NASET's Education Children with Severe Disabilities Series

Transition Services on the IEP

Part III

Introduction

Since the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), Public Law 94-142, in 1975, Individualized Education Programs (IEP) have been a requirement of law for all children and youth with disabilities found eligible for special education. Each student's IEP must list goals and objectives for educational activities and include information about the student's assessment and educational placement, the instructional content areas to be addressed throughout the year, the timelines and persons responsible for activities corresponding to the goals and objectives, how student progress will be evaluated, and the related services that each student needs in order to benefit from his or her special education. With the newest amendments to the EHA -- now entitled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA 2004- a component has been updated to the IEP. Beginning no later than age 16, each student now must also have included in the IEP a statement of the transition services that he or she needs in order to prepare for such post-school outcomes as employment, postsecondary education, adult services, independent living, and community participation .

Clearly, for students aged 16 or older and, in many cases, for students who are younger, the contents of the IEP have expanded, and this will broaden the focus of IEPs and affect how they are developed. Traditionally, the IEP has been designed for a maximum of one year, breaking annual goals into short-term objectives. With the addition of transition services, the IEP becomes longer term, with objectives spanning across several years.

For the first time, planning is oriented towards life after high school, with plans including adult services agencies and community agencies, where applicable. This is an enormous step forward in the concept of preparing students educationally, and will require a great deal of insight, foresight, and planning on the part of students, parents, and school and other agency professionals.

- This area has been developed to explain transition services in the IEP. First, in order to provide a good grounding as to the meaning of these services, we will review IEPs and their purpose. The next section will discuss IEP development with respect to transition services.

- The last part of this chapter will examine how federal law might be translated into educational action; this includes looking closely at transition components to include in the IEP, current national trends regarding setting goals for transition, and the importance of assessment in helping each student plan for transition.

Overview of IEP Development

All students in special education are expected to leave school prepared to:

- Live independently
- Enjoy self-determination
- Make choices
- Contribute to society
- Pursue meaningful careers
- Enjoy integration in the economic, political, social, cultural and educational mainstream of American society
- The IEP is the blueprint for attaining improved educational results for students with disabilities. It is used to strengthen the connection between special education programs and services and the general education curriculum.

The IEP serves two major purposes:

- It is a written plan for a student in special education: Simply stated, the IEP explains the specific educational objectives and placement for a particular student. It is a management tool for the entire assessment teaching process
- The IEP becomes the critical link between the student in special education and the special teaching that the student requires (Lerner, 1997)
  Components to be Included in the IEP

According to IDEA 2004 the components of an IEP must include:

- (i)a statement of the child's present levels of educational performance, including -- (I) how the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum; or (II) for preschool children, as appropriate, how the disability affects the child's participation in appropriate activities
- (ii)a statement of measurable annuals goals, including benchmarks or short-term objectives, related to -- (I) meeting the child's needs that result from the child's disability to enable the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum; and (II) meeting each of the child's other educational needs that result from the child's disability
- (iii)a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aids and services to be provided to the child, or on behalf of the child, and a statement of program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child -- (I) to advance appropriately toward attaining the annual goals; (II) to be involved and progress in the general curriculum in accordance with clause (i) and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and (III) to be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and non-disabled children in the activities described in this paragraph
- (iv)an explanation of the extent, if any, to which the child will not participate with non-disabled children in the regular class and in the activities described in clause (iii)
- (v)a statement of any individual modifications in the administration of State or district-wide assessments of student achievement that are needed in order for the

child to participate in such assessment; and (II) if the IEP Team determines that the child will not participate in a particular State or district-wide assessment of student achievement (or part of such an assessment), a statement of -- (aa) why that assessment is not appropriate for the child; and (bb) how the child will be assessed

- (vi)the projected date for the beginning of the services and modifications described in clause (iii), and the anticipated frequency, location, and duration of those services and modifications
- (vii)beginning at age 14, and updated annually, a statement of the transition service needs of the child under the applicable components of the child's IEP that focuses on the child's courses of study (such as participation in advanced-placement courses or a vocational education program); (II) beginning at age 16 (or younger, if determined appropriate by the IEP team), a statement of needed transition services for the child, including, when appropriate, a statement of the interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages; and (III) beginning at least one year before the child reaches the age of majority under State law, a statement that the child has been informed of his or her rights under this title, if any, that will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority under section 615(m)
- (viii)a statement of -- (I) how the child's progress toward the annual goals described in clause (ii) will be measured; and (II) how the child's parents will be regularly informed (by such means as periodic report cards), at least as often as parents are informed of their non-disabled children's progress, of -- (aa) their child's progress toward the annual goals described in clause (ii); and (bb) the extent to which that progress is sufficient to enable the child to achieve the goals by the end of the year."

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Requirements under IDEA 2004

The initial draft of the IEP should be developed at the eligibility meeting by the committee members, the parent(s) and, when appropriate, the student. Each student's Individualized Education Program is a vital document, for it spells out the special education and related services that he or she will receive. A team that includes parents and school professionals and, when appropriate, the student develops the IEP. The new IDEA maintains the IEP as a document of central importance and, in the hope of improving compliance, moves all provisions related to the IEP to one place in the law.

At the same time, several key changes have been made to what information the IEP must contain and the way in which the IEP is developed. The IEP retains many familiar components from previous legislation, such as statements regarding the student's present levels of educational performance, annual goals, special education and related services to be provided, projected dates for the beginning and end of services, and transition services for youth. However, some modifications have been made to these familiar components to place more emphasis within the law upon involving students with disabilities in the general curriculum and in the general education classroom, with supplementary aids and services as appropriate.

For example, "present levels of educational performance" must now include a statement of how the child's disability affects his or her involvement and progress in the general curriculum. Similarly, the IEP must contain a statement of special education and related services, as well as the supplementary aids and services, that the child or youth needs in order to: "...be involved and progress in the general curriculum...and to participate in extracurricular and other nonacademic activities; and...to be educated and participate with other children with disabilities and non-disabled children.

With these new IEP requirements, there is a clear intent to strengthen the connection between special education and the general education curriculum. As the Committee on Labor and Human Resources' Report [to Accompany S. 717] states: "The new emphasis on participation in the general education curriculum... is intended to produce attention to the accommodations and adjustments necessary for disabled children to access the general education curriculum and the special services which may be necessary for appropriate participation in particular areas of the curriculum..."

Along the same line is the requirement that the IEP include an explanation of the extent to which the student will not be participating with children without disabilities in the general education class and in extracurricular and non-academic activities. This explanation of the extent to which the child will be educated separately is a new component of the IEP, yet is clearly in keeping with the changes noted above.

Other aspects of the IEP are entirely new as well. For example, each student's IEP must now include a statement of how the administration of State or district-wide assessments will be modified for the student so that he or she can participate. If the IEP team determines that the student cannot participate in such assessments, then the IEP must include a statement of (a) why the assessment is not appropriate for the child, and (b) how the child will be assessed. These changes work in tandem with changes elsewhere in the IDEA requiring that students with disabilities be included in State and district-wide assessments of student achievement.

Other new IEP requirements are statements regarding: (a) informing the student about the transfer of rights as he or she approaches the age of majority; (b) how parents will be regularly informed of their child's progress toward meeting the annual goals in the IEP; (c) where services will be delivered to the student; and (d) transition service needs of the student beginning at age 14.

IDEA maintains essentially the same process for developing the IEP -- namely, the document is developed by a multidisciplinary team, including the parents. However, the new legislation increases the role of the general educator on the IEP team, to include, when appropriate, helping to determine positive behavioral interventions and appropriate supplementary aids and services for the student. Also added to the IEP process are "special factors" that the IEP team must consider. These factors include:

- behavior strategies and supports, if the child's behavior impedes his or her learning or that of others
- the child's language needs (as they relate to the IEP) if the child has limited English proficiency
- providing for instruction in Braille and the use of Braille (unless not appropriate), if a child is blind or visually impaired
- the communication needs of the child, with a list of specific factors to be considered if a child is deaf or hard of hearing
- whether the child requires assistive devices and services.

