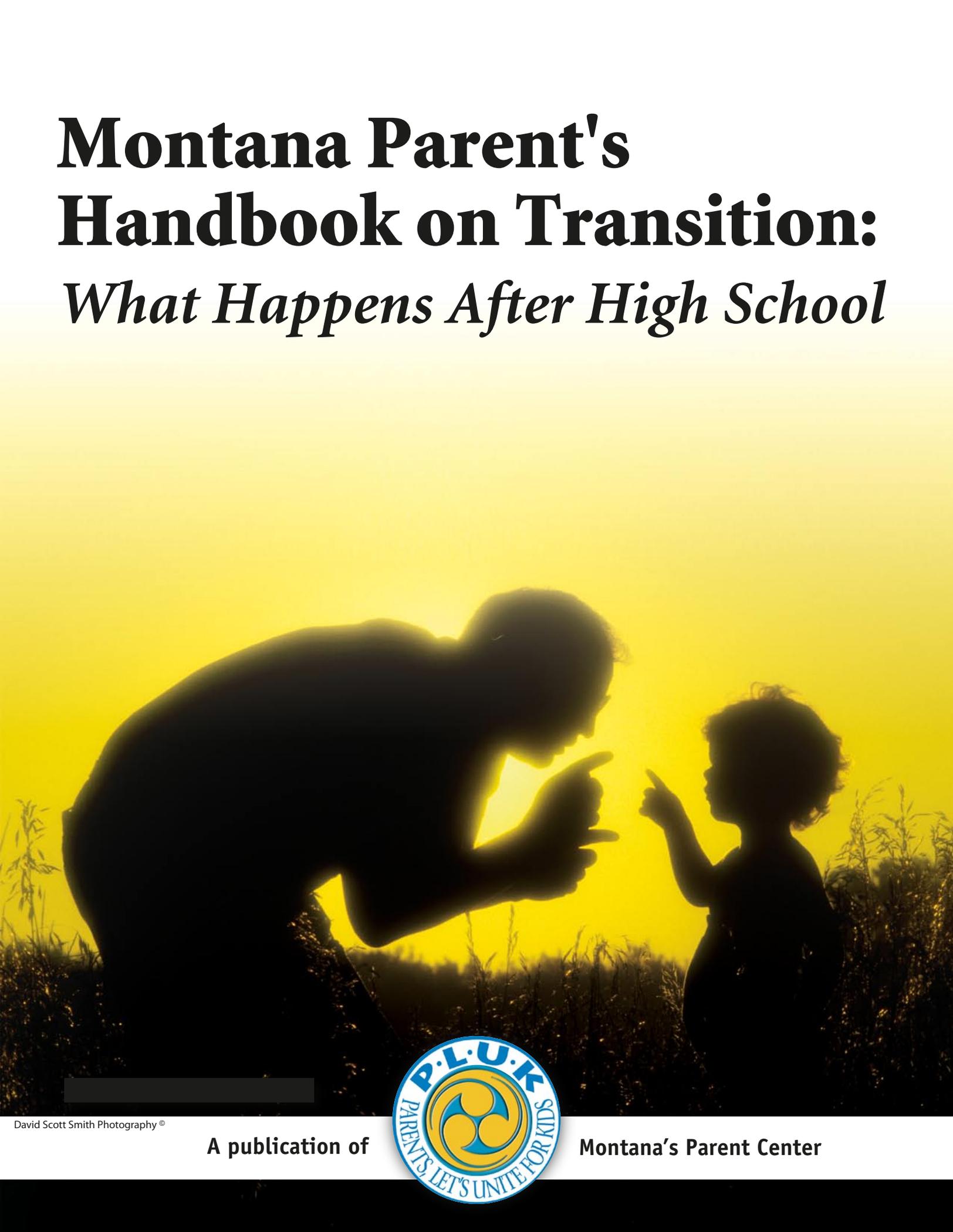


# Montana Parent's Handbook on Transition: *What Happens After High School*



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Montana's Parent Center



# **Montana Parent Handbook on Transition: What Happens After High School?**

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## Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	III
Part I: Preparing for Transition to Adulthood.....	4
Parental Involvement is a Key in the Transition Process .....	4
Independence.....	5
Guardianship .....	5
Sex Education.....	5
Driving/Public Transportation .....	6
Legal Identification.....	6
Selective Service .....	6
Prepare Your Child at Home for the Challenges of Adult Living.....	6
Part II—The Public School's Role in Transition.....	8
Section 504 Does Not Cover Transition Planning.....	8
Transition Services.....	8
Transition Planning and Successful Adult Living.....	8
Functional Skills.....	9
Creating a Transition Plan.....	9
The Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) .....	10
Participation in the Transition Planning Meeting.....	11
Parent Involvement in Individualized Transition Planning.....	11
Age of Majority: Who Signs the IEP—the Parents or the Student? .....	12
How Should Students Be Involved in Transition Planning? .....	12
Teaching Self Determination Skills.....	14
Special Education and High School Graduation.....	14
Futures Planning.....	15
The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Futures Planning Process .....	16
Part III—Transition Options and Time-Limited Services .....	17
Short-Term Vocational Services .....	18
Vocational Rehabilitation .....	18
Job Corps .....	18
Military Service.....	18
Daily Living Assistance .....	18
Reference Materials for Student Support Services in Postsecondary Settings.....	19
Glossary of Terms .....	20
Appendix A – Summary of IDEA .....	23
Appendix B – Resources.....	25
Montana’s Part C Early Intervention Resources (Infants and Toddlers, Birth to Age 3).....	25
Advocacy & Information for All Ages in Montana.....	25
State Resources.....	26
National Resources .....	27

## **Part I: Preparing for Transition to Adulthood**

Preparing for transition should begin very early in children's lives and continue until they are able to be on their own. The parents' role is to help their children gradually to achieve mastery of the skills necessary for functioning independently. Obviously, the amount of time required varies by individual and by circumstances. However, as a rule of thumb, parents should expect that it might take longer for a child with disabilities to make the transition than for typically developing children. For example, it is common for young people with disabilities to take one transition step at a time—first venturing out to take a job, but still living at home. In phase two, the child may then move out of the family home after becoming well established on the job. This step-by-step process may take several years longer than it would for a nondisabled young adult.

### **Parental Involvement is a Key in the Transition Process**

Though there are no specific guidelines for parents to follow, there are several roles for them to play, including;

- members of the IEP Team,
- providers of information,
- sources of values,
- determiners of priorities,
- case managers,
- advocates,
- role models, and
- risk takers.

The most important role that parents have in transition is the gradual process of letting go. When a child has disabilities and has required a great deal of extra care and concern from parents, it is sometimes difficult for parents to let go of their children and allow them to grow up. There is, however, danger in restricting and protecting children with disabilities unnecessarily. Children with disabilities need experience just as other children do. Parents have to be willing to take some risks and allow their children to experience frustration and failure so that they also have the chance to learn from their mistakes and become competent adults.

