



Parents' Connection

Transition Services for Students Over the Age of 18

By Fred Gruber

For more than 35 years, The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has guaranteed students with disabilities the right to a free, appropriate education with one main goal: to prepare them for further education, employment and independent living. But without services and supports through the transition years, students with disabilities can end up at home, unemployed, underemployed or dependent on government for services and supports – and decades of special education can be wasted.

This summer, the Government Accounting Agency (GAO) issued a report on transition, noting that students with disabilities encounter major challenges as they transition from high school into postsecondary education or the workforce. The GAO also reported that students may not be prepared to successfully transition to life after high school due, in part, to limited opportunities to engage in vocational and life skills training or obtain work experience while still in school.

By their very definition, students with disabilities require support, services and modifications beyond that needed by students without disabilities. It stands to reason that it may take them longer to acquire the skills needed for life as a young adult in an increasingly complex world. Like early intervention and preschool services, transition services for those over the age of 18 can make a life-long difference for a student with disabilities.

For students with more significant disabilities, the decision to provide special education beyond age 18 is easier, because their needs are more apparent. For other students, the decision about when to graduate and accept a diploma may

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Building Partnerships for Promising Futures

ASAH's Annual Conference

ASAH's 36th Annual Conference

Charting the Course for Excellence in Special Education

Atlantic City at the Atlantic City Convention Center, November 2, 2012.

Keynote address to be delivered by Michael Fowlin, www.michaelfowlin.com

For more information please visit www.asah.org.

Hope to see you there!



New Advocacy Videos Will Make it Easier for Parents to Navigate the System

This fall, ASAH is launching an 8 part-series of short videos designed to teach families how to advocate for their child. The series covers common advocacy problems families face, including eligibility for special education, transition, extended school year services, placement, LRE, the 'stay put' provision of IDEA and other areas of the law. Check them out at our website, www.asah.org

Small Steps

This summer, Senate Education Committee Chairwoman M. Teresa Ruiz (D-Newark) asked parents, advocates and stakeholders interested in improving special education for advice on how to make the special education system work better, particularly for parents who struggle to get their child's needs met.

While she acknowledged how complex — and sometimes cumbersome — special education can be, she charged the group with a seemingly simple request: Come up with 'small steps' that could make a difference.

It is with that in mind that I offer a few "small steps" that can make special education work better for everyone:

1) Start Fresh: The school year is brand new, and the pencils are sharp. Use this as a chance to begin positive relationships with the people you work with: parents, students and professionals. And if you have had trouble in the past, use this opportunity to start anew.

2) Be knowledgeable: Whether you are a parent, an educator or school district leader, the students in your life depend on you to know the options and to make informed choices.

3) Focus on outcomes: So much of what we do and measure in special education is about *how* things get done, not the outcomes. Be sure that you keep focused on results.

4) Do what it takes: Senator Ruiz set a great example for all of us by calling an unprecedented summertime hearing of her committee in order to learn more. Invest time in learning about options for your student, and in exploring ideas that may be new to you.

5) Respect all stakeholders: At the hearing, lawmakers listened as closely to the mother of a

child with reading challenges, as she did to the Assistant Commissioner and seasoned policy advisors. Special education is a collaborative process and must draw on the perspectives of every member of the IEP team – and every stakeholder in the system.

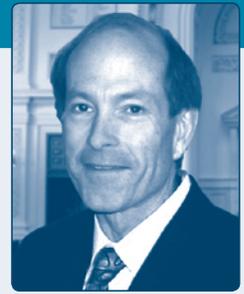
When ASAH shared ideas with the Senator and the committee, we drew on these principles, and urged the Committee to do what they can to make the system work better for families AND school districts.

One "small step" that would make a world of difference: be sure that when school districts and parents are considering out-of-district placement, state-approved private schools are one of the options.

Many parents continue to tell ASAH advocates that private schools are not even mentioned as an option, and if a parent suggests it, they are often told 'no.' Many parents tell us that they have to fight hard, just to learn what options are available.

