



# THE FAMILY GUIDEPOSTS

## ENGAGING IN YOUTH TRANSITIONS

National  
Collaborative on  
Workforce and  
Disability

**NCWD**

For Youth



Navigating the Road to Work

### Youth Program Edition

This document was developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth)—comprised of partners with expertise in disability, education, employment, workforce development, and family issues—in collaboration with the U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP). NCWD/Youth is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL) in Washington, DC. NCWD/Youth assists state and local workforce development systems to integrate youth with disabilities into their service strategies. Information on NCWD/Youth can be found at [www.ncwd-youth.info](http://www.ncwd-youth.info). Additional information related to family engagement may be found at [www.PACER.org](http://www.PACER.org). Contact NCWD/Youth at [contact@ncwd-youth.info](mailto:contact@ncwd-youth.info) or 1-877-871-0744.

Information about ODEP and other federal government resources on disability can be found at [www.dol.gov/odep](http://www.dol.gov/odep).

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## Introduction

### Overview of the *Guideposts for Success*

*The Family Guideposts: Engaging in Youth Transitions* (*The Family Guideposts*) builds on the *Guideposts for Success* developed by the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) in collaboration with the Office of Disability Employment Policy at the U.S. Department of Labor. The five youth-centered *Guideposts for Success* are:

1. School-Based Preparatory Experiences;
2. Career Preparation and Work-Based Learning Experiences;
3. Youth Development and Leadership;
4. Connecting Activities; and
5. Family Involvement and Supports

The *Guideposts for Success* describe the supports, programs and policies young people

need across five key areas to move toward maximum independence and success in adulthood. Grounded in more than 30 years of research on practices that help youth successfully transition to adulthood, each section of the *Guideposts for Success* first identifies what all youth need to succeed in a specific area and then identifies additional supports that may be needed by youth with disabilities. Utilizing a holistic approach, the *Guideposts for Success* recognize that families, schools, community institutions, and government agencies must all be involved in helping youth transition into the adult world. Engaging families in youth transition helps ensure that students gain the academic confidence and meaningful experiences they need to chart a successful path toward the future. As such, *The Family Guideposts: Engaging in Youth Transitions* series is designed to help families support their youth in these five areas, both directly and through

the support of community organizations and agencies.

*The Family Guideposts: Engaging in Youth Transitions* is written as two complementary tools to address a range of stakeholder needs. This tool, *The Family Guideposts: Youth Program Edition*, is written for educators and youth service professionals to provide an overview of issues involved in successful transition for youth and their families and to explore approaches for effective partnerships with families of youth in transition. While written for organizations, this tool may also include helpful reference materials for parents in collaborating with schools and agencies to plan for transition.

The companion tool, *The Family Guideposts: Parent and Caregiver Edition*, is written specifically for families of youth in transition. This publication highlights specific action steps that parents and other adult caregivers can take to support their youth in transition in alignment with the *Guideposts for Success*.

Both the *The Family Guideposts* and the *Guideposts for Success* tools are based on an extensive review of research, demonstration projects, and effective practices covering a wide range of programs and services. Based on lessons learned from youth development, education, and workforce development programs, they reflect core commonalities identified across disciplines, programs, and institutional settings.

## **Purpose of *The Family Guideposts***

**The goal of *The Family Guideposts* is to help families focus their energy and take specific actions to address the priorities of their transition-age youth.**

With or without a disability, late adolescence and young adulthood are critical times in the lives of youth. Characterized by rapid changes in both physical and psychological development, adolescence is a time when all youth are struggling to define themselves and become independent adults. While youth increasingly look outside their families for approval, supportive family relationships remain important in their lives. Families provide necessary emotional, material, and informational support; at the same time, parents need to allow young people space to develop their own senses of identity. Of course, these periods of transition bring about feelings of both anxiety and optimism for the future for the youth as well as the family. Families may need assistance in identifying information and resources to help them support their young adults on the journey to adulthood.

"Family" is defined here broadly as adults and children related biologically, emotionally, or legally, including single parents, blended families, unrelated individuals living co-

operatively, and partnered couples who live with biological, adopted, and foster children.

*The Family Guideposts: Engaging in Youth Transitions* series links the extensive review of youth development research to evidence-based practices in family engagement. Roles that are emphasized in *The Family Guideposts* are those that assist families as they become fully informed about career and life options; support their youth as they make the most of secondary school and create a pathway toward the future and advocate for school improvement so that their youth and all youth benefit from high quality academic and career transition opportunities.