Parents have to jump start the transition process and plan ahead so that their children have the training and background they need to take over responsibility for themselves. Parents need to help with daily living skills, sex education, social skills development, and acquisition of good work habits. In order to be effective in planning for their children's transition, parents need to become familiar with the supports and services that adults with disabilities use to assist them in living and working in the community. As with other children, children with disabilities benefit from having parents who assume they will grow up and be on their own some day.

As high school graduation approaches, there are a number of decisions which only families and students can make about aspects of adult living. Educators and social agency personnel can be helpful in informing parents about these issues, but parents and students themselves must be the ones to make the final decisions. It is helpful for families to face these issues head-on and take action, so that plans for transition into adult living can proceed in an orderly way. Consider these topics together:

## **Independence**

As students with disabilities approach graduation from school, it is important for them and for their families to consider realistically how much independence to expect that the students will be able to achieve. Sometimes parents of children with disabilities fall into the trap of being more protective of their children and doing more for them than is necessary. Each task that young adults with disabilities can perform for themselves is one less task that someone else may have to be paid to do. School personnel can help you teach your son or daughter skills that lead to independence, but ultimately parents have to decide how much they are willing and able to let go of their parental role and allow their children to be on their own.

## **Guardianship**

It sometimes comes as a stunning surprise to parents when they learn that under Montana law they have no legal responsibility or control over their child after he or she reaches age 18, unless they apply for guardianship through the District Court.

Not having power to act for an incapacitated child can be a problem for a variety of reasons, especially should the occasion arise that the incapacitated individual needs medical treatment and cannot sign the medical release forms. Guardianship should be considered carefully according to your specific child's needs. Guardians may only be appointed to meet the actual mental and physical limitations of incapacitated persons. Guardianship must be designed to encourage the development of maximum independence of the person and may be used only to promote and protect the well being of the incapacitated person.

In Montana, there are three levels of guardianship: full, limited and conservatorship. Full guardianship carries with it the full rights and responsibilities of parenthood. Limited guardianship allows guardians only those powers and duties specified by the court's order. Conservatorships allow for the management of property or financial benefits on behalf of the incapacitated person.

## **Sex Education**

A young adult who is headed for a more independent life after high school graduation will need the information and skills to deal with sexual maturity. Very few disabilities impair sexual function so you can assume that your child will mature sexually and need help with understanding and managing his or her sexual functions. Families should consider how much and what kind of sex education would be useful. As a parent, you may need to deal with issues of birth control or sterilization. Physicians and hospitals generally refuse to do sterilization surgery without a court order that authorizes such surgery. The courts, for their part, are uncertain whether they have the jurisdiction to order sterilization.

Consult legal counsel for help with this issue if your family has to consider the sterilization of a child with a disability. NOTE: Young adults, whether they are disabled or not, are free to marry when they have reached the legal age (18) and have complied with state requirements (e.g., physical examination).

### **Driving/Public Transportation**

Whether or not a teenager with disabilities can get a driver's license depends upon the instruction the student receives and the student's level of skill and judgment. In planning the transition from high school, it is important to discuss the realistic possibilities for a child to benefit from driving instruction and to pass the driver's test.

Young adults with physical disabilities can learn to drive with appropriate mechanical modifications of their automobiles. The local vocational rehabilitation office can supply information about hand controls and other such devices. If drivers' training is offered in your child's high school, then students with disabilities are eligible for accommodated instruction and the opportunity to gain a learner's permit and a driver's license. People with reading impairments (e.g., learning disabilities) can request accommodations for taking the written driver's test (questions can be read aloud to the applicant).

If a student is unlikely to be able to drive or to pass a driving test, then plans should be made to assist the child in learning to use alternative means of transportation like public buses or a bicycle. Staff at the Independent Living Centers (ILCs) can be helpful in assisting young adults with accessing public transportation.

### **Legal Identification**

Students who won't drive may apply for a State Identification Card at any Driver's Licensing Bureau. The card is a legal state ID that can be used in place of a driver's license. There is no age requirement. When your child applies for an Identification Card, bring a birth certificate or any legal document that has the child's name and date of birth on it.

### **Selective Service**

All males are required to register for selective service within 30 days of their 18th birthday unless they are institutionalized or hospitalized. Registration can be accomplished by obtaining a registration form at a local post office. For more information, call the Selective Service Administration at 847-688-6888.

### **Prepare Your Child at Home for the Challenges of Adult Living**

- Foster as much independence as your child is capable of achieving.
- Concentrate on the child first and the disability second.
- Create household chores and insist upon completion.
  - A small child can dust chair legs, baseboards, and wash windowsills.
- Teach basic cooking skills.
  - Microwaves and easily prepared foods make simple cooking possible for practically everyone.
- Expect children to accept consequences.
  - Children need practice in accepting responsibility for their behavior.
- Allow children to take risks. They will learn (by trial and error) their own style of compensation.
- Give them the joy of accomplishment, of living with the results of their own decision-making.
- Help them to cope with the results of an error in judgment and don't penalize them by saying "I told you so."
- Don't set a double standard for children in the family.
  - Expect all of the children—disabled or not—to conform to certain basic rules for courtesy and ethical behavior.
  - Don't allow a child with disabilities to think he or she gets special treatment.

- Don't allow your child to manipulate you. Manipulative behavior interferes with achieving maturity as an adult.
- Try to make his or her routine as much like that of the rest of the family as possible.
- Teach social skills.
  - Remember that it is hard to be a friend of someone who doesn't have appropriate social skills.
  - Be sure that your child socializes with individuals without disabilities as well as individuals with disabilities.
  - Have your family interact with families who do not have children with disabilities.
  - Teach your child to think of others—remembering birthdays, saying thank you, volunteering to help, listening to others.
- Develop your child's conversational skills.
  - People who can only talk about their disability or who keep bringing the conversation back to themselves are boring.
- Encourage the child to work at a community job or a job in the home or neighborhood (volunteer work is helpful as well as paid employment).
  - Stress good work habits like being on time, completing tasks, and doing work neatly.
- Teach as many personal care skills as your child can learn when your child is young.
  - Model and monitor good grooming habits.
  - If your child is going to require personal care services for a lifetime, allow another person outside the family to care for his or her personal needs as the child becomes a teenager.
- Allow your child to develop as many practical skills as possible, including:
  - Driving (even if it takes extra lessons) or public transportation skills,
  - Basic Banking Skills (deposits, withdrawals)
  - Asking for help.
- Help your child to develop leisure skills (sports, daily exercise, hobbies, computer or table games)
- Help your child to set realistic goals
- Let your child make as many decisions for himself or herself as possible
  - This will give the child personal management skills necessary for adulthood.
- Involve your child in the ordinary activities of running a home
  - Mowing the lawn
  - Taking out the trash
  - Learning to fix things
  - Hanging pictures
  - Doing the laundry

The child may not be physically able to do all of these tasks, but knowing how they are done is important.

