

Transitioning Collaboration with High Schools and Vocational Rehabilitation

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The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), PL 101-476, states that an Individual Education Plan (IEP) for deaf and hard of hearing students must include a statement of needed transition services beginning no later than age 16 and annually thereafter. When determined appropriate for the student, transition services should begin at fourteen or younger. Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities including postsecondary education, vocational training, employment, acquisition of daily living skills, and/or community participation. Both the student and parent must be invited to participate in the IEP if the meeting includes transition planning.

Transition services are an integral part of the Individualized Education Plan and not an add-on. Therefore, the transition plan cannot be dealt with separately from the IEP. Since the transition plan is part of the IEP, students and parents are covered by the legal rights and guarantees of the IEP. The inclusion of the transition plan makes the IEP a plan to achieve desired post-school outcomes in employment, education, etc. The goals and objectives of the IEP should be written with the intention of aiding the student in accomplishing his or her identified post-school goals. If transition services are not needed in a particular area, then it is required that this be stated on the plan.

There are various ways of approaching the implementation and identification of the transition services plan. At the North Carolina Schools for the Deaf (NCSd) we have designed a Transition Plan form to state the needed transition services. This plan identifies the student's post-school goals, the activities requested to assist in their accomplishment, the responsible agency or person, and the targeted completion date.

If a state or local agency is responsible for providing or paying for transition services following the student's graduation from high school, this must be indicated on the transition plan. The school/interagency transition team, which meets with the student and parent to plan transition services, should include involved agencies, school staff members, postsecondary representatives, and others responsible for the programming and planning. To facilitate the establishment of this interagency team for students in regional schools for the deaf, these team meetings may be held in the community. Suggested team members are representatives from community resource centers, colleges, training centers, interpreter providers, vocational rehabilitation, etc.

The participating agency is defined as a state or local agency, other than the public agency responsible for the student's education, that is financially and legally responsible for providing transition services to the student. If a participating agency fails to provide agreed upon transition services indicated in the IEP of a student with a disability, a meeting for the purpose of identifying alternative strategies to meet the transition objectives is required. Once a post-school commitment has been made by the deaf or hard of hearing student, the exit interagency team meeting can be held whereupon agency responsibility can be identified.

Our primary state agency collaboration at this time is with Vocational Rehabilitation (VR). The VR counselors' offices are situated on the campus of the North Carolina School for the Deaf. This easy accessibility facilitates communication, coordination, and planning. Another asset to the working relationship we have with Vocational Rehabilitation is that their regional training and assessment facility is located approximately two miles from our campus. Because of these factors, VR is an important working member of our transition team. They are constantly working with us in assuring the provision of transition services to our students in employment, training, postsecondary education, and independent living.

As part of our transition services to fourteen year olds, most of whom are in the eighth grade, an eighth grade career profile is compiled. This booklet contains results of interest testing, learning style evaluation, achievement testing, transition planning, and aptitude testing. Even at this early stage of transition planning, a Vocational Rehabilitation evaluator administers the General Aptitude Test Battery to our eighth graders. The results are interpreted to the eighth graders along with the provision of the above mentioned information. This, in turn, assists the student in filling out a transition plan along with the required Department of Public Instruction's four year education plan. During the eighth grade orientation the students are advised of VR's role in their transition plans as well as how to contact the counselors on our campus.

Since this is only the second year that a transition school counselor has been assigned to coordinate transition services to NCSD students and the state has not designated specific forms and guidelines to follow other than those stated by the law, we are constantly designing and updating our forms. Rather than using the IEP objective sheets to indicate student transition goals, we designed a transition plan form to complete. This gives a unified picture of how the student intends to make his or her transition from school to the community. As you can see on the North Carolina School for the Deaf Transition Plan, Vocational Rehabilitation plays a very important role in our students' transition.

In three out of the four postsecondary outcomes indicated on this transition plan, Vocational Rehabilitation has offered their services. In the employment transition action plan section, VR provides services in assessment, job shadowing, job skills development, and pre-employment training. Not only do our VR counselors provide aptitude testing in the eighth grade, they also provide an in-depth vocational assessment profile for our juniors. This assessment is used by the transition team to guide the student in finalizing career plans and establishing an IWRP (Individual Written Rehabilitation Plan). VR also assists us in planning and directing job shadowing opportunities for our students.

In the education section of the transition action plan, Vocational Rehabilitation works closely with the school transition team and the students in empowering them in selecting the appropriate vocational training or college or university. The Vocational Rehabilitation counselor, transition school counselor, job developer, student, and parents meet regularly to provide financial information, arrange college tours, and discuss any questions that may arise.

Regional Vocational Rehabilitation counselors are present at our annual Transition Fair to meet our students and their families. The Transition Fair evolved from what we once referred to as *College Day*. Along with Vocational Rehabilitation representatives, regional agency representatives staff a booth from which they explain their services to our students, staff, and parents. Agencies represented include the Community Regional Resource Centers, Regional Mental Health Counselors for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Assisted Living Programs, Services for the Blind as well as representatives from nine colleges. As our program and collaboration develop, the Transition Fair is only part of what may eventually be called *Transition Day* where agencies, colleges, and training facilities can schedule workshops, individual sessions, and such with students, their parents, and staff to better educate all of us in transition services.

Vocational Rehabilitation also works very closely with the school transition team in the Residential/Independent Living section of the action plan. VR, along with the Single Portal of Entry community coordinator, facilitates transition for multiply impaired students by aiding in the locating and placement in group homes, sheltered workshops, adult day activity programs, and the like. VR also assists multiply disabled students transition by obtaining job time based measures and other needed measurements of their ability.

Last, but not least, Vocational Rehabilitation also assists the transition team in completing an annual graduation survey. Since VR has frequent contact with our graduates who seem to be quite mobile in jobs and college attendance, they are able to help us in obtaining addresses and telephone numbers to facilitate our contact attempts. As you can see, Vocational Rehabilitation plays a very important role in the transition planning and action plan implementation for North Carolina School for the Deaf's student population.