The language in the new IDEA emphasizes periodic review of the IEP (at least annually, as previously required) and revision as needed. A new, separate requirement exists: Schools must report to parents on the progress of their child with disabilities at least as frequently as progress of non-disabled children is reported, which seems likely to affect the revision process for IEPs. If it becomes evident that a child is not making "expected progress toward the annual goals and in the general curriculum," the IEP team must meet and revise the IEP.

The new legislation specifically lists a variety of other circumstances under which the IEP team would also need to review and revise the IEP, including the child's anticipated needs, the results

of any reevaluation conducted, or information provided by the parents. IDEA 2004 and Transition Services.

The requirements for providing transition services for youth with disabilities have been modified IDEA 2004. While the definition of transition services remains the same, two notable changes have been made to IEP requirements:

- (1) beginning when a student is 14, and annually thereafter, the student's IEP must contain a statement of his or her transition service needs under the various components of that IEP that focus upon the student's courses of study (e.g., vocational education or advanced placement)
- (2) beginning at least one year before the student reaches the age of majority under State law, the IEP must contain a statement that the student has been informed of the rights under the law that will transfer to him or her upon reaching the age of majority.

The new law maintains 16 as the age when students' IEPs must contain statements of needed transition services. These two requirements -- one for students aged 14 and older and one for students aged 16 and older -- seem confusingly similar. However, the purpose of including certain statements for students beginning at age 14, according to the Committee on Labor and Human Resources' Report [to Accompany S. 717], "is to focus attention on how the child's educational program can be planned... [and] the provision is designed to augment, and not replace, the separate transition services requirement, under which children with disabilities [who are 16 or older] receive transition services

The second mandate within IDEA that will affect IEP development of students is the law's statement of when, at the latest, the provision of transition services must begin. According to IDEA:

...The IEP for each student, beginning no later than age 16 (and at a younger age, if determined appropriate), must include a statement of the needed transition services... [Section 300.346(b)(1)]

The way in which this age requirement is stated gives school districts some latitude in deciding when to begin providing transition services. At a minimum, schools must provide services to students who are age 16. As the regulations state in a note, "For all students who are 16 years or older, one of the purposes of the annual [IEP] meeting will always be the planning of transition services, since transition services are a required component of the IEP for these students (Section 300.344, Note 2). However, a school may provide transition services to younger students, when their needs deem it appropriate. This may be particularly important for students with severe disabilities or for those who are at risk of dropping out of school before age 16. Considering the fact that 36% of students with disabilities do, in fact, drop out of school the need clearly exists to provide transition services to many students who have not yet turned 16 years old.

Although the statute does not mandate transition services for all students beginning at age 14 or younger, the provision of these services could have a significantly positive effect on the employment and independent living outcomes for many of these students in the future, especially for students who are likely to drop out before age 16.

Note 3 (in Section 300.344) goes on to quote from the Report of the House Committee on Education and Labor, which was written to accompany and explain the IDEA:

"Although this language leaves the final determination of when to initiate transition services for students under age 16 to the IEP process, it nonetheless makes it clear that Congress expects

consideration to be given to the need for transition services for some students by age 14 or younger. The Committee encourages this approach because of their concern that age 16 may be too late for many students, particularly those at risk of dropping out of school and those with the most severe disabilities. Even for those students who will stay in school until age 18, many will need more than two years of transitional services. Students with disabilities are now dropping out of school before age 16, feeling that the education system has little to offer the. Initiating services at a younger age will be critical" (House Report 101-544, 10 (1990).

In reference to students with severe cognitive and multiple disabilities, this House Report goes on to observe that, before these students "age out" of the public school system, "they must have time to develop the essential skills which will be critical for them throughout their lives. Transition services for this population must be considered, planned, and provided over a multi-year time period" (U.S. House of Representatives, 1990, June 18, p. 10). Thus, Congress makes its intent clear that, while providing transition services to students with disabilities under the age of 16 is not a requirement of the law, it is still highly desirable for many individuals, particularly those with severe disabilities and those at risk of dropping out of school.

Individuals Involved in Transition Planning

The regulations of IDEA are very clear as to what individuals should participate in determining the transition services a student needs and what these services will entail. In addition to the usual participants at an IEP meeting (e.g., the student's classroom professional, a school representative, and the parents), the public agency is required to invite to any meeting where transition services will be discussed:

The student

A representative of any other agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services. The Student- It is particularly important that the student be involved in the process. As can be seen above, the regulations specifically state that the student must be invited to attend the IEP meeting. This includes students who are younger than 16. If transition services for a younger student are discussed at a meeting where the student is not present, no decisions regarding transition services may be made without holding a subsequent IEP meeting for that purpose and inviting the student to the meeting.

Furthermore, the coordinated set of activities developed "must be based on the individual students needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests". If the student does not attend, then the school must take "other steps to ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered". In most cases, the person most able to determine and explain the student's preferences and interests is, of course, the student.

However, perhaps the most important reason to involve the student in transition planning goes beyond what is required by law. The critical issue here is one of self-determination. "Self-determination, which includes self-actualization, assertiveness, creativity, pride, and self-advocacy, must be part of the career development process that begins in early childhood and continues throughout adult life" (Ward, 1992, p. 389). It is vital that educational systems, parents, and other service providers do everything they can to facilitate the development of each student's self-determination skills, for these are at the core o the student developing the ability to manage his or her own life. The IEP meeting is one critically important and appropriate, place for the student to have an active, self-determining role. What is being discussed and planned in the IEP meeting, after all, are services that will directly affect the student's life, now and in the future.

To facilitate the student's participation in the transition process, however, many students may need to be informed about the nature of their role in the IEP meeting and afterwards -- specifically, what their participation entails. Expressing personal preferences and desires and advocating for themselves, particularly in the presence of "authority figures" such as administrators, professionals, and parents, may be a new role for students, one for which they need guidance and feedback. Parents can help prepare the young person to participate in IEP meetings, talking about its purpose, describing what goes on and who typically attends, and discussing transition issues with their child before (and after) the meeting occurs. Some students may benefit from rehearsing certain aspects of the meeting (e.g., greetings, appropriate ways to express preferences or suggest alternatives). If the student requires any accommodation, such as an interpreter or an augmentative communication device, this should be arranged (by the student, parents, or professional) in advance of the meeting, to remove any artificial obstacles to the student's participation. Ultimately, "the goal is for students to assume control (with appropriate levels of support) over their transition program and identify and manage its various components" (Ward, 1992, p. 389).

Parents must also be invited to any meeting where transition services will be discussed, and they must be informed that that is the purpose of the meeting. The school must also indicate to the parents that the student will be invited and identify any other agency that will be invited to participate.

Participating Agencies that would typically be invited to participate in discussing and determining what transition services a student should receive would be those agencies that share responsibility in some way for providing or paying for those services. Thus, the agency responsible for providing vocational rehabilitation services might be invited to send a representative. If an agency is invited to send a representative to a meeting and does not do so, the school "shall take other steps to obtain the participation of the other agency in the planning of any transition service."

Together, this group of people -- the student, the student's professional(s), a representative of the school, the parents, representatives from outside agencies that will be involved in planning or providing transition services, and any other invited participants -- will discuss and determine what transition services the student needs.

Determining What Transition Services Are Needed

IDEA does not specifically identify how the IEP team determines what transition services a student needs, but since transition services are included as a component of the IEP, the process traditionally used to identify other needed educational or related services would apply. This process typically involves evaluation using a variety of measures, such as observations, anecdotal information, and testing (standardized and/o performance). (See later in this document for a more detailed discussion of assessment issues.) Obviously, this evaluation process would focus upon transition issues (employment, postsecondary education, adult services, independent living, and community participation), asking questions such as:

- What competencies and knowledge does the student need in order to move successfully into employment (postsecondary education, adult services, independent living, community participation, etc.)?
- What skills and knowledge does the student have at present in each of these areas? Is functional vocational evaluation necessary to determine the student's level of skills? What knowledge and skills does the student still need to acquire?

