

Tips for Transition

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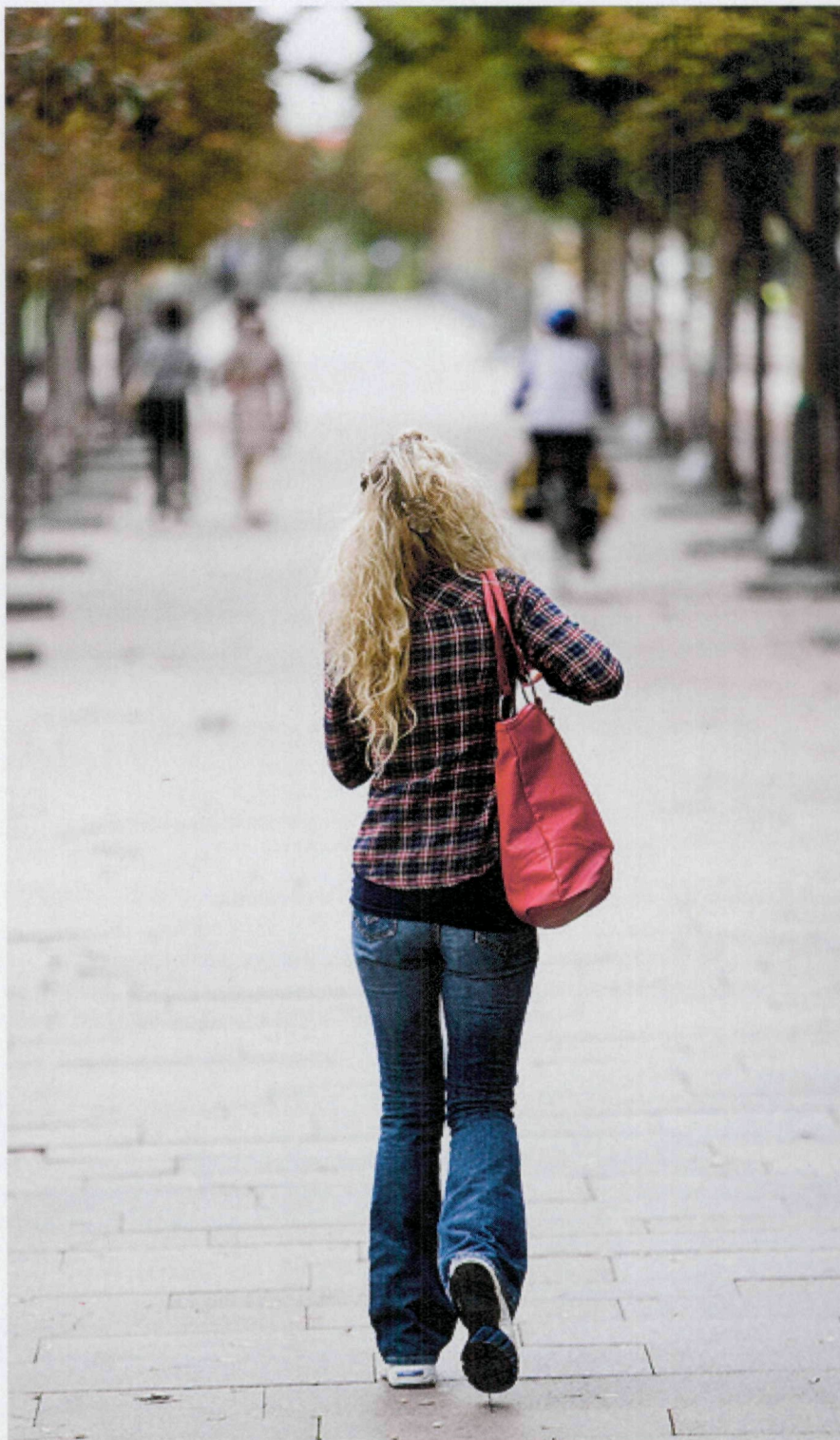
Mary E. Morningstar

