

transition



The passage from youth to adulthood

*Your guide to the services and
information that can make
transition a success for
young people with disabilities*

*Where, why, when and how
to make the most of the years
between 14 and 22*

This publication is available in alternate accessible formats
by calling the Advocacy Center, Inc., toll free 1-800-342-0823



Federal law guarantees every student with a disability who is 14 and older the right to assistance in moving from the world of school to the world of work.

“Disability is a natural part of the human experience,” wrote the United States Congress in passing this legislation, “and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society.”

At the Advocacy Center, we work to advance the dignity, equality, self-determination and expressed choices of people with disabilities. Transition planning is intended to provide people with disabilities the supports and services they need to reach their dreams. As with all good intentions, the reality can sometimes fall short. Because transition is so critical to a student’s future, knowing your rights can save years of wasted time.

Above all, knowing the law and having the highest expectations for the rights it confers will spur all of us to achieve more than we ever imagined.

This handbook is designed to give you a basic understanding of the rights of students with disabilities and the obligations of the special education system under the law. If, after reading it, you have further questions, please call the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities toll free at 1-800-342-0823. It is our mission to ensure that Floridians with disabilities have the free and appropriate public education that is their right. And we believe there is no time to waste.

Sincerely,

Gary Blumenthal

Executive Director

Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities, Inc.,

To students with disabilities and their families, friends, teachers, special education teachers, guidance counselors, vocational rehabilitation counselors and transition coordinators.

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All children – whether or not they have a disability — have rights, needs, talents and dreams. For students with disabilities, the key to a smooth transition to adulthood lies in recognizing the possibilities unique to their gifts and goals. Transition, which usually takes place between the ages of 14 and 22, can be much more successful if a student has access to all the supports and services that permit him or her to live as fully and independently as possible.

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Rehabilitation Act, students with disabilities have the right to substantial assistance in making the most of their transition years. However, they don't always get the services to which they're entitled. That can be because the laws and regulations are not well understood, or because providers are short on money or time, or because the student's transition team lacks an energetic, knowledgeable and determined leader.

If you are a young person moving toward adulthood — or the parent, teacher or friend of one — this handbook is designed to help you understand what services are available and how to gain access to them.



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young person
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what is transition?

Transition begins with a plan.

It's the process that takes young people with disabilities from childhood to adulthood.

The activities in the process must be coordinated among and by everyone involved. The student and his or her family, educators, service providers and friends do the planning, and agree on the contributions each will make and how they will work together.

The activities must be designed to produce an outcome. The young person and his or her team select goals for adulthood, and the activities and services in the plan are designed to reach those goals – whether employment, higher education, vocational training or living arrangements that confer maximum independence on the student.

The transition must promote movement from school to post-school activities.

The desired outcome can include any number of goals, such as post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment, supported employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living and community participation.

The outcome must be based on the individual student's needs, preferences and interests.

The activities in the process can include instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school, adult-living objectives, functional vocational evaluation, and, when needed, the acquisition of daily living skills.

A well-managed transition gives young adults the chance to have the greatest possible independence, competence, enjoyment and mastery of life.

For a transition plan to be effective, the combined efforts of everyone involved are necessary – the student, family and friends, educators, and professionals from government and private agencies.

With that team in high gear, the student in transition will have more adult opportunities and a much better chance to succeed. The transition years can be a time to prepare for adulthood, make the living arrangements that will work and line up the services and technology that can supply freedom and competence.

Federal laws and regulations require that some people with disabilities (those covered by IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) have assistance in their transitions. Others with disabilities (those covered by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, but not by IDEA) have a right to transition services if they request them. Much can be gained by requesting them.

A few of the goals and services to be considered during transition are:

- vocational rehabilitation
- vocational counseling
- vocational training
- college
- career, trade or profession
- integrated employment (alongside non-disabled colleagues)
- supported employment
- self employment
- continuing and adult education
- adult services
- assistive technology
- independent living
- community participation (experiences such as attending church, taking public transportation, using the library).

Anything works better if it's planned. Besides, it's the law.

Students in special education are required by federal law to have Individual Education Plans (IEPs) and, as adulthood approaches, transition plans as well. Any student with a disability is entitled to have a plan if he or she requests one.

Young people with disabilities who are covered by the Rehabilitation Act but not by IDEA sometimes don't choose to take advantage of all the planning that schools, parents and government officials can provide for them. However, there are benefits in exhausting every opportunity. Creative planning can open the door to assistive technology, additional services or expert advice that may give a student much more freedom and personal power in adult life.

The IEP spells out the kind of education a student wants and needs, along with the support services required to achieve it. Later plans – both transition and vocational — deal with the student's goals and needs for adulthood.

Why plan?

***To get more in life.
There are many ideas,
services and technologies
for people with disabilities,
and planning can
put them within reach.***

**Creative
planning can
open the door
to assistive
technology,
additional
services or
expert advice.**



how may plans are there?

- What are they?

- Who has them?

Basically, four plans have been created under federal law to protect young people with disabilities from discrimination in education and employment.

Depending on which laws cover them and what stage of transition they're in, young people with disabilities will have one or more — probably at least two — of these four official types of plans:

1. The IEP

Individualized Education Plan — is a detailed, evolving plan for educating a student with a disability.

IDEA requires that all the students it covers — that is, students in special education — have IEPs, which are written by teams that vary in composition according to the needs of each student. IEPs are updated at least every year.

Students who are covered by IDEA and required to have IEPs are between the ages of 3 and 21, are evaluated by the appropriate professionals, and are determined by a multidisciplinary team to be eligible because of one or more of 13 specific categories of disability. The categories are autism, deafness, deaf-blindness, hearing disabilities, mental retardation, multiple disabilities, orthopedic disabilities, other health disabilities, serious emotional disturbance, specific learning disabilities, speech or language disabilities, traumatic brain injury, and visual disability.

Those who are covered by IDEA are also eligible for assistance under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, but during the person's school years, the requirements of IDEA are more specific. To be sure a child receives the services he or she needs, IDEA spells out a concrete and specific process. That process guarantees that useful steps will be taken to give the child equal access to an education.

2. 504 plans

Students with disabilities who are not covered by IDEA — that is, students who need accommodations in education but do not need modified curricula — have a plan similar in purpose to the IEP. Covered by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, it is most often called a "504 Plan."

A 504 plan, like an IEP, specifies the steps to be taken to give the young person an equal chance to be educated. It describes the kind of education that is right for him or her and the services and technology to make it possible.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act covers people who have a physical or mental disability that substantially limits one of the legally defined major life activities — walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, writing, performing math calculations, working, caring for oneself or performing manual tasks — but do not need all the special instruction and related services that are covered by IDEA.

The 504 plan can and should be handled as carefully and thoroughly as the law requires for an IEP. The person with a disability, his or her parents and any advocate has a right to insist on a thorough process and all necessary services and benefits for which the student is eligible.

how many plans are there?

3. TIEP

Students covered by IDEA are required to have a further plan as they grow into their later teens. In Florida, it's called a Transition Individualized Education Plan, or a TIEP. It can be either a separate plan or a section of an IEP.

Students who have 504 plans are not legally required to have separate transition plans, but they are entitled to transition planning as part of their 504 plans.

4. IPE

The student who attends school with an IEP or a 504 Plan is likely to leave school with a new kind of plan — an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).

The IPE is a blueprint for successful employment for the person who uses the services of the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) or the Division of Blind Services (DBS).

A student who is eligible for vocational rehabilitation has a right to an IPE developed by DVR or DBS before he or she leaves school. Without the plan, the student can't gain access to services from DVR or DBS. It is a roadmap to reach his or her desired and appropriate employment goal in adult life.



504 Plan Frequently Asked Questions:

1. What is a 504 plan?

A child with a disability who does not need special education and services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) may be eligible under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act.

2. Who is eligible for a 504 plan?

*A child must have a physical or mental impairment that **substantially limits one major life activity**, such as walking, seeing, hearing, speaking, breathing, learning, reading, writing, performing math calculations, working, caring for oneself and performing manual tasks.*

When should the planning begin?

early.



The planning for a child's education should begin when the child enters school or is discovered to have a disability.

As the child grows older, the transition becomes more important in arranging the best possible education, work, living arrangements, services and assistive technology.

Transition planning should begin by age 14 and, ideally, even sooner.

Students covered by IDEA are required to begin transition planning at age 14, with at least a statement in the education plan — the IEP — of which supports and services they'll need during their high-school years.

By age 16, students covered by IDEA are legally required to have a transition-services plan covering all their needs to move to successful adulthood.

Students not covered by IDEA but covered by Section 504 and other parts of the Rehabilitation Act have the right to a 504 plan, which is sometimes prepared as late as the senior year in high school.

But the student's senior year is critically late to begin planning.

Students with disabilities have the right, under IDEA and the Americans with Disabilities Act, to equal access to the advantages of education. Equal access may require extensive planning and foresight by students, their families, their schools and all relevant agencies and organizations.

