Secondary Transitions from Pre-K to Post-School

Transitions occur continuously throughout a student's educational journey, from early childhood through post-school. Each transition brings new expectations, environments, and opportunities for growth. When transitions are intentional, well-supported, and grounded in collaboration between schools and families, students are better positioned to develop the skills they need for long-term success in school, work, and life.

This document, Transitions from Pre-K to Post-School, is designed as a family-friendly guide for educators to use to support families with developmentally appropriate skills and experiences across key grade spans. It is organized around four critical areas connected to positive post-school outcomes:

- Self-Determination
- Post-Secondary Education and Training
- Employment
- Independent Living and Community Participation

This resource reflects the belief that families are a child's first teachers, and that collaboration between families and schools is key to supporting students throughout their education.

PK-2nd Grade Skills

Self-Determination

- Help children explore and discover what they enjoy.
- Encourage children to make choices and share their likes and opinions.
- Practice safety through stories, games, and drills (such as bus, fire, bike, and stranger safety).
- Learn to recognize safety signs, like stop signs or warning labels.

Post-Secondary Education and Training

- Help build skills like paying attention, starting tasks, finishing tasks, and staying calm.
- Show how to make choices and work as a team at home, school, or in groups.
- Notice interests that show up often and explore related jobs.
- Encourage sticking with tasks, like finishing a puzzle or building with blocks.
- Use a daily schedule and check off tasks when they are done.
- Build early executive functioning skills (focus, attention, task initiation, and completion, self-regulation).

Employment

- Talk about different jobs in the community, like jobs at stores or banks.
- Take children to work to see what adults do on the job.
- Talk with the school team about classroom or school jobs.
- Give chores at home, like cleaning a room or clearing the table.
- Explain jobs in ways that are easy to understand.

Independent Living/Community Participation

- Encourage positive relationships and talk about the difference between strangers and trusted adults.
- Practice what to do and who to ask for help when feeling unsafe.
- Practice self-care skills with less help over time, like choosing clothes or brushing teeth.
- Visit places in the community, such as stores, parks, and the library.
- Talk about money, what things cost, and how to spend money wisely.

3rd-5th Grade Skills

Self-Determination

- Using positive language, begin to have conversations with children about their disability (e.g. brain difference vs. disorder). Be factual and informative.
- Model how to use positive, non-judgmental language to describe themselves.
- Discuss how accommodations and services support children's strengths, interests, preferences, and needs.
- Identify short and long-term goals at school and as a family.
- Encourage children to know what they need and model how they can advocate for themselves at school, at home, and in the community.

Post-Secondary Education and Training

- Talk with the school team about assessment results and diploma options, and what they may mean for the future.
- Work with children to set up effective routines and/or study environments at home.
- Encourage increased independence and use of tools (e.g. weekly calendar, checklists) for scheduling, organization, and homework task completion.
- Discuss skills and behaviors essential to success (punctuality, courtesy, reliability, responsibility, self-regulation).
- Relate individual effort, hard work, and persistence to achievement.

Employment

- Inquire about school-based jobs.
- Volunteer with the family in the community.
- Help extended family members or neighbors with tasks in their community (e.g. help with shopping, raking leaves, picking up sticks in the yard).

Independent Living/Community Participation

- Support children to complete self-care tasks.
- Encourage children to participate in school extracurricular and community recreational activities.
- Help children build social skills (e.g. understand what it means to be a good friend, support children's relationships with friends).
- Provide opportunities to practice time management skills (e.g. setting an alarm to get up in the morning, using a daily or weekly schedule/calendar).
- Ensure children have opportunities to solve problems and learn from mistakes in both real-life situations and scenarios.
- Practice what to do in emergencies and assist children in memorizing important information (e.g. their address, family, and emergency telephone numbers).
- Discuss budgeting and savings for future purchases.

6th-8th Grade Skills

Self-Determination

- Encourage children to attend their IEP meetings and participate in developing secondary transition goals.
- Discuss your shared vision for children's future.
- Support children to understand their disability specific to strengths and areas of need and how to communicate these with others as appropriate.
- Assist children to access and use assistive technology, as appropriate (e.g., text-to-speech on a phone or computer).
- Set challenging yet attainable expectations.

