12

POSTSCHOOL

BRIAN FREEDMAN, PH.D.
University of Delaware

LAURA EISENMAN, PH.D.
University of Delaware

CATHY COWIN

SEAN ROY
Pacer Center

> "Treat people as if they were what they ought to be and you help them become what they are capable of becoming."
>
> **—Goethe**

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this chapter, you will be able to:

1. Identify common challenges faced by students and families during the postschool transition process and strategies for a successful transition.
2. Describe the landscape of adult lives (employment, postsecondary education, and independent living) and available supports.
3. Recognize how to partner with families so that postschool connections can be made.

Educators may be tempted to think of graduation as the ultimate goal for their students, imagining their students crossing the finish line after the long educational race from preschool through high school. However, for most families of students who have disabilities, graduation is just the beginning of a much longer adventure, supporting their children as they travel into adulthood and through many more years of community membership. In fact, **the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** recognizes this lifelong journey as one of the major reasons for providing special education services in the first place. The regulations for IDEA describe the primary purpose of special education services this way:

> ...to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs *and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.* (IDEA, 2006; emphasis added)

With this understanding, educators are considered to have a strong **measure of accountability for the postsecondary outcomes of the students with** disabilities that they serve. Why should educators be concerned about what happens *after* a student leaves school? Is it even possible for educators to have an impact on students' postschool situations? The purpose of this chapter is to share the experiences and challenges faced by students with disabilities and their families after they leave high school as well as share strategies for effectively partnering with families during this time.

POSTSCHOOL OUTCOMES

Concerns for the postschool outcomes of students with disabilities were raised by national longitudinal studies conducted in the 1990s and 2000s (see, for example, Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Newman et al., 2011; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005). These studies documented that, although there was variability within and across disability categories, too few of these students experienced postschool success, and they had significantly poorer outcomes than their peers who did not have disabilities. Not only were students with disabilities graduating at far lower rates than their peers, they also were significantly less likely to be employed, enroll in further education, and live independently. Blackorby and Wagner (1996) noted that 3 to 5 years after leaving school, slightly more than half (57%) of students with disabilities were employed, yet 69% of their peers had found jobs. In regard to postsecondary education, the gap was even larger: only 27% of students with disabilities had experienced any further education, but 68% of their peers had. A similar gap was seen in the area of independent living. Three to 5 years after leaving school, approximately 37% of students with disabilities were living independently, while 60% of their peers were doing so. More recently, Wagner et al. (2005) and Newman et al. (2011) noted that students with disabilities' postschool situations have been improving in some areas, but overall they continue to lag behind their peers. While the percentages of students who graduate high school and enroll in postsecondary education have slowly increased, there is still room for significant improvement, and their rates of employment and independent living continue to be low.

PREDICTORS OF POSTSCHOOL SUCCESS

Research has demonstrated that the foundation for postschool success is strongly related to the educational opportunities and experiences students have before they leave school, including in the earliest years of their education (Haber et al., 2015). Educators can have a strong impact on the postschool outcomes of their students. Table 12.1 shows a variety of school-age factors that have been found to contribute to positive adult outcomes in each of the three major postschool domains. Perhaps not surprisingly, involving families and collaborating with community agencies during the school years are important predictors of adult success for children with disabilities. And, as discussed in the preceding chapter, beginning when students enter their secondary school years, the IDEA includes expectations for how schools will involve families, students, and adult service agencies in the transition planning process as part of IEP development and the delivery of transition services. Especially as students approach their final years of school, educators must work closely with families, students, and community agencies to understand the important legal transitions and role adjustments that will occur.

TABLE 12.1 ■ School-Age Predictors Associated With Positive Postschool Outcomes

Predictors	Outcome Domains		
	Education	Employment	Independent Living
Inclusion in General Education	✔	✔	✔
Paid Employment/Work Experience	✔	✔	✔
Self-Care/Independent Living	✔	✔	✔
Student Support	✔	✔	✔
Career Awareness	✔	✔	
Goal-Setting	✔	✔	
Interagency Collaboration	✔	✔	
Occupational Courses	✔	✔	
Parent Expectations	✔	✔	
Self-Advocacy/Self-Determination	✔	✔	
Social Skills	✔	✔	
Transition Program	✔	✔	
Vocational Education	✔	✔	

Predictors	Outcome Domains		
	Education	Employment	Independent Living
Youth Autonomy/Decision-Making	✔	✔	
Community Experiences		✔	
Exit Exam Requirements/Diploma		✔	
Parent Involvement		✔	
Program of Study		✔	
Travel Skills		✔	
Work Study		✔	

Notes: Adapted from National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT, n.d.).

A checkmark indicates that research has shown a significant connection between a factor and a postschool outcome. An absence of a checkmark does not mean that there is not a relationship; rather, it indicates inconclusive or lack of research in that area.

AGE OF MAJORITY

In most states, when young people have their 18th birthday, they are considered to have reached the "age of majority"; they are no longer minors. Adult students are legally entitled to make their own decisions in many matters where their parents had previously been in charge. This includes being responsible for their educational services decisions if they are still in school. This shift in responsibility is recognized in IDEA 2004, which requires schools to inform families about the approaching change in legal status. Specifically:

- Beginning no later than one year before the child reaches the age of majority under State law, the IEP must include a statement that the child has been informed of the child's rights under Part B of the Act, if any, that will transfer to the child on reaching the age of majority under §300.520.

This means, for example, that an adult student will now receive the annual notice of IEP meetings and act as his or her own representative on the IEP team. Parents will be notified of the meeting and may be *invited* to attend by their adult child, but they are no longer the legal representative of the student on the IEP team. Even with this legal change, most students will continue to need their families' involvement and support, and families will continue to be critical members of transition teams. Educators can facilitate these new decision-making roles by teaching students self-determination skills and coaching families on the types of advocacy that will be helpful to their adult child (Wandry & Pleet, 2009).

Families may have additional questions about the implications of this change in their adult child's legal status and wonder whether guardianship should be considered. Many families struggle with the decision to pursue guardianship. While most families want their youth to live self-directed lives, a small percentage of individuals with disabilities are genuinely vulnerable and may need a family member to make certain decisions on their behalf. Families should be educated on and encouraged to consider different options for shifting or sharing decision-making authority. Full guardianship is the most restrictive approach, because it transfers a person's right to make their own decisions to another person. Obtaining guardianship involves a lengthy legal process that varies from state to state. Guardianship is typically irreversible. Due to the time, expense, and concerns about limiting their young adults' rights, families my not wish to pursue this option. Limited guardianship and power of attorney restrict the shifting of decision-making authority to specific areas of the person's life and power of attorney can be revocable.

In general, it is important to know that helping adults with disabilities make choices for themselves rarely requires an "all or nothing" approach. Some individuals may be able to make informed decisions in one area of their life but require support in another. Likewise, different levels of support can be applied. Supported decision making is a less restrictive approach for those individuals who do require assistance (Blanck & Martinis, 2015). This method involves trusted family, friends, and professionals who assist an individual to understand and express choices by considering the person's unique preferences, providing information in forms that are accessible to the person, and incorporating accommodations and other supports that the person may need to enact a decision. Students who have had opportunities to develop **self-determination skills** during their school years will be better situated to act as informed decision makers in the transition to adulthood.

ENTITLEMENT VERSUS ELIGIBILITY

Another important legal change that occurs as students exit school relates to their eligibility for special services. Throughout their education, students with disabilities are protected from discrimination by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and, importantly, they are entitled to education and related services that are free and individualized to their specific strengths, needs, and interests through the IDEA. However, once students with disabilities leave secondary school and move into postsecondary life, IDEA no longer applies. As adults, they are no longer entitled to special services. Their civil rights to be protected from disability discrimination and receive reasonable accommodation (under the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act) do remain in place, but access to disability-related services will depend upon the state and locality in which they live. Typically, people with disabilities must apply for services through state, county, or regional government agencies such as vocational rehabilitation or developmental disabilities programs. These agencies will determine whether the nature of a person's disability makes them eligible for services based on each agency's particular regulations and funding. Just because a child with a disability was eligible for services under IDEA does not mean that the child will be eligible for services as an adult in the areas of employment, further education, or independent living. For example, a young adult with a significant learning disability would likely not be eligible to receive state-funded adult services that support independent living unless that person was deemed to have an intellectual disability. Even if the student had independent living–related goals on their IEP, they may not qualify as an adult for services that fund the development and maintenance of daily living skills.

