Stepping Forward:

A Self-Advocacy Guide for Middle and High School Students

(Formerly "An Educational Journey from Self Discovery to Advocacy")
Revised 2014
Update 2016

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Information for Students

Self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself. It requires knowledge of your personal strengths, preferences, interests, needs and rights as an individual. Self-advocacy involves acting in an assertive and appropriate manner to make your needs and desires known to others.

Transition planning involves thinking about your life after high school and developing a long-range plan in the areas of college, training, employment, and independent living. Middle school and high school are the times to focus on developing the skills you will need to compete and succeed in these areas. Transition planning also helps you identify and link with colleges, training programs, and state and local agencies that may provide services you need.

This guide was created for middle and high school students as an instructional tool for the development of self-advocacy skills and transition planning.

It is divided into 5 chapters:

Chapter 1	Disability Awareness
Chapter 2	Learning to Self-Advocate
Chapter 3	Transition: Career Planning and Community Connections
Chapter 4	Participating in Planning and Placement Team (PPT) Meetings
Chapter 5	Resources

The lessons within each chapter are arranged in order and are designed to build upon one another. You will have the opportunity to select and participate in activities that will help you learn more about yourself (your likes, dislikes, strengths, weaknesses, and needs). You will also have the opportunity to select and participate in a variety of activities that involve gathering information about your community (e.g., other people, programs, jobs, laws, transition planning options). Remember that everyone is unique and will progress through the various chapters and lessons at different rates. As you participate in this process, you will learn how to use the information you gather to make decisions, develop transition planning goals, and begin advocating for yourself.

Journaling

Creating a journal will be an important part of your educational journey from self-discovery to advocacy. A journal can be a valuable record of your personal history and growth. As you look back on your journal, you may find valuable information about problems you faced and how you overcame difficulties. You will document experiences related to work, relationships, awarenesses, achievements, failures, and triumphs. A journal may help you have a better understanding of yourself.

Some people use journals as a personal record that they will not share with anyone, while others will create the journal to share as class work, for school credit, and/or as part of a career/college portfolio. You should talk with your teacher or counselor about whether your journal will be personal or if it will be shared with others.

Journal entries can be made in a spiral notebook, a binder with loose-leaf paper, or a document on your computer, smart phone, or tablet. Whatever you decide, be sure your journal is large enough to accommodate all the information you will gain about yourself, your community, and your life options.

Each journal entry should begin with the date of the entry. You are encouraged to personalize your journal entries with drawings, doodles, photographs, words, poetry, clip art, YouTube videos, and any other resources and materials that describe how you are thinking and feeling at the moment. Remember, this is YOUR journal. It is a reflection of YOU.

Your teacher may have you create a new journal every year, so it would be a good idea to save your old journal entries. An important outcome of your educational journey from self-awareness to advocacy involves being able to look back to where you started, and see how far you've come.

Your journey begins now!

Learn more online:
How to Create an Online Journal
www.ehow.com/how_5778779_create-online-personal-journal.html

Information for Teachers and Students

The chapters in this guide are NOT meant to correspond with grade levels and can be taught as early as middle school. As with any instructional materials, information in this guide may need to be adapted to meet individual student strengths and needs. For example, some students will be ready to take a formal learning style inventory in middle school, while others may finish grade 9 without having a thorough understanding of their learning style.

Please keep in mind the following CT CORE Transition Skills when working with students. The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) feels that students should work toward mastery of these key CORE skills in order to achieve success after high school. Development of self-advocacy and self-determination skills are incorporated with (or build into) each of the CORE skills.

CT CORE Transition Skills

To the maximum extent possible, **Each Student** with a disability will be able to:

A. Explain his/her disability including individual strengths, needs, preferences and interests.
B. Utilize effective self-determination skills including areas such as: choice-making, problem-solving, goalsetting, communication and self-advocacy.
C. Strengthen his/her self-esteem and social-emotional awareness by analyzing his/her strengths and challenges in order to implement personal/vocational goals.
D. Assist with the development of his/her Individualized Education Program (IEP).
E. Attend, participate in and/or facilitate his/her Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting.
F. Demonstrate leadership skills to affect positive social change by guiding or directing others on a course of action and/or influencing the opinion and behavior of others.
G. Describe his/her rights and responsibilities under disability legislation (e.g., IDEA, 504, ADA).
H. Demonstrate and accept responsibility for his/her independence and activities of daily living.
I. Demonstrate appropriate social interactions and skills to develop and maintain meaningful relationships.
J. Demonstrate skills to access appropriate physical and mental healthcare resources to meet his/her individual needs.
K. Demonstrate skills to access community resources and participate in the community by establishing support networks.
L. Demonstrate skills to access appropriate postsecondary education, training, or lifelong learning opportunities to meet his/her individual needs.
M. Demonstrate skills to access appropriate employment to meet his/her individual needs.
N. Identify and ask for accommodations necessary to ensure equal access and full participation in postschool education and/or employment settings.
O. Demonstrate skills needed to access appropriate transportation (both public and private).
P. Demonstrate the ability to use technology to enhance employment, learning, and community involvement.

(Transition Task Force, CSDE, 2016)

See also: ***Transition Bill of Rights For Parents of Students Receiving Special Education Services*** at **http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/special/trans_bill_of_rights_for_parents_of_students_receiving_sped_services.pdf**

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CHAPTER 1

Disability Awareness

Whether your plans after high school involve work, college, training, or a combination of these, it is important that you understand your strengths and limitations, know how they affect your performance, and be able to communicate your learning style to others. The following action items will help you become aware of your disability and increase your ability to self-advocate.

- **Your disability does NOT define you!**

  You are a person first, who happens to have a learning disability, physical limitations or emotional difficulties. Or perhaps you have hearing or vision loss, autism, or an intellectual disability. You also have many other traits, qualities, and roles that describe who you are, for example, athletic, artistic, organized, good listener, kind to others, helpful, son, daughter, friend.

- **Know your disability and begin to accept your disability as a description of how you learn or function in a particular environment.**

  A student with a learning disability, for example, may struggle to do work in an algebra class, but have little difficulty participating in a game of basketball or giving an oral presentation. A student with Asperger's Syndrome may excel in a science class, while participating in school sponsored sports or clubs may be very difficult.

- **Accepting your disability may take time.**

  Learning about yourself - including your strengths, weaknesses, and your disability - is an ongoing process. It takes time to sort out all the information that you have been given about your disability. You may need to do research, ask questions, talk to other people who have similar disabilities again and again before you can fully understand how your disability impacts you.

- **Identify what accommodations work for you.**

  An accommodation is a change made to teaching or testing procedures in order to provide you with access to information and to create an equal opportunity for you to demonstrate your knowledge and skills. An accommodation does NOT change what you learn; an accommodation changes HOW you learn. You are still held to the same high standards as your classmates and are expected to learn all the required class content.

  Some common accommodations include - extended time to complete assignments or tests; oral or audio exams; preferential seating (for example, sitting closer to the teacher so that you can best see or hear instructions); a note taker; a computer with spell-check or voice-recognition capabilities; and computer programs for math and literacy support. An accommodation may also be a "safe place" or a "safe person" when you need a time out.

Ask your teacher what accommodations may help you. Appropriate accommodations are determined based on your strengths and needs as well as the demands of the content area (like math or history) and the task. Accommodations might also be based be based on assessment information. Try several different types of accommodations and then decide which ones work best for you.

Make sure your accommodations are listed on page 8 of your Individualized Education Program (IEP). Also make sure that the types of accommodations that you are receiving match with the goals you have for yourself after high school. Students who may be receiving many types of accommodations, may not be able to get all of those accommodations on a college campus. For example, using a word bank or taking an open book exam may be allowed in high school, but not in most college classes.

If you do not have a copy of your IEP, ask your teacher or a family member for a copy. Asking is a beginning step of self-advocacy.

- **Learn that your identification as a person with a disability gives you certain rights to services and protection from discrimination.**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) entitles you to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) through the age of 21 or until you graduate from high school with a regular high school diploma. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) offer individuals with disabilities protection from discrimination in public and private education and employment settings.

Did you know that you must disclose (or make others aware of) your disability in order to be protected by some provisions of these laws? It is important that you understand your rights under these laws, and that you are able to describe your disability clearly to others. For more information, please read *Lesson 1.4: Understanding Your Rights and Responsibilities under Disability Law*.

The following activities will help you identify your strengths, interests, and limitations and give you a better understanding of your disability.

Learn more online:
Accepting My Disability
www.going-to-college.org/myplace/disability.html

Things That Make Me Special

List 25 things that make you special.

Think about:

- Your strengths
- Things you know how to do well (your abilities/skills)
- Things you enjoy doing
- Things you have done that you are proud of
- Your talents
- Important things you have learned
- Positive things about your personality

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(Maine Medical Center, n.d.)

LESSON 1.1

Identifying Successful People with Disabilities

Many famous people have achieved their life goals in spite of, or perhaps because of, their disability. Consider what Jay Leno, comedian and former host of *The Tonight Show*, had to say about turning his mild dyslexia into a competitive advantage:

> *"One thing about mildly dyslexic people – they're good at setting everything else aside to pursue one goal. I go five nights a week every week, no days off, no sick days. I figure that eventually things will go my way. Ambition wins over genius 99% of the time."*

Jay Leno's experience may not be common to all people with mild dyslexia, but it demonstrates how his disability has personally affected him.

Begin your journey to self-awareness by understanding how other people with disabilities have achieved success in their work and personal lives.

Activity

- **Research successful or famous people who have a disability.**

  Go online and search for "famous people with disabilities" or look at the list of successful people with LD and AD/HD at www.greatschools.org. Pick out one or two people who share your interests and talents, and learn about their personal and/or professional accomplishments.

Or See Next Page for Another Activity Option

Visit www.cpacinc.org/SteppingForward to watch:

Famous People with Disabilities

&

Famous People with Learning Disabilities

Activities

- **Interview someone with a disability who has been successful in reaching his or her life goals.**

  If you don't know any successful adults with disabilities, contact your local Independent Living Center (ILC) and ask if they could recommend someone for you to interview. Contact information for the Connecticut ILC's can be found in the Resources section of this guide.

  Some interview questions to ask:

  - What personal and/or professional goals have you achieved?
  - What personal qualities or traits helped you to reach those goals (for example, hard work, perseverance)?
  - How do you describe your disability?
  - Did you need any accommodations or use any assistive technology?
  - Who were the people who helped you achieve your goals?
  - What role did education play in helping you achieve your goals?

- **Use the information from your research or interview to complete one of the following disability awareness projects:**
  - Give an oral presentation to your class
  - Write an article for your school newspaper or school website
  - Create a poster
  - Share the information with your family

  Think about how this person's disability is similar to or different from your disability. Are there feelings or experiences you have in common with the person you researched or interviewed?

Write your thoughts about having a disability in your journal.

You will complete a variety of activities over the next several years that will help you better understand yourself and your disability. By the time you graduate from high school you will be able to see how your personal awareness of your disability has expanded and how self-advocacy is a critical skill you use in all areas of your life.