*The Family Guideposts* address issues faced by all youth, including those with disabilities, as they transition to adulthood. They can help families focus their energy in meaningful ways to support the development and success of their transition-age youth. Depending on the individual, this might include graduating from high school, going to college, finding a first job, building a circle of friends, participating in community recreation programs, connecting to the adult health care system, or a combination of these experiences. Using the framework of the *Guideposts for Success*, *The Family Guideposts* highlight proactive roles families can play within each Guidepost area.

For organizations and agencies who work with youth and their families, *The Family Guideposts: Youth Program Edition* provides a framework to empower families to contribute to successful adult outcomes for their youth, and to tap into family support more effectively and work more collaboratively

and intentionally with both individual parents and organized parent groups.

For families of youth with disabilities, *The Family Guideposts: Parent and Caregiver Edition* serves as a tool to incorporate research-based strategies into their young adult's secondary education and transition plans. Each family brings unique needs and perspectives to the table. While the primary purpose of *The Family Guideposts: Parent and Caregiver Edition* is to provide a framework to empower families to support their adolescents as they emerge into adult roles, families are also encouraged, where feasible, to consider assuming advisory and influential roles on local school, community, school district, or state advisory boards. Policymakers, schools, and community organizations increasingly recognize the value of parents as partners in systemic accountability as well as the important role they play in their own youth's development.

## Underlying Assumptions

*The Family Guideposts* reflects a key precept of national disability policy that "disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to live independently, enjoy self-determination, make choices, and contribute to society," (Rehabilitation Act Amendments, 1992).

In addition, the *Guideposts for Success* lists six underlying assumptions shaping each of the five *Guideposts*. These include: 1) high expectations for all youth, including youth with disabilities; 2) equality of opportunity for everyone, including nondiscrimination, individualization, inclusion, and integration; 3) full participation through self-determina-

tion, informed choice, and participation in decision-making; 4) independent living, including skills development and long-term supports and services; 5) competitive employment and economic self-sufficiency, even if with supports; and 6) individualized, person-driven, and culturally and linguistically appropriate transition planning. *The Family Guideposts* builds upon these principles and add the following four fundamental beliefs:

1. All families, regardless of income, education level, or cultural background have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
2. All parents have the capacity to support their children's learning.
3. Parents and school staff should be equal partners.
4. The responsibility for building partnership between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially with school leaders.

Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, and Davies (2007) advocate for these four fundamental beliefs in *Beyond the Bake Sale: The Essential Guide to Family-School Partnerships*. Justifying these statements with research evidence, they challenge schools to use these beliefs as the foundation for building partnerships with families rather than limiting possibilities with negative assumptions about families' lack of participation.

## **Strengths-Based Approach**

*The Family Guideposts* utilizes a strengths-based approach that moves beyond the notion of family participation (or lack there-

of), to one that seeks to build upon family strength and knowledge. Families are recognized as dynamic and complex and as the best source of information regarding their youth. In a strengths-based approach, schools and community organizations know that families are always engaging with their youth in informal and very meaningful ways. Such a recognition of family strengths and functioning enables organizations to build connections and confidence with families that demonstrate to youth that school and home are aligned in their efforts to work productively for the future.

A strengths-based approach enables schools and youth serving programs to develop insightful two-way communication and quality relationships that are the foundation of successful family partnerships. Building this collaborative relationship will be easier for some parents and organizations than others. To deepen understanding of ways in which educators can best support family engagement in youth transitions, schools and youth serving organization may want to consider family perceptions. Some questions that schools and youth organizations may want to ask themselves are:

- ◆ How can our school or community organization better understand family perceptions as we work to support youth in transition?
- ◆ What are the unique family strengths upon which to build partnerships for youth transition? How can we share *The Family Guideposts* in a way



that support their capabilities and confidence?

- ◆ How can our school or community organization communicate appreciative and authentic interest that will engage families in ongoing collaboration around their youth's transition?

Proactive outreach, planning for access, and focus on building relationships with families are especially important to fostering involvement of families with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. A strengths-based approach enables schools and other community organizations to utilize family culture and life experience as a rich resource from which to draw insights during their shared work on behalf of youth. While the task of guiding youth through a myriad of possibilities for their future can be challenging, youth can be well anchored when guided by what they and their families have most valued in their home and community life experiences. Virtually all parents want their youth to feel valued and be valued members of their community. However, no family has to go it alone. Families, schools, and communities all share the responsibility of helping youth grow into capable, contributing adults, and there are a number of places parents and family members may turn for support.

