

is starting her own business, and the other two are competitively employed and thinking positively about the future. In fact, one student said, "I feel like I am driving off into the future and there are no brakes on my car and nothing to stop me."

As a career educator, I can think of nothing more important for all students than comprehensive transition planning that emphasizes self-determination, problem solving, and to apply brakes and navigate around them. Good transition planning provides students an internal roadmap to use when they have to make a detour or apply the brakes. The positive outcomes of these three students exemplify what can happen when students, parents, and professionals work together to plan for the future.

Comprehensive transition planning is the vehicle that ensures that each student reaches his or her **postschool goals**. The final outcome of this planning process should be a life that includes employment, postsecondary education, a place to live, community involvement, financial stability, transportation, and ample medical services (Virginia Commonwealth University Rehabilitation Research and Training Center on Supported Employment, 1994). To achieve this result, the transition planning process should begin with helping students determine their desired postschool goals.

DETERMINING POSTSCHOOL GOALS AND COURSE OF STUDY

The **transition planning process** assists students and their families in establishing long-range goals and making the service connections necessary to accomplish these goals. Students must be assisted in developing the self-determination skills needed to fulfill their role as a key member of the transition team. A well-organized transition team that is student focused must play a primary role in supporting the delivery of transition services if meaningful change is to occur in the student's life (Blalock, 1996).

Beginning Early

Since 1990 local education agencies have had the primary responsibility for coordinating all aspects of the transition planning process. When transition services were first mandated in 1990, special educators were required to begin transition planning with students no later than age 16 but were encouraged to begin earlier. The 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act amendments (IDEA 1997) changed the minimum age for beginning the transition process to age 14, with the provision that services could still begin earlier if needed.

With the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, school systems are now directed to ensure that transition services are in place by the time a student reaches his or her 16th birthday,

requiring that a transition component be added no later than the first IEP in effect when the child turns 16. IDEA 2004 requires that IEPs for this age group include "appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills." In addition "the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reach these goals" must also be addressed (Section 614, (D) (1) (A) (VIII) (aa-bb)).

Although the age at which transition must be addressed has been raised, it is important that special educators realize that nothing in IDEA 2004 precludes beginning transition services for a student earlier than age 16 if needed. In some cases age 16 will be too late to begin the transition planning process. Students who are at high risk for dropping out of school, have significant disabilities, need extensive vocational training, are pregnant or parenting, have unstable home situations, are involved in the juvenile justice system, or otherwise require the involvement of multiple adult service agencies need to have comprehensive transition components developed and agency linkages established beginning at age 14 or younger. As discussed in Chapter 3, each student should be assessed individually to determine the appropriate time to initiate the transition planning process. The final decision regarding when to develop a full transition component for a student younger than age 16 is left up to the IEP team, but it can be expected that some students will need the process to begin prior to the minimum age required by law.

Beginning the transition planning process early can be considered best practice for a large portion of students with disabilities. By beginning early to determine realistic postschool goals, educators can ensure that students have the opportunity to access curriculum and participate in community experiences to develop the skills needed for future environments. Also, early planning increases the time that students and their families have to familiarize themselves with and develop relationships with the adult service system (Center on Community Living and Careers, 2003).

Beginning by Age 16

At this point in a student's educational career, he or she should be assisted in determining postschool goals along with an appropriate course of study, specific transition services, and the adult service linkages needed to support the student's efforts to achieve postschool plans for employment, education, and community participation.

Since 16-year-olds who are on target to graduate at age 18 are only 2 years from completing high school, and the students who will remain in school until age 21 are often those with the most significant disabilities requiring multiple service linkages, it is important for IEP teams to have a clear focus regarding the child's future as soon as possible. Establishing clear and realistic postschool goals matching student strengths, needs, and interests that are supported by a comprehensive course of study and a broad array of transition activities can help make the best use of the time available for service delivery.

Understanding the Vision: Postschool Goals

Regardless of when the transition planning process begins, all involved parties need to understand the student's postschool vision. Postschool goals can articulate this vision and help paint a mental image of where the student wants to work, live, and learn and the types of community activities in which the student will be involved. A comprehensive transition planning process requires that everyone become a detective, willing to ask the questions that will uncover the essence of the vision for the student's life after graduation. Questions should focus on the student's present abilities, needs, and interests, available services both on the school campus and in the community, and what is needed to assist the student in getting from where he or she is now to where he or she needs to be at graduation. School personnel should not hesitate to dig deep for the information even if the answers uncover the school's need to change service delivery strategies, add additional services, or try new ideas. Figure 4.1 lists examples of questions that could be asked of the student and family members to ensure that the transition process is truly student driven.