This information will be critical in determining appropriate transition services for the student and in developing the specific transition plan. In particular, the plan should address the areas in which the student most needs to increase his or her knowledge and skills in order to prepare for transition.

It must be pointed out that, although the regulations state unequivocally that "the coordinated set of activities must...include instruction, community experiences, and the development of employment and other adult living objectives", emphasis added), there may be occasions when certain of these services are not provided to a student. This possibility arises from Section 300.346(b)(2), the section of the regulations defining the contents of the IEP. This section states:

"If the IEP team determines that services are not needed in one or more of the areas specified in the IEP must include a statement to that effect and the basis upon which the determination was made."

Presumably, this statement is included to acknowledge that students differ from each other in terms of the nature and severity of their disability, personality, abilities, cultural values, and interests. Therefore, the type and amount of transition services needed may also differ from student to student. Just as special education and related services provided to students differ depending upon student need, so, too, will transition services vary? As with other educational services provided to students with disabilities, then, transition services will be individualized to fit the person's unique needs.

Thus, an IEP team may legitimately decide that a student does not need transition services in one (or more) area(s). For example, a student might be planning on studying at a local university. To prepare for transition to this environment, he or she may need to develop objectives related to the university's application process and to investigate what accommodations the university makes available to students with disabilities and which accommodations he or she will need, if any. Some instruction may be necessary to help the student address these objectives, but community-based experiences may not be necessary. To be in compliance with the law, the IEP for this student must then state that services in community-based experiences will not be provided and give the reason(s) why the team feels that the services are not needed. However, "since it is part of the IEP, the IEP team must reconsider its determination at least annually." Presumably, this latter requirement is intended to ensure that when new information about the student becomes available or the student's plans change, appropriate changes are made in the transition services he or she needs in order to prepare for life after high school.

Hopefully, the regulation permitting variability in the type and amount of transition services will not also permit school districts to avoid providing services that are, in fact, needed by students. Students and parents should remember that the regulations require a team approach to making decisions about which services are needed, and that they are integral members of the team. In some cases, advocating for needed transition services may be an important part of obtaining the services. For disputes that cannot be settled through open discussion, compromise, or mediation, students and parents have recourse through the law's procedural safeguards (e.g., due process hearings). These safeguards are the same as those for resolving conflicts over special education and related services, for, indeed, transition services are an expansion of the IEP process and can be provided either as special education or as a related service.

Once the team has reached agreement on the transition areas that will be important for the student to emphasize, actually developing statements within the IEP may be different from the process used for detailing special education and related services. The most important difference

is that planning for transition must look several years into the future, proactively addressing questions such as:

How many years of public school does the student have remaining?
Given the student's present level of performance and where he or she needs to be by the end of high school, what transition services are needed this year?
What services are needed in each remaining year?

Especially important to the goal-setting process is the concept that skills are learned along a progressive continuum of difficulty. This means that new skills should build upon the skills mastered previously and that addressing more advanced skills and knowledge can often be deferred to transition plans made in subsequent years.

A second difference is that the plan does not necessarily have to state the transition services in terms of annual goals and short-term objectives. Interestingly, the rules and regulations of the IDEA do not specifically require -- nor do they specifically exclude -- the use of goal and objective statements for transition services (such statements are required for other educational services). However, it is certainly good educational practice to plan many of the transition services using annual goal statements and short-term objectives. Such statements allow school districts, parents, and students to see clearly where they are going and to measure progress.

Providing Transition Services

The IDEA requires that, when appropriate, the IEP of each student planning for transition should also include "...a statement of each public agency and each participating agency's responsibilities or linkages, or both, before the student leaves the school setting.

The public agency, typically the school, is primarily responsible for the provision of transition services. According to the law, the school's responsibilities in this regard -- what services it will provide -- must be stated clearly in the student's IEP. The responsibilities of any other participating agency (e.g., vocational rehabilitation) must also be stated in the IEP, including a statement of the agency's "commitment...to meet any financial responsibility it may have in the provision of transition services." Linkages between agencies, such as cooperative agreements to provide transition services, must also be stipulated.

Establishing such interagency linkages can be of enormous benefit to students planning for transition. This is because, as students with disabilities leave the public school system, their entitlement to educational, vocational, and other services ends. In the place of one relatively organized service provider (the school system), there may now be a confusing array of many service providers (i.e., the local vocational rehabilitation agency, the state department of mental health, developmental disabilities councils, community services boards, the federal social security system, and so on). Individuals with disabilities who have left school become solely responsible for identifying where to obtain the services they need and for demonstrating their eligibility to receive the services. Therefore, for many students with disabilities, identifying relevant adult service providers, establishing eligibility to receive adult services, and having interagency responsibilities and linkages stated in the IEP, all while still in school, "will be necessary to ensure a smooth transition from school to adult life."

Where Transition Services Can Be Provided

The IDEA does not enumerate where transition services should be provided. However, it is important to note that the definition of transition services states that the coordinated set of activities that the IEP team designs to promote the student's movement to post-school life must include:

Instruction
Community experiences
The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives
If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. [300.18(b)(2)]

These requirements make it clear that transition services should be provided across a variety of locations, including within the community, as befitting the needs of the student and the particular skill or knowledge to be acquired. For example, the IEP team might determine that the student needs to learn how to operate within the community. One important facet of this general goal might involve knowing how to ride the bus. Transition services, then, might address the student's need to ride the bus by developing learning experiences within the classroom (e.g., instruction in how to identify the proper bus and pay for the ride) and then matching the classroom experience with activities within the community (e.g., actually taking the bus). More will be said later in this document about the importance of providing students in transition with community-based experiences.

Expanding the IEP

Adding transition services to the IEP takes advantage of an already established process for deciding upon and delivering educational services to students with disabilities. The IEP process under the IDEA is much the same as under the EHA, in that a multidisciplinary team -- including the parents and, where appropriate, the student -- meets to discuss and set appropriate goals and objectives for the student with a disability. The team also identifies the services the student needs, states how it will determine if the student has achieved the goals and objectives, and decides other important aspects of the student's special education, including the amount of time to be spent in regular education classes.

However, now that needed transition services must be stated in the IEPs of all students who are 16 years old and older (and in the IEPs of many students who are younger than 16), the basic tenets of the IEP described above are expanded, if not in format, then in philosophy. Perhaps the largest and most significant aspect of including transition services in the IEP is the need to expand the original concept of annual goals and short-term objectives to focus on outcomes of special education and incorporate the long-range life goals of the student with disabilities. This change in philosophy does not by any means indicate that educators and agency personnel can predict or be responsible for what the rest of an individual's life will entail. It does, however, cause professionals and families to think beyond the parameters of year-long goals and school-only service systems. The subsequent challenge for IEP teams is the creation of transition goals that reflect the needs the student with disabilities will have as an adult and yet still fit within the guidelines of IEP process.

The fact that the IDEA 2004 specifically defines transition services as a component within the IEP will, undoubtedly, have other ramifications for local education agencies and education professionals. For example, while many local education agencies (LEAs) across the country are already providing these services, they are following their own, individually-styled formats for transition planning. This includes the use of a separate Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) that

is attached to the IEP. Since transition services are now defined as being part of the IEP, LEAs using a separate document (the ITP) may need to integrate development of this document into the IEP process.