One of the primary goals of school is to help students plan and prepare for the rest of their lives. This planning and preparation is especially important for students with disabilities. One recent study which highlighted the importance of the transition from school to adult life is the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). The 10-year NLTS2 study of the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of youth with disabilities who received special education services found that youth with disabilities are

- Less likely to enroll in post-secondary programs than were their peers in the general population (45% vs. 53%).
- Less likely than their general population peers to be employed after leaving school (57% vs. 66%).
- Less likely than the general population to have a checking account (46% vs. 68%).
- Less likely than their general population peers to have a credit card (28% vs. 50%).

These data indicate the importance of better preparing students for the transition process. One way for practitioners to begin to close these gaps is to design and implement an effective transition plan for their students (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009).

The Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) states that transition planning



should begin at the earliest age appropriate and no later than age 16. IDEA requires schools to make collaborative efforts to provide students access to an array of postschool activities including integrated employment, postsecondary education and training, community participation, and independent living. IDEA defines transition services but does not give examples of these services.

The current state of research in transition practices has resulted in several efforts examining transition activities, services, and practices implemented throughout the United States. One such effort is the What Works Transition Research Synthesis Project of Colorado State University. The goal of this project is to review and synthesize 20 years of research and advancements in the area of transition for youth with disabilities. To date, the project has published several papers synthesizing transition research studies on functional life skills curricular interventions (Alwell & Cobb, 2009a), social and communication interventions (Alwell & Cobb, 2009b), transition planning/ coordinating interventions (Cobb & Alwell, 2009), and self-determination (Cobb, Lehmann, Newman-Gonchar, & Alwell, 2009). The study found a relationship between functional life skills, social/communication interventions, transition planning/coordinating interventions, and transition-related outcomes. It was also found that multi-component self-determination interventions provided more positive effects than single component interventions.

The National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) has also been working to identify evidence-based transition practices. Researchers from NSTTAC first focused on analyzing research specific to experimental studies (both group and single-subject designs). The Taxonomy for Transition Planning (Kohler, 1996) was used as an organizing structure for the transition practices. The taxonomy has five broad areas: (a) student-focused planning, (b) student development, (c) interagency collaboration, (d) family involvement, and (e) program struc-

ture. Each of the five areas is further broken down into subcategories of specific activities as well as descriptors of certain transition practices. For the NSTTAC review, transition practices were assigned a rating of strong, moderate, or low, depending upon the rigor of the evidence associated with the practice. During the second phase of the research, NSTTAC expanded its review to include correlational research studies. Using the results from both stages of the study, NSTTAC systematically evaluated the effectiveness of transition practices and identified 16 predictors associated with improved postschool outcomes, including career awareness, community experiences, inclusion in general education, intera-

gency collaboration, and parental involvement (Test et al., 2009; see Figure 1 for the full list of predictors).

From these recent efforts to identify and document transition practices, the Division on Career Development & Transition (DCDT) launched an effort to identify field-based transition practices that align with the evidence of effective practices. The primary purpose of the DCDT effort was to identify grassroots transition practices currently in use by practitioners. The goal was to collect, document, and share transition practices that aligned with the evidence as well as to provide ideas and suggestions to others in the field.

Tips were solicited through an online survey that was sent to various stakeholders including practitioners, parents, and other professionals who work with students with disabilities. From this initial solicitation, approximately 240 participants accessed the web site. All incomplete submissions were removed from the database. Every tip went through a comprehensive review and vetting process conducted by an outside review team consisting of researchers and field-based experts. During the first phase of the

review process, all tips were confirmed to be in the correct category under which the tip was submitted. The solicitation for tips included eight specific domains that aligned with Kohler's (1996) broader taxonomy. The categories were (a) transition planning, (b) student involvement, (c) transition assessment, (d) assistive technology and universal design for learning, (e) family involvement, (f) interagency collaboration, (g) tips for specific disability groups, and (h) curriculum and instruction (see Figure 2). The first level of review focused on determining whether or not the tip was submitted under the correct transition practice category. This initial review phase also identified any tips that were incom-