1. What is the student's dream job? If the student does not have a specific career interest, what transition activities are needed to assist the student with career awareness and determining vocational interests?
2. If the student could live anywhere, with anyone, in any residential setting, what would his or her first choice be?
3. What are the student's strengths and capabilities? How have these assets been used in the educational setting? What can be done to ensure that the student's skills are used to increase future success?
4. What type of exit document does the student desire, and which course of study best matches the student's postschool plans? If necessary, is the student willing to remain in school past the age of 18 to complete a specific course of study?
5. In what types of extracurricular activities and community activities is the student participating? What can be done to facilitate greater involvement in activities related to the student's future goals?
6. What barriers might hinder the student's achievement of postschool goals? What solutions are there to these barriers, and how can they be implemented effectively?
7. What types of accommodations and modifications will be needed to ensure that the student achieves a high level of success?
8. What types of personal resources and natural supports (e.g., transportation, job leads, adaptive equipment) does the student have access to that might assist in accomplishing postschool goals? (deFur, 2000; Morningstar, 1995).

Figure 4.1
Examples of Questions to Ensure a Student-Driven Transition Planning Process

IDEA 2004 requires that all transition services be designed

"within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to postschool activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation (Section 602(34) (A)).

The postschool areas noted in IDEA can be consolidated into four domains:

1. *Employment* (integrated employment including supported employment);
2. *Postsecondary education* (continuing and adult education/vocational education);
3. *Residential* (independent living); and
4. *Community participation* (adult services).

Postschool goals describe the student's desired status after graduation and should be developed prior to any other component of the IEP. The outcome goals should drive the development of the IEP through a backward planning process. Beginning with the student's postschool goals ensures that the remainder of the IEP supports the student's desires regarding life after graduation (Flexer, Simmons, Luft, & Baer, 2001). Transition planning requires teams to plan several years ahead—a much broader vision for student achievement than looking at a single school year (deFur, 1999).

Postschool outcomes should reflect high but realistic expectations for student achievement. Students who have been involved in an appropriate course of study, community experiences, and self-determination training will have the self-knowledge needed to understand their abilities and limitations. Most adolescents struggle with future career decisions, and it is the responsibility of parents/guardians and transition staff to assist them in holding onto their dreams while establishing attainable postschool goals.

Initially postschool goals may be less specific, increasing in detail as students move closer to graduation. In all cases, goals should reflect measurable outcomes so that a child's progress toward accomplishing post-high-school plans can be accurately determined. A measurable postschool goal can assist team members in making needed adjustments in the quality or quantity of transition activities in which the student is involved if the student is not making progress.

The chances of developing achievable postschool goals can be increased if students are supported in exploring their interests and abilities through vocational education, academic coursework, community participation, and career awareness activities. The greater the range of experiences, the more prepared a student will be to make decisions about the future. Failure to provide such support can result in a student's not receiving the transition services needed by the conclusion of high school, resulting in a period of instability after graduation.

Students and those supporting them in transition planning must be aware that postschool outcomes will change from year to year as they mature and gain addi-

tional knowledge. Sometimes postschool goals can change drastically for a student due to unexpected events. A student planning to live at home and attend a local university may receive a scholarship and decide to attend a university away from home, thus needing skills required for dorm life. A student who plans to live at home may have to pursue a group home placement due to the sudden illness of an elderly caregiver. The process of transition planning must be flexible enough to accommodate students' expected and unexpected changing desires, needs, situations, and dreams.

DETERMINING A COURSE OF STUDY

Once postschool goals are determined, students must be assisted in choosing a course of study that best matches their future plans. Course-of-study descriptions should be clear enough so that all parties involved understand the specific courses that are being recommended along with the sequence in which these courses should be completed. Since failure to see the relevance of high school coursework to future goals can be a contributing factor in dropping out of school, clearly aligning a course of study with future goals can motivate a student to obtain a high school diploma.

Pathways to a high school diploma are often preestablished, and students should be guided in choosing the pathway that best meets their abilities, interests, and future dreams. Care should be taken to ensure that students are encouraged to pursue a rigorous course of study that results in obtaining a viable high school exit document. All planning documents required for general education students (e.g., career development plans, 4-year plans) should also be used when determining the transition needs of students with disabilities in order to ensure alignment of these documents with the transition component of the IEP. Once postschool goals are developed and a course of study is chosen, the IEP team must look at what will be needed to encourage and support the student in achieving his or her goals for life after graduation.

