BLOOM CONSULTING

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Health, Hope, and the Future

Transition Planning for Students with Complex Medical Needs

Why this Matters

Students with significant medical needs often have transition plans that focus heavily on safety, care, and school access, but not enough on adulthood.

- Medical complexity does not remove the need for post-school planning.
- Transition should begin early and be meaningful.
- Students with epilepsy, neurological conditions, or significant health needs may need intentional support to access:
  - employment
  - postsecondary education
  - community life
  - adult services

The goal is not only graduation; the goal is quality of life after high school.

IDEA and the Legal Foundation for Transition

Under IDEA, transition services must be included in the IEP by age 16, or earlier when appropriate. Transition planning should prepare students for life after high school — not just graduation.

- Transition must be included in the IEP.
- It must be based on the student's needs, strengths, preferences, and interests.
- It must support movement from school to post-school activities.
- It must include measurable postsecondary goals and transition services needed to help the student reach those goals.

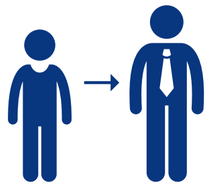
Transition planning is both a legal requirement and a quality-of-life responsibility.

IDEA Definition of Transition Services

Results-oriented

Focused on improving academic and functional achievement

Designed to help the student move from school to adult life



Connected to postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment, adult services, independent living, and community participation

IDEA defines transition services as a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability.

Why Transition Is Especially Important for Medically Needy Students

For students with significant medical needs, transition planning must address both disability-related needs and adult-life outcomes.

- They may need support managing medication, fatigue, seizures, transportation, appointments, and emergency plans.
- Families may be unsure what adulthood can look like beyond school-based supports.
- Adult systems are often more fragmented than school systems.
- Strong transition planning helps prevent isolation, unemployment, loss of services, and overdependence on family caregivers.

Moving from Protection to Preparation

Many medically fragile students are protected well in school, but not always prepared well for adulthood.

🛡️ Protection Principle

Safety is important, but it should not become the only goal.

🌱 Growth Principle

Students can learn self-advocacy, decision-making, communication, and independence at their own level.

Transition planning should ask:

- What does the student want her adult life to look like?
- What supports will she need?
- What skills can we begin teaching now?

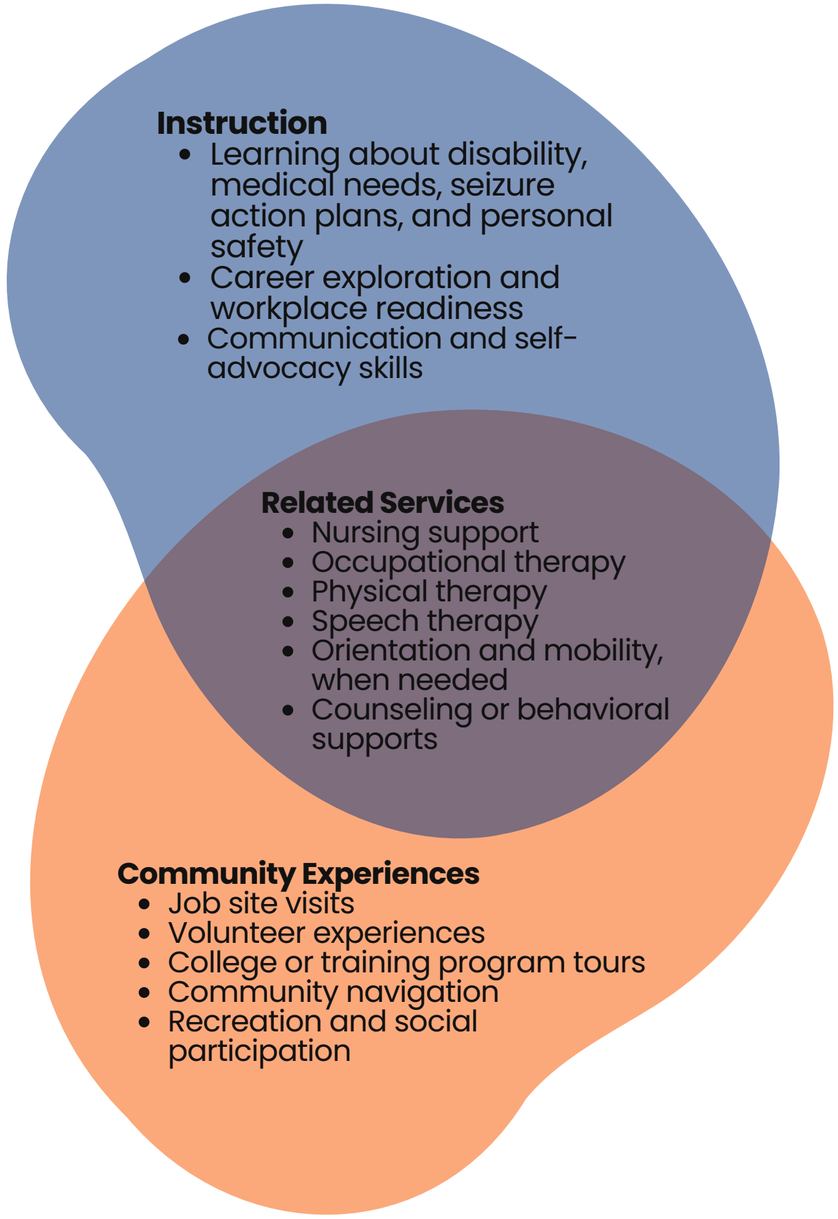
What Is a Coordinated Set of Activities?