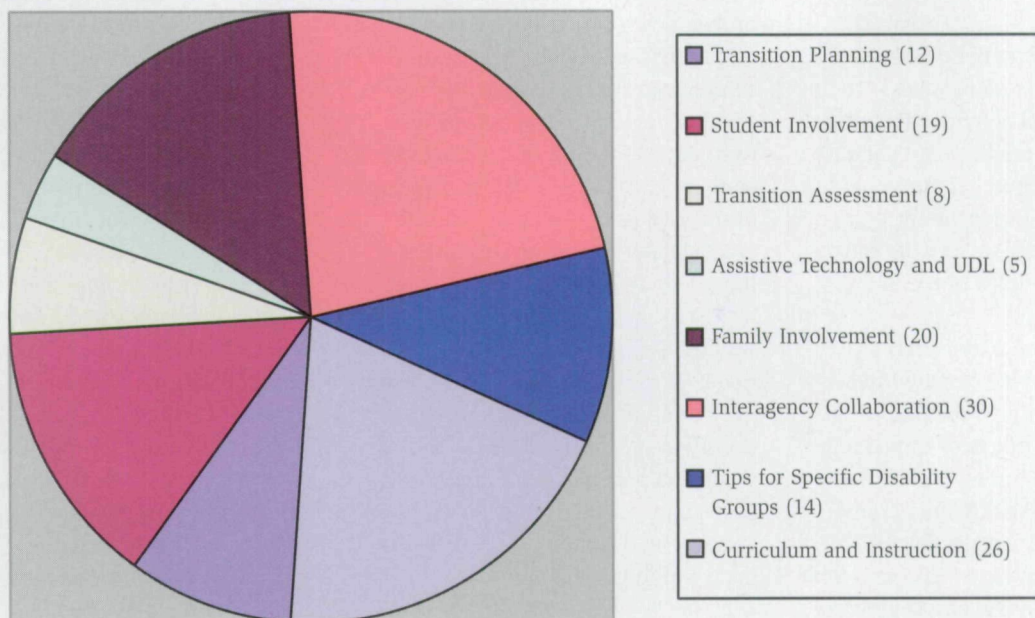
The goal was to collect, document, and share transition practices that aligned with the evidence as well as to provide ideas and suggestions to others in the field.

plete, and a follow-up e-mail was sent requesting additional information. Duplicative and similar tips were combined when submitted by multiple practitioners. These tips were merged into one tip that reflected the practices

Figure 1. National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center's (NSTTAC) Predictors of Postschool Success

- Career awareness
- Community experiences
- Exit exam requirements/high school diploma status
- Inclusion in general education
- Interagency collaboration
- Occupational courses
- Paid employment/work experience
- Parental involvement
- Program of study
- Self-advocacy/self-determination
- Self-care/independent living skills
- Social skills
- Student support
- Transition program
- Vocational education
- Work study

Figure 2. Tips Submitted by Category



of all of those who submitted the tip. In addition, all text was edited for readability, but the voice of the practitioner or parent who submitted the tip was maintained. This process resulted in 134 unique tips representing participants from 39 states and provinces. During the second phase of the review process, all of the tips were reviewed and vetted by 15 members of the DCDT board according to the specific member's area of expertise (e.g., the parent representative reviewed the parental involvement tips, the student representative and researchers in the area of self-determination reviewed the student involvement tips). The primary purpose of this second analysis was to ensure that the tip met a field-based definition of an effective practice. Through this process, follow-up with approximately 12 practitioners was

required in order to clarify questions and expand upon original information. All tips, except one, were confirmed as meeting the criteria.

