

Emory Autism Center Transition Toolkit

Student-Involved IEPs



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Welcome Message

Welcome and thank you for sharing an interest in supporting successful transition outcomes for students with autism.

The Vision of the Individualized Transition to Adulthood Plan (ITAP) is that adolescents and young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD or autism) transition from high school to an interdependent life with a continuum of supports for positive life outcomes.

Our Mission is to develop a person-centered model of transition planning that prepares transition-aged youth with ASD to access and benefit from a comprehensive range of services and supports. This toolkit and others available on our website are here to support you with this shared mission.

Thanks for joining us!



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Emory Autism Center
Department of Psychiatry
and Behavioral Sciences

A Note about Language

When discussing individuals with autism it is crucial to use language that is respectful and inclusive; the best practice is to ask the person how they would like to be referred to and use that.

We recognize that many autistic people and advocates have preferences regarding person-first or identity-first language. In consultation with our neurodiverse project Advisory Board, we have chosen to use person-first language throughout this toolkit.



Who Is This Toolkit For?

The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a critical document, guiding goals and services for students on the spectrum, and the opportunity for students to engage, participate and lead their own IEP meetings is a well-regarded practice.

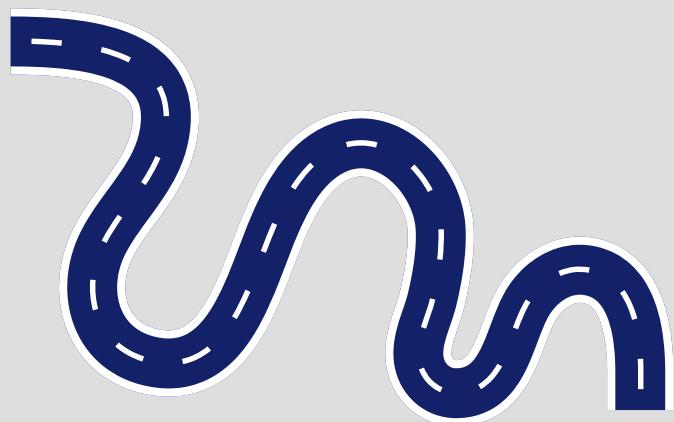
This toolkit is intended for teachers and other district personnel who want to include students in their IEPs to a greater degree. In this toolkit, you will find guidance and resources for educators who want to initiate, lead, and implement the student-involved IEP process and how student-involved IEPs support positive transition outcomes for students with autism.

This toolkit contains information, tips, examples, and tools that educators (and others) can use to create and implement student-involved IEPs in their educational settings.

How Do Student-Involved IEPs Help Students with Autism Successfully Transition to Adulthood?

Student-involved IEPs empower students with autism for post-secondary success by developing and enhancing communication skills, building self-awareness and self-determination skills, and facilitating the development of meaningful transition goals.

Student-involved IEPs increase engagement in not only the IEP process, but also in school.



How Do Student-Involved IEPs Help?

Enhancing Communication Skills

Student-involved IEPs provide a structured space for students with autism to build and strengthen their communication skills in ways that align with their individual needs. As students express their thoughts, preferences, and goals, they practice functional communication in a real world context, reinforcing their ability to advocate for themselves.

Since communication extends beyond spoken language, students may use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, sign language, picture systems, written responses, or gestures to participate. Teachers must recognize and support these diverse communication methods by providing tailored supports – such as visual aids, prompting strategies, or assistive technology (AT) – ensuring every student can actively engage and develop their communication skills within the IEP process.



How Do Student-Involved IEPs Help?

Building Self Awareness & Self Determination Skills

Self-determination skills include goal setting, problem solving, decision making, self-advocacy, and self-awareness.

Student-involved IEPs create opportunities for students to identify their goals and advocate for their needs. When students are engaged by making choices, sharing their strengths, needs and interests, and setting goals, a student's sense of agency over their learning increases, their motivation increases, and they are more likely to take responsibility for their learning.

For example, a student may share with the team their strength in understanding scientific concepts, but also share their struggles with working in small groups. This information could assist the team in developing effective accommodations. Another student might request career technology courses aligned with their career goal or share their need for additional time during test taking or advocate for self-regulation supports.

In addition, the student-involved IEP process provides a space to practice giving and receiving feedback, enhancing their understanding of constructive criticism.

How Do Student-Involved IEPs Help?