A coordinated set of activities is not one form, one meeting, or one goal. It is a planned, connected approach across school, home, medical care, community, and adult services.

IDEA identifies areas that may be included:

- Instruction
- Related services
- Community experiences
- Employment and adult living objectives
- Daily living skills, when appropriate
- Functional vocational evaluation, when appropriate

Coordinated Set of Activities for Medically Needy Students



The Role of Medical Providers in Transition Planning

Medical providers can help schools and families understand what supports are truly needed without unnecessarily limiting the student's future.

- Help identify safe participation supports.
- Clarify restrictions versus reasonable precautions.
- Support emergency planning.
- Help document health-related accommodations.
- Encourage independence in health self-management when appropriate.

The IEP Must Connect to Adult Outcomes

Transition IEPs should not only list services. They should connect present needs to adult goals.

The IEP should answer:

- What does the student want to do after high school?
- What skills does the student need to get there?
- What supports are required?
- Who is responsible for each activity?
- How will progress be measured?

Required Postsecondary Goal Areas

Education or Training

Examples: vocational training, college, certificate program, adult learning, supported learning.

Employment

Example: competitive integrated employment, supported employment, customized employment, volunteer-to-work pathway.

Independent Living
(when appropriate)

Example: transportation, medication management, safety skills, money management, community participation.

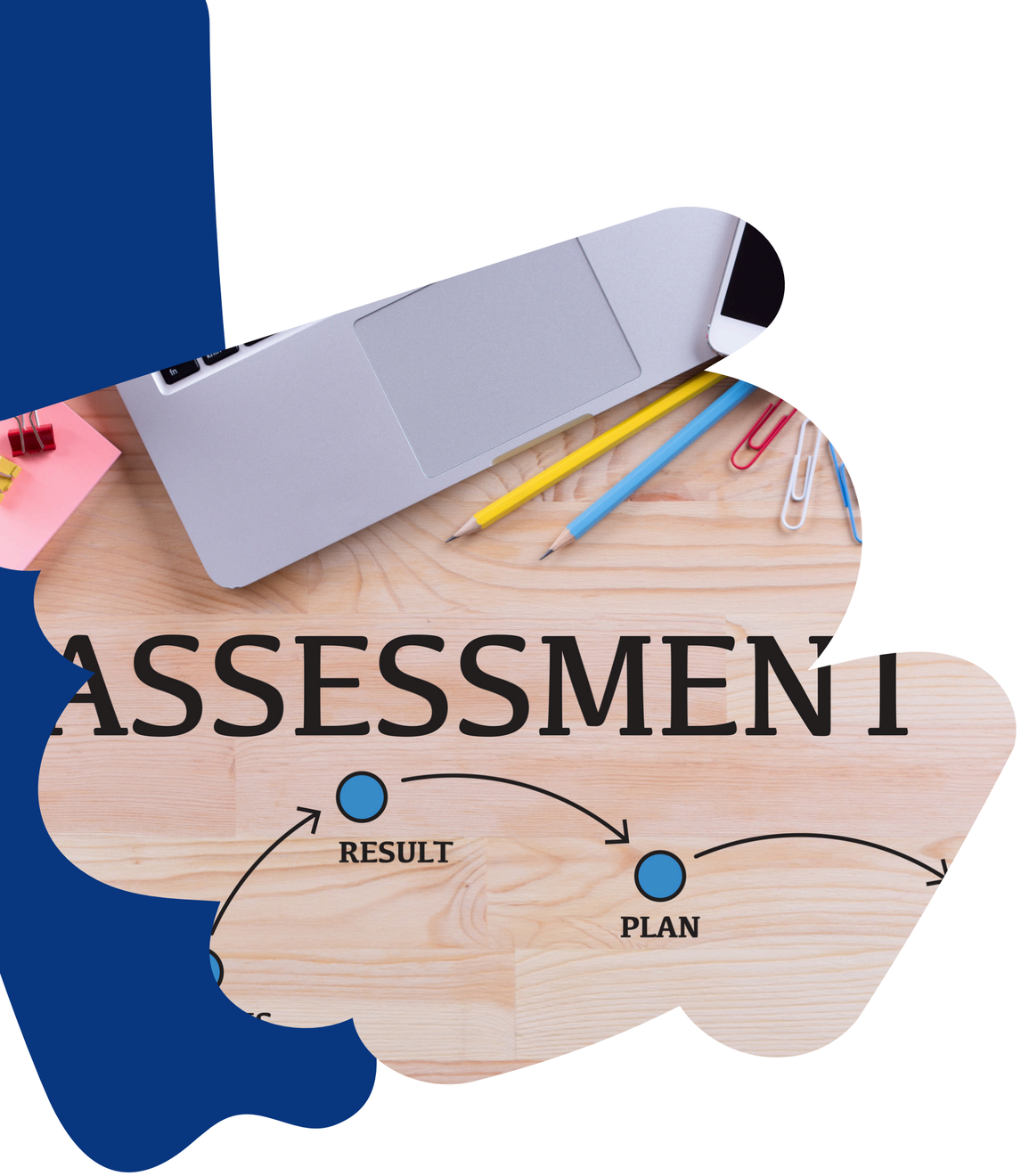
Every transition plan should identify a student's vision for learning, work, and independence after high school.

