



Approved  
January 2022

pubpol@exceptionalchildren.org

# POSITION STATEMENT

## Secondary Transition Services

**CEC maintains that it should be the goal of all educators and policymakers to understand, support, and facilitate the transition of children and youth with disabilities to post-school life.**

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) maintains that it should be the goal of all educators and policymakers to understand, support, and facilitate the transition of children and youth with disabilities to post-school life. This includes supporting children and youth to achieve their respective goals regarding postsecondary education and training, competitive integrated employment, adult roles and responsibilities, and full community participation.

### General Introduction

The CEC represents the nearly 400,000 special education teachers entrusted to assist children and youth with disabilities to meet the goals and requirements established by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This includes a commitment to facilitate secondary transition services and components of the individualized education program (IEP) as early as necessary, to prepare students with disabilities (SWD) for life after high school, with transition being the driving force of the IEP and not an “add-on” to typical academic and related services. Through evidence-based, well-coordinated services, and robust program evaluation, special education teachers promote inclusion of SWDs in their schools and communities.

All SWDs must receive secondary transition services aligned with all categories of life after high school. To be of benefit, transition services must address the whole student and services must align with the goals identified within the IEP based on student-focused planning. This expectation includes addressing postsecondary education and training (e.g., college, vocational training, or college experience programs); competitive integrated employment; adult roles and responsibilities, including living independently; and full and meaningful inclusion in the community.

*Note: Throughout this document, CEC has adopted definitions provided by various federal laws (i.e., Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act [WIOA] of 2014) in its position regarding secondary transition services. In addition, CEC has also adopted predictors of post-school success of children and youth with disabilities as identified through research and supported by the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: The Collaborative (NTACT: C) (Prince et al., 2018; Rowe et al., 2015; Test et al., 2009, April; Test et al., 2009).*

### Intended Outcomes of Secondary Transition

Secondary transition is intended to facilitate the movement of SWDs from school to post-high school activities to afford individuals the opportunity to live a full and inclusive life while living, learning, loving, and earning. This includes preparing for potential participation in postsecondary education, vocational education, competitive integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, and full community participation with respect to adult roles and responsibilities. All SWDs should have access to instruction and experiences designed to develop and enhance knowledge and skills to be successful in all areas of life.

- The goal of secondary transition is to ensure SWDs:
  - gain the knowledge and skills to fully participate in their community;
  - have access to experiences to develop such knowledge and skills; and
  - are provided the skills, services, supports, and resources to support them in pursuing college, vocational schools/programs, and in obtaining, maintaining, and advancing in competitive integrated employment.
- Transition of SWDs is most effective when professionals and families address it from a birth to adult approach, beginning transition planning as early as possible and ideally prior to the age of 14.
- Pursuing postsecondary education, training, employment, and full community participation must be options available to all SWDs, regardless of significance of disability. To do so:

---

**The Council for Exceptional Children is the largest international professional organization dedicated to improving the educational success of children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents.**

- SWDs should be provided early and ongoing opportunities to set goals and access services toward all postsecondary paths (i.e., education, training, employment, community living); and
- Professionals supporting SWDs should have high expectations and not limit students' postsecondary options or referral to available services based on significance of disability.

Additionally, because transition-aged students, in most cases, may exit high school upon turning age 22 (or at the end of the year in which they turn 22 in Illinois, and age 26 in Michigan), the services comprising best practice should be considered across the continuum and may look different for students over the age of 18.

## Parameters and Beliefs

Given the intended outcome of secondary transition and our commitment to improving the post-high school outcomes of SWDs, CEC supports the following principles and practices related to the provision of secondary transition services for SWDs supported in all educational settings and based on research.

## Secondary Transition Predictors of Post-School Success

The field should be oriented to the existence and use of evidence-based, research-based, and promising practices.<sup>1</sup> Professionals should align programs, practices, and strategies with the predictors of post-school success (Test et al., 2009; Rowe et al., 2015) to support the effective secondary transition of SWDs to post-high school endeavors. These practices should be considered through the lens of cultural sensitivity valuing students' cultural and linguistic strengths as facilitators in learning and development (Sinclair et al., 2019). The predictors are categorized into four key cluster areas--**Student Skills, Career Development, Collaborative Processes, and Policy**. Within each cluster are specific services, strategies, and concepts that have demonstrated a positive impact on the post-school outcomes of SWDs relative to further education, employment, and independent living. CEC supports the alignment of transition planning for SWDs along these four cluster areas. School personnel must be trained in the use of predictors and the various programmatic elements that have demonstrated a research-based positive impact upon the post-school outcomes of SWDs. For a more detailed description of the cluster areas and examples within each, visit the CEC Secondary Transition supporting document at <https://exceptionalchildren.org/policy-and-advocacy/position-statements>.