Facilitating Meaningful Transition Goals

When a student with autism actively participates in every aspect of their IEP process, the path to achieving post-secondary goals becomes more meaningful and clearer to not only the student, but the whole team.

By addressing critical questions such as, "Where am I now?" "Where do I want to go?" and "What do I need to do this year to bring me closer to my goal?", students gain a deeper understanding of their own journey.

Student involvement ensures their unique strengths, needs, and aspirations shape the IEP, leading to goals that truly resonate with the student. This collaborative approach supports meaningful skill development in areas such as social communication, executive functioning, self-awareness, and daily living.

When we involve students with autism in developing goals, students demonstrate increased engagement and goal acquisition.

The student-involved IEP process is a perfect place for students to assist the IEP team in developing meaningful transition goals that go beyond the standard Transition Plan domains of Education and Employment.

A meaningful and comprehensive IEP Transition Plan includes goals within all of the Transition Plan domains: Education/Training, Employment, Adult Living, Community Participation, Related Services, and Daily Living.

Examples of Adult Skills Supported by Involving Students in the IEP Process

Social Skills

- Collaboration
- Listening
- Expressing thoughts & preferences
- Greetings and introductions

Daily Living

- Cooking
- Daily hygiene
- Financial literacy
- Household chores
- Transportation
- Safety skills
- Healthcare access

Executive Functioning

- Planning skills
- Organizational skills
- Breaking down tasks
- Prioritizing
- Time management skills
- Self-regulation skills

Self-Awareness

- Goal setting
- Decision making (positive choices)
- Advocating for accommodations
- Building leadership skills

Before You Start

Important Ideas to Consider

Effective student-involved IEPs begin with a case manager supporting a **student-centered** philosophy.

Imagine the IEP as a vehicle for the student to demonstrate their self-advocacy skills and share their progress.

Support the student before, during, and after the IEP.

Believe that EVERY student can participate in their IEP.

Commit to allocating sufficient time for the student-involved process.

Be Creative as there are many effective ways to implement student-involved IEPs.

Start Small by considering beginning with just one section of the IEP and building from there.

Include Families in the Process

Our students' greatest support can come from their families, especially after they leave the school system. Student-Involved IEPs highlight the transition process and emphasize the students' growing independence.

Be sure to include families in conversations regarding post-secondary plans by sharing resources about college, employment, and vocational training. Support families with ways to help their student build self-awareness skills, executive functioning, social engagement, and daily living skills and share resources related to transition planning.

Additional Considerations

Modifications & Differentiation



Communication Methods

Students with ASD communicate in a variety of ways, and it is essential that their IEP meetings have environmental supports to facilitate their active participation using their preferred communication methods. For some, this may include spoken language, while others may rely on AAC supports such as communication boards, speech-generating devices, or text-based systems. Still other students may use sign language, gestures, or other non-spoken means. By ensuring that IEP meetings are accessible and inclusive to all communication methods, students can meaningfully engage in decisions about their education and post-graduation planning.

Physical Aspects

Creating an accessible physical environment is critical to ensuring that students can fully participate. Even planning for basic needs like restroom breaks, beverages and snacks is important! Be mindful of specific accessibility requirements such as providing enlarged documents, text-to-speech tools, captioning, low-vision adaptations and other ways to ensure accessibility. Keep in mind the physical arrangement of the room as well, particularly where the student might be seated, accounting for the student's sensory, physical or social profile. By proactively addressing these physical aspects, the meeting environment can be inclusive, accessible, and conducive to the student's active engagement.

Preference for Predictability

Students with ASD often have a desire for predictability, so preparing the student in advance is essential. Preparation often will include explaining who will be attending the meeting (show pictures!) and the purpose and agenda of the meeting (print out a copy, or have it pulled up on a screen). Some students may need a detailed roadmap of what to expect during the meeting, including a practice or “walk-through”. Make sure your student knows they can request a break, and practice how they would prefer to communicate this. By providing this information in advance, educators and IEP teams can foster a more inclusive environment and reduce some of the anxiety that accompanies not knowing what to expect.