Bringing in the World Outside of School

Another ramification of having transition services as part of the IEP is that the participants in an IEP meeting may now include individuals from outside of the school setting, such as representatives of adult service providers (i.e., vocational rehabilitation, Social Security Administration, JTPA programs, Community Services Board). Including professionals from non-school agencies in IEP development is important in providing transition services, because any or all of these agencies may be involved with the student during and/or after his or her public school years. Further, the concept of responsibility has been expanded to include non-school professionals. This is intended to encourage creative cooperation between the agencies to share transition responsibilities for the youth with disabilities and to forge linkages. Interagency coordination between youth and adult service providers will greatly facilitate the transition process and encourage collaborative planning and programming at the local level. Certainly, these linkages are vital to students' successful transition to the adult world.

But what happens if a participating agency, such as the vocational rehabilitation agency, fails to provide the services it has agreed to provide? The IDEA states that, in this instance:

"...the public agency responsible for the student's education shall, as soon as possible, initiate a meeting for the purpose of identifying alternative strategies to meet the transition objectives and, if necessary, revising the student's IEP."

Thus, should an agency default on its agreed-upon obligation, the public agency -- in most cases, the school -- is required to reconvene the IEP team and find alternative strategies for meeting the transition objectives stated in the IEP. One potentially negative outcome of this mandate is that, when any adult service provider fails to carry out its stated obligations, the responsibility for transition services returns to the schools. This possibility is addressed in the regulations for the IDEA, which state that, even when the school re-convenes the IEP team to discuss alternative ways of meeting a student's transition objectives, the participating agency defaulting on its obligation is in no way relieved "of the responsibility to provide or pay for any transition service that the agency would otherwise provide to students with disabilities who meet the eligible criteria of that agency" How exactly the defaulting agency will be held accountable for the services it had agreed to provide is unclear, except that the policies and procedures set forth in the State plan for special education services -- specifically those relating to interagency agreements would be called into play. These policies and procedures should give the schools a mechanism for resolving disputes and for securing reimbursements from other agencies. However, because the strength of these agreements varies from location to location, some school districts may find that this particular regulation does not save them from having to assume total responsibility for paying for and providing transition services. How defaults will affect students and the services they receive also remains to be seen.

Another potentially negative outcome of this regulation governing defaults lies in the fact that the IEP team can, if necessary, revise the student's IEP. The way that the regulations state this might lead some to believe that goals and objectives stated in the IEP may be dismissed, simply because it is difficult for the school to find ways to meet them.

It is extremely important to note that revising the IEP does not mean that goals and objectives may be abandoned. The Secretary of Education is very clear on this point, as follows:

"When an IEP team is reconvened, an alternative strategy may be able to be identified without changing the student's IEP. In other cases, the IEP team may find it necessary to revise the IEP to include alternative ways to meet the goals that were identified."

Thus, it is not the goal and objective statements that may be revised; it is the ways in which the goals and objectives will be met.

Broadening Curriculum and Staff Roles

Traditionally, educators have focused upon providing school-based services. Now, with transition services, schools must expand the scope of their services to include instructional and educational experiences that will occur outside of the school building and that are related to much broader outcomes: employment, independent living, functional skills, and community participation. And "as the definition of the secondary-level special education classroom expands beyond the physical structure of the school building to include the entire community, personnel capabilities must be expanded as well" (DeStefano & Wermuth, 1992, p. 543). Staff must learn new roles, new information, and new skills; they must be able to collaborate with "families, employers, community-based service providers, and other key players in the post-school environments encountered by students with disabilities" (p. 544). Clearly, these changes -- expanding curriculum and expanding the competencies of staff -- present schools with a significant challenge, particularly in this time of budget crunches and academically-oriented educational reform.

Given all that has been said above -- the many details of federal regulations and how they govern provision of transition services -- it may be useful to conclude this section by looking again at the Congressional intent behind transition services. This represents the spirit of the law and should be a guiding force in how school districts work with students with disabilities to prepare them for life after high school.

Suggested Transition Components

Having looked at the IEP as a planning document, and some ramifications of including transition services in the IEP, let us now examine more closely the specific areas or domains that are critical for IEP teams to address when planning for a student's transition to adult life. These domains are:

- Employment, including supported employment
- Postsecondary educational activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, and continuing and adult education
- Independent living, including exploration of residential options and daily living skills that will be needed in adult life
- Eligibility for various adult services
- Community participation, including recreation and leisure activities and the development of personal and social skills.

This discussion is based upon the transition planning being conducted in states throughout the country and upon the definition of transition services contained in the IDEA. Before beginning to discuss each of these areas, however, it is important for the IEP team to realize that transition goals are not designed to predict what an individual will be doing in twenty years.

While some of the transition goals developed for a student may be related to acquiring quite specific skills (e.g., how to use a piece of equipment essential to a particular occupation), many of the goals and objectives should represent basic skills that cut across the domains listed above. For example, punctuality is important not only in maintaining employment; it also has value in maintaining personal relationships, in accessing recreation and leisure activities, and in using public transportation. Similarly, the ability to use money is important in independent living environments (for instance, to buy food or pay the rent) and in recreational situations, where tickets to an event might need to be purchased. Thus, it is a good idea for a student to address transition goals that focus upon developing skills that will be as relevant twenty years from now as they are at the time of IEP development.

For each student, self-determination and self-advocacy skills would certainly be relevant now and in the future. It might be suggested that four of the most fundamental skills or knowledge students can have that will serve them well in a wide variety of adult situations are the following:

- the ability to assess themselves, including their skills and abilities
- awareness of the accommodations they need because of their disability
- knowledge of their civil rights to these accommodations through legislation such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973
- the self-advocacy skills necessary to express their needs in the workplace, in educational institutions, and in community settings

These skills will provide students with a strong base for participating in the development of IEP goals, including transition services, and for managing the many aspects of adult life that will become important after high school.

Another issue that may be important in transition planning -- and one that may ultimately affect decisions made in each domain -- is transportation. The IEP team may need to consider (a) the availability of public transportation in the student's community; and (b) how dependent the student will be upon public transportation in order to go to work or postsecondary school, travel to and from home, access adult service providers, and move about in the community. If the student can drive and expects to have access to a vehicle, then transportation may not be a critical factor in planning for the future. However, if the student will have to rely upon public transportation, then this fact needs to be taken into consideration when exploring future options. Certainly, many students will want to develop the ability to use public transportation by the time they leave the school system. In some cases, decisions about what postsecondary schools to attend, where to live in the community, and so on may be driven by the availability of transportation and the student's skill in using it.

It is also important to understand that not every student with disabilities will need to receive transition services in all of the domains. The domains discussed below will need to be considered to the extent indicated by the nature and severity of a student's disability and his or her plans and desires for the future. Some students with severe disabilities will need extensive intervention to plan effectively for transition to adult life. Students with milder disabilities may require only limited services in one or two areas, with specific attention given to how their disability affects a particular aspect of transition.

IEP Development and Employment

Given the research presented earlier on the unemployment and under-employment of individuals with disabilities, and the fact that working has been shown to make an enormous qualitative difference in the lives of people with disabilities (Harris & Associates, 1986), all members of the IEP team must give serious consideration to planning and preparing the young person for future employment. Developing employment-related transition goals for a student will require discussion and planning of issues such as:

In what type of work is the student interested?
Considering the nature and severity of the student's disability and the nature of his or her job interests, is it more appropriate for the student to be involved in competitive employment or some level of supported employment?

If the student has chosen a particular occupational field, does he or she have the skills and abilities needed to succeed in that field? What specific work skills is the student missing?

Does the student know what employee behaviors are considered important to successful employment, and does he or she demonstrate these behaviors?
What school activities are needed in order for the student to acquire these work-related skills and behaviors?

What type of academic, social, and/or vocational program is needed to help the student acquire relevant work skills and behaviors before he or she exits high school? Is there such a program available within the school system or community? If not, what individuals and organizations (school, businesses, paraprofessionals, and job coaches) can collaborate to develop a personalized program to address the student's needs?

What types of accommodations might the student need on the job? Is the student informed as to his or her rights under federal law to receive accommodations? Does he or she have the self-advocacy skills necessary to request and obtain these accommodations?