This article does not provide an exhaustive list of all the tips but briefly illustrates the types of tips submitted in each category. The tips included were selected because they can be easily implemented by practitioners and they serve to complement current transition-related services and activities. The practitioners who submitted these tips are not included in this article but can be found on the database.

Database of Tips for Transition

All Transition Tips were uploaded into a searchable database on the Transition Coalition web site (www.transitioncoalition.org). The database is searchable by key word, domain, and

state. It allows the user to e-mail the practitioner who submitted the tip to request additional information or to ask questions. For tips for which web sites or additional resources were provided, the database links to the additional information (see Table 1). Anyone can suggest a tip by filling out an online form. New tips are reviewed and, if appropriate, added to the database. In this way, Tips for Transition will remain a renewable resource for transition practitioners.

Examples of Tips for Transition

Transition Planning

Transition planning is a life-long activity in which students, families, and professionals work together to plan for a successful adult life. Transition services are highly individualized and what

Table 1. Tips for Transition Online Resources

Description	Web Site
Transition Tips Database	http://www.transitioncoalition.org
National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)	http://www.nlts2.org/
What Works Transition Research Synthesis Project	http://www.nsttac.org/ebp/what_works.aspx
Evidence-Based Secondary Transition Practices	http://www.nsttac.org/ebp/evidence_based_practices.aspx
Ansell-Casey Lifeskills Online Assessment for Independent Living Skills	http://www.caseylifeskills.org

might work for one student may not be appropriate for another. Transition planning should be an ongoing dynamic process designed to help the student achieve his or her long-term goals. Some examples of transition planning tips include the following:

1. **Organize a transition group that meets once a month.** During the Transition Group meeting the students are grouped according to grade level and their transition plan. A special education instructor teaches the skills needed by the ninth graders, 10th graders, 11th graders and 12th graders. Parents have quarterly meetings to review their child's work from Transition Group as well as to provide information as a partner in the process.
2. **Start the transition process early by having realistic transition goals in place by the ninth and 10th grade.** Transition planning must begin early in order to be successful. Goals must be realistic and start no later than the ninth and 10th grade. Information about the student can be collected through informal interviews, a positive student profile sheet, community-based work experience evaluations, and general observation. A close partnership needs to be developed with the student, parent(s), teachers, and administration. When everyone works together, a successful transition is more likely to occur.
3. **Use a transition interview with students beginning at age 13.** We use a format developed by our Area Educational Agency transition team. This information is used to develop transition individualized education programs (IEPs). Interview sections include postsecondary living, postsecondary learning, postsecondary working, employability skills, and recreation/leisure (see Figure 3). A complete copy of the interview questions can be downloaded from the Tips Database (www.transitioncoalition.org).
4. **Have your students develop a portfolio.** This can be as simple as a three-ring binder and should

include the student's best work, photos of activities, academic successes, interviews with teachers/others, peer comments/activities, video, audio, and so on. This portfolio can be used for IEP meetings, eventual job opportunities, and college applications.

Student Involvement

According to IDEA 2004, transition services must be based upon "student needs, taking into account student strengths, preferences, and interests." Students should be involved and play an active role in the transition process. Involvement in the transition process teaches the student important self-advocacy and self-determination skills. The following are examples of opportunities for student involvement:

1. **Student-led IEP with a focus on transition goals.** The IEP transition meeting should be student-directed. This is often difficult for the student so we review and practice before the meeting. Prior to the IEP review with the student, transition assessments they have been given are discussed with them, along with their likes and dislikes, strengths and weaknesses. Before the IEP meeting, discuss with the student when he or she will speak and what he or she plans to say. Involving students in the IEP reaches students on so many levels and there are numerous positive effects. Involve your students in writing their IEPs when they are freshmen. Have them write their own present level of educational performance (PLEPs), transition pages, and goals.
2. **Have the student create a person-centered plan.** This plan should encompass the student's entire life and help him or her establish supports so that the student is living his or her preferred lifestyle. Often the school IEPs are so general or vague in this arena, that they do not include the person's wants, dreams, and desires (see Figure 4).
3. **Recruit students with disabilities who are currently in college.** College students with disabilities can speak

with high school students with disabilities (and their parents and teachers) who are interested in attending college. They can also describe their disabilities, accommodations, and first-hand experiences at college.

