



## Transition Information: Pennsylvania

### **Timeline**

- *By the age of 14:*
  - Transition planning should begin when the student is 14 years old or earlier.
  - A transition team should be assembled to start to create a transition portion of the IEP that will help address the student's post-secondary goals.
  - At this age, the IEP only needs to include course work and the educational program that the individual is to be involved in. It should also include some prospective information about the possible post-secondary goals that the student is interested in.
- *By the age of 16:*
  - The transition plan goes into effect at age 16.
  - At this age, there should be a statement of needed transition services and specific post-school outcomes and the instruction and training that is necessary to ensure that those goals are achieved by the time the student turns 21 years old.
- *Before the age of 17:*
  - The guardianship/conservatorship process should begin. (The age of majority in Pennsylvania is 18, **BUT it is 21 for special education purposes**).
    - The student and their family should be informed of this transfer at least a year in advance. A form of consent should be included in the student's IEP and the student should be reminded of and prepared to handle the transfer.
    - If families and students feel uncomfortable with the transfer of the decision-making abilities to the student, the prospective guardian needs to petition for guardianship at the local probate court.
  - The vocational rehabilitation process should begin at least 2 years prior to high school graduation.
- *Before the age of 18:*
  - Apply for Social Security benefits, Social Security Disability Insurance and Medicaid.
    - If ineligible for Medicaid, look into other health insurance options, as it is likely the individual will no longer be covered by the parents plan after age 19 if not enrolled in college or covered by Medicaid.
  - Add your name to the waiting list for residential placements in the state. Regardless of future residential plans, it is good to be on the waitlist, as these lists can be extremely long, and it is easy to remove your name than it is to add it.
- *At age 18:*
  - Register to vote.
  - Upon an individual's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, he or she changes from a system of being entitled to certain rights and privileges to a system of eligibility.
  - Male students should register for the draft, no matter the level of functioning.
  - If applicable, individuals should apply to adult agencies for vocational and day programs, as well as for supported living.

## **Starting the Transition Process:**

Transition planning should begin when the student turns 14 years old or when the student starts high school. This means that a transition team should be assembled to start to create a transition portion of the IEP that will help address the student's post-secondary goals. The student should use career awareness programs to find possible career paths he or she might be interested in and discuss with their parents and transition teams what paths are appropriate and practical given their interests and abilities. The transition team should include the student, their parents, teachers, therapists and any agency representatives that will be involved in the student's transition process, such as those who will be providing services to the student in the future. At this age, the IEP only needs to include course work and the educational program that the individual is to be involved in. It should also include some prospective information about the possible post-secondary goals that the student is interested in.

The transition part of the IEP will go into effect when the student turns 16 years old. At this age, there should be a statement of needed transition services and specific post-school outcomes and the instruction and training that is necessary to ensure that those goals are achieved by the time the student turns 21 years old. It should include detailed information regarding future education, employment, community experiences, and living situations. It also should address all future therapies that the student will need to prepare him or her for the real world, including speech therapy, social skills training, and behavioral preparation. IEP meetings should occur annually to assess the progress that the student is making and also to alter the IEP goals in accordance with the students' preferences and interests.

## **Education:**

IEPs should include information about prospective course work for each level or grade of education that the student is planning on pursuing. This should also include any training or instruction that is done for vocational preparation, such as skill-specific training. It is also important that the IEP specify a prospective graduation date as well as the diploma option that has been selected for the student. If higher education is being considered, it should be included in the student's IEP and preparation for the college application and survival process should begin as early as 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Time should be allotted in the IEP for the preparation and taking of the required standardized tests and the completion of the college application process. Also, it is important that proper preparation is done to ensure that the students will feel comfortable taking college-level courses.

FAPE is provided for all students with disabilities until they complete their graduation requirements or IEP goals or until they turn 21 years old.

Pertaining to graduation requirements, the state of Pennsylvania provides minimum graduation requirements and LEAs can add to those requirements. The only diploma option is the regular high school diploma. There are allowances made for students to complete the state-mandated requirements for graduation, including reducing the number of required credits, using alternate courses to earn the required course credits, using extensions for getting those credits and other allowances which have to be addressed and approved within the student's IEP. There is no state exit exam for the students to complete to get their diplomas.