- Encourage money management, budgeting, and saving.
- Encourage your child's sense of humor. Make laughter part of every day.
- Provide sex education.
- Make a determination about guardianship
- Plan financially, including making a will, getting a Social Security number for the child, and applying for Supplemental Security Income and Medicaid when the child reaches 18.

## **Part II—The Public School's Role in Transition**

Public schools are required to write Individualized Transition Plans (ITPs) for special education students who are preparing to leave high school. Though school districts are not required to provide any more educational services once a student has graduated, school personnel are supposed to work with parents and students on designing a plan which will allow the student to transition smoothly from school to adult living.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), a federal special education law, requires that transition plans be written for all 16 year-old students in special education. Transition plans can be written for students as young as 14 if these students require extensive planning to make a successful transition.

### **Section 504 Does Not Cover Transition Planning**

Section 504, a portion of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, is an antidiscrimination statute which forbids discrimination against individuals with disabilities by any program receiving federal funds.

The regulations that govern the implementation of Section 504 include language covering equal educational opportunity. This language closely parallels the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and guarantees that students with disabilities must be afforded a free, appropriate public education (FAPE).

Section 504 is not, however, as explicit about the specifics of transition planning, nor does Section 504 require an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP).

Students; who are eligible under Section 504 but not eligible under IDEA, are entitled to equal educational opportunity and accommodations that provide physical access to educational facilities and access to the curriculum offered. Under Section 504, school districts are required to provide reasonable accommodations that allow students with disabilities to participate in the general education curriculum and in whatever vocational or career education opportunities are afforded to other students.

### **Transition Services**

The law says that transition services means a coordinated set of activities which promotes movement from school to post school activities; including postsecondary education; vocational training; integrated employment, including supported employment; continuing adult education; adult services; independent living; or community participation. The coordinated set of activities must be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and must include instruction, community experiences, development of employment, and other post school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

### **Transition Planning and Successful Adult Living**

Transition has become an issue because there is evidence that when special education students leave school they are not always prepared to meet the demands of getting a job, finding a place to live, and becoming a functioning adult in the community.

For example, the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) in Washington, DC has estimated that between 50 and 75 percent of working-aged people with disabilities are unemployed. If the value of special education is measured by how successfully it prepares students for their future lives, then special education is clearly not as effective as it should be. Failure to plan for the transition from school into the community can result in graduates who are unable to function in the real world.

In the field of special education, teachers have developed a number of teaching methods that suit the unique needs of their students. But these methods do not necessarily speed up the process of learning. The fact is that there may not be enough time for a child to reach total competence in all skills. When school ends (at age 19, 20, 21, or 22, depending on school's policy) students must then begin to cope with the requirements of adult living, whether they are prepared or not.

Since a student's time in school is limited, it is important to spend that time wisely. Priority must be given to learning skills which the student needs to function in the real world. To set priorities for the student's time, it is important for parents and school staff to plan for the student's future.

Planning for transition requires looking at the necessary (functional) skills a student will need to become a successful adult and then designing a program that develops those skills during the time that the student has in school.

### **Functional Skills**

Functional skills vary according to individual students' needs and capabilities. Some students will need functional academic skills while others will need greater emphasis on self-help or vocational skills.

In the past, much of what a special education student learned was determined by the academic program in regular education or by the sequence of skills that make up "normal" development.

For example, a child with learning disabilities may have been working for several years on elementary level reading skills. This student has been moving step-by-step through the typical developmental curriculum in reading, but has not gotten very far. When that student enters high school, decisions have to be made about whether continued instruction in reading is worthwhile or if the student's time would be better spent learning vocational skills. The question is, will he or she learn enough by the time the child finishes high school so that he or she can get a job and live independently? Would the student's time be best spent on reading or on some other skill? See the Appendix A Functional Skills worksheet for some ideas on prioritizing functional skills for your teen.

### **Creating a Transition Plan**

Planning for transition means making decisions about how a student moves from school into the community. Such planning requires important questions:

- Does the student have the skills necessary to obtain employment?
- Is the student a candidate for postsecondary education (e.g., college, vocational training, military)?
- Does the student have special needs for transportation?
- Does the student have the social skills to behave appropriately on the job? In the community?
- Where will the student live? With parents? In an apartment? In his or her own home? With a roommate? In a group home? In adult foster care?
- Will the student be self-supporting or will he or she require support through government benefits? Family resources?
- Will the student require supervision for some or all decision-making?
- Does the student know how to use leisure time?
- Will the student have friends or make friends in the community?
- Has the student mastered independent living skills like cooking, grocery shopping, cleaning and so forth?
- Can the student manage money, pay bills, and keep a checkbook?
- Does the student require an attendant to help with personal care needs?

Answers to these kinds of questions provide the basis for transition planning. If a child lacks skills in important areas of adult life, then the child can work on those skills while still in school and become better prepared to take on adult responsibilities after graduation. A successful transition from school into the adult community is a step-by-step process:

**Best Guess.** The process begins where the individual is now. Given what is known about this individual, what is your “best guess” about where he or she is headed after high school? Is this person going to enter the job market after high school or continue with postsecondary education? Will this individual live in a group home, an apartment, a private home?

**Next Step.** From where the individual is now, what is the most likely “next step” in his or her education? What choices are there for the location and style of education he or she might receive? Making choices about whether or not the individual will continue on with academic instruction, begin community-based training, work on life skills or some combination of all three depends on the person’s needs, the challenges of the most probable environment after graduation, and the long range goals for the individual.

The “next step” should be in the least restrictive environment for that individual; that is, the most normal situation in which the individual can function. In addition, the individual should spend as much time as possible with peers who do not have disabilities.

**Next Environment.** When a student changes classrooms, teachers, school buildings or programs, he or she faces new expectations and demands in the next environment. To prepare the student for those changes, it is necessary to look at the next environment and see what the requirements are for success there. What are the expectations for students without disabilities? What skills are critical to being able to function in the next environment?

**Strengths and Weaknesses.** Where does the student stand right now? How is the student performing in the following areas: academic subjects, social behavior, activities of everyday living, communication, personal grooming, work habits and so forth?

**Make a Match.** Once you have decided what the student’s strengths and weaknesses are, you can match his or her skills to what is required in the next environment. Are there skills the student must learn before he or she can take the next step? What training does the student need before moving on?

**Make a Plan.** Planning a student’s education becomes easier when you have already considered long-range goals and have made a decision about the next step in the educational program. You can develop an educational plan that outlines the skills the student needs to learn in order to function in the next environment. Then you can link the goals and objectives in the student’s Individualized Education Program (IEP) to predictions you have already made about the student’s future.