Some students will need technology (augmentative communication devices, listening headsets, television captioning and decoders, telecommunications devices, videotext displays,

readers, taped texts, Braille materials, large print materials, wheelchairs and other forms of universal and assistive technology). Time is required to find the technology, match it to the student's needs, find a funding source for it, acquire it and train the student to use it.

Students with disabilities need teachers who understand how they learn, how much they can learn (often more than teachers think), how they can prove what they've learned and how they can utilize it as adults. The earlier the transition teams understand a student's needs, the likelier they are to be fulfilled. It takes time, patience and persistence.

Although the law requires that students covered by IDEA begin their transition planning no later than age 14 — and all young people with disabilities have the right to start by then — timely planning will probably not occur unless someone insists upon it.

In making decisions for post-school life, one of the first hurdles for students with disabilities is being declared eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.

When should the planning start?

Now, if not sooner.

What should the plans cover?

The education and all the supports and services that a young person with a disability needs to prepare for the fullest possible life as an adult.

If the education system, vocational rehabilitation agencies and private and government social services can provide a service or support, and the person covered by the plan needs it, the plan should show the way to get it.

IEP and 504, the education plans

The IEP and the 504 plan ideally begin in childhood, the earlier the better, and deal primarily with the child's education. Early planning is the bedrock of the transition plan. Even if the 504 plan is developed later, it still provides the necessary structure for the transition plan.

An IEP or a 504 Plan should be reviewed at least annually — and can be reviewed anytime, upon request — to reflect the student's progress and evolving situation, and to stimulate ideas about what will help him or her take advantage of new services and technology as they become available.

An IEP or 504 plan should spell out:

- all the student's educational needs related to his or her disabilities;
- the services to be provided and when they are expected to start and end;
- which agencies or individuals will provide the services and who will pay for them;

- measurable goals and objectives for the student, with dates to begin working toward them and to reach them (assessments conducted by professionals can be a basis for the goals, and new assessments periodically can measure the progress and inspire new goals);
- program modifications and supports that will be needed to help the student reach the goals in the least restrictive environment. "Least restrictive environment" means that, as much as possible, the student learns in the regular curriculum, learns alongside other students (those who have disabilities and those who do not) and participates in extra-curricular activities with other students (those who have disabilities and those who do not); and
- technology devices or other assistance that might make it possible for the student to participate fully and equally in mainstream school life, or at least in the best possible education — and who, or what agency, will supply it.



What should the plans cover?

The plans are designed individually, and reflect each person's vision and values.

TIEP, the transition plan (or the transition portion of a 504 plan)

Adulthood brings new needs, rights and opportunities. As a student grows to adulthood, his or her IEP could change significantly, and the transition plan should play an ever-larger role in this process.

The student's transition plan will cover not only schooling but also vocational training and living skills – in short, whatever the young person will need to make a successful transition to adult life. The transition plan — whether a TIEP or a portion of a 504 plan — should spell out:

- the high-school program the student needs and the type of diploma the student can earn, and when it can be expected;
- whether, where and how the student will pursue education beyond high school;
- the kind of work the student wants to do and can do with the right training, supports and services, and how he or she will prepare for that work;
- any job training the student will need, whether it will be in a formal classroom setting, in the community, or both;
- any life skills the student has yet to learn; and
- services or assistive technology devices the student will need and which agencies can supply them.

IPE, the vocational rehabilitation plan

The IPE states the student's employment goal and the services the student will need to achieve it.

It is important for a student with a disability and his or her vocational rehabilitation counselor to choose an employment goal specific enough to make it clear which services are needed to reach it.

The goal should not be, for example, health care. It should be a particular job in health care — nurse's aide, records technician or surgeon. Instead of business, the goal should be receptionist or comptroller. Instead of law enforcement, it should be security guard, detective or prosecutor. The goal can always be changed if it proves to be too much, too little or simply the wrong direction.

With a specific goal, an IPE can then list in detail the services that are needed and who will pay for them. The services can include further education, transportation, mental-health therapy, medical treatment, technology and anything else necessary for the student to reach his or her goal. The IPE can also specify responsibilities of the young person, such as reporting progress to the counselor or regular attendance at classes.

The plans are designed individually, and reflect each person's vision and values.

What should a student's plan be?

Education plans should be detailed strategies for achieving the best possible adult life.

A transition plan has the same purpose but looks ahead to the needs, changes and possibilities of adulthood.

An IPE, or employment plan, focuses on preparing for work as an adult.

How is transition planned?

The transition team meets regularly to figure out what will work for the student, then commits to executing its strategy.

The school has primary responsibility for creating and maintaining the IEP or 504 plan and the transition plan, although many other institutions and agencies should help. The IPE is primarily the responsibility of the vocational rehabilitation counselor. The student with a disability and his or her vocational rehabilitation counselor write the IPE together, generally with the advice and counsel of others.

If educators do not begin transition planning soon enough, they can be prompted to do so. Members of a student's family, the student him- or herself, or anyone close to the student can make a request to the school. The request should be written, and the person making it should keep a dated copy.

The first step in the planning process is a comprehensive evaluation of the student. It should be done as soon as the child enters school or as soon as the question of a disability arises. Either the parents or the school staff may initiate it. If the school asks for an evaluation, the staffers must obtain prior parental consent.

The evaluation will help determine whether the student has a disability, whether the disability is covered by IDEA or the Rehabilitation Act, and what education services the student needs in order to succeed.

When the student is determined to have a disability, the school staff calls a meeting to write an IEP or a 504 plan, depending on the nature of the disability. (Ideally, that happens long before the transition years.)

Before the meeting, the parents or guardian should receive a copy of the assessment in time to study it, understand it and consider whether to accept it.

The meeting should include (and under IDEA is required to include) the parents, teachers, counselors and anyone who can contribute. The same professionals, depending on the needs of the student, should help develop and maintain a 504 plan.

Together, the members of the team decide what the student needs, what services will be provided and what outcomes are anticipated.

The meetings are repeated at least annually through the school years. The written record of the decisions made at the meetings becomes the evolving IEP (or 504 plan) document.

The same process produces the TIEP, or transition plan.

How is the transition planned?

Via regular meetings of those who know the student best with those who know

the best ways to accommodate the barriers caused by his or her disabilities. The plans are a guide to the student's best chance for success as an adult.



What else is the plan good for?

It's a way to decide what's needed to help the student and a regular progress check.

It's a record, a way to monitor and measure the progress, make sure the commitments are kept and decide whether the right commitments have been made.

In addition to planning the student's education, a thorough plan for a student with a disability can give him or her measurable goals and regular occasions to make the measurements and compare the results.

The meetings, and the plans that result, provide:

- a written record of the decisions reached;
- a commitment of the resources necessary to provide the student with appropriate services;
- a way to assure that the student receives appropriate services;
- an opportunity to resolve differences between the parents and the other participants during the meeting, and ultimately a record should the parents choose to appeal any decisions;
- a record that shows whether the child is receiving the free and appropriate education required by IDEA; and
- a way to evaluate the student's progress toward the planned outcomes.

For students

Preparing for your IEP meeting

United States law says that starting at age 14, you must be invited to your IEP meetings. Since these meetings are so important to your future happiness, the more you can be part of them, the better the team will work together. Everyone wants you to be successful.

As you go through transition, it's important for you and your IEP team to communicate well. The IEP maps out what you will learn in school and what you need to learn it. It tells your teachers how they can best help you learn and prepare for what you will do when you leave school. Your IEP could include goals such as balancing a checkbook, improving your reading skills, or socializing with groups of people. Depending on your goals, your IEP team will plan, step by step, how to get you there.

Before the meeting

- ✓ Get a copy of your IEP and go over it with your parents or teachers until you understand it. Ask questions about the parts you don't understand.
- ✓ Think about what you want to do. Write out your ideas ahead of time, and practice what you want to tell your team about your goals.
- ✓ Do your homework by learning what classes or training you need to achieve your goals.
- ✓ Invite someone you trust to attend the meeting to encourage and support you. It could be a brother or sister, aunt or uncle, neighbor or school friend.
- ✓ Be sure you get enough sleep the night before and eat a good breakfast the day of your transition IEP meeting.

During the meeting

- ✓ Discuss with your team how your health condition will affect your goals and plans.
- ✓ Know your rights. What will you do if your IEP team makes a decision you don't agree with? Remember: If you have concerns, the law guarantees you another meeting.
- ✓ Believe in yourself and your success.

Who plans the transition?

The student and his or her team.

The IEP team

Under IDEA, the IEP transition team should include the student, parents, and school staff who know the student best — not a teacher and a counselor but *the* teachers and counselors who know the student best — as well as representatives of every agency that might play a role in meeting the student's needs. Those agencies can include:

- developmental services agencies
- alcohol, drug abuse and mental health programs
- community colleges
- the Florida Division of Blind Services (DBS)
- the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)
- deaf service centers
- children's medical services
- children and family services
- community mental health services
- the Centers for Independent Living (CIL)
- Social Security programs
- speech-language programs
- any other agency with services or programs that might contribute to the student's successful transition to adult life.