### **Guardianship:**

The age of majority in Pennsylvania is **18 years old**. At this age, all rights to make decisions about the disabled individual's welfare are transferred to the individual from their parents or guardians. This means that the student can make all decisions about their well being on their own. However, for special education purposes, the age of majority is **21 years old**. The student and their family should be informed of this transfer at least a year in advance. A form of consent should be included in the student's IEP and the student should be reminded and prepared to handle the transfer. This includes understanding the choices of making those decisions and the possible consequences of such important decisions, such as decisions related to health, education or finances.

If the student feels uncomfortable handling that responsibility and the family feels that the student's disability impedes them from understanding what is in their best interests, it is possible for the family or any prospective guardian to petition for guardianship at a local court. This is considered a last resort because plenary or full guardianship relinquishes all control of the individual's rights to another person. If a petition is filed by a possible guardian at a local court claiming that the person is incapacitated and unable to make important life decisions, and medical evidence is presented in court that concurs with that argument, a legal proceeding will take place. Lawyers need to be present to represent both the prospective guardians and also the disabled individual in order to ensure that the individual's best interests are represented at the hearing. Once every piece of evidence is presented to the court, the judge or jury will decide whether guardianship is necessary and in the individual's best interests and also what the terms of the guardianship will be. The judge will also decide who the best guardian is for the individual. Limited guardianship is possible where the terms and powers of the guardianship are specified in court by the judge. Other options include getting a power of attorney. Terms for termination of the guardianship will also be provided.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation:**

The Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation, or OVR, provides vocational rehabilitation services to help persons with disabilities prepare for, obtain, or maintain employment. OVR provides services to eligible individuals with disabilities, both directly

and through a network of approved vendors. Services are provided on an individualized basis. The OVR counselor, during face-to-face interviews, assists customers in selecting their choice of vocational goals, services and service providers. An Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) is developed, outlining a vocational objective, services, providers and responsibilities.

OVR provides diagnostic services, vocational evaluation, counseling, training, restoration services, job placement assistance, support services and assistance with learning assistive technology. To apply, contact a local OVR office and arrange for an interview with a counselor so they can understand the skill set of the student and help them create an IPE. They can also help with getting SSI benefits for students with disabilities and help with the Ticket to Work Program.

To find a local office, visit

[www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=606620&mode=2](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt?open=514&objID=606620&mode=2)

## **Social Security:**

Benefits should be applied for before the student's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday and then be re-evaluated after the student's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. It is also important that the office be contacted well in advance before the student's 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to understand that eligibility and application process.

Applicants may apply online or by contacting Social Security directly. Local Social Security offices can be found using SSA's office locator or by calling 800-772-1213.

- *Social Security Administration:* [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov)
- *Social Security Benefit Application:* [www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityonline](http://www.socialsecurity.gov/disabilityonline)
- *Social Security Benefits for People with Disabilities:* [www.ssa.gov/disability](http://www.ssa.gov/disability)
- *Social Security Office Locator:* <https://secure.ssa.gov/ICON/main.jsp>

## **Housing Resources:**

Pennsylvania Public Housing Agency Contact Information:

[www.hud.gov/offices/pih/pha/contacts/states/pa.cfm](http://www.hud.gov/offices/pih/pha/contacts/states/pa.cfm)

US Department of Housing and Urban Development: HUD in Pennsylvania

<http://portal.hud.gov/portal/page/portal/HUD/states/pennsylvania>

Disability.gov Guide to Housing:

[www.disability.gov/resource/disability-govs-guide-housing](http://www.disability.gov/resource/disability-govs-guide-housing)

## **Pennsylvania Resources**

### **Bureau of Special Education**

Pennsylvania Department of Education  
(800) 879-2301

[www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Special%20Education/Pages/default.aspx#.VhQ-gvIVhBc](http://www.education.pa.gov/K-12/Special%20Education/Pages/default.aspx#.VhQ-gvIVhBc)

### **Pennsylvania Vocational Rehabilitation Services**

Department of Labor and Industry

[www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/vocational\\_rehabilitation/10356](http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/vocational_rehabilitation/10356)

### **Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN)**

[www.pattan.net](http://www.pattan.net)

*Secondary Transition:*

[www.pattan.net/category/Educational+Initiatives/Secondary+Transition](http://www.pattan.net/category/Educational+Initiatives/Secondary+Transition)

### **Pennsylvania Bureau of Autism Services**

(866) 539-7689

[www.dhs.state.pa.us/foradults/autismservices](http://www.dhs.state.pa.us/foradults/autismservices)

### **Pennsylvania Secondary Transition Guide**

[www.secondarytransition.org](http://www.secondarytransition.org)