DETERMINING TRANSITION ACTIVITIES

Postschool outcome goals comprise major life accomplishments or milestones, and a wide range of activities must be provided to ensure their accomplishment. IDEA 2004 requires that these transition activities be delivered in a coordinated fashion and states that it be:

based on the individual child's needs; taking into account the student's strengths, preferences and interests; and includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, the acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (Section 602 (34) (B-C))

What Transition Activities Are

Transition activities are the steps leading to accomplishing postschool goals. An array of activities and services must be planned and implemented for each postschool goal. Some students will not need activities in all postschool goal areas, but it is important that the IEP team thoroughly evaluate each student's desired goals to ensure that all necessary activities are provided. Since the school's legal responsibility for a student ends when the student exits from high school, all transition activities should be planned to ensure their completion by the time of graduation. Any support that will be needed after graduation should be clearly indicated as a responsibility of the appropriate adult service provider. Beginning with postschool goals, the IEP team should assist the student in outlining the steps from the goals back to the present to determine what activities need to occur before graduation.

Categories of Transition Activities

IDEA 2004 indicates the areas of transition activities that should be considered, including instruction, related services, community experiences, employment, postschool adult living activities, and, if needed, daily living skills, as well as functional vocational evaluation. More than likely, these activities will be linked to more than one of the student's postschool goals. IDEA does not provide definitions for the various categories of transition activities, allowing greater latitude and fewer boundaries in the transition planning process. Storms, O'Leary, and Williams (2000) have provided descriptions for each of the categories that can be helpful in explaining the areas to transition team planning members who may not be familiar with some of the terminology.

Instruction. Instruction involves formal strategies designed to teach a skill or set of skills. Instruction can be provided in school through a variety of modes (e.g., tutoring, general education classes, career/technical education classes, academic classes) or in other locations by various agencies (e.g., a community college). Transition activities that are instructional in nature can range from assisting a student in attaining high scores on a college entrance exam to improving daily living skills in preparation for living in a supported apartment.

Related Services. Related services include supportive and therapeutic services and activities that students will need during and after high school to achieve and maintain their goals. This area can include services such as transportation, physical therapy, occupational therapy, rehabilitation counseling, parent counseling and training, orientation and mobility training, and speech therapy. Transition planning teams must not confuse this section of the IEP with the portion that speaks to the delivery of related services within the school environment. It is important to ensure that students receive all necessary related services while in school, but planning must also address needs outside the school environment and postschool needs. Many students and their families will need assistance connecting with the agencies that will ensure continuation of needed supports throughout adult life.

Community Experiences. Community experiences provide students the opportunity to practice skills in the actual settings in which they will be used (e.g., vocational education, shopping, transportation, banking, recreation and leisure activities). These activities can be incorporated into a student's curricular experiences or conducted by adult service providers through various training programs during or after school hours.

Employment. Employment activities prepare a student for a future career. This area incorporates career awareness, career exploration, career preparation, and career assimilation. Employment activities can assist students in choosing appropriate postsecondary training or education or for entering the workforce immediately upon graduation.

Postschool Adult Living Activities. Adult living activities foster skills needed to function at a high level of independence (e.g., registering to vote, filing insurance claims, obtaining medical care, obtaining legal assistance, buying furniture, renting an apartment). These activities enhance the quality of a student's life as an adult because the skills, although not necessarily used on a daily basis, eliminate the need to rely on others for assistance.

The two areas of transition activities that IDEA 2004 proposes to be applied "when appropriate" are acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. Although some students may appear not to require these activities, transition team members should help students analyze their individual needs to ensure that areas of need are not overlooked.

Daily Living Skills. Daily living skills involve activities that are required for day-to-day functioning within the home and community. These are activities that are done routinely by self-sufficient adults (e.g., cleaning, bill paying, personal hygiene, home maintenance, cooking, shopping for groceries). Daily living skills can also include activities that will encourage increased independence (e.g., assisting in physical care, self-feeding, assisting with food preparation).

Functional Vocational Evaluation. The assessment of a student's interests, aptitudes, and vocational skills can help determine appropriate vocational training and educational placements. Vocational evaluation can take many forms, but the key to obtaining a realistic picture of the student is observation in real vocational settings. Since students with disabilities often experience difficulty with traditional forms of assessment or may not have the life experiences necessary to make informed decisions about their interests, it is important to expose them to a variety of real and simulated work environments. Vocational assessment can be performed by school personnel (e.g., special populations coordinators, transition coordinators, guidance counselors) or by outside agencies (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation, college/university testing services). More information about assessment can be found in Chapter 3.

Transition planning includes the areas that are mandated by IDEA, but care should be taken to include any additional areas critical to a successful adult life.

Areas such as health and medical issues, transportation, and financial planning, although not specifically designated as categories of transition activities under IDEA, should be addressed during the planning process (Everson, Zhang, & Guillory, 2001). For example, learning to make transportation arrangements, use of public transit, or obtaining a driver's license are vital to success in employment, community participation, and postsecondary education. Likewise, accessing medical services and maintaining one's health are considered adult postschool activities that promote a better quality of life.