### **The Individualized Transition Plan (ITP)**

As with everything else in special education, the power is in the IEP. The Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) has all of the required elements of an IEP plus information about: community-based instruction, vocational education, future placements, performance criteria in future environments, skills in nonacademic domains and annual goals which are linked to future needs.

The form used for an Individualized Transition Plan (ITP) is the same as the typical IEP except that there is an additional page where specific transition issues are addressed.

An ITP should emphasize the functional skills that a student needs to learn in order to be prepared for adult living. These functional skills may include: learning strategies and study skills; daily living skills like keeping a checkbook, buying groceries, cooking, and cleaning; and vocational skills like having good work habits on the job, getting along with the boss and other authority figures, having appropriate social skills in the community, learning to communicate needs and so forth.

When looking over an ITP, parents need to look at the following:

- Age-appropriateness of activities
- Activities that are community-referenced
- Functional skills
- Skills that can be generalized (e.g., used in more than one environment or situation)
- Activities that are based on the individual's preferences and choices.

### **Participation in the Transition Planning Meeting**

The usual required members of the IEP team must be present—the parents, an administrator, a special educator, a regular educator, and the student. Parents must be notified in advance that the IEP meeting being scheduled is a Transition IEP. The student should be given an opportunity to participate in the meeting or to provide information for use at the meeting. During the student's senior year, the meeting may also include, if needed, representatives from agencies that provide adult services. The purpose of involving representatives from adult service agencies is to share information and make concrete plans for involving the student in appropriate adult services. Typical adult agency participants might be a Developmental Disabilities Program Case Manager, a caseworker from an Independent Living Center, a mental health adult case manager, or a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor.

### **Parent Involvement in Individualized Transition Planning**

Transition planning is an important part of the IEP process, so parents need to give thought to the role they play in planning for their child's move from school into the world of work and adult living. Here are some suggestions for parent involvement:

- Understand exactly what is meant by the term "transition" and how your school is addressing this need.
- Participate in and reinforce the transitional activities that your child is experiencing in the classroom and in community-based training.
- Be sure that your child's IEP contains a sufficient number of transition-related objectives, beginning in the elementary years and continuing through junior high and high school.
- Help your child to develop good work habits and behaviors and the self confidence needed to succeed on the job.
- Be sure the school is allocating enough time to the transitional needs of your child.
- Encourage local employers to consider providing training sites for students in vocational programs.
- Promote the hiring of individuals with disabilities by local businesses.
- Set an example yourself by hiring persons with disabilities in your business.
- Become well versed in legislation and services that affect transition from high school.
- Volunteer your time to work with your child's transition program.
- Join a parent support group that discusses transition issues.
- Promote an understanding of the need for students with disabilities to acquire functional and self help skills.
- Nurture and promote connections between your child and family members and your adult friends. Personal connections often provide the best means for young adults with disabilities to find work in the community.
- See transition planning as a family responsibility and work cooperatively and actively with school staff to make your child's transition a success.

## Age of Majority: Who Signs the IEP—the Parents or the Student?

In Montana, young people reach the age of majority at 18. At this point, they become the signers of their own IEPs unless they are so incapacitated that someone has to act for them. If parents have guardianship of a student 18 or older, parents continue to be the signers of the IEP.

Parents continue to be participants in IEP meetings after the student reaches the age of 18. If parents and the student disagree about how the IEP should be written, then the family may need some outside help from a counselor or mediator to assist them in reaching an agreement. If a special education student under the age of 18 is emancipated and not living with his or her parents, then the student may sign the IEP and give or withhold consent on the contents.

## How Should Students Be Involved in Transition Planning?

IDEIA requires that students be involved in some way in making choices concerning their ITPs. Most students with disabilities can attend their own ITP meetings and express their views, but they will need some assistance in understanding the process and knowing how to contribute. As soon as possible, students with disabilities should begin to attend their own ITP meetings. In advance of the meeting, parents can discuss the ITP meeting format, the issues which will be discussed, and who will be at the meeting.

At first the student may want to attend only part of the meeting and to be present as just an observer. Gradually, over time, the student may feel more ready to be a participant. When the student voices interest in participation, it is sometimes helpful for the student to write down what he or she wants to share. The process of preparing in advance helps the student to sort out thoughts and become more articulate about what is important to him or her.

Some young people will not be able to participate in the full ITP meeting, but these students can sometimes be interviewed separately and their ideas can then be brought to the meeting by parents or the student's teacher. There are specific transition interview questionnaires that can be used to help students identify their choices and preferences for the future.

While the concept of involving students in developing their own IEPs may seem difficult at first, in fact, students have much to gain from being involved. During the process, they can:

- Learn more about their strengths and skills and be able to tell others what their goals and needs are;
- Learn more about their disability, including how to talk about and explain the accommodations that help them to compensate for the effects of the disability.

In any case, it is important for young people to think about their own futures and to be given an opportunity to articulate their hopes and desires for further education, careers, and adult living. When students are involved, they have a greater sense of ownership in the plan and a deeper commitment to working on the goals contained in it.

Involving students with disabilities in the planning process is not something that occurs automatically. Most young people, whether they have disabilities or not, will need help with learning the skills necessary for self-determination—that is, thinking and planning for themselves. Typical self-determination skills:

**Personal Goal Setting:** Goal setting involves answering those difficult questions like: What do I want to do? Where do I want to live? How do I want to handle getting out on my own?

**Disability and Personal Identity:** Adolescence is a time when young people develop their sense of personal identity. For youth with disabilities, their identities include having a disability.

At some level, all young people with disabilities have to come to terms with how their disabilities affect body image, sense of competence, and concepts of personal integrity and independence. Some young people have to handle a lifetime of personal care assistance from family members or paid assistants; others have to recognize that they will have to use compensatory skills or adaptive equipment in order to conduct their daily lives; still others will have to come to terms with taking medications or enduring treatments that allow them to function and participate as normally as possible in daily life.

Often, parents have taken some or even all the responsibility for coping with their children's disabilities. As the child reaches the time in life when he or she will be entering the adult world, parents have to let go of some of their support and vigilance while the child takes over more and more personal responsibility. This can be a difficult process both for parents and for their children, but it is a necessary one in order for the child to achieve as much independence as possible.

**Acceptable Risks:** Moving into adult living means that young people must make choices and take risks in areas that may not be as safe and nurturing as their home environment with parents. Part of growing up for all children involves venturing out and making mistakes, learning from mistakes, and going on.

**Asking for Help:** Youth with disabilities have to learn gradually how and when to ask for help. Often for them, this is the hardest part of growing up. Many young people with disabilities want to be fiercely independent. Just like other teenagers, they do not want to look or act different from anyone else. There are, however, times when it is necessary for young people to face their actual differences from others and ask for help when needed.

