

Council for Exceptional Children Supporting Document Secondary Transition Services

This supplementary document supports the Council for Exceptional Children’s (CEC) Secondary Transition Position Statement found at <https://exceptionalchildren.org/policy-and-advocacy/position-statements>.

Definitions

The following definitions for students and youth with disabilities are taken from *Section 300.8 of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004* and *Sections 361.5(c)51 and 361.5(c)58 of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) 2014*, and the 2020 *Notice of Interpretation in the Federal Register*, each issued by the U.S. Department of Education. The definition of Career and Technical Education (CTE) was taken from *the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (Perkins V) 2018*.

<p>Secondary Transition (defined by IDEA)</p>	<p>Transition for children and youth with disabilities at the secondary level means a coordinated set of activities and services that are designed to be results oriented, focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the movement from school to post-school activities and include postsecondary education, vocational education, competitive, integrated employment (including supported employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation). These services are based on the student’s individual needs, considering strengths, preferences, and interests. This includes instruction, related services, community experiences, development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation (Sitlington et al., 2010).</p>
<p>Career and Technical Education (CTE) (defined by Perkins V)</p>	<p>CTE emphasizes developing career and college readiness in secondary, postsecondary, and adult students, and includes special populations, such as children and youth with disabilities. One purpose of the law is to increase the employment opportunities for populations who are chronically unemployed or underemployed, including individuals with disabilities (PL 115-224 – H.R. 2353).</p>
<p>Child with a Disability (defined by IDEA)</p>	<p>A child with a disability means a child (aged 3-21) who has (a) been evaluated in accordance with the federal regulations and (b) identified as an eligible child with a disability (under one of the federal disability categories below) who requires special education and related services.</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autism • Deaf-blindness • Deafness • Hearing impairment • Intellectual disability • Multiple disabilities • Orthopedic impairment • Other health impairment • Emotional disturbance • Specific learning disability • Speech or language impairment • Traumatic brain injury • Visual impairment (including blindness)
<p>Student with a Disability (defined by WIOA)</p>	<p>A student with a disability (SWD) means an individual with a documented disability enrolled in and/or attending a secondary, postsecondary, or other recognized education program who:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. is not younger than the earliest age at which IDEA requires the provision of secondary transition services, or is not younger than the age at which the state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency elects to provide pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS); and 2. is not older than 21 years of age, unless the State law provides for a higher maximum age for receipt of services under the IDEA, and does not exceed the state maximum age. <p>Secondary students with a disability also include students who are being homeschooled and students educated in non-traditional secondary education programs (e.g., charter schools, private schools, juvenile justice facilities, and virtual schools).</p> <p>A student with a disability is one who is:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. determined a student with a disability and/or receiving special education and related services in accordance with IDEA; or 2. meets the requirements of an individual with a disability, for purposes of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

	<p>*This definition of SWD includes students who have been determined eligible for VR services as well as those who are potentially eligible for VR services, regardless of whether they have applied for VR services.</p>
<p>Youth with a Disability (defined by WIOA)</p>	<p>A youth with a disability means an individual with a documented disability who is not:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. younger than 14 years of age; or 2. older than 24 years of age (34 C.F.R. §361.5[c]58). <p>Youth with disabilities can receive secondary transition services from VR; however, only eligible SWDs and potentially eligible SWDs may receive pre-employment transition services (Pre-ETS) through the vocational rehabilitation agency. A SWD always meets the definition of a “youth with a disability” due to fitting within the specified age range. However, not all youth with a disability will be considered students unless they meet the requirements of the definition of a SWD.</p>

Career Development

Assessment

Age appropriate transition assessment should address multiple areas, including, but not necessarily limited to, vocational interests, skills, and abilities, social/soft skills, self-determination skills, time management skills, organizational skills, leadership skills, behavioral/performance, communication skills, and environmental assessments (National Technical Assistance Center on Transition [NTACT], 2016).

- Transition assessment should be aligned with broad, schoolwide efforts in college and career readiness that encompass academic, social, and transition skills. To do so, we must ensure a range of professionals are involved in team-based planning, including not only transition educators, but also school counselors, general educators, and vocational rehabilitation counselors, to name a few. These professionals require collaborative tools and structures that will foster team-based work, akin to Multi-Tiered Systems of Support.
- Local educational agencies (LEA) should make an effort to expand transition assessment into the elementary and middle school grades to help inform individualized education program (IEP) teams and to address transition as early as possible.
- Educators should be knowledgeable of and implement a variety of linguistic and culturally sensitive transition assessments (both formal and informal) to help SWDs develop their measurable annual IEP goals and their postsecondary goals.
- All students, regardless of their disability, should have the opportunity to participate in postsecondary education including academic access (e.g., reading, writing, mathematics, and coursework aligned with personal interest), study skills, travel and assistive technology assessment. LEAs have the responsibility to be informed of the wide range of

postsecondary educational options available to SWDs, including students with intellectual disability, such as Comprehensive Transition Programs (e.g., Think College), Career and Technology Education programs, as well as funding available for such programs.

