

## **Transition Guide for Disabled Young Adults**

**So many things have changed! The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing school closures in many areas of education, have caused major problems for disabled students. Two things that have not changed, however, are that these young ladies and gentlemen remain disabled, and they are approaching and reaching adulthood.**

**In August, the United States Department of Education (DOE) issued *A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities*. The DOE has recognized that the pandemic has resulted in significant changes to students accessing educational services differently than they had done before the effect of the school closures. However, while the Department understands that these services may have been in-person, distance communication, or a hybrid system, the importance of the provision of transition and pre-employment transition services has not changed. It encourages educational agencies to “engage in innovative strategies, involving students and youth with disabilities and their families in the transition and pre-employment transition processes as early as possible”.**

**The DOE further stresses that the transition must involve an “outcome-oriented process” where schools work with disabled students or youth and their families to provide “outreach efforts and the coordinated provision of services.” It notes that Federal law states that these transition services must involve community-based activities and measurable annual goals based upon relevant transition assessments. Further, it must be provided for all students with disabilities. The Transition programs in in the disabled students’ Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) must present meaningful opportunities to prepare for the transition from school, to maximize independence in their communities, to be self-sufficient, and to prepare for a competitive integrated employment.**

**The Transition Guide consists of almost 70 pages. We have summarized the salient features below. You can obtain the full report, visit:**

**<https://www2.Ed.gov/about/offices/list/osiers/transition/products/Post-secondary-transition-guide-2020.pdf>**

## Summary of The Transition Guide

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## **Transition Planning: Opportunities and Programs to Prepare Students and Youth with Disabilities for Success**

To aid in the seamless transition from school to post-school activities, the Transition Guide addresses the following topics:

- Transition planning opportunities and programs;
- Transition services and requirements, as authorized by *Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)* and the *Rehabilitation Act*;
- Education and employment options for students and youth with disabilities after leaving secondary school; and
- Supporting the decisions made by students and youth with disabilities.

### **Overview**

Before a disabled student leaves high school, preparations for adult life should have been underway, and should continue beyond graduation. For early transition planning and active participation in decision-making to occur, members of the planning team need to be well aware of the student's abilities, needs, and available services. The first section of this guide highlights the educational opportunities, credentials, and employment strategies to help the student while he or she is in school to prepare for his or her Postsecondary education and/or career.

**Transition Planning.** Local educational agencies (LEAs) and State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies participate in planning meetings to help the student and his or her family make critical decisions about this stage of the student's life and goals. LEAs and VR agencies work together to identify the transition of the student, such as assistive or rehabilitation technology, mobility services or travel training, and career exploration through vocational assessments, work experiences, and the student's desires.

The student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) specifies that these transition services begin when he or she becomes 16 years of age. The courses of study referred to in the IEP are supplemented with other appropriate transition services such as examples of living skills when developing post-secondary goals (self-advocacy, management of home and finances, and the use of public information).

Education and Training Opportunities involve formal or informal connections between educational, VR, employment, training, social services, and health service agencies. The following are examples of existing options, programs, and activities that are available for transition to adult life.

- *Regular High School Diploma*
- *Alternate High School Diploma.* This is a diploma for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, as defined by the State. Working toward this diploma often causes delay or keeps the student from completing the requirements for a regular high school diploma. The State must continue to make a free appropriate public education (FAPE) available to any student who graduates from high school with credentials other than a regular high school diploma or General Education Development (GED). This FAPE obligation of the LEA does not extend beyond the student's 22nd birthday.

Dual or Concurrent Enrollment Program. This is a partnership between a Postsecondary education institution and a local school district in which a student who has not yet graduated from high school is able to enroll in one or more postsecondary courses and earn postsecondary credit.

Early College High School. This is a partnership between a school district and a college or university that allows a student to simultaneously complete requirements toward earning a regular high school diploma and earn at least 12 credits transferable to the college or university at no cost to the student.