Asking for help may mean physical assistance with simple things like opening doors or carrying a lunch tray, or it may mean harder things like asking a teacher to shorten an assignment or explaining to a boss that directions need to be repeated.

**Support Services:** More and more support services are available to assist people with disabilities, but these supports are useless if the individual does not take advantage of them.

Students with disabilities have to be taught how to use assistive devices and adaptive equipment. They have to learn about where special services (e.g., special transportation, tutoring services, low vision clinics) are located and how to access them. They have to learn how to plan their time so that they can take advantage of support services and still get everything done that is expected of them at school or on the job.

Using support services takes practice and a good sense of humor. The high school years are a good time to practice using supports when there are still people around to provide instruction and assist with problem-solving.

**Articulating Needs:** Sometimes the hardest part about seeking support is being articulate about what is needed. Many young people with disabilities need practice in explaining what they need to peers, adults, employers, teachers, and members of the public.

**Self-Advocacy:** As students with disabilities reach adolescence, they need to learn gradually how to be advocates for themselves. As they are able, they must take on the roles of explaining to others their legitimate needs, responding to questions about their disabilities, and asserting their rights.

## Teaching Self Determination Skills

Parents usually teach self-determination skills at home. Occasionally counselors or educators at school can teach these skills. Some high school programs offer courses in self-determination training; others incorporate self-determination skills into coursework. Sometimes parents feel the need to seek assistance from private counselors in working through identity issues with their child. Often it is helpful for the teenager with disabilities to have the assistance of someone other than a parent (an adult friend, clergy member, or older sibling) to sort out feelings about independence and self-advocacy.

Parents, too, sometimes need outside help to assist them with issues of letting go. When a child with disabilities is nearing the time for leaving home and becoming less dependent on parents, the parents themselves may suffer some "withdrawal pangs." Taking care of a child with disabilities can be an enormous responsibility. The tendency on the part of parents is to be protective or even overprotective. When letting go must take place, as a parent, you may need emotional support to weather this significant change in your life.

Sometimes parents find it difficult to assist their children with self-determination skills. High school resource teachers or guidance counselors are good resources for teaching these skills. If you would like staff assistance with teaching your child self-determination skills, contact the school and make self-determination skills part of your child's transition IEP.

## Special Education and High School Graduation

Typical high school students must earn a certain number of credits in order to receive a high school diploma. This is also true for students in special education who plan to attend college after high school or who wish to take standard academic or vocational/technical courses.

Some special education students, however, do not take the standard courses for which academic credit is given. These students can graduate from high school and receive a diploma if they complete the goals and objectives on their IEPs. In other words, high school credit can be given for completion of an IEP. The transition plan should specify whether the student will be receiving high school credits in the standard way or will receive credit for IEP completion.

Students who are not in special education usually graduate from high school at 18 or 19. For students in special education, local school districts in Montana have a choice of whether to graduate students at 18 or 19 or to allow them to stay in school longer until age 21 or 22. School districts are not required by law to keep special education students beyond the usual graduation age unless they set a local policy allowing special education students who need a longer time in high school to stay in the educational setting until 21 or 22.

When a transition plan is written for a student, the plan should indicate when the student is expected to graduate. When a student is graduating, there should be a formal meeting to exit the student from special education.

## Futures Planning

Personal Futures Planning is an informal process for making plans for an individual's transition into adult living. Futures planning focuses less on school requirements and special education and more on opportunities for people with disabilities to develop personal relationships, have positive roles in community life, increase their control of their own lives, and develop the skills and abilities to achieve these goals.

Futures planning is more than just a plan; it is a problem-solving process. In futures planning, a small group of people meets to brainstorm strategies for assisting an individual with disabilities to make a successful transition. This circle of support, a person-centered team, makes commitments and takes action to ensure that changes will be accomplished for the person with disabilities. Personal Futures Planning (developed by O'Brien, O'Brien and Mount) can complement the IEP process in schools or the planning processes in adult services. A futures plan can help those involved with the focus person see the total person, recognize his or her desires and interests, and discover the individual's capacities and gifts.

Typically, IEP meetings tend to focus on a person's deficits, even though some effort is usually made to mention strengths as well. IEPs are, for the most part, written from a deficit point of view—what is wrong with the person and how are we going to fix it. Futures planning seeks to eliminate the pattern of looking for deficiencies. Through a simple process, the plan identifies and builds on a person's skills and roles in within the community.

If you would like to conduct these informal planning sessions for your child, you will need:

**Facilitators:** Usually two are needed, one to interview the group and another to record responses.

**Comfortable Setting:** Futures planning meetings are usually held in a home or school setting. Wherever they are held, a relaxed, low-key atmosphere should be established.

**Focus Person:** The focus person is the individual with a disability for whom the planning session is being held.

**Participants:** The key people in the focus person's life should attend the planning meeting. Key people usually include a mixture of close friends, family members, neighbors, clergy or friends from the person's religious community, teachers, therapists or doctors.

**Time:** A good futures planning meeting takes at least two hours.

**Newsprint and Markers:** The recorder uses a process called "group graphics" to organize and portray the information from the group. This process helps the information "come alive" for the group. The facilitator conducting the meeting interviews the group and then the recorder records on newsprint all of the comments made by the group, using colored markers, symbols and words. The recordings produce a series of pictures and symbols that are called "maps" and illustrate the patterns of a person's life. This graphic description becomes the foundation for the futures planning. Using graphic symbols in this way helps to stimulate creativity and to encourage participation by people who have difficulty with words.

There are three steps in the Personal Futures Planning process. The first is the creation of a personal profile representing comprehensive information about the individual, including past events, relationships, places, preferences, ideas about the future, obstacles and opportunities. The second step is the development of a plan for the person based on the information gathered from the group. The final step is the commitment by the group to form a network of support to help the person carry out the plan.

### **The Strengths and Weaknesses of the Futures Planning Process**

The Personal Futures Planning Process can be helpful in identifying strategies for enriching the lives of individuals with disabilities. However, the futures planning process is not perfect. It has some potential pitfalls that parents should know about:

- Profile information may focus exclusively on possibilities and ignore real limits and constraints.
- Expectations may be raised too high. They may either be unrealistic, or there may be no path for reaching certain goals.
- Long-range thinking may completely overshadow short-term methods and strategies. Participants may not develop immediate strategies for action. They may ignore real day-to-day issues that require immediate attention and support.
- The process can be irrelevant if the participants in the planning session do not have strong, personal relationships with the focus person.
- The process is dependent on an external facilitator. Experienced facilitators are critical to an effective and creative planning meeting. The facilitator's own skills and values can greatly influence the outcome of the planning process.

To be of practical value the futures planning process has to be coupled with concrete planning techniques like the IEP. The dreams recorded in a futures plan can become a reality only if the paths toward the goals are identified and individuals are committed to helping your child reach those goals.