LESSON 1.2

Completing a Learning Style Inventory

Everyone has a particular learning style that describes the way he or she learns best. Some people need to see things in writing in order to learn and remember information. We call this style of learning visual (sight). Other people need to hear information. This style of learning is called auditory (sound). There are also people who learn best by doing a task. This style of learning is called tactile/kinesthetic (small/large movements). Most people use a combination of these techniques, but you may find that you use one technique more than the others.

In addition to describing the way you learn best, learning style inventories can help you identify whether you work better alone or in a group and whether you express information better orally or in writing. It is important that you know your own learning style. Knowing about learning styles can help you determine what types of accommodations you may need in the classroom as well as at home or in the work world.

You can begin to better understand your individual learning style by completing a formal learning style inventory. If you haven't already taken one, your teacher, counselor, or school psychologist can help you obtain a learning style inventory and review the results with you. There are many different inventories you can take. The following websites contain different types of learning style assessments. You may want to take a few to help determine how you learn best.

Activities

- The **CITE Learning Styles Instrument** helps learner determine whether they prefer visual-language, visual-numerical, auditory-language, auditory-numerical, auditory-visual-kinesthetic, social-individual or social-group. CITE is available at: www.wvabe.org/CITE/cite.pdf
- The **Barsch Inventory** is a quick learning style assessment. The assessment will help determine if a learner has a visual, auditory, and Tactile/Kinesthetic. Access the Barsch Inventory at: www.iusb.edu/tutoring/barsch.php
- The **Index of Learning Styles Questionnaire** is designed to assess a person's learning styles in four areas: active/reflective, sensing/intuitive, visual/verbal, and sequential/global. Complete the questionnaire at: www.engr.ncsu.edu/learningstyles/ilsweb.html
- The **Learning Styles Chart** gives learning style descriptions, strategies to enhance learning, and resources that may be helpful for improving study skills. View the chart at: www2.fiu.edu/~keysj/LearningStylesChart.pdf
- The **Multiple Intelligences Self-Assessment** from Edutopia contains information on the multiple types of human intelligence and ways of processing information. Available at: http://www.edutopia.org/multiple-intelligences-assessment

Write your learning style and current accommodations in your journal.

Visit www.cpacinc.org/SteppingForward to watch:

My Learning Style

LESSON 1.3

Learning More about Your Disability

As you progress through school, you may have additional questions about your disability. There are a number of steps you can take to expand your knowledge and understanding of your disability.

Activities

- **Meet with your school psychologist, special education teacher, social worker or anyone else who is qualified to review the results of your most recent educational and psychological evaluations and assessments with you.**

  Ask questions until you truly understand what each assessment is designed to measure and how you performed on it. Write down the name of each evaluation you were given and, based upon the results, make a list of your learning strengths, weaknesses and needs. Make sure you understand why you are eligible for special education and related services based upon your performance on these evaluations. Also be sure you understand what types of special education services you receive, and why.

  Transfer this information to your journal.

- **Go online to get additional information about your disability.**

  There are a number of websites that provide information on specific types of disabilities. You can also find general information on topics such as self-advocacy, transition from school to adult life, assistive technology, etc. by searching online at www.kidshealth.org. Go to Teen Health and Search.

- **Read fiction and nonfiction books about people who have disabilities.**

  You can fulfill English or summer reading requirements and learn more about various disabilities at the same time. LDOnline offers a book list for kids with over 50 titles of books that relate to young people with learning disabilities and/or ADHD. You can list at www.ldonline.org/kids/books. Check out your local community or school library, or disability web sites, for books that relate to other types of disabilities.

Learn more about your disability online:

KidsHealth
www.kidshealth.org

LDOnline Book List
www.ldonline.org/kids/books

- **Learn about the things you need to do to take care of your health as an adult.**

  If you take medication, have a chronic health care need like asthma, allergies, or diabetes, use hearing aids, orthotics, or a nebulizer, or have a mental health condition, it is important to learn as much as you can to make the transition easier and to help avoid emergency situations. It is also important to know what to do if an emergency does arise.

  The Center for Health Care Transition Improvement provides tools including videos, tip sheets, webinars, radio shows, and printable material to take with you such as a medical summary and emergency care plan (if necessary). Please visit the website at **www.gottransition.org** for more information.

  You should be able to answer the following questions:

  - Do I know my height, weight, birth date, and social security number?
  - What is the name of my condition and can I explain my health care needs?
  - Who do I call in case of an emergency?
  - What kind of medical insurance do I have and where can I get an insurance card?
  - What are the names of the medications that I take and what do they do?

    (A copy of your medications and your insurance card should always be kept in your wallet or purse, along with your doctor's name and phone number in the event of an emergency.)
  - How do I get prescriptions refilled?
  - Where can I get my medical records?
  - How do I schedule a medical appointment?

  Record this information in your journal and update it as necessary.

- **Research the availability of assistive technology (AT) that may be needed to help you at school, college, home, work, and in the community.**

  In the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (2004), an assistive technology device is defined as "any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability." (Sec. 602(1)(A); 34 CFR §300.5).

  Examples of AT devices include wheelchairs, walkers, screen readers, communication devices, highlighters, digital recorders, audio books, calculators, Mp3 players, tablets, laptops, and computer programs for reading and writing.

The *Connecticut Assistive Technology Guidelines* indicate that AT is a very important part of the planning process as students transition from school to employment, community settings, and training and higher education. AT should be considered to help students:

- Complete transition assessments
- Fill out applications
- Communicating and completing tasks in community and employment settings
- Accessing and participating in training and college programs

When you are discussing AT at your transition PPT meetings, the following should be considered:

- What specific equipment will be needed and used?
- What are the student's training needs?
- Who will pay for the AT (family insurance, school district, family)?
- How will the equipment be updated, replaced, or repaired?
- Where will the equipment, manual, and other documents be kept?
- What will happen to the equipment upon graduation (will it be returned to the school or can the student buy the equipment from the school)?
- What will be needed in the settings after graduation? (AT needed for high school may be very different than technology needed for employment) (Connecticut Assistive Technology Guidelines, 2013)

As a young adult, it is your responsibility to learn about these aspects of your life now. At a transition workshop for parents, the mother of two young adults with severe hearing impairments spoke about the surprising phone call she received from her son, a freshman in college. Shortly after arriving at school he had called to ask what kind of batteries were needed for his hearing aid. He had no clue because his mom had always purchased and installed the batteries for him. Don't let this happen to you! Don't leave high school unprepared to manage your own healthcare and disability needs.

The Connecticut Tech Act Project can provide you with information on assistive technology services, devices, and funding possibilities. For more information on this project visit the Connecticut Tech Act website.

For a database on assistive technology and links and resources visit the Able Data website.

Learn more online:

National Health Law Program
www.healthlaw.org

Connecticut Tech Act Project
www.cttechact.com

Able Data
www.abledata.com

Visit www.cpacinc.org/SteppingForward to watch:
Assistive Technology in Action: Meet Sam
Assistive Technology in Action: Meet Jared
Assistive Technology in Action: Meet Nick

LESSON 1.4

Understanding Your Rights and Responsibilities under Disability Law

Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) is the federal law that requires that special education and related services be provided to eligible students with disabilities. Under the IDEA, the public school district where you live is responsible for making sure that you receive special education and related services appropriate to your individual needs. How and where the services are provided is determined by the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) and should be included in your Individualized Education Program, or IEP. IEP's must be reviewed and updated at least once per year.

The PPT is made up of regular and special education teachers, a school administrator, parents, other specialists as needed (e.g., school social worker, psychologist, occupational therapist, physical therapist, speech and language therapist) and YOU. The PPT members are different for each student receiving special education services. The team makes decisions regarding your education therefore it is critical that you attend to participate in planning for YOUR future.

As the most important member of the PPT, you have the right to participate in meetings regarding:

- Planning and reviewing evaluation and reevaluation results
- Developing, reviewing and revising your IEP
- Transition planning (see Chapter 3)

As mentioned previously, the **Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)** and **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** may protect you from discrimination at school, college, and in employment, community, and housing situations. However, in some instances, you must disclose (or make others aware) that you have a disability in order to be protected by these laws. This is one of the reasons why it is so important that you develop a good understanding of your disability and accommodation needs, and that you learn how, and when, to communicate information about yourself to others.

It is also important that you know your rights and responsibilities under these laws. The next several pages provide a brief description of these two laws.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination based on disability in any program or activity that receives federal funds. It was originally signed into law in July of 1990 and was revised in 2008 as the ADA Amendments Act (ADAAA). This includes schools, colleges, employment, state and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications. To be protected by the ADA as an individual with a disability, you must:

- have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits major life activities;
- have a history or record of such impairment; or
- be perceived or regarded by others as having such impairment.

Your rights under the ADA:

Title I of the ADA requires employers with 15 or more employees to provide qualified individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from the full range of employment-related opportunities available to others. Title I prohibits discrimination in job application procedures; the hiring, promotion or discharge of employees and job training, pay, and other privileges of employment. It restricts questions an employer can ask about an applicant's disability before a job offer is made. Title I also requires that employers make reasonable accommodations (e.g., restructuring jobs, making work-sites and workstations accessible, modifying schedules, providing services such as interpreters, and modifying equipment and policies) to the known physical or mental limitations of otherwise qualified individuals with disabilities, unless it results in undue hardship.

Title II of the ADA covers public agencies including state and local government and transportation services. Title II states that public transportation authorities may not discriminate against individuals with disabilities in the provision of transportation, including bus, subway, train, paratransit, and special transportation services. Title II also applies to all state and local public housing.

Title III of the ADA states that no individuals shall be discriminated against, on the basis of disability, in the full and equal enjoyment of goods, services, and privileges of accommodations of public places including those used for:

- Lodging (inns, hotels)
- Food service (restaurants, bars)
- Entertainment (movie theatres, concert halls, stadiums, museums)
- Public gatherings (auditoriums, convention centers, lecture halls)
- Sales (grocery stores, clothing stores, hardware stores, shopping centers)
- Services (laundromats, banks, hair salons, travel agencies, funeral homes, gas stations, accountants or lawyers, pharmacies, medical doctors, dentists, hospitals)
- Public transportation (terminals, depots)
- Exercise or recreation (parks, zoos, amusement parks, gyms, health spas, bowling alleys, golf courses)
- Education (elementary and secondary education, colleges, universities, postgraduate private schools)
- Social services (day care centers, senior citizen centers, homeless shelters, food banks)

Public accommodations must comply with specific requirements to make buildings accessible, including policies, practices, and procedures to promote access. Accommodations must also provide effective communication for individuals with hearing, vision, or speech impairments.

Title IV of the ADA addresses telecommunication services for individuals with hearing and speech impairments. This provision requires telecommunication companies to provide interstate and intrastate communication by wire or radio 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It also requires closed captioning of federally funded public service announcements.