**Summary of Performance (SOP).** This is required for each student whose services under IDEA terminates due to high school graduation with a regular high school diploma, or due to exceeding the age of eligibility for FAPE. The school district must provide the student with a summary of his or her academic achievement and functional performance that includes recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting his or her postsecondary goals.

**Employment Opportunities.** It is important for disabled students to obtain as much work experience as possible. The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth reports that the value of a work experience, whether paid or unpaid, (1) helps students acquire jobs at higher wages after they graduate, and (2) promotes students who participate in occupational education and special education in integrated settings to be competitively employed more than students who have not participated in such activities.

Community-based work experiences, such as internships, apprenticeships, and other on-the-job training experiences, provide more opportunities for students to learn a specific job, task, or skill at an integrated site, and to transfer the knowledge gained to real-time work experience. To Learn more about the value of community-based experiences, visit:

<http://www.ncwd-youthinfo/>.

The following list describes work-based strategies to enhance competitive integrated employment opportunities for disabled students and youth.

- Internships are formal agreements whereby a student or youth is assigned specific tasks in a workplace over a predetermined period of time. They can be paid or unpaid.
- Mentorship is an employee training system under which an experienced individual (mentor) is assigned as an advisor,

counselor, or guide to a trainee (mentee). To learn more about mentoring in the business community, visit: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/mentoring.html>.

- **Apprenticeships** are formal, sanctioned work experiences in which an apprentice learns specific occupational skills in a trade, such as carpentry or drafting through on-the-job training as well as through related academic knowledge. Many apprenticeships include paid work components. VR counselors assist disabled individuals with the apprenticeship application process.
- **Paid Employment** is a standard job in a position an applicant negotiates with an employer. It features a wage paid directly to the student or youth. Such work is scheduled during or after the school day, and is often an integral part of a student's course of study.
- **Career Pathways.** The Career Pathways model is designed to facilitate an individual's career interest and advancement with multiple entrance and exit points in the person's career over his or her lifetime. The model includes contextualized curriculum, integrated basic education, career counseling, support services, assessments, and credit transfer agreements towards credential attainment.

### **Conclusion**

**Students and youth with disabilities, along with family members and professional support staff should examine the opportunities mentioned above to help them plan for their desired post-school goals.**



## **Transition Services and Requirements: *IDEA* and the *Rehabilitation Act***

### **Overview**

This section describes services and key requirements of the *IDEA* and the *Rehabilitation Act* that facilitate the transition from school to post-school activities.

### **Transition Services for Students with Disabilities under *IDEA***

A primary purpose of *IDEA* is to ensure that all disabled students have available to them a FAPE that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for additional education, employment, and independent living. As stated earlier, these services must be addressed when the student turns 16, or younger, if determined appropriate by the IEP team and updated annually thereafter. The *Rehabilitation Act* authorizes a continuum of services, such as pre-employment transition services, job placement services, or other VR services, as appropriate to secure meaningful careers. Providing these transition services is a shared responsibility between the school and VR agency.

Under *IDEA*, schools must provide special education and related services to disabled students at no cost to the family, in conformity with a properly developed IEP. Further, the student is to receive these services in the least restrictive environment, and must be educated with non-disabled students, if appropriate. These requirements apply to transition services, including employment-related transition services, and apply equally to the employment portion of the student's program and placement.

*The IEP.* This is developed by an IEP team that includes: the parents, not fewer than one of the student's regular education teachers, not fewer than one of the student's special education teachers, a representative of the school district who is qualified to provide and

supervise the provision of special education services, and any other individual - provided that both sides were informed of his/her attendance.

The IEP must contain the services and supports needed by the student to gain the skills and experiences necessary to reach his or desired post-school goals, in the first IEP to be in effect when the student turns 16, or younger, if determined by the IEP Team, and updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include:

- appropriate measurable Postsecondary goals based upon transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills;
- the transition services needed to help the student reach those goals; and
- age-appropriate transition assessments based on the student's needs to be used to determine appropriate measurable Postsecondary goals.