Right now, private schools are not included in New Jersey's "Real Time" database of special education options. If they were added — and it would be a simple, quick, easy thing to do — parents and school districts could make informed decisions and consider all the options for placement.

It is just one of the "small steps" that can go a long way in helping students with disabilities.



Gerry Thiers
ASAH Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gerry Thiers". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a light blue background.

Gerard Thiers,
ASAH Executive Director

Transition Services (continued from cover)

be less clear. Too often, the decision is based on accumulated credits, test scores and grades – measures that fail to capture a student’s readiness for adult life.

So how does the IEP team go about making the decision about when a student should plan to accept a diploma? The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) provides an ideal structure for decision-making as it relates to graduation. It identifies several transition domains including:

1. Further education
2. Employment
3. Independent living
4. Community participation

The IEP team should carefully review the student’s post-secondary goals in each domain and ask: What skills will this student need for success? Does the student have these skills and can he or she use them in the settings where they are needed?

While the specific skills needed by students with disabilities over the age of 18 will vary, most will

need a program that can teach self-advocacy and self-determination, and that offers instructional activities in career education, work and volunteer experiences, problem-solving and interpersonal communication. These skills are needed whether the student is planning on a day program for adults, or college at a 4-year program.

Community-based instruction is an important aspect of transition services for students over the age of 18 because it provides hands-on opportunities to use functional life skills in real environments. Students gain experience making sound purchase decisions, handling money and banking successfully, and managing tasks, schedules and transportation to meet work, academic and personal obligations. By mastering these adult skills through supervised community-based instruction, students develop confidence and competence.

Educators should talk to students and parents to help them understand that the decision to continue special education service beyond age 18 is not an indication of a lack of progress, but rather, an investment in their future.

Fred Gruber is the Educational Supervisor at the Y.A.L.E. School, an ASAH member school in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, where he oversees the school’s transition program at both the high school and post-secondary levels.

ASAH Initiative Will Help Ensure Seamless Transition from School to Adult Life

Some of the challenges facing students with disabilities attending ASAH member schools as they make the transition from student to adult life just got easier.

With help from Hinkle, Fingles & Prior, P.C., ASAH will launch a new Transition Initiative to help students prepare for adult life. Beginning this fall, ASAH will offer events, workshops, webinars and other programs, including specialized clinics to review with parents the detailed Individual Education Plan (IEP), and will also update and reprint ASAH’s popular “Guide to Transition Services.”

“We’re very pleased to partner with ASAH in a project

designed to promote and enhance effective transition from school to adult life,” said law firm partner S. Paul Prior, Esq. “ASAH member schools are leading the way when it comes to effective transition planning, but there is always more that can be done.”

Watch the ASAH website www.asah.org, and ASAH’s Facebook page for information about events in your area.



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NJ Rules on Independent Evaluations Violate Federal Law - Must be Changed

This spring, the U.S. Department of Education notified New Jersey officials that the State's special education rules concerning independent evaluations for students with disabilities violate federal law and must be changed immediately.

Many parents seek an independent evaluation when they disagree with the local school district's evaluation findings. The State code allowed local districts the opportunity to conduct an assessment in an area not covered by the initial evaluation or reevaluation **before** parents were granted the independent evaluation at no cost. This "second chance" to conduct a comprehensive evaluation is not allowed under federal law.

Do You Need Advocacy Assistance? Call ASAH's Toll Free Parent Assistance Line ("PAL") at 1-877-287-2724

The Federal investigation was in response to an inquiry from an advocate. The federal officials reviewed New Jersey rules and ordered the State to eliminate N.J.A.C. 6A: 14-2.5(c)(1) which says, "If a parent seeks an independent evaluation in an area not assessed as part of the initial evaluation or a reevaluation, the school district shall first have the opportunity to conduct the requested evaluation.

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Executive Director: Gerard Thiers; Editor: Susan Recce. Send questions, comments, and ideas to: Parents' Connection c/o ASAH, Lexington Square, 2125 Route 33, Hamilton Square, NJ 08690. 1-877-287-ASAH (2724) susanr@asah.org. www.asah.org

Lexington Square, 2125 Route 33
Hamilton Square, NJ 08690