The 504 team

The composition of the 504 team is less formally dictated by law than the IDEA team, but it's a good idea to have the same sort of mix, to cover all the services and opportunities the student might need and want. The student or anyone responsible for that person can request the participation of experts in the field.

The transition team

The transition can be planned by the members of the IEP or 504 team, plus additional contributors such as professionals in the fields of higher education, adult living arrangements and employment.

IPE, an employment plan

The IPE plan is written by the student and his or her vocational rehabilitation counselor, who enters the picture when the student is determined eligible for services from DVR or DBS.

The counselor will be more valuable, however, if he or she has been involved in the student's education planning from early on.

Any involved family members and other members of the student's IEP (or 504) team should contribute to drafting the plan, but it's the student and VR counselor who must agree on the final version.

**Who plans the transition?
The student's team,
composed of his or
her main champion
(a family member or other
determined advocate) and
all professionals necessary
to provide educational and
other services.**

Including the student

Federal law requires a public agency (such as a school) that is planning for a student with a disability to invite him or her to the IEP meeting if transition will be discussed.

If the student does not attend the meeting, the public agency must take other steps to ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered.



How important are family members in the planning process?

...parents' participation and leadership can make a big difference...



Crucial.

Federal laws, especially IDEA and its later amendments, state clearly the importance of parental involvement in planning for children with disabilities.

For several reasons, the parents' participation and leadership can make a big difference.

First, the parent is almost always the best-informed and most-focused specialist on the needs, desires and strengths of the student. Since their focus is broader, teachers and other professionals may overlook these unique characteristics. A parent, other family member or advocate will have a better chance of ensuring that all the right options are included. A parent should insist on including everyone who might be important.

Parents should ask questions, read all documents slowly and carefully, and schedule as many meetings as necessary until they are satisfied that their son or daughter will have the best available preparation for adult life. As the student matures and becomes more involved in the planning, he or she may assume the leadership role.

A dedicated and energetic teacher may also lead the team by coordinating the student's program and working to ensure that promised services are delivered.

Parents may need to enlist other professionals for the planning team who know what services different agencies can or must provide under the disability laws.

If no one on the team is playing the leader role energetically, one or both parents can learn to champion the rights and needs of their soon-to-be adult son or daughter. In fact, any young person

will benefit enormously if at least one parent or other family member takes that role, even if the professionals on the team are also doing so.

Here are a few tips for the team leader, whether it is the student, a family member, friend or professional advocate:

- Read and get familiar with the laws that cover the student's rights. Bring copies to the meetings.
- If an agency representative says, "It's not our job," research the issue and you may be able to respond, "Yes, it is."
- Know the agencies and organizations that are equipped to help you. Some will give you invaluable information, some will provide services and some will advocate to enforce the law if necessary. Others will need prodding.
- Remember that any of the plans can be amended to add services whenever necessary. Should you learn of one that would help you attain your goal, get it written into your plan.
- Make your requests in writing and get the answers in writing. If you or your child is denied services, request in writing that the decision, its reason and the grounds for denial be provided in writing.
- Ask for an assessment of the need for a service before requesting the service. For example, instead of requesting speech therapy for a child, request a speech assessment. Then, if you disagree with the assessment, you have the right to an independent evaluation at public expense.
- Go up the chain of command. If an agency representative denies a service and you disagree, go to that person's supervisor, then to the agency

head. Then follow the agency's appeal procedures. If you don't know the rules and procedures, ask for them. They should be available in writing.

- In dealing with denial of services and other problems, you can obtain information and referral, and possibly legal representation from the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities.
- Make certain the plans contain measurable goals and objectives. Without them, it is difficult to determine if the student is making adequate progress toward his or her goal.
- Ask for assessment reports prepared by professionals who can accurately measure the student's needs and abilities. Future assessments will measure his or her progress. Services should be provided based on the assessment findings. Assessments are mandatory for students covered by IDEA, and are both desirable and available for 504 students.
- Ask for a copy of any assessment, comprehensive or specific, before any meeting at which it will be discussed. Study the assessment and be ready to proceed with it or ask for another if it doesn't seem adequate and correct.
- Take other stakeholders to the planning meetings. While advocating for yourself, your child, your client or friend, you'll be more effective if you're not alone. Take experts who will back up your judgment, friends or counselors who can speak knowledgeably about the situation, professionals who know the system and other advisers who can help the team stay on track. Your companions may not need to speak at all, yet may nonetheless give weight to your analysis of the situation.

- Don't back down to please the professionals working with you. Back down only when you decide you've been wrong about your child's needs and gifts.
- Generally, you'll accomplish more if you show respect for the professionals, even if they become impatient with you — but respect does not mean you have to agree with them. You may go online and read the Web sites of advocates and lawyers who have worked successfully with people with disabilities. Many of their tips are excellent and of no cost to you.
- Remember that not many decisions are final. Stick with what works. Keep your written records in order. Should you encounter resistance, call another meeting, ask for another assessment, be persistent, quote the laws again, pull out the regulations and, if nothing works, bring more allies onto the team, request a due-process hearing, and contact the Advocacy Center. If all else fails, get a lawyer.

How important is the family or another determined advocate?

Crucial.

How important are family members in the planning process?

Tips for Family Members

- ✓ Talk to your child about his or her hopes and dreams for adulthood.
- ✓ Help your son or daughter meet adults with disabilities who can serve as mentors and role models.
- ✓ Work with your child to learn about his or her disability, the transition process and self-advocacy.
- ✓ Observe your child's skills at socializing, organizing, workplace behaviors and independent living.
- ✓ Assign your child chores at home.
- ✓ Give your son or daughter the opportunity to budget and spend money.
- ✓ Role-play situations that your son or daughter might encounter.
- ✓ Help your child learn to use public transportation.
- ✓ Discuss your child's medical and transition needs with your family physician.
- ✓ Call your son or daughter's teachers to request that transition and financial planning begin as soon as possible.

What happens when a person with a disability turns 18?

Getting your own place

Being on your own is exciting and challenging. It's also a lot of hard work. As you plan, ask yourself if you're truly ready to shop, cook, clean and deal with repairs, bills, laundry and landlords. If the answer is no, you might want to reconsider.

If the answer is yes, it's time to develop a plan.

- Who will help you in an emergency?
- Will your apartment need accommodations?
- Who will handle your Social Security and health benefits?
- Can you really afford to live on your own?
- Do you need to open a checking account?
- Do you know how to cook, clean, do laundry, pay bills?
- How will you get to work, school, the bank, the grocery store?



- Which family members and friends will be part of your emotional and practical support system?
- How will you keep in touch with your parents so they won't worry?

Remember:

Being on your own gets everyone down at times. Having a network of people you love and trust will smooth your path.

The person normally has more rights, more risks and more responsibilities.

There are five types of changes for the 18-year-old:

1 – When they turn 18, young people acquire the rights and access to records that their parents had exercised, including:

- the right to be notified of IEP or 504 plan meetings;
- the right to be notified and consent to evaluations;
- the right to invite additional participants to IEP meetings;
- the right to be notified and consent to specialized education and related services.

Parents are still notified of meetings regarding their child's education, even after he or she turns 18.

Under the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act, young people gain the right to access their records at 18, and parents lose that access, but an 18-year-old can give his or her parents access to the records by signing a release.

If parents think their child will be unable to make important decisions (such as those about education, money management or health care) even at the age of 18, they may seek legal guardianship, durable power of attorney, or designation as representative payee for Social Security benefits. A lawyer may be necessary to make those arrangements.

2 – Young people who received Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits for a disability may lose them as adults, depending on the nature of their disabilities.

An 18-year-old receiving SSI benefits should expect to have his or her eligibility re-determined — using a different, adult disability standard — in the month before the 18th birthday. Some childhood disabilities do not have adult equivalents, particularly in behavioral areas. If the disability for the person under 18 is a learning disability, for instance, as an adult, he or she will not be eligible for SSI for that reason alone.

3 – The health insurance may change.

Parents should check their policies to determine if they cover adult children with disabilities. Some policies, but not all, continue coverage as long as the child is in school.

4 – An 18-year-old is old enough to vote.

Americans may vote at age 18 unless declared incompetent by a court of law. To register in Florida, one must turn 18 by Election Day and be a U.S. citizen and a legal resident of the county in which one plans to vote.

5 – Young men are required to register for military service.

All males are required to register with the Selective Service within 30 days of turning 18 unless institutionalized or hospitalized.

What happens when a person with a disability turns 18? An 18-year-old is an adult — unless a legal proceeding gives some or all the responsibility for him or her to a parent or guardian.

How long can students with disabilities stay in school?

Students who are covered by IDEA may receive certificates of attendance or non-standard diplomas. If they do not receive a standard diploma, they are entitled to remain in school — not necessarily earning credits toward graduation — until they are 22.

A student who has earned a standard diploma or has reached the age of 22 usually forfeits the right to a “free and appropriate education” or to an IEP unless he or she is entitled to some form of compensatory education.