UNDERSTANDING CONCERNS, KNOWING OPTIONS, AND CREATING PARTNERSHIPS

Each of the following sections of this chapter will address these issues in more detail. As students **transition** to adult roles, educators must be knowledgeable about the options for students' employment, further education, and independent living. They need to be aware of the kinds of questions and concerns that families may have about the next steps in the postschool journey and must be skilled at creating true partnerships with families in support of their children's transition into adulthood.

Employment

Common Questions From Families

- How can we strengthen my son's/daughter's IEP so skills needed for employment are attained?
- What are the community supports available to help support my youth in employment?
- I have heard the term "supported employment" but do not understand what it is. Does it apply to my youth?
- Should I encourage my youth to disclose his/her disability during a job interview?
- Are employers willing to hire people with disabilities?

CURRENT STATISTICS AND OPTIMISTIC TRENDS

The completion of high school brings about a transition toward employment, with students taking those critical next steps toward establishing a career. While some students will continue into postsecondary education, many students will seek employment immediately following high school. However, successfully finding and maintaining a paid job in an inclusive setting can be challenging for a person with a disability. In fact, the participation rate of people with disabilities in the labor force was estimated at about 20% in 2012 and 2013, compared with 70% of people without disabilities (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

Historically, many people with disabilities were denied the opportunity to become competitively employed despite being capable of success. However, there have been recent policy movements that have strongly encouraged and even mandated that all people with disabilities have the opportunity to work in a competitive environment. One such movement is called Employment First, through which advocates and policy makers have formally identified the importance of people with disabilities finding meaningful employment in an integrated setting (Wehman & Brooke, 2013). Federal **legislation** called the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, passed in 2014, also ensures that all people with disabilities will be given the opportunity to seek competitive employment and requires that states devote more funding than ever before to transition-age youth. The transition to employment should start early, though, to ensure that the student has adequate time to develop an understanding of career options, an awareness of strengths and weaknesses, and the skills necessary to be successful. Collaboration among the student, families, school professionals, and adult service providers can ensure this can happen.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

As a student nears the end of high school, they have likely begun a multistep process of career development, in which they participate in learning experiences designed to help them prepare for employment and other facets of adulthood. Students often begin the career development process in elementary school through the acquisition of work-related dispositions, interests, and habits. This should accelerate during ages 14 to 16 for students with disabilities, coinciding with the mandated inclusion of transition-related goals on their IEP related to the four stages of career development:

- *Career awareness*—learning about career roles and tasks
- *Career exploration*—comparing strengths and weaknesses to a variety of different careers. This process may include job shadowing or volunteer work.

- *Career preparation*—identifying an initial career path and taking steps toward that—for example, beginning an internship or apprenticeship in employment is being pursued post–high school, or AP courses or entrance exams for a postsecondary education program
- *Career assimilation*—shifting fully out of the high school setting and into the postsecondary setting

Through the IEP process, employment goals and appropriate career development activities are identified. One commonly used model for engaging in career development is the Life Centered Education (LCE) Model (Council for Exceptional Children, 2015).

As the student prepares to enter the adult world, multiple federally funded state agencies are available to offer potential support. State vocational rehabilitation (VR) programs offer support and services for people with physical and cognitive disabilities who are interested in finding gainful employment. Each state has a different system for how support is offered through VR, and there may be varying degrees of collaboration between a student's school and their VR case manager. In working with VR, all students will develop an individual plan for employment (IPE) that establishes the student's career goals and the activities necessary to achieve these goals. The IPE is critical, as this plan is used to determine the types of support that VR will offer in pursuit of the activities and goals determined by the student and team.

Students with intellectual/developmental disabilities may also have access to employment support services through additional state agencies. For these students, resources from multiple state agencies can often be used in conjunction to provide more extensive supports to help a person find and maintain their job. Typically, the earlier students are connected to these services, the better the outcome (NTACT, n.d.). However, many families may not fully understand the importance of connecting early on with these agencies, and their support may be needed in order to submit eligibility applications. Furthermore, many families may be so consumed with external stressors that they may have difficulty devoting the necessary time and energy to making these connections to adult agencies independently. School officials can therefore facilitate this process of students and families connecting to these adult agencies (Pleet & Wandry, 2009).

EMPLOYMENT SETTINGS

There are many types of settings in which people with disabilities find employment. The job responsibilities and work environment will depend on the student's goals, interests, strengths, and weaknesses, as well as their level of support need and the services available in their region. The job search process frequently begins in high school and may often be supported by the student's assigned adult service agency case manager(s) if the student has been declared eligible for those services. The following are options for students with disabilities:

- *Day programs and sheltered workshops*—activity centers exclusively for people with disabilities. These typically include recreational activities, makeshift work, prevocational activities, and skill training. Sheltered workshops have come under recent scrutiny and even shut down, as many suggest that they have similar qualities to institutions. While some claim that sheltered workshops serve as a stepping stone for people with disabilities to move into competitive, community-based employment, the research does not back this claim (Cimera, Wehman, West, & Burgess, 2012).
- *Job placement*—Rehabilitation counselors or community-based service providers support people with disabilities through VR in preparing a resume, identifying and applying for jobs, interviewing effectively, and advocating for necessary accommodations. VR counselors or other service staff can then remain involved for a specific period of time, providing job coaching or supporting the creation of natural supports that allow the person to function independently.

- *Internships*—opportunities for genuine work experiences in a business setting for a limited period of time. Internships might be supported by school staff, VR counselors, or others. They provide an opportunity for a person with a disability to learn about different types of jobs and job tasks in that employment setting, the workplace social skills that are necessary for success, and opportunities for networking. These types of early work experiences are one of the strongest predictors of success, particularly for students with significant disabilities (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011).
- *Self-Employment*—Some people with disabilities elect to create their own business, either due to a unique passion or skill or in order to create their preferred employment setting. Vocational rehabilitation agencies typically offer support in creating a business plan and engaging in job tasks that may be too difficult for the individual to handle because of their disability.
- *Supported employment*—This service is typically accessed by people with the most significant support needs with the goal of finding competitive employment. Support is offered for the person to engage in job exploration activities, apply for open positions, and then for on-the-job support on an ongoing basis. Supported employment services usually constitute a joint effort between vocational rehabilitation and developmental disabilities services so that support can be offered beyond the usual timeline allowed by VR.
- *Customized employment*—a process often encompassed within supported employment in which a person and employer agree on a job description that matches the person's strengths and interests, as well as the needs of the employer. The job responsibilities often differ from a standard job description.

The process of identifying career goals and prospective employment opportunities should be led by the student. Students will likely require support to consider their career options and the various positions available in different fields. Some students may have had previous discussions with their families about their career and employment options. Families offer valuable ideas to the discussion about employment options and job prospects. Students may also differ in opinions from their families about the career they hope to pursue. School staff have an important role in facilitating a balance between empowering the student to lead the process of deciding next steps while ensuring that the family's ideas, opinions, and support are nurtured and included.

RIGHTS, ACCOMMODATIONS, AND SELF-DISCLOSURE

People with disabilities are offered civil rights protections through the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which ensures equal opportunities in multiple aspects of a person's life, including employment (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2009). The ADA prevents discrimination against "qualified individuals," defined as a person who can perform the essential functions of a job, with or without reasonable **accommodations**. A reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to a job or work environment that allows a person to perform a job or participate in that organization as all other employees are able to do. It might include creating a physically accessible workspace or documents that offer typed instructions that are otherwise offered verbally. ADA does not automatically require an employer to hire a person with a disability or provide any accommodation requested, but rather it is designed to create a more equal playing field through which people with disabilities can be hired and maintain their jobs. In order to receive employment accommodations, a person must disclose how they are impacted by a disability. This process, though, requires potentially complicated decisions, and many students will benefit from support in making this decision.

Multiple variables factor into a person's decision about whether or not to disclose their disability and request accommodations. People with visible disabilities may be more inclined to disclose early on versus someone with a hidden disability, like attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. Negative past experiences with being identified as disabled may influence disclosure decisions, as well as concerns that others may perceive the person as less capable or competent or that accommodations will be costly or time consuming. Unfortunately, some employers continue to hold negative attitudes about hiring and retaining people with disabilities or have unclear procedures for disclosing and requesting accommodations (Erickson, von Schrader, Bruyere, & VanLooy, 2014). One study discussed the disclosure process with focus groups of people with disabilities (Jans, Kaye, & Jones, 2012). Participants had differing opinions about the timing of disclosure (e.g., before/at interview, before/at start of work), although most agreed that disclosure at some point was important. Overall recommendations that were offered for interviewing for jobs and disclosing information included focusing on abilities, exhibiting enthusiasm and self-confidence, inquiring about the job tasks and work environment early in order to consider potential accommodation needs, and preparing ahead of time about how to handle inappropriate questions.