For the IEP team to address these questions on an informed basis and develop appropriate employment goals and objectives for the student, a thorough vocational assessment of the student may be essential. Vocational assessment -- which will be discussed in more detail later in the next chapter-- can provide the IEP team with valuable information, such as what interests and aptitudes the student has, and what work skills the student has mastered and which skills need to be developed. One such model -- called the Life-Centered Career Education Curriculum (Kokaska & Brolin, 1985) -- breaks down the area of occupational skills into such goals as:

(a) selecting and planning occupational choices
(b) exhibiting appropriate work behaviors
(c) seeking, securing, and maintaining employment
Within each of these general goal areas, specific corresponding objectives might include:

- (a) identifying occupational needs, interests, and aptitudes
- (b) following directions, working at a satisfactory rate, and accepting supervision
- (c) searching for a job through want ads and personal networking, applying for a job, and interviewing for a job.

Of course, these are just some of the objectives that might be developed to address general occupational goals. Each of these objectives might be broken down further or other objectives might be developed to address the specific needs of the student. When setting goals, it is important to remember that employment skills, like any skills, are learned along a progressive continuum of difficulty. For example, the suggested goal areas under "Exhibiting Appropriate Work Habits and Behaviors" range from the basic behaviors of following directions and being punctual, to more advanced behaviors such as working at a satisfactory rate, working with others, and accepting supervision, and finally to a sophisticated behavior such as demonstrating occupational safety (Kokaska & Brolin, 1985).

It should also be noted that planning employment goals does not necessarily dictate specific jobs. While it is fine to develop goals related to acquiring the skills needed to do a specific job, this should not happen to the exclusion of developing the general skills and abilities necessary for seeking, securing, and maintaining employment. An important aspect of transition planning is building skills that will generalize to adult situations and serve the student well later in life. In fact, most of the behaviors addressed in the "Work Habits" section may be practiced within the classroom setting from a very early age. This suggests that, ideally, transition planning should begin in the early elementary school years, giving students with disabilities the time and opportunity to develop a broad base of basic skills that would be transferable to the wide variety of situations they will encounter throughout their lives.

IEP Development and Postsecondary Educational Activities

Planning post secondary educational activities recognizes that not all young people will seek employment immediately after they leave high school. Many students will want to pursue further education. This education may be academic in nature, such as going to a university or college, or it may be technically oriented, such as going to a trade school or vocational center to acquire the skills needed for a specific occupation (e.g., electrician, plumber, and cosmetologist).

Goals and objectives related to this option will depend on (a) whether the student is intending to pursue an academic or technically-oriented education after school; and (b) the nature and severity of the student's disability and how it affects pursuing postsecondary education. Some important general goals and objectives in this transition area might include:

- the learning of effective study habits
- arranging for job try-outs to allow the student to sample work in a specific area
- making arrangements for accommodations needed during college board or SAT testing (e.g., test in Braille, oral presentation of questions, untimed testing, other)
- identifying postsecondary institutions that offer the sort of training or education desired
- identifying the types of accommodations and support services that the student needs because of his or her disability
- identifying postsecondary educational institutions that make available the accommodations or support services needed by the student
- applying to the schools of choice and advocating for needed accommodations.

As with any transition goal-setting, planning for postsecondary education should be firmly grounded in assessment. Students who wish to attend college may still consider vocational assessment as an important process in identifying postsecondary and career options (Rothenbacher & Leconte, 1990). IEP Development and Independent Living

Considering the eventual independence of an individual with disabilities is often a source of concern and excitement for both the individual and his or her family. Many issues will need to

be considered under this transition domain, including (a) where the student will live (either staying in the family home or living elsewhere), and (b) the skills that are basic to taking care of oneself.

Exploring Independent Living Options

Not every student with disabilities will need to consider the question of where he or she will live after leaving high school. Some will wish to continue living in the family home. Others may be attending a postsecondary institution that provides housing for students. However, for many students, exploring the question of where to reside in the community will be an important transition issue. Options may range from independent living to group living to institutional care, and may take the following forms:

Independent living situations do not provide the person with disabilities with supervision or support. The person is responsible for all aspects of self-care and maintenance. Renting an apartment or house alone or with a group of friends, with no more assistance than what a person without a disability might receive, would be an independent living situation.

Foster homes are owned or rented by a family that provides some care and support to one or more nonrelated individuals with disabilities. This setting emphasizes "the individuality, diversity, and intimacy" that the family situation typically provides (Janicki, Krauss, & Seltzer, 1988, p.6).

Group homes have staff who provide care, supervision, and training for one or more individuals. The number of individuals may vary from group home to group home. Small group homes may have fewer than 10 people, while a large group home might serve from 21 to 40 individuals.

Semi-independent living situations generally have separated units or apartments in one building, with staff living in a separate unit in the same building. The staff provides some care and support to the individuals with disabilities who live there, in keeping with each individual's needs.
Board and supervision facilities have staff that provides residents with more extensive care and support than they would receive in a semi-independent living situation. For example, residents have sleeping rooms and receive meals and supervision. However, no formal training or help with dressing, bathing, and so on is provided.

Personal care facilities have staff who provide residents with help in dressing, bathing, and other personal care. No formal training is provided to residents.

Nursing homes or institutions provide comprehensive care to individuals with disabilities, including daily nursing care. (Hill & Lakin (1986), as cited in Janicki, Krauss, & Seltzer, 1988, p.6)

The type of living option most appropriate to an individual with disabilities will depend upon his or her personal desires (e.g., whether he or she wants to live at home or outside the home, either alone or with others), the nature and severity of the disability, the amount of care, support, and supervision the person needs on a daily basis, and the amount of support available through the family and through local, state, or federal agencies (Eshilian, Haney, & Falvey, 1989, p. 120). Each student and his or her family members will need to decide which independent living option best suits the needs and preferences of the student in question. The school can provide instruction in areas that would help an individual gain independence, such as home economics, driver's education, and money management.

Schools can also help the student address this post-school adult living domain by providing him or her with information about living options in the community and assessing the student's need for support. The student and his or her family can then use this information to explore options on their own. They might visit as many of the options as possible and learn the eligibility and application requirements of each. Based on the information they collect, a decision would then be made within the family about where the student will live as an adult.

Acquiring Daily Living Skills

Daily living skills are the skills involved in taking care of oneself on a daily basis. These skills are an important subcomponent of the independent living domain and include such activities as dressing, grooming, household chores, shopping, managing finances, and so on. How completely the student has mastered daily living skills may ultimately determine the type of living environment selected as most appropriate.

As with the other post-school adult living domains, a thorough assessment of student skill levels is an essential part of developing appropriate instructional activities. Parents and students can contribute a great deal of anecdotal information in this regard, as would an ecological assessment. Depending upon what assessment reveals about a student's proficiency at daily living skills, independent living goals may accent such skills as: (a) caring for personal hygiene needs, (b) managing finances, and (c) purchasing and preparing food. Each of these goals can be broken down into objectives that would range in level of difficulty. Under Kokaska and Brolins (1985) model, for instance, the goal area of "Managing Daily Finances" includes a range of objectives that are learned in sequence, so that across one or more years a student might be required to master any or all of these skills:

- identifying money and making change
- budgeting and making wise expenditures
- obtaining and using bank facilities
- keeping financial records
- calculating and paying taxes

Similarly, the general goal area of "caring for personal hygiene needs" might be broken down into objectives ranging from basic skills such as being able to dress and groom oneself appropriately, to more advanced skills such as knowing how to prevent and care for illness. Stating each objective needs in terms that are observable and quantifiable allows the IEP team to determine concretely if the student has mastered the skill in question.