DID YOU KNOW?

- ◆ People with disabilities are much more likely than those without disabilities to consider inadequate transportation to be a problem (30% versus 10%, respectively)—a gap of 20 percentage points.
- ◆ People with disabilities are three times as likely as those without disabilities to not have received necessary health care on at least one occasion in the previous year (19% versus 6%, respectively). Similarly, people with disabilities are much more likely than those without disabilities to postpone or put off seeking needed health care because they cannot afford it (28% versus 12%, respectively; National Organization of Disability, 2000).

GETTING IT DONE

There must be depth and breadth to the planning process. It is not enough to simply list activities and services that are routinely provided or readily available. The transition component must contain activities specific to the postschool goals of the individual student. Those involved in transition planning must be willing to brainstorm, problem solve, and make arrangements for services that typically might not be considered. In a study conducted by McGill and Vogtle (2001), it was discovered that although students with physical disabilities felt that learning to drive would increase their independence and life choices, participation in high school driver's education classes often was not even presented as an option. Those involved in planning must avoid limiting options and access to services even if a student desires to participate in something in which students with disabilities have not traditionally been involved. Systems change within a school system can result by illuminating student needs that are not being met and offering options for meeting these needs. The availability of options and opportunities can increase the achievement and stability of postschool goals (Lindstrom & Benz, 2002).

There may be cases when a student does not need services in one of the transition domains. This is usually the result of the student's possessing all the skills

and/or her postschool activities. However, it is important to justify the final plan.

Think

Transition planning for those in the environment requires a variety of skills. Within the school environment, staff, families, and community members must oversee the transition process. A single activity requires a variety of transition activities. Although the individual's needs make a difference, the transition process is a shared responsibility. The student's involvement in the transition process is essential.

Consider

When the student is not ready to be considered for a transition plan, it will be a challenge to find a way to meet the student's needs. This might require a complex and individualized approach.

Provide

Determining the student's needs requires a variety of skills. Early planning and providing opportunities for the student to participate in the transition process and developing the student's skills are essential.

and/or having access to all the postschool resources needed to accomplish his or her postschool goals. IDEA '97 removed the requirement that the IEP contain a justification statement for any transition domain that was not addressed; however, it is still imperative that the IEP team consider all areas to ensure that the final plan is comprehensive.

Think Outside the Box

Transition activities can and should occur in a variety of environments, including those in which the student will be expected to function after graduation. These environments can include the school campus, vocational training sites, adult living skill training sites, postsecondary campuses, home, and local neighborhoods. Within each of these settings there will be various individuals, including school staff, family members, adult service providers, friends, and employers, who will oversee the implementation of the transition activities. To ensure coordination, a single activity may be the responsibility of more than one person or agency. This requires that care be taken when assigning responsible persons for each transition activity.

Although students should be given multiple opportunities to demonstrate their independence, school personnel and adult service providers should not make assumptions about a student's ability that result in a lack of follow-through. Members of the transition team must strive to balance the need for student independence with comprehensive service delivery. In situations in which a student lacks emotional and financial support, closer monitoring of the implementation of the transition plan may be needed (Taylor-Ritzler et al., 2001).

Consider Timelines

When selecting transition activities, the time span needed for completion should be considered and each activity should designate the date by which the activity will be accomplished. Some activities will involve a one-time event while others might continue over several months or throughout an entire school year. The complexity of activities will determine the amount of time needed for planning and implementation.

Provide Students with Multiple Experiences

Determining the activities needed to accomplish a student's postschool goals requires input from a variety of individuals over a number of years. During the early phases, the activities may serve as a means of assisting students in finalizing their plans for life after graduation. For example, students must have the opportunity to refine their interests and experiment with matching their abilities and desires to various career pathways (McBride & Stitt-Godhes, 1994). By choosing appropriate employment-related transition activities, students can be exposed

to an array of services and experiences needed to finalize their postschool employment goals. The same is true in all domains of transition planning. Students cannot be expected to make informed decisions regarding where they want to live, postsecondary education, or other community activities unless they have the experience upon which to base these decisions.

One of the keys to successful transition planning is to ensure the availability of a wide range of activities that are individualized to each student's specific needs and desires. Figure 4.2 provides examples of various transition activities that are relevant to the domains of employment, residential living, postsecondary education, and community participation. While Figure 4.2 lists transition activities for middle school and high school students, it is never too early to start preparing students for the transition planning process. Therefore, Figure 4.3 lists some activities that can be done by both teachers and families that will help younger students be better prepared to participate in their transition from school to adult life.

