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## Notes on Transition Planning for College

All students can benefit from well-designed transition planning for college. With specific reference to those students identified for special education, middle and high schools have a responsibility under IDEA to focus on a range of transition interventions (see *Transition 101* on the website of the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities – <http://www.nichcy.org/resources/transition101.asp> ).

In general, family stakeholders in a community need to work together to ensure the middle school and high school do all that they can to provide an effective transition-to-college program. (In this respect, there are various resources to draw upon – see a couple examples cited at the end of these notes.)

And, either through such middle and high school programs or through other resources, each family needs to ensure that an individual transition plan is developed and effectively implemented.

Given this, it falls to the student and the family to ensure that the college selected is a good fit for the student's current motivation and capabilities and that transition plans for after high school graduation are implemented and regularly modified as necessary. It is particularly important to map out the personal, interpersonal, and academic supports, accommodations, and services that will be available and can be readily accessed by the student.

Below are examples of steps related to college transition planning for the student.

(1) *Develop an Individual Transition Plan.* Student works up an individualized transition plan with the support of those with whom s/he has a good working relationship (e.g., a family member, high school counselor, therapist, peer support group, etc.). In developing the plan, it will help to contact the college (e.g., email the student counseling center, disability office, etc.) to determine what that institution provides to facilitate effective transition and to garner advice about facilitating a successful transition. It is important in developing the plan to anticipate specific problems that will arise and write up how to address them.

(2) *Easing Anxieties and Strengthening Specific Coping and Self-advocacy Attitudes and Skills.* To increase the likelihood that the transition plan is successful, additional time should be devoted to working with the student to (a) anticipate and alleviate worries about the transition and (b) enhance specific coping and self-advocacy attitudes and skills related to the type of personal, interpersonal, and academic challenges s/he will likely encounter during the period of transition.

(3) *Ensuring Availability and Access to Relevant Support Mechanisms.* Some will be available on campus; others will have to be accessed off campus. It is essential to be certain that the student will have ready access to tutoring, counseling, continued treatment, etc. There also needs to be a regular schedule for student family communication.

(4) *Easing into College Demands.* In high school, advanced placement courses provide an initial sampling of what to expect. Well-orchestrated visits to and orientations at the college are imperative. These should include a focus on both the physical plant and resources and on social and cultural facets. If feasible, this is a good time to connect the student with someone who agrees to be the student's college mentor/advisor/counselor/coach. After graduation, a summer college course can be a next transition experience. For some students, community college is a useful transition step to university enrollment. During the first term at college, many students

need to avoid taking too heavy a course load. For those with special needs, all necessary accommodations should be established upon enrollment. And, this is the time to ensure the student is effectively connected to someone on the staff who can do some mentoring, advising, counseling, and coaching and is involved with some peers who can facilitate access to social activity and support networks.

(5) *Minimizing Financial Concerns.* Specific attention needs to be paid to financial concerns, including care in budgeting, how to access financial aid/loans/scholarships, and likely problems that will arise if a student has to supplement income by taking a part time job.

(6) *Monitoring, Problem Solving, and Celebrating Successes.* Obviously, there must be a means for monitoring the student's reactions to college and general life stressors and providing relevant support and enhanced coping and problem solving strategies as necessary. Special emphasis needs to be given to critical times in the college schedule and calendar (e.g., enrolling in classes, dealing with major assignments, mid term and final exams, vacation periods). From a psychological perspective, it is important to watch for and take steps to minimize threats to feelings of competence, self-determination, and interpersonal relationships with significant others. And, it is important not to forget about taking time to celebrate each significant accomplishment.

(7) *Revamping Plans and Supports.* In addition to difficulties that may arise in successfully implementing the transition plan, provision must be made for regular evaluation and adjustment of plans and supports. This is essential not only to react to problems, but to address natural developmental changes in students during the first year in college. It is common, for example, for students to go through considerable changes in their goals, peer group and intimate interpersonal relationships, and values (e.g., they change majors, rethink career goals, fall in love, etc.).

For more, you might start with the publications and resources on the website for the **Transition Coalition** at the University of Kansas. See <http://www.transitioncoalition.org/cgiwrap/tcacs/new/resources/index.php>

Among their many publications on this topic, you might start with: *The Community Transition Program: Experiences Starting a Community-Based Program for Students Aged 18-21*. "This manual is based on the development and operation of one community-based transition program in Lawrence, KS called Community Transitions (C-Tran). The teachers of C-Tran reveal their insights and share many of their resources, programming, and curricula to help others develop community-based transition programs."

They also have links to various other resources.

Also see, Chapter 7 on "Transition to Postsecondary Education" in *Transition Education and Services for Students with Disabilities* by P/L/ Sitlington & G.M. Clark (4<sup>th</sup> edition, 2006) published by Pearson (Allyn & Bacon).



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