FEDERAL BENEFITS

Some people with disabilities are eligible to receive federal income support because their disability significantly impacts their ability to maintain full-time employment. This benefit involves a program called Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Eligible students and families go through an application process in which they need to show proof of their disability and financial need. When a student receives SSI, they should not be discouraged from seeking employment either in addition to their SSI or in replacement of their SSI. However, some students and families may be fearful of losing their benefits, as they depend on this income. Students and families should be made aware that (a) students can work while they receive SSI; (b) SSI recipients may be able to receive additional benefits for paying for items that are necessary for work; and (c) some students may be able to keep Medicaid, federal health insurance that is received along with SSI, even while they are working (Brooke, Revell, McDonough, & Green, 2013). Benefits counseling is highly recommended for students who are applying for and receiving SSI so that informed decisions can be made about employment.

COMMON QUESTIONS FROM FAMILIES REGARDING SPECIFIC ISSUES RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT

How Can I Help Build Needed Work Skills and Soft Skills So My Son Can be Successful in Employment?

Employment is a key aspect of a young person's transition to adulthood, and families can play a crucial role in making sure youth have the work skills and soft skills needed to be successful at work. It is important to note that young people with disabilities may function at different levels but should be expected to acquire these skills to the extent they are able.

The term "work skills" refers to abilities in reading, writing, and math, as well as employment-specific skills like communicating, working with others, making decisions, and becoming a lifelong learner (Center for Literacy, Education, and Employment, n.d.). The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD-Youth) authored an info brief titled *Helping Youth Build Work Skills for Job Success: Tips for Parents and Families* (NCWD-Youth, 2012). The brief offers ideas for parents on how they can help youth build work skills through home-based activities. Those ideas include:

- Helping youth identify his or her learning style to find the most effective way they learn and communicate.
- Plan family activities that help youth develop their powers of observation.
- Have youth practice sending thank-you notes for appropriate occasions.
- Bring a job application home, or find one online, and help your youth fill it out.
- Ask your youth to read a book or newspaper article, and then ask them to summarize the key points of what they read.
- Ask your youth to identify a task with multiple steps, such as making a meal, and have them guide you through it.
- Encourage your youth to participate in school- or community-based activities that promote leadership.
- Keep your weekly grocery receipts and ask your youth to make a chart to track spending.
- Help your youth find opportunities to practice working with money.
- Consider what assistive technology is available to help with reading, communicating, and math.
- Make sure your youth's IEP includes goals and activities related to building key work skills.
- Many youth, including youth with disabilities, struggle with displaying appropriate "soft skills" in employment situations. A lack of soft skills can lead to poor work performance, conflict with coworkers, and even losing the job altogether. Soft skills are the nontechnical interpersonal and communication skills we use every day to be successful at work and in the community. They include having a positive attitude, taking directions from others, working well as part of a team, communicating so that others can understand, and being at work on time.

For many adults, building soft skills was something that happened naturally. They may have been acquired through parental expectations such as chores, respectful communication, or an emphasis on work ethic. Many youth with disabilities will gain these skills the exact same way. Here are some ideas on how families can help youth build soft skills that lead to success in employment:

- Find opportunities for youth to practice respectful communications with adults. This may include shaking hands, maintaining eye contact, and answering questions when asked.
- Have a discussion with your youth about the need for employees to take work direction. Point out that employment may mean having to do things you don't want to do but that need to be done if they are part of the job.
- Schedule monthly family meals where everyone dresses in clothes considered "work casual" (slacks, dresses, shirts with buttons, dress shoes, etc.). This helps youth understand that there are times when dressing a certain way is a requirement.
- Assign your youth a chore where they have to take responsibility for getting something done every day or week. This may include unloading the dishwasher, getting themselves up for school, or taking out the trash. Hold the youth accountable for remembering to do their jobs.
- Ask your youth to plan, shop for, and make a family meal once a month. If a youth is not able to do this independently, then work as part of a team to make decisions and prepare the meal.
- Make sure your youth's IEP includes goals and activities related to identified need areas. This could include social functioning or reading social cues, hygiene, clear communication, or completing tasks with accuracy.

My youth has a job goal that I don't think is realistic. How can I help him/her explore something more attainable without compromising the dreams he/she has for herself/himself?

It is not uncommon for youth with or without disabilities to dream of having an extraordinary job. There is nothing wrong with young people wanting to be pro athletes, music stars, or video game designers, but it is problematic if this is the only career interest or if skills are not present that would make attaining that goal reasonable. Parents can find themselves in a tricky situation—not wanting to dash their youth's dreams but wanting to make sure youth are preparing for an employment goal that can be met.

Youth often gravitate toward these grand career interests because they don't have experiences that allow them to recognize the wide array of employment options available. In other cases, youth may be very interested in a certain area (such as sports or video games) and have picked jobs (pro athlete or video game designer) because that is what they have seen. Families can still respect their youth's goals while helping them explore attainable job options within the fields they find interesting. Here are some strategies:

- Help your youth research the actual number of jobs that are available in a given field. For example, there are approximately 450 players on pro basketball rosters at a given time. Discuss that a minute percentage of players actually make it to the pros. Then help them explore other jobs related to basketball, pro sports, sports marketing, athletic training, or working in a sports stadium, just in case they don't become a pro athlete.
- Many states have detailed web sites that offer state-specific labor market statistics and information on career fields and relevant education. Use this information to help your youth explore aspects of the job they are interested in. For example, a youth may see that being a microbiologist requires advanced degrees in college but that a laboratory assistant only needs an AA degree.
- If all else fails, parents can encourage their youth to secure a different job as a means to gain income while the youth is working on their desired career goal. In time, the youth may become interested in other careers or continue to work toward their dream job, which is OK too.

How Can I Use My Own Networks to Find Work Experience Opportunities for My Youth?

Networking is often described as a powerful tool for getting a job. The common saying is that "who you know" is more important than "what you know." Unfortunately, youth may not have the social connections to take advantage of the power of networking. Families can assist by accessing their own personal networks to find potential career exploration activities, work experience opportunities, or job leads for youth.

Some may see their "network" as a formal group made up of professional contacts. This is only partly true. A person's personal network can also include family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, members of a church, or owners of businesses you frequent. Families are encouraged to use these valuable contacts to cultivate possible work opportunities for their youth. Once potential network partners are identified, they should then be connected to the student's support team and included as part of the student's career plan. Examples might include:

- Asking a neighbor who works at the airport to speak with a youth about the range of jobs found there.
- Asking members of your book club if anybody knows a veterinarian that your daughter can conduct an informational interview with.
- Asking your brother, who works in retail, if he is aware of any job openings at his stores.
- Checking your church bulletin for possible volunteer opportunities to add to a resume.
- Having discussions with other parents to see if anybody has contacts at a manufacturing plant for a youth who wants to know more about welding.

STRATEGIES FOR PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

Consider the following methods for partnering with families in supporting a student in finding postschool employment:

- Have honest discussions with the parents/student about the student's strengths, challenges, how current skills transfer to potential careers, and future supports.
- Listen to the family's input on the student's strengths and future job prospects, as they may have awareness of strengths and experiences that are unknown to school staff or ideas for jobs that had not been considered.
- Encourage family/students to provide additional information to the team (school/agency) that will help promote better employment outcomes, such as connections in the business community or other networking opportunities.
- Incorporate the additional information shared by parents/students into the IEP.
- Facilitate the relationship among the student, families, and state agencies (e.g., vocational rehabilitation). Be open to supporting families who may be reluctant or take longer to connect.
- Adhere to confidentiality requirements (e.g., explaining release of information forms) in order to promote trust with families. Ensure parent/student is fully informed about what information will be released to agencies.
- If needed, help facilitate completion of applications for state agency support. That may include helping the parent/student answer questions and obtain paperwork.
- Help the parent/student understand all options available for employment support, for example, by offering a workshop or provider fair in which different agencies present.

CASE STUDY 1

PARTNERING TO SUPPORT SUCCESS IN EMPLOYMENT

Ben is preparing to graduate from high school with a diploma. He has multiple learning disabilities (dyslexia and dysgraphia) that were first identified in elementary school. Ben has worked very hard to maintain a C average, and he describes school as "really hard." He really enjoys baseball but had to leave his high school varsity team in order to focus on his studies. Ben still has dreams of playing professionally. He also has an intuitive understanding of how to put things together, from cars to electronics. Ben is popular and is considered the kind of person that can get along well with various groups of people. Ben is looking forward to finishing high school and expresses no interest in going to college.