## Part III—Transition Options and Time-Limited Services

Making the transition from high school to adult living is a big step for any young person and especially so for young adults with disabilities. Parents play a major role in helping their children make this transition successfully. With advance planning, parents can prepare their children to be as independent as possible. Working closely with educators and other professionals, parents can ensure that their children learn the skills while they are still in school that will help them to find jobs and live productively in the community.

Many young people, including those with disabilities, make the transition from school to work and adult living without using any assistance from public or private agencies. Some individuals obtain employment at the end of high school programs using contacts gained through previous work experience. Young people with disabilities often attend postsecondary educational institutions and gain skills that lead to employment. Other young adults locate their own jobs through family contacts, neighborhood networks, or short-term volunteer work. Be sure that your child has an opportunity while still in high school to take an aptitude test and that the results of the test are explained to you and your child.

**Vocational Aptitude:** Vocational interests begin to stabilize during the middle teen years so it is helpful for students to take general aptitudes that will assist them in defining broad career areas that have potential for them. Vocational interests are often assessed using group-administered verbal interest inventories such as the Occupational Interest Survey Form DD (Kuder & Diamond, 1985) and the Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1985).

Some young people make the transition using time-limited services. Time-limited services are those that last for a particular amount of time, usually long enough to help the individual gain employment, further education, or greater independence. Examples of time-limited services are vocational rehabilitation, job training programs, and postsecondary student support services. The presence of a disability often qualifies an individual for time-limited services or creates special support for participation in job-related training.

**Vocational Rehabilitation:** Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) services are a publicly supported, time-limited program designed to help people with disabilities find work. VR counselors typically begin working with their clients during the student's senior year in high school. Once an individual has been found eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, VR will provide support and training until the person gets a job and then the VR services will be ended.

In addition to job training and placement services, VR may also fund the purchase of equipment, tools, clothing or uniforms that are necessary for employment, and may pay for transportation costs, medications, eyeglasses and other similar items needed to make employment possible.

VR services are limited by the amount of funding provided by federal and state governments. Individuals may be eligible for services but may have to wait for services until funding is available.

Besides the public Vocational Rehabilitation services, there are also some private rehabilitation businesses that assist with job training and placement for people with disabilities. The cost of these services is the responsibility of the individual or the family.

## **Short-Term Vocational Services**

### **Vocational Rehabilitation**

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) serves individuals who have disabilities that constitute substantial barriers to employment. VR services are available for individuals with a wide range of disabilities, including persons with cognitive delays, physical disabilities, and learning disabilities. VR may not turn down a client because the individual is considered to be "too disabled." VR is supposed to assume that a client is potentially employable, no matter how severe the disability. Visual Rehabilitation Services provides time-limited job training and placement services for individuals whose vision presents a substantial barrier to employment.

### **Job Corps**

Job Corps is another federally funded program that provides job training for disadvantaged youth. Young people with disabilities can receive job training through this program if they have the physical and mental capacities to meet the minimum standards for the training. Individuals with learning disabilities or emotional disorders who are reasonably independent for their ages and physically healthy can be good candidates for Job Corps training. Job Corps may be contacted by calling 406-259-2322.

### **Military Service**

Military services can be selective about the individuals they recruit. Students with disabilities who wish to enter one of the branches of the military have to be able to meet the minimum mental and physical requirements of the service.

For example, the military services have had a long-standing policy of not accepting individuals who must take medication on a regular basis. This policy would apply to someone who takes asthma medication regularly as well as to someone who takes a stimulant medication like Ritalin. Military recruiters use scores from the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) to assess the qualifications of candidates for military service. Any student interested in going on to the military should take this examination while still in high school.

### **Daily Living Assistance**

Independent Living Centers (ILCs) are another source of time-limited transition support. ILCs assist persons with disabilities by providing training on the specifics of living independently; including advocating for services, seeking physical access, acquiring adapted equipment, locating housing, or using public transportation. ILCs also have peer-mentoring programs that link successful adults with disabilities to young people who are just making the transition to adult living. These adult mentors can show their protégés how to "navigate" in the community and take care of daily activities. Independent Living can begin working with an individual while that person is still in high school and may provide follow-up services when the individual begins to live in the community as an adult. ILCs can also assist with referrals to other adult service agencies.

## Reference Materials for Student Support Services in Postsecondary Settings

<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Authors</u></b>	<b><u>Title</u></b>
1985	<i>R. Skyer and G. Skyer</i>	<i>What Do You Do After High School?</i>
1985	<i>C.T. Straughn and S.C. Colby</i>	<i>Lovejoy's College Guide for LD</i>
1986	<i>J. Slovak</i>	<i>Bose Directory</i>
1988	<i>C.T. Mangrum and S.S. Strichart</i>	<i>College and the Learning Disabled Student</i>
1989	<i>A.J. Sclafanai and M. Lynch</i>	<i>College Guide for Students with LD</i>
1992	<i>Peterson's Guides</i>	<i>Peterson's Guide to Colleges with Programs for Learn ing Disabled Students, 4th Ed.</i>
1993	<i>M. Kravets and I.F. Wax</i>	<i>K &amp; W Guide to Colleges for LD</i>
1997	<i>C. Ipsen</i>	<i>A Guide to Montana's Post-Secondary Programs</i>

For additional references, contact the TRIC/PLUK Library at 1-800-222-7585.

## Glossary of Terms

**Accommodation**—changes in the learning environment that do not alter curriculum content.

**Adaptation**—changes in the ways that curriculum content is received or in the types of products that students are required to produce as evidence of understanding the curriculum.

**Basic Classes**—academic classes that offer curriculum parallel to the regular developmental curriculum but which is taught at a simpler or lower level. Reading levels of materials may be at a lower level and testing may be focused on mastery of main concepts without expectations for finer detail or more elaborate understanding

**Collaborative Class**—a regular academic class that is taught by two teachers, one from regular education and one from special education. The regular education teacher presents the developmental curriculum and the special education teacher assists students who need extra help to understand the curriculum or to respond to assignments.

**Community-Based Instruction**—vocational or life skills instruction that is offered in community settings where the skills being taught would normally be performed, rather than in an artificial setting like the classroom.

**Developmental Curriculum**—regular education academic curriculum that follows a sequence considered the normal pattern for most students.

**Futures Planning**—an informal process for identifying a person's assets and community supports and devising a transition plan based upon these assets.

**Guidance Counselor**—a professional educator who is trained to evaluate aptitudes and provide guidance in selecting courses to prepare for going to college, vocational school or into the workforce. These individuals often preside over the Child Study Team and IEP Team meetings for students in special education.