Sensory Needs

You likely will want to prioritize addressing the student's sensory needs within the IEP meeting. Your student may have sensory sensitivities related to the lighting in the room, ability to hear subtle background noises, or scents and smells; accordingly, it may be important to dim or adjust lighting, offer noise canceling headphones, or request that meeting attendees avoid or limit their use of scents. In addition, it is often helpful to offer sensory supports such as fidget tools, weighted items (e.g., weighted blanket), or a more quiet and calming area to visit for a break. By considering these unique preferences and sensory profiles, teachers can create a setting that promotes active engagement and overall well-being.





Family Support

Encourage parents to share their insights about their student's strengths and challenges to help guide you as you consider and develop ways for the student to participate in the IEP process.

Work with parents to set realistic student participation goals and model supporting the student to reach those goals, noting that the goal is the quality of the participation rather than the quantity.

Consider and be sensitive to the family's cultural values and norms related to their student's disability and independence level by maintaining open lines of communication.

Student-involved IEPs empower students by amplifying their voice. With kindness and compassion, guide parents in creating space for their child's input, recognizing that many parents have spent years advocating on their learner's behalf.

Continuum of Student Involvement

IEP occurs without student present: Decisions are made by the IEP team without student input.

Minimal participation: Student attends and may observe, but has little to no preparation or input.

Some involvement: Student shares information and provides input on goals; student may answer questions.

Active engagement: Student contributes to discussions and helps shape their goals.

Taking responsibility: Student prepares for and leads a section of the meeting, such as sharing progress or discussing accommodations.

Managing the meeting: Student takes on a leadership role with support from the team.

Student-led IEP: Student leads and fully takes charge of the meeting, including invitations, introductions, facilitating discussions, and decision-making.

Note: The diagram was adapted from the [OSSE Secondary Transition Website](#)

Strategies to Get Started



As you consider the following suggestions, keep in mind that there are **many ways** to hold a student-involved IEP.

It is up to you as the case manager to be creative and support your student in participating to share their strengths, preferences, needs, and plans for the future.

Just as every student is different, every student will want to participate in a different way.

Start small, and provide lots of support, examples, and opportunities for practice.

The goal is to move students closer to leading and directing all aspects of the IEP process.



