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## **Position Paper on Transitioning from School to Adult Life**

Students graduate from secondary schools into an adult world in which they will need varying degrees of support in order to live, work, and socialize with their peers. All too often, young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities are unprepared to assume adult roles. A limited scope of academic, vocational, and social experiences has led to a limited future that is frequently segregated, lonely, and underproductive.

### **Issue**

Although transition planning is mandated by New Jersey administrative code NJAC 6A:14 to begin the year the student turns 14, successful transitioning is, in fact, more than a plan, it is a dynamic process. It begins on the first day of preschool and emphasizes the child's sense of value and place in the community. Though the law mandates transition planning, the quality of the process varies from school district to district. The combined expertise, commitment, and resources of individual school districts and parents determine the quality and outcome of the linkages forged with the people and/or agencies that will provide needed support throughout the student's life. And finally, even with the transition requirements of the New Jersey Administrative Code, the implied promise of a "continuum of services" is not kept.

### **Position**

Full integration and participation in the community, in work, home, and leisure, with whatever individualized supports are necessary, should be the goal for every student who is transitioning into adult life. The Arc of New Jersey will encourage secondary schools to design and implement transition services based on that goal and will encourage the expansion of supported employment services, individualized housing opportunities, and integrated recreational activities. Most importantly, the process of transition should be highly individualized so that resulting plans align with both the individual's personal interests and his or her unique needs. Dialogue about transition should include but not be limited to: geographically and cognitively appropriate day habilitation programs, post-secondary opportunities, medical needs, mental and behavioral health challenges, Employment First opportunities, and beyond.

**Rites of passage** are defining moments in everyone's lives. For young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities the groundwork for transition from school to the adult world must be laid early and well. With the growth and prevalence of post-secondary options for young adults leaving their educational entitlement, these opportunities should be communicated from an early age as a viable option and as a goal for the future.

**A positive sense of self-worth**, as well as personal responsibility, are values that guide the educational process from early childhood on. Students have the right, as well as the responsibility, to be full contributing members of their communities. Teachers and families must challenge the student, rather than merely accommodate him or her.

**Successful transition** does not occur in a vacuum. It reaches beyond the school into the community. It includes real life experiences, not simulated ones. It depends upon a close knit collaboration among families, educators, adult service providers, employers, and most importantly, the students themselves, all working toward the actualization of a vision of a personal future for the student.

**Vocational and independent living assessments** should identify student preferences and strengths without regard to preconceived limits.

**Assessments** should lead to curricula that will develop student strengths into meaningful vocational and life skills. Standardized evaluations should be enhanced by situational assessments that reflect a broad range of experience, ability, and opportunity.

**Students with intellectual and developmental disabilities should experience the same daily, seasonal, and yearly rhythms of life as their peers without disabilities.** After school and summer jobs not only open the door to vocational experience and a paycheck, but leave the door open to the student's full participation in the social and academic life of secondary school.

**The responsibility for an effective transition process** lies not in the educational system alone. Parents and their students, adult service agencies, both public and private, should be actively involved in the process also. Their inclusion on the "transition team" is essential to break down the walls between school and community, between present and future, and to ensure completion of the process.

**Regular follow up studies** of the young adults' performance after graduation should be conducted, with the results shared on the local and state levels. This will permit evaluation of different approaches to transition throughout New Jersey and will encourage replication of successful programs.

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