

Transition: Be the pilot of your future

Every child must graduate from high school feeling hopeful about their future. Parents and students with disabilities can begin preparing for transition early on and take the wheel of their future. Students transition and go in many different directions after high school. Some go on to postsecondary education, employment or the military. Regardless of disability all students have the right to consider an entire range of options. It's like you've been a passenger on a plane for years, then someone tells you that you are being promoted to pilot. It will now be up to you to use what you've learned to pilot the plane and navigate your own course! It can cause turbulence if you and your young adult are not prepared for the transition of moving from school to adult life. Here are some ideas:

- Make sure that your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) includes transition planning. The plan is based on school-administered transition assessments that include your child's interests and abilities. In Louisiana, transition assessments, planning, and services begin when the student turns 16 or before. The plan must be based on the student's needs and take into account the student's interests and preferences.
- When planning your child's transition IEP, take into account what transition services your child will need in the areas of postsecondary education, employment, and, when appropriate, independent living skills. You may also want to

encourage the IEP team to include goals for your child's participation in community activities, recreation, and leisure in the adult world if there are disability-related issues. Each area of need should be addressed in the IEP with an annual, measurable goal or other specific services to meet the goal.

- It is important to help your child become an effective self-advocate. Engage in open discussions on how disability impacts his or her daily life. Empower them with knowledge. The understanding of one's strengths and limitations will enable youth to advocate for their needs and legal rights. You can promote your child's self-knowledge through role playing. Social interactions, job interviews, and how to explain accommodation needs can all be practiced with you at home. Parents can also encourage transition aged youth (and younger children as well) to attend and participate in their own IEP meetings.



Attendance and participation at these meetings offers your child a significant opportunity to develop and practice needed skills while building confidence and self-determination (finding one's own path in life).

- During your child's junior and senior year, begin to assess appropriate adult service providers. Planning ahead is important because each provider has different guidelines and requirements and may have waiting lists. Families and students may want to seek out and interview service providers during this time and

report back to the IEP team for additional input and guidance. Adult services to consider include the vocational rehabilitation agency, county services, workforce centers, the disability office of a college or technical school, regional agencies, residential services, in-home support agencies. Families and youth can find more resources that connect youth to communities and careers at the Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals website at: <http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov/index.cfm/page/1137>, including many disability specific and general organizations listed throughout Louisiana.

- Before your son or daughter turns 18, consider applying for Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. SSI is a federal income support program administered by the Social Security Administration. SSI provides monthly cash assistance to individuals with disabilities who have limited income and resources. To be eligible for SSI benefits, both disability and financial criteria must be met. The student's family income is no longer considered for financial eligibility when the student is 18, so many students become eligible for this financial help. There are also many excellent "Work Incentives" to take advantage of once a person receives SSI, such as Student Earned Income Exclusion and the Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS). An in-depth look at program rules is highlighted in the SSI Spotlights <http://socialsecurity.gov/ssi/links-to-spotlights.htm>
- When your son or daughter receives a high school diploma, IEP services will end. Be sure to ask the IEP case manager for your child's "Summary of Performance (SOP)." The SOP will summarize academic achievement and functional performance, as well as give recommendations on how to help your son or daughter meet postsecondary goals. Topics that might be summarized include information from work experience (school, community, summer jobs, volunteer work); vocational assessment (interests, aptitude, formal assessments, and situational assessments); career and employment ideas (jobs your child enjoyed or would like to try).

Vocational Rehabilitation is one example of an adult service provider. Vocational Rehabilitation, the flagship program of Louisiana Rehabilitation Services, is a one-stop career development program that offers individuals with disabilities a wide range of services designed to provide them with the skills, resources, attitudes, and expectations needed to compete in the interview process, get the job, keep the job, and develop a lifetime career. LRS' Vocational Rehabilitation Program provides comprehensive rehabilitation services that go far beyond those found in routine job training programs. This frequently includes work evaluation and job readiness services; assessment for and provision of assistive technology, such as customized computer interfaces for persons with physical or sensory disabilities; job counseling services, and medical and therapeutic services.

Louisiana Rehabilitation Services assists persons with disabilities in their desire to obtain or maintain employment and/or achieve independence in their communities by providing rehabilitation services and working cooperatively with business and other community resources. For a listing of Regional LRS offices visit: http://www.laworks.net/WorkforceDev/LRS/LRS_RegionalOffices.asp