**Inclusion**—the involvement of a student with disabilities in the typical activities of the school, including placement in regular classes, involvement in extracurricular activities and relationships with age-appropriate peers

**Individualized Transition Plan (ITP)**—when a special education student reaches the age of 16 (or earlier at age 14 if the student is in special education more than 50% of the time), a plan must be developed to indicate how the student will make the transition from high school into adult living. Transition IEPs should address the skills students need to learn while they are still in high school that prepare them for work and living as independently as possible. The Individualized Transition Plan should indicate when the student will graduate and how he or she will achieve a high school diploma (e.g., earning credits, completing IEP goals).

**Learning Strategies**—techniques for learning specific subject matter. Good students develop learning strategies that help them to organize information, store it in memory, and retrieve it when they need it. Students with learning disabilities often do not develop efficient learning strategies; they tend to operate using trial and error methods that are inefficient. Such students have to be taught direct strategies that will help them study more efficiently and remember what they are learning.

**Learning Strategies or Study Skills Class**—a class that offers no subject matter content, but which teaches students strategies to help them become more efficient learners in their academic courses. For example, students may not be taught algebra, but would learn strategies for studying algebra more effectively. These classes may also help with accommodations in the student's other classes and may offer oral testing or materials modifications that are used for other classes. Sometimes individual tutoring in subject matter is also offered in order to help a student catch up with a class or relearn some skills that the student has missed.

**Life Skills (Functional Skills)**—these skills include the activities of daily living that all adults have to perform in order lead independent lives. Activities may include cooking, washing clothes, mending, house cleaning, personal grooming, budgeting, banking, shopping, driving, using public transportation, making appointments, dealing with agencies, job seeking skills, managing time, daily communication skills, and interpersonal skills.

**Modified Curriculum**—changes in curriculum content (e.g., amount, concrete or abstract).

**Parallel Curriculum**—course of study which covers the same subject matter as the regular curriculum (e.g., mathematics, science, English), but which presents the subject in simplified terms using different methodologies.

**Peer Tutors**—students who are trained to provide instruction to other students who are about their same age.

**Regular Class**—a class which is part of the regular academic or elective program of the school. Such classes follow the normal developmental curriculum, but may be modified by providing accommodations for the student with disabilities. Accommodations must be spelled out in the IEP.

**Replacement Curriculum**—content that is altered significantly from the standard curriculum and taught using specialized methods and materials.

**Resource Class**—a resource class is a subject matter class (e.g., English, earth science) offered only to students in special education which presents the curriculum at a lower level than would be offered in the regular classroom.

**Special Education**—instruction which is specially designed to meet the unique needs of the individual student with disabilities.

*Even though the high school curriculum is laid out so that students acquire credits for taking specific subjects, this process of taking subjects and acquiring credits can be modified in order to provide special education. For special education students, you do not have to follow the regular developmental curriculum. You can skip steps, go around certain activities or do whatever the student needs. Special education is supposed to be uniquely designed. By definition, a special education program should NOT look like the programs that every other student is taking. The methods of teaching may be different. The ways the student responds may be different, the time frame may be different. Any of the components of the teaching/learning process can be modified in order to meet the student's unique needs.*

**Study Skills**—a set of activities which help students learn how to study different subjects, how to organize materials, how to plan long-range assignments, how to do research, how to read in content areas, how to study for tests, and how to take tests.

**Transition**—refers to the changes which occur when a student leaves high school and enters the adult community. This change may involve decisions about further training, college attendance, getting a job, finding a place to live, and becoming a part of the community. For some students, transition involves receiving services from adult social service agencies. Other students make the transition without any particular help from agencies, but with support from family and a network of social acquaintances and friends. Some students will be completely independent after high school, some will need moderate support, and others will need support throughout their lives.

**Vocational Training**—instruction in skills related to specific vocations like graphic arts, auto mechanics, agriculture and so forth.

**Work Study**—on-the-job training at work sites which provides the student with opportunities to apply work skills learned in the classroom. Students are generally enrolled in academic classes for part of the day and spend part of the day in the work environment.

## **Appendix A - Summary of IDEA Services for Children**

*Please note that your child may be referred for evaluation and qualify for services at any age.*

### **Age: Birth up to age 3 (Part C Services)**

*Service: Home-based Early Intervention*

How to qualify?

If you suspect a disability or delay:

Contact your local early intervention agency (see Appendix B),

*(please note that some school districts have preschool screening at this age and will refer to the Early Intervention Agency if needed)*

Sign consent for assessment,

Early Intervention agency will conduct assessment, and

Early Intervention agency will determine eligibility based on assessment results.

If your child qualifies for early intervention services:

You and the Early Intervention agency will determine appropriate services within the IFSP (Individualized Family Service Plan). These services can include, but are not limited to:

Parent and family education/counseling,

Speech/audiology,

Physical/occupational therapy,

Home visits, and

Transportation and related costs.

Six to three months before a child's third birthday, transition to preschool special education services begins.

### **Age: 3-5 (Part B Services)**

*Service: School-based preschool Special Education*

How to qualify?

If you suspect a disability or delay:

Contact your local school district,

Sign consent for assessment,

School personnel will conduct assessment, and

You and the school personnel will review the assessment results and determine eligibility for preschool special education services within a CST (Child Study Team) meeting.

If the CST determines that your child qualifies for and would benefit from preschool special education services:

You and the school district personnel will convene an IEP (Individualized Education Program) meeting to:

Design an appropriate special educational program,

Determine placement,

Determine any needed related services,

The IEP will be implemented upon your consent and approval, and

The IEP can be reviewed at any time as your child's needs change.

Before age 6, transition to Kindergarten and First Grade begins.

**Age: 6-18 (Part B Services)*****Service: School-based Special Education***

How to qualify?

If you suspect a disability or delay:

Contact your local school district,

Sign consent for assessment,

School personnel will conduct assessment, and

You and the school personnel will review the assessment results and determine eligibility for special education services within a CST (Child Study Team) meeting.

If the CST determines that your child qualifies for and would benefit from special education services

You and the school district personnel will convene an IEP (Individualized Education Program) meeting to:

Develop the IEP

Consent for placement in Special Education

Monitor and review IEP, and

Re-evaluation, when needed.

Transition planning to adulthood may begin at any time, but must begin by age 16.

Graduation!!! Transition to adulthood.

## Appendix B – Resources

### Montana’s Part C Early Intervention Resources (Infants and Toddlers, Birth to Age 3)

**Family Support Services Advisory Council** —advises and assists the **Developmental Disabilities Program on the implementation of birth through age three (Part C) services statewide.**

<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/fssac>.

The following early intervention agencies serve different regions in the state. For a detailed map, visit the Montana Department of Health and Human Services on the web at <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/fssac>.