Get Students Involved

Students, parents, and adult service providers can increase the quality of the transition component dramatically through effective involvement. Regulatory guidelines for the implementation of IDEA mandates have been clear regarding the intent for students upon reaching transition age to be actively involved in developing their IEPs. Professional organizations recommend that the previous regulations in the area of student involvement be retained and strengthened in this area. It is best practice for students to both attend their team meetings and be a contributing member of the team using self-determination skills obtained through guided instruction and practice (Division on Career Development and Transition, 2005).

Age of Majority. IDEA also recognizes that most students will reach the age of majority while in high school and requires schools to notify students and their parents or guardians of the impending transfer of rights:

Beginning not later than one year before a student reaches the age of majority under State law, a statement that the child has been informed of the child's rights under this title, if any, that will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority. (Section 614 [VIII] [CC])

Educational rights that transfer to a student at the age of majority include those related to educational placement, evaluation, programming, mediation, and due process. Exceptions for transferring all rights to a child upon reaching the age of majority can be made if the child is not capable of making informed decisions regarding his or her education.

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Figure 4.2
Examples of Tran

Postsecondary Education

- Referral to Vocational Rehabilitation for tuition assistance
- Assistance with applications/financial aid forms
- Assistance with selecting an educational institution
- Assistance in understanding the criteria for admission and deadlines for application
- Contacting the student support services personnel at a college and learning about services for students with special needs
- Effectively expressing limitations and needs
- Information about civil rights, confidentiality, and personal rights as they relate to postsecondary education
- Training in budgeting skills
- Remedial classes in academic areas
- Information about residential options for postsecondary education
- Visits to campus(es)
- Arranging transportation to postsecondary education
- Preparation for college admission tests
- Assistance in arranging for accommodations/modifications for admission tests
- Self-advocacy training
- Study skills training
- Test-taking skills training

Employment

- Off-campus vocational experiences (e.g., job shadowing, paid community-based training)
- On-campus vocational experiences (e.g., school-based enterprise, small business, on-campus jobs)
- Vocational education courses
- Workforce Investment Act (WIA)-related activities (e.g., work experience, summer employment, leadership training, mentoring)
- Work adjustment activities
- Referral to Vocational Rehabilitation for supported employment services
- Referral to state Medicaid waiver program
- Referral to Mental Health for case management services
- Establishment of case management services for long-term follow-up through Medicaid reimbursement for supported employment
- Training in job-seeking skills
- Training in job-maintenance skills
- Training in employment-related social skills
- Vocational training in the skills required for a specific vocational area
- Work behavior and work habit training
- Registration at Employment Security Commission
- Vocational evaluation/assessment
- Assistance in understanding the results of vocational evaluations/assessments

(continued)

Figure 4.2
Examples of Transition Activities by Domains

- Assistance in understanding work-related forms/paperwork
- Training in functional academic skills related to employment settings
- Self-advocacy skills
- Career counseling
- Establishment of natural supports on the job site
- Training in employment-related laws and legislation related to persons with disabilities
- Training in employment goal setting
- Plan for Achieving Self-Support (PASS) or Impairment-Related Work Expenses (IRWE) development and approval
- Transportation arrangements
- Tour of a technical school
- Attendance at a job fair

Residential (Independent Living)

- Assistance in understanding social security benefits
- Training in clothing care
- Training in household maintenance (e.g., cleaning, simple repairs, contacting a repairman)
- Cooking skills training
- Menu planning
- Training in money-related skills (e.g., opening a bank account and using banking services, budgeting, comparison shopping, checkbook management, use of coupons, credit and loans, purchasing major items, paying bills)
- Yard care
- Simple first-aid training
- Training in obtaining medical/health care services
- Training in budgeting skills
- Choosing a financial institution that meets personal financial needs
- Community service use training
- Telephone usage training
- Touring residential living options
- Referral to Mental Health for assistance in locating residential placement
- Learning about criteria for subsidized housing

Community Participation (Recreation)

- Taking community-based classes in a hobby or area of special interest
- Exposure to and training in community recreational activities
- Assistance in enrolling/joining community recreational organization
- Social skills training
- Training in social amenities
- Arranging for a recreation buddy
- Training in budgeting for recreation and leisure activities
- Training in how to make and keep friends

Figure 4.2
Continued

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- Evaluating personal recreational interests
- Participating in school sports
- Joining a community sports team
- Participating in a church-related activity
- Administering recreational/leisure assessments and surveys
- Joining a hobby club
- Joining the YMCA
- Touring community recreation sites

Figure 4.2
Continued

Sources: Aspel, 1997; Fairfax County Public Schools, 1998.