Level of Involvement

Preparing for the IEP Meeting

Suggestions organized from less to more involved

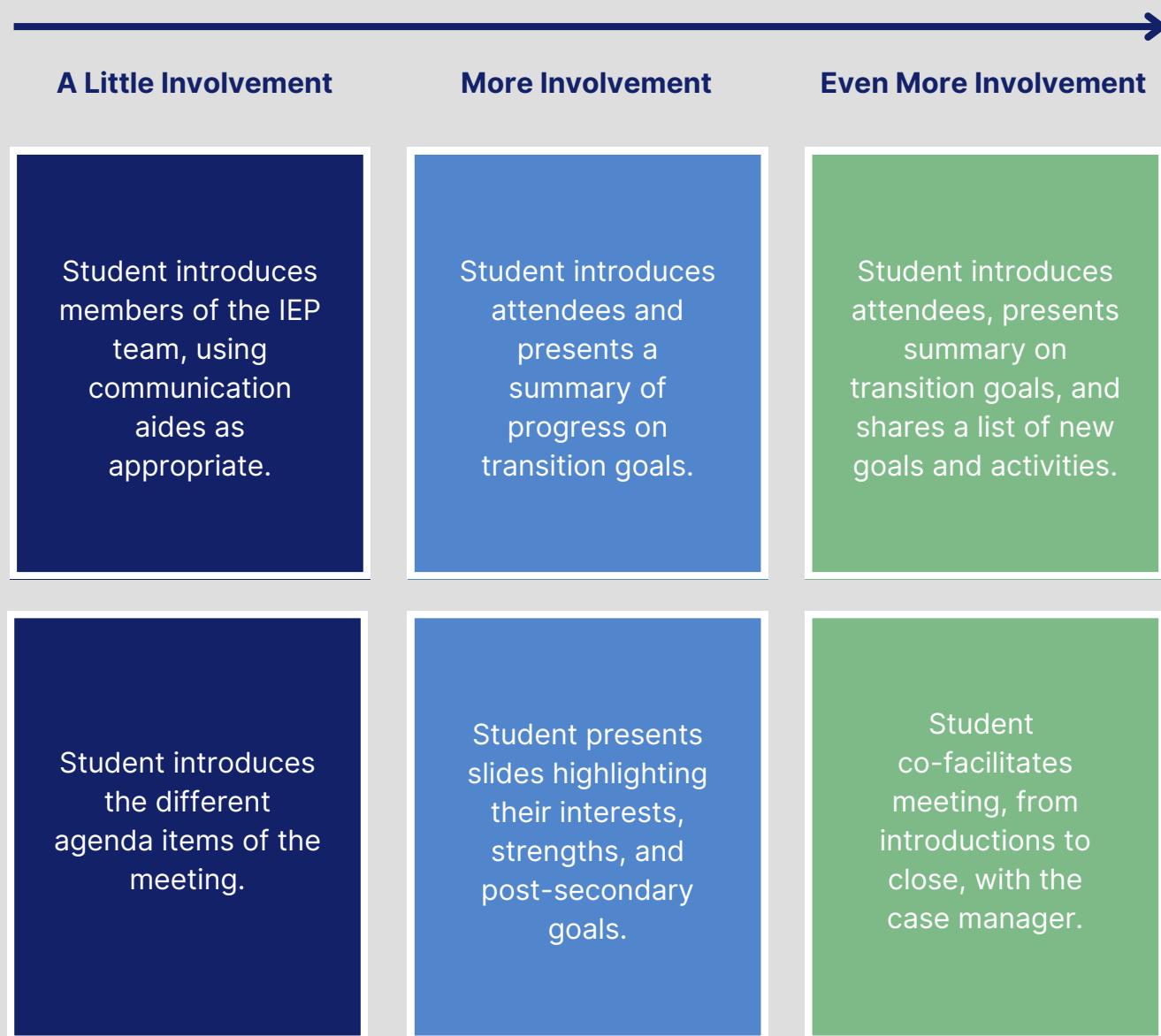


Level of Involvement

During the IEP Meeting

With everyone's prior approval, you might find it helpful to document or highlight certain parts of the meeting (perhaps even record it). This can be a great tool when you review and reflect on the meeting with the student afterward.

Suggestions organized from less to more involved



Level of Involvement

After the Meeting

Participation in the IEP process doesn't conclude at the end of the IEP meeting! Now is the time to **celebrate, review, reflect, and develop** an action plan. All these suggestions are more effective if you can refer to a video of the IEP meeting (or at least the portion your student led). As always, these suggestions are meant to be general, not every suggestion will be appropriate for all students. You are the expert on your student!

1. Celebrate! Start with praise and acknowledgment for the student's participation in their IEP, be sure to specifically note with the student examples of positive participation in their IEP.

2. Review: With the student, review the IEP meeting and the resulting IEP document. We have created a handy fillable form to help guide your discussion (you can find it in the Appendix section of this toolkit).

3. Reflect: Using the fillable Reflect Form (located in the Appendix section of this toolkit), guide your student in a more nuanced reflection of the meeting to help them understand what went well and what they might change in the future.

4. Action Plan: The last step after the IEP is perhaps the most important, as this is where your student will make a personal plan for engaging with the goals and activities within their IEP. They will also determine who can help them reach their goals. See the Appendix for a form to help with the creation of an action plan.

Case Examples

Case Study: Karl



Meet Karl! Karl is in the 10th grade and plans to attend Technical School after graduation to study transportation and logistics. He loves working with engines at his uncle's repair shop on weekends. To prepare for his IEP presentation, his teacher reviewed Karl's entire IEP with him, focusing on his goals, accommodations, and transition plan. Karl decided to share work samples showing his growth in math and writing. He also invited his uncle to the IEP to discuss Karl's help at the shop and potential careers. With his teacher's help, Karl selected assignments to share and considered academic goals to present that will help him reach his goal of attending technical school.

Karl introduced his team, including his uncle, "the best mechanic in the metro area." After introductions, Karl shared the meeting agenda, reviewing it as he handed out typed copies. When it was time to review his progress, Karl shared his writing and math assignments from the beginning of the year and just before the meeting. With his teacher's help, Karl highlighted improvements, and his teacher showed a graph of his performance rising from 30 to 80% in math and 40 to 50% in writing. Karl asked what reading and math skills he would need for technical school.

After Karl's meeting, his teacher shared how proud he was of Karl for participating in his IEP. Luckily, the teacher had recorded the meeting (with permission) and showed Karl the video, stopping it several times to offer Behavior Specific Praise. After a break, they reviewed and reflected on the meeting one-on-one and developed an action plan using fillable forms. The completed forms will be kept in Karl's Transition Portfolio.

