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DEAFBLINDNESS: EDUCATIONAL SERVICE GUIDELINES: TRANSITION TO ADULT LIFE

This fact sheet has been developed to guide you through the development of a transition to adult life plan for your youth with deaf-blindness. It is based on the Deafblindness: Educational Service Guidelines (the Guidelines).ⁱ

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) protects the rights of children with disabilities, including children with deaf-blindness, ages 3-21, to a free, appropriate public education. It requires the provision of a free, appropriate education for all children with disabilities that prepares them for further education, employment, and independent living. The transition process helps youth with disabilities plan for their future.

Transition should be in the IEP no later than the school year during which your youth turns 16 at the latest. (Some states start the transition process at age 14). Without effective transition, too many youth with deaf-blindness leave school with little chance for employment or community living.

Your youth must be invited to any IEP meeting where transition is being discussed. The notice letter must indicate that transition will be discussed. The IEP team must fully include you and your youth in developing the transition plan. Your youth needs to learn about his/her disability, accommodation needs, and how to articulate what s/he needs before leaving high school. Participating in transition planning is a vital part of this process.

Your youth's IEP should include assessments to determine appropriate post-secondary outcomes. These may include vocational evaluations, interest inventories, independent living assessments, and psychological and educational testing. Independent living assessments help identify the supports your youth will need as an adult living and working in the community, such as communication support service providers, interpreters, augmentative communication systems, etc. Person-centered planning strategies can help identify strengths, preferences, and specific skills needed for successful transition.ⁱⁱ

The IEP also has to include appropriate measurable post-secondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments such as interest inventories or community-based vocational assessments that help your youth identify career interests. The IEP for your youth should be driven by these goals.

The transition plan in the IEP must address whether consultation from adult agencies such as vocational rehabilitation, developmental disabilities, or agencies serving adults with deafness/hearing loss or blindness/vision loss is needed, and how it will be obtained. The school may need to establish interagency agreements with adult service providers to ensure the development and implementation of an appropriate plan. You and your youth need to consider four areas when thinking about life after high school:

Post-secondary education: What kind of post-secondary education is realistic and appropriate? What skills are needed? The IEP should identify and implement steps to make sure that when college is identified as a post secondary goal, the student has taken appropriate courses in high school. Is your youth expected to pass the high school graduation test? Will s/he take the S.A.T. or A.C.T? Will s/he need accommodations?

Employment: What are your youth's career goals and what skills do they need? Preparation for employment may include career awareness activities, job sampling, going to conferences, and contact with adults with deaf-blindness. Such adults can serve as positive role models and enhance expectations. The IEP should address skills to help your youth know where to find a job, complete an application, and handle an interview.

Independent living: To maximize the possibility of independent living, your youth must learn concepts and skills in natural settings beyond the school building, the school day, and the school year. Consider transportation, getting around the community, food shopping, meal planning and preparation, using money/making change, personal hygiene, and social relationships. If s/he is eligible for support from other agencies, the plan should address how you will get help to apply for and access those services.

Health: Health needs to consider include appropriate nutrition; proper hygiene; exercise as a life skill; effects of adverse chemicals (alcohol, tobacco, other substances); and reproductive education. Transferring responsibility for self-care to your youth requires consideration of factors such as complexity of health needs, physical and intellectual abilities of your youth, and cultural values, health care practices, and beliefs about disability.

Your youth must also receive appropriate transition services. IDEA defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities designed within a results-oriented process, focused on improving your youth's academic and functional achievement to facilitate their movement from school to post-school activities. Services must be based on your youth's needs, taking into account their strengths, preferences and interests. Transition services include:

- ♦ *Instruction:* Courses of study and/or skills.
- ♦ *Related services:* Many services may be required to help your youth benefit from special education. These may include transportation; services such as orientation and mobility; speech-language pathology, audiology, and interpreting; physical and occupational therapy; recreation (including therapeutic recreation); psychological, social work, and counseling; and school nurse services.
- ♦ *Community experiences:* These experiences are provided outside school, in the community, such as community work experiences, job site training, banking, shopping, transportation, counseling, and recreation.
- ♦ *The development of employment and other post-school living objectives:* These are services that lead to a job or career or support activities such as registering to vote, filing taxes, renting a home, accessing medical services, filing for insurance or accessing adult services such as SSI.
- ♦ *If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills:* These are the skills needed to do activities that adults do every day - preparing meals, paying bills, maintaining a home, grooming, caring for clothes).
- ♦ *Functional vocational evaluation:* This assessment process provides information about job/career interests, aptitudes, and skills, gathered through situational assessment, observations or formal measures.

Transition services should be delivered through curricular and extracurricular activities across many settings – *in academic and vocational classrooms, at home, and throughout the community* – to practice and reinforce skills in real life situations, so your youth feels comfortable in those settings.

As your youth approaches adult life, it is critical for him/her to be aware of support needs. Your youth must choose to identify that s/he needs support, and must be able to articulate those needs based on disability. At age 18, “adult rights” pass to your youth (unless you or another adult are appointed his/her legal guardian). College, work, and community settings must provide reasonable accommodations *only* if they are made aware that they are needed. The IEP team must also provide information about the age of majority at least three years before your youth turns 18 so that you have time to build services in the IEP to help your youth learn to make IEP decisions.

Last Evaluation: Unless you and the school agree that a reevaluation is unnecessary, your youth must be evaluated every three years to determine whether s/he continues to have a disability and whether his/her strengths and needs have changed. No matter how often evaluations have been done for your youth in transition, it is important to discuss and plan for a *final evaluation* to provide up-to-date information prior to graduation.

Summary of performance (SOP): IDEA requires that your youth receive an SOP (academic achievement, functional performance, and recommendations on how to assist her/him to meet post-secondary goals) upon graduation or “aging out” (usually at age 21).ⁱⁱⁱ This can be part of the documentation required under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act to help establish your youth's eligibility for accommodations and supports in post-high school settings. It is also useful for the Vocational Rehabilitation Comprehensive Assessment process.

The development of an effective transition to adulthood plan for your youth with deaf-blindness will serve as a “roadmap” for your youth's future. For more information about the process and components of the transition plan, contact your state parent center (www.parentcenternetwork.org). For more information about transition for youth with deaf-blindness, go to www.perkins.org and put “service guidelines” in the search bar. To find your state deaf-blind project, or get resources and inspiring stories about self-advocacy by youth and young adults with deaf-blindness, go to the website of the National Consortium on Deaf- Blindness, www.nationaldb.org, and click on your state, or call 800-438-9376.

This fact sheet was developed in collaboration with the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network and the Perkins School for the Blind, with help from state deaf-blind projects and parents of children with deaf-blindness.^{iv}

ⁱ Deafblindness: Educational Service Guidelines, www.perkins.org/resources/educational-publications/deafblindness-educational-service-guidelines

ⁱⁱ For more information on person-centered planning, visit the Cornell University ILR School Employment and Disability Institute Person-Centered Planning Education Site at www.ilr.cornell.edu/edi/pcp

ⁱⁱⁱ www.nsttac.org

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