Title V of the ADA addresses miscellaneous areas and includes a provision prohibiting either (a) threatening or (b) retaliating against individuals with disabilities or individuals attempting to aid people with disabilities who are trying to access their rights under the ADA.

Your responsibilities under the ADA:

- Apply only for jobs that match your basic qualifications (education, training, and experience).
- After you are hired, if you need accommodations to perform the job, you must identify yourself as a person with a disability and be able to clearly state your specific accommodation needs.
- Be prepared to provide updated written documentation of your disability (medical records, educational and psychological test results).
- If you think you have been discriminated against in any public program, you may file a complaint by visiting **www.ada.gov/filing_complaint.htm**.
- If you think you have been discriminated against in an employment setting, you may file a complaint by visiting: **www.ada.gov/ada_title_I.htm**.
- Learn information about ADA for students who are preparing for college at **www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transition.html**.
- Access general information about Section 504 and the ADA for students with disabilities at **www.pacer.org/publications/adaqa/504.asp**.

Comparison Between the IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA

	The IDEA	Section 504	The ADA
Mission	Assures a free, appropriate, public education in the least restrictive environment. Students are entitled to services	Assures students with disabilities equal educational opportunity to be fully integrated into the mainstream Individuals must qualify for services	Assures ALL PERSONS with disabilities with equal opportunities and nondiscriminatory treatment in a broad array of areas, including those not covered under Section 504 (e.g., private businesses, state/local governments) Individuals must qualify for services
Scope	Applies to public elementary and secondary schools	Applies to any program or activity that receives federal financial aid	Applies to public or private employment, transportation, accommodations, and telecommunications
Coverage	Students requiring special education services, ages 3-21	All "qualified" individuals with disabilities	All "qualified" individuals with disabilities and qualified nondisabled persons associated with a person with a disability
Definition of Disability	List of disabilities provided	No list of disabilities provided. Physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major activities; record/ history of such an impairment; or being regarded as having an impairment	No list of disabilities provided. Same criteria as Section 504. Broadens definition of "disability" by including a non-exhaustive list of "major life activities" and "major bodily functions" and modifies definition of "substantially limits" to be less rigid.

	The IDEA	Section 504	The ADA
Identification Process	Places the responsibility for identification and evaluation on the school district at no expense to parent or student	Places the responsibility for identification on the student with a disability who must provide documentation. Cost of evaluation is responsibility of the student	Same as Section 504
Service Delivery	Special education services and auxiliary aids identified by Team and stipulated in the Individualized Education Program (IEP)	Services, auxiliary aids, and academic adjustments provided in the regular education setting	Services, auxiliary aids, and accommodations arranged for by designated ADA Coordinator unless "undue hardship" occurs for employers
Funding	Federal funds conditional to compliance with IDEA regulations	No authorization for funding attached to this Civil Rights statute	No authorization for funding attached to this Civil Rights statute

(Adapted from Brinckerhoff, L.C., Shaw, S.F. & McGuire, J.M., 1993)

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act states that "no qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall be excluded from the participation in, be denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under" any program or activity that receives federal financial assistance.

Almost all public and private colleges and universities receive federal financial assistance. Therefore, if you are attending college or any postsecondary training program that receives federal funds, you will be protected by Section 504.

The school or college must insure that the programs offered are accessible to students with disabilities. However, a school cannot provide any service or accommodation if it does not know that one is needed. If you do not require any accommodations you can choose to keep information about your disability private. If you need accommodations, you will need to disclose information about your disability in order to receive them. Often when attending a college or university for the first time, it is a good idea to register with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities on campus whether or not you feel that you will need accommodations. By doing so, you will be able to access accommodations at any point during the next two semesters more easily.

Your rights under Section 504:

- You have the right to complete the regular college admission process without identifying yourself as a person with a disability.
- You have the right to receive appropriate and reasonable academic accommodations, including note-takers, interpreters, and assistive technology.
- You have the right to an accessible dorm room if dormitories are provided to students without disabilities.
- You have the right to participate in extracurricular activities offered by the school.

Your responsibilities under Section 504:

- Insure documentation of your disability and suggested accommodations is CURRENT (in most cases no more than three years old).
- Contact your high school counselor or the college's Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (if you have a college in mind) to find out what services and supports are available.
- Ask for classroom and/or testing accommodations at the beginning of the semester. Do not wait until you have done poorly on an exam to disclose your disability and accommodation needs.
- If a teacher or professor refuses to make an accommodation that you have requested, work with the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities or contact your school's ADA/504 Coordinator to help resolve the situation. You may also file a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education within 180 days of the discriminatory action. You may file a complaint by visiting **www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/howto.html**.

Activities

Obtain more information on these laws by completing one or more of the following activities:

- **Assist your regular or special education teacher in providing an instructional unit on disability law.**

  Working as a class, determine the specific components of the laws that you would like to learn about. Break into small work groups and decide who is going to research and present specific components of disability law. The State Education Resource Center (SERC) and the Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center (CPAC) have a variety of curriculums and other publications that focus on IDEA, the ADA and Section 504. See the Resources section of this guide for additional information. You can also find information about these laws at your local library and on the internet.

- **Arrange for a guest speaker who is knowledgeable about disability law to give a presentation to your class.**

  For names of possible speakers, call the Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy or the University of Connecticut's A.J. Pappanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Education, Research and Service (UCEDD) (See the Resources section of this guide for more information).

- **Identify former students or other adults with disabilities in your community, who have experience advocating for themselves.**

  Ask your teacher for assistance in locating possible speakers. Arrange for them to make a classroom presentation or provide a parent/student workshop focusing on their personal experiences with disability laws in school, community, and workplace settings.

- **Attend workshops that discuss college application procedures and student support services.**

  Ask your special education teacher or school counselor to give you an advance notice of these types of workshops.

CHAPTER 2

Learning to Self-Advocate

Now it is time to learn how to advocate for yourself. It's natural to feel uncomfortable talking about your disability or asking for help. With practice, and time, it will become easier. State and federal laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act were passed to give you an equal opportunity to education and employment. These laws allow you to access the same facilities and programs available to individuals without disabilities. The ADA and Section 504 also give you the right to request specialized instruction, modifications to the curriculum, accommodations in non-academic and extracurricular activities, adaptive equipment or assistive technology devices, an aide, assistance with health related needs, school transportation, or other related services and accommodations.

It is your responsibility to take advantage of these laws by becoming a self-advocate. There are a number of steps you can take to learn how to speak up for yourself and get the help you need in order to be successful.

Activities

- **Describe your accommodation needs in terms of making things equal, rather than asking for an unfair advantage.**

  Some teachers or employers may think that providing accommodations for you is unfair or unnecessary. They may worry about the reactions of other students or employees who think you are receiving special treatment. Learn how to describe your accommodation needs in terms of making things equal. Clearly communicate that you need certain accommodations in order to be successful and that you are NOT asking for standards to be lowered.

- **Develop an assertive style of communication.**

  You can stand up for your rights, and be a role model to others, by being polite, respectful, and prepared. Do not be aggressive, demanding or confrontational. Remember the old adage, "you can attract more bees with honey than with vinegar." But, don't be passive either.

- **Practice, practice, and practice.**

  Speaking up for oneself is easier for some people than for others. For many, it takes time to develop good self-advocacy skills. Practicing self-advocacy skills while you are in middle school and high school can give you the confidence you will need to advocate for yourself as an adult.

Activities

- **Identify barriers to effective communication and include specific self-advocacy objectives in your IEP.**

  Think about the areas in which you need to develop specific skills such as listening, asking for help or accepting criticism. These are all skill development areas that affect your ability to effectively self-advocate, and can be translated easily into goals for your Individualized Education Program (IEP). It is very important that you attend and participate in your Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings where your IEP will be discussed and developed. As you grow in confidence as a self-advocate, you may want to consider leading a portion of this meeting. You will learn more about this in Chapter 4.

- **Know when and when not to disclose your disability.**

  Disclose information about your disability only on a "need-to-know basis," or when you require accommodations. Safe people with whom to share information include your parents, doctor, teachers, school psychologist, counselor, college disability specialists, college professors, employer, and one or two trusted close friends. Do not use your disability as an excuse to try to obtain compassion or understanding regarding personal problems. It is important to share about yourself discreetly, knowing your audience and the reason for disclosing personal information.

Visit www.cpacinc.org/SteppingForward to watch:
Getting Accommodations, Communication & Mastering Soft Skills for Workplace Success

LESSON 2.1

Developing a Personal Self-Advocacy Plan

Activity

The first step in learning how to self-advocate is the development of a personal self-advocacy plan. Creating a personal self-advocacy plan can help you begin to think about your individual needs as a learner. The plan can also be used to help you describe your accommodation needs to others.

In this plan you will describe your disability, learning strengths and weaknesses, needs, the type of teaching style or classroom accommodations that help you learn best, and any assistive technology you may need in order to be successful.

Your personal self-advocacy plan will also list any specific skill or behavior areas that you need to develop in order to be an effective self-advocate. Individualized self-advocacy goals need to be identified as part of the PPT and transition planning process, and written into your IEP every year.

Consider whether you need to develop skills in the following areas:

- Problem solving
- Asking for help (at school, home, work, and in the community)
- Listening
- Accepting feedback and constructive criticism
- Identifying and understanding communication styles (assertive, aggressive, and passive)
- Understanding body language and other non-verbal communication
- Persuasive communication
- Giving feedback and constructive criticism

It is best to review your personal self-advocacy plan at least once a year. You may also want to use this beyond high school as a personal development tool. "My Personal Self-Advocacy Plan" (found on the next page) may be an excellent objective to be written into your IEP.

My Personal Self-Advocacy Plan

Name: _____

Grade: _____

Date: _____

My disability is:

My learning strengths are:

My learning weaknesses are:

I learn best when:

The specific classroom accommodations I need are:

I need to develop the following self-advocacy skills:

(CSDE, 2004)

LESSON 2.2

Requesting Academic Accommodations

Activity

School is a great place to practice self-advocacy skills. One way to practice these skills is to request accommodations. You can begin by sharing your written personal self-advocacy plan with a trusted peer, classmate, sibling, parents and general or special education teacher.

You can practice different styles of communication and compare what it feels like to talk in a passive (soft-spoken, timid) manner, an aggressive (loud and demanding) manner, and an assertive (pleasant and polite) manner. You can also role play situations in which the teacher, professor or employer refuses to provide any accommodations. This activity will provide you with several opportunities to become comfortable with the process of asking for accommodations.

Next, select the classroom teacher with whom you feel most comfortable, and present your plan to that teacher. Schedule an appointment at a time that is convenient for the teacher. Bring specific documentation describing your disability. If you are nervous about meeting with the teacher privately, you can ask your special education teacher to accompany you for support and guidance.

Tips for requesting accommodations:

- Introduce yourself
- Share your learning style and strengths
- State your disability and any difficulties you are having in class or on the job
- Share what you do to accommodate your disability
- Request specific accommodations
- Thank your teacher for his/her time

Ask for feedback on how effective you were in describing your disability and accommodation needs. Remember that self-advocacy is a process. Learn from your mistakes, and have the courage to try again!

