



## Transitioning From Middle to High School For Children in Special Education

### More Changes

Entering High School is another transition that can bring up questions and concerns. Students have already experienced changing classes, multiple teachers, using lockers, changing clothes for PE, increased homework, etc. So in that respect students probably have mastered or are at least familiar with many of the skills needed for the high school setting. However, there is an increased emphasis on being independent and responsible with many differences from middle school:

- The school may be larger with many new students and teachers to meet.
- Driver's training and other electives must be decided on.
- Social situations create opportunities for dating, after school activities, etc.
- Peer pressure may change or be experienced differently by a student.
- Critical decisions about pursuing a diploma or a certificate of completion must be addressed.
- Class choices become more numerous
- Preparation for taking the California High School Exit Exam begins
- Life after graduation must be planned well before that becomes a reality.

### Transition Plans

Transition planning must be included in the IEP that is in effect when a student turns 16. (This was changed from age 14 to 16 in IDEA 2004, federal special education law that was amended in 2004). However, waiting until age 16 might not afford enough time to ensure a student is taking the classes they need or working on goals that will promote their success upon leaving high school.

Transition CAN be discussed earlier than age 16 and certainly questions about a diploma versus a certificate of completion need to be addressed earlier. Ask the IEP team about this at the meeting held just prior to moving out of middle school.

The Transition Plan is not a one time document. It is an evolving process that is based on student needs and looks at:

- student interests
- preferences
- and strengths

By age 16 there need to be measurable annual goals including academic and functional goals with a view of preparation for:

- further education (after high school),
- employment and
- independent living

As a student enters high school there is a focus on choosing classes that will allow a student to, for example, apply to colleges, or be ready for vocational classes, and/or learn to function more independently. It is important to note that all students who graduate with a diploma must successfully complete Algebra I. For students with math difficulties, there are Algebra I classes that extend over a two year period. Requirements for a certificate of completion will be determined by the IEP team. Students receiving either a diploma or a certificate of completion are entitled to participate in graduation activities.

### **The IEP Meeting**

The IEP team should discuss the process of transitioning your student from middle to high school and include any critical IEP components that must be included when your student begins high school:

- Arrange for student visits to the high school if appropriate (if this cannot occur during school hours, be sure and arrange for a visit to the campus during another time)
- Get information about orientation days, registration, student IDs, etc. for incoming freshmen.
- Invite the high school case manager to your last middle school IEP meeting to ensure that the class schedule is appropriate and meets your child's needs.
- Develop goals (and objectives if appropriate) that increase independence
- Learn about any upper class buddy programs that might be available for freshman.
- Discuss the need for accommodations and/or modifications and how these will be provided to your child's teachers.
- Plan the right balance of academic and functional instruction that suits your child's needs
- Identify one high school staff person that you can contact and that your child can seek out to help with transition issues.

### **Ahead of Time**

Some things to consider doing:

- Get a copy of the high school student handbook which includes graduation requirements
- Meet with high school staff (case manager, counselor, vice principal, or principal) ahead of time to let them know your student's special needs and become acquainted with school rules and requirements
- Look at the campus and determine if there are any accessibility issues that need to be addressed (distance, stairs, restrooms, etc.)

### **Ready, Set, Go**

Most students see high school as an exciting time of their life. With preparation and support, students with special needs can have that same experience.

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