

A LIFETIME OF LEARNING AND EARNING: A Family Guide to Work Preparation for Deaf and Hard of Hearing High School Students

By Annette Reichman, MS, and Susan Jacoby, PhD

As a parent, you may be amazed at how quickly time is passing. Within the next few years, your deaf or hard of hearing child will be graduating from high school. You may have many questions about the future of your soon-to-be young adult. Like all parents, you expect that your child will have the same opportunities that everyone else has and that he or she will be prepared to make important decisions about his or her life. As you envision the future, you see your child being fully independent and having a lifetime of employment and career opportunities.

How can your child prepare for life after high school? **One of the most essential elements is your personal involvement and support.** No one is better placed than you to offer the emotional support and encouragement, recreational and social opportunities, and independent living skills experience that your child needs to prepare for the future. As the primary support person for your child, you also may be able to tap your community for financial assistance and other services and benefits your child needs to prepare for and succeed in postsecondary education or work.

There are three important steps you can take to support your high school-age child's preparation for adult life:

1. Study all you can about transition planning and what makes a good plan.
2. Ensure that you and your child participate in transition planning.
3. Encourage your child to find employment while in high school.

Study All You Can About Transition Planning and What Makes a Good Plan

The goal of transition planning is to give active support to your child's transition from high school to life as an adult. Depending on your child's goals and

needs, transition planning can include preparation for postsecondary education, community participation, and self-sufficiency. Self-sufficiency means your child maintains quality employment that is based on his or her unique needs, preferences, and interests.

As you may know from participating in your child's Individualized Education Program (IEP), transition planning is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for all children 16 years of age and older. The IDEA also stipulates that educators and VR counselors must offer transition services to high school-age students with disabilities, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing, to prepare them for life after high school. Transition services can include academic instruction, community experiences, daily living skills development, vocational evaluation, and actual work experience.

To advocate effectively for your child, you should know that the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 specifically requires the VR program to have agreements with public schools that outline how they will work together to develop the transition plan for your child. The plan must describe what services will be offered and by which agency or school. Ideally, the transition plan will be developed and approved during your child's junior year.

How do you know if the transition plan meets your child's needs? The most important criteria are whether it will:

- guide your child through the choices he or she must make about the future, and
- teach the skills he or she needs to be self-supporting as an adult.



A Lifetime of Learning and Earning: A Transition Series for Families of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

ANNETTE REICHMAN

Director/Liaison for the Office of Special Institutions in the U.S. Department of Education, Annette Reichman, MS, works with Gallaudet University, the National Technical Institute for the Deaf, and the American Printing House for the Blind on their annual budget requests, on implementing and meeting the Government Performance Results Act indicators, and on determining appropriate policy decisions. Previously, when co-authoring this article, Reichman served as the Chief of Deafness and Communicative Disorders Branch in Rehabilitation Services Administration, where she actively supported efforts by state VR agencies to improve and expand employment opportunities for VR consumers who are deaf, hard of hearing, deaf-blind, or late deafened.

SUSAN JACOBY

Manager, Transition National Mission Initiatives at the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, Gallaudet University, Susan Jacoby, PhD, leads the Clerc Center's development and dissemination programs and services that support deaf and hard of hearing student transition throughout school and beyond into postsecondary education and employment.



A good transition plan focuses on *your child's long-term future* rather than just on jobs that are currently available to your child.

Ensure that You and Your Child Participate in Transition Planning

Successful transition begins with trusting your child to lead his or her own transition planning. Encourage your child to take responsibility and

make his or her own decisions, even if this means learning from mistakes. No one has more at stake in this process than your child. By participating in transition planning, he or she can practice goal setting, decision making, and self-advocacy. You, as a parent, need to ensure that your child is actively involved in planning his or her own future, including understanding and participating in IEP meetings.

The team that develops the transition plan includes you; your child; teachers, counselors, and transition specialists; and a VR counselor. The transition specialists provide career guidance and counseling and help employers, teachers, and you identify and implement strategies to support your child.