Post-Secondary Education and Training

- Engage in the Personalized Education Plan (PEP) process, which will be developed at school by the end of their eighth-grade year.
- Expect and foster positive study habits.
- Support children in understanding what education and training are needed to reach their career goals.
- Help children learn about the educational, vocational, and technical training options available in high school.
- Talk with children about these high school training options and how they connect to future goals.
- Learn about the secondary transition services the school provides starting at age 14.
- Explore outside agencies that may provide or pay for services during and after high school, such as the West Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services, WorkForce West Virginia, and the West Virginia Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities Waiver Program.
- Complete required paperwork so children can receive services from these agencies.

Employment

- Help children explore volunteer opportunities that match their interests.
- Encourage children to take part in volunteer activities to build skills and experience.
- Support children in finding small paid jobs in the neighborhood, such as shoveling snow, mowing lawns, or pet sitting.
- Talk with children about the importance of being on time, being polite, and using appropriate language at work.
- Discuss why proper dress and strong work ethics are important for success in jobs.

Independent Living/Community Participation

- Take on more responsibility with chores (e.g. laundry, developing grocery lists, assisting with grocery shopping, meal preparation, washing the car).
- Follow classroom and community safety rules and routines (e.g. fire drills, bus rules, pedestrian safety).
- Open a savings or checking account for children (if applicable) from paid community jobs and discuss banking procedures.
- Encourage children to choose their own clothes each day.
- Support children in taking medication as directed, when appropriate.
- Help children make healthy choices for meals and snacks.
- Encourage children to prepare meals and snacks and clean up afterward.
- Support children in sorting, washing, and folding laundry.
- Help children use a planner or calendar to manage activities and school assignments.
- Encourage children to practice talking with medical and dental staff, store clerks, and other adults in the community.
- Teach children how to identify trusted adults and strangers and how to call for help when needed.
- Encourage children to explore new hobbies and interests.
- Support children in building relationships with peers, mentors, and other supportive adults.
- Help children take part in extracurricular activities and community programs.
- Teach children about community resources that can provide help and support.
- Help children learn what to do in emergencies, such as fires, accidents, or severe weather.
- Practice emergency routines with children until they can respond on their own.

9th-10th Grade Skills

Self-Determination

- Actively take part in IEP meetings and support children throughout the process.
- Encourage children to lead part or all of their IEP meetings when appropriate.
- Help children explain their disability and describe how others can support them.
- Support children in identifying and explaining the accommodations or modifications they need.
- Encourage children to share their strengths, needs, and learning preferences.
- Help children set school and life goals based on their interests and assessment information.
- Explore Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) through the West Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services and other outside agencies.
- Learn about changes to legal rights that transfer to the student at age 18.
- Encourage children to build independence by practicing decision-making skills.
- Help children understand how work interests and leisure activities can support long-term success and satisfaction.

Post-Secondary Education and Training

- Ensure the Personalized Education Plan (PEP) and suggested courses of study are discussed and appropriate during IEP meetings.
- Explore education and training options after high school such as:
    - College options that exist for students earning a regular diploma
    - College and program options that exist for students earning an alternative diploma
    - Technical school programs
    - Apprenticeship and certification programs
    - Careers in the military
- Learn what help and supports are available in colleges and training programs, such as testing accommodations.

Employment

- Support children to explore Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses.
- Support children to explore requirements for careers of interest.
- Understand that self-employment is a career option.
- Explore jobs that match strengths, interests, and work style (working alone or with others).
- Explore Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) with children's case manager and the West Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) staff to explore those opportunities.

Independent Living/Community Participation

- Encourage children to take part in school or community clubs and activities.
- Help children learn about transportation options and how to get around in their community.
- Support children in building time-management and money-management skills.
- Help children understand their own health and medical needs.
- Encourage children to take the lead in conversations with doctors and other medical professionals when appropriate.
- Support children in learning daily living skills such as cooking meals, doing laundry, and cleaning.
- Help children use a planner or calendar to manage activities and appointments.
- Teach children how to stay safe when spending time with friends or out in the community.
- Help children learn appropriate ways to interact with law enforcement, medical and dental staff, store clerks, and other adults.
- Help children identify and request needed accommodations for the driver's permit or driver's license process at the Department of Motor Vehicles.
- Support children in obtaining a driver's license or a state-issued ID for work or identification needs through the Department of Motor Vehicles.

11th-12th Grade Skills

Self-Determination

- Actively take part in IEP meetings and support children throughout the process.
- Encourage children to lead part or all of their IEP meetings when appropriate.
- Support children in setting their own academic and transition goals based on informed choices.
- Help children identify clear next steps to work toward their goals.
- Learn about the Age of Majority when a child turns 18 and becomes responsible for their own rights.
- Understand that IEPs won't follow the student once they exit school services, either with a Regular Diploma, Alternate Diploma, or age out of services.
- Discuss the opportunity to register to vote when children turn 18.
- Remind your male child that it is mandated to register for Selective Service when they turn 18.

