

The Arc of Texas

The Arc of Texas, a statewide organization advocating for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities to be fully included into their communities fully supports SB 1125. The Federal IDEA affirms that students with disabilities must be provided a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that prepares them for further education, employment and independent living. Students with disabilities must be prepared to be post secondary ready when they leave school.

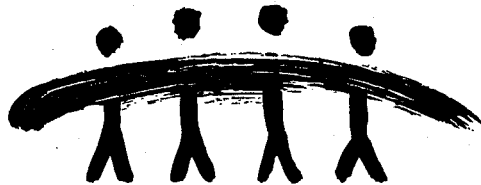
The Senate Committee on Education Interim Study Committee report to the 81st legislature recommends that student centered transition planning, as part of the student's IEP begin at age 14 to ensure a more effective transition. The committee states that it is important for the student's IEP to focus on their post school goals at every step along the way and as students grow older it becomes more vital that they have targeted and specific plans for transition.

The HB 1230 report based on legislation by Senator Zaffirini, from the 80th legislature found that ineffective transition planning in schools is due to inconsistencies in expertise, skills, resources, quality standards and accountability, inefficient communication with youth and families, lack of coordination and collaboration with appropriate agencies, lack of comprehensive information needed for a successful transition including information on adult services and gov't benefits and services, lack of supported employment services while still in school, delayed transition planning and scarcity of follow up and outcome data

Good transition planning includes - A Student centered process (person directed planning) knowledgeable people, willingness to network and develop relationships with adult service agencies, community providers and businesses, accurate and timely information to students and parents about post school services and supports and how to access them to achieve the student's goals, the school district providing support and services for students while still in school that will help lead to post secondary readiness such as: vocational evaluations, individualized job development, supported employment services, support for success in post secondary education (community college, university or career and technology certificate courses).

Moving transition planning to age 14, requiring schools to designate a transition specialist, providing information to parents and students and monitoring the schools preparation of students with disabilities for post school life will help move us in the right direction to meet the IDEA purpose of preparing students with disabilities for further education, employment and independent living.

Requiring schools to give all students with disabilities a Texas specific transition and employment resource manual and requiring the school district to have personnel that are knowledgeable about transition and employment services will help parents, students and schools better prepare students for post secondary readiness. They can begin to make connections, work together, share resources and expertise with adult services agencies, and provide counseling and advice on courses and transition services that will help the student



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reach their goals. Schools that have been successful have staff who are knowledgeable about transition and employment services and have working relationships with parents, students and local adult services agency representatives.

Currently there is not a lot of data about how school districts are implementing transition planning and services for students. Transition planning is a major emphasis of both state and federal law yet it is not included as an indicator in the TEA performance based monitoring and analysis system. TEA is required to collect data as part of the federal State Performance Plan

TEA data for 2006-2007 Federal State Performance Plan Indicator 13 determines if schools have developed IEPs for students with disabilities that included coordinated, measurable, annual IEP goals and transition services that would reasonably enable the student to meet their postsecondary goals. Of the 3,308 student folders reviewed, 20% of youth aged 16 and above (677) did have an IEP that met this requirement and 80% of youth aged 16 and above (2,631) did not have an IEP that included these IEP goals and transition services. TEA Analysis of the 2006-2007 data indicates the areas of greatest need state wide:

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IEPs do not include measurable postsecondary goals;
student strengths, preferences and interests are not reflected in identified postsecondary goals;
annual IEP goals do not facilitate movement toward postsecondary goals.

Districts are not implementing the federal requirement that they develop effective transition plans and students are not prepared for post secondary readiness. We do not know from the data whether plans have been implemented. Are students getting the services and supports they need to be post secondary ready when they leave school. Do they get counseling services and person centered planning, employment assessments and supported employment services, Do they participate in career and technology courses, take community college courses, attend technical schools and take license and certification tests or attend universities. We do not have data on yearly progress toward post secondary goals.

It is important to address the transition and employment services that are provided to students while they are still in school as part of the PBMAS system so school districts that need further support and training to prepare students for a successful transition to life outside the public school will be identified and students will leave school post secondary ready.