Courts sometimes order compensatory education for a student who did not receive appropriate education services at the appropriate time. When that happens, educational services may be delivered after the student turns 22 or receives a standard diploma.

Unless compensatory education is ordered, public schools are not responsible for determining and meeting a student’s educational needs if he or she has a standard diploma or is older than 22.

Post-secondary education

After high school, a student may seek a post-secondary education at a college, university or trade school, but the school will be responsible only for education and any accommodations necessary to achieve equal access under the law.

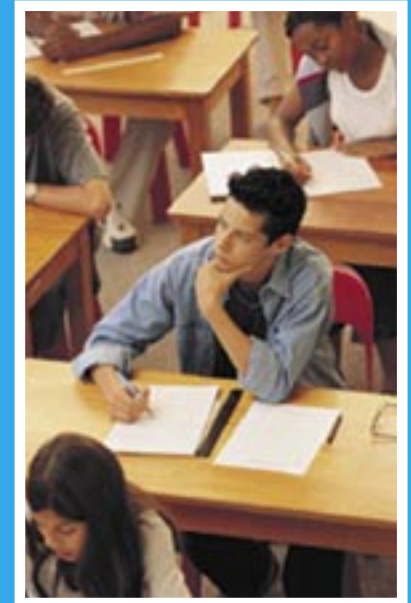
A post-secondary educational program will not usually conduct meetings or write plans, but will support students with disabilities via arrangements such as a reduced course load, recording devices, sign-language interpreters, readers, extended time for testing, or adaptive software and hardware for computers.

To receive the accommodations, the student must notify the school that he or she has a disability and requires certain accommodations, services or technology.

The post-secondary school is not required to lower its academic standards for a student with a disability. The school may be required to allow more time to take a test, for example, but is not required to alter the content of the test. Nor is it required to fundamentally alter the nature of its programs or accept excessive financial burdens for students with disabilities.

How long does school last?

Students with disabilities who have the interest and aptitude to pursue academics beyond high school can stay in school as long as students without disabilities can — until they run out of money or degrees to pursue.



When do students with disabilities go to work? How?

Their schools, communities and/or vocational rehabilitation agency will teach them to write a resume, prepare for an interview, look for work or build a career.

They may choose to go directly to work when they finish high school, or to seek a wide variety of post-secondary outcomes: community college, university, vocational training or some other aspect of adult education. If the transition planning has gone well, youths who finish school will move into the next stage as planned — with employment, vocational rehabilitation and/or a combination of services that will make it possible to perform to their greatest potential.

Educators and vocational experts should work together to ensure that the transition from school to work is smooth and seamless.

Two state agencies in Florida help young people prepare for and find employment. The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) serves people with “physical, mental, or emotional disabilities.” The Division of Blind Services (DBS) serves individuals with bilateral visual disabilities.

DVR and DBS offer a broad range of services based on the student’s vocational goals and barriers to employment. To make the most of these services, the student needs a DVR or DBS representative on his or her IEP team long before leaving school.

Client Choice

People with disabilities who are eligible for services have the right to choose among many public and private providers. Services should be customized to each person’s needs and include the full range of available services.

Vocational rehabilitation is a process that provides the services needed to reach an employment goal, including transportation assistance, education and vocational training, tuition, books and fees, physical and mental restoration services, assistive technology, vehicle and home modifications, equipment, tools, uniforms, durable medical equipment, family care services, help to establish a small business, job placement services, job coaching/ supported employment and more. People who are eligible for vocational rehabilitation services may choose to receive these services from either a state agency or a private provider.

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Florida Division of Blind Services are state agencies mandated to provide such services to eligible clients. Remember, you have the right to choose. You can ask for a vendor list, which may include doctors, medical professionals and many other types of vendors who are approved to accept DVR and DBS fees. You can also choose among many private providers, including Employment Networks, which are providers certified under the Ticket to Work Program to provide rehabilitation and employment services to Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities. The Social Security Administration pays those ENs participating in the Ticket to Work Program. However, the ENs only receive payment when their clients are able to work at a level that disqualifies them from receiving cash benefits from the SSA. If you are not willing to work at this level, ENs may not be willing to be your provider. All ENs have the right to choose not to work with you, just as you have the right to choose not to work with them.

Other resources include the One-Stop centers, which provide job referrals and placement assistance, employment counseling, testing, job development, labor market information, employment skills workshops, support services, and business services. Often the two state agencies will contract with one or more of these organizations to provide services. In some cases, a client may be involved with one or more service providers without being involved with the state agencies.

Top 10 Transition Tips to access and negotiate services with the two Vocational Rehabilitation Services agencies in Florida

1. Fill out an application for VR services so that an official decision can be made on your eligibility. Make sure students and their parents complete the application well before the student leaves high school.
2. Obtain as much information as possible about VR so you understand the eligibility criteria and your ability to negotiate services as an eligible client. Be a wise consumer!
3. Youths with disabilities must be able to describe their disability and how the disability may prevent them from working without VR services. This is one of the questions that will be asked in order to determine eligibility. Prepare to answer this question realistically.
4. The Rehabilitation Act requires that a student found eligible for VR services must leave the school system with a completed Individualized Program for Employment (IPE). It is in your interest to work with VR to establish eligibility while you are still in school so that you will be approved to receive services under an IPE by the time you leave school.
5. If you are determined eligible, an Individualized Program for Employment (IPE) will be developed and you should be given "informed choice" in selecting the services you require to become employed. You should be allowed informed choice when selecting services, vendors, providers, and the job goal.
6. VR is an employment program. Establishing an employment goal that you and VR can agree to is central to receiving services. Focus on establishing a job goal rather than only requesting training. Training will only be provided if it is necessary to achieve your job goal. Be ready to explain why any requested training will help you obtain your employment goal.
7. Plan for a meaningful career. Set a long-range goal other than entry-level employment. If you have the ability, capability and interests to succeed in an occupation that requires advanced training, make sure to negotiate this from the beginning with your VR counselor.
8. Your IPE can be amended if there are additional services you require to become employed. Make sure to stay in close communication with your VR counselor.
9. Know your rights and exercise them when necessary! Use the VR chain of command if you encounter problems that you cannot resolve with your counselor's assistance.
10. If you are verbally denied a service, always request the decision in writing with the reason and the policy that is being used to deny you. Don't take no for an answer if services will help you become employed.

In theory, anyone who needs vocational rehabilitation because of a disability that creates a barrier to employment.

According to the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a person who is determined by qualified personnel to require services because of a physical, mental, or emotional disability that interferes substantially with employment is eligible for vocational rehabilitation.

People with visual disabilities in both eyes are eligible for vocational rehabilitation via the Division of Blind Services, currently housed at the state Department of Education (DOE). Those with any other disabilities who are eligible for vocational rehabilitation receive services from the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, also at DOE.

Those who have Social Security benefits (SSI or SSDI) based on their own disabilities are presumed to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation, unless there is clear and convincing evidence that they are too significantly disabled to benefit from VR services.

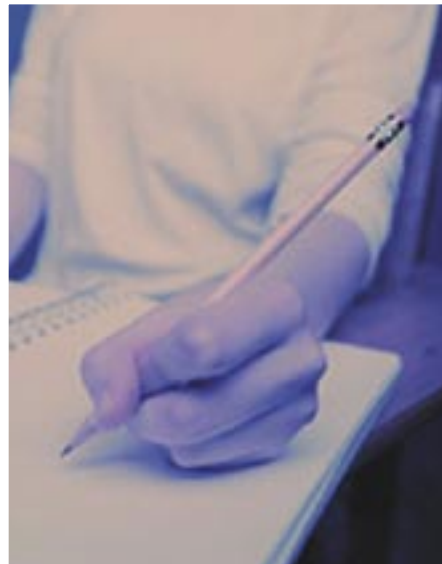
Who is eligible?

Anybody with a disability who wants to work and can, with the right supports and services.

Who is eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation?

... a person who is determined by qualified personnel to require services because of a physical, mental, or emotional disability that interferes substantially with employment is eligible...

When should a young person apply for vocational rehabilitation?



Early.

The time to apply for vocational rehabilitation should be specified in the student's IEP or 504 plan, or a state VR counselor can recommend the best time.

Either way, it's better for a student not to wait until his or her senior year to apply.

Being declared eligible often takes much longer than the official guidelines suggest. The student, parent or advocate should be in close touch with education and DVR or DBS officials to know when to apply.

If the vocational rehabilitation agency is prepared to participate in the student's transition process, an early application can make an important difference in the outcome. (In Florida, the Division of Blind Services is ready with transition programs and effective counseling when the student is 14; DVR services generally start later.)

In any case, preparation for vocational rehabilitation takes time — to apply for services, undergo any evaluations that may be required, be found eligible and assigned a counselor, formulate a strategy, and write and negotiate the employment plan, or IPE.