*Note: The postsecondary goals and transition services are just one component of the IEP. The student's other annual IEP goals (academic, functional, etc.) to compliment and assess the student's transition service needs must also be included.*

**Other Agency Representatives.** Representatives of other agencies, such as the VR agency, can be invited to participate at the IEP Team meeting in which transition services and Postsecondary goals are discussed, if that agency is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for the transition services in the IEP.

### Transition Services for Disabled Students and Youth Under the Rehabilitation Act

One of the primary roles of the State VR is to empower individuals with disabilities to make informed choices about their careers by providing a continuum of services to achieve employment outcomes in

competitive integrated employment or supported employment. Disabled students and youth receive a broad range of customized services under the VR program, in group settings or on an individual basis. Some VR services are not available to youth with disabilities who do not meet the definition of a “student with a disability” under the *Rehabilitation Act*.

To be eligible for VR services, an individual must meet the following criteria:

- have a physical or mental impairment that constitutes or results in a substantial impediment to employment; and
- require VR services to prepare for, retain, advance in, or regain employment.

Individuals who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and/or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits are presumed to be eligible for VR services, unless there is clear and convincing evidence that they are unable to benefit from such services.

Section 113 of the *Rehabilitation Act* refers to “potentially eligible” students with disabilities with respect to the provision of pre-employment transition services. In this regard, all such students, regardless of whether they have applied for or been determined eligible for VR services are considered “potentially eligible” for purposes of receiving pre-employment transition services. The term “potentially eligible” is applicable only with respect to the requirements related to pre-employment transition services. Disabled students who need other individualized transition services must apply and be determined eligible for the VR program and develop an approved IPE with his or her VR counselor.

Disabled students who receive pre-employment services before applying for VR services, and may need other VR services should submit an application as early as possible in the transition planning

process. The VR agency is required to implement an order of selection for services. Consequently, the assignment to a priority category is based on the date of application for VR services, not the date of the referral or receipt of pre-employment transition services.

### Distinction between the Terms

*Student with a Disability* is an individual with a disability who is enrolled in an education program; meets certain age requirements; and is eligible for and receiving special education or related services under *IDEA* or *Section 504*.

*Youth with a Disability* is an individual who is not younger than 14 and not older than 24.

### Coordination and Collaboration between the State Educational Agency (SEA) and the State VR Agency

SEAs, LEAs, and VR agencies work together to provide the various services and opportunities to help students and youth with disabilities transition to post-school life and careers. If various work-based learning experiences are not customary services provided by an LEA, the VR agency and the LEA collaborate and coordinate the provision of such services.

The continuum of services available through the VR program includes: pre-employment transition services.

“Pre-Employment Transition Services” and Individualized Transition Services, which are services offered as an early start at job exploration to help students with disabilities identify their career interests. They include:

- job exploration counseling;
- work-based learning experiences;

- counseling on opportunities for enrollment in transition or Postsecondary programs at institutions of higher education;
- workplace readiness training to develop social skills and independent living; and
- Instruction in self-advocacy.

***Individualized Transition Services*** are provided by VR agencies based on an individual's needs. Further, they should enrich the planning process; assist in the application to the VR program; and provide a continuum of services necessary for the movement from school to post-school activities. These individualized transition services are described in an approved IPE. Some of these activities are:

- travel expenses,
- vocational and other training services,
- employment development activities,
- job search and placement services, and
- job coaching.

**Individualized VR Services.** After a student or youth applies for VR services, is accepted, and receives an approved IPE, individualized VR services will be provided. Depending on the student's or youth's individual needs, these can be, but are not limited to:

- an assessment of the individual's needs, including possible rehabilitation;
- counseling to assist the individual to exercise informed choices;
- refer the individual to other agencies for services that VR may not have available;
- assist the individual with job-related services, including: job search, job retention services, follow-up and follow-along services;
- transition services to facilitate school to Postsecondary life;
- supported employment services for those with the most significant disabilities; and

- services to the individual's family in assisting him or her achieve an employment outcome.

