Key points:
- **IDEA: Transition plan must be individualized to student's needs**
- **Conduct multiple assessments to determine student's strengths, preferences, interests**
- **Don't offer same transition services to all students without assessing individual needs**

Avoid 'cookie-cutter' transition services

All students with disabilities in your district when they turn 16 take a career class, participate in a career day, and visit a local college. Is this enough to fulfill your transition planning obligations under the IDEA?

No, a District Court ruled in *S.G.W. v. Eugene School District*, 69 IDELR 181 (D. Or. 2017).

The IDEA specifically states that transition services must be "based on the individual child's needs." 34 CFR 300.43 (a)(2). Offering the same services to all students without conducting individualized transition assessments could land your district a denial of FAPE claim. Indeed, individualized transition planning is the key to keeping students on track toward graduation and postsecondary success, sources said.

As such, focus on conducting individualized, comprehensive transition assessments and designing a transition plan and services based on the results of those assessments, advised Nancy Edminster Hinkley, director of the Transition Services Professional Development Support Center at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y.

Consider these tips from transition specialists:

- **Make sure student actively contributes to transition planning**

The IDEA requires IEP teams to take into account a student's strengths, preferences, and interests when developing a transition plan.

"Too often, we see transition goals written without student input or without a clear connection to a youth's goals for life after high school," said Renelle Nelson, a parent advocate and children's mental health, emotional, or behavioral disorders coordinator at the PACER Center in Minnesota.

Involve the student and gather her input to keep the transition plan "person-centered" and "youth-driven," Nelson said.

"That's how you know you have met [the student's] personalized needs and facilitated student development at the same time," Hinkley said.

- **Conduct comprehensive transition assessments**

In the *Eugene* case, offering transition services such as a career class or college visit wasn't the problem, the judge noted. Rather, the IDEA violation was the district's failure to conduct age-appropriate transition assessments and determine which additional services, if any, the student needed to prepare for life after high school.

"Using a variety of assessments based upon consideration of current and adult environments related to independent living, employment, and education is key," Hinkley said.

Use the student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance as baseline data for her areas of need, Hinkley said. Then, assess students in the following areas, she recommended:
-- Self-determination.
-- Education and training.
-- Employment and careers.
-- Adaptive behavior and independent living.

Assessments can be formal (involving the use of standardized instruments) or informal (such as teacher observations), Hinkley said. Formats can include formative, summative, norm- or criterion-referenced, site- or competency-based, or portfolio assessments, along with self-assessments, she said.

• **Use assessment results to develop postsecondary goals, transition services**

Based on the assessment results and the student's PLAAFP, work with the student to develop appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals in the three areas required by the IDEA, Hinkley said: education and training, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills.

Also determine necessary transition services, defined by the IDEA as a "coordinated set of activities" meant to facilitate a student's transition from school to post-school life, she said. While doing so, you can also identify areas that require additional assessment, she said.

"Assessment data is the foundation of the IEP development process," Hinkley said. "It allows the team to link the [student's] present levels of performance, postsecondary goals, annual goals, and coordinated set of activities within an IEP."

• **Find ways to personalize general transition activities**

If your district offers general transition activities that all students participate in, such as a career class or college visit, as part of a student's transition plan, make sure you find ways to personalize the activity to the student's needs. Strategize how to transfer the needs identified in the student's transition assessments to the activity, Hinkley said.

For example, if a student needs to learn how to use public transportation for a future job, include travel training in the class curriculum. Or, if a student plans to go to college, discuss disability disclosure and how to request accommodations during the college visit.

See also:
• Invite student to IEP meeting when transition services are on agenda *(May 15)*
• Encourage students to take initiative in transition planning *(March 6)*
• SmartStart: IEPs -- Transition Planning (Procedural Requirements)

For more stories and guidance on this topic, see the Postsecondary Transition Roundup.

Ragini Algole *covers postsecondary transition, charter school, and transportation issues for LRP Publications.*

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