Ben's family is considered middle class. His mother is an administrative assistant in a law office, and his father has a manufacturing job at a factory in a neighboring town. Ben also has an older brother who is excelling at the state university. Over the course of his schooling, Ben's parents have had both positive and negative experiences with his IEP teams.

Ben's school team has conducted career assessments with Ben and helped him see how his strengths might be applied to a variety of jobs. The school also helped him set up an internship at an auto body shop this past year. This was a positive experience for him, although Ben remains unclear about his future career goals. When Ben's family was asked about their thoughts on Ben's future employment and career, they pointed out that he had successfully earned money the past several summers by mowing neighbors' lawns and doing yard work and that he had

(Continued)

CASE STUDY 1 (Continued)

developed a strong customer base. Ben acknowledged that he really enjoys this work but did not think that he could find a "regular" job doing that. Ben's school team also learns from his family that they are strongly connected to the Lutheran church and that Ben is well liked there. Ben's family understands that school has been challenging for him, although they are still hoping he will go to college in order to maximize his future opportunities. The school team does not dismiss this suggestion and instead facilitates a discussion with Ben and his family about the options for Ben pursuing postsecondary education or training. They discover that Ben is unaware of postsecondary training options in the fields that he is interested in, although he remains unsure of whether he wants to continue education and training beyond high school.

Over the past few years, his school team has helped Ben take charge of his IEP process. He is able to communicate his strengths and weaknesses well. Ben's family is also supportive of him playing a lead role in the decision-making process, although they are also nervous about him making decisions for himself that are not informed. Ben's school team helps him get connected to vocational rehabilitation (VR). Before doing so, they ensure that Ben and his family are educated on the types of supports that VR can offer, and they discuss the role that Ben and his parents will play in working with VR. The school team participates in the initial meetings with VR in order to contribute information about Ben's goals, school experiences, and previous career exploration activities. Together, Ben's new team creates his individual plan for employment (IPE). Prior to the meeting, Ben's family helped him think about how he wanted to advocate for himself, including by requesting help developing a resume, identifying internships, and continuing with the assistive technology that has helped him in school. Ben's parents also share with VR that they are hopeful that Ben will at some point pursue postsecondary education. The newly expanded team creates a plan that includes a variety of options for Ben to pursue.

Questions to Consider

1. How did Ben's school team create a partnership with his family?
2. What information was provided by the family that the team did not otherwise have?
3. How did the school team promote Ben's self-determination while respecting and valuing input from his family?
4. What supports might Ben and his family need as he pursues his plan?

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Common Questions From Families

- How can we strengthen my son/daughter's IEP so skills needed for postsecondary education are attained?
- What are the main ways college differs from high school?
- What can my son or daughter expect from the college in terms of academic accommodations?
- What other supports can students with disabilities access through the college?
- What assistive technology is available to help my youth be a success in college?
- What will the college disability services office require in terms of documentation of the disability?
- Can my child with an intellectual disability go to college?
- What are the options for my child with a disability to pay for postsecondary education?

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION OPTIONS

Families and students with disabilities may not see college as an option because of struggles they experienced in school or their beliefs about what "college" is and who it is for. The reality is that postsecondary education comes in many forms to fulfill the many different educational needs of adults across the lifespan. For example:

- Four-year colleges or universities that typically require students to meet particular academic standards for admission and offer bachelor's and graduate degrees
- Community colleges that may have open admissions policies and offer shorter-term technical certificates and 2-year associate's and other degrees
- Disability-specific degree-granting institutions (e.g., Landmark College) or certificate programs housed within institutions of higher education
- Career (vocational) technical schools that provide training and certification in specific trades
- Adult education programs that support attainment of literacy and other basic academic skills (e.g., GED programs)
- Lifelong learning programs that engage people in courses related to their personal interests

Not everyone needs or wants to go to college. Many people, with or without disabilities, move directly from high school into employment. However, there is no reason that people with disabilities should not have the same opportunities as their peers to continue their learning after high school as they pursue their academic, career, and social-recreational goals. Increasing numbers of youth with disabilities of all types are choosing to enroll in postsecondary education (Newman et al., 2011). In fact, when the Higher Education Opportunity Act was reauthorized in 2008, it created new opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities—a group that has had extremely limited postsecondary education options. The act created model demonstration programs in universities and community colleges for students whether or not they had a high school diploma. The act also created access to federal financial aid for students with intellectual disabilities enrolled in federally approved comprehensive transition and postsecondary (CTP) programs in institutions of higher education (Federal Student Aid, 2015). The main point is that postsecondary education is not a one-size-fits-all situation. Supporting students with disabilities to access postsecondary education requires helping families and students think about how to create a good match with the person's educational goals and the types of supports the person will need in college or other adult education settings.

FROM ENTITLEMENT TO ELIGIBILITY

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, an important part of planning for the transition to new adult roles is to be aware that the IDEA no longer applies once a student exits high school. The emphasis in postsecondary education will be on equal access and reasonable accommodation under the ADA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. One major consequence of this critical legal transition is that students are now responsible to *self-identify* as a person with a disability if they want to receive accommodations. Once accepted into a postsecondary education institution, students must actively seek out the institution's disability services office and request services. Many students are reluctant or uncomfortable with this process due to fear of being viewed negatively because of their disability. Unfortunately, too many wait until they are struggling or even failing before meeting with someone in the disability office (Getzel & Webb, 2012). Other students who were not previously identified as disabled or who may not be sure what kinds of accommodations they need also may be unsure about presenting themselves to the disability office. In general, it is better to arrange an initial meeting as early as possible to discuss students' concerns and possible accommodation or service needs.

Another important consequence of the legal transition is that *eligibility* for disability support services must be established with the institution (AHEAD, 2012). Just because a student had an IEP in high school does not mean he or she will be automatically eligible for disability services in college. Conversely, a student who was not eligible for special education during high school could be determined eligible for accommodations in college. In some institutions, students must make a case for their eligibility for disability services by providing a current diagnostic evaluation report (usually not more than 3 years old) from a licensed, appropriately credentialed professional. This is especially important for students with less visible disabilities such as learning disabilities or attention disorders. A recent *comprehensive* psychological-educational evaluation from a school psychologist completed within the last 3 years of high school may be acceptable. If an institution requires a current diagnostic evaluation, the student is responsible for assembling the necessary documentation, even if that means getting a new evaluation at his/her own expense, and then working with the disability office to determine eligibility for accommodations.

ACCOMMODATIONS

In line with these changes, which **accommodations** will be deemed reasonable must be negotiated based on the nature of the impairment, the demands of the specific academic setting, and the standards of the education program. There are no IEPs in college! When meeting with the disability office, the student must be prepared to act in a self-determined manner. They need to be able to describe the nature of their disability and express their educational goals, strengths, and weaknesses. They need to be able to explain what accommodations have worked for them and why and be ready to do some problem solving about their support needs in postsecondary environments, including options for **assistive technology** (AT). As needed, educators should support students in thinking about how AT may have been helpful for them in high school, refer students for AT evaluations, and encourage students and families to explore what is available. Common examples of accommodations available in postsecondary education institutions include:

- exam accommodations (e.g., quiet setting, extra time)
- alternate-format books and materials
- notetakers, readers, and scribes
- assistive technology and software
- interpreter services/Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART)
- reduced course load
- faculty notifications and consultation
- accessible classroom locations
- accessible on-campus transportation

It is important to be aware that personal devices (e.g., hearing aids, communication systems) and personal assistants (e.g., aides for daily living activities) are not the responsibility of the institution. Some institutions may offer—for free or for a fee — additional support services that go beyond what is required under ADA. Examples of these include:

- individual or small-group tutoring
- academic coaching
- life skills coaching
- disability-focused social support groups

SOCIAL LIFE AND CAMPUS PARTICIPATION

Families and students also need to consider that social life is often a big part of the postsecondary education picture, especially in 4-year and residential college settings. Students and families need to think about the type of social environment a student prefers, the impact of disability-related factors such as fatigue or stress, and how to stay connected to support systems (e.g., family and friends). Likewise, on-campus living can offer a supportive, transitional experience to independent living. It can also raise a host of new challenges related to self-management and social interactions. Students and families need to consider transportation and location, need for personal assistants, single room versus roommates, and managing community living.