## **Framework for Family Action in Youth Transition**

This section of *The Family Guideposts* is designed for families of a youth in transition. Families of teenagers and young adults may feel alone or overwhelmed when navigating a path for their youth's future. Often youth

don't want parents to "get in the way," and families are concerned that schools either won't take the time to listen or won't understand the perspectives of a parent or family member.

Family engagement in youth transition is as important as family involvement has been throughout all of a young person's schooling. Families are key to understanding the motivation, vision, and goals that a youth holds for his or her future. Family expectation of youth are key, because as adolescents and young adults make their transitions, they begin to internalize these expectations to chart a path for their own future. As youth take on new responsibilities for their own independence, families can assist through working with the schools and other community organization to ensure their success. In fact, it is a responsibility of the school and larger community to support families and youth as they chart a path toward the future. *The Family Guideposts: Parent and Caregiver Edition* provides information on what to look for during your youth's transition and how to get support from the school and community to ensure your youth transition successfully.

In 2007, Appleseed, a nonprofit network of public interest justice centers, published *It Takes A Parent: Transforming Education*. The report summarizes two years of research in 18 school districts across six states and concludes:

"It is clear that as a nation we have not emphasized or financially invested in parental involvement in ways that we should. A renewed focus on parental involvement is a powerful and exciting potential direction for education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century...Parental involvement is not a



silver bullet, but is an important part of the solution.” (Preface p. 1)

The Appleseed report identifies three overarching objectives for parents in their partnerships with schools: a) **become fully informed**; b) **support youth** in getting the most out of their education; and c) **advocate for school improvement**. Advocacy may also extend beyond school boundaries into the community.

Families may want to select from among the recommended actions only the approaches that best align with their youth’s needs and goals for the future. For example, if a student has just recently begun high school, a family may initially want to choose just one action across each of the four *Guideposts* (school-based experience, career preparation, youth development, and/or connecting activities). That way youth and family can begin to lay a foundation for future transition and begin by trying out a few ideas to see what feels right.

Alternatively, if a young person is almost finished with high school and has narrowed his or her goals for the future, a family may find that they want to place emphasis on a number of career preparation and work-based learning activities that are closely tied to their youth’s immediate goals. Similarly, the family of an older youth with a disability may want to pinpoint targeted transition services that will enable them to realize their own vision for autonomy and ongoing connections.

Focus on those recommendations that best suit your situation and are most likely to make a difference for you and your family. If you implement even a few of these recommendations, you will be helping to support your youth in reaching their full potential and facilitating a successful transition from education to a job or career of their choosing.

## Family Involvement & Supports

Participation and involvement of parents, family members, and/or other caring adults promotes the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth, leading to better post-school outcomes. All youth need parents, families, and other caring adults who do the following:

- ▶ have high expectations that build upon the young person's strengths, interests, and needs and that foster each youth's ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency;
- ▶ remain involved in their lives and assist them toward adulthood;
- ▶ help youth access information about employment, further education, and
- ▶ community resources;
- ▶ take an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners; and
- ▶ have access to medical, professional, and peer support networks.

In addition, youth with disabilities need parents, families, and other caring adults who have the following:

- ▶ an understanding of the youth's disability and how it may affect his or her education, employment, and daily living options;
- ▶ knowledge of rights and responsibilities under various disability-related legislation;
- ▶ knowledge of and access to programs, services, supports, and accommodations available for young people with disabilities; and
- ▶ an understanding of how individualized planning tools can assist youth in achieving transition goals and objectives.

Research by the National Network of Partnership Schools at Johns Hopkins University has shown that families will have high levels of engagement, even with secondary schools, if school outreach is engaging and appropriate to their needs (Epstein & Sheldon, 2006). Thus, schools and youth organizations should employ strategies that support parental efficacy and enable families to meet their needs. Each action recommendation that follows includes a discussion of research-based practices and strategies schools and organizations can use to support families in youth transition.

## **Action recommendations for programs serving Families of ALL Youth**

### **Hold high expectations**

Nearly all states have adopted the goal of having youth graduate from high school college and career ready. One powerful way that family members may support their youth is by holding high expectations for their future academic achievement, employment, personal development, and community involvement. High family expectations are associated with achievement as well as resiliency, i.e., the ability to overcome adversity to achieve positive developmental outcomes.

