

# *Tips from the Special Education Division: Secondary Transition Services and Supports*

**April 2023**

**Question: What is important to know about secondary transition services and supports?**

## **Answer**

Secondary transition services are critical to support youth with disabilities in demonstrating preparation for their next steps after high school and successfully transitioning to the world of adulthood. Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams work together to plan and implement academic and non-academic courses and programs of study that help all youth achieve successful post-school outcomes such as postsecondary education and training, employment, and community engagement. These services are developed and implemented in alignment with a High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) and often involve coordination with community businesses and state agencies. Secondary transition is more than providing pathways for the individual's movement from high school to employment; it is a comprehensive approach to educational programs, focused on aligning student goals with educational experiences and services. Transition planning at its core is an individualized, student-centered activity that requires collaborative effort to address student needs regarding education, employment, community involvement, home and family life, and physical and emotional health.

Employment is critically important to one's sense of identity and perceived success in society. It is also at the heart of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), whose purpose is, "to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living."<sup>1</sup> Washington is also an employment-first state, part of a national systems-change framework centered on the premise that all individuals, including those individuals with the most significant disabilities, are capable of full participation in [Competitive Integrated Employment \(CIE\)](#).

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<sup>1</sup> [20 U.S. Code § 1400\(d\)\(1\)\(A\)](#)



## Individualized Decisions about a Student's Graduation Date and Plan

For a student receiving special education services, the IEP team determines the student's graduation plan and date based on what is in the best interest of the student for continuing their secondary education.

**Note:** In Washington, to graduate with a high school diploma students must meet the graduation requirements which are in place for their expected graduation year (cohort). This is determined upon their entry into high school beginning their 9th grade year. For students who entered 9th grade during the 2019–20 school year (Class of 2023) they must meet the state and local requirements which include developing a [High School and Beyond Plan](#) (HSBP), completing one or more Graduation Pathways, and completing [high school subject area requirements](#).<sup>2</sup>

Students who have not yet met their high school graduation requirements nor earned a high school diploma after four years are eligible for a free public education through the school year in which they turn 21 years old, if determined to be necessary by the IEP team. This includes students under 21 who have earned a high school equivalency certificate.

WAC [Section 392-172A-02000](#) (2)(b) says: "(2) A student who is determined eligible for special education services shall remain eligible until [...] (b) The student has met high school graduation requirements established by the school district pursuant to rules of the state board of education, **and** the student has graduated from high school with a regular high school diploma" (emphasis added).

**IMPORTANT: For students receiving special education services, state rules make a distinction between meeting graduation requirements and graduating with a diploma precisely because it is up to an IEP team to determine a student's graduation plan, including transition services, and determining the graduation date.**

Additionally, Kevin's Law<sup>3</sup> allows students who will continue to receive special education services under an IEP between the ages of 18 and 21 to participate in the graduation ceremony and activities after four years of high school attendance with their age-appropriate peers and receive a certificate of attendance. Students who participate in the graduation ceremony will receive a certificate of attendance, which is not a high school diploma. Students may receive a diploma at a later date once they complete their graduation requirements and the IEP team has determined that no additional special education services, including transition services, are needed. The receipt of the diploma would end the student's eligibility for special education services and FAPE.

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<sup>2</sup> [OSPI Graduation Toolkit: Class of 2023](#)

<sup>3</sup> [RCW 28A.155.170](#)

As an example, an adult student could have met the graduation pathway requirement and state and local subject area credit requirements for graduation but could continue as an adult student to access IEP and transition services if those are determined by the IEP team to still be needed as part of the student's graduation plan. **While there is a belief that a district must hold back a credit, this practice is unnecessary if the IEP team determines IEP and transition services are still needed.**