Families may be surprised to learn that privacy regulations restrict their access to information about their children's activities and performance in postsecondary education. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Acts (FERPA), adult students must give formal consent for other people, including family members, to access their educational information. Therefore, families and adult students should discuss the support or advocacy roles family members will play during the college years and consider what kinds of communication systems and information access should be put into place to support those activities.

FINANCIAL FACTORS

Finances also will be an important consideration. Who will pay for tuition, books and supplies, room and board, transportation, and daily living needs? Similar to other students, students with disabilities will need to use personal and family resources such as savings, loans, federal financial aid, and scholarships to help pay for postsecondary education expenses. However, students with disabilities may have access to other sources of financial support (Health Resource Center, 2014). For example, state vocational rehabilitation agencies will sometimes pay for certain postsecondary education expenses if a student's program of study is part of a career plan developed with the agency. Students with disabilities who are eligible for other government benefits such as SSI should consult with their local social security office to determine how to maintain their benefits when receiving scholarships or participating in work-study arrangements that may affect their monthly income and total assets.

Common Questions From Families Regarding Specific Issues Related to Postsecondary Education

As a Parent, How Can I Best Support My Child to be Successful Academically and Socially in College?

College is traditionally a time when students explore living independently, gain lifelong friends and social networks, and take responsibility for their education and career choices. In the past, college students were seen as independent of their parents, but that perception is changing. We now understand that youth are often interdependent—learning how to live on their own while still being connected to their families.

Parents of youth with disabilities are often used to playing the role of advocate and coordinator while their student is in high school. Once the student reaches postsecondary education, the role of family changes from coordinator to support person and mentor. Colleges generally want their main relationship to be with the student, and this is preferable since it helps build independence and self-determination skills. However, parents can still support their youth's academic success and social connections in college. Here are some ideas.

- Many colleges have parent/family programs designed to inform parents about how college works and how they play a role in student success. Check to see if the college your student is choosing has one of these programs. Visit the Association of Higher Education Parent/Family Program Professionals (www.aheppp.org) for more information.
- Encourage your youth to disclose their disability to the college's disability support office before they begin their coursework so the appropriate academic accommodations can be secured. Many youth with disabilities choose not to do this, thinking they can get by on their own. Academic performance can be severely impacted if the right accommodations are not in place.
- If your youth is still in high school, and you anticipate possible issues with social functioning, consider asking the IEP team how that can be addressed. Supports like social coaching can be effective and may be offered by community-based employment agencies.
- Check in often with your youth to make sure academic and social issues aren't present. Many families may be hesitant to do this, but an open line of communication can allow parents to identify problems before they get out of hand.
- Strongly encourage your student to get involved in campus clubs, intermural sports, or arts activities. College is often a place where it is easy to find somebody who shares similar interests. However, connections cannot be made if the student becomes isolated from his or her peers.

Will the College Notify Me If My Son or Daughter Experiences Academic Problems or Mental Health Issues?

As a general rule, college students are their own legal guardians and considered adults in the eyes of a college. Therefore, it is not common practice for colleges to notify parents about academic problems or emerging mental health issues. Some families may find this frustrating, maybe because they have always had a role in monitoring academic performance or because they have valid concerns about their youth's mental health. There are good reasons to protect students' privacy and workable strategies parents can use to help support students' academics and mental wellness.

As mentioned earlier, the Family Educational Rights Act (FERPA) of 1974 protects the rights of students and limits who has access to educational records. For parents of college students, this law limits what colleges can share about academic performance. However, FERPA is often misinterpreted as meaning that colleges cannot share any personal or academic information with parents under any circumstances. This is not true. For example, FERPA allows parents to have access to education records if the student signs a release form or if the student is still claimed as a dependent on the parent's taxes. FERPA should be seen as a good opportunity for parents to work together with their college student to establish communication and accountability around academic performance.

Parents who have youth with mental health issues should seek to establish a plan of action before the student enrolls in a given college. To begin with, this means helping the student understand the value in disclosing the disability and choosing a college that has the appropriate counseling supports in place. The Jed Foundation (2015; www.jedfoundation.org) suggests the following strategies for parents to protect a student's mental health in college:

- Keep the lines of communication open with your child so they feel comfortable letting you know if they are having issues.
- Understand under what circumstances a college will notify you regarding a mental health issue. This should be done prior to enrolling a student.
- Understand what mental health services are available at the college, especially if the student has an existing disorder.
- Be honest on the college medical history form about your youth's current or past mental health issues.

- Identify if your youth is eligible for support through the college's disability services office.
- Transfer care and records to the college counseling center or local mental health provider.

STRATEGIES FOR PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

- Understand the family's perspective, values, and expectations related to postsecondary education in order to incorporate these into team discussions.
- Provide support for parents/student in the application process for colleges, federal financial aid, and other available forms of financial support.
- Connect the parent/student with outside agencies (such as vocational rehabilitation) that may provide support for postsecondary education.
- Provide the student with a summary of performance (SOP) as required by federal law. The IEP, psychoeducational evaluation, academic achievements, and accommodations will help the student when applying for college and disclosing a disability.
- Work with the student and family to help them learn how to explain the impact of the student's disability in academic settings and the kinds of accommodations that are helpful.

CASE STUDY 2

PARTNERING TO SUPPORT SUCCESS IN POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Zoe wanted to attend the local community college to pursue her goal of becoming a dental assistant. Because this was Zoe's last IEP meeting before high school graduation, Ms. Kelly, the special education team leader, made a point to carefully review and discuss the transition plan components of the IEP. Zoe had done a fine job during the early part of the IEP meeting of explaining her academic strengths and why she needed certain accommodations for reading and writing tasks. Zoe's mother, Mrs. Hernandez, had confirmed that the family had completed the free application for federal student aid (FAFSA) and that Zoe had completed the college application during the school's recent College Night event. Ms. Kelly reminded Zoe and Mrs. Hernandez to save copies of the educational evaluation report that had been completed the previous year by the school psychologist. Zoe might need to give a copy to the college as a way to document her learning disability. Mrs. Hernandez looked puzzled at this and asked whether the IEP would be better to show them. Plus, she was not sure they had a copy. Ms. Kelly promised to give them a copy before they left along with a summary of performance and explained that the IEP would no longer be in effect. The college would make its own determination of Zoe's eligibility for disability accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). She explained that many colleges make that determination based on professional disability evaluations and the student's own explanation of her accommodation needs. She encouraged Zoe and Mrs. Hernandez to contact the disability services office at the community college to confirm what documentation they would prefer. She recommended that they also request a meeting with a disability services counselor at the college to learn more about the steps Zoe would need to take for requesting accommodations. This reminded Ms. Kelly that she also wanted to refer Zoe for an assistive technology consultation so that she could explore some alternative technologies that might be useful for her in college. The school had supplied Zoe with a laptop that had many accessibility features, but the laptop would remain at the

(Continued)

CASE STUDY 2 (Continued)

school. It would be important for the family to explore whether they should invest in a similar laptop for use in college or consider some other options, like a "smart" pen.

Questions to Consider

1. What partnership opportunities did Ms. Kelly and the school help create?
2. What other opportunities could have been discussed as part of the IEP process?
3. How might other teachers partner with the family to support Zoe's success in college?

INDEPENDENT AND INTERDEPENDENT LIVING

Common Questions From Families

- What supports are available in school to help them prepare for independent living?
- What are the common housing options for people with disabilities?
- What is the role of Social Security benefits programs in my youth's ability to live independently?
- How can my adult child participate as part of the community?
- My child will not be able to drive. What community supports are available to help provide transportation after he graduates?

People with disabilities can live successful lives of their choosing and be participating members of their communities. Depending on how they are impacted by disability, some students may need to learn particular skills in order to promote their independence and perhaps require support in conducting daily living skills. Direct instruction is often necessary to teach students self-determination skills, how to self-advocate, and to improve daily living skills, and while some of these skills might be learned during high school, for many students with disabilities, the learning will continue beyond high school and with their families and postschool support team.