Some students have benefited from applying as early as age 14. Others — especially those seeking services from DVR instead of DBS — have found that applying for VR services in the junior year of high school leaves enough time to take advantage of the entire transition process. That can change, so it's a good idea to discuss the timing with counselors at school and the state agencies.

A student who does not apply for VR services while he or she is in school can still apply later and be approved — there is no age limit for eligibility — but in most cases, the sooner the services begin, the more likely they are to succeed.

When should a young person apply?

Before the last year of high school, in some cases long before.

Ticket to Work

People with disabilities who are also beneficiaries of Social Security may receive employment-related services and supports under the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999. The Ticket is a voucher for services that will help eligible clients with their transition to work.

The Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Florida Division of Blind Services are providers to whom eligible clients may choose to assign their Ticket, but there are over 50 other providers in the state of Florida. To learn more about other providers, please visit <http://www.ssa.gov/work/ServiceProviders/providers.html> or <http://www.yourtickettowork.com>.

People with disabilities can lose their eligibility for Medicaid and Medicare if they go to work. If you are receiving benefits and thinking about working, it could affect your benefits. Please talk to your benefits planner. If you have problems, call the Advocacy Center's PABSS (Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security) Program toll free at 1-866-875-1794.

To learn more, please contact the Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach program in your area by calling 1-866-352-2725.

Vocational Rehabilitation Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who provides vocational rehabilitation services in Florida?

Florida has two VR agencies, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division of Blind Services. Both are part of the Florida Department of Education. For more information, please call or visit their websites:

Division of Vocational Rehabilitation

Division of Blind Services

VR helpline – 1-866-515-3692 (toll free)

1-800-342-1828 (toll free)

<http://rehabworks.org>

<http://www.state.fl.us/dbs>

2. Who is eligible for vocational rehabilitation?

You are eligible if you have a physical, mental or emotional disability that interferes substantially with employment.

3. When can I apply?

Work with your teachers and school administrators to make sure that applying for VR services is on your IEP or Section 504 plan. Don't wait until late in your senior year to apply. Make sure you fill out an application so that VR can make a formal decision on your eligibility well before you leave the school system.

4. What is the advantage of having VR make a decision on my eligibility for services before I leave high school?

The law requires that if you are eligible, you must leave school with an approved VR Individualized Program for Employment (IPE). With an IPE, you can begin receiving services from VR as soon as you leave high school. Otherwise, you may experience unnecessary delays that can cost you years of your life.

5. What help can I request from VR if I am determined eligible?

If you are found eligible, you and your counselor will develop and agree to an IPE that will list your employment goal and the services you need to reach it. The services are individualized and unique to your situation, so feel free to discuss your specific needs with your counselor. You should be able to explain why your requests will help you succeed in your rehabilitation program.

6. What services can VR provide me?

Vocational exploration, career and interest assessments, trial-work experiences, on-the-job training, job coaching, supported employment, career planning, counseling and guidance, assistive technology (aids, devices and training), assistance with transportation to participate in your rehabilitation program, vocational training programs, college training, medical and

Yes.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation is required to serve all eligible clients. If DVR can't pay for everyone, the agency must - under federal supervision — go to process called an "order of selection", serving the most severely disabled clients first. Since Florida DVR has not done this, it is required to provide a full range of services to all eligible clients.

psychological diagnosis and treatment, support services, rehabilitation engineering evaluations and services, and job placement.

Remember, services may be unique to you. Don't hesitate to discuss your needs with your counselor.

7. Does VR only help me obtain entry-level employment?

No. The Rehabilitation Act requires that individuals with disabilities have an active voice in choosing employment goals and meaningful careers consistent with their interests, strengths, resources, priorities, concerns and capabilities. VR will pay for an advanced degree if that is appropriate.

8. If I have a problem with VR agency decisions on my case, whom can I contact to learn more about my rights?

Your counselor and the counselor's supervisor should help you understand your rights to challenge any decision you disagree with. The Client Assistance Program (CAP) at the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities is also available to provide information, advice, negotiation or possible representation in disputes with VR agencies in Florida. Please call 1-800-342-0823, mailbox extension 300, if you need additional assistance or information to resolve disputes with DVR or DBS.

If a person is eligible for VR, are the services available?

Yes, if they are agreed upon in advance and individualized to the student's needs.

What does the Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation do?

DVR helps people with disabilities choose the kind of work they'd like to do, learn to do it and get the chance to do it.

DVR provides or arranges many services to that end, including:

- assistance with transition
- vocational exploration
- career and interest assessments
- trial-work experiences
- on-the-job training
- job coaching
- supported employment
- career planning
- counseling, guidance and referrals
- technology (aids, devices and training)
- assistance with transportation to rehabilitation
- vocational training
- college
- medical and psychological diagnosis and treatment
- physical and mental restoration services
- help with additional costs during rehabilitation
- interpreters for the hearing impaired and readers for the visually impaired
- personal assistance (including training in directing personal assistance) during rehabilitation
- support services (group homes, sheltered workshops, supported work programs, job coaches, for example)
- assistive technology evaluations and services,
- job placement

The choice of services in the plan should be reviewed at least annually. Amendments are possible whenever they are needed.

What does DVR do?

It equips people with disabilities with opportunities for a satisfying career.

It should do both.

The purpose of vocational rehabilitation is greater than landing a first job. The Rehabilitation Act requires that people with disabilities have an active voice in choosing employment goals in keeping with their interests and abilities.

DVR sets no time limit on services and will help as long as the person is progressing toward his or her employment goal and participating actively in that direction. Someone with the desire and aptitude to be a lawyer, doctor, scientist or minister should not settle for a job as a receptionist in the firm where those professions are practiced, unless it is only a step in a plan that goes further. Career goals should be consistent with the student's interests and disabilities.

**The
Rehabilitation
Act requires
that people with
disabilities have
an active voice
in choosing
employment
goals...**



Are there ways to make VR work better?

Yes.

For applicants who want to be approved as eligible — and then, when approved, for persons receiving vocational rehabilitation — there are ways to make it more successful.

When applying:

DVR determines eligibility according to the person's disability and barriers to employment. Applicants, with help from their families and teams, are more likely to succeed if they:

- obtain as much information as possible about VR services and eligibility criteria (see appendix for contact information);
- prepare to describe their disabilities without exaggerating or minimizing the effects;
- are ready to explain how a disability prevents them from working.

Being prepared will help not only with one's eligibility determination but also with negotiating services after eligibility is determined.

Negotiating the services:

A VR client is more likely to succeed if, with support from a counselor or other advocate, he or she:

- establishes a job or career goal FIRST — training will be provided only if it's necessary to achieve the desired outcome;
- explains why the training requested will help achieve that goal;
- sets a career goal that is the most advanced and meaningful work the participant hopes to do, not just entry-level employment;
- targets that occupation from the start with the VR counselor;

- stays in close communication with the counselor, since an IPE can be amended if additional services are needed.

The Client Assistance Program at the Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities (toll free 1-800-342-0823) can provide information and referral to DVR and DBS clients and those trying to enter the programs. After investigating the facts of a case, CAP may negotiate or advocate for a client, or represent that person in appealing a decision made by a VR agency.

How can a person with a disability make the most of vocational rehabilitation?

By setting realistic but challenging goals — and preparing to negotiate for everything necessary to achieve them.



How to get the most out of adulthood. Many students with disabilities hope to work, earn money and have more interesting, satisfying lives as a result. But some are too severely disabled or otherwise not good candidates for the job market. And there is more to life than work — social activities, recreation, athletics, spiritual and emotional pursuits.

Whether the young person with a disability will need supported employment, accommodations to attend college, cash benefits, or any combination of those and other services, he or she should have help deciding on a plan.

Any student receiving Social Security benefits should contact the Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach (BPAO) organization serving their area. The BPAO organizations provide information to assist the student in maximizing his or her benefits. They can also provide critical information on the impact that work activities might have on a person's overall benefits. To contact the local BPAO organizations in Florida, call toll free: 1-866-352-2725.

With a knowledgeable and energetic transition team, a student with a disability can have many choices, possibly including:

- **Social Security benefits** — Some students will be eligible for cash benefits and the Ticket to Work program offered by the Social Security Administration. Enacted by Congress in 1999, the "Ticket" is a voucher for employment-related services and supports that help beneficiaries of Social Security return to the workplace. For a student receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), those options need to be explored before the age of 18, when his or her eligibility is re-determined.
- **Adult Support Services**, long term or temporary, including supported living programs, group homes, sheltered workshops, supported employment and job coaches.
- **Centers for Independent Living (CILs)** — The centers, located throughout the state of Florida, train people with disabilities on the specifics of living independently, such as self-advocacy, finding housing and using public transportation. The centers also advocate for services, seek physical access and acquire adaptive equipment such as motorized mobility devices, computers that talk, faucets with lever handles or electronic eyes.

A Center for Independent Living can begin working with a student who is still in school, then provide follow-up services when he or she grows to adulthood. The centers can also assist with referrals to other adult service agencies.

What else — besides work — should a person in transition plan?

... there is more to life than work — social activities, recreation, athletics, spiritual and emotional pursuits.