**The Individual Plan for Employment (IPE).** Once a student or youth is determined eligible for VR services he or she, or a representative, develops an IPE, with the help of a qualified VR counselor or advocate. However, only a counselor employed by the VR agency may approve and sign the IPE.

**The IPE requirements facilitates the transition process:**

- The IPE is a written document agreed to and signed by the eligible individual (or representative) and the Counselor employed by the VR agency;
- The affected individual must be given the opportunity to make an informed choice in selecting the employment outcome, needed VR services, the provider of those services, and the related components of the IPE;
- A copy of the IPE must be provided to the individual (or representative);
- The IPE must be renewed annually by the VR counselor, and amended as necessary; and
- The IPE must be developed no later than 90 days after the date of eligibility of determination.

### **Youth with Disabilities No Longer in School**

**A VR counselor can assist any youth with disabilities who has an approved IEP, regardless of whether or not he or she is in school. The counselor can assist in exploring careers, identifying a career path leading to that youth's goal, and identifying the services and steps to reach that goal.**

**Although youth with disabilities do not meet the definition of a "student with a disability," they may receive transition services as group transition services, prior to or after applying for VR services, as well as**

individualized transition or other VR services, after receiving an approved IPE. These services may consist of: job exploration counseling, including assessments and vocational counseling, work adjustment training, vocational/occupational training or Postsecondary education, and job development services such as: job search, job placement, and job coaching.

**Coordination of Services is required.** The VR counselor coordinates VR services with services provided by employment-related programs, such as youth programs funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) and provided at American Job Centers.

### **U.S. Department of Labor Programs**

Youth programs at DOL include:

- ***Job Corp*** programs offer career technical training in over 100 careers;
- ***YouthBuild*** programs focus on the construction trades;
- ***Financial Literacy Programs***;
- ***Entrepreneurial Skills Training***;
- ***Provision of local laborer market and employment information***;
- ***Activities to help youth*** transition to postsecondary education and training; and
- ***Specific occupation or occupational cluster*** preparation and training.

To be eligible for these DOL programs, the youth must be age 14-21, attending school, be from a low-income family, and they must meet one or more other conditions, such as English language learner, homeless, an offender, or others.

### **Social Security Administration Work Program**

The SSA offers the Ticket to Work program which provides career development services to beneficiaries between 18 to 64 to assist these individuals to become financially independent.

### Review of the Key Points in the Transition Process

- 1: Individualized Education Program (IEP). At your child's IEP meetings, ensure that transition services are addressed by age 16.
  
- 2: Be familiar with the steps to transition planning:
  - A. Invite the student;
  - B. Administer age appropriate transition assessments;
  - C. Determine needs, interests, preferences, and strengths;
  - D. Develop postsecondary goals;
  - E. Create annual goals consistent with Postsecondary goals;
  - F. Determine transition services, including courses of study needed to pursue the goals;
  - G. Consult other agencies, in particular the State VR agency; and
  - H. Update annually.
  
- 3: **Implementation of Transition Services: Provide transition services as identified in the IEP. Pre-employment transition services are provided under the *Rehabilitation Act*. Alignment of the IEP and IPE facilitates a seamless service delivery system.**
  
- 4: **Referral to VR and/or other Adult Agencies:**
  - A. Pre-employment transition services provided under the *Rehabilitation Act*, as



- appropriate;
  - B. Familiarize yourself with laws relating to other programs; and
  - C. Learn about community agencies that provide services to support students, such as travel training and daily living skills.
  
- 5: **VR Application Process:**
  - A. Share employment interests and capabilities during the intake interview; and
  - B. Focus on assessments to lead the the student's postsecondary goals.
  
- 6: **Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE):** once a student has been determined to be eligible for VR services, the IPE must be developed and approved within 90 days, and no later than the time the student leaves the school setting.
  