Because acquiring daily living skills is so central to a person's ability to function independently, much care needs to be taken in how instructional activities are designed. For many students, particularly those with severe disabilities, a community-based curriculum is highly appropriate. In a community-based approach, students may initially learn and practice a skill (e.g., buying food) in the classroom but eventually practice the skill in a community or home setting. This is because many students will have difficulty transferring what they have learned in the classroom to the actual setting in which the skill is typically used (e.g., the grocery store). What happens then is that, while the student can perform the skill in class, he or she may not be able to do so in the real world environment where the skill is actually needed. Therefore, "community environments frequented by the student and by his or her family now and in the future should be the environments used to directly teach" (Falvey, 1989b, p. 92). It is important to note that community-based instruction is most effective when only a small number of students receive instruction at a time.

For a number of logistical reasons, many school districts have been reluctant to use a community-based approach. The most typical problems include difficulty in staffing, funding, transportation, liability issues (who is responsible for injury or property damage when students are involved in community training), safety of the students, community access, and administrative, professional, and parental support (Falvey, 1989b, pp. 94-105). Yet, there are many ways in which school districts can address and overcome these problems (see Falvey, 1989b). Now that "community experiences" are listed in IDEA's definition of transition services one would expect to see school districts providing some transition services through a community-based curriculum. It is certainly worthwhile for districts to develop instructional programs based in the community and for parents and student to support this type of learning experience. Such an approach to learning and teaching is often essential, if students are going to master the skills necessary to functioning in the community.

IEP Development and Eligibility for Adult Services

For many youth, "a successful transition into the labor force is contingent upon a successful transition from special education to the adult service delivery system" (DeStefano & Snauwaert, 1989, p. 37). This is because, once the young adult with disabilities exits the school system, he or she is no longer formally entitled to receive services. Rather, the youth must demonstrate his or her eligibility to receive services. Moreover, students and their families may be faced with a multitude of service options, each with its own eligibility requirements. For young people with disabilities, two of the most important service providers may be:

- the Social Security Administration, which administers the Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) programs (each of which can provide individuals with disabilities with cash benefits, work incentives, and Medicaid coverage)
- the Vocational Rehabilitation system, which can provide services ranging from job training to job placement and follow-up

Since transition planning must now involve input from community agencies that will serve the individual upon exiting the school system, using IEP goals as a vehicle to investigate, identify, and satisfy these agencies' eligibility requirements will give the student a head start in accessing these service providers in the future. For example, a goal might be for the student to become familiar with at least four postsecondary service providers. Corresponding objectives and activities could then specify visiting the agencies, meeting with caseworkers, determining eligibility requirements, and completing the paperwork necessary to establish eligibility in the agencies judged to be most appropriate to the student's needs. The school system might even wish to arrange for representatives of these agencies to visit the school and meet with a group of students.

Parents and students should be aware that some adult service providers such as the Social Security Administration require several months to process applications. To avoid an unnecessary delay in receiving services upon graduation, it is suggested that the student file an application six months or so before leaving school. Parents and students should also be aware that students may be placed on a waiting list to receive services from agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation. Therefore, it is a good idea to explore alternatives to these traditional service providers. Often, word-of-mouth provides the best leads to alternate service providers. The school itself or the district's special education office may be able to recommend agencies or organizations that provide services or referral within the community or county. Other organizations that parents and students might consider contacting include: private nonprofit organizations within the community, local parent advocacy groups, disability advocacy groups, and the Developmental Disabilities Council. It may also be helpful to look in the Yellow Pages

Telephone Book under "Family Services" ("Human Services" or "Social Services" in some locales) and see what service agencies are listed.

IEP Development and Community Participation

The IDEA specifically mentions community participation as one possible domain of transition planning. Indeed, if the end goal of transition is to live successfully in one's community (Halpern, 1985), then transition teams will need to address not just where the young adult will live in the community, and where he or she will work or go to school, but also how the individual will live. Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (1980) defines "community" as "an interacting population of various kinds of individuals in a common location." Unfortunately, for many individuals with disabilities, community is merely a place of buildings and streets. There is little social interaction with other community members and little participation in community events. Through planning and preparation, however, young people with disabilities can learn to participate more fully in, as well as contribute to, the life of their community. Specific attention may need to be given to two dimensions of community participation: recreation and leisure skills, and personal and social skills.

IEP Development and Recreation and Leisure

Many youth with disabilities need special assistance to learn how to use their recreation and leisure time constructively. Planning often needs to focus on developing a student's ability to identify, pursue, and participate fully in recreational and leisure activities in school and in the community. According to Falvey & Coots (1989, p. 142), positive outcomes of developing students' recreation and leisure skills are that:

- having these skills can facilitate the participation of individuals with disabilities in a variety of environments
- recreation and leisure activities are physically and emotionally beneficial to persons of all ages;
- these activities provide opportunities for social interaction, communication, and the development of friendships;
- constructive use of leisure time can reduce inappropriate social behavior; and
- these activities can be developed into vocational and career opportunities.

No professional, however, should pretend to know the most enjoyable activities for a student outside of school, and most certainly the student's likes and dislikes may change with maturity. It is important that recreation and leisure activities developed to address IEP goals and objectives are ones "that are desired, preferred, and chosen by the individual" (Falvey & Coots, 1989, p. 146). Therefore, parents and professionals are cautioned against developing transition goal statements that essentially force the student to participate in a recreational activity that is not of personal interest or value. Goal statements might focus upon helping the student learn to use his or her leisure time constructively and in ways that are personally enriching; the specific skills needed to participate in a chosen recreational activity (e.g., swimming, tennis, singing, bowling, card games, etc.) might also be developed. In communities that have recreational facilities and activities open to community members, goal statements might focus upon developing the student's basic skills in information gathering, self-initiation, and choice-making, all of which would empower the student to pursue his or her own interests. Concrete objectives, then, might include the student's learning:

- what types of assistive technology are available to facilitate his or her participation in recreational activities of interest

- what specific accommodations or adaptations can be made to help the student participate in a recreational activity
- how to find out what is happening in the community
- how to access public transportation
- how to acquire tickets to events.

These objectives might be tied initially to school events, so that, depending upon the interests and abilities of the student, he or she might pick a number of school events to attend (e.g., ball games, concerts, plays, dances), find out when and where the event takes place, buy a ticket, and arrange transportation to and from the event.

Extending these activities to community events would be the next logical step in the student's acquisition of the basic skills needed to participate in recreation and leisure activities. Using a community-based curriculum, as described under "Independent Living: Daily Living Skills," is highly recommended. To take advantage of events occurring in the community, it is a good idea to develop a resource bank of community organizations. (Some of these organizations may be agencies that could share responsibility for planning and implementing the transition services a student needs.) Examples of organizations in the community that may be helpful include: the park and recreation department, recreation centers, YMCA and YWCA, movie theaters, bowling alleys, pools, community colleges, church groups, hobby groups or clubs, and neighborhood gyms and sports clubs (Falvey & Coots, 1989, pp. 159-160).

IEP Development and Personal and Social Skills

While transition planning cannot encompass all phases of an individual's life roles, helping the student to develop good personal and social skills is likely to prove beneficial across many of the domains of adult life. For example, having good personal and social skills can help the person form and maintain friendships within the community, interact with service providers, and obtain and maintain employment. Thus, the development of personal and social skills is an appropriate transition goal for many students.

The goals and objectives developed in this area, of course, should be individualized to meet the student's particular needs. For example, if a student has difficulty in behaving in ways that are socially appropriate, objectives might include learning how to maintain eye contact; learning how to greet people; knowing the difference between strangers, acquaintances, friends, and intimates and how each should be treated; developing appropriate table manners; demonstrating the ability to take turns during conversations; and so on. If the student has difficulty with behaving in ways that are socially responsible, objectives might range from the student knowing the difference between public and private situations, to being able to recognize authority figures, to becoming aware of the laws and punishments for certain types of behavior.

Certainly, having good personal and social skills is important to functioning in the many domains of adult life. There are many resources available to assist parents and professionals in planning activities that will help the student develop these useful skills.