DEVELOPMENT OF LIFE SKILLS

Life skill instruction in high school needs to be individualized according to the student's IEP and is not typically a part of the academic curriculum (Test, Richter, & Walker, 2012). Test et al. (2009) examined the literature and identified several life skills that could be taught using evidence-based practices. As seen in Table 12.2, Life skills instruction includes not only practical skills of daily living such as banking, home maintenance, and cooking, but also "soft" skills such as self-advocacy and negotiation, which are critical across postschool settings and significantly improve a student's likelihood for success. Life skills can be taught in a variety of environments, including the classroom or through computer-based instruction or community-based instruction (Test, Richter, & Walker, 2012). Professionals or family members may be hesitant to allow the person to pursue a particular skill or test it out (e.g., taking a public bus). However, if the skill is important *for* the student and *to* the student, members of the support team should consider allowing the student to pursue attaining the skill with individualized instruction and supports. In some cases, the student may be able to learn a skill that others thought would be too difficult. Even if the skill is not attained as planned or to the desired level, the experience represents a very important learning opportunity for the student and team to evaluate the types of instruction and supports the student will need in the future and to consider alternative skill sets that would be useful for the student. Given the nature of these skills, they represent another opportunity to partner with family members so that the student can be developing these skills across environments. Lesson plans and more information about evidence-based practices are available for free to the public from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (see http://transitionta.org/evidencepractices).

SUPPORT FROM STATE AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT

As the end of high school approaches, students and families should be supported in getting connected to state services that can support people with disabilities during adulthood. Students with more significant disabilities may have access to services available through their state developmental disabilities (DD) services agency or their state aging and disability (AD) agency. The type of support a student receives could vary greatly from state to state. As part of this connection to adult services, students may be declared eligible to receive Medicaid, a federal program that provides supports for health care and other aspects of daily living. If the student was previously eligible for Medicaid as a child, they must be reevaluated for eligibility as an adult, usually when they turn 18 years of age. The connection to these services should be made as early as possible in order to facilitate a smooth transition as the student departs high school and leaves the IDEA system. As mentioned previously, the adult service system is quite different than IDEA, as the student, with the support of family, is expected to apply for services (and is not necessarily sought after by the agency), identify their own goals and support needs, and advocate for themselves when they desire change in services. In general, states do not have the same level of obligation for ensuring that comprehensive services are provided.

People with disabilities who have Medicaid often receive therapeutic and support services in their own home and community. Historically, these individuals have been institutionalized, isolated from society and segregated in order to receive necessary services. However, recent changes to the Home & Community-Based Services (HCBS) regulations, the rules which determine how Medicaid services are delivered, create new assurances that people with disabilities receiving Medicaid will have greater access to community-based services and activities of their choosing (Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services, 2014). Adult services provided through Medicaid funding are now required to be guided by a person-centered plan, through which the person is supported in identifying desired outcomes and supports needed to achieve those outcomes. Furthermore, the HCBS regulations are designed to ensure that Medicaid-funded community-based residential services (services provided to a person in their home instead of an institution) occur in a community setting that does not isolate the person and is a setting that offers privacy, dignity, and respect to the individual. Medicaid also funds institutional residential services, but less restrictive environments with individualized supports that meet the needs of the person should be considered first. The choice of residential options is important for young adults who desire to move out of their family home or for families who are having difficulty providing needed supports in the home.

TYPES OF RESIDENCES

Upon completion of high school, many young adults begin to think about and make preparations to leave their family's home, living either independently or in a shared or supported living situation. The decision about whether a young adult with a disability moves out is again a very personal one made by the young adult and their family and is usually based on multiple factors. For some, the decision to move out may be a natural next step because the young adult and family feel ready, or perhaps the student is going away to college. For others, the young adult and family may believe that the individual does not have the skills to live independently or the appropriate support may not be available. For individuals with more significant support needs, like intellectual and developmental disabilities, there are a variety of housing options available (Larson, Salmi, Smith, Anderson, & Hewitt, 2013):

- *Congregant settings*—a residence that is owned, rented or managed by an adult services provider for the purpose of providing housing for people with significant cognitive disabilities. These residences typically offer instruction, supervision, and other forms of support. These settings include intermediate care facilities (ICF) and group homes.
- *Host family/foster care*—a home that is owned or rented by an individual or family who provide support and care for an unrelated person with a significant disability.
- *Own home*—a home owned or rented by one or more people with disabilities where instruction, supervision, personal assistance, and other support is provided as needed. "Supported living" can be offered in these settings and refers to services and supports that are provided by a provider who comes into the person's home.
- *Family Home*—a home owned or rented by a family member in which the person with the disability resides and in which the individual receives paid care, instruction, supervision, or other support from persons other than family members and/or from family members who are paid.

In 2011, according to a national study, the vast majority of adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities lived at home (57.8%), while a smaller percentage lived in congregate settings (26.5%), and even fewer adults lived in their own home (11.6%) or with a host family (4.1%) (Larson, Salmi, Smith, Anderson, & Hewitt, 2013).

The type of residence a person lives in does seem to be correlated with other facets of their life. Individuals who live in their own home tend to experience greater independence and self-determination and have greater participation in their community. Ticha, Hewitt, Nord, and Larson (2013) found that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who owned or rented their own home (versus living with their family or in a group home) were more self-determined in decision making, including decisions about how their funds were spent. Kim and Dymond (2012) found that individuals with significant disabilities receiving supported living supports were more independent in domestic and safety skills and participated more meaningfully in their communities than individuals in group homes. In this study, however, most individuals—regardless of living situation—participated only minimally in their communities, suggesting the importance of equipping students with skills and connections they need to fully participate in their communities as adults.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

The development of connections to the community, including social relationships and recreational activities, is critical for maintaining a strong quality of life (Amado, Stancliffe, McCarron, & McCallion, 2013). Developing personal and social relationships has also been characterized as the most important transition goal (Halpern, 1994). For some young adults with disabilities, this may come naturally due to well-developed relationships in high school or a continuation of involvement in activities from high school to postschool. However, for many others, it will require some focus on developing the relationships and daily activities that will allow the person to benefit the most and remain connected to their community.

During their postschool years, many students with disabilities report that they remained connected to their high school peers (Newman et al., 2001). These interactions were both face to face and through electronic communication and remained fairly steady from 1 to 8 years post–high school. The level of interaction ranged according to type of disability, as more than 80% of young adults with learning disabilities and speech impairments reported seeing friends weekly, whereas about 50% of students with intellectual disabilities reported seeing friends on a weekly basis. Community participation was much more limited across groups, though, as 50% of all young adults with disabilities reported engaging in at least one community activity (e.g., volunteer activity, community group) during the year.

Families often provide significant social support for students with disabilities during school and are a source for connecting with the community through family outings or family membership (e.g., in religious organizations). Many adults continue to rely on family members' support postschool, which would also seem natural given the high rate at which many people with disabilities, particularly adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, continue to live with their families (Larson, Salmi, Smith, Anderson, & Hewitt, 2013). However, people with intellectual and psychiatric disabilities may have less support available over time, as their parents age, siblings move away, and they are less likely to have spouses, partners, and children (Widmer, Kempf-Constantin, Robert-Tissot, Lanzi, & Carminati, 2008). In fact, family and paid staff often represent the majority of social networks for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities (Amado, Stancliffe, McCarron, & McCallion, 2013). This can be quite limiting over the course of time, and without more proactive action, young adults with intellectual disabilities may have few people with whom to engage in reciprocal and meaningful social relationships.

Social networks can serve as important tools for developing and maintaining social relationships and social support beyond high school. Social networks represent the numerous relationships that form connections within groups and between different groups. These connections are important for people with disabilities in order to form an effective support system, connect with those who share similar interests, identify potential mentors; and facilitate connections to additional outlets for social and recreational activities (Eisenman & Celestin, 2012).

Steps should be taken before the completion of high school to examine and develop a student's social network in order to maximize opportunities in the community for social interaction and participation. Students should be encouraged to participate in extracurricular activities during school, as this will help provide the basis for relationships that can perhaps continue postschool. Given the nature of community participation, activities should not be limited to the school setting, and IEP goals and activities should include the child's school team as well as families and perhaps other community members. The planning process should start with an examination of those activities that the student enjoys and wants to continue postschool. The process should also include identification of existing and desired relationships and a discussion of whether those peers are connected to activities that the young adult would like to join (Eisenman & Celestin, 2012). This process lends itself well to both the IEP as well as the person-centered planning process that was mentioned earlier as the driver of adult services. Therefore, finding opportunities to have the information shared across these two processes might represent an important model for the student and members of the multidisciplinary team in order to further promote a steady transition process into postschool life.