Visit www.cpacinc.org/SteppingForward to watch:

Communication
&
Getting Accommodations

Frequently Used Accommodations and Modifications

Materials/Books/Equipment

Access to Computer
Alternative Text
Alternative Worksheets
Spell Check
Calculator Manipulatives
Consumable Workbook
Large Print Text
Word prediction or Voice Recognition Software
Supplementary Visuals
Speech to Text Devices
Highlighted or Color Coded Texts

Tests/Quizzes/Assessments

Alternative Tests
Extra Credit Options
Hands-on Projects
Limited Multiple Choice
Reduced Reading
Extra Time–Tests/Projects/Written Work
Oral Testing
Pace Long Term Projects
Preview Test Procedures
Prior Notice of Tests
Shortened Tasks
Simplify Test Wording
Student Write on Test
Test Study Guide
Objective Tests
Orally Read Tests/Directions
Rephrase Test Questions/Directions

Grading

Audit Course
Grade Improvement
No Handwriting Penalty
Pass/Fail
Modified Grades Based on IEP

Organization

Assignment Pad
Provide Study Outlines
Pencil Box for Tools
Extra Space for Work
Daily Homework List
Desktop List of Tasks
Assign Partner
Daily Assignment List
Post Assignments
Folders to Hold Work
List Sequential Steps
Electronic Organizers
Templates for Written Work
Give One Paper or Section at a Time
Post Routines

Environment

Adaptive Work Space
Clear Work Area
Preferential Seating
Study Carrel
Minimizing or Structure Transitions
Reduction of Auditory or Visual Stimulation

Behavior Intervention/Support

Behavior Contracts
Break Between Tasks
Contingency Plan
Positive Reinforcement
Proximity/Touch Control
De-escalation Strategies
Emergency Plan
Peer Supports/Mentoring
Daily Feedback to Student
Set/Post Class Rules
Parent/Guardian Sign Behavioral Chart
Chart Progress and Maintain Data
Cue Expected Behavior
Parent/Guardian Sign Homework
Modeling Expected Behavior by Adults

Instructional Strategies

Assign Study Partner
Provide Models
Review Directions
Multi-Sensory Approach
Number Line
Personalized Examples
Highlight Key Words
Immediate Feedback
Check Work in Progress
Concrete Examples
Review Sessions
Use Manipulatives
Use Mnemonics
Pre-teach Content
Have Student Restate Information
Mimed Clues/Gestures
Provide Notes/Outline to Student
Cueing/Prompts
Extra Drill/Practice
Visuals to Support Instruction
Computer Supported Instruction
Provide Student With Vocabulary Word Bank
Support Auditory Presentations with Visual

(CSDE, 2013)

LESSON 2.3

Learning When and How to Disclose Information about Your Disability

Although self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself, it does not mean that you need to disclose information about your disability in all situations. Remember that your disability is, in large part, a function of your environment. For example, a painter with dyslexia (a reading disability) would probably not experience much difficulty with his or her disability on the job. On the other hand, a college student with the same disability would probably need specific supports and accommodations in order to do well in class.

You will need to make decisions about how and when to disclose information about your disability throughout your entire adult life. It is best to think about disclosing information regarding your disability on a "need-to-know" basis. Generally speaking, if you will not need any accommodations as a result of your disability, it is probably best to keep the information private. If you will need accommodations, the only way you will be able to get them under disability laws (ADA and Section 504), is by making your disability known. As an adult, the primary responsibility for requesting accommodations rests with you.

Activities

- **As a class or in small groups, discuss the pros and cons of disclosing your disability.**

  Share personal examples of situations in which you have had to talk about your disability.

  - How did you feel?
  - Were you confident, uncomfortable or anxious in describing your strengths, weaknesses and need for accommodations?
  - How was the information received?

  Also talk about various situations in which no one knew you had a disability. Situations may include dating or socializing; classroom experiences; work or job application procedures; medical procedures or treatment; extracurricular or recreational activities; and community activities such as church or volunteer experiences. Explain why it was not important for you to disclose your disability in those situations.

- **As a group, using pages 29 and 30 , discuss three examples of how and when it would be best to disclose your disability in specific situations.**

  Situations could include applying for or working at a job; looking for an apartment or house; applying for college or training programs; using transportation; and visiting a medical office. Consider the following questions:

  - What are the pros of sharing that I have a disability?
  - What are the cons of sharing that I have a disability?
  - Under what conditions should I self-disclose regarding my disability?
  - Under what conditions should I keep my disability private?

Visit www.cpacinc.org/SteppingForward to watch:
411 on Disability Disclosure

Record information from the group discussions in your personal journal.

Disability disclosure and things to think about when applying for a job:

- Employers may NOT ask whether you have a disability during a job interview, although they may ask probing questions such as "This job is stressful for many people as it involves tight deadlines and coordinating multiple projects. How would you handle this?" If you voluntarily disclose your disability, however, an employer may ask you follow-up questions regarding your disability.
- Does the job require a pre-employment examination? These tests must measure your ability to do the tasks required by the job (for example, a proofreading test would be an appropriate skill measure for an editorial assistant position but probably not for a job as a server in a restaurant). An employer is only allowed to give you a pre-employment exam if this is something done with all prospective employees.
- Will you need accommodations in order to take the test? The employer must provide reasonable accommodations (such as extended time or use of a reader) in pre-employment examinations, but you will have to self-disclose in order to request the accommodations and may have to provide proof of your disability in order to receive them.
- Is a medical exam required? If all job applicants are required to have a medical examination, an employer may request that you have a medical examination, but only after an employment offer is made. Do you have any physical limitations that would get in the way of your ability to do the job? Can you perform the job with appropriate and reasonable accommodations?
- Will drug testing be done? Some employers may test applicants for illegal drugs. If you take a prescription medication for your disability, ask your doctor whether it is likely to show up in the test results. Decide whether or not you should disclose information about your prescription drugs prior to taking the drug test.
- Will you need accommodations to perform the essential functions of a job? In most cases, if you need accommodations to perform the essential functions of a job, the best time to disclose your disability is AFTER you receive a job offer, and BEFORE you begin work.

(Adapted from Brown, 2000)

Learn more about employment rights and disclosure considerations:
The Americans with Disabilities Act: Civil Rights for You
by Dale S. Brown
www.ldonline.org/article/5999

Disability disclosure and things to think about when applying to college:

- A college admission form CANNOT require you to disclose whether or not you have a disability.
- Students may choose to disclose their disability during the admissions process. If you decide to disclose your disability to a college, this information CANNOT be used to deny admission. Colleges and universities cannot discriminate on the basis of disability.
- Disclosing a disability does NOT guarantee admission. Colleges and universities do not have to alter their admission requirements or standards. Students with disabilities must meet the same admissions criteria as all prospective students.
- Disclosing a disability can provide you with an opportunity to explain possible discrepancies in your academic record. For example, it is typical for students with learning disabilities to have good high school transcript grades and low SAT scores or vice versa. Does this describe you? If so, you may want to consider disclosing your disability during the application process either through the required essay or during a personal interview, if there is one. You can put your self-advocacy skills to good use by explaining how your academic strengths and weaknesses relate to your proposed course of study.
- If you choose not to self-disclose during the application process, you may still do so at any time after you have been accepted to a college or university. At that point you will need to go to the Office of Disability Support Services (or the department and/or person responsible for coordinating services for students with disabilities) and request services. You will also need to provide recent documentation of your disability. Be aware that you cannot disclose and expect an adjustment on classes that have already been taken.

(Adapted from Barr, Hartman, and Spillane, 1995)

Visit www.cpacinc.org/SteppingForward to watch:
College & Disability Services: Student Feud

LESSON 2.4

Using Written Information to Support Your Advocacy Goals

Developing the ability to advocate for yourself requires more than just good oral communication skills. The written word can also be a valuable tool in helping to convey information to others. In fact, using written instead of oral communication is often better if you need to create a paper trail. A paper trail can provide a record of events that have occurred as well as requests that were made. Written information is also required in order to provide documentation of your disability and progress in school.

There are two important skill development areas involved in using written information to support your advocacy goals. The first area involves the use of written information to make your needs/concerns known. The second involves record keeping, so that you'll have ready access to important papers that can help document your need for services and/or accommodations.

Letter Writing

The Wrightslaw website and online newsletter, *The Special Education Advocate,* offer accurate, up-to-date information about special education law and advocacy for children with disabilities. The following information on letter writing was adapted from the article *12 Rules for Writing Great Letters.*

Communicating by writing a letter in written either a written or electronic format (e-mail) is a useful life skill. You can use written communication to:

1. Request information
2. State an opinion
3. Decline a request
4. Express appreciation
5. Create a paper trail

Some letters have more than one purpose. It is important that your letter writing skills show your ability to convey your thoughts in words!

Learn more online:
12 Rules for Writing GREAT Letters
www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/12rules_letters.htm

Activity

The following activity can help you develop skills in letter writing:

- **Select one of the reasons for writing a letter that is described on the previous page (1-5) and decide who you are going to address (your teacher, your boss, your parents, etc.).**
- **Using a blank document on your computer or three blank sheets of paper answer these questions.**

  On the first sheet write "WHY? Why am I writing this letter?"

  On the second sheet write "WHAT? What are my goals in writing this letter?"

  On the third sheet write "Other Thoughts." Brainstorm. Write down your thoughts. Make lists.

  Don't worry about writing in complete sentences or prioritizing. Your goal is to dump your thoughts from your brain onto these sheets of paper or documents. It doesn't need to take a long time for you to write down all your important thoughts. Do not allow yourself to obsess about details. Don't worry about spelling at this point. You should focus on the big picture.

- **Write your first draft.**

  Tell your story chronologically, (put events in the order in which they happened from first to last), weaving in the facts. Make your letter clear, concise, and easy to understand. Then, put it away for a day or two. Many times, letters that are written in anger, or when you are feeling emotional, require a "cooling off" period and revision time.

- **Read your letter aloud.**

  Think about whether your letter is brief, clear, interesting and accurate.

  Then, make the necessary edits. It is important that all spelling and punctuation are correct. Double-check your work using the spell check feature on your computer or have a dictionary handy.

- **Give your letter to at least one other person to read.**

  Your reader should be someone who will tell you the truth, who will critique your letter and share honest comments and suggestions. Ask this person if they understand:

  - what you are trying to accomplish;
  - what you want; and
  - what your goals are for writing this letter.

  If you haven't expressed yourself clearly and you find yourself explaining your points to the reader, STOP and write down your explanation. Then edit your letter, adding the information from your explanation.

Use your high school years to perfect your letter writing skills. Develop cover letters to accompany:

- Employment resumes
- College applications
- Grant and scholarship applications

You may also want to use letter writing to advocate for causes in which you believe.