What is Assistive Technology? Who'll pay for it?

It's any device or system that can maintain or improve the capabilities of a person with a disability, and the training or other support to ensure its availability. There are several options for payment.

Payment for assistive technology may come from any of several sources — the special education system, the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, the Division of Blind Services, Medicare, Medicaid, private insurance or the SSI program's "Plan for Achieving Self Support."

Which agency will pay? The answer depends on the disability, age and situation of the person who needs it. It also depends on how the technology is expected to impact that person. If, for instance, the technology makes it possible for a student to be educated in the least restrictive environment, as the law requires, then it may be considered the school's responsibility.

When school officials are deciding whether to place a student with a disability in a regular classroom, before they look at other placements, they must consider how assistive technology can help the student succeed in the least restrictive environment.

A student's IEP or 504 Team can determine the need for assistive technology based on a professional evaluation. If the student needs the technology for home study, or in the transition to adulthood, the school may pay for both the equipment and the training to use it. A student with a disability may also need — and have a right to — some form of technology in order to participate fully in school activities.

In that case, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act may require that the school provide the technology, as well as any training necessary to use it. DVR and DBS are required to equip an eligible person for employment.



Assistive technology services include evaluation, maintenance, repair and training for students, their families and the professionals working with them.

Examples of AT devices or aids:

- Augmentative communication systems, including talking computers
- Assistive listening devices, including hearing aids, personal FM units, closed-caption TVs and teletype machines (TDDs)
- Specially adapted learning games, toys and recreation equipment
- Computer-assisted instruction
- Electronic tools (scanners with speech synthesizers, tape recorders, word processors)
- Curriculum and textbook adaptations (audio format, large print format, Braille)
- Copies of overheads, transparencies and notes
- Adaption of the learning environment, such as special desks, modified learning stations, computer touch screens or different computer keyboards
- Durable medical equipment

What is Assistive Technology? Who'll pay for it?

A major source of financing for assistive technology is Medicaid, which regularly pays for such items as custom and power wheelchairs, augmentative and alternative communication devices, specialized beds, bath equipment, high- and low-tech lifting devices, and other technology that helps overcome the effects of disabling conditions.

Sources of Medicaid funding vary based on whether the person with a disability is under or over age 21, which state he or she lives in, and which program or waivers he or she qualifies for.

Medicare helps pay for durable medical equipment, defined as equipment that:

- can withstand repeated use;
- is primarily and customarily used to serve a medical purpose;
- generally would not be useful to a person who isn't ill or injured; and
- is appropriate for use in the home.

What is assistive technology? Who'll pay for it?

It's any of dozens — maybe hundreds — of devices or systems that increase the competence and independence of the user. And there are almost as many sources of funds to pay for them. The person with a disability who needs assistive technology should start by asking for an evaluation (or several), and when the need is established, the next step is to find a funding source for it — by asking the school, planning team and state, federal and private agencies.



Making the transition from school to work

Success takes planning and persistence



Marlon's Pathfinder gives him a deep voice, like Darth Vader's. As he selects each word, the augmentative communication device says it aloud, and at the end of each sentence, it repeats all the words together.

Marlon, who is 22 and has cerebral palsy, a visual impairment and a speech communication disorder, teaches graduate students at Nova Southeastern University how to program the device that gives him the ability to speak. Then he administers a test they must pass in order to graduate.

"We had a project with his name on it," says Dr. Carole Zangari, director of the Tyler Institute at Nova Southeastern University's Fischler Graduate School of Education and Human Services.

The project was "WorkABLE Solutions," which teaches communications skills for the workplace, with an emphasis on computer technology. Marlon works in the augmentative communication lab part-time, weekdays from 8:30 to 2. He has a computer with a 24-inch monitor, a screen magnifier and a modified workstation. The Pathfinder enables him to talk as well as send and receive e-mail. He also has a job coach, a personal care attendant and transportation to and from work.

"He gets whatever he needs," says his mother, Opal, a home health aide at an assisted living facility. "He tests graduate students who will specialize in teaching kids like Marlon. He loves it."

But Zangari and other rehabilitation professionals caution that Marlon's success in making the transition from school to work did not come easily.

"It was one of those ideal situations, not likely to be transportable to other situations," says Zangari of the job at NSU. "There have been many disappointments and glitches."

For students with disabilities and their families, it can be daunting to enter the maze of provider agencies and organizations that pay for services like Marlon's.

"For our program, the issue is one of empowerment," says Pauline Pedersen, a senior career development specialist at *Maximus I Can*, a federal pilot project that assisted some 350 disabled young Floridians during its three-year duration. "It's taking the fear out of dealing with agencies that families have because they've been denied services, or because of the power the agencies have over them."

Do your homework

First, experts say, students with disabilities and their families should find out everything they can about the services they need, the agencies that provide them and whether or not they are eligible for them.

"Most of the time they have no idea what's available in the community," says Pederson.

"One of the biggest obstacles I've seen is that the participants and the families aren't familiar enough with the agencies and what they do," adds Pedersen's colleague Janet Sanchez, also a career development specialist at Maximus. "I recommend they do their homework. Go to the library and get on the Internet. Ask what services are available. Look in the phone book for local counseling and referral services."

Start early

Students with disabilities often lose years of productive employment if they don't begin their transition planning early, says the Advocacy Center's Ann Robinson. She advises students to fill out an application for Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services well before graduation from high school.

"Applying for VR services, attending evaluations, and vocational exploration and planning are critical for students before leaving high school. Employment opportunities or additional training will be based on that foundation"

Making the transition from school to work

Success takes planning and persistence

"The biggest problem is early intervention," agrees Pedersen, who says that's why *Maximus I Can* worked with younger students than VR does. "Twelve isn't too early. They're already looking toward middle school."

Marlon began working with Christine Vassell, an independent support coordinator on contract with the Florida Department of Children and Families, when he was a junior in high school. He also had help from his Exceptional Student Education (ESE) teacher, Speech-Language Pathologist, Assistive Technology Specialist and the Advocacy Center. When VR found Marlon eligible for services, his teachers and advocates developed an Individualized Program for Employment, or IPE, listing the supports he would need in order to succeed.

Part of planning, says Pedersen, is to make sure there's "enough time for everyone to do what they're supposed to."

Develop a transition plan

Identify a realistic goal. If the student is severely involved, says Pedersen, the goal may be "no longer using Depends, or being able to stand four times as long. Success to us is measured by the level of independence."

If the student's goal is meaningful employment - "what the child wants, not the parents," says Pedersen - the next step is to identify several career goals and the agencies responsible for paying to achieve them.

Easier said than done, says the Advocacy Center's Corey Hinds, who also worked with Marlon.

"While Marlon's IEP addressed services and supports in the high school, it left out the answer to an all-too-common question," says Hinds. "Who will pay for the technological aids, equipment, job coaching, personal care attendant and transportation when he graduates? Marlon's mother did not have any idea how to pay for these services."

Find a coordinator

Rehabilitation experts say it's essential for students facing transition to have a professional working with them to coordinate all the services they will require, and to get commitments - in writing - from the agencies paying for services.

"You need an impartial person who knows the law and knows the responsibilities of each agency and entity, and has some authority to hold their feet to the fire," says Zangari, "because when the student has a need that is complicated or costly, everyone says, 'It ain't my job.'"

Marlon had Hinds and Vassell. His mother, who has five younger children, says other parents shouldn't be discouraged "so long as they have a coordinator to work with them."

Hinds says the list of services Marlon needed to achieve his career goals was developed in a series of meetings with the Department of Education's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services and DCF's Division of Developmental Disabilities. Then the agencies began to sort out which of them would pay.

"There was an impasse," says Hinds. "The sides could not agree which services would be provided. Then we clearly structured the list as employment services and daily living services, and reviewed the DVR/DD cooperative agreement." Only then did the sides agree, says Hinds, "so knowing the roles and responsibilities of agencies is a critical part of making the transition plan become a reality."

Family services

Often, says Pedersen, the student's family needs support services for the student to succeed. "If there are things in the family negatively impacting the participant, we can intervene," she says. One student had a parent in such despair about his future, she says, that mental health services were necessary. Other families may require help with money management skills.



Making the transition from school to work

Success takes planning and persistence

“The single biggest thing missing is that person to make sure each agency steps up to the plate when the client has a need that isn’t being met.”

Keep in touch

It’s important for parents to communicate frequently with teachers, guidance counselors and parent advocates, says Sanchez.

“One student wasn’t passing,” she recalls. “He’d been doing okay when they passed out the mid-nine-week grades, but then he failed a class and there was no summer school. His mother didn’t know he was failing, so he lost a year.”

“Know what’s going on before it gets unmanageable,” she concludes.

Know your rights and fight for them

“The last thing these families need is to be set up for disappointment one more time,” says Carole Zangari.

But all too often, that’s what happens - especially, she says, because impartial, effective coordinators and advocates like Vassell and Hinds aren’t widely available.

