



Transition Planning Best Practices

Successful transitions for students with special education needs rely on 4 main factors:

1. Start Early
2. Individualized Goals
3. Partnerships
4. Skill Building

Start Early

Planning for life after high school should begin as early as possible to allow time for exploration, skill development, and practice. Transition planning works best when it is ongoing and adjusted as students grow and their goals become clearer.

Planning conversations should include:

- **Explore the options:** Teach students and families about the different pathways available and provide opportunities to research and ask questions.
- **Try it out:** Give students hands-on opportunities to explore interests and build skills through course selection and school programs such as learning strategies courses, technical education courses, Specialist High Skills Major (SHSM), co-op placements, and dual credit programs.
- **Focus on skill development:** Identify the skills students need to succeed in their chosen pathway. Create a clear plan to build those skills through targeted courses, work experiences, and individualized supports (such as alternative goals outlined in the IEP).

Individualized Goals

Transition goals should be tailored to each student, based on their interests, strengths, and needs. Planning should always include the student and involve their parents or caregivers as active partners.

Effective planning can include:

- **Sharing information early and often:** Provide students and families with details about post-secondary pathways starting in Grades 7 and 8, using multiple formats such as school websites, presentations, webinars, and IEP meetings.



- **Including the student as an active participant in planning:** Include the student in IPRC meetings, as appropriate, and engage them in goal-setting activities that are appropriate for their functional level.
- **Incorporating transition into IEPs:** Use the transition section of the IEP to set goals, document progress, and guide planning for life after high school. Create alternative programs within the IEP to set specific skill-building goals that align with the student’s post-secondary plans, strengths, and challenges.

Partnerships

A key part of a successful transition is helping students understand what to expect and giving them opportunities to explore and practice their next destination. Partnerships with organizations, institutions, companies, and community members allow students to learn about their future pathways before they get there.

- **Community:** Work with local community organizations to support student transitions. Host joint events, invite guest speakers (such as support staff or families with lived experience), and organize tours of programs or facilities students may attend. Make sure transition plans, timelines, and supports align with available community programs and help families connect with these resources.
- **Apprenticeships:** Connect with provincial apprenticeship and skilled trades organizations to access trades fairs, expos, webinars, and training opportunities. Partner locally with tradespeople or companies to provide co-op experiences, apprenticeships, or presentations about career pathways in the trades.
- **Post-Secondary Education:** Beyond connecting with recruitment staff, reach out to Accessibility Services at local colleges and universities. Invite staff to transition fairs, webinars, or meetings so students can learn what supports are available and what to expect when attending post-secondary programs.
- **Workplace:** Build relationships with local employment agencies and share their services with students and families. Partner with local businesses to provide co-op placements or hands-on work experiences, giving students a real understanding of workplace expectations and skills.



Skill Building

No matter which pathway students choose, having the right skills is essential. All students should focus on developing independent living skills, learning and study skills, workplace skills, and any specialized skills needed for their chosen path. Students with special education needs often benefit from explicit teaching and repeated practice, so it's important to start early.

Steps for Skill Building:

- 1. Identify skill gaps:** Work with students, families, and teachers to determine which skills need development. Use the IEP, educational assessments, and evaluations to guide this process.
- 2. Set SMART goals:** Use the alternative plans in the IEP to create clear, measurable goals for skill improvement. Record progress and follow through consistently.
- 3. Teach and practice skills:** Students need direct instruction and opportunities to practice. Use Learning Strategies classes, K-courses, or other school programs to teach essential skills for success.
- 4. Avoid over-accommodating:** Review accommodations regularly. Gradually shift to student-driven strategies, such as using assistive technology or time management tools, to build independence.
- 5. Monitor and update goals:** Check that students are making progress and improving their skills. Update plans as needed to reflect growth and new areas for development.