While high expectations reflecting individual strengths and interests are important for all youth, they are particularly important for youth with disabilities. Research from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), the largest study of youth with disabilities to date, indicates that high family expectations are an important factor

associated with academic success in school (Newman, 2005). Higher academic achievement, in turn, leads to postsecondary education opportunities, better employment outcomes, and financial self-sufficiency.

In contrast, low expectations are often cited as a factor limiting educational achievement and employment outcomes. Even though economic self-sufficiency through employment, with or without supports, remains an unfulfilled dream for many young adults today, including those with significant or multiple disabilities, aspiring to a future where every individual works to his or her full potential, lives in his or her community of choice, and contributes to society remains the nation's goal. This objective is more likely to be obtained if families are steadfast in their belief and expectation that their youth will succeed.

### **How schools and community organizations can support families' high expectations**

Increasingly, students who are successful in post-high school training have the opportunity to participate in accelerated (Gifted, honors, IB, and AP) educational programs in high school as academic preparation for college. Access to accelerated learning for underserved students relies heavily on the level of families' knowledge and engagement with the school at critical junctures (e.g., middle to high school transition). Schools and community organizations can help ensure access to accelerated programming for students who have not traditionally accessed those programs by reaching out to their families, including but not limited to providing additional support during the 9<sup>th</sup> grade

transition. Families may also need support to understand challenging curricula so they can support youth at home in their academic success. Schools and organizations can also ensure students receive support with college preparatory coursework and with the college application process. Both approaches are particularly important for families of first-generation college-bound students.

## **Remain involved**

As teenagers mature, they seek more time and approval from their peers. However, there are still opportunities for families to play important roles in their lives. Research indicates that if families stay engaged in their youth's school, social, and community activities, get to know their friends, and continue to be involved in their important life decisions, they are more likely to have children who complete high school and avoid negative choices like substance abuse, irresponsible sexual involvement, and illegal activity. Families of youth who struggle can benefit from supports designed to assist them in taking advantage of tutoring, mentoring, and other learning programs that will assist their child to be successful in school.

## **How schools and community organizations can involve families**

High schools can consider creating dedicated family centers, spaces that are usually located either within a school building, at a centralized location in the school district, or in a community setting. High schools that have family centers have found that this intentional space enhances family partnerships as students transition into and from secondary school. Family centers offer pro-

grams that inform parents about school values and expectations as well as work with parents to help them become advocates for their children. In "High School Family Centers: Transformative spaces linking schools and families in support of student learning," Mapp, Johnson, Strickland, and Meza (2010) document the benefits of Family and Parent Centers in secondary schools. They note that these centers send a welcoming message to families and signal that they are insiders to the families' culture and values, rather than outsiders. In addition, these centers facilitate parents' access to the classroom, which enables them to understand their children's school work and receive support for family educational needs such as parenting training and support and adult education. Responsive programming in family centers focuses on family self-efficacy, including relationship building, development of social capital, and self-development, and can be implemented alongside routine activities such as coffee meetings or an international pot luck dinner.

## **Help youth access information**

Young adults will need information about employment, further education, and community services options to make informed decisions about their futures. Knowing where and how to access critical information will be important to them throughout their lives.

## **How schools and community organizations can support families to help youth access information**

Families who guide their adolescents through the information-seeking process can instill a sense of competence, persistence, and independence that will build



a foundation for future adult success. Family engagement specialists in school districts and community organizations should ensure families are equipped with names of individual agencies and networks so that they can guide their youth through the information seeking process, and in doing so, build skills so youth can eventually manage their own services. Help families understand that with high school graduation, youth move from a world of entitlement (e.g., Section 504 plans and Individualized Education Programs) to eligibility (Americans with Disabilities Act), requiring youth to advocate for their supports and services. There are a wide variety of services and supports available to address needs around employment, postsecondary education, transportation, housing, and other areas. Connect parents to their state's Parent Center ([www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center](http://www.parentcenterhub.org/find-your-center)), Center for Independent Living ([www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory](http://www.ilru.org/html/publications/directory)), or a community-based disability advocacy agency for more information.