“The single biggest thing missing is that person to make sure each agency steps up to the plate when the client has a need that isn’t being met,” says Zangari. “If Voc Rehab says, ‘It’s not my job,’ and I say, ‘Yes, it is,’ how’s the poor client going to know who’s right? You have to be aware that they’re short-changing you - and 95 percent of clients don’t know.”

Parents should know that IEPs can be amended to add services whenever necessary, says Pedersen. “It’s okay. It’s all about empowering the parent.”

The Advocacy Center’s Robinson advises students who are denied services to get the decision in writing, along with the reason and the policy used as grounds for denial. Go up the DVR or DBS chain of command, she adds, if you and your counselor can’t find a solution.

The Client Assistance Program at the Advocacy Center can provide information and assistance with negotiation, and may represent clients in an appeal with DVR or DBS.

Don’t give up

Marlon credits the success of his transition to “not giving up, and making goals for myself.”

He advises other students facing transition, “Just make sure you have great people behind you.”

“Marlon was fortunate in that he had a lot of support systems,” says Vassell. “His mom was there for him. I was there. The more support, the better the chance of success.”

And the best thing about his job at NSU?

“To feel like I’m doing something great for disabled people,” says Marlon.

Glossary

ADA, Americans with Disabilities Act

Enacted in 1990, the ADA guarantees people with disabilities civil rights protections in employment, public accommodations, government services and telecommunications.

Title II of the ADA covers public programs, activities and services such as the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and the Division of Blind Services. Most requirements of Title II are based on Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, which prohibited discrimination based on disability in federally assisted programs and activities. The ADA then extended Section 504's non-discrimination requirement to all activities of public entities – such as the State of Florida – and not only those receiving federal funds.

Assistive technology

High-tech adaptive and accessibility aids for people with disabilities and special needs.

Augmentative/Alternative Communication Systems (AAC)

Systems of communication, such as communication boards, that can help with writing, spelling, typing, word selection, conversation, speech synthesis, manual reading or other communication needs resulting from a disability.

Disability

A physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.

Due process rights

Rights that give school personnel and parents ways to solve problems and settle disagreements. They include the right to participation, the right to have notice, the right to give consent and the right to a due process hearing. The hearing is a formal meeting run by an impartial hearing officer, where parents and school officials can resolve disagreements fairly.

Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT).

Comprehensive prevention services for Medicaid-eligible children.

Exceptional Student Education (ESE)

In Florida, special education services and programs for students who have a disability or who are gifted in other ways.

Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act

The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (20 U.S.C. § 1232g; 34 CFR Part 99) is a Federal law that protects the privacy of student education records. The law applies to all schools that receive funds under an applicable program of the U.S. Department of Education.

504 Plan

An individualized plan for a student with a disability who may not meet the eligibility criteria for Exceptional Student Education (ESE), but who requires accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

A federal regulation (34 CFR 300.121) specifying that all children with disabilities aged three through 21, including children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school, are entitled to a free and appropriate public education. Districts must provide FAPE to all students with disabilities who have not reached age 22 and have not earned a regular high school diploma.

Individual Educational Plan (IEP)

A written plan to identify the special education and related services designed to meet the individual needs of a student with a disability. The IEP is developed by the student and his or her teachers, parents and others as appropriate. It is reviewed annually, but may be revised at any time, upon request.

Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE)

A vocational rehabilitation plan that targets a specific job goal and services that are necessary in order to reach the goal. The plan can be amended at any time and should be reviewed annually.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Placement of a student with disabilities in a regular class or in a special program for the amount of time that is appropriate for the child. Taking a child out of a regular school setting should be done only to ensure access to a satisfactory education.

Medicare

Medicare is the federal program that provides health care coverage to Americans who are 65 or older, or who have a disability, no matter what their income. You are eligible for Medicare if you are 65 years or older, and you are a U.S. citizen or have been a permanent legal resident for five continuous years, or if you are disabled and have had Social Security for at least two years, or if you get continuing dialysis for permanent kidney failure or need a kidney transplant, or if you have Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS-Lou Gehrig's disease).

Medicaid

Medicaid is a jointly-funded, Federal-State health insurance program for certain low-income people. It covers approximately 36 million individuals including children, the aged, people with disabilities, and people who are eligible to receive federally assisted income maintenance payments.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, amended in 1998, prohibits any recipient of federal funds from discriminating against persons with disabilities.

Section 504 requires that all children with disabilities be provided a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment.

Special Diploma, Option I (Florida)

A type of diploma for students with a disability who are not able to meet all requirements for a standard high school diploma. Students must meet district credit requirements and master the Sunshine State Standards for Special Diploma.

Special Diploma, Option II (Florida)

A type of diploma for certain students with a disability who are not able to meet all requirements for a standard high school diploma. An individual employment and training plan is developed by the IEP team. It lists specific competencies related to job preparation skills and adult living skills for the individual student. The student must master all competencies included in the plan and be successfully employed for at least one semester. Districts may offer Option 2, but are not required to do so.

Special education services

Specially designed instruction for a student with a disability. Special education adapts lesson delivery, content and instructional methods to the student's needs and provides services such as instruction in Braille, additional individualized practice or social skills training.

Standard Diploma (Florida)

The type of diploma earned by most Florida high school students. The state legislature and the local school district set the requirements. Other diploma options include a college-ready, vocational diploma and an international baccalaureate diploma. Students are required to earn at least 24 credits in a set of required and elective courses, have a 2.0 Grade Point Average, and pass the high school graduation test.

Supported employment

Supported employment includes sites where most co-workers do not have disabilities and those who do have regular contact with those who don't.

Ticket to Work

The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program is the centerpiece of new legislation enacted under the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999. It is a nationwide initiative designed to assist people with the training and support they need to go to work by increasing their choices. SSA beneficiaries with disabilities can find employment, vocational rehabilitation (VR) and other support services from public and private providers.

Transition Services

A set of coordinated activities designed to help a student move from school to post-school activities. These may include independent living, work or continued education after high school, instruction, related services, community experiences, work toward post-school goals, and, if appropriate, daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation, all based on the student's needs and preferences.

Transitional IEP

An IEP written during a student's eighth grade year or at the IEP meeting conducted during the year the student turns age 14. This IEP deals with issues related to making the transition to adult life after high school, including diploma decisions.

Transition Resources

Florida

Statewide Agencies and Organizations

Florida's Protection and Advocacy Agency
 Advocacy Center for Persons with Disabilities
 2671 Executive Center Circle West, Suite 100
 Tallahassee, FL 32301-5092
 (850) 488-9071; (800) 346-4127 (TTY)
 (800) 342-0823; (800) 350-4566
 (Spanish and Creole Speaking Clients)
 E-mail: info@advocacycenter.org
 Web: <http://www.advocacycenter.org>

Benefits Planning Assistance and Outreach
 (Social Security beneficiaries only)
 Statewide Toll Free Number: 1-866-352-2725

State Department of Education: Special Education
 Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services
 (The Bureau of Instructional Support and Community Services
 supports school districts and others in their efforts to provide
 exceptional student education programs for students ages 3
 through 21 who have disabilities or who are gifted.)

Division of Public Schools and Community Education
 Florida Department of Education
 325 W. Gaines Street, Suite 614
 Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400
 (850) 488-1570
 Web: <http://www.firn.edu/doe/commhome>

Florida Department of Education Publications
 related to Exceptional Student Education, Early Intervention
 and School Readiness, Intervention
 and Prevention, Student Support Services, Dropout Prevention,
 Juvenile Justice Education
 Web: <http://www.myfloridaeducation.com/commhome/pub-home.htm>

State Education Agency Rural Representative
 Instructional Programs
 Division of Public Schools and Community Education
 Department of Education
 Florida Education Center, Room 514
 Tallahassee, FL 32399
 (850) 488-2601

State Vocational Rehabilitation Agency
 Florida Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
 Department of Education
 2002 Old St. Augustine Road, Building A
 Tallahassee, FL 32301-4862
 (850) 488-6210; (800) 451-4327
 Web: <http://www.rehabworks.org/>

*Office of State Coordinator of Vocational Education for Students
 with Disabilities*
 Division of Workforce Development
 Department of Education, Turlington Building
 325 W. Gaines Street, Room 701
 Tallahassee, FL 32399-0400
 (850) 487-3164
 Web: <http://www.firn.edu/doe/workforce>

Programs for Youth who are Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services and School-to-Work
 Transition
 Division of Vocational Rehabilitation
 Department of Education
 2002 Old St. Augustine Road, Building A
 Tallahassee, FL 32301-4862
 (850) 488-8380 (V); (850) 413-9629 (TTY)

ONLINE TRANSITION SERVICES WEBSITES

If you don't have a personal computer
 to reach these Internet sites, please
 take this list to
 your local public library and ask a
 library staff member for help in using
 the computer.