## Reminders for Secondary Transition Services and Supports for Students Between 16 and 21

- Adult students who are continuing transition services must have equitable access to course offerings and graduation pathways as they may still be working to fulfill graduation requirements.
- The High School and Beyond Plan (HSBP) is a graduation requirement for all students that should be updated annually to reflect academic progress towards graduation and adjust for changing interests, goals, and needs in alignment with the IEP Transition Plan<sup>4</sup>
- Transition services are individualized services based on a student's strengths, preferences, interest, and needs. They are determined by the IEP team as part of a results-oriented process focused on improving academic and functional achievement of students with the goal of supporting movement from school to post school activities.<sup>5</sup>
  - Course planning and the HSBP are requirements for all students and thus are not individualized transition services.
  - CCTS has a self-paced training module to further explore best practices for [Writing Effective Transition Plans](#).
- The service type, provider, location and duration of special education, related services, and transition services are an individualized decision driven by the IEP process and decisions must be based on the students unique, disability related needs. Transition service decisions should not be based on the district's school or transition program schedule or model. A full day transition program may not be needed for most adult students. Many students may require more focused transition services as outlined in the IEP Transition Plan. Examples include:
  - Complete job shadowing experiences,
  - Learn how to navigate the public transit system,
  - Receive targeted instruction to fill out job applications to prepare for job interviews, and/or
  - Practice using functional communication strategies (for example an augmentative communication device) in the community.



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<sup>4</sup> [WAC 180-51-220](#)

<sup>5</sup> [WAC 392-172A-01190](#)

## Best Practices for IEP Transition Plans and Transition Services



- Transition planning is a student-centered activity that requires a collaborative effort and collective expertise of a team. See [Appendix A: The Transition Team Members and Roles](#).
- While the HSBP must begin by grade 8<sup>6</sup> and the IEP Transition Plan must be fully developed by age 16<sup>7</sup>, it is best practice to begin discussing, planning, and working towards transition in middle school or earlier. OSPI has [Career Guidance Washington Lessons](#) which are a guidance and life planning curriculum for students in Grades 6–12 that can be used, differentiated and adapted to support early student driven transition planning.
- Student led IEPs are an excellent practice to ensure that the transition planning process is student-centered and provides a route for students to develop self-advocacy and the skills and plan necessary to support their goals for after high school. The Center for Change in Transition Services (CCTS) has a self-paced training module to further explore best practices for [Student-Led IEPs](#).
- IEP teams in collaboration with school staff should support students to understand the accommodations and modifications outlined in their IEP as well as to advocate for their use across learning environments and report on their usefulness in the IEP process. A student's ability to independently utilize and request these supports is an important skill in adult life and is needed in post- secondary education and training settings where accommodations are student- directed.
- Independent living coursework and content such as balancing a check book, securing a first apartment, or riding a bus may be part of an 18–21 off site program but may be needed as part of a student's graduation plan earlier than age 18. This content and support should not be limited to only adult students or only students receiving special education. A best practice is to consider offering independent living content in a course as an elective open to all students.
- Student participation in work-based learning opportunities that align with a student's post-secondary goals help students engage in career exploration as well as to develop self-advocacy and other employment skills. CCTS has a self-paced training module to further explore best practices for [Developing Job Shadowing Experiences](#).
- IEP Teams should be making connections with Washington State adult service agencies and community-based organizations early in the IEP transition process as many of these partners may be able to provide transition services and other support to students while in school and during adulthood.
  - Use the [Find a School Transition Counselor Tool](#) to find the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) Transition Liaison who serves your high school. This

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<sup>6</sup> [RCW 28A.230.090](#)

<sup>7</sup> [WAC 392-172A-03090](#)

- interactive [Office Locator](#) can help IEP teams contact their local DVR office to learn more about how DVR can support a student's transition.
- To learn more about how the local Developmental Disabilities Administration (DDA) office can support a student's transition visit [Find a DDA Office](#).
  - To learn more about how the local office for Washington State Department of Services for the Blind can support a student's transition visit their [Contact Us](#) page.
  - CCTS has an interactive [Agency Connections Map](#) by county that lists agencies that can support students in the areas of post- secondary education, employment, healthcare, housing, and transportation.