The transition plan should include teaching your child how to make

POSTSECONDARY REALITIES FOR DEAF AND HARD OF HEARING STUDENTS

First some good news: High school work preparation can enhance significantly the likelihood that young adults who are deaf or hard of hearing will achieve their employment, career, and personal goals. More than 30 years of experience shows that early exposure to the workplace and to the development of life skills makes a difference. Research demonstrates repeatedly that successful employment is most likely when work experience has been part of a student's high school program.

Deaf and hard of hearing students are completing high school and earning diplomas. The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005) reports that 90 percent of deaf and hard of hearing students go on to complete high school. Of those finishing, 97 percent of their parents report the student earned a regular diploma. The same report also indicates that college graduation rates have increased for deaf and hard of hearing students. Of students with hearing loss, 37 percent in 2005 vs. 13 percent in 1987 are graduating with AA degrees; and 36 percent in 2005 vs. 6 percent in 1987 are graduating with BA degrees.

Unfortunately, the research also offers some bad news. Despite experience and research in the area of transition and the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), youth with disabilities are still much more likely than youth without disabilities to drop out of high school and much less likely to attend a college or university or be employed.

Most high school students with disabilities do not go to college after leaving high school. Among students with no disabilities, 50 percent enroll in postsecondary programs within two years, and 68 percent, within five years (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000; 2001a). The data from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 in 2005 indicated that just 20 percent of students with disabilities took courses at a two-year college and just 9 percent were enrolled in a four-year college at some point after leaving high school. Young people in the general population are more than four and one-half times as likely to have enrolled in a four-year college.

WHAT ABOUT HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING?

According to the same report, of deaf and hard of hearing students who were not enrolled in college, only 13 percent were enrolled in vocational programs and 34 percent were employed in competitive settings. About two in 10 young deaf and hard of hearing adults were reported to be living independently of their parents.

In 1997, Marita Danek and Howard Busby published *Concepts and Premises in Transition Planning and Programming: Empowerment Through Partnership*. This work was commissioned by the Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center at Gallaudet University as a prelude to a National Dialogue on Transition held in 1998. Their research indicated that young deaf and hard of hearing adults continue to experience high unemployment and underemployment. Many of those who were employed worked part time, and most did not participate in postsecondary education opportunities. Large numbers of deaf and hard of hearing youth receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI).

informed decisions, self-advocate, and live independently. He or she must learn how to manage on a limited budget, since initial earnings most likely will be entry-level, at least during the first post-high school years. You can work with the high school to make sure that academic skills are taught in the context of real-life experiences (e.g., that math be taught through handling money, making a budget, etc.) and that they incorporate the development of social skills for work and community living.

Your child will need to learn self-advocacy, including standing up for his or her rights and requesting services and support related to transportation, housing, and employment. Your child should be given the opportunity to learn which rights apply in different situations, such as housing and employment (e.g., accommodations needed) and how to ask for specific accommodations.

Encourage Your Child to Find Employment While in High School

One of the most important goals of transition planning is preparing for future employment and career opportunities. Parents believe their deaf or hard of hearing child will be employed.

All parents of deaf and hard of hearing children participating in the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (Wagner et al., 2005) expect that their child “definitely will” or “probably will” have paid employment in the future. Meaningful employment in high school is one of the most important factors in long-term employment success. Assisting your child with this process is the third step you can take to support his or her transition.

To be ready for employment after high school, whether part time during college or vocational school or full time, your child needs to know what happens in the workplace. Think back to your own experiences in high school. How did you gain this knowledge? Perhaps your parents talked about their work day at the dinner table. Maybe they told you about their job responsibilities or a specific problem at work and how they solved it. Take the time to share with your child what you do at work and how you made this particular career choice for yourself. If you can, bring him or her to your office or place of employment in order to have your child job shadow you and your colleagues or friends. Activities like job shadowing, unpaid or volunteer work, internships, or part-time paid work give your child valuable work skills and experiences.

There are several strategies your child could use to find a job. For example, encourage your child to look at want ads in the newspaper and “help wanted” signs in stores and community bulletin boards. You can use your personal network of family, relatives, friends, neighbors, local businesses, and religious communities to identify job opportunities for your child either part time after school or full time during the summer months. These can be activities like babysitting, volunteering at a local hospital, or doing odd jobs in the immediate neighborhood.