*CEC strongly supports the Employment First philosophy.* The premise of Employment First is that **all citizens**, including individuals with significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in competitive integrated employment and community life (Association for People Supporting Employment First [APSE], 2017; Butterworth et al., 2017; Carter et al., 2017). There are multiple pathways (e.g., internship, supported employment, customized employment, and comprehensive transition programs) for IEP teams to consider for each SWD as they prepare for competitive integrated employment.

*Early transition to employment* should include social/soft skills as well as job specific skills. CEC believes this should reflect, **for all students with a disability**, a progression through all stages of career development (i.e., Awareness, Exploration, Preparation, Career Placement, and Continuing Education) (Shirlington et al., 2007). In addition, schools should provide work readiness and community-based work-based learning experiences (WBLE) that are individualized and responsive to individual student goals. This means utilizing transition assessment data and student input regarding their interests, preferences, strengths, and needs to identify multiple diverse work experiences throughout the school year and during the summer.

Schools should promote and use their interagency collaboration and coordination of transition services with vocational rehabilitation, workforce development boards, mental health, developmental disability, and others responsible for supporting students and youth with disabilities to provide work readiness instruction and WBLEs as they transition to life after high school.

- This is especially important in rural areas, with consideration given to virtual and remote work-based learning opportunities.
- Local Educational Agencies (LEA) need funding to reduce the technology disparities in rural areas and in low income/high need areas to support SWDs in participating in WBLEs, transition programs, and instruction to help meet their vocational and independent living goals.

<sup>1</sup> Evidence-based practices are based on the greatest number of research demonstrating effectiveness using sound research designs, adhering to quality indicators for evaluation, and including required minimum number of participants. Research-based practices are also based on a moderate number of research studies, require a moderate number of studies demonstrating effectiveness, using sound research designs, and adhering to quality indicators for evaluation. Promising practices are based on research, including exploratory correlational or qualitative research designs, require the fewest studies demonstrating effectiveness, may or may not utilize sound designs, and may or may not adhere to quality indicators for evaluation (NACT, 2018).

Schools should develop multiple partnerships with businesses within the community as well as within their own district buildings to create a variety of job shadow, internship, paid work, and other WBLEs to meet the diverse needs, interests, strengths, and preferences of all SWDs.

## Transition Planning/Programming

*CEC believes that all transition planning should consider the cultural and linguistic diversity of youth and families.*

IEP teams should:

- use the cultural and linguistic strengths of individual youth in transition planning;
- support youth and families in addressing common obstacles in transition planning;
- draw upon and develop resources to assist the unique values of youth and families in transition planning; and
- seek additional information, tools, and strategies to build their capacity to assist the student and family in transition planning.

*Transition planning* should be based on the student's strengths, preferences, interests, and needs taking into consideration the family and cultural dynamics. The planning process should be student-driven with multiple stakeholders supporting the process.

To meet these expectations and provide all SWDs effective transition planning, CEC believes there needs to be pre-service training and continued professional development for educators to effectively teach self-determination skills to all SWDs (Martin et al., 2006). Pre-service special education higher education programs must include instructional content related to secondary transition, including interagency collaboration, to prepare teachers for coordinating and providing transition services for SWDs. In addition, special education teachers benefit from ongoing professional development and engagement with professional organizations and national technical assistance centers to stay current in practices supporting the successful transition of SWDs (CEC, 2021). LEAs should be knowledgeable of program evaluation and how to use available data (e.g., State Performance Plan Indicator 14-Post-School Outcomes data) to assess the impact of their practices (at the classroom, school, district, and state levels) on post-school outcomes of SWDs (Mazzotti et al., 2014). LEAs, specifically including school counselors and transition professionals, must become informed about the variety of postsecondary education/training options available for SWDs so they can better prepare students and their families to access such programs. School guidance counselors and local level CTE liaisons and counselors are critical partners to ensure SWDs have access to information and opportunities to explore a wide range of postsecondary options. Purposeful, data-driven decision-making in transition planning will help LEAs best support SWDs in reaching post-school goals.

