



Key points:

- **Be sensitive, compassionate when discussing student's abilities, needs with parents**
- **Use 'discrepancy analysis' to compare student's current abilities, goals**
- **Look for compromises when student, parents disagree on postsecondary vision**

HOW I ADVISE MY CLIENTS': How can IEP teams develop appropriate, realistic postsecondary goals?

Developing postsecondary goals for a student with a disability can be especially difficult when the student's interests or preferences don't match up with her abilities. Parents may also be set on a specific vision for their child's future and resistant to developing a more realistic transition plan.

So how can IEP teams in your district best tailor a student's transition plan to meet her abilities *and* interests? How can you work with parents who have different or unrealistic expectations for their child?

Special Ed Connection® posed these questions to school attorneys and specialists in the field. Read their responses, edited for length and clarity, below:

□ **Heather Rutland, school attorney, [Eichelbaum Wardell Hansen Powell & Mehl PC, Austin, Texas:](#)**

Sometimes, parents and students need time to adjust their postsecondary expectations. Districts may need to fall back on hard data to help the family get to a more realistic place about the future. Present this data in terms of what the child *can* do, rather than what the child *can't* do, and be patient but firm as you propose a transition plan. Stress that this plan is individualized just like the IEP and explain the logic behind any recommendations.

After the attention paid to their child in public school, parents often fear real-world options for student growth will be limited. It is useful, therefore, to introduce representatives from agencies that will work with the student after high school to help manage the family's expectations about transition. Even after high school, there is no one-size-fits-all plan.

When a student and parent differ on what the student's postsecondary picture looks like, look for compromises. If the student wants to work after high school but the parent has visions of community college, focus on skills critical to success in both areas and plan for transition in a more generalized fashion. For example, work on universal skills such as understanding timetables and navigating public transportation while the IEP team continues to help the family find a cohesive plan for the future.

I advise my clients to have a realistic vision of what their role is -- not what the parent would like it to be, but what the law requires -- and be able to communicate that gently but effectively to the family.

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□ **Michael Stoehr, educational consultant, [Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network](#):**

Often, students and families enter the transition process with a preconceived notion of what the student will be doing after she graduates from high school.

A "discrepancy analysis" assessment process first engages the student in exploring her interests and preferences and how these equate to various career pathways. The student should explore education and training, wage, and employment outlook information for occupations related to her interests and preferences. At this stage, it's important to review with the family if there is congruency between their vision for their child and their child's current interests and preferences.

Next, thoroughly review or assess the student's current academic and functional strengths, needs, and utilized accommodations. Include a discussion regarding where the student is currently functioning in relationship to her peers.

Finally, conduct the discrepancy analysis. This process involves reviewing the student's projected postsecondary goals (and the requirements to achieve those goals) and matching them to her current academic and functional abilities.

If it appears that the student can reasonably obtain her projected postsecondary goals, then the IEP team can support the student accordingly. If the analysis indicates that the student would have extreme difficulty achieving her projected postsecondary goals, even with the implementation of reasonable supports and accommodations, the IEP team needs to discuss with the student and family alternative employment options that are aligned with the student's interests and preferences and take into account her academic and functional ability levels.

□ **Marcy Gutierrez, school attorney, [Lozano Smith](#), Sacramento, Calif.:**

- **Identify areas of need:** Gather information regarding the student's strengths, preferences, and interests from the student and her parents, teachers, coaches, and other relevant individuals. Plentiful information will produce a full picture of the student's abilities and needs, which will allow the IEP team to work with the student to explore all options.

- **Base postsecondary goals upon primary goal:** Consider the student's overarching goal when developing postsecondary goals. Whether it be working part-time, attending vocational school, or enrolling in community college, the focus should be on developing goals that translate to postsecondary life.

- **Help parents understand student's preferences:** Compare the student's and parents' perceptions of the student's strengths and weaknesses and the conflict between their preferences and the student's

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ultimate goals. Discuss these issues so parents can participate in the IEP process. This will help foster parents' understanding of the student's views and help the IEP team develop an appropriate transition plan.

- **Address parents' concerns if they disagree with child's goals:** It is best to understand why the parents don't agree. Do the parents believe the goals are too difficult or easy, the student's needs can be met elsewhere, or the goals are not in tune with the student's strengths or preferences? Once the IEP team understands the parents' concerns, it can recraft the postsecondary goals with those concerns in mind. These postsecondary goals must still meet the individual needs of the student.

Editor's note: This feature is not intended as instructional material or to replace legal advice.

[Ragini Alcole](#) covers postsecondary transition, charter school, and transportation issues for LRP Publications.

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