Below are some examples of opportunities to use letter writing to advocate:

- Write your representative from Congress to support disability or other legislation.
- File a grievance and/or complaint with a business or industry whose services or products are not satisfactory.
- Write to the newspaper or town committee to participate in community forums around issues of the economy, education or the environment.

(Adapted from Wright, 2007)

Record Keeping

As you BEGIN high school it is important that you obtain, organize and keep copies of all papers that document your disability. This information will be necessary to help you get accommodations either on the job or in college or other programs. These documents will also help determine if you are eligible for many adult services.

Make sure you have copies of the following information before you leave high school:

- Your most recent evaluations given by the school or an independent evaluator. These may include educational, psychological, neuro-psychological, speech and language, physical or occupational therapy, and vocational evaluations. Most colleges require documentation of your disability that was done within the past three years.
- Your report cards and any progress reports.
- Standardized test results such as the Smarter Balanced Assessment (which has recently replaced the Connecticut Academic Performance Test).
- Your most recent IEP and any behavior or service plans.
- Medical records related to your disability.

If you have difficulty with organizational skills, ask your teacher, transition coordinator, or parents to help you develop a record-keeping system.

(Adapted from Crabtree, 1998)

CHAPTER 3

Transition: Career Planning and Community Connections

Did you know that most people find their jobs through family and friend connections? Having a broad network of family and friends who can support you in developing and reaching your goals is important. Friends and family members can help you make decisions, assist you in obtaining needed services, and refer you to others who can help with the career-planning process. For example, your Uncle David just might know an employee at the Department of Public Health who can help you explore your interest in food safety; or your neighbor down the street, who works at the local hospital may be able to assist you in your job search in the medical field.

The following are suggestions of things that you can do to expand your social network, receive help with career planning, and practice your advocacy skills. Work with your teacher, counselor, friend or family member to figure out how to follow through with one of these suggestions.

- **Develop a support network.**

  Identify family members and friends who can encourage and support you in reaching your goals. There are also state and national advocacy groups you can join to help you become a better self-advocate.

- **Develop mentoring relationships.**

  Mentors are people who provide information, support and encouragement. They are individuals who are available to listen to you, answer your questions, and offer suggestions regarding training; employment; college; and independent living. Studies have shown that students who have mentors are more successful in achieving their goals. A trusted teacher, a special aunt or uncle, your high school coach, minister, or supervisor at work are examples of individuals you may want to consider for a mentor.

- **Obtain information on person-centered planning tools that can help you plan for the future.**

  There are a variety of person-centered planning tools you can use to help you develop life and career goals. Tools such as MAPS, PATH, and Circles of Support can assist you with identifying the skills, supports and services you need to help you reach your goals. Go on-line and research these resources in more detail. Talk to your parents and teacher about the benefits of conducting a person-centered planning meeting for and with YOU!

- **Take career interest inventories.**

  These paper and pencil or computer-generated inventories can help you identify your interests and skills, and match them to various occupations. You can ask your teacher or school counselor for career interest inventories. You might already have taken several career interest inventories as part of your Student Success Plan which all students in grade 6-12 must have (see page 37).

- **Participate in a variety of real, community-based work experiences.**

  While career interest inventories can help you obtain some beginning information about the types of jobs you might be interested in, there is no substitute for on-the-job experience. Job shadowing, informal interviews, situational assessments, part-time jobs, and volunteering can all provide you with the experiences and information you will need to narrow down your career choices.

- **Identify state and local adult service agencies.**

  Making the transition from school to adult life involves leaving an educational system that must provide you with a free and appropriate education and entering a system that is based upon eligibility and the availability of resources. Be sure to seek out organizations and agencies that can help you obtain the adult services you may need. A list of resources is provided at the end of this guide.

Visit www.cpacinc.org/SteppingForward to watch:
Vocational Rehabilitation Services: Jack's Jobs & Skills to Pay the Bills: Networking

LESSON 3.1

Thinking about Your Life Five Years from Now

Although you may think it's too early to decide how you will earn a living, it is critical that you start exploring various career possibilities NOW. It is helpful to begin the process of career exploration by thinking about your skills and interests. There are no good or bad jobs, only good or bad job matches. The primary focus of your career planning process is on finding a good match between your interests and skills and the requirements of the job.

Activity

- **To help you explore your vocational skills and interests, begin by making a list of:**
  - School subjects you like and in which you earn good grades
  - Your personality traits (for example, patient, friendly, talkative, organized)
  - Your physical traits (for example, strong, good with your hands, athletic)
  - Extracurricular activities in which you participate (for example, clubs, sports, hobbies)
  - Past or present work or volunteer activities
- **Also, think about the following:**
  - Do you prefer being inside or outside?
  - Do you like to sit, stand or move around?
  - Do you like to work with data (numbers, written information), people, or things?
  - Do you like to work alone or with others?
  - Do you like to work during the day or at night?
  - Do you like to work where it is quiet or where it is noisy?
  - Are you interested, willing, and/or financially able to go to college or trade school to receive additional education and training beyond high school?

Write a statement regarding your current career interests and record this information in your journal.

It should be interesting to see whether your career interests stay the same or change over the next several years.

There are a variety of career interest inventories you can take to help you determine your interests and possible career choices. There are also assessments that will match your aptitude and values to specific career fields. Your school's counseling department or career center can direct you to these inventories, as well as others on a school's computerized career system such as Naviance or Career Cruising. Some career assessments to check out include:

- Harrington O'Shea Career Decision Making System
- Transition Planning Inventory (TPI)
- Transition Skills Inventory (TSI)
- Picture Interest Career Survey (PICS)
- Reading Free Vocational Interest Inventory
- College Survival and Success Scale (CSSS)
- Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment (ACLSA)
- Career & Life Explorer (great for middle school students)

Activity

- **Go online to www.careeronestop.org and search for more information about career interests inventories. Have fun taking this online inventory and learning more about yourself.**

Record the types of inventories you completed and the results of these inventories in your journal. Highlight the jobs or career clusters you plan to explore further.

To help you further identify careers you may be interested in, check out the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA) website at www.cbia.com/edf/CareerPathways.htm. The website contains videos that will give you a "real-life" look at career opportunities that are available, particularly in Connecticut.

Be aware that if you are a student receiving special education services, career exploration activities are REQUIRED as part of the transition planning process. Career exploration activities are also part of your Student Success Plan (SSP), Connecticut's version of an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) that all students, including students with disabilities, in grades 6-12 should be working on. Make sure that both the SSP and transition planning for your IEP address similar career and academic goals. Learn more by visiting www.sde.ct.gov and searching for Student Success Plan.

Learn more online:

Drive of Your Life
www.careeronestop.org

Career Pathways Series
www.cbia.com/edf/CareerPathways.htm

NCWD Fact Sheet on Individualized Learning Plans
www.ncwd-youth.info/sites/default/files/FactSheet-ILP.pdf

According to IDEA, transition is a coordinated set of activities, developed and implemented throughout your high school years. These activities are designed to help you succeed in life after graduation. These activities may include not only classroom instruction but also community experiences, vocational evaluations, and related services.

Transition planning is a process that helps you:

- determine your strengths, interests, preferences and needs;
- identify post high school goals in the areas of college, training, employment, and independent living; and
- obtain the academic and functional skills needed to reach those goals.

The Planning and Placement Team (PPT) helps you to develop transition goals as part of your Individualized Education Program (IEP).

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), requires that transition planning begin at the PPT meeting following your 15th birthday. During this meeting, long-term goals, called Post-School Outcome Goal Statements (PSOGS), are developed in the areas of postsecondary education or training, employment, and independent living skills (if appropriate). These statements define your long-term goals after high school AND provide the information needed to develop annual goals and short-term objectives on your IEP.

Developing a long-term goal gives you something to work toward. For example, if you are planning to go to college, it is important that you take the required number of English, mathematics, science, and foreign language courses in high school. Developing a long-term goal does NOT mean that you cannot change your mind for the remainder of high school. PSOGS must be reviewed and updated each year, usually at your annual PPT meeting.

Your PSOGS will be based on:

- your strengths and interests; and
- results of your career inventories, grades, and volunteer and work experiences.

This gives you the opportunity to change your goals and/or courses of study if you find that you are on the wrong track. Transition planning provides you with academic and work experiences to help you make informed decisions about your future.

Think about your long-term goals and record them in your journal.

Be sure to share these goals with your parents and teacher and consider sharing them at your next PPT meeting.

LESSON 3.2

Developing Transition Goals

- Are you organized with your school work?
- Do you ask for help when you don't understand something?
- Do you speak up for yourself to express your opinions, even if others disagree with you?
- Do you attend your Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting?
- Do you participate in your PPT meeting?
- Do you know your disability?
- Can you explain and/or describe your disability?
- Can you clearly state your accommodation needs?
- Do you take care of your personal health care needs, including hygiene; getting enough sleep at night, and going to the doctor and dentist for annual checkups and when you are sick?
- What are your strengths and interests?

What do you want to do when you graduate from high school?

Remember to think about these major life areas when developing transition goals:

- Postsecondary education (2-year or 4-year college, training program, certificate program)
- Vocational training
- Competitive employment (including supported employment)
- Continuing and adult education
- Adult services
- Independent living and community participation

The publication *Building a Bridge: A Resource Manual for High School Students* (CSDE, 2009) is a transition manual that can help you take an active role in developing transition goals and objectives. Your school may have copies of this guide, or you can download a copy free of charge from the Connecticut State Department of Education's website at **www.sde.ct.gov**. Click on "Special Education" then "Secondary Transition Resources."

Building a Bridge contains checklists and other valuable information on transition, including self-advocacy, your IEP, your rights and responsibilities under the IDEA, and developing transition goals and objectives. Use this manual to help you develop and update your goals on an annual basis.

Learn more online:
Building a Bridge: A Transition Manual for High School Students
www.sde.ct.gov

If you are having difficulty developing transition goals, there are a variety of person-centered planning activities that can help. MAPS, PATH, and Circles of Support are all examples of person-centered planning tools that can help you identify and communicate your goals for the future. Person-centered planning attempts to identify and highlight the unique talents, gifts, and capabilities inherent in everyone. It assumes that you are the foremost expert on your wants and needs, and focuses on building a "community" of people who can help you move closer to your goals. The SERC library (see the Resources section of this guide) also has information on many of these planning tools.

Write your transition goals for post-secondary education, employment, and independent living either in your journal or in a separate document or notebook if you don't wish to share your journal. Bring you goals to your next PPT meeting.

It is important to remember that your goals in each of these transition areas may change over the next few years as you learn more about yourself and various school, work and adult living options. That's okay! Take advantage of your high school years to explore all these options. NOW is the time to think about and share your ideas, concerns, and questions about career planning, and what you would like to do when you graduate from high school.

Learn more about person-centered planning at:
www.pacer.org search Person-Centered Planning

Activities

There are a number of hands-on and research-related activities that can provide you with additional information to help you make informed career and life decisions. Select from the following activities, or come up with your own ideas to learn more about employment and postsecondary education options and develop your leadership skills:

- **Get a part-time job.**

  Try babysitting, lawn-mowing, bagging groceries, delivering newspapers, or working in an office, a restaurant, or store.

