



# “What Parents Need to Know”

**Spotlight on:** 

## The Transition Process from High School to Post-Secondary Education for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students

**S**am was always very interested in technology. In fact, we have a picture of him at 18 months old kneeling on a chair looking into a computer screen. Later, while in middle school, he and his dad spent many evenings building a computer together with the help of a friend who has a computer networking business. During Sam's middle school years, he was able to job shadow for a day, working with a computer networking company to learn if this was a career interest or possible course of study he would like to pursue in post secondary education. His middle school encouraged him to be a student assistant working with the technology specialist, as well as be the student representative on the technology task force. He was also recruited to be a member of the extracurricular Math Counts team, and competed with other middle school students across the state. While in high school, Sam took as many math, science and computer classes (including AP courses) his schedule would allow. He successfully completed the Cisco Academy course and now has transitioned to post secondary education, at the university or college level, majoring in engineering.



Transition is a process that requires planning and educating, including a team of community members, adult service agencies, educational professionals, family members, and students themselves. It is an outcome-oriented process to take a look at the student's interests, ability levels, preferences, and individual needs to become a successful member in the adult world and the world of work. Throughout this process, positive and negative events will occur. The team must continue to focus on the goal of a smooth transition from high school to a post-secondary education, with the end result culminating in a deaf or hard of hearing(d/hh) student's entrance as a contributing member of adult society.

Many high school students have no idea where they want to be tomorrow, let alone where they may want to be as an adult living in a world where they will be making personal decisions, working to support themselves, and adding value to the world. Transition should start in the early years with educators and families making children aware of choices, endless possibilities, and allowing

them to dream. Exploration and preparation for transition should be developed during the middle and high school years. Continuing education or post-secondary education then become the responsibility of adult service agencies, the individual themselves, and their family.

The Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that planning for transition services be included in the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process. IDEA requires that needed transition begin to be discussed in a student's IEP by the age of 14. (moving the time frame up from age 16 in previous legislation) This enables the IEP team to help the student achieve post-school goals with a coordinated set of activities. It establishes the relationship of the individual student's abilities with post-school goals. The team should consider areas of instruction, related services, community experience, employment, and adult living goals. IDEA requires that transition planning be addressed annually at 14 years of age and after, and should focus on the student's course of study. The IEP team, including the student and parents, must map out an educational program with experiences to prepare the student for adult life, and must link students and families to post-school services, including adult service agencies. The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) monitors the implementation of provisions of IDEA. Current research finds that states and local districts are experiencing some difficulties in implementing the transitions provisions of IDEA. (Storms, O'Leary, & Williams, 2000)

For a deaf/hh student who has the interest, ability, and preference to attend post-secondary education, it is critical to create a plan with the IEP team, including a transition goal that focuses on a student's course of study, as well as an outline of classes to allow the student to reach this goal.

Consider the people involved in the process and what their roles may include to support a transitioning student.

### **Deaf/ hard of hearing Student:**

- ❖ Consider preferences, interests, and abilities to identify transition goal.
- ❖ Individual student must understand their hearing loss and what it means in terms of accommodations and modifications needed in the academic world and social/work worlds.
- ❖ Attain self-advocacy skills with training, coaching and practice
- ❖ Attain daily life skills for independent living, with consideration of community involvement and employment.

### **Parent:**

- ❖ Support the student with realistic transition goals.
- ❖ Collaborate with professionals.
- ❖ Provide appropriate information on the student's strength, interests, and needs to the team.
- ❖ Be an equal member of the IEP team.

### **Deaf / Hard of Hearing Special Education Teacher:**

- ❖ Provide information on student's strength, achievements, and IEP goal progress
- ❖ Consider accommodations and modifications to effectively access the general education curriculum, including a communication-driven environment.
- ❖ Help coordinate course of study for completion of student's transition goal, including a list of classes for four years of high school.
- ❖ Consider and help implement IEP transition goal, including post-school services, agencies and programs for transition planning.