4. **Organize a peer-mentoring group in your high school for students with disabilities.** In this group the students will learn about their disability, accommodations, and strengths.

Transition Assessment

Transition assessment is defined as "the ongoing process of collecting data on the individual's strengths, needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future working, educational, living, and personal, and social environments. Assessment data serve as the common thread in the transition process and form the basis for defining goals and services to be included in the IEP" (Sitlington, 1996, p. 160). The following are transition assessment tips:

1. **Use the Ansell-Casey Lifeskills Assessment for independent living skills** (Nollan et al. 1997). Use the Ansell-Casey Lifeskills Assessment to determine current knowledge and target learning opportunities. Involve the youth and family in this process even when they are reluctant or seem resistant. Use this tool, to engage high school IEP case managers in "age appropriate transition assessment." Materials on the web site (www.caseylifeskills.org) are free.
2. **Create a discovery profile for each student.** Observation and work experiences are used to identify skills and preferences for each student. A discovery profile is completed for each student from observations at school, in the community, at home, and during a recreational activity. The information is used to create a series of work experiences, internships, and part-time employment. The information is also used to develop a customized transition from school to work. Each student

Figure 3. Sample Student Interview Questions

Student Interview for Transition Planning

Name: _____ Date: _____

School: _____

Interests, Preferences, and Strengths:

POSTSECONDARY LIVING

I plan to move away from home when I am _____ (age).

I plan to live in: _____ a large city _____ a small town _____ country (rural area)

If you have a particular place in mind, list it here: _____

Places I will go in my community:

_____ banks	_____ movie theaters	_____ public library
_____ restaurants	_____ work	_____ shopping malls
_____ friends' houses	_____ video rental store	_____ church
_____ grocery store	_____ parks/recreational spots	_____ golf courses
_____ discount stores	_____ community centers	_____ vote
_____ night spots	_____ employment agency	_____ other

When I live on my own, I plan to live in:

_____ An apartment	_____ A condominium	_____ Dormitory
_____ A mobile home	_____ A house	_____ Other _____

I want to live:

_____ Alone	_____ With my husband/wife	
_____ With parents	_____ With one or more roommate(s)	
_____ With someone to assist me		

To reach this goal, I will need to: _____

These are the skills which I currently demonstrate at home:

_____ Cleaning	_____ Cooking	_____ Grocery shopping
_____ Laundry	_____ Checking account	_____ Scheduling of appointments
_____ Debit card	_____ Savings account	_____ Taking medications
_____ Budgeting	_____ Clothes shopping	_____ Cell phone
_____ Home repairs	_____ Paying bills	_____ Video games
_____ Computer use	_____ Other _____	

When I live on my own, I plan to get around by:

_____ Driving my own car	_____ Riding my bike	_____ Walking
_____ Riding a motorcycle	_____ Riding with a relative	_____ Other
_____ Riding public transportation	_____ Riding with friends	

I currently have a: _____ Driver's Permit _____ Driver's License _____ Neither

To reach this goal, I will need to:

will leave high school with a customized job, adult services, and transportation. An example of a completed discovery profile can be found in the Tips Database (www.transitioncoalition.org).

3. *Use a variety of strategies to gather information.* Take the time to get to

know your students and to build a good rapport with them before trying to assess abilities and interests. Use surveys to help students determine interest and direction. Often students who are not able to effectively communicate their strengths and experiences are able to do so

with a situational assessment conducted in a variety of different work settings. Have students explore careers of interest through job shadowing. One idea is to set up numerous job shadow experiences to cover specific interests that students have shared.