Making Informed Decisions. Making an informed decision requires the ability to consider multiple options and understand the consequences of various decisions, ultimately making a decision after synthesizing and analyzing all available information. The legal transfer of rights to students is a huge step in empowering students in their planning process. However, some students are not able to participate fully in the process due to the severity of their cognitive or emotional disabilities. IDEA recognizes this possibility and includes measures to ensure that the student's best interests will be protected. If a student has been declared incompetent through the court system, a guardian is appointed to make decisions for the individual. In some cases an individual under limited guardianship may maintain certain rights. In the case of limited guardianship, it is important for the school staff to obtain a copy of the guardianship papers and determine the extent to which the student will legally be involved in the educational decision-making process.

Some students, although they have not legally been declared incompetent, will exhibit such severe cognitive or emotional disabilities that they will be unable to participate meaningfully in making educational decisions. In these instances, IDEA allows school systems to appoint someone (often a parent or relative) to act in the best interest of the student when educational decisions and plans are being made.

School systems should use the age-of-majority ruling to adopt a philosophy that promotes self-determination instruction beginning in elementary school. If a school system meets only the requirement of notification without proper education, family members may become worried that their decision-making authority will be undermined. Parents and students must be prepared far in advance for the transfer of rights in order to prevent parents from seeking unnecessary guardianship or misunderstanding their role as a partner in the transition planning process (Lindsey, Wehmeyer, Guy, & Martin, 2001).

Why Student Involvement Is Important. It is best practice for students to be active members of their IEP team to ensure that the transition component accurately reflects their abilities, preferences, and interests. Previous IDEA regulations have

- Begin as early as possible to assist students in thinking about life after graduation by teaching self-determination, social skills, academic skills, and daily living skills beginning in elementary school.
- Help students develop an understanding of their disability and the impact it may have on adult life.
- Show students their educational records and provide guidance in understanding the forms and terminology. Educate students about legal rights in the areas of special education, vocational education, postsecondary education, employment, and the adult service system.
- Teach specific skills related to student participation in the IEP process.
- Teach students how to set goals and objectives. Develop a personal action plan that allows students to see the connection between setting long-range goals and following a plan to achieve those goals (e.g., planning a party, learning a new hobby).
- Bring in as guest speakers older students or young adults with disabilities who have been successful in accomplishing their postschool goals.

Figure 4.3
Activities That Prepare Younger Students for the Transition Planning Process

Sources: ERIC/OSEP, 2000; Warger & Burnette, 2000.

reinforced this practice with requirements for student attendance at IEP meetings and the consideration of student interests, preferences, needs, and abilities in developing all transition components. A student's absence at the IEP meeting when transition is to be discussed should be a rare occurrence. Even if a student must miss the IEP team meeting, measures should be taken to ensure that the student's input is considered.

Wehmeyer, Palmer, Agran, Mithaug, and Martin (2000) recommended that student involvement in transition planning include focused, student-directed instruction involving problem solving, goal setting, decision making, self-advocacy, and opportunities to direct planning meetings. If postschool goals are to be achieved, each goal must focus on the desires of student and family and not simply be a reflection of what the professionals think is best (Wehman, 1992).

Involving Students in Team Meetings. Inviting the student by extending a separate invitation to the IEP meeting encourages the student's presence during transition planning. However, simply inviting the student to attend does not guarantee active involvement and may not even guarantee attendance. The first step toward meeting the spirit of the law is ensuring that students are self-determined. Without sufficient self-determination skills it is very difficult for students to overcome fears and speak up for themselves regarding what they want in life and what is needed to get there.

Special educators must first work with students to ensure that they understand the importance of attending meetings. Fostering of this awareness should begin prior to high school by educating students about the importance of future

DID YOU KNOW?

In a study of nearly 1,000 adults with mental retardation, Weinmeyer and Weitzler (1995) found that

- Only 2.2% indicated they had a choice in where they lived.
- Only 3.4% indicated they had chosen their roommate.
- Only 11.2% indicated they had selected where they worked or their daytime activities.

planning. Students should understand their role as a consumer of services and the school's responsibility in assisting them in achieving postschool dreams. If needed, a school system should put supports in place such as providing transportation to the meeting or offering incentives for student attendance and active participation.

The presence of the student at meetings will assist team members in staying focused and allow adult service providers to become familiar with the student, thereby increasing the soundness of decisions concerning current and future service delivery. Effective transition planning can come about only if a student leads his or her transition planning team meetings or at the very least is a contributing member of the team. Countryman and Schroeder (1996) discovered that family members had a better understanding of their child's abilities and interests when school conferences and meetings were student led.

