

Supporting the Transition from Middle School to High School



The primary goal of this tip sheet is to provide resources for administrators, educators, and caregivers to collaborate for an effective transition from middle school to high school. Many students and families are overwhelmed with the process of moving to a larger school setting and need tools and resources to create a successful plan for autistic individuals. By working together as a team, autistic students can provide valuable information on their goals to lead to successful outcomes in high school.

Creating a strong transition team to support individuals during the process from middle school to high school is essential for the transition process. This team will provide valuable insight in creating the student's transition plan. The student is the key member of this team and should participate throughout the process. A good reminder of this is the quote, "Nothing about me, without me."



Transition Planning

The transition to high school should include the following team members during planning and Individualized Education Plan (IEP) development:

- » Middle school teacher of record
- » High school local education agency (LEA)
- » High school teacher of record
- » General education teachers
- » Related services (SLP, OT, PT, guidance)
- » Vocational rehab counselor (if applicable)
- » Job coach (if applicable)
- » Student
- » Caregivers

The middle school team can begin communicating with the caregivers and future high school placement during the student’s eighth grade year. If the annual review for the student has already occurred, the team will need to gather and hold an additional IEP meeting for transition placement planning.

The following is a quick list for middle school teams to adapt and think through how to map out the transition plan. It is important to foster communication between middle school and high school staff to ensure continuity of support and services. This chart illustrates great first steps for middle school administrators in the spring, prior to transition to high school.

ACTIVITY	MAR	APRIL	MAY	JUNE
District office provides list of 8 th grade students with disabilities				
HS principal letter to MS principals				
HS SPED director letter to each MS SPED staff member				
HS SPED director and SPED staff visit middle schools				
HS guidance staff give orientation to all MS students				
HS English honors program explained to all MS students				
IEP meetings at HS scheduled by HS SPED case workers				
Letter to each MS case worker from SPED with schedule of all IEP meetings, dates, times, and who will be attending each meeting from HS				
Letter to each parent from HS SPED director with cc to each child’s MS case worker before each IEP meeting				
MS case worker sends reminder letter to parent just before IEP meeting				
MS case worker calls parent to remind him/her just before IEP meeting				
IEP meetings held at HS with all incoming 8 th graders who will receive SPED services				

HS=High School MS=Middle School SPED=Special Education



Assessments and Transition Meetings

There are several formative assessments that will be needed to determine the appropriate path for high school. The assessments will be unique to the student and unique to the school setting. These may include curriculum-based assessments, daily living skills assessments, interest surveys, and vocational assessments. School teams should consider discussing these with caregivers and students early within the eighth-grade year to prepare for the transition.

During the transition meeting it is important to review assessments, set goals, identify school resources, and discuss self-advocacy skills for the student. This meeting will lay the foundation for communication throughout high school and identify follow-up plans for monitoring progress and adjusting the transition plan as needed once the student enters high school.

One conversation will be to determine the type of diploma path for the student. In Tennessee, there are four different diploma options available to students graduating from a public high school. The four options include a regular high school diploma, a special education diploma, an occupational diploma, and an alternate academic diploma. Each diploma type has different eligibility requirements to be successful and vary the outcomes students can take when they leave high school.

TENNESSEE DIPLOMA OPTIONS - HIGH SCHOOL POLICY 2.103			
Diploma Options	Who Is Eligible?	Terminal? (Yes or No)	Included in Graduation Rate?
Regular	Everyone	Yes - terminates eligibility for IDEA services	Yes
Alternate Academic	Students assessed on the alternate assessment	No - student still eligible for IDEA services through 21	Yes*
Occupational	Students with an IEP who will not be able to earn the regular diploma	No - student still eligible for IDEA services through 21	No
Special Education	Students with an IEP who will not be able to earn the regular diploma	No - student still eligible for IDEA services through 21	No

**Included in graduation rate if completed within the four years plus one summertime limit. (Alternate Academic Diploma Overview - TN.gov)*

When evaluating the diploma pathways, it is important to discuss long-term goals beyond high school, including college, vocational training, or employment, and incorporate steps to achieve these goals into the transition plan.



TRIAD offers the following free courses on person-centered planning. To access, users must first register for an account at triad.vkclearing.org.

- ❑ **Autism Transition Facilitator Course → Transition Tips for Students with ASD: Person-Centered Planning**
Log in and launch at <https://bit.ly/4bTLMte>
- ❑ **Transition Tips for Caregivers of Students with ASD**
Log in and launch at <https://bit.ly/3K3hloc>

The TN-TAN Network offers the following free resources on transition planning:

- ❑ **Measurable Postsecondary Goals Template, Checklist, and Examples**
https://transitiontn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Planning_Lesson-2-Postsecondary-Goals-Checklist_03-05-18_FINAL.pdf
- ❑ **IEP Draft Guidance**
https://transitiontn.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/ATI_IEP-Draft-Guidance_03-18-22_FINAL.pdf
- ❑ **Transition Service Checklist**
https://transitiontn.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Planning_Additional-Reading_06-14-2018_FINAL.pdf
- ❑ **Transitioning Students with Disabilities from Middle to High School**
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ967472.pdf>
- ❑ **The Importance of Transition Planning for Special Needs Students**
<https://revistas.rcaap.pt/rpe/article/view/rpe.8713>