Assistive Technology and Universal Design for Learning

IDEA 2004 defines assistive technology as “any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with a disability” (IDEA, 2004, Sec. 620 [1]). Universal Design for Learning is the concept that accommodations and modifications benefit everyone (Edyburn, 2005). Tips for these categories follow.

1. **Use a voice-to-text program such as *Dragon Naturally Speaking*** (Version 11; Nuance Communications, Inc., 2010). These programs are beneficial for students with severe dysgraphia; for example, one student who was interested in becoming a writer shared his stories in writers club and used this program for some of his homework assignments.

2. **Use video modeling to teach social skills and work-related skills.** Ideally, actors with learning disabilities should appear in the videos and demonstrate the skills taught. Research supports the use of video modeling for students with autism (Bellini & Akullian, 2007). Also, Imagination Stage, a theater that provides acting training for teens and adults with learning disabilities (LD), has successfully created job skill training videos featuring actors with LD and has presented them to local schools and disability providers. This program is called “Imagine Working.”

3. **Use picture technology with students who are nonreaders.** When preparing for interviews or IEP meetings for students who are nonreaders, use assistive technology tools such as Pix Writer (<http://www.slatersoftware.com/>). Using these tools the student is able to type answers, ideas, questions, or information on the computer. When the material is printed a picture is attached to the word, assisting the nonreader to be as independent as possible. Using these tools boosts the self-confidence of the student

Figure 4. Example of a Person-Centered Plan



From *Making Dreams Happen: How to Facilitate the MAPS Process* by Katharine Furney, 1996, Burlington, VT: Vermont Transition Systems Change Project, Center for Transition and Employment, University of Vermont. Reprinted with permission.

4. **Have your students use a word processor.** One readily available yet overlooked bit of technology is the modern word processor. Students who can learn to type can often leave behind years of frustration from poor motor control that leads to poor letter formation. Word processors provide students with spell-check, grammar-check, and often templates to write letters and other documents. Mastering this powerful tool will prepare students for writing in almost any setting.

Family Involvement

Families play an important role in a student's life. Traditional or nontraditional, biological, foster, or adoptive families provide vital support to students with disabilities through the transition process as well as throughout their lives. Families should be involved with and play an active role in the transition process. Suggested tips follow.

1. **Use a checklist at the IEP of students ages 18 to 21 to assist the student and parents.** This checklist can include items such as the Division of Developmental Disability

Services contact information; social security information, guardianship options, transportation options, and local adult service providers (see Figure 5).

2. **Develop transition brochures and tips sheets.** These materials can explain college, work, life skills, and initial placement in special education. These brochures can also be given to families and students at IEP meetings.
3. **Get parents involved before the student's 16th birthday.** During the IEP meeting explain what transition is and what we do and need to do at the high school level to get the students prepared for postgraduation. At this meeting have information about requirements for college and work. To encourage more parental involvement have the parents sign in for a prize so you know how many of the parents attended and how many you need to get more involved.
4. **Know the student, the family, and their circumstances.** The more complete your knowledge about the student, the community, and agencies, the better the match.
5. **Have a futures night.** A futures night is an event planned for students and their parents, usually one evening during the week. At this meeting, information is presented about vocational rehabilitation, guardianship and supplemental security income (SSI). Futures nights can be used to inform parents and students about transition-related issues.

Interagency Collaboration

Interagency collaboration is the process of establishing relationships with outside agencies that may be paying for or providing related services to the student once she leaves secondary school. These services could include paying for tuition, job coaching, life skills training, and mental health services.

1. **Encourage all nurses to participate in the development of the IEP related to the student's health care**

needs. As a state consultant for school nurses, I encourage all nurses to participate in the development of the IEP related to the student's health needs.