### **Take an active role in transition planning**

Secondary and postsecondary schools frequently offer activities to support youth as they make decisions about courses, career exploration, employment experiences, and further education. These could include such activities as career interest assessments, guest speakers, field trips to job sites, job shadowing, and internships. While school guidance and work experience counselors frequently take the lead in organizing these activities, the number of students that each counselor sees is increasing annually, prohibiting counselors from providing individ-

ualized support. Families who are informed about these activities can provide more personalized support, especially in view of their lifelong knowledge of their children.

At last count, 44 states and the District of Columbia require or encourage students to complete an Individualized Learning Plan (ILP) to map a path to achieve post-school goals, including college and careers. A quality ILP is a document/portfolio consisting of a student's: (a) course taking and postsecondary plans aligned to career goals; and (b) documentation of the range of college and career readiness skills that the student has developed. The ILP is a process that provides students access to personalized career development opportunities focused on developing their self-exploration, career exploration, and career planning and management skills. The process enables students to become aware of the relevance of academic preparation and work-based and other learning opportunities, and the importance of completing a two- or four-year postsecondary credential.

### **How schools and community organizations can engage families in transition planning**

Family engagement in ILPs not only enhances the student's experience; parents report having a stronger positive regard for and better relationship with the school as a result of their involvement as well. Schools and community organizations can engage families in activities that support the individual learning plan including monitoring homework, reviewing and discussing student goals, signing off on the ILP comment section, and participating in postsecondary

planning activities. Families can also be supported to participate in parent-teacher conferences on report card results and interim reports.

Family engagement need not be limited to involvement in a specific child's individual learning plans. Schools can also offer school-wide opportunities for parent engagement, allowing them to become a part of a larger network of responsibility for student success. Parents are able to understand their student's learning within the context of the school and to connect with the larger school community.

Schools can also present data on both student and school-wide learning goals, providing parents with information on the school's performance measured against state and national standards to use in leadership for school improvement.

### **Help youth access networks**

Individuals who have networks of support can weather most crises. Adolescence is the perfect time for youth to learn how to establish networks while they still have family support to guide them. Networks will include friends, professional contacts, and service providers. Entering adulthood, young people can make and keep their own medical and dental appointments and begin establishing their own system of record keeping. They can be encouraged to initiate contact with other entities that provide critical services for adults such as a tax accountant, auto service center, hair stylist or barber, and bank. Families can also encourage young people to seek out

and develop supportive networks of peers with common interests and goals.

### **How schools and community organization can support families to help youth access networks**

Mentoring can be a key part of a youth's access to support networks. In "Working to Make it Work: The role of parents in the youth mentoring process," Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico, and Lewis (2011) found that families play a key role in enabling students to access and navigate mentoring support. Through their interviews of families of youth participating in mentoring programs, the authors found that parents play a variety of roles when interacting with the youth and mentor team, including that of coach, collaborator and monitor. They note that the parents' negotiation of these multiple roles was often unrecognized by the youth mentoring programs. For schools and community organizations to effectively involve and support families, their staff need to acknowledge and celebrate the informal strengths that families have that enable their youth to access networks and other resources.

### **Recommendations for programs serving families of youth with disabilities**

#### **Help youth understand the impact of their disability**

Youth need the support of parents, school staff, and other caring adults to learn about and understand the lifelong implications of their disability. Knowing this information can help inform their decision-making about future pathways and career related choices.

es. By many reports, youth with disabilities frequently have little information about their disability and its impact on their lives, especially their adult lives. Adults who shelter them from these facts leave youth to wonder privately about the unspoken taboo: the differences between themselves and their peers. Often, what they conclude is far worse than the reality, lowering their self-expectations and creating a self-fulfilling prophecy. Because advances in technology have only recently made it possible for people with certain types of disabilities to live into adulthood, little information may be available. In such circumstances, it falls on youth and families to take these often uncharted journeys together.

### **How schools and community organizations can assist families of youth with disabilities to understand and communicate regarding the impact of a youth's disability**

Families of youth with disabilities often experience more stress than parents of youth who do not have disabilities. Schools and community organizations can support families to share information about a disability by understanding each family member's coping style and how communications regarding a disability can best be shared from a strengths-based perspective. In "Families of Children with Disabilities: Building School-Family Partnerships," Patrikakou (2010) states that such strengths-based communication strategies are the most effective and important elements of partnership building with families of children with disabilities. Additionally, programs serving youth with disabilities can

keep on hand disability specific materials such as pamphlets, adolescent and youth literature, and multimedia products which can be loaned to youth and families as soon as the youth is ready for those conversations. Schools and community organizations can also engage medical, social work, and other community professionals to provide specific information about the disability so that families and youth can engage in informed decision-making about accommodations, needed supports and interventions, health care transition, and IEP goals.