Self-determination training should begin at an early age, with opportunities for students to learn about their personal traits (e.g., learning styles, abilities, interests, needed accommodations, modifications, future life-style preferences, natural supports) in order to ensure their readiness for participation in transition planning by the time they reach high school. For more information on commercial self-determination curricula that can be used to provide direct instruction to students in the area of self-determination, visit www.utcc.edu/sdsp. In addition, examples of PowerPoint presentations used by students to lead their IEP meetings, as well as teacher training materials, are available at www.studentledieps.org.

Helping Students Guide Their Futures. To make informed decisions, students must have an understanding of what they want and need in life. As discussed in Chapter 3, self-awareness can be enhanced through transition assessment.

The goal for all students is to ensure that transition planning decisions are truly based on their desires and interests even if they are not able to communicate this information through traditional means. Life experiences are also important to students when making decisions related to their future. Both parents and school personnel should provide exploratory activities in the home and community that will provide a base of experience upon which to make decisions regarding a future career and life-style.

Making clear to students the importance of transition planning to their future is also necessary. A commitment should be obtained from each student to participate in all transition planning activities. This commitment may be verbal or may even involve a written statement. Students also must be taught about how the transition process works, including how and when meetings are conducted, possible team members, what IDEA mandates, their individual rights, and available services. Prior to actual participation in a transition planning meeting, students should be given multiple opportunities (i.e., small-group activities and role playing) to identify appropriate postschool goals and to practice expressing these goals, requesting services, and discussing their personal traits.

A student's participation can be hampered by fear of the unknown or an intimidating situation, so it is helpful if the student can actually observe another student's meeting, watch a videotape of a meeting prior to attending for the first time, and/or meet the members who will be in attendance. It is also helpful for students to spend time with transition professionals in activities such as completing transition surveys, interviews, and/or dream sheets. A sample of a student dream sheet can be found in Figure 3.4.

Test and colleagues (2004) conducted a review of the literature to investigate interventions designed to increase students' involvement in their IEP process. Their findings suggested that students with widely varying abilities could be actively involved in the IEP process. Results also indicated that both published curricula designed to teach students skills to enhance their participation prior to IEP meetings and person-centered planning strategies are effective in increasing students' involvement in their IEP meetings.

Encourage Others to Support Student Participation

The level of student participation in transition meetings can also be enhanced or hindered by the actions of team members (Timmons & Whitney-Thomas, 1998; Whitney-Thomas & Timmons, 1998). Members should receive training in encouraging behaviors and actions that can facilitate a greater comfort level for the student while establishing an atmosphere of openness and acceptance. For example, team members should take care to talk *to* the student rather than *about* the student, directing comments, suggestions, and questions to the student even if he or she has limited communication skills. This may be a change for many adult service providers who are used to "staffing" clients who may not be present at the meetings and for special educators who are used to holding dialogues with parents or guardians.

Team meetings should be conducted in a manner that is flexible enough to accommodate a wide range of communication levels and modes. Team members should refrain from using professional jargon or making assumptions about the comprehension level of the student. Students may need to use an augmentative communication device, be assisted by an interpreter, have statements clarified, be given additional time to respond to questions, or be prompted to participate in team discussions.

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During transition planning it is imperative that students feel that their desires and dreams are being taken into consideration and that their opinions are valued. Team members should ensure that student input is not met with negativity or disdain even if students' suggestions appear unrealistic. It is the team members' responsibility to guide and assist students in achieving their postschool goals even if these goals are not what the team members would have chosen. No decision or conclusion should be reached during the transition planning that does not receive the student's approval. In the end, ensuring student involvement will pay off in increased commitment by the students to accomplishing their postschool goals and a greater awareness of the final vision—independent and productive involvement in the community after graduation.

Get Parents Involved. Although the student is the focus of all transition-related activities, the parent is also a vital player (Hanley-Maxwell, Pogoloff, & Whitney-Thomas, 1998; Wehmeyer, Morningstar, & Husted, 1999). Federal regulations have long required parent participation in the IEP process, but if the purpose of the meeting is to discuss transition issues, the parent invitation should indicate this purpose, the adult service agencies that will be invited, and the student's involvement. Of course, long before the student's parents receive an invitation to a transition meeting, educators should have provided information to them concerning laws, transition planning, adult services, promising practices, goal setting, advocacy, and any other information relevant to their child's transition needs.

Successful transition is dependent on the support network available to the student after graduation. Since many students, with and without disabilities, are often dependent on their families for emotional and financial support, getting parental input into the transition planning process increases the chances of future success. Parents who participate in transition planning prior to graduation will be better equipped to assist their sons and daughters in navigating the adult service provider system after graduation. For example, after graduation a student might not qualify for the level of services provided while he or she was in school, and therefore parents would be required to help with tasks such as case management (Thorin & Irvin, 1992).

DID YOU KNOW?

