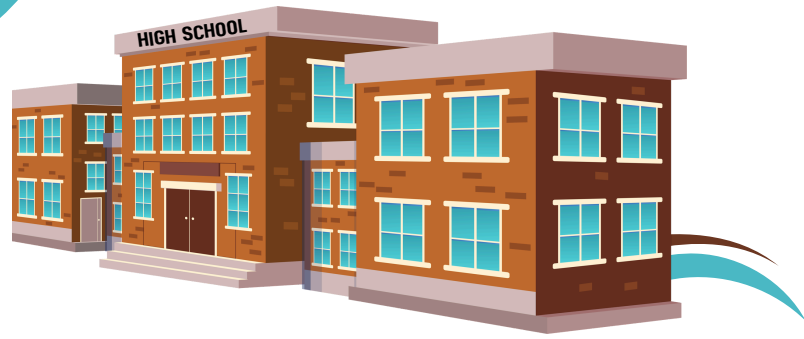


Transitioning to High School: Preparing Students with Disabilities



The transition to high school is an exciting milestone, but it can also bring uncertainty for students and their families. High schools are often larger, expectations increase, schedules become more complex, and students are expected to take on greater independence and responsibility. For students with disabilities, this transition also provides an important opportunity to begin planning for the future. As the IEP team prepares for high school, it should consider the student's course of study, needed accommodations and supports, self-advocacy skills, and long-term goals for education, employment, and independent living. Thoughtful planning can help ensure a successful transition and set the foundation for adulthood.

In North Carolina, transition planning must begin no later than age 14 as part of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. While students should be invited to every IEP meeting whenever appropriate, their participation is especially important when discussing transition services and postsecondary goals. Encouraging students to attend and actively participate in their IEP meetings gives them the opportunity to share their strengths, interests, concerns, and goals for the future. It also helps them develop self-advocacy, decision-making, and communication skills that will prepare them to navigate school, work, and adult life with greater confidence and independence.

TIP: *Help your student understand their disability, including both their strengths and the challenges they may experience. This knowledge empowers them to advocate for themselves, communicate their needs, and access the supports and accommodations that will help them succeed in high school and beyond.*

Course of Study

North Carolina high school students with disabilities may follow one of three courses of study: Future-Ready Course of Study, Occupational Course of Study (OCS), or the Extended Content Standards. The IEP team will discuss which option is most appropriate based on the student's strengths, present levels of performance, assessments, interests, and postsecondary goals.

Students should be invited and encouraged to participate in these important conversations. Families can help prepare by talking with their student about their interests, career goals, plans after high school, and the skills they will need to achieve those goals. Starting these conversations early helps students become active participants in planning their education and future.

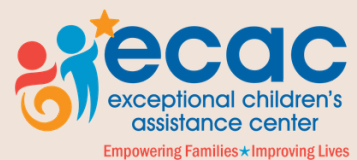
Transition Meeting

A transition meeting can help make the move from middle school to high school smoother and more successful. Although not required, it is considered a best practice for the IEP team to meet before a student leaves middle school to discuss the transition to high school. When possible, a representative from the high school - such as a special education teacher, counselor, or administrator - should participate to answer questions about schedules, graduation requirements, daily routines, available supports, extracurricular activities, and accessibility.

These meetings often take place during the spring of the student's eighth-grade year, although some schools hold transition meetings or orientation events at the high school before or shortly after the school year begins.

The transition to high school also marks the beginning of more focused transition-to-adulthood planning. The IEP team will begin discussing the student's goals for life after high school and identify services and activities that will help prepare them for adulthood. This planning may include career exploration, workplace readiness and soft skills, self-advocacy, independent living skills, community experiences, volunteer opportunities, and postsecondary education or training.

Families play an important role in this process. Talk with your student about their interests, strengths, preferences, and future goals. Consider the skills they will need to achieve those goals and work with the IEP team to ensure the transition plan supports their vision for the future.



**Scan for ALL
of ECAC's
Transition
Resources**





Questions for Families to Consider

As you prepare for the transition to high school, take time to think about your student's strengths, needs, and goals.

- How will my student navigate a larger school and a more complex schedule?
- What accommodations, supports, or strategies have worked well, and will they still be appropriate in high school?
- Will my student need additional supports to be successful in a new environment?
- Which course of study (Future-Ready, Occupational Course of Study, or Extended Content Standards) best aligns with my student's strengths, needs, and future goals?
- What are my student's interests, strengths, and long-term goals?
- What skills will my student need to achieve their goals after high school (education, employment, and independent living)?
- Has my student begun developing self-advocacy and self-determination skills?
- Could my student benefit from Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) to help prepare for work and adulthood?



Questions to Ask the Transition Team

Don't be afraid to ask questions. Working together with the school can help ensure your student has the supports they need for a successful transition.

- How will my student receive special education and related services in high school?
- What accommodations and supports are available if my student struggles with organization, time management, or self-advocacy?
- Who will be my student's primary contact person if questions or concerns arise?
- What opportunities are available for career exploration, job shadowing, work-based learning, volunteering, or internships?
- How can my student become involved in clubs, sports, or other extracurricular activities?
- What transition services will be included in my student's IEP?
- What happens if my student refuses special education services or accommodations? How will the school encourage participation while promoting self-advocacy and independence?
- How will we monitor my student's progress during the first year of high school?



Preparing for High School: Summer Checklist

The summer before high school is a great time to build skills and confidence. A little preparation can help your student feel more comfortable and ready for this new chapter.

Build Self-Advocacy Skills

- Practice how to ask teachers and classmates for help through role-playing.
- Encourage your student to explain their strengths, challenges, and accommodations.
- Review ECAC's [Self-Advocacy Fact Sheet](#) together.

Develop Organization and Time Management Skills

- Practice using a planner or digital calendar to keep track of assignments and activities.
- Use phone reminders or alarms to help establish routines.
- Learn strategies for breaking large assignments into smaller, manageable tasks.

Become Familiar with the High School

- Tour the school, if possible.
- Review the class schedule and practice finding classrooms.
- Learn about school routines, clubs, extracurricular activities, and transportation options.
- Discuss who your student can go to if they need help during the school day.



Keep Planning for the Future

Continue talking about your student's interests, strengths, and goals for life after high school. Discuss different career options, education or training opportunities, and the skills they will need to achieve their goals. These conversations help students become active participants in planning their future.



Once School Begins

Maintain open communication with both your student and the school team. Encourage your student to share what is going well and any challenges they may be experiencing. When communicating with the school, keep messages clear, respectful, and in writing whenever possible. If your student needs additional or different supports, you can request an IEP meeting at any time to discuss their needs.

Transitioning to high school is an exciting milestone, but it can also feel overwhelming for students and families. With thoughtful planning, open communication, and the right supports, students can build the confidence, independence, and skills they need to succeed in high school and beyond. Support your student in dreaming big while planning for success. Set ambitious and realistic goals based on their strengths, interests, abilities, and support needs, and identify the steps needed to achieve them.



www.ecac-parentcenter.org
1-800-962-6817