### **Learn about disability rights and responsibilities**

When youth with disabilities reach the age of majority of their state (typically age 18), they become legally responsible for decisions pertaining to their educational rights under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). At that time, unless parents have been granted legal guardianship, the special education rights and responsibilities that previously applied to parents will transfer legally to the adult child. While schools are required to ensure that students and families are informed of the transfer of these rights one year prior, youth who have been actively involved in their IEP and transition planning at a younger age will be much better prepared for this new responsibility.

Disability advocates encourage youth and families to prepare for this shift in roles and responsibilities by promoting the active involvement of youth early in the IEP process and throughout their transition planning. Experience with self-advocacy and decision-making—by leading their own IEP meetings, for example—will help students when

they graduate or age out of secondary education and leave the special education system behind. When they become adults, individuals with disabilities are not “entitled” to adult services—job training, educational accommodations, or housing supports, for example—in the same way they were entitled to special education services. Instead, young adults must proactively apply for and request the services they need. They must also demonstrate that they “qualify” for these services by meeting the eligibility requirements of the college, government agency, or social service program providing each service.

### **How schools and community organizations can support families to help youth learn about disabilities rights and responsibilities**

Due to the disability rights laws that apply to postsecondary education, employment, and other adult services and settings are so different, schools and youth serving program should work with families to ensure that their youth with disabilities have information about their civil rights under the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Rehabilitation Act, and other federal and state disability legislation. Without knowledge of these rights, youth may not understand that they must disclose their disability in order to receive accommodations at college or from an employer, or how to challenge disability-based discrimination they might experience in the workplace or the community. Families can partner with educators so that what is being taught about disability rights

and responsibilities at home reinforces what the youth is learning in school.

### **Learn how to access services**

Youth who have accurate information about their own disability and an awareness of the implications of that disability on their lives are more prepared to use supports, services, and accommodations appropriately for their own growth and success. Federal, state, local, and private sources fund such services for youth and adults with disabilities. Many of these services are funded under the Federal Rehabilitation Act, the Federal Developmental Disabilities Act, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and other related disability legislation. These services include support related to postsecondary education, employment, independent living, and community access, depending on the youth’s disability-related needs.

### **How schools and community organizations can work with families and the IEP team to learn about various agency and service options**

It is recommended that vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors and other service providers be a part of a youth’s IEP transition team to ensure that youth and their families have access to the most accurate information possible to make informed decisions about longer term needs and to help ease the move to adult services. Schools and community organization can work alongside parent training and information centers, centers for independent living, and disability advocacy organizations to help youth and families learn about potential supports and



services, program eligibility requirements, and how to apply for services.

## **Understand individualized planning tools**

Individualization is a fundamental tenant of disability policy, as disability conditions, experiences, and needs are so diverse. There is a plethora of individualized planning tools throughout disability programs and services. For example, special education and vocational rehabilitation laws require that schools and adult agencies incorporate individualized planning for the transition to employment, postsecondary education, and independent living. Professionals in these fields utilize a number of resources specifically designed for this purpose, including tools that can help individuals with disabilities to determine their career interests and aptitudes, identify further education options that are appropriate for the youth's goals, and to develop plans to achieve the skills and gain the knowledge they will need.

IDEA requires that the transition components of the IEP be based on "age-appropriate transition assessments" and centered on supporting the student to attain their "post-school interests and preferences." In addition, IDEA requires all schools to prepare a Summary of Performance (SOP) for each special education student as he or she exits from public education. The SOP must include a summary of the education and career related experiences that prepared the student to meet his or her post-school goals as well as recommendations for the supports

and services that will be needed in postsecondary settings.

Ideally, the SOP provides enough information to demonstrate a student's eligibility for postsecondary education, develop a Vocational Rehabilitation plan, access county programs, or apply for an entry level job. A good SOP can help students make a seamless transition to adult services by expediting the eligibility determination process and avoiding unnecessary duplication of assessments. However, youth and family advocacy, as well as guidance from disability service professionals about what information is actually needed may be necessary to ensure that a student's SOP is comprehensive enough to serve these purposes.