## Closing

The IDEA requires public schools to provide secondary transition services to eligible students with disabilities to help prepare for post-school life, including postsecondary education and training, competitive integrated employment, adult roles and responsibilities, and full community participation. These services must be provided by personnel trained in best practices, supported by well aligned systems and communities, and begin as early as possible to ensure the best outcomes. CEC will work with policymakers to ensure that existing systems can be enhanced to better serve students with disabilities to achieve their transition goals.

## References

Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE). (2017). Employment first map. Retrieved from <http://apse.org/employment-first/map/>

Butterworth, J., Christensen, J., Flippo, K. (2017). Partnerships in employment: Building strong coalitions to facilitate systems change for youth and young adults. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 47, 265-276. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-170901>

Carter, E. W., McMillan, E., Willis, W. & Tennessee Works Partnership . (2017). The Tennessee Works Partnership: Elevating employment outcomes for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, 47, 365-378. <https://doi.org/10.3233/JVR-170909>

Council for Exceptional Children. (2021). Strengthening the workforce to support all children and youth with exceptionalities. Position Statement. Retrieved from [https://exceptionalchildren.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/strengthening\\_the\\_teacher\\_workforce\\_112021.pdf](https://exceptionalchildren.org/sites/default/files/2021-11/strengthening_the_teacher_workforce_112021.pdf)

Martin, J. E., Van Dyce, J. L., Christensen, W. R., Greene, B. A., Gardner, J. E., & Lovett, D. L. (2006). Increasing student participation in IEP meetings: Establishing the self-directed IEP as an evidenced-based practice. *Exceptional Children*, 72(3), 299–316. <https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290607200303>

Mazzotti, v. L., Test, D. W., & Mustian, A. L. (2014). Secondary transition evidence-based practices and predictors: Implications for policymakers. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 25, 5-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1044207312460888>

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT). (2018). Broad Definitions. Retrieved from [https://transitionta.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/LOE\\_Definitions\\_Simplified\\_Final\\_Spring2018\\_checked.pdf](https://transitionta.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/LOE_Definitions_Simplified_Final_Spring2018_checked.pdf)

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT). (2016). Age Appropriate Transition Assessment Toolkit, Fourth Edition. University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Original by the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) and Walker, A. R., Koreroing, L. J., Fowler, C. H., Rowe, D., & Bethune, L. Update by Fowler, C. H., & Terrell, M. Retrieved from [https://transitionta.org/system/files/toolkitassessment/AgeAppropriateTransitionAssessmentToolkit2016\\_COMPLETE\\_11\\_21\\_16.pdf](https://transitionta.org/system/files/toolkitassessment/AgeAppropriateTransitionAssessmentToolkit2016_COMPLETE_11_21_16.pdf)

Prince, A. M. T., Hodge, J., Bridges, W. C., & Katsiyannis, A. (2018). Predictors of postschool education/training and employment outcomes for youth with disabilities. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 21, 77-87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143417698122>

Rowe, D. A., Alverson, C. Y., Unruh, D. K., Fowler, C. H., Kellems, R., & Test, D. W. (2015). A Delphi study to operationalize evidence-based predictors in secondary transition. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 38, 113-126. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2165143414526429>

Sinclair, T. E., Osmani, K. J., Suk, A. L., & Williams-Diehm, K. L. (October, 2019). Council for Exceptional Children's Division of Career Development and Transition Publications Committee. *Fast Facts: Culturally Responsive Transition Practices*. Retrieved from [https://dcdt.exceptionalchildren.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/CultResponsiveFASTFACTS10\\_15\\_19.docx](https://dcdt.exceptionalchildren.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/CultResponsiveFASTFACTS10_15_19.docx)

Millington, P., Neubert, D., Begun, W., Lombard, R. C., & Leconte, P. (2nd edition). (2007). *Assess for Success: A practitioner's guide for transition assessment*. CA: Sage Publications

Test, D. W., Mazzotti, V. L., Mustian, A. L., Fowler, C. H., Kortering, L. J., & Kohler, P. H. (2009). Evidence-based secondary transition predictors for improving post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 32, 160-181. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0885728809346960>

Test, D. W., Mustian, A. L., Mazzotti, V. L., & White, J. (2009, April). Evidence-based practices and predictors in secondary transition. Presentation at the Council for Exceptional Children Annual Conference. Seattle, WA.