In a study conducted by Salembier and Furney (1997):

- ◆ 30% of parents interviewed "didn't like" or "really didn't like" their level of participation in IEP/transition planning meetings.
- ◆ 69% reported listening more than talking during meetings.
- ◆ 40% indicated that their son's or daughter's plans did not reflect individual interests and needs.

Importance of Parent Participation. Parental support can facilitate a smooth transition to adult life by encouraging good school attendance, increased academic achievement, and high self-esteem. The information parents possess about their sons and daughters (e.g., abilities and skills in environments outside the school, natural supports, likes and dislikes, social skills in the community) can increase the chances of a good match between students and their postsecondary goals (Furney, Hasan, & DeStefano, 1997; Solembier & Furney, 1998; Wittenstein, 1995), and the influence parents possess can assist in the accomplishment of these goals.

Parents can serve as powerful role models for work ethic, community involvement, and good citizenship. Parents can also provide the stable and secure environment needed as their young adult practices advocacy skills, takes risks, tries out new things, makes mistakes, and even flounders a bit before settling on a definitive life path. Parents who serve as active and knowledgeable participants in the transition process can advance their son's or daughter's progress toward postsecondary goals often more effectively than school personnel, due to their history and relationship with their child.

Ensuring Active Parent Participation. Parent involvement can be enhanced through trusting, caring, and open relationships. Educators must spend time with family members formally and informally discussing the desired vision they have for their young adult. Taking the time to assist family members in understanding high school curricular options, adult services the student can access, educational, vocational, and rehabilitation laws and regulations, transition terminology, the transition planning process, and advocacy strategies can enhance communication with the family during the transition planning process (Solembier & Furney, 1997). Although parent education is vital to ensuring effective participation, a national survey administered by Johnson and Sharpe (2000) to special education administrators across the nation indicated that 76% of the respondents reported that they did not provide formal parent workshops. Parents must be assisted in comprehending the full range of possibilities for their child. It is helpful to pair them with other parents whose children have had successful transition experiences so success stories can be shared and fears alleviated.

Just as the students, family members must be made to feel that they are full partners in the transition planning process. All team members should understand the importance of effective family involvement and exhibit behaviors and attitudes that sincerely convey the value placed on family participation. Team members should be open to family involvement in transition team meeting agenda setting, implementation of transition activities, and measures that ensure the inclusion of family members in all communications that normally occur between team members.

The quality of the relationship between service providers and family members can be a key factor in the quantity and quality of family involvement. Ladd-Allen and Getzel (2001) reported that families view the transition experience as more positive if service providers take the time to understand the family

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dynamics and culture, become personally involved, and share information freely. Family members desire a collaborative partnership, but they view issues related to bureaucracy, cultural differences, trust, equality, and attitudes as barriers to participation in transition planning activities.

The entire transition process will be smoother if both parents and students are prepared early for the future. Parents can have an enormous impact on their children through their actions and words. During the early years of development, parents can begin to talk with the student about his or her future, model a good work ethic, assist the student in learning about the jobs of family members, and encourage risk taking appropriate to the student's future dreams. Even in the best of situations, however, the transition years require changes not only for the student but also for the family, and both educators and outside agencies should be available to provide the resources and emotional support needed so that families can be equipped to handle the changes. Educators must be sensitive to the family situation and take into consideration the family's needs when facilitating involvement in the transition planning process (deFur et al., 2001).

Get Agencies Involved. By now it should be clear that school systems cannot conduct effective transition planning without the involvement of students and families. But school systems also need the support and assistance of the adult service system. The magnitude, intricacy, and complexity of transition require educators to look outside the school system for assistance in ensuring that all students' transition needs are met. Invitations to IEP meetings at which transition is going to be discussed should be extended to any agency or individual who can be expected to be involved in assisting in the delivery of transition services. It is important for students and their parents to be properly informed of adult services and supports so that they can assist in deciding which representatives should attend transition meetings.

Even if adult service providers are included at team meetings and indicate their willingness to deliver services, there may be incidences when agencies do not follow through with commitments. In these situations special educators should be prepared to make other plans to ensure that students receive needed services to accomplish their postschool goals. This may require reconvening the IEP team to discuss alternative options for obtaining services for the high school and post-high-school years. Adult service agencies should not be relieved of the responsibility for delivering services if a student meets eligibility guidelines simply because of the school system involvement in the transition process.

The collaboration and coordination of service delivery between the school system and adult service providers is important if service integration is to occur. Students can receive a greater benefit from the transition service delivery process if there is an array of service providers involved in planning and implementing transition activities (see Chapters 1 and 5).

Bringing all parties together for transition planning will assist in obtaining information needed to develop a realistic and comprehensive IEP. This information