

Bridging the Gap: Strengthening Transition Planning Under IDEA in 2025

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Across the United States, students with disabilities and their families face a pivotal moment as they prepare for life after high school. Whether the goal is higher education, employment, or independent living, the transition from school to adulthood is a critical juncture—and one that is too often marked by uncertainty and unmet needs.

At the heart of this challenge lies the Transition Planning Component of the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Transition compliance is measured against the IDEA's "Indicator 13" against which states collect data and report annually on its performance. This part of the act requires that every student with an IEP aged 16 and older (or younger, if appropriate) has a transition plan that is measurable, meaningful, and student-driven. Yet, despite decades of federal mandates and growing awareness, many states and districts continue to struggle with consistent, high-quality implementation.

At the [Center for Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education \(TAESE\)](#) at the Institute for Disability Research, Policy, and Practice (IDRPP), we work alongside state education agencies across the country to

improve systems of support for students with disabilities. Through our team of Technical Assistance providers, we collaboratively plan and implement professional development, compliance monitoring, and systems-level coaching to help states meet IDEA requirements and, more importantly, to ensure that students are truly prepared for life beyond school.

The Promise—and the Reality—of Transition Planning

IDEA's transition requirements are designed to empower students with disabilities, alongside their families and teachers to set goals and take steps toward achieving them. A compliant transition plan must include:

- **Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals** based on age-appropriate transition assessments.
- **Transition services** (including courses of study) that will reasonably enable the student to meet those goals.
- **Annual IEP goals** related to the student's transition needs.

However, compliance alone does not guarantee quality. In our work with states and districts, we often see IEPs that technically meet the requirements of Indicator 13 but fall short in preparing students for real-world success. Goals may be vague or disconnected from student interests. Transition assessments may be outdated or generic. And collaboration with adult service agencies—so vital to a smooth transition—may be inconsistent or nonexistent.

New Federal Guidance: A Call to Action

In January 2025, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) issued updated guidance on transition planning under IDEA and the Rehabilitation Act. The guidance emphasized:

- **Early and ongoing transition planning**, starting well before age 16.
- **Student and family engagement** in all aspects of planning.
- **Interagency collaboration**, particularly with vocational rehabilitation, Medicaid, and developmental disability services.
- **Equity in access** to transition services for students with complex support needs, students of color, and those in rural or under-resourced communities.

This guidance aligns closely with the IDRPP's mission to support people with disabilities across the lifespan. It also reinforces the importance of technical assistance in helping states and districts move from compliance to excellence.

What We're Seeing in the Field

Through our partnerships with multiple states, TAESE has identified several common challenges in transition planning:

- **Inconsistent training** for educators on how to write meaningful, measurable goals.
- **Limited use of transition assessments** that reflect student strengths, preferences, and interests.
- **Gaps in collaboration** between schools and adult service providers.
- **Lack of culturally responsive practices** that engage families from diverse backgrounds.

These challenges are not insurmountable—but they require sustained effort, targeted support, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

How Technical Assistance Makes a Difference

TAESE supports states in several key ways:

1. Compliance Monitoring and Data Review

We help states monitor local education agencies (LEAs) for compliance with Indicator 13, using structured tools and rubrics to assess the quality of transition plans. This data informs targeted technical assistance and helps identify systemic trends.

2. Professional Development

We offer training for educators, administrators, and related service providers on topics such as:

- Writing effective transition goals.
- Conducting and using transition assessments.
- Engaging families in culturally responsive ways.
- Collaborating with adult service agencies.

3. Systems coaching

Beyond individual training sessions, we work with state and district leaders to build sustainable systems for transition planning. This includes developing guidance

documents, revising policies, and creating communities of practice.

4. Resource Development

We create or leverage existing tools, templates, and checklists that educators can use to improve the quality of transition plans. These resources are grounded in research and informed by real-world practice and are selected using state-nuanced and relevant requirements.

Looking Ahead: A Shared Responsibility

Improving transition planning is not just a matter of meeting federal requirements—it's about honoring the aspirations of students with disabilities and giving them the tools to thrive. It requires collaboration across systems, investment in professional learning, and a deep commitment to equity.

At the IDRPP and TAESE, we believe that every student deserves a future filled with possibility. Through our technical assistance work, we are proud to support states in making that future a reality.

Call to Action

If you are a state or district leader looking to strengthen your transition planning systems, we invite you to connect with us. Together, we can build a future where every student with a disability is prepared, empowered, and supported to achieve their goals.



About the author: Norm is the Director of the Technical Assistance Division (TA Division) within the Institute for Disability Research, Policy, and Practice (IDRPP). He also serves as the Director of the Center for Technical Assistance for Excellence in Special Education (TAESE), a nationally-recognized provider of Technical Assistance at the local, state and federal level.