Once your child has secured an interview, you can continue to provide support by assisting with the following preparation:

- having and producing important documents (e.g., driver’s license) as needed,
- completing application forms accurately and completely,

- preparing for an interview through role play prior to the interview, and
- learning how to sell oneself to a potential employer.

Once your child has begun working, you can continue to reinforce these fundamental work habits:

- following attendance policies and being on time,
- dressing appropriately,
- maintaining good hygiene,
- communicating appropriately and courteously with others,
- knowing how to use appropriate means of transportation, and
- determining what job accommodations are needed and recommending them to supervisors.

One additional consideration is learning what communication strategies your child can use that will lead to successful interactions and exchanges of information with coworkers and the supervisor. Specific suggestions include:

- sharing with the employer strategies that you as a parent use to communicate successfully with your child,
- showing the employer inexpensive options for making environmental cues visible to your child (e.g., light signaler for the phone, pagers for announcements, etc.), and
- asking the school transition specialist or the VR counselor to offer on-the-job training through a job coach or sign language interpreter (depending on how much support your child needs).

You also can be available for visits or phone calls from your child’s employer (if appropriate) to give suggestions or information that may be helpful on the job.



Putting It All Together

By following a complete transition plan, undergoing a variety of work experiences, and having your support, your child can be well prepared for successful employment after high school, whether part time during college or in a permanent full-time job. He or she can develop the skills and confidence needed to participate in a variety of increasingly challenging jobs and become more self-sufficient. At the same time, your child can increase his or her self-awareness and self-determination skills. Through hard work and support, your child can develop the necessary work behavior, a positive reputation, and networking skills. By the time your child graduates from high school, he or she will be well on the way to a successful future.

VR Services

WHAT ARE VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION SERVICES?

Vocational rehabilitation (VR) services are a range of support services available in each state to eligible individuals with disabilities (including your child). These services enable them to obtain meaningful employment and career opportunities. The services must be consistent with your child's strengths, resources, goals, concerns, abilities, interests, and informed choices.

WHAT SERVICES WILL VR PROVIDE TO YOUR CHILD?

VR services include but are not limited to:

- vocational counseling, guidance, and referral services;
- physical and mental restoration services;
- vocational and other training, including on-the-job training;
- assistance for students with disabilities transitioning from school to work;
- maintenance for additional costs incurred while receiving VR services (e.g., purchase of tools or school supplies);
- transportation related to other VR services;
- interpreter services for individuals who are deaf;
- reader services for individuals who are blind;
- personal assistance services to those with mobility impairments while an individual is receiving VR services;
- rehabilitation technology services and devices;
- supported employment services; and
- job placement services.

WHERE CAN YOU FIND INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR STATE'S SERVICES?

Every state has at least one VR agency. The addresses and telephone numbers of the local VR agencies generally are listed under "State Government" in the local telephone directory. You can also find information at <http://www.jan.wvu.edu/SBSES/VOCREHAB.HTM>

See the first publication, *Vocational Rehabilitation Services FAQ for Parents of Deaf and Hard of Hearing High School Students*, in this new Clerc Center series, *A Lifetime of Learning and Earning: A Transition Series for Families of Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students* at <http://clerccenter.gallaudet.edu/Transition/LearningtoEarn>



Questions to Ask

QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK THE HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITION SPECIALIST AND VR COUNSELOR, ON BEHALF OF YOUR CHILD:

- How can my child actively participate in developing the IEP for transition?
- Is a local VR counselor on the transition team?
- Is “person-centered planning” focusing on my child’s strengths used to develop an appropriate transition plan?
- Are “self-determination” curricula and learning experiences part of the transition plan?
- Are “work-based learning experiences” a significant part of the high school curriculum?
- What education and career options are available? How does this fit my child’s interests, dreams, and goals?
- What are the labor market trends?
- What community resources are available for my child as a young adult?

