

Making Successful Transitions for Individuals with Developmental Disabilities

Statement of Principles



The North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities (NCCDD) believes that people with intellectual and other developmental disabilities (I/DD) have the right to pursue opportunities for education, training, employment, meaningful relationships, and full participation in the community. To achieve these outcomes, people must receive individually tailored support that prepares them to navigate life.

Transition, for the purposes of this statement, means helping individuals and families think about post-secondary education, careers through work and volunteering and life after high school. This includes identifying goals, as well as necessary skills and connections, and acting upon them. The intent of transition services is to explore, plan and implement next steps in a way that allows the person to develop useful and practical links to the adult world. This process in public schools is supported by the provision of funds and services to aid in transition when a person is 14 years or younger, as necessary. Students in privately funded schools may not have access to the same transition support options.

People with I/DD are more often unemployed and underemployed upon leaving school compared to others. Many students with I/DD leave school without earning a diploma and attend post-secondary programs at rates lower than their peers. Adults with developmental disabilities, particularly those with intellectual disabilities, are much less likely to be employed than others, with unemployment rates as high as 80% or more. When employed, many adults with I/DD earn less than their co-workers. These facts point to our society's general failure to prepare, train, and facilitate successful movement from high school to opportunities within higher education, competitive employment and adult life.

Transition from high school to work and adult life can be challenging for all students, but even more so for students with special needs. When most people with I/DD leave a public high school, their access to special education and related services ends. The individual and family leave a relatively organized system and take on much more responsibility for identifying, accessing and coordinating services and supports on their own such as:

- Choosing a school;
- Applying and paying for it;
- Finding transportation;
- Choosing a place to live;
- Starting work; and
- Managing daily support needs are among the many decisions that self-advocates and families must make.

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In addition to support services, attitudes can play a significant role in successful transition. Educators, parents and service providers can set high expectations about education, training and the individual's career and life path. Students should be encouraged and challenged to pursue options and take next steps. Transition works best when people work together with shared goals in mind.

North Carolina must improve its capacity to support individuals with I/DD in the transition from school to work and adult life. State and local policies should improve coordination and collaboration among high schools, colleges and universities, vocational rehabilitation, Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS), local governments and employers to ensure a smooth transition and lifelong planning from one developmental phase to another. Leaders at all levels and across all state systems must implement strategies to ensure families' and self-advocates' access to user-friendly information and the tools to plan skillfully for the future.

