

Domain ④: Family Engagement

Parents and Guardians of students with disabilities are vital stakeholders in their transition from school to post-school life. As documented in the secondary transition literature, parent and family involvement (i.e., attending the IEP meeting) is a predictor of post-secondary success for young adults with disabilities (Test et al., 2009). Parental involvement is also a predictor of post-school employment (Test et al., 2009). Significantly, adults with moderate to severe disabilities worked more hours, earned higher wages, and lived more independently when their parents were moderately to highly involved in their transition planning process (Landmark et al., 2010). Furthermore, the school system will fade out of the picture at the age of 21, if not before. Depending on the services available, eligibility requirements, and potential waiting lists, adult service agencies might or might not be able to fill the role that the school once played so families need to be adequately prepared for the road that lies ahead.

Including parents and guardians as active collaborators in the transition process is not just a thoughtful and beneficial thing to do. It is required by law. To paraphrase from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2004) regulations, state and local education agencies are required to provide, as part of ongoing services to support positive outcomes for students with disabilities, parent training and information activities (Rowe, 2015).

Kohler and Field (2003) defined family participation as practices that “focus on a wide array of roles through which families might be involved in planning and delivering individual and community-level transition education and services, such as assessment, decision making, policy development, and as trainers” (p.178).

Points of Connection

- Schools need to begin the transition discussion early with parents. If the conversation begins at age 16, valuable time and opportunities have been lost! In the state of South Carolina, transition planning must begin at the age of 13.
- Schools should provide parents with a timeline of the transition process, highlighting when certain events will take place and who will/could be involved in the process.
- Schools and partner organizations should help families to identify the ways in which they can be involved and invite them to contribute to the transition planning process.
- Schools and partner organizations should provide training and learning opportunities that highlight transition-relevant state and federal laws and guidelines, as well as available parent-friendly resources.
- Schools and partner organizations should alert families to available community resources given the student’s specific needs and employment goals (e.g., DDSN, Vocational Rehabilitation, Family Organizations, Independent Living Centers, Post-Secondary Education Programs)
- Schools and partner organizations need to emphasize the benefits of integrated, community employment (e.g., self-esteem, independence, socialization, and economic self-sufficiency).