In order for individuals with disabilities to access various activities (e.g., employment, community participation), transportation will need to be considered. There are multiple transportation options, and each requires some planning and consideration of the individual's strengths, weaknesses, personal choice, and knowledge of the local transportation system to determine whether it should be accessed. Newman et al. (2011) reported that 78% of young adults with disabilities postschool had either a driver's license or learner's permit. Many adults with disabilities utilize the public transportation system (e.g., bus, train). While these are technically required to be accessible to all people according to the Americans with Disabilities Act, some buses do not maintain their accessible equipment and many train stations are still inaccessible (National Council on Disability, 2005). People with disabilities who cannot utilize a fixed-route transportation system with accommodations (e.g., due to their physical or cognitive disability or lack of access to accessible fixed-route systems) can apply to use the paratransit bus system. Paratransit buses are specifically designed for people with disabilities and offer door-to-door service at least within ¾ of a mile from a fixed-route bus stop. Unfortunately, the paratransit bus system has its own challenges. Riders frequently report trip denials or significantly late arrivals, which impact their ability to participate in daily activities (e.g., employment, doctor's appointments).

Transportation training is important for ensuring that the person is able to access the preferred method of transportation and access their postschool activities. This might include an adapted driver's education class, individualized instruction and practice on how to use a fixed-route bus or train system, or developing independence in scheduling and riding a paratransit bus. This is another activity that is beneficial to begin while the student is still in high school in order to promote a more seamless transition postschool, and the nature of the activity suggests an important partnership with family and future adult service providers.

Common Questions From Families Regarding Specific Issues Related to Independent and Interdependent Living

How Can I Help My Child Increase Their Self-Advocacy Skills?

One of the true measures of an independent adult is the ability to understand what your strengths and needs are and to be able to communicate those needs to others so you can get what you need. This **self-advocacy** is a vital part of the transition process for youth with disabilities. Not all youth have the skills to speak up for themselves effectively. Here are some tips for parents to help build self-advocacy skills in youth:

- *Help youth understand their disability*—Many youth with disabilities are unaware of what their disability is and how it impacts them in key areas. This can lead to youth struggling for reasons they don't understand or failing to seek useful accommodations and supports. Parents can work with the IEP team to help youth understand what their disability is and how it impacts them in learning, working, independent living, and social situations.
- *Have students lead their IEP meetings*—Regular meetings of a student's IEP team tend to be adult dominated and not youth friendly. This is unfortunate, because the meeting is for the student to help plan for education success and, ultimately, transition to the community. Parents and educators can gradually get youth more involved in their own IEP meetings, eventually having youth lead them as they near graduation.
- *Practice communicating needs*—Asking for help takes a set of skills not all youth have. It's also not something everyone is comfortable doing. Youth should be given safe opportunities to practice communicating their needs to others, for example, with trusted teachers or internship supervisors or in IEP meetings.

What Can I Do to Make Sure My Youth Has Social and Recreational Opportunities Once She Graduates?

Families of youth with disabilities want what is best for their youth transitioning to adulthood. To many families, having friends and being connected to a community are equally as important as having their youth find employment. Unfortunately, many youth with disabilities experience isolation and a disconnectedness to the outside world once they leave high school. Families can ensure that their youth have social connections and recreational opportunities, but it is important to start early. Here are some ideas for what families can do:

- Many of us forge social connections and friendships through employment. Families should support youth in finding work not only because of the income it brings but also for the structure and social benefits employment can provide.
- Many communities have social recreational opportunities operated out of community education or a community-based organization. Some may be specific to people with disabilities, and some may be for the general public. Offerings may include classes on a topic of interest, dances, sports leagues, or community outings.
- Some youth who have difficulty establishing social connections benefit from friendship clubs created for people with disabilities. These clubs or organizations are often established by parents as a way for disconnected young adults to socialize with one another. Consult your local parent training and information center or advocacy organization for more information.
- For youth who are still in high school, identifying possible social and recreational opportunities is an excellent activity for the IEP. Ask youth to research options in their community and report back during the IEP meeting. Schedule visits or interviews with the ones that look promising as subsequent activities.
- Volunteering and service learning in the community is another way for youth to make social connections. Consider participating with your youth in a food drive, home-building project, or community cleanup. This may instill an obligation to serve and give opportunities to meet a variety of people.

My Youth Has Complicated Health Care Needs. What Unique Transition Considerations Should I be Aware of?

Youth with special health care needs may have a unique set of challenges as they envision independent lives for themselves. Postschool transition will often impact three major areas: transition from pediatric health care to adult providers, transition from high school to postsecondary education or employment, and transition from home to more independence in the community (PACER, 2015).

Many families find it particularly difficult to help their youth move from the pediatric to the adult health care system. There tends to be a comfort level built up over years of seeing the same doctor, and finding a new specialist in the adult system that knows the disability can be a challenge. Parents are encouraged to start this transition process early and to address such aspects as their youth's ability to manage their own health care, health care financing (insurance, the Affordable Care Act, Social Security programs), transferring care, and understanding how adult care will differ from the pediatric world.

Youth with special health care needs may have access to transition planning options in high school, either by virtue of qualifying for special education or by having an individualized accommodation plan (i.e., a "504 plan"). This structured process is the perfect time for youth to work on understanding the impact of their health condition on learning, working, and living in the community and how to build skills needed to function in those areas. Possible areas of focus on the IEP for a youth with special health care needs might include communication skills (including disclosing the disability if necessary), assistive technology, researching transportation options, building work skills and soft skills, understanding possible supports in postsecondary education, medication management (can be a goal on the IEP), and financial literacy.

Youth with unique health challenges may also have special considerations when planning on living independently in the community. A key area may be accessing needed services and supports so they can live on their own. Related to that is the issue of accessible housing if necessary and planning for where to live and setting up needed support systems. In addition, youth sometimes require home health staff or personal care attendants (PCA), which comes with a responsibility for managing those services. Transportation can be a significant challenge, especially for people that require assistance in rural areas. Finally, parents should help youth plan to make their own decisions once they turn 18 or explore options to support them in doing so.

How Can I Make an Informed Decision About Whether to Pursue Guardianship for My Son or Daughter?

Many families seek guardianship over their son or daughter with a significant disability without fully researching alternatives. This has led to many people with disabilities losing the ability to make decisions about their own lives. Guardianship should only be sought if a person is deemed incapacitated, unable to make important decisions for themselves, and perceived to be a personal or financial risk to themselves (Vining, 2012). The main question for families to consider is what the issue is that the disability raises and what can be done to address that specific issue. Many times, guardianship is an overly restrictive response to a problem that could be handled through different supports or planning.

However, there are times when the impact of the disability is such that a person cannot make their own financial, medical, or independent living choices. Parents are encouraged to consider all alternatives and only choose guardianship when other options are inappropriate. For example, there is a growing movement toward "supported decision making," mentioned earlier in the chapter, in which people with disabilities rely on trusted families and friends to help them understand situations and choices so they can make their own decisions.

Families must become aware of their state's laws and available options, as these may vary from state to state. Common alternatives to guardianship include: power of attorney, trusts, representative payee, conservatorship, living wills, and county case management.

STRATEGIES FOR PARTNERING WITH FAMILIES

- Listen to parents/student expectations, concerns, and fears about their child living independently.
- Link the parent and student to the appropriate person/organization who can answer questions about such matters as Social Security, special needs trusts, independent living supports, guardianship, and so forth.
- Help the parent to process their concerns and decisions that need to be made. Be mindful not to interject opinion. Respect the values of families.
- Encourage parents to allow their child to make decisions and to have opportunities to act independently.
- Help parents complete necessary paperwork to apply for supports through state and government agencies. The support will ensure follow-through and, in the long run, will reduce paper workload of educators.
- Take time to understand how the family's cultural background may impact decisions that are made regarding future decisions about independent living.
- Learn from the family how they are already connected to the community in order to understand ways in which the student might be able to leverage the family's social network and involve the student in the community.

CASE STUDY 3

PARTNERING TO SUPPORT SUCCESS IN THE COMMUNITY

Russell is 17 years old and in 12th grade. He has a mild intellectual disability and has been diagnosed with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and oppositional defiant disorder (ODD). He has exhibited behavior issues in the past at school but has improved greatly due to the structured environment of his classes. His teachers report that he consistently participates and follows class routines well. He demonstrates a strong work ethic and works hard in completing assignments. He is earning credits to receive a high school diploma and is on target to graduate in one year. He could remain in school until age 21 but would prefer to focus on receiving his diploma and exiting from school to work. He does not have his driver's license but has received travel training for public transportation through the school program.