Post-Secondary Education and Training

- In IEP meetings, explore opportunities for elective courses and work-based learning experiences including internships and apprenticeships.
- Learn about applications, costs, and requirements for programs after high school.
- Support children to complete college applications and/or finalize post-secondary plans.
- Complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Form if financial aid is needed for education after high school.

Employment

- Help children apply for services through the West Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services or other outside agencies when appropriate.
- Support children in finding and keeping a job.
- Help children create and update a resume.
- Support children in preparing for job interviews, such as practicing interview questions and getting enough sleep the night before.
- Encourage children practice using their chosen transportation options to get to work and other activities.
- Help children learn about career supports and services that are available to them.

Independent Living/Community Participation

- Help children learn about adult services and benefits that may be available, such as Social Security benefits or community-based waiver programs.
- Support children in creating a plan to travel independently in the community using transportation options that work for them.
- Help children identify and request needed accommodations for the driver's permit or driver's license process at the Department of Motor Vehicles.
- Support children in obtaining a driver's license or a state-issued ID for work or other identification needs.
- Encourage children to continue building healthy and positive relationships.
- Support children in increasing independence with daily living skills, such as preparing meals and doing laundry.

Post-School Skills

Self-Determination

Help adults to:

- Understand healthy versus unhealthy qualities of relationships.
- Advocate for quality care and support from providers.
- Make healthy and safe relationship choices.
- Build a circle of support.
- Identify and seek out accessibility supports and services.
- Discuss pros and cons of life decisions (work, school, housing, employment, relationships) and seek support when needed.
- Understand which community agencies provide various supports and services.
- Make decisions about health and wellness, such as preferred physicians, etc.
- Continue to build and evolve dreams and identify what needs to be done to make these happen.

Post-Secondary Education and Training
Help adults to:

- Locate student accessibility services and request support as needed.
- Make decisions about classes/coursework and know how to communicate with advisors if needed.
- Revisit the transition plan and consider any needed revisions to align with current goals.
- Consider options for future personal and professional growth.

Employment
Help adults to:

- Initiate communication with the employer about interests, needs, scheduling, issues, etc.
- Determine the level of support needed for employment.
- Explore funding options to support customized or supported employment.
- Talk with a benefits expert about how working may affect income supports like Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

Independent Living/Community Participation
Help adults to:

- Manage money (identify appropriate supports if/as needed, such as representative payee).
- Learn about debt and credit.
- Learn how to build and keep good credit.
- Begin planning for long-term financial stability.
- Manage time (use of calendars and alarms, etc., to be on time for appointments/classes/work).
- Make decisions about transportation (determine if supports are needed).
- Pursue opportunities to engage in community activities and maintain positive social relationships.
- Explore/determine housing/independent living options.
- Create routines to ensure positive health, wellness and self-care (e.g. healthy diet, preventative healthcare, exercise, self-care activities).
- Explore fire safety and natural disaster preparedness for the home.

Helpful Terms Used in This Guide

This section explains the definitions of key terms used in this guide.

Accommodations: Changes or supports that help a student access learning, such as extra time or different materials.

Age of Majority: The age when a student becomes legally responsible for their own education decisions. In West Virginia, this is the day the student turns 18.

Assistive Technology: Tools or devices that help with communication, learning, or daily activities.

Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV): A state office that issues driver's licenses, permits, and state identification cards.

FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid): A form used to apply for financial aid for college or training programs.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): A written plan that describes the supports and services a student receives at school.

Personalized Education Plan (PEP): In West Virginia, a Personalized Education Plan (PEP) is a required academic and career planning document developed collaboratively for every student starting in eighth grade. The PEP outlines a student's academic pathway and guides course selection to ensure alignment with the student's individual interests, career aspirations, and post-secondary goals.

Post-Secondary Education: Education or training that happens after high school, such as college, technical school, or apprenticeships.

Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS): Services that help students explore jobs, learn work skills, and prepare for employment while still in school.

Selective Service: A required registration for males at age 18 related to national service.

Self-Determination: The ability to make choices, set goals, speak up for needs, and take part in decisions about one's life.

Supplemental Security Income (SSI): A federal program that provides income support for eligible individuals with disabilities.

West Virginia Department of Rehabilitation Services (DRS): A state agency that provides services to support employment and independent living.

WorkForce West Virginia: A state agency that supports job training, employment services, and workforce development.

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