Case Examples

Case Study: Marci

Marci is in her junior year and plans to work full time and live on her own after graduation. She has definite ideas about how she wants her IEP team to support her.

Marci and her mom attended the Transition Fair where she learned about Warm Springs and their programs. Her case manager reminded her that she is already receiving Pre-ETS services from Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency (GVRA). Marci decided to attend Warm Springs' vocational program through GVRA to become a Certified Nursing Assistant.

She is nervous about the requirements and has spent sleepless nights worrying. Her older sister, Rae, a Technical College student, talks about all the reading! Marci likes to listen to her textbooks through headphones, especially if there is a picture or graph to see. Her teachers give her extra time to finish, so she doesn't feel rushed. How will she convince the instructors at Warm Springs to give her these considerations?

Marci and her case manager review her Transition Portfolio. Marci decides to share her latest Transition Assessment results, a student and teacher interview, photos of her volunteering at the nursing home, and a letter of recommendation from the Volunteer Coordinator. Marci asks if the GVRA counselor can be invited to her IEP, and the Case Manager makes a note to investigate. Marci and her Case Manager practice how she will share her information and the support she needs with her IEP team.

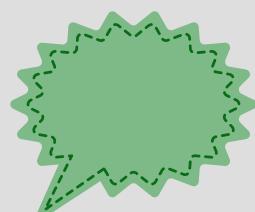
The day of her IEP, Marci is feeling confident. She introduces almost everyone, except for one unfamiliar face. She is delighted to discover that her case manager convinced Marci's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor to attend. Marci makes sure everyone gets a copy of the agenda she and her Case Manager prepared.



After each teacher reports on her progress, Marci shares information from her Transition Portfolio about her recent assessments. The VR counselor asks for a copy of the Truity results showing strengths in Helper and Builder areas. The VR counselor talks about the assistance they can provide after Marci graduates. Marci is relieved to hear she would qualify for similar supports she received in high school, especially access to digital texts. She learns many students already qualify for these services. The counselor reviews eligibility documentation, IEPs with accommodations, and work samples, and tells Marci how to access this information after graduation.

The photos of Marci at the Assisted Living Center are popular, and the VR Counselor asks to scan the recommendation letter for Marci's file. Marci agrees. The conversation turns to her school schedule. The ELA teacher asks the VR counselor how students handle all the writing. A lively discussion follows about voice-to-text options, editing software, and opportunities to polish writing skills. Marci asks, "How can I learn to use that technology now?" The IEP team decides to add these supports to Marci's Transition Plan and ensure she has flexibility in her schedule for early release if she gets a part-time job at an Assisted Living Center. Marci's Case Manager asks if Marci feels she has communicated fully with her teachers about the support she needs to be successful. Marci says yes, and the Case Manager asks for agreement to adjourn the IEP meeting.

Marci and her Case Manager meet a few days after the IEP. The Case Manager confirms Marci has a personal email address and sends her the link to her Transition Portfolio. The Case Manager explains that at the end of Marci's senior year, her Summary of Performance (SOP) will be filed there. It will summarize her accomplishments and help communicate with post-secondary support providers. The Case Manager suggests Marci write a brief thank-you email to the VR Counselor for attending her IEP. Marci feels this will be a lot of work but agrees. She is surprised to find it is easier than she thought. She gets a response before the end of the day. She feels very grown up and firmly on her path to success.



Case Examples

Case Study: Linda

Linda is in the 10th grade. She likes her ELA class but not her math class. She enjoys being at the center of social situations, but oversharing and anxiety can be issues. Linda sometimes finds it difficult to focus for longer than 25 minutes and aims to increase her ability to stay on task. She uses the chat feature on her phone to communicate when overwhelmed and takes breaks to walk. In class, she does best with a fidget or manipulative, printed PowerPoint notes, and a person to check in with.



Before the IEP Meeting

Both of Linda's parents work in the school system, and she is interested in a career in education. This year, she helped her mom in the church nursery and has been in Girl Scouts since elementary school. Linda and the Case Manager met to discuss her upcoming IEP. The Case Manager reviews her Transition Goals and Activities, ensuring Linda is on track. Linda completed them all and thought she could relax but learned they need to set new goals for next year. They decide she will continue Girl Scouts, practice talking to adult leaders about more responsibilities, and attend Math Tutoring sessions.

