the student's independence in work completion. The team may now know this skill will become increasingly important as he transitions to postsecondary education.

school. This includes planning and preparing for the transition from school to adult life, processes that are particularly important for students with disabilities. In transition planning for these students, school psychologists traditionally collaborate with educators, parents, and other professionals as contributing members of the IEP teams to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments that strengthen connections between home, school, and the community. Further, psychologists participate in the efforts of IEP teams to identify and select student-appropriate transition goals. IDEA requires that one or more transition goals be included with each student's IEP, based on age-appropriate transition assessment and evaluation data (IDEA, 2004) to be implemented when the student turns 16 (in some states 14). A school psychologist can be a welcome addition to the IEP team to help come up with ideas to help students with disabilities in the transition process.

THE ROLE OF FAMILIES

Families are an integral part of the transition process. Especially for culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families of children with disabilities, the collaboration with school personnel during transition planning can be challenging. Professionals (e.g., special education, general education, administrators, and stakeholders) should examine what steps they take to support CLD families and their transition-age children (Zhang, 2005; Zhang & Benz, 2006; Zhang, Landmark, Grenweige, & Montoya, 2010). Parents from CLD backgrounds need to feel that they play a vital role in the future success of their sons or daughters with disabilities. In fact, all parents should feel they play a vital role in this process. Differences in culture and ethnicity can affect families' involvement in transition planning and the goals that they emphasize for their children. For example, Turnbull and Turnbull (2001) found that families from Western cultures (i.e., Anglo-European) valued independence and personal choice, while other cultures (e.g., Native American) valued interdependence and cooperation for the good of the group. CLD families (i.e., African American, Hispanic American, and Native American) are found to place great emphasis on culture and interdependence when planning for their children's transition programs (Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2001). Teachers, administrators, and other school personnel need to be cognizant of the way they communicate with and in how they participate with parents from various different cultures and backgrounds (see Table 2 for steps to incorporate families into the transition process).

On the whole, family members provide an additional source of support for the transition to adult roles for students with disabilities. Programs encouraging high levels of family involvement are more likely to increase academic growth, confidence, and self-advocacy skills among the students they serve (Karvonen, Test, Wood, Browder, & Algozzine, 2004; Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1995). Furthermore, students whose parents successfully advocate with school personnel are likely to have better post-school outcomes in terms of employment (Lindstrom, Doren, Metheny, Johnson, & Zane, 2007) and independent living (Devlieger & Trach, 1999). Having parents of students with disabilities being

Table 2. Steps to Incorporate CLD Families into the Transition Process.***Step One: Enrich Families' Lives***

Professionals need to be familiar with the community and postsecondary options (e.g., employment and education) available to the CLD families of the students in their classrooms. Professionals must view families as valuable members of the transition planning team in order to avoid feelings of inadequacy within the family (Cooney, 2002; Geenen, Powers, & Lopez-Vasquez, 2005).

Step Two: Demonstrate Cultural Competence

A critical component to successful transition planning is the encouragement and respect of all family perspectives on a child's potential strengths (Cooney, 2002).

Step Three: Support Family Values

Professionals must provide opportunities for CLD students to transition into postsecondary life with their family values intact. A professional can facilitate CLD students and families in identifying transition goals, such as prevocational training, job placement, independent living, and community-based work experiences that are culturally appropriate and valuable to families.

Step Four: Promote a Family-centered Approach

Professionals can promote a family-centered approach during transition planning while understanding and meeting the unique needs of their students. One way to do this is through the use of a student self-directed intervention (Shogren, 2011). To assist CLD students, professionals can introduce the *Self-directed IEP* (Martin, Marshall, Maxson, & Jerman, 1996; Valenzuela & Martin, 2005) to facilitate CLD student and family voice.

involved in the transition process is critical to student outcomes after high school. What is more, high parent expectations have been found to be valid predictors of post-school success (Doren, Gau, & Lindstrom, 2012; Lindstrom, Doren, & Miesch, 2011). The key is to get parents to be involved in the transition process.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITIES IN TRANSITION

The community plays an active role in the transition process of students with disabilities. Community activities fit perfectly into transition planning and should be incorporated whenever possible. Such activities include community-based instruction, job shadowing, community-based work experiences, volunteering, supervised employment, and service learning. These activities can be used independently or in conjunction with each other. The community is a great resource because it allows students to apply the skills learned in the classroom in authentic environments, which, in turn, helps students to generalize those skills to their surroundings after high school. Students are likely to acquire and maintain skills more effectively when they learn and practice in community-based settings (Stone-MacDonald, 2011). In the same vein, teachers should consider connecting with community leaders to get their students out in the community to practice the skills learned in the classroom. This is essential for helping students transfer skills in a controlled environment to a real and uncontrolled environment. In addition, this allows students to problem-solve and think about what they need to do and how they need to interact with others in a new environment. Not doing this is detrimental to the possible success of students with disabilities who have been trained in a classroom to be able to transfer skills to a setting outside the classroom.