While his behaviors have improved at school, his mother reports that many times he is verbally aggressive at home. She stated that he is often in disagreement with her suggestions but is more willing to take direction from other trusted adults, such as his teachers at school or family friends. His mother has also stated that she is very concerned about how he will manage living on his own and holding a job. She believes that he will be able to work with computers, as she sees how knowledgeable he is about them.

Russell lives with his mother. His father is not involved in his life. The family is struggling financially, although they do have a stable living situation. Transportation is an issue, as the family car is not dependable. Russell's mother has disclosed that she often feels overwhelmed by her financial situation, being a single parent and supporting Russell.

Russell's educational team at school has given his mother information about services through the developmental disabilities services agency, vocational rehabilitation and guardianship. They have told her she must complete applications, and they need to be completed as quickly as possible. His mother contacts the school often with questions and concerns but has not followed through with the paperwork. She says she is panicking and doesn't know what to do. Typically she is unable to attend meetings because of poor transportation.

The educational team recognizes that Russell's mother will need more one-on-one help with completing applications and connecting to agencies. The designated point person for Russell's mother listens empathetically to her concerns, addressing each one with factual information when appropriate. She makes sure that Russell's mother understands that the educators are partners in wanting Russell to successfully transition from the school environment into the community. She provides a checklist that is individualized for Russell that breaks down the steps that his mother must take.

Because Russell has an intellectual disability, the first step is to complete an application for the developmental disabilities services state agency. Russell's mother is connected to a person from the agency who assists in the application process. A trusted member of the school team facilitates the meeting and ensures that required school documentation is available. The meeting is set up close to where the family lives so that transportation is not an issue. The developmental disabilities agency staff explains to Russell's mother that if Russell qualifies, he would receive a case manager who would help oversee his services. This would include respite care, which would offer a break for Russell's mother. Russell would also receive supported employment services that include one-on-one assistance to help find employment and learn job-specific tasks.

Another concern that Russell's mother has is about his ability to live independently. Residential services through the agency are explained to her, and she feels much calmer. Guardianship and alternatives to guardianship, such as power of attorney, are also explained. She is given infor-

(Continued)

CASE STUDY 3 (Continued)

mation and told about an upcoming workshop in which a lawyer will be explaining the process in more detail.

The educational team finds that as Russell's mother's concerns are addressed and she becomes better informed, they receive fewer phone calls from her and, when they do, her questions are direct and without the degree of panic. At the time for his annual IEP meeting, the team is able to create a document that is rich with detail about the transition plan. The plan is not only compliant with federal regulations but also meaningful to Russell and his mother.

Questions to Consider

1. How did Russell's support team ensure that his mother would feel like a valued member of the team?
2. What elements of this case reflect important strategies for partnering with families?
3. Which members of the school team would be able to partner with the family as future decisions are made with Russell and his mom?

Summary

While the postschool transition process can feel like an ending to school professionals, it marks an important beginning for students and families. As students and family members prepare for potential employment, postsecondary education, and independent/interdependent living, school professionals play a critical role in providing support for next steps. Through empowerment, partnership, creation of opportunities, and connection to community resources, the school team can facilitate a successful transition into adulthood.

Additional Resources

Web-Based

Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund: A Comparison of ADA, IDEA, and Section 504: http://dredf.org/advocacy/comparison.html. A comparison among the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA), the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 in regards to each law's purpose, who is protected, how the laws affect education, funding for services as well as procedural safeguards and due process.

Employment & Disability Institute: https://www.edi.cornell.edu/. The Employment and Disability Institute (EDI) is a leading resource on employment and disability information for businesses, lawmakers, federal and state agencies, educational institutions, unions, and service providers. The institute provides research, technical assistance, training, scholarly reports, and training publications to support the contributions of people with disabilities and ensure their full inclusion in their communities.

Home and Community Based Services Advocacy: http://hcbsadvocacy.org/. Information about the Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) regulations and requirements for several Medicaid authorities under which states may provide home- and community-based long-term services and supports. The regulations enhance the quality of HCBS and provide additional protections to individuals that receive services under these Medicaid authorities.

Institute on Community Integration. http://www.ici.umn.edu/. The Institute on Community Integration is based at the Minnesota University Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) and is part of a national network of similar programs in major universities and teaching hospitals across the country. Through collaborative research, training, and information sharing, the institute improves policies and practices to ensure that all children, youth, and adults with disabilities are valued by and contribute to their communities of choice.

LDonline—the Law After High School. http://www.ldonline.org/article/The_Law_After_High_School. Question-and-answer format to provide information about the rights a person with disabilities may have under the Rehabilitation Act, ADA, and IDEA.

National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth): http://www.ncwd-youth.info/. NCWD/Youth assists state and local workforce development systems to better serve all youth, including youth with disabilities and other disconnected youth. NCWD/Youth offers a range of technical assistance services to state and local workforce investment boards, youth councils, and other workforce development system youth programs.

National Longitudinal Transition Study–2 (NLTS2): http://www.nlts2.org. The National Longitudinal Transition Study–2 (NLTS2) includes information on 11,270 youth nationwide who were ages 13 through 16 at the start of the 10-year study. Information collected from parents, youth, and schools provides a national picture of the experiences and achievements of young people as they transition into early adulthood.

National Resource Center for Supported Decision-Making: http://supporteddecisionmaking.org/. Supported decision making (SDM) is an effective, less restrictive alternative to guardianship that uses trusted friends, family members, and advocates to give people with disabilities the help they need and want to understand the situations they face and the choices they must make so they can make their own decisions. Website provides information about legal cases, evidence-based outcome measures, advocacy for changes in law, policy, and practice to increase self-determination and demonstrate SDM to be a valid, less-restrictive alternative to guardianship.

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT): http://transitionta.org. A national technical assistance and dissemination center funded by the U.S. Department of Education to provide technical assistance and disseminate information to state education agencies, local education authorities, schools, and other stakeholders to implement evidence-based practices leading to improved academic and functional achievement for students with disabilities, preparing them for postsecondary education and the workforce; as well as implement policies, procedures, and practices to facilitate and increase participation of students with disabilities in programs and initiatives designed to ensure college and career readiness and to achieve 100% compliance with IDEA, Part B Indicator 13 (I-13).

U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP): http://www.dol.gov/odep/. The Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) is a sub–cabinet-level policy agency in the Department of Labor. ODEP's mission is to develop and influence policies and practices that increase the number and quality of employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

PACER 2013 Minnesota Secondary Transition Toolkit for Families: A Guide to Preparing Your Child with a Disability for Life Beyond High School: http://www.pacer.org/publications/MDE-Toolkit-2013.pdf. This toolkit was created to make transition planning easier and offers easy-to-understand information about the purpose of transition planning, the goal and importance of age-appropriate assessments, and the required rules that are used by schools. It also includes information on the community partners that can provide youth with supports as adults. Topics include health care and health maintenance, benefits planning, postsecondary education and accommodations, recreation, social resources, transportation, and housing.

PACER Health Information Project: www.pacer.org/health. PACER's Family-to-Family Health Information Center (F2F HIC) provides a central source for families of children and young adults with special health care needs and disabilities to obtain support, advocacy, and information about the health care system. PACER promotes family-centered care and family and professional collaboration at all levels of health care. The F2F HIC also has a strong commitment to promote and support the needs of families from racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse communities.

PACER National Parent Center on Transition and Employment: http://www.pacer.org/transition/. Founded in 2014, PACER's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment builds on PACER's decades of experience providing high-quality assistance and support to parents, youth, and professionals on transition topics. This innovative project ensures that the needs of the family remain at the forefront and helps youth with disabilities find success in postsecondary education, employment, and life in the community.

Think College Differences Between High School and College: http://www.thinkcollege.net/topics/highschool-college-differences. Outlines the legal and procedural differences between the K–12 experience and the educational supports provided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and how educational supports are provided in postsecondary education by the Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

Print

Brown, J. T. (2012). *The parent's guide to college for students on the autism spectrum*. Shawnee Mission, KS: AAPC Pub.

Getzel, E. E., & Wehman, P. (2005). *Going to college: Expanding opportunities for people with disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Grigal, M., & Hart, D. (2010). *Think college! Postsecondary education options for students with intellectual disabilities*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Heath Resource Center. (2014). *Planning ahead: Financial aid for students with disabilities, 2014–15 edition*. National Youth Transitions Center, The George Washington University. Available at https://heath.gwu.edu/files/downloads/2014_2015_heath_financial_aid_ publication.pdf

Varrassi, V. (2015). *Transition to college and career: Experienced-based strategies to improve readiness of students with disabilities*. Palm Beach Gardens, FL: LRP Publications.