2. **Hold a transition fair each year.** The fair should include service providers, breakout sessions covering various topics (e.g., guardianship issues), a panel presentation with community service providers (e.g., Vocational Rehabilitation), as well as general information for parents.
3. **Organize and host a social security online application workshop at your high school.** Have a representative from the Social Security office come to the school and work with the families and students to complete the applications.
4. **Organize a district transition team made up of teachers, administrators, and a parent mentor.** The purpose of the meeting is to discuss various aspects of a student's transition needs starting in the eighth grade. The meetings are to learn

more about every aspect that students with special needs and their families might want to know as they prepare to exit high school. Each teacher then has future planning meetings separate from the IEP, with the family and the IEP team. The meetings start in eighth grade and continue every year to discuss various aspects of a student's transitions and needs.

Tips for Specific Disability Groups

Some strategies have been used successfully to help students in the transition process who share similar characteristics, needs, and strengths, such as students with vision impairments and significant intellectual disabilities.

1. **Have students with significant intellectual disabilities create a PowerPoint presentation.** For students

with significant intellectual disabilities or students who have difficulty with communication, assist them in preparing a PowerPoint presentation outlining their preferences, interests, needs, strengths, and their post-school dreams. Have the students use this PowerPoint at planning meetings to assist the other team members in learning more about the student. Students can also create a PowerPoint for everything from individualized research to self-assessment in a life skills class. Students who complete job shadowing or work experiences can create a PowerPoint, complete with photos from the work site and a section on self-assessment. The PowerPoint can be printed out and added to the student's portfolio. Students using this process report that "it's cool" and they "really enjoy it!"

2. **Students who cannot read can complete "My Goals After School."** "My Goals After School" is a transition assessment redesigned using pictures in Boardmaker (Mayer-

The more complete your knowledge about the student, the community, and agencies, the better the match.

Johnson, LLC, 2004). Boardmaker is a software program that creates picture symbols to communicate. The redesigned assessments are used with students who are nonverbal or nonreaders, to ensure that students with significant disabilities have access to career transition information.

3. **Use picture instructions to teach household chores.** When teaching adolescents with limited verbal abilities to perform household tasks such as cleaning, using small appliances, or cooking, use a series of picture instructions that model each step of the process. These images are individualized for each person, with the number of steps in the sequence reflecting the learning style of the individual. Make sure to take the time to work with the indi-

vidual at his or her pace so that the student learns each step of the process. Chain together the steps so that the student can complete each step to complete the entire task.

4. **Create a notebook of important paperwork for postsecondary settings.** For students who are going to a postsecondary setting, create a notebook with important paperwork for use when they leave high school. Include sections on rights and responsibilities, specific college information including the Office of Disability Resources, determination of eligibility and severity of eligibility with proper documentation, vocational goal development, financial statements, medical records, and the last copy of their IEP accommodations with current testing as well as the summary of performance. At the back of the notebook include business cards for people they may need to contact. Having everything in one place can position the student to start off in a positive direction after high school.

Curriculum and Instruction

The courses in which the student enrolls should help develop the knowledge and skills needed to achieve transition goals. Different types of curriculum, employment experiences, and life skills instruction can be used to assist students in the transition process and to prepare for adult life.

1. **Implement community-based instruction.** Teach students what the real world requires by involving them in community-based instruction programs which explore career avenues. Involve students in self-advocacy preparation so that in high school and beyond they are able to understand their learning differences and how to level the playing field related to their specific needs.
2. **Develop job shadowing work programs.** Giving juniors and seniors the opportunity to job shadow in areas that interest them can help students decide on a program and college. For example, students have shadowed veterinary technicians