Tying Transition Goals and Objectives to School Events and Activities

Once transition goals and objectives have been developed for a student with disabilities, school personnel then design activities to help the student achieve each objective. With their focus on developing skills that will help the student in a variety of adult roles, some transition services may be distinct from other educational services the school system typically provides. For

example, developing a student's ability to participate in community activities may be a new task for many school districts. Investigating residential options as a part of the Independent Living domain would be similarly new ground for many schools. It may be difficult to develop activities corresponding to some of the stated transition goals and objectives, when educational programming typically revolves around placing the student in one class for first period, another class for second period, and so on. Thinking creatively about educational programming may be necessary in order to develop a "match" between a student's transition goals and objectives and his or her class schedule (e.g., First Period-Special Education English, Second Period-Social Studies, etc.). While not intended to imply that all transition goals can be met through programming within the school building itself -- the community must clearly be the site of many transition activities -- this section presents some examples of ways in which school systems can incorporate transition activities into students' educational programs, as well as take advantage of school events and activities to help students with disabilities achieve transition goals.

Many employment-related transition goals can be addressed in vocational education programs. Teachers should be alert to opportunities to place students in jobs within the school, where they can practice skills learned in vocational education class. For example, students might be required to work in the office one hour a day as a lab placement. Specific skills such as answering telephones, typing, or computer work could be practiced, and worker behaviors such as punctuality, working under supervision, and staying on task could be observed, developed, and evaluated.

Under the independent living domain, many daily living skills can be readily addressed in classes the school typically offers. For example, these "matches" could be made:

- food purchase and preparation in home economics or math class, or in the school cafeteria or store
- money management in math class
- reading survival words, using the phone book, reading the help wanted ads, movie schedule, bus schedule, and so on in English class
- personal hygiene in health or home economics class
- driving or transportation issues in driver's education class

Students could then apply the daily living skills relevant to their needs by performing "jobs" around the school. Working in the cafeteria, for example, could provide students with concrete application of food preparation skills. Selling tickets at a school event or working in the school store provides similar opportunities to apply money management skills.

Recreational and leisure skills could also be developed in a number of ways within the school. Physical education classes are a good place to learn skills that are useful to pursuing recreational activities such as swimming, baseball, or basketball. Elective courses such as music, art, dance, creative writing, or home economics offer students opportunities to develop appreciation for ways to use leisure time constructively. This can form the basis for eventual investigation of and participation in community events and clubs. After school clubs such as astronomy, drama, band, or intramural sports offer similar opportunities for growth and involvement. Even events that require passive participation (e.g., attending school plays or sports events) can be used to develop skills and interests that will transfer to community settings.

The development of personal and social skills can be addressed through classes that allow students to interact. This would include both special education classes and mainstream classes with peers without disabilities. Places such as the school bus or the cafeteria also give students the opportunity to address goals and objectives in this area, as do after school clubs (e.g., working on the newspaper or yearbook).

The important point here is that there are many diverse and creative ways that transition goals and objectives can be addressed, using the resources within the school and the events and activities that typically take place there. Parents and professionals can take advantage of what is naturally occurring in the school to give students the opportunity to practice and apply many of the skills important to transition. This may be essential in rural locations where the nearest town is miles away and students have limited opportunities to practice within the community those skills they are learning in school.

The Importance of Assessment in Transition Planning

The underlying philosophy of transition planning is the student's preparation during the school years for longer-range life roles. Planning for post-school life must be based on a thorough assessment of the individual. Assessment will reveal that person's strengths and needs, information which can then be used as the basis for making educational decisions.

Assessment should not involve the use of only one instrument or test. In order to provide a broad range of information about the student, a variety of assessment approaches and tools is necessary. For example, achievement tests used in the classroom can contribute information about the student's skills in reading, math, or other subject areas. Psychometric tests can be used to measure the attributes of the individual such as his or her interests, personality, or aptitudes. Observations of the student also contribute valuable information about the student, such as attentiveness, dexterity, attitude, and skill level at a particular task. Particularly good observational and anecdotal information about the student comes from the student's parents, because "parents and other family members are generally most familiar with the levels of skill proficiency of their sons or daughters" (Falvey & Haney, 1989, p. 18). The student, too, may also be a rich source of information about his or her skill levels, interests, and attitude.

While achievement and psychometric testing and observations provide good information, they may not provide sufficient information for planning nonacademic goals. Vocational assessment of students with disabilities is, therefore, strongly recommended. "Vocational assessment is a systematic, ongoing process designed to help students and their parents understand the young person's vocational preferences and potential" (Rothenbacher & Leconte, 1990, p. 2). Through the assessment process, students and families have the opportunity to learn about various careers, as well as the student's personal and vocational attributes and weaknesses. Vocational assessment should contain components that gather information not available through academic testing -- specifically the essential characteristics of the individual that make up his or her vocational profile. The areas to be assessed include the student's:

- occupational or vocational interests and preferences
  aptitudes in skills such as mechanical, spatial, numerical, and clerical
- worker style preferences, such as the desire to work with people or things
- learning preferences and styles, such as auditory, visual, or hands-on exposure
- worker characteristics, including student traits, values, employability skills, and other work-related behaviors
  abilities in specific technical, industrial, or other skills required in actual jobs
- functional or life skills, needed to address personal and independent living problems such as transportation, financial and housing management, and social skills (Rothenbacher & Leconte, 1990)

Most of this information can be gathered through informal means, such as inventories that measure interests, learning styles, and worker characteristics. Additional assessment methods include trying different tasks that replicate skills needed on the job, or performing actual workplace tasks during on-the-job tryouts.

A particularly useful and appropriate method of collecting information about the student in all transition domains is called ecological assessment. This method involves looking closely at the environment where an activity normally takes place and determining, through observation and through actual performance, the steps that are involved in performing the activity. For example, a professional or paraprofessional might go to the bus stop and observe and list in detail the steps involved in waiting for and catching the bus. He or she might then actually ride a bus, to check the completeness of the list that has been developed. This list then serves as an inventory of the component skills (steps) a student needs in order to perform the activity. It is important that the inventory describe each component skill in observable terms, sequence the skills in the order needed to perform the overall activity, and include all steps required to initiate, prepare for, participate in, and terminate the activity (Black & Ford, 1989, p. 300).

After the inventory is completed, student assessment is conducted at the actual site where the activity is typically performed. It is critical that the student be somewhat familiar with the environment and activity prior to conducting the assessment; assessing the student when he or she is confronting a new situation will not give a true indication of his or her abilities (Black & Ford, 1989). Thus, continuing our example, the student would be asked to catch and ride the bus, without assistance, and an observer would use the inventory as a checklist, identifying which components of riding the bus the student can perform and which he or she can not (including when he or she performs the right action but at an unacceptable rate). "In the event of an obvious error or no response, the professional should be prepared to provide the least amount of assistance required by the student to help him or her move on to the next step" (Black & Ford, 1989, p. 298).

How the student performed the activity is then compared to the steps of the inventory, and discrepancies are noted. These discrepancies form the basis for making decisions about what skills to teach the student and what to adapt. Adaptations can involve changing the sequence, developing an aid, or teaching the student to perform different but related activities (Black & Ford, 1989; Falvey, 1989a). Some students may be expected to master all of the steps in an activity; others may be expected to master some of the steps and partially participate in others.

Ecological assessment is one of the most appropriate means of determining what skills and components of skills a student needs to develop in order to address the many domains of post-school life. Its emphasis upon breaking tasks down into their component steps ensures that students are, indeed, focused upon learning to perform those tasks they will actually need in adult life.

Whatever the methods used in assessment, the end result should be a more thorough understanding of the student's skills in the post-school adult living objectives. This understanding should lead to more appropriate choices in setting transition goals that are sensitive to the student's interests, preferences, needs, and aptitudes.

Suggestions for Transition Planning

Federal policy has encouraged the development of diverse approaches to transition planning. Accordingly, school districts involved in transition planning for students with disabilities have developed models and programs that reflect local geography and philosophy, student populations, and staff and funding resources. As a result, no nationally consistent model for IEP transition goal planning exists as of this writing.