- 7: **Common VR services Available under the *Rehabilitation Act*:**
  - A. Transition services;
  - B. Vocational counseling;
  - C. Vocational training;
  - D. Postsecondary education;
  - E. Supported employment services;
  - F. Career development; and
  - G. Job placement.
  
- 8: **VR Service Record Closure:** As a result of the student or youth with disability:
  - A. Achieving employment outcome; or
  - B. No longer pursuing an employment outcome and, therefore, is determined to be ineligible for VR services.

## **Options After Leaving Secondary School: Education and Employment Goals**

### **Overview**

As students with disabilities transition from secondary school to postsecondary education, training, and employment, it is critical that they are prepared academically and financially. Postsecondary options, with the help of the VR program include:

- two- and four- year colleges and universities,
- trade and vocational schools,
- adult education programs, and
- employment outcomes in competitive or supported employment.

### **Postsecondary Education and Training Options**

Secondary School. Whether in middle or high school, there are a number of critical steps to be taken to become college-ready, a student should:

- take interesting and challenging courses;
- be involved in school or community-based activities to explore career options, including work-based learning or internship opportunities;
- meet school counselors to discuss career goals; and
- be an active participant during the IEP meetings.

### **Paying for College**

There are three types of Federal student aid: (1) Grants and Scholarships, (2) Work-Study, and (3) Low Interest Loans.

The following website provides information about student aid:

<https://studentaid.gov>.

**Completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) is the first step toward getting financial aid for college.**

**Students enrolled in a comprehensive transition and postsecondary program for students with intellectual disabilities, who are maintaining satisfactory academic progress in that program, may receive Federal student financial aid under: (1) the Federal Pell Grant, (2) the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant, or (3) the Federal Work-Study programs.**

### **Choosing the Right College**

**When researching potential college programs, students and their families are advised to work the Disability Support Services (DSS) office on the college campus to discuss related concerns and needs and the services available to students.**

### **Rights and Responsibilities in Postsecondary Education and Training**

**Students with disabilities are encouraged to be well informed about their rights and responsibilities, as well as those of the postsecondary school. When they graduate from high school, they are no longer entitled to FAPE under *IDEA* or Section 504. At the postsecondary level, Section 504 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability by recipients of Federal financial assistance, and Title II prohibits such discrimination by public entities, regardless of the receipt of Federal funds.**

**However, postsecondary educational institutions are not required to provide adjustments, aids or services that would result in a fundamental alteration of their academic program or impose financial or administrative burden on the institution.**

**The IEP team, VR counselor, or support professionals can provide specific guidance with regard to the student's rights and responsibilities. To receive more information on these, see "Students**

with Disabilities Preparing for Postsecondary Education: Know Your Rights and Responsibilities” at: <http://www2.Ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html>.

### **Structural Supports and Physical Accessibility**

Structural accommodations involve: ramp availability, elevators, convenient parking, doorway and restroom facilities modifications, and other architectural barriers removal or modifications.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Supports for Postsecondary Education**

The VR program assists individuals with disabilities acquire the knowledge and skills needed to achieve employment that can sustain economic independence. If indicated in the IPE, the VR agencies can provide financial support to pay for or offset higher education related expenses, including those not covered by financial aid or disability related expenses, such as personal assistants, interpreters, readers, and education support services.

### **Postsecondary Education and Training Programs and Opportunities**

The following are funded by the U.S. Department of Education:

**Gallaudet University**. Gallaudet University is a bilingual, multi-cultural institution of higher learning that provides for the intellectual and professional advancement of deaf and hard of hearing individuals through American Sign Language and English. To learn more, visit: <https://www.Gallaudet.edu/>.

**National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID)**. NTID is one of nine colleges within Rochester Institute of Technology, provides students who are deaf or hard of hearing career-focused degree programs and opportunities in the university’s cooperative education program with a faculty who specialize in educating deaf and hard of hearing students. For more information, visit: <https://www.NTID.Rita.edu/>.