Employment

Paid Employment:

The clear evidence over the past 30 years demonstrates paid employment in high school predicts paid employment post-high school (Mazzotti et al., 2021; Test et al., 2009). Research demonstrates that when supporting SWDs to achieve improved post-school outcomes, high school work experience is a clear predictor resulting in improved postsecondary employment outcomes (Carter et al., 2011; Carter et al., 2012; Carter et al., 2017).

SWDs should be provided opportunities to engage in **multiple and varied** work-based learning experiences in alignment with their strengths and interests to support them in achieving their vocational goals (e.g., apprenticeships, internships, on the job training, job shadowing, and paid and unpaid community-based work experiences).

Vocational Training/Education

Career and Technical Education (CTE)

Although research has indicated participation of SWDs in CTE increases the likelihood of positive outcomes after high school (Mazzotti et al., 2021), access to CTE programs for SWDs remains limited. In addition, quality research focused on SWDs and participation in CTE is not highly prevalent in either the special education secondary transition or CTE literature. Harvey and colleagues (2020) acknowledged these gaps in the research and called for greater coordination efforts across CTE and special education in policy and practice.

As such, it is increasingly important to explore partnerships between researchers and practitioners in special education secondary transition and CTE to determine the effectiveness of CTE programs, specifically for SWDs, to afford them opportunities for enrollment in such programs with the appropriate supports and accommodations to earn certifications and credentials toward reaching their vocational goals.

Researchers and practitioners in special education secondary transition and CTE should collaborate to identify the features of CTE programs which benefit SWDs including career internships, career clubs, presentations to the specific department's industry advisory board (e.g., Culinary Arts Advisory Board, Hospitality Advisory Board, Manufacturing Advisory Board), and advancement to post-school apprenticeships. Information such as this can be used to change policy and practice and improve access and employment outcomes for SWDs.

Collaborative Systems

Interagency Collaboration

State and Local Level: Schools are responsible for providing families with information regarding community services and agencies that can provide available resources and support.

- This includes, but is not limited to knowledge of and coordination with agencies and organizations, such as VR, developmental disability, mental health organizations, Youth Leadership Forum, juvenile justice, child welfare/foster care, homeless supports, workforce development systems, CTE, Centers for Independent Living (CIL), businesses, colleges and universities, local boys and girls clubs, and other local organizations.
- Additionally, schools and partner organizations need to support students and families to understand differences in eligibility requirements, environments, and length/duration of services for the various existing services and programs.
- Special education professionals/LEAs should engage in practices that result in effective collaboration with WIOA partners regarding career development, as specified in WIOA and required unified/combined state plans (U.S. Department of Labor, 2018), to build rapport and establish relationships to increase opportunities for SWDs.

Family Involvement

Family Engagement/Partnership: Engaging and empowering families in the planning and implementation of transition assessments, goals, services, and supports is essential to supporting SWDs to achieve their post-school goals (CEC, 2021; National Longitudinal Transition Study 2, 2005).

- Schools and organizations should ensure students and families understand their legal rights and have adequate information to make informed decisions throughout the transition planning process.
- [Parent Training and Information Centers](#) are valuable resources who work directly with families of children and young adults with disabilities from birth to age 26 to:
 - Help parents participate effectively in their children's education and development; and
 - Partner with professionals and policymakers to improve outcomes for all children with disabilities.

Professional Development/Pre-Service Training

Preparation of pre-service educators and ongoing professional development of educators in the field is essential to help SWDs reach their post-school goals. Understanding the law and requirements for transition planning, the identification of appropriate partners, and how best to prepare students for life after high school is critical for successful transitions. A gap often exists between current research in the field and direct application by practitioners. This can be provided in two manners; preservice training for future professionals and continued, systematic, ongoing training for current professionals.

As future professionals go through their pre-service teaching experience, they should be trained in specific requirements of IDEA, inclusive of assessments, goal planning and development, and transition service coordination. It should also be an expectation that pre-service special education teachers experience the practical application of the student-directed and driven process and functional manners of application for students in school.

In addition, pre-service and veteran educators and other professionals supporting students and youth with disabilities should be informed about the professional associations in their field to keep apprised of and utilize the most recent research- and evidence-based practice for supporting SWDs to reach their post-high school goals. This includes organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT), Association for Career Technical Education (ACTE), National Rehabilitation Association (NRA), and others.