A recent national study on transition (Repetto, White, & Snauwaert, 1990) provides insight into the transition activities within the states. The study confirmed that, from state to state, there is no consistency in transition-planning documents and processes. State departments may set

policy or offer guidelines concerning the age when transition planning should begin, which persons should form the transition team, and what areas need to be addressed when planning transition goals. However, the responsibility for designing the transition planning documentation and developing the actual planning process seems to rest with the local education agencies (LEAs). This means that there may be little consistency between LEAs within a state in terms of the planning age, transition team membership, and type of documentation used for planning and providing transition services. While flexibility at the local level allows each district to provide services based upon individual needs and resources into the area, this very flexibility certainly contributes to the inconsistency present nationwide.

Given that transition practices vary from state to state, and from LEA to LEA, the following general suggestions may help set the stage for positive teamwork, regardless of the transition approach taken by individual school districts.

Suggestions for Parents

Here are some ideas that may be useful to parents as their child with disabilities becomes involved in planning for transition:Become familiar with how your school or LEA approaches transition planning. You may find it very helpful to know the specific format your school or local education agency (LEA) uses for including transition goals within the IEP. (Although formats vary among LEAs and across states, the core components of IEPs, described earlier, appear to be present in most planning documents in some form.) You can usually get this information by contacting the Director of Special Education in your district and asking about transition services for youth with disabilities. Be sure to ask for the name of the person in charge of developing transition services. While there may be no one with this specific responsibility, many states and LEAs have designated contact persons. Meet with the person or persons who have responsibility for developing these services, and get copies of whatever forms they use to help students plan for transition. As an informed parent, you are then able to advocate for including statements in your child's IEP regarding levels of performance, team membership, annual goals and objectives, specific services, projected dates of initiation and duration, and objective evaluation criteria. You will also be able to monitor whether these statements are adhered to in practice.Keep accurate records on your child. Records to keep include medical episodes (including injury or serious illness), Social Security or Medicaid involvement, employment experiences, volunteer experiences, previous vocational coursework, possible acquaintance networks for employment opportunities, and alternatives for family residential care. All of these records can be very useful during transition planning and after your child has left the public school system.Be aware of your rights. You have the right to access your child's educational records, to question decisions made without your input, to demand appropriate assessment, and to advocate for positive changes in school transition curriculum. Encourage your child to express his or her views and feelings during IEP meetings. Your child has the right to receive needed transition services and to contribute to the nature of the services he or she receives. Let your son or daughter know that his or her interests and preferences are an integral part of developing appropriate transition goals.

Encourage your child to communicate those interests and preferences, and do everything you can to make sure that your child's opinions are understood and valued by other members of the transition team.Don't be reluctant to express your own views and feelings during IEP meetings. You, as a parent, know your child better than anyone. You know his or her strengths and weaknesses, preferences and desires, and much, much more. Your observations can contribute a great deal to the planning process. Make sure you get a copy of your child's IEP stating transition and other educational goals. Having a copy of your child’s IEP will help you keep track of what needs to be accomplished in terms of your child's transition. Do what you can to reinforce your child's preparation for transition. There are many things that you can do to help you child prepare for transition.

Every day presents opportunities to reinforce your child's development of skills in self-advocacy, self-care, household management, and decision making. These skills are vital ingredients for assuming the responsibilities of adulthood. Keep in touch with other members of the transition planning team. This helps to avoid delay or conflict in executing the objectives listed in your child's IEP or in seeking and obtaining appropriate services.

Suggestions for Professionals

Here are some ideas that professionals may find useful when developing and providing transition services: Take advantage of resources available elsewhere. If there is no model for providing transition services available in your vicinity, or if your school system is expanding or modifying existing services, contact other professionals within and outside of your state to see what they are doing in the area of transition. Ask for copies of the specific formats they use. For example, there may be guidelines available at the state level. Other LEAs in your state may have working models for transition planning and service provision. Other states may be able to provide useful information that will help your school or LEA develop an effective process for providing transition services. Use these resources to develop a process that works for your locale.

Statewide information would be available by contacting your State Department of Special Education or other districts in your state, or, for those living on reservations, by contacting the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Communicate fully with the student and his or her parents and solicit their input about transition needs and interests. In most cases, the student can contribute vital information about his or her preferences, interests, and needs. Parents also have unique insights about their child with disabilities and can contribute information that will help the transition team develop appropriate goals and objectives for the student. Try to avoid using esoteric or jargonistic language in IEP meetings, for this can detract from the parents' or the student's perceptions of themselves as full team members. Develop a curriculum or approach that allows for community-based experiences. Many students with disabilities (particularly those with more severe disabilities) learn functional and life skills most effectively when taught in the environment where the skills are actually used. There may be many obstacles to developing and using community-based experiences for students with disabilities, but these can be overcome through planning and persistence.

Students with disabilities will certainly benefit from the efforts of professionals to develop a community-based approach to teaching and learning. Reminders for the IEP Team. These suggestions are actually reminders of important things to consider when the IEP team convenes to plan the transition services that a student with disabilities will need. Be sure to consider student interests and aptitudes when developing a transition plan. One of the great injustices that can occur during educational planning is charting a young adult's future needs without consulting the person who is most affected. Both parents and professionals should never be too quick to rule out a student's desires on the grounds that they are "unrealistic" or difficult to address. Make sure that the IEP goals, objectives, and activities are broken down into workable segments that prepare the student for the larger postsecondary world. Goals and objectives should be based on transition needs that have been identified for the student and should build upon sills and abilities the student has already demonstrated. Goals should not be unattainable considering the school's resources. However, schools should actively seek to address goals requiring creative programming through all possible resources available to them. This includes developing shared service delivery approaches that involve adult service providers, as well as exploring resources available within the community. State who will be responsible for providing each transition service.

Because transition planning involves personnel from schools and other community agencies, transition goals in the IEP should state the parties responsible for each goal, the timelines within which each goal is to be accomplished, and mutually understandable criteria for evaluation of student outcomes. Case management duties, wherein one participant serves as the overseer of the collaborative efforts of the other participants, are in most cases assumed by the school. However, all participants who sign an IEP are accountable for fulfilling their respective roles. When interagency agreements are contained within the IEP, each participant in essence agrees to work collaboratively with the others and indicates that agreement by signing the IEP. Make use of student educational placements to achieve transition goals. It is possible to make creative use of student educational placements to achieve transition goals and objectives. For example, a transition goal might be for the student to become informed about his or her rights to reasonable accommodation under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). This goal might be addressed in the student's English or social studies class through a composition or a project. The student might complete the required composition or project by focusing on what the ADA requires in terms of reasonable accommodation. This sort of project works well in integrated classrooms, giving all students the opportunity to learn about this newest civil rights legislation.

Conclusion

The inclusion of transition services in IEP development for youth with disabilities is a positive social and legislative move. Preparing students while they are still in school for the important roles of adulthood -- employment, education, independent living, adult service providers, and community participation -- is vital to reducing the disproportionately high unemployment rates and substandard wages and benefits experienced by too many individuals with disabilities.

Parents or guardians, school personnel, adult agency personnel, local education agency representatives, and, most importantly, youth with disabilities are being asked to work together in choosing goals, objectives, and activities that will best prepare youth with disabilities for future life role needs. Although there is no consensus on the "correct" format for transition goal inclusion in educational planning, the vital point is not whether the goals are in the IEP itself or in a separate ITP document. The issues of great importance are whether the goals and objectives specified for a student are in keeping with the individual and the family's real life needs, whether the goals and objectives are broken into workable segments that contribute in an organized manner to the larger picture of successful adult adjustment, and whether all resources are being utilized to achieve those goals and objectives. If these issues are addressed in a cooperative manner, based on solid assessment, and rooted in solid evaluation criteria, each student and community will benefit far beyond the student's school years.