**Model Transition Program for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) into Higher Education.** TPSID projects provide access to academically inclusive college courses, enhancing participation in internships and competitive integrated employment, and encouraging engagement in social and personal development activities. For more information about TPSID programs and projects, visit: <https://think-college.net/what-is-think-college/think-college-National-coordinating-center>.

### **Examples of State Local Collaboration to Support Postsecondary Options for Individuals with Disabilities**

**Autism.** Through the VR agencies have worked with postsecondary institutions to provide supports, such as faculty training, career guidance, self-advocacy instruction, and increased communication among VR counselors, faculty, and family members.

**Supported Education.** The VR agencies have collaborated with community colleges to provide: additional tutoring, study skills training, college-life and other training for transition students who enroll and seek remedial courses before matriculating into a degree or certificate program.

**Postsecondary Employment Options.** One of the primary purposes of the *Rehabilitation Act* is to maximize opportunities for individuals with disabilities for competitive integrated employment.

**Preparing for Careers.** VR agencies implements stages leading to a satisfying and productive career. These stages are:

- Career awareness helps individuals learn about work values and role in work;
- Career exploration helps individuals explore work interest, skills, abilities, and the requirements of various employment options;

- Career preparation helps individuals understand their strengths and challenges, and make informed choices about preparation activities that will lead to a chosen career area; and
- Career placement helps individuals begin to responsibly and productively in a job and a career area.

On-the-job training (OJT) offers an opportunity for an individual to be hired at the conclusion of a training period. This training is usually short-term and offers a paid or unpaid work experience. VR counselors identify and arrange for the OJT with employers, and often provide transportation or other employment-related services and supports. Additional information about community-based work experiences is covered in section one of this guide.

### **Types of Employment Outcomes Authorized under the *Rehabilitation Act***

***Competitive Integrated Employment.*** This pays a competitive wage in a location where both workers with or without disabilities interact on a daily basis while performing their work. The *Rehabilitation Act* emphasizes the achievement of competitive integrated employment to ensure that all individuals are treated fairly and equally. Both schools and VR program staff must provide documentation of completion of specific services and actions prior to referring a student with a disability to a subminimum wage employment.

***Supported Employment.*** These are ongoing support services, including customized employment, to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability in supported employment. These are:

- provided singly or in combination and are organized and made available in such a way as to assist an eligible individual to achieve competitive integrated employment;
- based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in an IPE; and

- provided for a period of not more than 24 months, unless it is otherwise extended.

***Customized Employment.*** This designs or tailors job tasks to meet the individual's interests, skills, and capabilities, as well as the needs of the employer. It does this by using various strategies, such as:

- customizing a job description;
- developing a set of job duties, work schedule, and job arrangement;
- using a professional representative to work with the employer; and
- providing services and supports at the job location.

For more information on customized learning, visit:

[https://www.dol.gov/Oder/documents/vignerre\\_v3\\_blue\\_508\\_final.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/Oder/documents/vignerre_v3_blue_508_final.pdf)

***Self-Employment*** refers to an individual working for himself or herself for earning his or her income from a trade or business. VR agencies offer service and guidance to assist a student or youth with a disability to prepare for self-employment, such as training or start-up costs for their business. In many cases, the VR counselor refers the student or youth to local community organizations that provides technical assistance to develop a business plan or pay for the development of a business plan. The student or youth will use the collected information to identify the goals and objectives in their IPE.

## **Supporting Student-made Decisions: preparation for Adult Life**

### **Overview**

To engage students, families, IEP teams, VR professionals, and other support professionals should:

- set high expectations;
- use a person-centered planning approach;

- support the student's or youth's social and emotional learning;
- provide the student or youth with support to make their decisions; and
- provide counseling to the student or youth to make informed choices.