Linda noticed her friend, April, can take tests in a quiet room and asks if she can too. The Case Manager explains it's a committee decision but encourages Linda to self-advocate. The Case Manager suggests sharing her Strong's Interest Inventory results, where she scored highest in Social and Conventional areas. Linda was hesitant about speaking to the team but agreed to a recorded presentation with PowerPoint. She and her teacher created the PowerPoint and a script, rehearsed, and recorded it. The day before the meeting, Linda and her Case Manager visit the conference room to practice. Linda makes place cards for each participant and plans which fidgets to bring.

Linda meets her Case Manager in the Conference Room. She places her premade name cards around the table, seating her case manager next to her. Her parents join, followed by her ELA and Math Teachers. Linda introduces everyone and directs them to their seats. She needs to be redirected once when she overshares about her mother helping her wash her hair. The Case Manager leads the meeting but prompts Linda to share her PowerPoint. The team is impressed and congratulates Linda on a good job. The IEP committee agrees to add Testing in a Quiet Room and Extra Time to Complete Tests and Assignments to Linda's accommodations. Linda feels the committee spends too much time discussing her tendency to overshare but understands when her dad points out it could be dangerous with the wrong person. The committee agrees Linda will join a Safety Circles group with the School Counselor, which Linda likes as she enjoys making new friends.

The IEP meeting is long, and a couple of times, Linda gets lost in the conversation. Her mom gently points to the agenda to get her back on track. Just when Linda thinks she can't take any more, the meeting is over. Linda and her Case Manager meet the next day after her IEP meeting to debrief. Linda is surprised to learn she must ask her teachers to test in the quiet room. "I thought the principal would make them let me," she says. The Case Manager asks Linda to share three things: 1) Something she liked about the meeting, 2) Something she didn't like, and 3) Something that surprised her.

Here are Linda's answers:

Something she liked: "Having all of those nice people in one place."

Something she didn't like: "That they couldn't all stay and talk for the rest of the day. It would have been a great party."

Something that surprised her: "How easy it was to get them to agree to let me take tests in a quiet room and have extra time. I already took a math quiz in a quiet room and got an 80%. WAY better than I usually do!" She was also surprised she didn't need her fidgets. "I forgot all about them," Linda said. "I was just so interested in what everybody was saying. After all, this was about my future."

Models for Student-Involved IEPs

The suggestions in this toolkit are designed to help you consider concrete ways to support your student. Consider exploring the following curricula and resources to deepen your understanding of student-involved IEPs and the many ways that students can actively participate.

Whose Future is it Anyway?

This transition planning process helps prepare students for their IEP meeting with 36 teacher directed mini lessons including activities and vocabulary.

I'm Determined – The Educator's Path to Success

These self-paced modules are all about student-involved IEPs, the benefits, how to start, connections between home and school and how to use some of the resources from I'm Determined.

Choice Maker Self Determination Curriculum

From the Zarrow Institute on Transition and Self Determination, this curriculum facilitates high school to adult life planning partnerships between students, families, and educators through 8 lessons, and includes pre and post measurement tools.

NEXT S.T.E.P Complete Program

This Curriculum is designed to help students learn how to take charge of their own transition planning process, with 16 lessons to guide students to develop their own transition plans.

More Resources

Student-involved IEPs Slides

From the Virginia Department of Education, this slide presentation details ways to support student's participation in the IEP, and outlines the benefits to students, parents, administrators, and teachers. This resource would be a great introduction to the topic of student-led IEPs for staff.

Two Rivers Learning Institute

These resources and rubrics are designed for student involved IEPs.

Emory Autism Center

Educational consultants can provide your district with training and technical assistance.

Self Determined Model of Instruction

From the University of Kansas, this model includes lesson plans, assessments, and videos for goal setting and planning, and includes the Self Determination Inventory.

Iris Center Module — Student-Centered Transition Planning

This is a free, self-paced module to understand student centered transition planning.

Student Transition Planning Checklist

This interactive checklist can be used annually to focus discussion and engage students in their IEP and transition planning, as well as guide goal writing.

The resources mentioned throughout this toolkit are solely intended as examples and do not endorse any organization. It is important to note that the language used in these resources is centered both around person-first and identity-first language.

Tips for Sustainability

Students who become involved in leadership of their own IEPs will be well served to continue this practice. Each time the student is empowered to lead, they will become a stronger and more capable self-advocate and more in charge of their learning.