### **Regular Education Teacher:**

- ❖ Consider course of study in regular education curriculum to achieve transition goal.
- ❖ Help implement accommodations and modifications to regular education environments to allow for effective communication.

### **Agency Personnel:**

- ❖ Provide information on eligibility

requirements and services, including documentation required for deaf and hard of hearing students.

- ❖ Make families aware of possible agency waiting lists; long range planning often requires time and much paperwork.
- ❖ Provide information on the difference between IEP entitlement and the eligibility process of adult services.

*(Adapted from `The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 Transition Requirements: A Guide for States, Districts, Schools, Universities and Families; The Participants and their Roles.)*

Putting this all together may seem overwhelming, but with support from a team of people knowledgeable about your student, the process becomes clear and can be broken down into manageable steps. When the transition goal is clearly stated as college or university bound, the first step is to look at the requirements for high school graduation and the requirements for post-secondary or college entrance. The requirements may be different for a regular high school diploma versus that required for college entrance. Knowing this ahead of time will allow an appropriate mapping out of coursework for four years of high school to accurately reflect that desired outcome of college admission. Remember, a rigorous high school program, with appropriate supports and services for your D/HH student, will better prepare the individual student with skills to be successful in college. Every year the transition goal should be reviewed and updated according to the student's interests, preferences, abilities and needs. Throughout the transition process, parents are the one constant variable in a lifetime of changing schools, employers, service agencies, and professionals. Parents must be active, not passive, participants in transition planning. (Laurent Clerc National Deaf Education Center, 1999)

### **A Parent's Story:**

*"As a parent walking into an IEP*

meeting, intimidation is not the only conflicting feeling present when I see a room full of professionals extremely well-versed in their area of support for my child. I will always remember one of the last meetings I attended. I listened to the regular education teachers (YES, all four academic teachers were present to listen to each other!) and the positive comments they were able to make towards my child: That my child was: always in attendance; always completed his work on time; actively participated; knew his accommodations and was able to express them to them in a polite and knowledgeable manner; self-advocated when needs were not being met appropriately; had great understanding of the content area; had a very caring side towards other individuals. Regular educators were able to predict that my student would be highly successful in the college or university environment and the world of work in his chosen career path. It was heartwarming and helped to sweep away doubts I might have harbored as to this child's abilities in the 'real world'."

### A Deaf/hh student's story:

Sam considered his interests, preferences, abilities and needs and chose a transition goal of continuing his education in a post-secondary school at a university or college majoring in math, science or computers. After several years of taking college entrance level classes, Sam narrowed his interests to include a major area of study in engineering. At Sam's IEP annual review meeting, the team included courses that would allow him to graduate from high school with a regular high school diploma, allow him to take advanced placement courses in the areas of math and science, and include some skills in computers to make him employable in the work force. During this process, Sam worked on his self-advocacy skills, grew to understand his deafness through personal experience and deaf adult role models, understood how his deafness affected his access to education, and with the help of his parents gained independence. Sam connected with a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, specifically trained to work with deaf or hard of

hearing individuals, who helped him choose a career plan, write a Plan for Employment with the necessary training, and will help him find employment after his training is complete.

Transitioning from high school to post-secondary education, or college, removes one from the protection of the IDEA law and the right to a "free appropriate public education" (FAPE). College students are provided services under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (504) and the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA). As a civil rights legislation, Section 504 and the ADA prohibit discrimination based on disability or handicap. It will provide auxiliary aids, academic adjustments, and modifications to qualified students in order to have an equal opportunity to participate in or benefit from programs or activities provided by the college. It will also provide comparable and accessible housing to disabled students at the same cost as to other students. However, at the post-secondary level, an individual must identify their needs to the school (called "self-identifying") and request services through the college office for students with disabilities. Documentation of eligibility is needed, and could be provided by a family physician, otolaryngologist, or audiologist. For D/HH students, documentation may include:

- ❖ a statement of deafness or hearing loss with an audiogram that reflects the current (generally within one year) impact the deafness or hearing loss has on the student's ability to function,
- ❖ a written summary within the report explaining procedures and evaluation instruments used in the diagnosis along with a narrative of evaluation results,
- ❖ medical information to explain individual needs, and the individual's hearing status (constant or fluctuating) and how this impacts an academic program,
- ❖ a statement on the limitations of hearing loss on learning for which academic adjustments are request-

ed.(Colorado Options, 2003)

Each college is then responsible to provide the academic adjustments and services that allow an "equally effective" opportunity to students. For a D/hh student, adjustments might include the following:

- ❖ Priority registration
- ❖ Reduction in course load (12 credits instead of 15 credits)
- ❖ Course substitution for degree requirements
- ❖ Notetaker
- ❖ Interpreter
- ❖ Extended time
- ❖ Alternate test site
- ❖ TTY or other equipment in the dorm

(U.S. Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights 2004)

For each post-secondary educational situation, the student should become well informed as to what their rights and responsibilities are and what responsibilities fall to the school. Each post-secondary school or college may require you to follow reasonable procedures.

There are many questions to be answered and the most effective method is to visit the resource office for students with disabilities at any post-secondary school that is being considered by the student. General questions can be answered ahead of time on websites, and can be a good method to learn more about the individual schools policy. Appropriate questions to gain knowledge about the support services may include:

- ❖ Is there a resource coordinator for D/hh students?
- ❖ What services do you provide for D/hh students?
- ❖ Are staff knowledgeable about deafness and is there any training provided for staff to become knowledgeable?
- ❖ Are there D/hh staff on campus and how are they supported?
- ❖ How many deaf students attend this school presently and have attended in the past 10 years?

- ❖ What skills and certifications do interpreters need to provide services through your office?
- ❖ Do students have access to notetakers, tutors, and interpreters for courses and activities?
- ❖ Is the student responsible for requesting interpreters for all situations or are they included in planning special activities on campus?
- ❖ Are special testing accommodations provided within your office?
- ❖ What is the job placement rate for D/hh students?
- ❖ Is there a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor on site?

Asking questions will give you some insight to the office and staff you will be working with while attending your post-secondary school of choice. It often helps in the decision making process during your college search.

### **Student's Story:**

*Susie has always wanted to attend college, but was never quite sure what would be her course of study. During her transition from high school to college, she remained on a college bound course of study knowing she had the interest, ability and preference to continue her education. Her IEP team helped to plan for college entrance including three years of a foreign language, even though she had difficulty hearing the*

*language due to her deafness. She received a regular high school diploma, and was accepted to her college of choice following the application procedure of all students. While looking at schools, she made a visit to the resource office for students with disabilities to learn how to access effective communication in her college classes and what documentation she would need to provide to receive appropriate services. Upon moving into her dorm, she contacted the Housing Office to request a strobe fire alarm be for her room to alert her in case of fire. She also requested a special door bell with a strobe to alert her of visitors. Susie has progressed from an open-option major taking core required classes to anthropology major with a career goal of working as an archivist. She has successfully navigated the college environment being her own advocate and requesting support services as she feels they are needed.*

Transition is a process that occurs through many life stages from the early years through adulthood. Transitioning from high school to post-secondary education is another milestone in a d/hh individual's life and will impact their future in the adult world. Knowledge, understanding, and implementation of the transition process from high school to post-secondary education allows for success.

### **Citations**

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## The "What Parents Need to Know" Series

The "What Parents Need to Know" Series includes full articles and two-page synopsis of the following topics:

- ❖ Socialization and the Child who is Deaf or Hard of Hearing
- ❖ Self-Advocacy for Deaf and Hard of Hearing Students
- ❖ School Placement Considerations for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Student
- ❖ From High School to Post-Secondary Education: The Transition Process

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