  Write what you like and don't like about the jobs in your journal.

- **Volunteer.**

  Visit the Corporation for National and Community Service website at www.nationalservice.gov/serve-your-community/how-get-involved for information on volunteer opportunities. Your local library is also another source of resources on non-profit organizations in your town that may need volunteers.

- **Begin researching postsecondary education and training opportunities.**

  Options include 4-year colleges, community colleges, business and trade schools, and military service. Be sure to find out about the entrance requirements and application procedures.

  Record this information in your journal.

If you're not sure where to pursue training or advanced education in Connecticut, go to www.univsource.com/ct.htm. This site has links to all Connecticut colleges and universities, and the programs they offer.

- **Participate in job shadowing or community-based training experiences.**

  These opportunities may be coordinated through your district's transition or School-to-Career programs.

  It is important to have as many different types of work experiences as possible during your high school years. Your work experiences give you the opportunity to try out jobs you are interested in, as well as jobs that are available in your local community. For example, even if you have little interest in working in the insurance industry, if your community has a large number of insurance companies, try it! You might discover aspects of the industry that you like or become aware of other jobs (such as receptionist, administrative assistant, accountant, or cafeteria manager) that exist within the company.

  Check out www.jobshadow.com for more information on job shadowing.

Record all work experiences in your journal.

List the company name, dates you worked, type of work you performed, the name of your supervisor, and any personal comments regarding the nature of work (such as what you liked or disliked about it). Also note whether it was a paid job, internship, or job shadow experience.

If you do not know the difference between these types of work experiences, ask your school counselor or transition coordinator. Keeping a record of work experiences will help you with career planning, as well as resume development. Job shadow forms are located at the end of this section.

- **Identify a mentor who can help you with the career-planning process.**

  Find out if your school has a formal mentoring program, or ask your transition coordinator or school counselor to help you locate a mentor. Your local chamber of commerce, civic organizations, or independent living center may be able to help.

- **Interview your parents, mentor, or other adults you know about their first job or career.**

  Are they working in that same occupation now, or have they changed careers? Did they need additional training or education to obtain a job or advance in their career? Are they satisfied with their vocational choice? If given the opportunity to go back in time, what would they change or do differently?

Take notes during your interview, and write a paragraph or two in your journal that describes this person's career development process. Be sure to include your own thoughts about career development.

You may also wish to participate in a class discussion about how people choose their careers.

- **Conduct informational interviews with people who have jobs in which you are interested.**

  This interview differs from the previous activity in that it focuses more on learning about a specific occupation rather than the general career development process. You do not use informational interviews to ask for a job. Instead, use this opportunity to obtain information and develop a future contact in an occupational field. Scheduling the interview, preparing for and conducting the interview, and writing a thank you note upon the completion of the interview are all ways to practice your self-advocacy skills.

Record information about the informational interviews in your journal. Include the name of the person interviewed, job title, the date and time of interview, and any information obtained.

- **Look in a dictionary or online for definitions of the following words: vocation, occupation, career, and job.**

  How are they alike? How are they different?

Record this information in your journal.

  Be aware that you may hear these words being used interchangeably in PPT meetings or in other career guidance situations.

- **Develop leadership skills.**

  Leadership training programs are vital to ensure that you are prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future. The Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) has been held on the grounds of the University of Connecticut campus in Storrs, Connecticut since 1999. This forum is sponsored by the nonprofit, Connecticut Youth Leadership Project (CTYLP) through donations from state agencies, grant awards and private individuals. Each year high school sophomores and juniors with various disabilities are selected, through a competitive process, to participate in four days of educational and motivational leadership activities. YLF applications are distributed to every school district in October or November of each year. You may also obtain an application online at www.ctylp.org. Applicants are selected on the basis of demonstrated leadership skills in their communities and schools and must complete a required essay and interview. Students who are selected to participate are also required to develop a team leadership activity to implement with their group in a school or community during the following year.

  If you are interested in participating in the Youth Leadership Forum, see your transition coordinator, school counselor or director of special education or go online for an application.

- **Join a local self-advocacy or support group.**

  These groups can provide you with the support you may need to speak up for yourself. Some self-advocacy groups have a membership that is disability specific. For example, Autism Services and Resources Connecticut (ASRC) has social groups for young adults with autism; People First of Connecticut is for individuals with learning difficulties and developmental disabilities.

  Some groups are even age specific. Kids As Self-Advocates (KASA) is comprised of youth with disabilities aged 12 to 22 and their friends. The goal of KASA is to spread helpful, positive information amongst peers on issues related to living with special health care needs, education, and employment. Information on the national KASA organization can be found on their website below. To find an advocacy group to meet your individual needs, contact the University of Connecticut's A.J. Pappanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, or your local Independent Living Center (see the Resources section of this guide).

Learn more online:

Listing of CT Colleges and Universities
www.univsource.com/ct.htm

Corporation for National and Community Service
www.nationalservice.gov/serve-your-community/how-get-involved

Job Shadowing Information
www.jobshadow.com

National Mentoring Partnership
www.mentoring.org

Connecticut Youth Leadership Project
www.ctylp.org

Autism Services and Resources Connecticut (ASRC)
www.ct-asrc.org

People First of Connecticut
www.peoplefirstct.org

Kids ***as Self-Advocates (KASA)***
https://familyvoices.org/aboutkasa/

Job Shadow Interview Form

Business visited: _____ Date: _____

Position of person interviewed: _____

These are some sample questions you may want to ask in your job shadow interview:

1. How did you get started in this field?

_____

_____

2. What are the specific job requirements of your position?

_____

_____

3. What do you like most about your job?

_____

_____

4. What do you like least about your job?

_____

_____

5. What educational requirements are needed for this job?

_____

_____

6. What is the beginning salary range for this type of job?

_____

7. What are the hours you work at this job?

_____

8. Do you have to work overtime or on weekends?

_____

Other important information about this job:

_____

_____

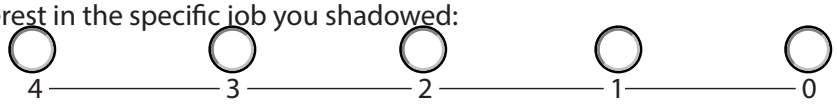
Post-Job Shadow Rating Form

Student name: _____

Name of business:_____

Type of job: _____

Rate your interest in the specific job you shadowed:



Very Interested	Somewhat Interested	Not at All Interested

Write down what you liked and/or disliked about this job visit.

Likes

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Dislikes

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

LESSON 3.3

Exploring Transition Options

Transition is all about making informed decisions about postsecondary education or training, having additional community-based work experiences, exploring independent living options, and identifying local and state adult service options. If you are 17 years old, your school district is required to notify you that all rights provided to your parents/guardians under federal special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act, will transfer to you when you turn 18. From this age forward, the PPT must send you a written notice of all future meetings. However, if you would still like to have your parent/guardian involved in the education planning process, Connecticut State Regulations (2013) allow students to put a statement in writing notifying the board of education that the parent/guardian will continue to have the right to make educational decisions on the student's behalf even though the student is 18 years old. If you need help writing or signing this statement, you can ask someone to help you. (Sec. 10-76d-12(e)).

You have now reached the age of majority and with this comes increased responsibility and independence. The following pages contain information and suggestions regarding exploring college and training programs, employment options, living options, and adult service options.

Exploring Postsecondary Education or Training Options

Does the career you wish to pursue require additional training or a 2-year or 4-year college education? Are you taking all the required courses in high school necessary to meet the admission requirements of the college or university?

Activities

Continue to explore different colleges and universities. The following activities can help:

- **Go online to find information on college planning.**

  One website that can assist you is www.collegeboard.org. Seek information on specific colleges that you think you might be interested in, and begin comparing them in terms of location, student population, cost, program and course offerings, and support services available to students with disabilities.

- **Attend workshops that can answer your questions about going to college.**
- **Tour colleges to determine preferences.**

  You might request that a student with a disability similar to yours gives you the tour (or meets with you during that time) so you can ask about his or her experience on campus.

- **Take the PSAT in 10th grade and the SAT and/or ACT in 11th grade.**
- **Talk with your school counselor.**

  If you are applying to college through the early admission process, check with your school counselor to ensure that you meet the application timelines.

- **Visit the following websites if you are planning to attend college:**
  - Heath Resource Center at the National Youth Transitions Center - www.health.gwu.edu
  - Association on Higher Education and Disability - www.ahead.org
- **Review the accommodations you are receiving in high school.** (Refer to page 8 of your IEP.)

  Be aware that colleges do NOT provide modifications. You are expected to meet the same academic demands as all other students attending college. The PPT should consider removing modifications throughout high school if you are planning to go to college so your success without modifications can be determined.

Exploring Community-Based Work Options

Are you ready to work, earn a paycheck, and gain practical on the job experience? Research has shown that students who perform paid work during their high school years have a better chance of finding and keeping a job after graduation. You may be able to receive pre-employment transition services and work experiences as part of your school's transition program in coordination with the CT Department of Rehabilitation Services (DORS). Talk to your school counselor and teachers about opportunities in your school and community.

The Connecticut Department of Labor has a fun, easy-to-use website, designed specifically for students. *Today's Youth - Tomorrow's Workforce* website provides answers to your questions about preparing for work and college.

Visit the CT Department of Labor website for information on:

- Online networking
- Resumes and cover letters
- Interviewing
- Job applications
- Internet job search sites
- Internships and volunteering
- Self-assessment
- Career exploration
- Other youth employment related topics.

Learn more about employment:
CT Department of Labor
www.ctdol.state.ct.us
Youth Rules!
www.youthrules.dol.gov

Also check out **www.youthrules.dol.gov**, a site specifically designed for teenagers.

After several work experiences - internships, volunteer work, and/or paid employment - it is now important to focus primarily on jobs that you like. If you are seeking a full-time job immediately upon graduation from high school, talk to your teachers and parents about a variety of on-the-job training experiences in your preferred career area while you are in high school. It is critical that you graduate with some specific entry level vocational skills, but your training should also be broad enough to enable you to change jobs within your career area.

Record all your jobs and work experiences in your journal, and include them in your professional resume.

Exploring Independent Living Options

Where do you want to live after graduation from high school? Where do you want to live five years from now? Ten years from now?

Where you live as an adult depends on two things:

1. How well you are able to live and support yourself with earnings from your full time job; and
2. Your personal preferences as to where and how you want to live.

It is important that you become knowledgeable about the different types of living options that may be available in your community.

Living situations can include:

- Family home, friend's or a relative's home
- Dormitory
- Renting a room
- Your own home/apartment/condominium rental or ownership
- Rent-subsidized apartment
- Supported living
- Supervised apartments
- Group homes
- Adult foster care

Visit and get to know these types of living options. Determine whether you are eligible for any of the supported living arrangements. Ask your parents, high school teacher, school counselor or social worker for additional information. Also develop a proposed timeline for movement from one living situation to another.