- 1. Build Transition Portfolios.** Build Transition Portfolios starting in the 8th grade. Be sure the student's vital information related to their IEP and Transition Plan is preserved electronically (or physically in a binder) to follow the student from grade to grade and after graduation. Keep the Transition Portfolio updated regularly and use it to support student participation in the IEP. Please see our Transition Portfolio Handout in the Appendix for more details.
- 2. Onboarding New Educators.** As new educators are onboarded, ensure that they are taught about expectations and procedures for student-involved IEPs. Establish mentoring models such that educators well versed in student-involved IEPs are supporting new professionals.
- 3. Family Involvement.** Family involvement is essential in fostering meaningful student participation in the IEP process. Parents offer valuable insights that help shape a student-centered approach. Maintaining open communication ensures that families are informed about their student's role in the IEP process and how they will actively participate in the meeting. This transparency empowers both the student and their family, allowing caregivers to gradually transition from advocates to supporters as their student takes on more voice and responsibility. Thoughtful family inclusion helps parents develop the skills needed to guide their child towards greater independence.

Appendix: After the IEP Meeting

After the IEP: <u>Reflect</u>	
What did you like about the meeting?	
What was easy about the meeting?	
What was hard about the meeting?	
Is there anything you would like to change about the meeting?	
If yes, what would you change?	
Was anyone missing in your meeting?	
If yes, who was missing? List them here.	

Appendix: After the IEP Meeting

<u>After the IEP: Review</u>	
What personal strengths were shared in the meeting?	
What personal needs were shared in the meeting?	
What classroom accommodations were shared in the meeting?	
Were there any new accommodations added?	
List any new accommodations.	
What annual academic goals were developed?	
What annual transition goals were developed?	

Appendix: After the IEP Meeting

<u>After the IEP: Action Plan</u>	
<i>Look back on your goals from the review document and pick one to focus on, do this for each of your goals on the IEP.</i>	
List 3 ways we can track your progress on your goals.	
Name at least 2 people who can help you reach your goals.	
Pick one goal from the review document to focus on and write it here.	
Let's break this goal into mini goals and list the mini goals here.	
How will you know this goal is complete?	
On what dates will we meet to review progress and check-in?	

Appendix: Student Transition Checklist

A tool for meaningful transition planning

This interactive checklist can be used annually to:

1. Guide transition planning and goal writing
2. Focus discussion with students about transition planning
3. Engage students in transition planning
4. Provide documentation for the transition portfolio

Digitally access the Student Transition Checklist: [HERE](#)



Appendix

Building A Student Transition Portfolio

Creating a Transition Portfolio is a powerful way to help students take ownership of their future. Whether digital or physical, this portfolio should include key information from the student's IEP and Transition Plan and follow them from grade to grade—and beyond graduation.

Why Build a Transition Portfolio?

- Encourages student self-advocacy and independence
- Organizes essential documents in one accessible place
- Supports smooth transitions between grades and post-secondary life
- Helps educators, families, and service providers understand the student's needs and goals

Digital or Physical?

Digital Options:

- Google Drive folder
- USB drive
- Web-based platform
- Slideshow (e.g., Google Slides)

Physical Option:

- Binder with tabbed dividers

Suggested Portfolio Sections:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Student Introduction/Biography<input type="checkbox"/> Interests and Activities<input type="checkbox"/> Strengths and Abilities<input type="checkbox"/> Needed Supports<input type="checkbox"/> Communication Preferences<input type="checkbox"/> Work/Internship Experiences<input type="checkbox"/> Career goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> Post-Secondary Education Exploration<input type="checkbox"/> Education and Academics<input type="checkbox"/> Assessments<input type="checkbox"/> Community Agency Contacts<input type="checkbox"/> Recommendation Letters<input type="checkbox"/> Academic Achievements & Awards
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Thank You

Acknowledgements

This guide was prepared in 2025 by Dayna Holbel, M.Ed.; Karla Wade, PhD; Sally Delgado, Ed.D.; Allison Wayne, M.Ed.; Alexa Gonzalez Laca, MPH; Virginia Cross; and Matt Segall, PhD. We'd like to thank our fabulous neurodiverse Advisory Board for their input and review, as well as the many students, families, and educators that we support and from whom we learn. Our work is generously supported by a grant from the Georgia Department of Public Health.

Connect with Us

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Visit our Website