*AWARE, Inc., Helena, Missoula*

Helena 406-449-3120    Missoula 406-728-3193

1-800-432-6145 • <http://www.aware-inc.org/>

*Child Development Center (CDC), Missoula*

406-549-6413 • 800-914-4779 • <http://www.childdevcenter.org>

*Developmental Educational Assistance Program (DEAP), Miles City*

406-234-6034 • 800-228-6034 • <http://www.deapmt.org>

*Early Childhood Intervention (ECI), Billings*

406-247-3800

*Family Outreach, Helena*

406-443-7370 • <http://familyoutreach.org>

*Hi-Line Home Programs, Inc., Glasgow*

406-228-9431 • 800-659-3673 • <http://hilinehomeprograms.org>

*Quality Life Concepts, Inc., Great Falls*

406-452-9531 • 800-761-2680 • <http://www.qlc-gtf.org>

*Support and Techniques for Empowering People (STEP), Billings*

406-248-2055 • 800-820-4180 • <http://www.step-inc.org>

### Advocacy & Information for All Ages in Montana

*PLUK* — Montana’s Parent Training and Information Center provides information, training and support to families, individuals and professionals statewide.

406-255-0540 • 800-222-7585 • <http://www.pluk.org>

*Disability Rights Montana (formerly MAP)* — advocates and attorneys who promote the rights of Montanans with disabilities.

406-449-2344 • 800-245-4743 • <http://www.mtadv.org>

## State Resources

### *Children's Special Health Services*

406-444-2596 • 800-762-9891 • <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov>

### *Department of Public Health and Human Services — Senior and Long Term Care Division*

406-444-4077

### *Disability Services Division Programs*

406-444-2590 • 877-296-1197 • <http://www.dphhs.mt.gov>

### *Head Start*

Services in Montana • <http://www.headstartmt.org>

### *Home and Community Based Services*

800-219-7035 Referrals

### *Montana Child Care Resource & Referral Network*

406-549-1028 • 866-750-7101 • <http://www.montanachildcare.com>

### *Montana Children's Health Insurance Plan*

406-444-6971 • 877-543-7669 • <http://www.chip.mt.gov>

### *Montana Independent Living Services*

<http://www.dphhs.mt.gov/dsd/independentlivingservices/index.shtml>

### *Montana Law Help*

<http://www.montanalawhelp.org/MT/index.cfm>

### *Montana Medicaid Programs*

<http://medicaidprovider.hhs.mt.gov/clientpages/clientindex.shtml>.

### *Montana School for Deaf & Blind Children*

406-771-6000 • 800-882-6732 • <http://msdb.mt.gov>

### *Office of Public Instruction (OPI)*

406-444-3095 • 888-231-9393 • <http://www.opi.state.mt.us>

### *Office of Public Instruction (OPI) — Special Education*

888-231-9393 • <http://www.opi.state.mt.us/SpecEd>

### *Office of Public Instruction (OPI) — Early Assistance Program*

406-444-5664 • 888-231-9393 • <http://www.opi.state.mt.us/SpecEd/EAP.html>

### *Office of Public Instruction (OPI) – Parents Page*

<http://www.opi.mt.gov/parents/>

### *State Commissioner of Insurance*

406-444-2040

## National Resources

### *ADA Information*

800-514-0301 (voice) • 800-514-0383 (TTY) • [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov)

### *ARC – Health Insurance Policy*

800-433-5255 • <http://www.thearc.org/NetCommunity/Page.aspx?&pid=429&srcid=217>

### *Disability Rights Laws*

<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/cguide.htm>

### *Equal Employment Opportunity Commission*

EEOC Offices 800-669-4000 (voice) • 800-669-6820 (TTY) • [www.eeoc.gov](http://www.eeoc.gov)

Information on EEOC Enforcement 800-669-3362 (voice) • 800-800-3302 (TTY)

ADA-Related Information 202-663-4395 • 202-663-4399 (TDD) <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm>

### *Federal Communications Commission*

888-225-5322 (voice) • 888-835-5322 (TTY) • [www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro](http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/dro)

### *Job Accommodation Network*

800-526-7234 (voice/TTY) • [www.jan.wvu.edu](http://www.jan.wvu.edu)

### *Montana Yellow Pages for Kids with Disabilities*

<http://www.yellowpagesforkids.com/help/mt.htm>

### *National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities (NICHCY)*

<http://www.nichcy.org>

### *Social Security*

800-772-1213 voice • 800-325-0778 (TTY) • Publications <http://www.ssa.gov> • SSI/SSDI Forms <http://www.ssa.gov/d&s1.htm> • Pass Plan <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/online/ssa-545.html> • Regional Communications Office (Denver) 801-377-5651 ext. 303

### *Regional ADA and IT Technical Assistance Centers*

800-949-4232 (voice/TTY) • [www.adata.org](http://www.adata.org)

### *U.S. Department of Education – Information for Parents*

<http://www.ed.gov/parents>

### *U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services IDEA Information*

202-245-7468 (voice/TTY) • [www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osep](http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osep)

### *U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division (ADA Title II and III)*

800-514-0301 (voice) • 800-514-0383 (TTY) • [www.ada.gov](http://www.ada.gov)

### *U.S. Department of Transportation, Federal Transit Administration, Office of Civil Rights (ADA Title II)*

888-446-4511 (voice/relay) • [www.fta.dot.gov/ada](http://www.fta.dot.gov/ada)





# Montana Parent's Handbook on Transition: *What Happens After High School?*

*"The straightforward information and resources are great." (Parent)*

*"Thanks for the information on Individual Transition Plans—I was stuck and this helped." (Parent)*

*"I appreciated the information on skill-building and self determination. I needed the explanations of the transition process and vocational aptitude testing for a recent meeting, and it really paid off." (Parent)*

The "Montana Parent Handbook on Transition: What Happens After High School?" discusses several topics to help parents of teenagers with special needs to understand the complex educational and societal transition to adult living.

This guide offers resources on skill-building, transition planning, and the importance of parental involvement in the transition process.

PLUK is a Montana nonprofit dedicated to providing training, information, and support to the 20,000 families in Montana who have a child with a disability or special health care need, and the professionals and educators that serve them:

- **Resources** —Special Needs Library (5,000+ volumes including books, DVD/Video, software, curricula) Accessible and Adapted Computer Lab, a variety of PLUK publications and electronic information via email and the PLUK website ([www.pluk.org](http://www.pluk.org))
- **Trainings** —Specific topics ranging from disabilities to medical, educational, financial, and human service issues, other training opportunities to learn parenting, communication, and advocacy skills.
- **Support** —Trained Family Support Consultants offer support and assistance with information, conflict resolution, and essential services. Consultants also provide referrals to other professionals and community support groups.

**PLUK**  
516 N 32nd Street  
Billings MT 59101

800-222-7585  
406-255-0540  
406-255-0523 (fax)  
[www.pluk.org](http://www.pluk.org)  
[plukinfo@pluk.org](mailto:plukinfo@pluk.org)

Rev 4/2008



**PLUK services are available throughout Montana and are free to individuals with special needs and their families.**