Be aware that many students with and without disabilities plan to live at home throughout college and for a few years beyond.

Record this information in your journal.

Learn more about housing options:
Disability.gov's Guide to Housing
www.disability.gov/resource/disability-govs-guide-housing

Exploring Adult-Service Options

Work with your transition coordinator to determine if you might be eligible for any adult services. All state agencies have eligibility requirements and many have waiting lists. State agencies that provide services to individuals with disabilities include:

- Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)
- Department of Development Services (DDS)
- Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)
- Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)
- Department of Rehabilitation Services, Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services (DHOH)

There are also a variety of private, not-for-profit agencies that can provide direct services. Information on private provider agencies in your area may be obtained from the Directory of Transitional/Vocational Service Providers available at www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/PDF/DEPS/Special/Directory_Trans_Service_Providers.pdf. Website addresses and telephone numbers for the state agencies can be found in the Resources section of this guide.

Be aware that special education law, the IDEA, states that **the school district must invite a representative of any participating agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services** (34 CFR 300.321 (b)(3)). The PPT must also contact outside/participating agencies to provide information, services, and links to resources that can help to inform the development of more appropriate transition goals and objectives in your IEP. Information from adult service agencies can help to move you toward your post-school goals, even if a representative from your agency is not able to or it is not appropriate for him/her to attend a PPT meeting.

Activity

- **With your teacher's help, write down the names of adult service agencies that might be able to help you or provide you with information that is critical to help you reach your post-school goals.**
- **Find out how and when you will need to apply for services.**
- **Decide whether representatives from these agencies should be invited to your next PPT meeting to help with transition planning.**

Record this information in your journal.

LESSON 3.4

Making the Transition from School to Adult Life

Are you ready to graduate? Have you finalized your plans for life after high school?

- What will you do when you graduate?
- Do you plan to get a full or part-time job, go to college, enter the military, or receive further vocational training?
- Will you live at home, in a college dormitory, in your own apartment, or in some other supported living situation?
- Have you acquired the skills you need to be successful in work, school, and independent living environments?
- Have all your IEP goals been met?

It is important for you to know that special education law, the IDEA, provides you with an opportunity to receive special education and related services through the age of 21 or until you receive a regular high school diploma. When you are getting close to completing your academic credits for graduation, if you feel that you do not yet have the transition skills necessary for adult life, you may want to consider asking your PPT about staying in school for an additional year or more to work on transition skills only.

Talk to your parents, teachers, or other adult mentors to help you decide whether you would benefit from additional years of public education that would only focus on preparing you for life after high school. Your friends or peers may not be the best people to help you make this decision. It is important that you talk with people who have experienced the responsibilities of adulthood and who can better appreciate the importance of a good education.

If you decide to stay in school, you do not necessarily have to receive your 13th year of education in your local high school. In fact, preparing for life after high school is best accomplished in a setting with non-disabled peers - students who are your age or older. Talk with your teacher and your PPT to discuss the options available to you to gain the skills that you need.

School districts throughout Connecticut are now required to consider allowing eligible students to participate in their high school graduation ceremony and other senior year activities with their classmates while withholding the actual diploma until the IEP objectives are met or the student turns 21. These students can then receive an additional year (or more) of community-based vocational training, work experiences, and/or educational services within an age-appropriate setting such as a college campus.

Remember that once you graduate from the public school system, you are no longer eligible for a free appropriate public education (FAPE) under the IDEA. Determine whether it is a good decision for you to take advantage of this opportunity to stay in school and better prepare yourself for the adult world.

Activities

If you have achieved your IEP goals, however, and no longer require special education, there are several activities that will ensure a smooth transition from school to adult life:

- **If you plan to attend college immediately upon graduation, take the SAT or ACT.**

  If you need accommodations to take the test, make sure all the appropriate paperwork is completed. Meet with your school counselor and talk about the steps you need to complete and the timelines for this test. Be prepared to take the SAT or ACT in the 11th grade. You may also take this test again as a senior to improve your scores.

- **Submit your college applications during the fall of grade 12.**

- **Apply for any adult services for which you are eligible.**

  Keep scheduled appointments, self-advocate for your needs, and continue to keep updated academic, medical, and vocational records after high school.

- **Seek out the services of your local Independent Living Center (ILC).**

  ILC's help people with physical and/or mental disabilities to live independently in their communities. Services may include assistance in obtaining modifications to a home or vehicle, adaptive equipment, personal care assistance, advocacy, peer counseling, and independent living skills training. The locations and phone numbers of the Connecticut Independent Living Centers are listed in the Resources section of this guide.

- **Familiarize yourself with the services of the Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy (P&A).**

  This office advocates for the civil rights of people with disabilities. If you're having trouble finding services or are not satisfied with the services you receive, P&A can help. Contact information is available in the Resources section of this guide.

- **Obtain assistance in finding a job through the Connecticut Department of Labor/American Job Centers.**

  They offer free services including:

  Self Service and Career Resource Areas

  - Job listings
  - Resume paper, envelopes and stamps
  - Phone, fax, copier
  - Computers
  - Internet access, word processing
  - Resource information, videos
  - Information on education and skills training
  - Information and referral to other support services
  - Information on employment, wage and economic trends

  Core Workshops:

  - Internet job search
  - Resume basics
  - Online applications/resume
  - Career exploration
  - Interviewing techniques
  - Keep your spirits up
  - Stress management

  Learn more about employment resources:

  American Job Centers
  www.ctdol.state.ct.us

  O*Net Online
  www.onetonline.org

  Voter Registration Information
  www.canivote.org

  A list of the American Job Centers that can assist you in your job search is available on their website: **www.ctdol.state.ct.us**. Another great site to check out is **www.onetonline.org**.

- **Register to vote.**

  If you are 18 years of age, you can further develop your self-advocacy skills and civic responsibility by registering and getting out to vote. Contact the registrar of voters at your local town or city hall for additional information.

  Not sure if you are registered to vote? Check your registration information at **www.canivote.org**. Also, visit **www.votesmart.org** for information on elections and candidates.

CHAPTER 4

Participating in Planning and Placement Team (PPT) Meetings

Developing the ability to effectively self-advocate involves not only learning new skills, but also seeking places where you can practice your self-advocacy skills. Your annual Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting is one of the best opportunities you have to develop your self-advocacy skills. It is important that you attend these meetings and become an active participant in the planning process. Remember that every student's experience participating in PPT meetings is different and the earlier you begin attending PPT meetings, even for a short time, the easier it will be to speak up for yourself. There are a number of things you can do to increase your ability to speak up for yourself at PPT meetings:

- **Understand your rights and responsibilities as a member of the PPT.**

  PPT meetings are held in order to develop an appropriate Individualized Education Program (IEP) for YOU. The PPT has the responsibility for developing your education and transition goals (required by age 16) for the upcoming year and for determining what special education and related services you need in order to reach those goals. You have a right, and a personal responsibility, to participate as a member of the PPT!

- **Attend each and every meeting held to discuss and plan your IEP.**

  By law, IEP's must be reviewed and updated at least once per year. This is usually done at your annual PPT meeting. You can, however, request additional meetings to help you develop your IEP. It's been said that 80 percent of success is showing up. Increase your chances for success by being an active participant in all planning meetings.

- **Be prepared.**

  Before attending your next PPT meeting:

  - Review the meeting agenda (see a sample agenda on page 56)
  - Review your latest IEP and progress on goals
  - Compile a list of questions, concerns, and goals for the future
  - Practice talking about your goals, strengths, weaknesses, and accommodation needs

- **Take an active role in leading or facilitating your PPT.**

  Throughout the country, students are self-advocating and taking more responsibility for leading their own PPT meetings. Take advantage of your high school years to develop and practice the skills necessary for leading your own PPT.

The lessons in this chapter can help you become a more active participant in your PPT meetings.

Visit www.cpacinc.org/SteppingForward to watch: ***IEP Meetings: Video Simulation***

LESSON 4.1

Understanding Your Rights and Responsibilities as a Member of the PPT

Although you may feel uncomfortable attending a meeting with all adults and where the entire focus of the discussion is on you, it is vitally important that you participate in all of your PPT meetings. After all, it is your life and education goals that are being discussed and agreed upon during these meetings. Do you really want your parents and teachers to plan your life without your input?

To help you participate more fully in your PPT meetings it is important to have a basic understanding of your legal rights to special education and related services.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) is the federal law that gives you the right to participate in planning activities related to your education and transition from school to adult life.

Although you may attend your PPT meetings at any age and it is great practice for learning self-advocacy skills, it is especially important that you participate if the purpose of the meeting is to discuss transition planning. The IDEA defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that:

- Focuses on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;
- Is based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests; and
- Includes instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.

Talk with your parents and teachers about learning to increase your involvement in the development of your IEP. Attendance, participation and facilitation of your PPT meeting is an excellent goal to be developed on your IEP.

By law, if your PPT is meeting to discuss transition services, then you must be invited to attend. Because your goals for the future are being discussed, it is important that you attend these meetings and become an active participant in the planning process.

If you choose not to participate in your annual meeting, the PPT is still required to make transition decisions based on your individual needs, taking into account your interests and preferences. Develop alternative ways to make your interests, needs and preferences known to members of the team.

Think about the following questions:

- Can you attend your PPT meeting without participating?
- Can you participate in your PPT meeting without attending?

Review this list of ideas to help you take an active part in the PPT meeting:

- Prepare a list of your goals to bring to the meeting (request that this list be read if you are not able or decide not to attend);
- Create a collage of pictures showing your goals for the future;
- Bring a friend to help support you in describing your goals;
- Develop a PowerPoint presentation of your strengths, interests, needs and dreams for the future;
- Practice role-playing your participation in the upcoming PPT meeting with a trusted teacher, friend, or parents;

In your journal, write what active participation in your PPT meeting means to you. Be sure to describe how you will ensure that your needs, preferences and interests are taken into consideration when developing your IEP.

LESSON 4.2

Reviewing the PPT Meeting Agenda

To help you understand the steps involved in a PPT meeting, obtain a copy of the PPT meeting agenda used by your school district. If your school district does not have a standard meeting agenda, you can refer to the sample agenda provided below. This agenda lists the typical areas that may be covered at each PPT meeting. Review and discuss each of the steps involved with your special education teacher or transition coordinator.

Make sure you ask questions about any terms you do not understand such as "procedural safeguards" or "triennial results."

