

4. TRANSITION PLANNING AT SCHOOL

This section outlines the following information on transition planning in the education system:

- The school's role – what you can expect from the education system in planning for your child's future;
- The value of work experience and co-operative education;
- Your role in the school transition plan – how you can utilize the education system resources for your transition plan;
- Being an active participant – the importance of being involved with your child in the education process; and
- Staying in touch – the importance of being aware of what is happening with the education process and how you can influence the opportunities available to your child by being involved.

The Ontario Ministry of Education has developed a process to help students with the transition to work, further education and community living. An Individual Education Plan (IEP) must be completed for each student with special education needs that details the academic expectations for each year of school. Research indicates that having both the parents and child involved in the development of these plans can significantly improve the likelihood of a successful transition. The following information provides an overview of the process outlined by the Ministry of Education and the role you should take in making your way through the school transition process and integrating it with your own family transition plan.



The School's Role

In Ontario, the Education Act, states that principals are responsible for ensuring that an IEP is developed for each student who has been identified as exceptional. If your child is 14 years of age or older, the IEP must also include a transition plan to appropriate post-secondary activities; for example, work, further education and/or community living.

The Principal will likely assign responsibility for coordinating the development, implementation and monitoring of your child's IEP to one person – possibly the classroom teacher. The Ministry of Education recommends that a team approach should be used throughout the IEP process. In reviewing the following information you will see the similarities between the planning process in school and the person-directed transition planning process described earlier.

The following is a list of important information that will be included in your child's IEP:

- their strengths and needs;
- relevant assessment data;
- medical/health information;
- your child's current level of achievement in each program area;
- goals and specific expectations for the student;
- program modifications or the changes required to grade-level expectations in the Ontario curriculum;
- accommodations or supports and services that will help your child access the curriculum and demonstrate learning;
- special education services provided to your child;
- assessment strategies for reviewing your child's achievements and progress;
- regular updates, showing dates, results and recommendations; and
- a transition plan (if your child is over the age of 14).

There are five phases to the IEP process which include the following:

1. gathering information;
2. setting the direction;
3. developing the plan;
4. carrying out the planned activities; and
5. reviewing and updating the IEP.

Most IEPs follow the timetable of a school year or semester. They are developed in early fall and cover the time up to the end of June or the end of a semester session. The IEP process involves ongoing review, evaluation and adjustment on a term-by-term basis. The IEP process is curriculum-oriented which means it should focus on how your child is expected to progress through the Ontario curriculum, with or without any modification of expectations.

The development of the transition plan through the education system should be consistent with the directions identified for your child in their IEP. The goals and action plan in the IEP should inform the development of the transition plan to ensure the actions in each are moving towards a common objective. You will need to ensure that both plans are consistent with your child's interests and preferences.

The header for 'Tip #14' is set against a background of a cloudy sky. The word 'tip' is written in a large, elegant cursive font, and '#14' is in a smaller, simpler font to its right.

The Ontario Ministry of Education, and many of the local School Boards have developed guides and templates for parents to assist with educational and transition planning. These can be accessed through website links which are identified in Part 2: Tools & Resources, Transition Planning Resources under Education Planning Documents.

These websites also include information on Special Needs Programs in Ontario and for each School Board.

The Value of Work Experience

As you participate in the development of the IEP, you will need to identify opportunities that will give your child a broad range of experiences to help explore their strengths, abilities and interests. Co-operative education and other forms of work experience programs available through the education system are an important part of developing a transition plan for your child. Co-operative (co-op) education, work experience, and school-work transition programs allow your child to experience a variety of opportunities and to learn more about themselves and the world of work.

Co-op education and work experience programs will require a written learning plan that covers their work placement goals and activities. To ensure the work experience is a meaningful one, the learning plan for the work experience program must be linked and consistent with the directions

identified in the IEP – the student’s goals, strengths and needs. It will be important for you or your transition coordinator to be the link between your child’s teacher and the co-op education teacher to ensure you make the most of this opportunity.

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tip #15

Further information on the Co-operative Education and other forms of Experiential Learning Program can be accessed through the Ministry of Education website at: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/document/curricul/secondary/coop/cooped.pdf

Your Role in the School Transition Plan

As a parent, you have a significant role to play in the development of your child’s IEP and their transition plan. Being involved with your child means you have a better chance of developing a successful plan consistent with your child’s vision for the future.

While the education system has established requirements, standards and guidelines for developing the IEP and transition plan, the shape of the process will likely be different in each school. Regardless of the process, parents and students should be consulted and involved in the development of the IEP and transition plan. You should be prepared to be involved in the process to ensure you are receiving the supports most appropriate for you and your child.

