



6 strategies to continue postsecondary transition services during COVID-19

Extended school closures have not stopped state and local efforts to support transition-aged students with disabilities access the academic, nonacademic, and social skills needed for employment, postsecondary education, and independent living. Only the approaches have been tweaked in this time of social distancing due to the coronavirus outbreak.

"Most of our teachers are having to completely adjust the way that they are serving students," said Joy Ivester, program director at the Transition Alliance of South Carolina. "Teachers are creative and innovative by nature, but this crisis has required an entirely new level of functioning for all of our teachers, related service providers, students, and parents."

The main adjustment for transition services has been tailoring individual students' skill-building needs through distance learning delivery approaches. Schools also are trying to determine how best to assess, document, and communicate with families and students.

"There are some challenges to online remote instruction, but there are some really unique solutions too," said Dawn Rowe, a technical assistance provider at the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition. "I think we need to think outside the box."

Transition services for high school students with disabilities are a requirement of the IDEA and must begin no later than the first IEP before a student's 16th birthday, although IEP teams can agree to start services earlier. [34 CFR 300.320](#) (b). The specific coordinated activities are individualized for each student, taking into account the student's needs, strengths, and preferences.

Ivester and Rowe offer the following advice for the continuation of transition services during extended school closures:

1. Help families with basic needs. Rowe said educators should make sure families have enough food, are safe, and are socially and emotionally healthy. "We need to help families adjust," she said. "Some [parents] have lost their jobs or have multiple children at home."

Educators should also determine if students have access to devices and internet in order to participate in online distance learning. Even if a student cannot access online distance learning, educators can still develop instructional packets and check in with families via phone calls.

2. Open up lines of communication with educators. A key element of transition services is that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum. Make sure general and special education teachers, as well as administrators, are continuing to collaborate and coordinate services for students.

"It just makes good sense to share strategies, resources, and information during this crisis so that energy, time, and resources are not wasted," Ivester said. The Transition Alliance of South Carolina developed a statewide resource sharing portal and virtual teacher workrooms so teachers can interact and share struggles and strategies, she said.

3. Coach families on skill building. Rowe recommended giving families explicit instruction on how to help their child build certain skills. That may include scripting out lessons to share with parents and providing suggestions for manipulatives that can be used to reinforce lessons. Ask families for feedback on how the lessons are being received, including the suggestion that families take pictures or videos of the student completing a task, she suggested.

4. Stay true to proven practices. Continue to use practices that validate and improve instruction, such as the review of students' present level of performance, documenting the engagement and performance of students, and analyzing how students' current lessons relate to their expected outcomes, Rowe said. "We need to focus on the science of teaching," she said.

5. Get creative with providing employment skills. Transition skills often include student on-the-job experiences that may be hard to fulfill during the pandemic. Educators can attempt to fill this void by going on virtual field trips with students. Teachers can also suggest online work experience or volunteer opportunities that can be done from the students' homes or research activities into certain careers, Rowe said.

6. Focus on interests and expectations. This may be a good opportunity to confirm if students' postsecondary goals and interests have changed or stayed the same. "Ask students what they want out of their education. It is their life," Ivester said. "Ask parents what their expectations are as they are very often highly influential in students' lives. It's critical to marry those parent expectations with the interests, preferences, and desires of the student."

See also:

- [Include, engage students with significant cognitive disabilities in distance learning](#)
- [Q&A: Keep Section 504 considerations in mind during online learning periods](#)
- [SmartStart: IEPs -- Transition Planning \(Procedural Requirements\)](#)

For more stories and guidance on this topic, access the [COVID-19 Roundup](#) and the [Postsecondary Transition Roundup](#).

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