## **How schools and community organizations can partner with families to help youth understand individualized planning tools**

During the transition years, schools and community organizations can assist families to partner with other agencies, (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, developmental disability services), or community-based programs that provide services to adults with disabilities to ensure that the planning tools used by various agencies work together to help youth achieve their post-school vision. One approach that is increasingly being used by individuals with disabilities and their families as well as social service programs is person-centered planning. Person-centered planning focuses on identifying the individual youth's comprehensive set of goals, and then aligning various tools, services, and supports to support them systematically. Families who are well-informed about all

these individual planning tools can help to ensure that the youth's goals and the services and supports needed to achieve them are properly captured and accounted for.

## Conclusion

*The Family Guideposts: Engaging in Youth Transitions* has been developed as a resource tool for families and youth programs—broadly defined—to assist transition-age youth, including those with disabilities, to make a smooth transition from school to additional education, work, and independent living. In addition to providing thought-provoking examples of how families can become informed, supportive and engaged in their youth's transition, *The Family Guideposts* also provides information that youth service professionals can use to empower, engage, and support families.

## Resources

To assist schools, community organizations, and families to identify supports that address their particular needs, *The Family Guideposts* includes a Resource section consisting of glossary terms that are used throughout this publication as well as references and related web resources. Web resources include national family engagement organizations as well as youth transition and disability support groups. Users of *The Family Guideposts* are encouraged to make use of national resources and to investigate corresponding resources available in their own communities.

The companion tool, *The Family Guideposts: Parent and Caregiver Edition*, provides detailed information about actions families can take to meet the youth needs under that the four additional domains of the *Guideposts for Success*: School-Based Preparatory Experiences; Career Preparation and Work-Based Learning Experiences; Youth Development and Leadership; and Connecting Activities.

# Glossary

**Accommodations:** Changes made in a classroom, work site, or other settings that assist people with disabilities to learn, work, or receive services. Accommodations are designed not to lower expectations for performance in school or work but to alleviate the effects of a disability.

**Career preparation:** Core activities that help youth become prepared for a successful future in careers or postsecondary education institutions including career awareness activities that expose young people to information about the job market, job related skills, the wide variety of jobs that exist, and the education and training they require, as well as the work environment where they are performed. Core activities also include: 1) career assessments (formal and informal); 2) opportunity awareness including guest speaker informational interviews, research-based activities such as wage comparisons and Web searches, community mapping, and exposure to postsecondary education such as campus visits and college fairs; and 3) work-readiness skills such as soft-skills development, computer competency, and job search skills.

**Family:** Adults and children related biologically, emotionally, or legally including single parents, blended families, unrelated individuals living cooperatively, and partnered couples who live with biological, adopted, and foster children.

**Family involvement:** The support for the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth that is provided by parents and/or other family, either

independently or in collaboration with professionals.

**Individualized Learning Plan:** A strategic planning tool intended to help all students identify and achieve college and career ready goals is required in many states and school districts. Referred to by different names in different states, an ILP outlines career development and exploration activities and helps students choose high school courses that will prepare them to reach their postsecondary goals.

**Mentee:** A person who is guided by a mentor.

**Mentor:** A wise and trusted counselor, teacher, or other caring adult.

**Mentoring Programs:** A trusting relationship, formalized into a program of structured activities, which brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee. Types of mentoring include one-to-one mentoring, group mentoring, peer mentoring, and e-mentoring. Typically in formal mentoring programs there will be an extensive matching process to ensure a strong relationship, and it is expected that the commitment will be for one year or longer. Informal mentoring relationships based on shared interests and personal affinity can be developed without the assistance or guidance from an organization.

**Person-Centered Planning:** Planning processes that focus on an individual's needs and desires and promote self-determination. In transition, person-centered planning focuses on the interests, aptitudes, knowledge,

and skills of an individual, not on his or her perceived deficits.

**Postsecondary:** Term used to describe settings that follow high school (such as trade school, college, or employment).

**Resiliency:** The ability and wherewithal to recover from adverse situations through having learned how to avoid such situations in the future or how to maintain a positive mode of coping.

**Self-determination:** The right and ability of all persons to direct their own lives, as well as the responsibility to accept the consequences of their own choices. Some of the skills that make someone self-determined or a successful self-advocate are the following: knowledge of one's strengths and limitations; belief in one's ability to achieve goals; ability to start and complete tasks; ability to assert one's wants, needs, and concerns; and ability to make decisions and see other options.