Present Levels Must Include Functional and Medical Impact

The present levels section should clearly describe how the student's medical needs impact school, community, employment, and independence.

Areas to include:

- Seizure history or medical episodes that affect participation
- Stamina and fatigue
- Communication needs
- Mobility needs
- Medication schedule
- Emergency response needs
- Cognitive or memory impact
- Attendance concerns
- Self-care and daily living skills
- Family/caregiver support needs



Transition Assessments for Students with Significant Medical Needs

Transition goals should be based on age-appropriate transition assessments.

Examples:

- Student and family interviews
- Interest inventories
- Functional vocational evaluations
- Community-based observations
- Self-determination assessments
- Assistive technology assessments
- Medical impact information
- Daily living skills assessments

IEP Goal Area: Self-Advocacy

Students should learn how to communicate their needs, preferences, and supports.

Example Goal:
Given visual supports or a communication device, the student will identify her medical or safety needs and request assistance in 4 out of 5 opportunities.

Possible Skills:

- Explaining diagnosis at an appropriate level
- Asking for help
- Identifying trusted adults
- Knowing what to do before, during, or after a seizure
- Participating in IEP meetings
- Expressing preferences for work, school, and community life

IEP Goal Area: Health and Safety Self-Management

Transition goals may need to include health-related independence.

Example Goal:
Given a checklist, the student will follow her personal health and safety routine, including medication reminders, hydration, rest breaks, and emergency plan steps, with 80% accuracy across three settings.

Possible Skills:

- Recognizing warning signs
- Carrying emergency information
- Following a seizure action plan
- Using a medical ID
- Communicating medication needs
- Knowing when to seek help

IEP Goal Area: Employment Readiness

Students with medical needs should still have access to employment exploration and preparation.

Example Goal:
Given supported instruction and job exploration activities, the student will identify three job interests, two workplace support needs, and one preferred work environment.

Possible Skills:

- Career exploration
- Understanding workplace expectations
- Time on task
- Social skills at work
- Asking for accommodations
- Identifying safe job settings
- Building stamina for work tasks

IEP Goal Area: Community Participation

Community participation is a key adult outcome, especially for students who may experience isolation due to medical needs.

Example Goal:
Given adult support and a visual schedule, the student will participate in one community-based activity and identify the location, purpose, and support needed in 4 out of 5 trials.

Possible Skills:

- Transportation planning
- Navigating public spaces
- Ordering food or making purchases
- Attending appointments
- Participating in recreation
- Volunteering
- Building social connections

IEP Goal Area: Daily Living and Independence

Not every student will live independently, but every student can increase independence.

Example Goal:
Given task analysis and adult support, the student will complete a daily living routine related to personal care, meal preparation, or home safety with increased independence over nine weeks.

Possible Skills:

- Personal care routines
- Meal planning
- Using a phone
- Emergency contacts
- Money skills
- Household tasks
- Medication routines
- Understanding personal boundaries and safety

IEP Goal Area: Postsecondary Education or Training

Postsecondary education does not always mean a four-year college. It may include many types of adult learning.

Example Goal:

- The student will explore three postsecondary training options and identify the supports, transportation, and medical accommodations needed for participation.
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Possible Options:

- Community college
- Vocational training
- Certificate programs
- Adult education
- Day habilitation with skill development
- Apprenticeship or supported training
- Disability-specific college support programs

Building a Strong Transition IEP Team

The team should include people who understand both disability and adult outcomes.

Possible Team Members

- Student
- Parent or guardian
- Special education teacher
- General education teacher
- School nurse
- Related service providers
- Medical provider input, when appropriate
- Vocational rehabilitation counselor
- Adult service provider
- Community or employment provider

Common Mistakes in Transition Planning

Common mistakes include:

- Waiting too long to begin planning
- Writing vague goals
- Focusing only on graduation
- Leaving medical needs out of transition planning
- Assuming employment is not possible
- Not involving adult agencies early
- Not teaching self-advocacy
- Creating goals that are not connected to real adult outcomes

What Good Transition Planning Looks Like

Strong transition planning is:

- Individualized
- Practical
- Strength-based
- Medically informed
- Community-connected
- Focused on dignity and adult life
- Built around the student's voice

Key message:
The question should not be "Can this student participate?" The better question is "What supports are needed for this student to participate meaningfully and safely?"

Final Takeaways

Transition planning for medically needy students should:

- Start early
- Include medical and functional needs
- Focus on adult outcomes
- Include coordinated services and supports
- Prepare the student for employment, education, independent living, and community participation
- Honor the student’s voice, dignity, and potential

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