

Educate, Collaborate, and Engage with Family Members throughout the Transition Process

Students learn work and independent living skills at home from their first teachers — their families. The Transition Predictors of Postschool Success include parent expectations and parental involvement as predictors that have demonstrated increases in employment for students with disabilities. Also, families will likely continue involvement with the student after they exit school services. However, understanding the importance of this involvement in the transition process does not predict a close collaboration between the home and school. What can educators do to increase family engagement in the transition process? The tips and strategies below encourage family involvement in the transition process through education, collaboration, and engagement.

Educate

- **Educate families regarding their power to contribute to and influence the transition process.** One of the most accurate predictors of school achievement and post-school success is the extent a family encourages learning and transition planning. Parents with high expectations for their children assist them in building upon their strengths, interests, and needs and foster their ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency.
- **Educate families about adult outcomes.** Help families understand current national, state, and school division transition data of people with disabilities. Knowing this data will help understand the importance of collaborating with school and adult agency partners to help children achieve their desired adult outcomes.
- **Educate families about workplace readiness skills.** Home is one of the earliest places children learn about work and jobs. Families need to understand the personal qualities and abilities, interpersonal skills, and professional competencies important to all workers. Families who reinforce good work skills in their homes decrease the chance of future employers firing their children due to poor soft skills.

Collaborate

- **Collaborate with families through consistent communication.** Regular contact with families can go a long way to building trusting partnerships. When communicating with families, take care to focus on students' strengths by sharing their successes and growth as well as any information that families identify as important.

- **Collaborate with families with cultural sensitivity.** Recognize and acknowledge the different perspectives and cultural backgrounds of your students' families and the role culture plays in making educational decisions. Families feel respected and valued when they receive opportunities to share their opinions, ask questions, or raise concerns openly.
- **Collaborate with families through involvement.** Encourage family participation in all aspects of the transition process including transition assessment, career development, and postsecondary goals and activities. Empower families to learn about their role in the transition process by providing transition-related events, information, and resources.

Engage

- **Engage families through self-reflection.** Acknowledge your cultural values and then recognize how students' diversity impacts future planning.
- **Engage families through understanding.** Recognize and understand the gifts and knowledge that students, parents, and families bring to the table. Encourage families to share their language, culture, and traditions as they discuss hopes, plans, and concerns for the future.
- **Engage families through active listening.** Be more intentional in active listening to make sure the transition plan is student-centered and reflects the preferences of the student and the family. Support the values of the family when identifying postsecondary goals, including vocational training, independent living, and community work experiences.
- **Engage families through effective practice.** Use methods, models, and questions for transition assessment that involve input from students, family, friends, and other key stakeholders to ensure culturally responsive data collection. Be purposeful in connecting families with agencies that might offer services or supports for postsecondary planning and transition (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, Social Security Disability Office, transit accessibility).

Family involvement in the educational process is a core component of post-school success. Students whose families are active partners with schools experience higher academic success and are less likely to have disciplinary infractions. These students are also more likely to graduate, leading to more post-school success opportunities. These tips focus on three critical ways to involve families, specifically in the transition planning process: educate, collaborate, and engage. Each strategy suggested will assist educators in building partnerships with families that will inform transition planning and enhance student outcomes.

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