### **Setting High Expectations for Secondary School Students with Disabilities**

Research has demonstrated that setting high expectations for students with disabilities promotes successful post-school transition. To set high expectations and foster successful post-school outcomes for students with disabilities, all individuals concerned with their education should:

- establish a school-wide culture of high expectations;
- provide students with disabilities access to rigorous coursework;
- ensure that students with disabilities have IEP goals that are aligned with the challenging academic content standards for the grade in which the student is enrolled, and receive the services, supports, and accommodations listed in his or her IEP.
- provide students with disabilities the opportunity to access college and career ready standards and assessments; and
- ensure that the educators have the tools and resources necessary to support success.

### **Person-Centered Planning?**

When developing the IEP or the IPE, planning is centered on interests, strengths, skills, and needs of the student or youth with a disability. Some person-centered approaches are:

- include in the planning process, individuals who have a deep knowledge of the student's or youth's academic and social history;
- view the student or youth as an individual, rather than as a diagnosis or disability;



- use everyday language in transition planning, rather than professional jargon; and
- ensure that goals are developed based on the student's or youth's unique strengths, interests, and capacities.

### **Addressing Students' Social and Emotional Needs?**

IEP teams must take active steps to provide opportunities for students with disabilities to acquire appropriate social skills. Many of these opportunities can be integrated into the student's existing course of study. Specific strategies include:

- role-playing;
- participation in social and emotional learning programs; and
- positive school climate.

### **Providing the Student and Youth with Disabilities with Support to Make Their Decisions?**

It is important for students and youth with disabilities to understand and acquire the skills for self-determination during school. Key characteristics of self-determination are the ability to:

- speak for yourself (self-advocacy);
- solve problems;
- set goals;
- make decisions;
- possess self-awareness; and
- exhibit independence.

Schools help students with disabilities develop such self-determination skills when they:

- support students in establishing their own transition goals;
- ensure that students are actively involved in IEP meetings and understand all of the information contained therein;
- help students develop skills to direct their own learning;

- use person-centered planning; and
- create and maintain a system that supports family involvement and empowers families to support the self-determination of their sons and daughters.

**Self-determination activities are those activities that result in individuals with disabilities the appropriate assistance, having the ability, opportunity, and support to:**

- communicate and make personal decisions;
- communicate choices and exercise control over the type and intensity of services, supports, and other assistance the individual receives;
- control resources to obtain needed services, supports and other assistance;
- participate in, and contribute to, their communities; and
- advocate for themselves.

### **Making Informed Choices.**

**The VR agency must provide its participants with the opportunity to exercise informed choice throughout the VR process, including making decisions about:**

- employment goals;
- services and service providers;
- settings for employment and service provision; and
- methods for procuring services.

### **Parameters of Informed Choice.**

**Parental Consent, Age of Majority, Supported Decision-making, and Guardianship. Out-reach to parents, family members, caregivers, and representatives plays a critical role in the transition process. States may transfer parental rights to the student when he or she reaches 18 years of age, except for a student who has been determined to be incompetent under State law. A student need not be**

placed under guardianship for his or her family to remain involved in educational decisions. Guardianship places significant restrictions on the rights of an individual. For more information, visit:

<https://www.parentcenterhub.org/age-of-majority-parents-guide>.

Also visit: <http://www.supporteddecisionmaking.org/>.

Parents are also encouraged to seek services from Parent Training and Information Centers funded by the Office of Special Education Programs and Parent Information and Training Programs funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration.

### **Conquering Financial Hurdles to Accomplish Goals**

Individuals with disabilities often endure greater expenses than non-disabled individuals. These can create hardships that can undermine the decision-making processes discussed herein, and impede the accomplishment of an individual's goals. Congress formally recognized this and passed Stephen Beck, Jr. Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act of 2014.

#### **What is an ABLE Account?**

The ABLE Act enables the creation of a RAZ-advantaged savings program (ABLE Accounts) that individuals with disabilities can establish to help pay for qualified disability expenses. Anyone whose disability occurred before age 26, and who receives SSI and/or SSDI benefits qualifies for an ABLE Account. If the individual is not already receiving the Social Security benefits, he or she still qualify if a letter is obtained from a licensed physician. For more information, visit: <https://www.ablenrc.org>.

