

Transition Planning for High School: Essential Questions & Expert Answers

Transition planning is most effective when it's collaborative, student-centered, and grounded in practical strategies. This guide brings together frequently asked questions and expert answers, organized by key themes such as family engagement, assessment, student voice, and postsecondary preparation.

Whether you're a case manager, educator, or service provider, use this resource as a quick-reference tool to strengthen your approach and ensure every student's path forward is shaped by their strengths, goals, and support network. Each answer is paired with resources to help you find the support you need.

Family Engagement

How can we effectively engage families who are unfamiliar with transition planning or hesitant to participate?

Start the year with a brief introductory call to families explaining the importance of transition planning and their role in the process. Use school events like Back-to-School Night and Special Education Advisory Council meetings to highlight key transition partners and share essential planning information.

Resources

- ▶ [Fast Fact: How to Engage Families In Transition Planning](#)
- ▶ [Webcast: How to Engage Families \(Tammy Burns- PEATC\)](#)

Transition Assessment and Student Voice

Which transition assessments provide the most useful and actionable data for students at the high school level?

Transition assessment begins with questions about a student's future, including their career interests, readiness for college or employment, and skill development. Start by reviewing existing data, then use tools like interest inventories, strengths assessments, self-determination checklists, and informal conversations to gather the insights needed to guide meaningful, individualized transition planning.

Resources

- ▶ [Guide: Transition Assessment Process](#)
- ▶ [Fast Fact: Practical Tips for Transition Assessment](#)
- ▶ [Fast Fact: 5 Steps in the Transition Assessment Process](#)

How do we ensure student voice and SPIN (Strengths, Preferences, Interests, Needs) are reflected in transition planning?

To include student voice and SPIN in transition planning, involve the student throughout the process. Regularly ask about their interests, preferences, and goals. Use assessments, conversations, and observations to gather their input. Discuss the information collected with the student to help them better understand their own SPIN. Make sure their ideas are clearly reflected in the plan, so their goals guide the supports they receive.

Resources

- ▶ [Fast Fact: Strengths-Based Approach to Transition Planning](#)
- ▶ [Fact Sheet: 10 Fascinating Facts About Finding a Career](#)

Employment & Postsecondary Preparation

What can be done to improve training and preparation for staff involved in transition planning?

Provide staff with practical resources, such as the Center on Transition Innovations' free courses, step-by-step guides, and curriculum materials and tools that focus not only on what needs to be done, but also how to do it. Encourage staff to seek mentorship from experienced transition professionals and make use of additional state resources such as T/TACs, PEATC, and DARS.

Resources

- ▶ [Website: Virginia Transition Partners](#)
- ▶ [Website: Virginia's Collaborative Model for Pre-ETS](#)

How can we support students in developing employability skills when they're pursuing a Standard or Advanced Studies Diploma and have limited schedule flexibility?

Even with limited schedule flexibility, students are developing key workplace readiness skills at school such as punctuality, teamwork, communication, and following directions. Many of these skills are naturally integrated into coursework, especially within Career and Technical Education classes and programs. Collaboration with educators, service providers, and families is essential for identifying student's strengths and needs, as well as recognizing areas for growth.

Resources

- ▶ [Fast Fact: Pre-ETS Activities](#)
- ▶ [Fast Fact: Increasing Participation in Pre-ETS for Students Pursuing Standard & Advanced Studies Diplomas](#)
- ▶ [Toolkit: Workplace Readiness Skills to Practice at Home](#)

How do we balance preparation for both employment and postsecondary education when their goals are still emerging or unclear?

Focus on building foundational skills like self-determination, communication, organization, and collaboration, which are essential for both employment and further education. Through classes and work-based experiences, students can explore authentic career settings to help define their interests. Partner with families and community agencies to expand exposure and exploration beyond the school setting.

Resources

- ▶ [Fast Fact: Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services \(DARS\)](#)
- ▶ [Topical Paper: Planning for the Future: One Student at a Time](#)

How do we improve coordination between Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and transition services to better serve students?

Meet regularly with Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services (DARS) to strengthen communication, collaboration, and coordination of transition services. Review your local cooperative agreement to clarify roles, address service gaps, and identify students' needs. Use shared planning tools such as the [Pre-ETS: Model Best Practices](#), and maintain regular communication to ensure aligned services and seamless support for students.

Resources

- ▶ [Guide: DARS Pre-Employment Transition Services Sequencing](#)
- ▶ [Guide: Implementing Monthly Pre-ETS Activities Year-Round](#)
- ▶ [Tool: Interagency Collaboration Assessment](#)

How do I manage the responsibility of transition planning when my plate's already full as a case manager?

Start with collecting transition data throughout the year, not just prior to IEP meetings. College and career readiness activities take place in general education courses and through school counselor academic and career planning. Build on these efforts to avoid duplication. Use simple tools like quarterly check-ins or parent surveys to track student strengths and transition activities at school, home, and in the community.

Engage families in planning and highlight how transition skills and activities can take place outside of school, such as during college visits, when managing a schedule, or while learning independent living skills at home.

Resources

- ▶ [Guide: Collecting Data using Task Analysis](#)
- ▶ [Fast Fact: Understanding and Analyzing Transition Data to Improve Outcomes](#)