Ongoing systematic professional development is critical throughout the career experience of special education professionals. These processes should be developed by LEAs to implement the transition requirements of IDEA. While it should refine its practice as impacted by the specifics of the LEA, it should also provide application of requirements, evidence- and research-based practices for transition instruction, services and resources within the community (including those only accessible in postsecondary settings), while focusing on the student-driven process. Incorporating secondary transition responsibilities of special education teachers should also be a component reflected in their performance evaluation.

There are, at times, underqualified professionals in the role of special education teachers (e.g., emergency or alternative certifications, boot camps) that do not have the necessary training in secondary transition. Additional emphasis should be made at the LEA level to ensure the skill set of school professionals necessary for statutory compliance and including growth toward students' postsecondary goals.

As with many educational processes, supporting a student is a wraparound process, and special education teachers, general education teachers, related service professionals, CTE educators, school counselors, and administrators should have training and ongoing professional development including information about transition education, services, and resources available to help SWDs transition successfully to life after high school. It should also foster a structure of flexibility to ensure the student's goals are addressed through their educational career.

Student Skills

Student Focused Planning

The *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* (Kohler et al., 2016) identifies Student Focused Planning as one of five critical components of secondary transition for SWDs. When properly addressed, teams ensure:

- Student preferences and interests drive planning using a student-centered planning approach;
- Transition planning begins by age 14;
- Cultural and linguistic considerations are embedded in the whole process;
- Students and families are core members of the team;
- Students are prepared to actively engage in planning and meetings; and
- Referral to adult agencies occurs prior to exiting high school.

Student Development

Another critical component identified in the *Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0* is Student Development (Kohler et al., 2016), which includes supporting SWDs in developing academic, life, social, emotional, and employment skills to effectively participate in and guide their transition planning. Special education professionals can facilitate this development by:

- Utilizing a variety of assessments providing rich data to support planning and decision-making and sharing results in ways for students and families to understand;
- Providing accommodations as needed;
- Supporting SWDs in taking courses or participating in activities preparing them for reaching their post-school goals;
- Teaching SWDs strategies for learning, studying, and taking tests;
- Reinforcing skills for success, such as organization, doing homework, studying, and fulfilling commitments;
- Teaching and providing opportunities to learn and demonstrate self-determination and self-advocacy skills reflected in goal-setting, decision-making, and problem solving;
- Fostering and supporting youth autonomy;
- Embedding career planning in academic instruction and connecting skills to direct application in careers;
- Providing opportunities to engage in CTE and other occupation-specific courses and activities to build skills toward reaching vocational goals; and
- Ensuring SWDs are engaged in career development, awareness, and experience opportunities in authentic settings, including work-based learning experiences, soft skills development, and job search skills to learn and practice meeting expectations in those environments.

Self-Determination:

Being self-determined is about acting as the primary causal agent in one's life (Shogren et al., 2015). Causal agents have the skills and attitudes enabling them to make or cause things to happen in their lives. People who are self-determined, self-initiate and self-regulate their actions to solve problems, make decisions, and set goals that impact their lives. Adolescents become more self-determined as they identify their interests and preferences, set and work toward goals aligned with those interests and preferences, engage in problem solving and decision making as they encounter barriers in working toward their goals, and advocate for themselves and their needs.

CEC believes these actions are critical for all students and should be embedded across the curriculum. However, students need support to learn and practice these skills in an integrated way if they are to lead self-determined lives.

Students with greater self-determination skills have:

- greater academic achievement in high school;
- higher rates of enrollment in and completion of postsecondary educational experiences; and
- higher rates of employment (Shogren et al., 2015).

Educators should:

- ensure self-determination goals and activities are included in the IEP and daily instructional experiences;
- access programs, resources, and processes within the school and/or community to ensure SWDs are supported to learn, practice, and use self-determination skills; and
- advocate to improve the quality of self-determination skills training in schools and community settings (Martin et al., 2006).

Policy

Postsecondary Education and Training

College-based transition services (referred to as dual enrollment and concurrent enrollment in various states) are transition experiences provided to students age 18 and older through partnerships between LEAs and colleges and universities. These partnerships support students to access college classes, engage in internships and employment, and navigate social, educational, and career experiences in an adult learning community with similar age peers. This transition service model has been used for over 30 years and demonstrates an example of effective postsecondary and employment transition experiences (Test et al., 2009).

Inclusive higher education options: Access to higher education for students with intellectual disability has changed significantly in the past decade with [hundreds of college programs](#) in the United States enrolling thousands of students with intellectual disability.

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