ADA Technical Assistance Program:
<http://www.adata.org>

Assistive Technology Funding and Sys-
 tems Change Project:
[http://www.ucpa.org/html/innovative/
 atfsc/index.html](http://www.ucpa.org/html/innovative/atfsc/index.html)

Center for Mental Health Services:
<http://www.mentalhealth.org>

Council for Exceptional Children:
<http://www.cec.sped.org>

Federal Resource Center for Special
 Education Network - <http://dssc.org/frc>

Job Accommodation Network:
<http://janweb.icdi.wvu.edu/english/>

Listserves on topics in
 Special Education:
[http://www.cec.sped.org/spotlight/
 mailing_lists/index.html](http://www.cec.sped.org/spotlight/mailling_lists/index.html)

transition resources

ONLINE TRANSITION SERVICES WEBSITES

National Association of State Directors of Special Education:
<http://www.nasdse.org/discussions.htm>

National Center on Secondary Education and Transition:
<http://www.ncset.org/>

National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials:
http://www.nchrtm.okstate.edu/index_3.html

National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities:
<http://www.nichcy.org>

National Transition Alliance:
http://www.dssc.org/nta/html/index_2.htm

National Transition Institute:
<http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/coe/sped/tri/institute.html>

National Transition Network:
<http://ici2.coled.umn.edu/ntn/>

Policy Partnership for Implementing IDEA: <http://ideapolicy.org/pmp.htm>

Programs for Youth who are Blind or Visually Impaired

Florida Division of Blind Services
Department of Education
2551 Executive Center Circle West, Suite 200, Lafayette Building
Tallahassee, FL 32399
(850) 488-1330
Web: <http://www.state.fl.us/dba>
State of Florida
Division of Administrative Hearings
The Desoto Building
1230 Apalachee Parkway
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-3060
(850) 488-9675
SUNCOM 278-9675
Fax Filing (850) 921-6847
Web: <http://www.doah.state.fl.us/internet/>

Florida Independent Living Council, Inc.
1018 Thomasville Road, Suite 100A
Tallahassee, FL 32303
(850) 488-5624 voice/TTY
(877) 822-1993 toll free
(850) 488-5881 fax

State Developmental Services

Developmental Disabilities Program
Florida Department of Children and Families
1317 Winewood Boulevard, Building 3, Room 325
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0700
(850) 488-4257

State Developmental Disabilities Planning Council
Florida Developmental Disabilities Council
124 Marriott Drive, Suite 203
Tallahassee, FL 32301-2981
(850) 488-4180
Web: <http://www.fddc.org/>

State Mental Health Agency
Mental Health Programs Office
Department of Children and Families
1317 Winewood Boulevard, Building 6
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0700
(850) 488-8304

State Mental Health Representative for Children and Youth
Children's Mental Health Program
Mental Health Programs Office
1317 Winewood Boulevard, Building 6, Room 290
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0700
(850) 488-8304
Web: http://www.state.fl.us/cf_web/

Assistive Technology

Florida Alliance for Assistive Services & Technology, Inc.
FAAST, Inc.
1020 East Lafayette Street, Suite 110
Tallahassee, Florida 32301-4546
(850) 487-3278
Web: <http://www.faast.org>

Florida Association of Rehabilitation Facilities, Inc.
2475 Apalachee Parkway, Suite 205
Tallahassee, FL 32301-4946
(850) 877-4816
Web: <http://www.respectofflorida.org/>

Technology Assistance Program (TAP) of the Advocacy Center at (800)-342-0823.

Organizations Especially for Parents

Parent Training and Information Center (PTI)
Family Network on Disabilities of Florida, Inc.
2735 Whitney Road
Clearwater, FL 33760-1610
(727) 523-1130; (800) 825-5736 (In FL only)
Web: <http://www.fndfl.org/>

Parent to Parent of Florida
Family Network on Disabilities of Florida, Inc.
2735 Whitney Road
Clearwater, FL 33760-1610
(727) 523-1130; (800) 825-5736 (In FL only)
Web: <http://www.fndfl.org/>

Community Parent Resource Center
Parent to Parent of Miami, Inc.
Community Parent Resource Center
c/o Sunrise Community
9040 Sunset Drive, Suite G
Miami, FL 33173
(305) 271-9797; (800) 527-9552
Web: <http://www.ptopmiami.org/>

Parent Teacher Association (PTA)
Florida Congress of Parents and Teachers, Inc.
1747 Orlando Central Parkway
Orlando, FL 32809-5757
(407) 855-7604
Web: <http://www.floridapta.org/>

National Federal Agencies and Organizations

Office of Special Education Programs
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20202
Telephone: (202) 205-5507
Web: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/index.html>

U.S. Department of Education
Office for Civil Rights
Customer Service Team
Mary E. Switzer Building
330 C Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202
Telephone: 1-800-421-3481
FAX: 202-205-9862; TDD: 877-521-2172
Email: OCR@ed.gov
Web: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/index.html>
OCR Complaint Process Website: www.ed.gov/offices/OCR/complaintprocess.html

Family Policy Compliance Office
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20202-4605
complaints under FERPA or PPRA
Web: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OM/fpcoc/>

U.S. Department of Justice
Americans with Disabilities Act Home Page
www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm U.S. Department of Labor
Web: <http://www.dol.gov>

U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration
Room 3329-MES
400 Maryland Avenue, S.W.
Washington, DC 20202-2551

Other Resources and Organizations

Cornell University
School of Industrial and Labor Relations
Program on Employment and Disability
www.ilr.cornell.edu/extension/ped/index.html
Policy and Practice Brief Series : "The Transition From School To Work"
Web: http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/dep/PP_4.pdf

Neighborhood Legal Services, Inc.
The National Assistive Technology Advocacy Project
495 Ellicott Square Building
295 Main Street
Buffalo, New York 14203
Tel: (716) 847-0650
Fax: (716) 847-0227
TTY: (716) 847-1322
Web: <http://nls.org/booklets.htm>

Center for Psychiatric Rehabilitation
Boston University
940 Commonwealth Avenue West
Boston, MA 02215
p: 617/353-3549 f: 617/353-7700
"Handling your Psychiatric Disability in Work and School"
Web: <http://www.bu.edu/cpr/jobschool/>

ONLINE TRANSITION SERVICES WEBSITES

Presidential Task Force on
Employment of Adults with Disabilities
http://www.dol.gov/_sec/programs/ptfead/main.htm

Project Tech Link-Linking Educators
and Parents to Transition Best Prac-
tices through Computer Technology:
<http://www.vcu.edu/rrtcweb/techlink/index>

School to Work Outreach Project:
<http://www.ici.coled.umn.edu/schooltowork/>

Social Security Red Book:
<http://www.ssa.gov/work/ResourcesToolkit/redbook.html>

TATRA
(Technical Assistance about Transition
and the Rehabilitation Act) Project:
<http://www.pacer.org/tatra/tatra.htm>

Technical Assistance Alliance for Par-
ent Centers: <http://www.taalliance.org/>

Ticket to Work: <http://www.ssa.gov/work/Ticket/ticket.html>

transition resources

ONLINE TRANSITION SERVICES WEBSITES

U.S. Administration on
Developmental Disabilities:
<http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ad>

U.S. Department of Health and Human
Services: <http://www.hhs.gov>

U.S. Office of Disability Programs:
<http://www.ssa.gov/disability>

U.S. Office of Employment Support:
<http://www.ssa.gov/work>

U.S. Office of Special Education and
Rehabilitative Services:
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS>

U.S. Office of Special Education Programs:
[http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/
OSEP/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/index.html)

U.S. Office of Disability Employment Policy
<http://www.dol.gov/odep/>

U.S. Rehabilitation Services Administration:
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/RSA>

U.S. Social Security Administration:
<http://www.ssa.gov>

Youth With Disabilities:
<http://www.ssa.gov/work/Youth/youth.htm>

Virginia Commonwealth University
Benefits Assistance Resource Center
1314 West Main Street
Richmond, Virginia 23284-9063
Phone: 804-828-1851
Fax: 804-828-2193
Resources for Students, Parents, and Faculty
Web: <http://www.students.vcu.edu/pda/>
Information, Resources, & Research about
Work & Disability Issues
Web: <http://www.worksupport.com/topics/ssw.as>
Get a Job! How Employment Affects Your Social Security
Income and Medicaid Benefits
Answers questions about why it pays to work when you receive
Supplemental Security Income.

Institute on Community Integration
University of Minnesota
102 Pattee Hall, 150 Pillsbury Drive SE
Minneapolis MN 55455
<http://www.ici.coled.umn.edu/schooltowork/%20>

National Transition Network (NTN) provides technical
assistance and evaluation services to strengthen the capacity
of individual states to improve school-to-work transition policies,
programs, and practices
<http://www.ici2.umn.edu/ntn/>

Transition Research Institute at Illinois
TRI, at the University of Illinois, is a research and evaluation
institute that identifies effective practices and programs.
Web: <http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/sped/tri/institute.html>

National Information Center for Children and Youth with
Disabilities (NICHCY)
P.O. Box 1492
Washington, DC 20013
(800) 695-0285 v/tty
(202) 884-8441 fax
Web: <http://www.nichcy.org/>

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