



Transition Planning and Special Education **Services for Students Exiting School** **A Brief Guide for Parents #4**

Transition planning is essential for students with disabilities as they enter high school; in Maryland, transition planning begins when students turn 14.

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the federal law governing special education, transition services mean “a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that:

1. Is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;
2. Is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests; and includes
 - A. Instruction
 - B. Related services
 - C. Community experiences
 - D. The development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and
 - E. If appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation.”

As the school year nears its end, many students are preparing to exit with a certificate of program completion or graduate with a diploma; once they leave, they will no longer receive special education services. It is important to review your child’s transition plan and ask to discuss it with the IEP team in preparation for your child’s exit. If you are unsure if your child is exiting, check with the IEP team. Since the Maryland State Department of Education is not requiring students to pass the high school assessments this year as a requirement for a diploma, some students may be considered ready to graduate who may not otherwise have been expected to leave school this year.

Parents may want to advocate for their children to continue receiving services to delay exit from the school system, or to ask for compensatory (make up) services if the school system has violated their child’s rights.

Here are some questions to consider to help determine if your child may be able to receive an extension of schooling to delay exit or possible additional services from their school system after your child has exited from school:

1. Has my child met their IEP goals? (Consider not just academic goals but other areas such as social/emotional learning, independent living skills, and behavior)
2. Has my child received a free, appropriate public education (FAPE)?
3. Were any of my child's services changed or stopped as a result of COVID-19 pandemic school closures? (For example, a job site placement or in-person job coaching)
4. Does my child require continued services either because of pandemic-related school closures or because it is necessary for them to receive FAPE before exiting?
5. Did my child make appropriate progress on IEP goals during the pandemic?
6. Was my child's IEP fully implemented during the pandemic?
7. Were there services my child should have been receiving during the pandemic that they did not receive?

After considering these questions, if you believe your child did not receive all of their transition services or other needed IEP services and is not prepared to exit school successfully, you may want to consider taking the following steps:

1. Request an IEP meeting and discuss how your child's transition goals have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. Ask the school to document the impact school building closures and the shift to distance learning have had on your child's ability to make progress towards IEP goals and objectives;
3. Document any violations of your child's rights, for example if your child did not receive the full amount of related services listed on the IEP and request compensatory services;
4. For students who are exiting in 2021 who may need an extension of services or compensatory education/recovery services: Begin discussion with the IEP team now about these issues. For students who are exiting this year, families must begin conversations now because once their children exit the system, they may lose the opportunity to raise their concerns or make the request for additional or compensatory services, and it will be too late to request an extension of services.

Consider Creative Options

You or your child may be interested in leaving school so they can move on with their lives, but consider whether there are additional services your child requires from the school system and if there is a way to develop a program that will allow your child to receive those services while they also enjoy additional opportunities and independence.

For example, consider whether your child could take advantage of dual enrollment, community-based instruction, work-based learning or other modified schedules, and discuss these options with your child's IEP team. These programs may allow your child to enjoy more independence and transition into adulthood while they continue to receive necessary services from the school system.

Understand Your Child's Rights

If you disagree with the school's decision to exit or graduate your child, document your disagreement with the school as a "change of placement." Change of placement requires parental consent and you would have a right to request mediation or file for due process based on your disagreement. Additionally, when there is a disagreement about a student's placement and a parent files a request for due process, they can invoke "stay put" which requires the school to keep the student in their last agreed-upon educational placement while the matter of placement is resolved.

For more information on mediation and due process, see [DRM's Special Education Handbook](#).

NOTE: One important consideration if you are considering an extension in services is if your child's eligibility to receive services through the Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) or any other agency would be impacted. If services are not in place yet and your child is proposed for exit this year, you may want to consider seeking an extension in services. On the other hand, if your child is set to begin adult services, you may not want to consider seeking an extension of services from the school system because staying in school might jeopardize your child's eligibility for those adult services.

For more information on transition planning, see [MSDE's Secondary Transition Planning Guide for Individuals with Disabilities](#).

This is the fourth in a series of brief guides for parents to address education issues during the pandemic. All guides can be found [here](#). Please feel free to contact Disability Rights Maryland's intake line at 410-727-6352 with questions or concerns or if you need this document in an alternative format.