Be prepared to ask lots of questions. Speak to the teacher, find out what the process will be, who will be leading the activities, who else will be involved, what will be developed and when. Make sure the teacher knows that you and your child want to be included in decision-making throughout the process. You will need to ensure that the IEP and transition planning processes are integrated and consistent with each other and moving in a direction consistent with your child’s preferences and interests.



tip #16

The York Region District School Board has developed a helpful four page summary of the IEP process for parents that is accessible at:

www.yrdsb.edu.on.ca/pdfs/w/schools/speced/SpecEdPlan-E-IEPGuide.pdf

Simcoe County District School Board has a brochure on the IEP Process for parents on their website at:

http://scdsb.on.ca/media/files/about-us/publications/IEPbroch_0903.pdf

Durham Catholic District School Board has a link to a Social Story Book that helps children who may have difficulties in making changes move to a new environment.

Visit their website at: www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/parents/a17.pdf

If you have started your own transition planning activities at home, there should be an overlap with the information being developed through the education system, for example, identifying your child's strengths, interests, dreams and areas to work on. Consider linking the education transition plan with the plan you are developing at home and make good use of the education system resources available to you.

Be an Active Participant

Help to establish the transition team by suggesting individuals you know will be creative and reflect a positive attitude throughout the planning process. Find out who will be involved from the school – both school personnel and those from the community. Do not hesitate to make suggestions as you see fit. Ask about including a parent from another family in the neighbourhood that has recently gone through transition planning. Find out if your child could be provided with a peer mentor, an older student about to leave the school system that has been through the process. Passport has a Mentoring Program for students with a developmental disability who are 14-21 years old. For more information on the availability of this program in your community, contact the Passport agency in your area as listed in Part 2: Tools and Resources, Section B, Financial Resources of this guide.

Best Buddies – Vrais Copains Canada is a national charitable organization dedicated to enhancing communities through one-to-one friendships between people with developmental disabilities and students. Best Buddies is grounded in the belief that friendship is important to the development of all individuals and that for all people with developmental disabilities friendship is an important way to make a connection to a community. For information

about a Best Buddies Chapter in your community visit the website at:
www.bestbuddies.ca/Home/tabid/36/Default.aspx

Be prepared to share lots of information about your child. Share any exercises you have already completed such as the vision setting activity. In addition to advocating for your child and presenting your views of them, it is also important to listen to what others have to say and value their input. They may bring a different but fresh perspective of your child that you may not see.

Be prepared to participate in meetings by bringing creative ideas and information to the table and encouraging the same of others. Help to establish realistic goals and expectations for your child. Then make sure activities are identified that help move towards achieving your child's goals both at home and at school.

Identify and seek out opportunities and experiences for your child during their school years that will help them achieve their goals for the future, for example, co-op experience, work experiences, or volunteer opportunities. These activities provide them with much needed work experiences but are also great networking opportunities that will help your child become connected to the community outside of school.

Stay in Touch

The IEP and transition plan will require lots of monitoring and review on a regular basis. Find out how this will be done and how your child's progress will be measured throughout the year. Make sure that reviews focus on ensuring the directions are still consistent with your child's interests and strengths and that identified activities are being completed as previously assigned. Regular reviews are important to ensure that your plan is on track and still consistent with a direction that you and your child are comfortable with pursuing.



Keep the lines of communication open with your child's teacher. Don't feel you have to wait for the next meeting of the transition team to discuss your child's progress. Recommend changes in goals, strategies and/or resources or support where you see a need.

This is your process. You will likely have to take an active role throughout your child's school career to ensure the process is moving your child towards the achievement of their goals. Making good use of the resources that are available through the school system will help to create a plan that will provide your child with many positive experiences to assist them make the transition to adult life.

5. TRANSITION IN THE COMMUNITY

This section outlines transition planning in the community system through a discussion of the following:

- Adult system reality – this is not an entitlement system and you need to be prepared;
- Access in Toronto – a description of accessing adult services in the Toronto Region; and
- Access in Central East Region – a description of accessing adult services in the Central East Region.

The service system is complex, there are many people accessing the services available and many waiting for supports. The transition to adult life may be a confusing time. Your child will likely have to leave behind some of the supports, if not all, they have become familiar with as an adolescent. You may need to develop a whole new set of activities, supports and services that are consistent with your child’s preferences and interests as they begin their life as an adult. There may be some services that will continue to the age of 18 and even beyond (e.g. Special Services at Home) and some that will not continue (i.e. Assistance for Children with Severe Disabilities). There are different supports and services available to a person over the age of 18 - such as the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

You need to become knowledgeable about services for adults and how or if your child will fit into it. This is a time for asking questions. Be sure you know what is going to happen to services and supports your family is currently receiving and what new services you may be eligible for as your child becomes an adult. Use this information as you begin your transition planning process.



An important note about the adult system: As you make your plans for the future it is important to remember your child is entitled to service through the publicly funded education system. Adult services are not based on a system of entitlement. Both the increased demand for service and government policies have required agencies to make difficult decisions in determining who they can serve.