**Summary of Performance:** As required by IDEA, schools must provide special education students who are due to graduate with a regular diploma, or exceed the age eligibility for a free appropriate public education under state law, with a summary of the student's academic achievement and functional performance that includes recommendations on how to assist the youth in meeting his or her postsecondary goals.

**Transition:** In the context of the *Guideposts for Success*, transition refers to the period of time that begins when a young person starts planning the move from secondary school to postsecondary school, vocational training, the work world, or adulthood. Youth aged 14

to as high as 24 (depending on individual factors and program definitions) can be considered "in transition."

**Vocational rehabilitation (VR):** The process of assisting individuals with disabilities to obtain, regain, maintain, and advance in employment through diverse services tailored to meet the needs of eligible individuals. Each state has a public VR agency.

**Work-based learning:** A supervised program sponsored by an education or training organization that links knowledge gained at the worksite with a planned program of study. Experiences range in intensity, structure, and scope and include activities as diverse as site visits, job shadowing, paid and unpaid internships, structured on-the-job training, and the more formal work status as apprentice or employee.

**Youth development:** A process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated series of activities that build on their capabilities and individual strengths and by addressing a full range of developmental needs.

**Youth leadership:** The ability of youth to guide or direct others on a course of action, influence the opinion and behavior of other people, analyze one's own strengths and weaknesses, set personal and vocational goals, identify community resources, establish support networks, participate in community life, and affect positive social change.



# Resources

## Beach Center on Disabilities

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

This website offers research-based and practical information focusing on the impact of policies and programs on families of youth with disabilities. The Center also develops training and support for practitioners serving families and their children with disabilities.

## Center for Parent Information and Resources

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

This website provides a central repository of information and products for the network of Parent Centers serving families of children with disabilities. It also has a directory of contacts for parent training and information centers across the country.

## Children, Youth, and Families At-Risk (CYFAR)

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

This website offers resources for community programs working with children, youth, and families. The CYFAR program marshal resources of the Land-Grant and Cooperative Extension Systems to develop and deliver educational programs that equip limited resource families and youth with the skills they need to lead positive, productive, contributing lives.

## Family and Community Engagement Network

[www.iel.org/fce](http://www.iel.org/fce)

The Institute for Educational Leadership's District Leaders Network on Family and Community Engagement (FCE) is a peer network that brings together district leaders from across the nation and provides the most up-to-date resources, professional development, and best practices to ultimately improve student achievement.

## Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health (FFCMH)

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

FFCMH is a family-run organization focused on issues of children and youth with emotional, behavioral, or mental health needs and their families.

## ILRU Directory of Centers for Independent Living (CILs) and Associations

[www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory](http://www.ilru.org/projects/cil-net/cil-center-and-association-directory)

This website provides a helpful directory for locating centers for independent living which are consumer controlled, community based, cross disability, nonresidential private nonprofit agencies designed and operated within a local community by individuals with

disabilities to provide an array of independent living services.

## **National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET)**

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

This website features many resources written for and of interest to the families of youth with disabilities. NCSET was originally funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs.

## **National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth)**

[www.ncwd-youth.info](http://www.ncwd-youth.info)

NCWD/Youth is a national technical assistance center which offers information about employment, education, and transition to adulthood for youth with and without disabilities. NCWD/Youth offers various briefs and other resources related to transition for families and professionals working with youth and families.

## **PACER Center**

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

With an emphasis on parents helping parents, PACER Center website provides information for parents on participating in the education of youth with and without disabilities as well as guidance related to vocational training employment, bullying prevention, and other services for children with disabilities.

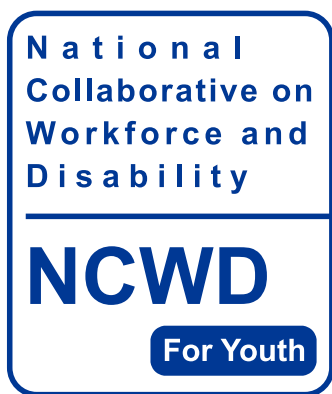
## **Parent Further**

[www.parentfurther.com](http://www.parentfurther.com)

This website developed by the Search Institute offers research-based resources, tips, ideas, and strategies for raising smart, strong, responsible kids.

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Navigating the Road to Work

[www.ncwd-youth.info](http://www.ncwd-youth.info)