Websites

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT TRANSITION PLANNING AND ADVOCATING FOR YOUR CHILD, VISIT THE FOLLOWING WEBSITES:

- Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center
<http://clercenter.gallaudet.edu/Transition/index.html>
- The Family as a Critical Partner in the Achievement of a Successful Employment Outcome
www.pacer.org/tatra/critpart.htm
- Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights Center (PACER): Technical Assistance on Transition and the Rehabilitation Act
www.pacer.org/tatra/tatra.htm
- National Center on Secondary Education and Transition
www.ncset.org
- The Transition Coalition
www.transitioncoalition.org
- National Transition Network
<http://ici2.umn.edu/ntn>



Suggested Readings

- Blackorby, J., & Wagner, M. (1996). Longitudinal post-school outcomes of youth with disabilities: Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study. *Exceptional Children*, 62(5), 399–413.
- Bowe, F. G. (Ed.). (1988). *Toward equality: Education of the deaf*. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Bowe, F. G. (2000). *Physical, sensory, and health disabilities: An introduction*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill Education, Prentice Hall.
- Bowe, F. G. (2002). *Transition for deaf and hard of hearing students: A blueprint for change*. Unpublished manuscript pursuant to a Mary E. Switzer Distinguished Fellowship award from the U.S. Department of Education, National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research.
- Carr, N. (1996). *Final report: A community-based vocational rehabilitation consortium for low functioning adults who are deaf*. Unpublished manuscript. Jackson Heights, NY: Lexington Center for the Deaf.
- Cohen, E. (1994). Restructuring the classroom: Conditions for productive small groups. *Review of Educational Research*, 64(1), 1-35.
- Dew, D. W. (Ed.). (1999). *Serving individuals who are low-functioning deaf: 25th Institute on Rehabilitation Issues*. Washington, DC: George Washington University, Regional Rehabilitation Continuing Education Program.
- Hasazi, S. B., Furney, K. S., & DeStefano, L. (1999). Implementing the IDEA transition mandates. *Exceptional Children*, 65(4), 555-566.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U. S. C. 1400 et seq., as amended by P. L. 105-17, the IDEA Amendments of 1997.
- Martin, J., Marshall, L., & DePry, R. (2001). Participatory decision-making: Innovative practices that increase student self-determination. In R. Flexer, T. Simmons, P. Luft, & R. Bart (Eds.), *Planning transitions across the life span*. Columbus, OH: Prentice Hall, Merrill Education.
- Moores, D. F. (1982). *Educating the deaf: Psychology, principles, and practices*. Dallas: Houghton Mifflin.
- Notice of Policy Guidance. (1992). *Federal Register*, 57(211), October 30, 49274-49276.
- Ohio Valley Educational Cooperative. (1999). *Project TRAILS (Transition: Responsible Actions for Independent Living Success)*. Shelbyville, KY: Author. (Copies available from Office of Special Education Programs, U. S. Department of Education, Washington, DC 20202.)
- Repetto, J., & Correa, V. (1996). Expanding views on transition. *Exceptional Children*, 62(6), 551-563.
- Slavin, R. (1995). *Cooperative learning: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- U. S. Department of Education. (2002). *Twenty-fourth annual report to Congress on implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*. Washington, DC: Author. Tables available online at www.ed.gov.
- Watson, L., & Johnson, T. (1996). *Continuation application for community-based projects for individuals who are low functioning and deaf or low functioning and hard of hearing*. Unpublished manuscript. San Antonio, TX: Methodist Mission Home.

References

- Danek, M., & Busby, H. (1999). *Transition planning and programming: Empowerment through partnership*. Washington, DC: Pre-College National Mission Programs, Gallaudet University.
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2000). *State profiles of public elementary and secondary education, 1996-1997*. Washington, DC: Author. (Also available online: <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2000/stateprofiles/>.)
- National Center for Education Statistics. (2001a). *Digests of educational statistics, 2000*. Washington, DC: Author. (Online at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2001>. Note also "Dropout rates" at <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/>.)
- Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., Garza, N., & Levine, P. (2005). *After high school: A first look at the post-school experience of youth with disabilities. A report from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.