Sample Transition PPT Agenda

1. **Welcome/Introductions** (members present)
2. **Purpose of the meeting** (transition planning, annual review, and/or other items to be discussed)
   - **What does the student want to do after high school?**
   - **How do the purposes of this PPT meeting impact the student's post-school goals?**
3. **Procedural safeguards** (legal rights and responsibilities of student, family, and school personnel)
4. **Student's present level of academic and functional performance** - including triennial/re-evaluation results (if appropriate) – especially as related to student's post-school goals
5. **Discuss student's strengths, interests, preferences, and needs** – including how they relate to student's post-school goals
6. **Discuss and identify the student's Post-School Outcome Goal Statements** (PSOGS) in the areas of:
   - Postsecondary Education or Training
   - Employment or Career
   - Independent Living Skills (if appropriate)
7. **Discuss course of study** needed to help student reach post-school goals (examples: courses, transition activities, non-academic activities)
8. **Discuss transition services necessary to help the student achieve his/her post-school goals** (examples: additional transition assessments, instruction, community experiences, employment/work experiences, daily living skills, vocational evaluation, field trips, conferences, postsecondary course work, job shadowing, informational interviews, virtual work or college choice exploration)
9. **Develop IEP annual goals and objectives, discuss accommodations and/or modifications, and related services, summer school/tutoring** (called Extended School Year or ESY)
10. **Statewide/Standardized Assessments** - Smarter Balanced Assessment (formerly CAPT); SAT/PSAT administration including accommodations (if appropriate)
11. **Planning for triennial/re-evaluation testing** for coming school year (if appropriate)
12. **Assistive technology and/or behavior plan** (if appropriate) – especially as related to student's post-school goals
13. **Transfer of rights under the IDEA** – year before student's 18th birthday
14. For seniors or during student's last year before exiting high school – **last annual review PPT should include:**
    - Confidentiality of records,
    - Summary of Performance (SOP) – specifically page 6 to record additional contact information for student,
    - Review Post-School Outcome Survey (student will receive and should complete the survey one year after exiting high school), and
    - Services available after graduation including adult service agencies and other community supports.
15. **Adjourn meeting**

Record in your journal any questions, concerns and fears you may have regarding your participation in your PPT meeting.

LESSON 4.3

Understanding the Importance of Being Able to Lead Your Own PPT Meeting

As discussed previously, one of the goals of self-advocacy is that you are able to lead your own PPT meetings (either independently or with support) during your high school years. Remember that self-advocacy skills take time to develop. Speaking up for yourself may be hard to do, but it will become easier with practice. Taking an active role in all of your PPT meetings is an excellent way to practice those self-advocacy skills.

It is also important for you to consider that during your PPT meetings you will have the support of others who care about your future, including your parents or other family members, and school staff. This type or intensity of support will not be available in most work or postsecondary education settings where you will be required to speak up for yourself. So take advantage of practicing with support now.

To help you begin to appreciate the importance of self-advocacy, review the following list of environments and situations in which you may need to advocate for yourself upon leaving high school:

- Job interviews
- College entrance interviews
- Meetings with college professors or job supervisors to discuss accommodation needs
- Meetings with adult vocational services providers, such as the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), to discuss eligibility and service issues
- Meetings with bank personnel to open a savings and/or checking account, acquire a debit card, complete credit qualifications for an auto loan, or a college loan
- Appointments at the Department of Motor Vehicles to take your learner's permit test and road test for your driver's license or register a car
- Registration to vote in the local, state and national elections
- Application to obtain a library card
- Medical or dental appointments
- Requests for a letter of recommendation
- Verbal complaints regarding poor services in a restaurant and/or store

Think about how your active participation in the PPT process might help you prepare for some of these adult situations. For example, you might consider whether you are developing skills in any of the areas listed below:

- Speaking about your strengths and needs
- Setting goals
- Problem solving
- Speaking in a group setting
- Listening

In your journal, record five situations in which you have advocated for yourself in the past month. Record five situations in which you will have to self-advocate in the future.

LESSON 4.4

Determining How Involved You Will Be in Leading Your Next PPT Meeting

Discuss the role you will take in leading your next PPT meeting with your transition coordinator or special education teacher.

You may wish to begin your involvement simply by introducing the PPT members and stating the purpose of the meeting. Your transition coordinator or school administrator can then lead other parts of the meeting by asking appropriate questions and making sure that the conversation remains **student-centered** (focused on YOU). Each year, as you become more comfortable with the role of self-advocate, you will assume more responsibility in leading the meeting. You have the responsibility for advocating for how much and what types of support you will need to participate fully in the PPT meeting and develop needed goals and objectives as part of your IEP. Your opinion is valued and needs to be heard.

The following worksheet was developed to help you determine how involved you will be in leading your next PPT meeting and will help you develop a narrative for leading your next PPT meeting.

For more ideas about student-led meetings, go online and search for student-led IEP meetings.

PPT Self-Advocacy Worksheet

Place a check mark next to each activity for which you will assume responsibilities and fill in the blanks to help you prepare for your next PPT meeting.

I will attend my next PPT meeting.

I will participate in the following ways:

Introduce myself

Hi, my name is_____.

I want to welcome and thank you all for coming to my PPT meeting.

State the purpose of the meeting

The purpose of this meeting is to

_____

_____.

Introduce the other PPT members (or)

Ask the other PPT members to introduce themselves

Would everyone please introduce themselves?

Ask someone to take notes for my IEP

Mr./Mrs. _____, would you please take notes for my IEP? Thank you.

Ask PPT members to report on my academic progress and related services

I would like an update on my progress this past year. Who would like to begin?

Describe my disability, strengths and weaknesses, and how I think I did in school this year

As you all probably know, I am receiving special education and related services because I have been identified as having _____ (describe your disability). Overall, I think I did _____in school this past year.

My favorite subjects were:

_____

_____

My least favorite subjects were:

_____

_____

The career exploration and transition activities I participated in were (for example, job shadow, interest inventory, volunteer work, internship, work experiences, paid employment): _____

_____

_____

*I needed the following accommodations and/or modifications:*_____

_____

Assistive technology I used included: _____

_____

State my transition goals in the areas of postsecondary education/training, employment and independent living/community participation

*Upon graduation from high school I will attend/enroll in:*_____

Upon graduation I will work in the field of: _____

Upon graduation I will (independent living goal): _____

Describe my educational program for the coming school year, including goals and objectives, classes, clubs and sports

*My educational goals for next year are:*_____

_____

Classes/clubs/sports: _____

_____

State my concerns and needs and ask PPT members for input

I am most concerned about: _____

_____

_____

I believe I will need the following related services, accommodations and/or modifications, and assistive technology to be successful: _____

_____

Does anyone have any suggestions to help me meet my goals?

Thank everyone for coming

Thank you all for coming to and participating in my PPT meeting.

I will not attend my next PPT meeting but will make sure my interests, preferences, and needs are taken into consideration by the PPT when they develop my IEP. I will do this by completing the following activities: _____

_____

(CSDE, 2004)

LESSON 4.5

Having a Successful PPT Meeting

You can increase your chances of having a successful PPT meeting by being prepared and actively involved in the meeting.

Before your next PPT meeting complete the following activities:

- Find out who will be attending, and determine whether you would like to invite anyone else.
- Decide what parts of the meeting you will be leading or directing.
- Review your last IEP and progress on goals.
- Identify your concerns and develop a list of questions.
- Think about new education, transition and self-advocacy goals you want to work on.
- Practice talking about your goals, strengths and weaknesses, and accommodation needs.
- Find out what jargon or acronyms are likely to be used at the meeting (such as IEP, SAT, BRS) and make sure you understand what they mean.

During the meeting:

- Speak up if you don't understand something.
- Ask team members to refrain from using any jargon or acronyms that you don't understand.
- Make sure that PPT members are talking to you, not about you.
- Get answers to the list of questions you prepared.
- If you disagree with some of the statements made about you, speak up and present your point of view.
- If you don't agree with the final decision made at the meeting, ask your parents to review the IEP with you at home and discuss your concerns in more detail. If you disagree with your parents, and you are 18 years old and your own legal guardian, you may wish to seek legal advice.

Participating in your PPT is one important way to develop your self-advocacy skills while you are still in high school. Take the time to re-read your Journal entries and see how much progress you have made in self-advocacy. Speaking up for yourself is a lifelong skill and nobody can do it better than you!

We wish you much success in college, training, employment, and community opportunities. May your future include those gifts and skills that bring you happiness!

CHAPTER 5

Resources

The following is a list of Connecticut agencies and organizations that can provide you with information and/or services as you make the transition from school to adult life.

Connecticut Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) - www.ct.gov/besb
184 Windsor Avenue, Windsor, CT 06095
(860) 602-4000 or 1-800-842-4510

Connecticut Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) - www.ct.gov/brs
25 Sigourney Street, 11th Floor, Hartford, CT 06106
(Spring 2014 moving to 55 Farmington Avenue, Hartford, CT 06105)
(860) 424-4844 or 1-800-537-2549
Call for the address and phone number of your local BRS office or visit their website.

Connecticut Department of Developmental Services (DDS) - www.ct.gov/dds
460 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 418-6000
Call for the address and phone number of your local DDS office or look in the blue pages of your phone book under State of Connecticut.

Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL) - www.ctdol.state.ct.us
200 Folly Brook Boulevard, Wethersfield, CT 06109
(860) 263-6000
Call for the address and phone number of your local American Job Center or look in the blue pages of your phone book under State of Connecticut.

Connecticut Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services (DMHAS) - www.ct.gov/DMHAS
P.O. Box 341431, Hartford, CT 06134
(860) 418-7000
Call for the address and phone number of your local DMHAS office or look in the blue pages of your phone book under State of Connecticut.

Connecticut's Independent Living Centers (ILC's) - www.cacil.net

Access Independence - www.accessinct.org
80 Ferry Boulevard, Suite 205, Stratford, CT 06615
(203) 378-6977

Center for Disability Rights (CDR) - www.cdr-ct.org
369 Highland Street, West Haven, CT 06516
(203) 934-7077 or (203) 934-7078 (TDD)

Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut (DNEC) - www.dnec.org
19 Ohio Avenue, Suite 2, Norwich, CT 06360
(860) 823-1898 (V/TDD)

Independence Northwest (IN) - www.independencenorthwest.org
1183 New Haven Road, Suite 200, Naugatuck, CT 06770
(203) 729-3299 (V/TDD)

Independence Unlimited (IU) - www.independnceunlimited.org
151 New Park Avenue, Suite D, Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 523-5021

Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities (P&A) - www.ct.gov/opapd
60B Weston Street, Hartford, CT 06120
(860) 297-4300 or 1-800-842-7303

Connecticut Parent Advocacy Center, Inc. (CPAC) - www.cpacinc.org
338 Main Street, Niantic, CT 06357
(800) 445-2722 or (860) 739-3089

Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) - www.sde.ct.gov
165 Capitol Avenue, Hartford, CT 06106
(860) 713-6543

Department of Rehabilitation Services Deaf and Hard of Hearing Services - www.cdhi.ct.gov
67 Prospect Avenue, 3rd Floor, West Hartford, CT 06133
(860) 231-1690 or 1-800-708-6796

State Education Resource Center (SERC) - www.ctserc.org
25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457
(860) 632-1485

University of Connecticut A.J. Pappanikou Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Education, Research and Service (UCEDD) - www.uconnucedd.org
263 Farmington Avenue, MC-6222, Farmington, CT 06030-6222
(860) 679-1500 or (860) 679-1315 (TTY) or toll-free (866) 623-1315

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