Figure 5. Sample IEP Checklist Used in Delaware

Transition To-Do List For 18- to 21-year olds: Critical before your son or daughter's last year in school:	
Date Completed	Tasks
	Apply to the Division of Developmental Disabilities Services (DDDS) at any age but preferably by age 18.
	Initiate Transition Planning with IEP team: yearly beginning at age 14.
	Identify career interests and skills; investigate additional education or training requirements.
	Broaden experiences with community activities and expand friendships. Consider participating in community recreational facilities and adult Special Olympics.
	Obtain a State of DE ID card and learn how/when to use it to communicate personal information.
	Identify future living preferences and options. Identify needed supports—the DDDS Family Support Specialist will help you.
	Practice and learn skills for independent living.
	Participate in the ICAP (Inventory for Client and Agency Planning) interview. The ICAP is an assessment tool used to determine what level of service and funding should be provided to support an individual receiving adult services. Contact your DDDS Family Support Specialist for more information. Be critical when responding to questionnaire.
	Consider guardianship and alternatives to guardianship prior to age 18. Guardianship is the legal power to care for another person and manage his/her affairs. It takes away some of the person's rights (such as making health care decisions or managing money) and gives those rights to someone else. Parents are not automatically their adult child's guardians. When people become adults (age 18 in Delaware), they get all the legal rights and responsibilities of any adult. Only the courts can appoint a guardian. Consult an experienced attorney.
	Apply to the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation to determine eligibility for services.
	Apply for supplemental security income (SSI) and Medicaid (if a person is eligible for SSI, he or she is also eligible for Medicaid). If the student did not receive benefits before the age 18, reapply once student turns 18.
	Apply for Paratransit services—which may be needed to get to work.
	Choose an Adult Service Provider by April of the year before your son or daughter will graduate. So, if graduation is June of current school year, make the decision by April of that school year. Contact your DDDS Family Support Specialist for help.

(including surgeries) and dinner theater (helping behind the scenes). A local TV station even allowed students to work with a cameraman. There are so many willing participants out there; they just need to be asked.

3. **Have your students develop a "small business process."** In this process, the students are involved in

the conception and followthrough of marketing a product. In our experience, the product took off like wildfire and additional products were added to the business. Students participate in all aspects of the business process from start to finish. Parents also became involved and interested in the industry. Students developed employment skills in a

very realistic setting. The product was sold not only within the schools but also within the community. The community became more aware of the unique talents and skills of our transition students.

4. **Teach a unit in which your students are given a three-bedroom house and a budget.** The students then have to furnish the house with the use of a basic checklist, and stay within the budget. The students must use fliers to find their housing items, write checks, and keep a check register.
5. **Develop portfolios for a senior project.** Have seniors make a portfolio for their comprehensive final. In the portfolio have them include samples of job applications; resumes; a list of five references; an application for a rental agreement; a list of their goals for 6 months, 1 year, and 5 years; letters of inquiry; and thank-you notes for a job interview. After grading the portfolio, place a letter of recommendation for a job in the binder and mail it to the student. This project is a perfect way to create a tool that will allow students to have all of this information in one folder when they go out and apply for jobs.

Final Thoughts

These tips for transition are not intended to be an exhaustive list of research-based transition practices, but rather an opportunity for grass-roots practitioners to share what is working for them. Although all tips were vetted and approved by experts in the field before being included, they should not be considered evidence based. Transition practices lacking a research base can still be beneficial when taking into account the practitioner's "professional wisdom" which is acquired through experience. The Department of Education has stated that professional wisdom can be used in evidence-based education when empirical research is lacking or incomplete (Whitehurst, 2001). Because of the individualized nature of the transition process and the differences in available resources with

in schools and communities, not all of these tips will be practical or possible in all situations. Ideally, this repository of tips will continue to grow as practitioners submit tips from which others may benefit.

Transition practices lacking a research base can still be beneficial when taking into account the practitioner's "professional wisdom" which is acquired through experience.

The intended purpose of this effort was to identify transition practices currently being used by practitioners and to share these ideas with the field. In addition, other potential uses for the tips are being considered. For example, comparing tips with currently established evidence-based research would be extremely useful. In this way the tips could provide ideas for future research on effective transition practices.

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