



Transition

Practice Perspectives - Highlighting Information on Deaf-Blindness

Number 4 January 2009



Finding a job, learning to live independently, and obtaining further education are important goals for all young adults as they leave high school. But achieving these goals is often extremely difficult for students who are deaf-blind. Limited or absent hearing and vision, difficulties with communication, and the frequent presence of additional disabilities make the transition from school to adult life very challenging. Extensive, thoughtful transition planning is essential.

Excellent transition planning isn't just a good idea. It is required by federal law for all students with disabilities. By age 16 at the latest, a student's individualized education program (IEP) must include annual goals and transition services that are:

- coordinated,
- measurable, and
- designed to reasonably enable a student to meet post-secondary (after high school) goals.

These are the standards measured by Indicator 13, one of 20 indicators that the U.S. Department of Education requires states to use to assess how well they are meeting the requirements of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

Surveys have shown that after high school, most youth who are deaf-blind live at home with their families, are unemployed, have few friends, participate in few community activities, and are unlikely to obtain further education. To change this situation and improve the lives of youth who are deaf-blind, students need services while still in school that meet the requirements of the law and are tailored to their unique needs.

In this publication, we introduce three young adults—Noah, Laura, and Patrick. Their stories illustrate important components of transition goals and services and show how creative, individually tailored assessment and planning can be used to promote employment, further education, and independence.

Life After High School For Youth Who Are Deaf-Blind

Employment

- employed
 - 30% (*NFADB, 2008*)
 - 18% (*Petroff, 2001*)
- unemployed
 - 82% (*Petroff, 2001*)

Living Situation

- living at home
 - 57% (*NFADB, 2008*)
 - 61% (*Petroff, 2001*)
- living independently
 - 11% (*NFADB, 2008*)
 - 5% (*Petroff, 2001*)
- other
 - 19% in group homes (*NFADB, 2008*)
 - 34% in residential care (*Petroff, 2001*)

Education

- any type of educational program (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, community college)
 - 17% (*Petroff, 2001*)
 - 40% (*NLTS2, 2005*)
- 2-year college
 - 5% (*Petroff, 2001*)
 - 10% (*NLTS2, 2005*)
- 4-year college
 - 0% (*Petroff, 2001*)
 - 3.5% (*NLTS2, 2005*)

(Note: The NLTS2 survey combined results for students with deaf-blindness and students with multiple disabilities)



Components of transition services:

- Post-secondary goals for training, employment, education, and independent living
- Annual transition goals to help students meet post-secondary goals
- Age-appropriate assessments to guide the development of transition goals
- Courses of study and services that promote functional skills and academic achievement
- Inclusion of representatives from adult service agencies in IEP meetings

Source: NTTAC Indicator 13 Checklist Form A
(www.nsttac.org)

Needs of students who are deaf-blind:

- A communication system that works (students use a variety of communication methods—gestures, objects, pictures, speech, ASL, Braille)
- Access to knowledge of the world at a distance
- Training in skills outside of the regular curriculum (e.g., independent living, orientation and mobility, and social skills)
- Accommodations for learning that maximize residual hearing and vision
- Job training during high school to improve chances of employment success
- Preparation and planning for educational opportunities after high school

Noah: Planning for Employment

Noah, a junior in high school, volunteers at the Boys and Girls Club in his home town. He enjoys greeting and shaking hands with arriving members and visitors and likes to travel around the building delivering materials and equipment (his wheelchair makes an excellent delivery vehicle). Noah is friendly and enthusiastic, in spite of physical and sensory challenges caused by cerebral palsy, cortical vision loss, and hearing loss.

To guide the development of IEP goals related to employment, Noah's IEP team used an assessment process called "discovery" (Callahan & Condon, 2007) to identify Noah's interests, strengths, and needs.

Discovery is a component of the customized employment approach to job development. The team learned that Noah loves being with people and likes to travel around his community. He also likes art and bold colors. And, as is true for all individuals who are deaf-blind, Noah has very unique communication needs. The best way to communicate with him is to pair words with objects, symbols, or gestures. To communicate with others, he uses a voice-output device, three signs, and vocalizations.

The discovery process provided a structured way to conduct an assessment focused on Noah's employment needs and to develop this post-secondary goal:

After finishing high school, Noah will work in a microenterprise—his own small business—developed with family assistance and related to his interests in art, travelling in the community, and interacting with a variety of people.



The team also developed annual transition goals and planned a number of related activities to help Noah achieve his goal. For example, while still in high school, Noah will work with a vocational rehabilitation counselor and a business consultant to develop a work goal and an individual plan for employment.



Laura: Promoting Independence

Laura is a young woman with a great smile who loves chocolate, swimming, and being understood. She also happens to be profoundly deaf, visually impaired, and developmentally delayed.

Laura's mom, Jackie, knew that Laura would need continued support and training after she left school and decided that a process called personal futures planning (PFP) was the best approach to planning for Laura's future. PFP helps to identify a person's hopes, dreams, preferences, and interests, as well as the supports that will be needed to make life easier. Jackie invited school staff members who knew Laura well to a dinner at their home and began the planning process. Representatives from agencies that would provide services to Laura following high school were invited to participate at later meetings.

It took many gatherings and a great deal of discussion to formulate a plan for Laura. Personal futures planning was used to identify Laura's adult service support and training needs and served as the source for her transition-related IEP goals. Several years after graduation, Laura is preparing to move into a place of her own, an apartment to be shared with a peer and with staff support. This setting will allow Laura to independently do the things she is able to do and enjoys doing—taking showers, obtaining meals and snacks, and arranging her environment to suit her preferences (she loves putting lots of pillows on the couch). At the same time, she will have support to accomplish tasks she cannot accomplish on her own.

Successful transitions may take many years to accomplish. But, when people share a vision and work together, the rewards can be great. Just ask that young woman sitting on the couch eating chocolates.

Patrick: Higher Education

Patrick, 21, is a bright, dedicated college student with a wide variety of interests, including computer science, information technology, Deaf studies, education, and the law. Like other college students who are deaf-blind, Patrick faces many daily challenges such as using mass transit, finding his way around campus, accessing information in the classroom, and communicating with fellow students and faculty in a fast-paced environment. Success in college requires more than academic preparation. It also requires a high level of independence and the ability to be a self-advocate.

Patrick's experiences highlight the importance of involving adult-service agencies in transition planning. Representatives from the Helen Keller National Center for Deaf-Blind Youths and Adults (HKNC) in New York, located near Patrick's high school, attended his IEP meetings and worked with the team to plan activities that would help him develop the skills he would need to be successful in college. His transition experiences included participating in HKNC summer programs, where he received training in orientation and mobility, communication skills, independent living, and self-advocacy.



The training also helped Patrick determine the types of support personnel (e.g., American Sign Language interpreters and note takers) and technology he would need in college to accommodate his hearing and vision loss. Although getting the accommodations he needs is an ongoing process, Patrick believes that his transition experiences helped prepare him for college. He recommends that all students with disabilities participate in their IEP meetings and receive skill training related to self-advocacy, self-determination, and self-support.



Key Points

- Transition planning while still in high school is essential and required by law.
- Students who are deaf-blind have complex needs that must be considered during transition planning.
- Transitions for students who are deaf-blind often require creative approaches to assessment and planning.
- Successful transitions begin early in life and may take many years to accomplish.

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Funded through Award #H326T060002 by the U.S. Department of Education, OSERS, OSEP. The opinions and policies expressed by this publication do not necessarily reflect those of The Teaching Research Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.