## Secondary Transition Resources

The [Secondary Transition Page](#) has a wealth of resources that may be helpful as you look at secondary transition systems and supports to support students as they transition to the world of adulthood. The following resources may be helpful:

- [Guidelines for Aligning High School and Beyond Plans and IEP Transition Plans](#)
  - Appendix B: Sample of HSBPs and IEP Transition Plans
  - Case Study of a 10th grader using a CTE Course Sequence as a graduation pathway: [Document](#) | [Webinar Recording](#) | [Slides](#)
  - Case Study of an Adult Student using the WA-AIM as a graduation pathway: [Document](#) | [Webinar Recording](#) | [Slides](#)
  - [Appendix C: High School Education and Training Opportunities](#)
  - [Appendix D: Post-Secondary Education and Training Opportunities](#)
  - [Appendix E: Post-Secondary Employment Options](#)
  - [Appendix F: Post-School Outcomes \(Indicators 1, 2,13, and 14\)](#)
  - [Appendix G: IEP Transition Planning Checklists for Educators](#)
  - [Appendix H: Transition Planning Checklist for Students](#)
  - [Appendix I: Transition-Planning Resources](#)

## Transition and Educational Services for Students Over the Age of 21

Earning a high school diploma or exceeding the age of 21 ends a student's eligibility and right to free appropriate public education (FAPE). Students who have earned a diploma or exceeded the age of 21<sup>8</sup> would not be eligible for special education services or be included in the transition recovery services process.<sup>9</sup> However, there is precedent in special education dispute resolution processes for compensatory education services to be provided to students, on a case-by-case basis, who have received their diploma, in the event that they were denied a FAPE. If a

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<sup>8</sup> [WAC 392-172A-02000\(c\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> [Washington's Roadmap for Special Education Recovery Services: 2021 & Beyond](#)

parent or adult student feels a student who earned a diploma was denied FAPE, they can pursue [dispute resolution options](#).

## Transition Recovery Services

Transition recovery services are additional transition services for students with IEPs. These extra services can address lack of reasonable progress on IEP goals or the transition plan because of missed or limited special education and related services, or for other reasons due to the COVID19 pandemic. The intent of transition recovery services is to make up services from the **pre-COVID IEP** that were missed during the COVID time period, not to create new opportunities or add new pathways. Districts have been encouraged to work with families and students to determine the need for recovery services on a case-by-case basis for all students pre-school through age 21. For students who may be exiting school, IEP teams should determine the need for transition recovery services prior to the student exiting.

By now, IEP teams should have reviewed and determined the need for recovery services for most students during annual IEP meetings in the 2020–21 and 2021–22 school years. Some students may have a continuing need for recovery services through the 2022–23 school year and beyond. Additional information on recovery services, including guidance, resources, and recorded webinars, can be found on the [OSPI Special Education Guidance for COVID-19](#) webpage (Special Education Planning Supports for School and IEP Teams during COVID section).

## Transition Recovery Service Funding

If a student's IEP team determines and documents that a student needs transition recovery services, these services must be provided as part of FAPE. Once these services are determined to be needed then the next question is how to provide transition recovery services and what funding is available to support the delivery of those services.

Funds continue to be available during the 2022–23 school year to support transition recovery services for students who are age 21 at the start of the school year. These funds are available for use for any transition-related needs, including special education and related services; transition services including education and training, employment, and independent living skills; and placement. See [Bulletin No. 046-22](#) (page 2) and [Transition Recovery Services Funding for Students with Disabilities who are 21 Questions & Answers](#).

Please direct any program questions on transition recovery services to the OSPI Special Education Office at [speced@k12.wa.us](mailto:speced@k12.wa.us) or 360-725-6075. If you have a fiscal question about transition recovery services funding, please contact OSPI's apportionment office at 360-725-7306.