Emory Autism Center
Transition Toolkit

How to Start a Transition Task Force

2024

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Welcome
Message

Thank you for being here and thank you for sharing an interest in supporting successful transition outcomes for students with autism. Our project, the Individualized Transition to Adulthood Plan (ITAP), is committed to helping build a community where adolescents and young adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) who are exiting the school system transition 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 the other resources you will find on our website are here to support you with this shared mission. Thanks for joining us!

EMORY UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Emory Autism Center
**Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences**
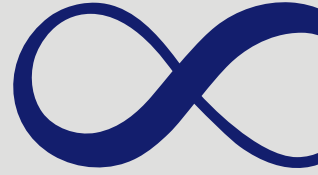
A note about language

When discussing individuals with autism it is crucial to use language that is respectful and inclusive, and 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 autism advocates may have preferences regarding person-first or identity-first language. Throughout this toolkit, we will consistently use person-first language.

Who is this toolkit for?

This Toolkit is intended for teachers and other district personnel who want to build a Transition Task Force (TTF) in their district or school. In this toolkit you will find guidance and resources for educators who want to initiate, lead, or participate in a TTF. Each section contains information, tips, examples, and tools that educators and others can use to create and sustain a TTF.
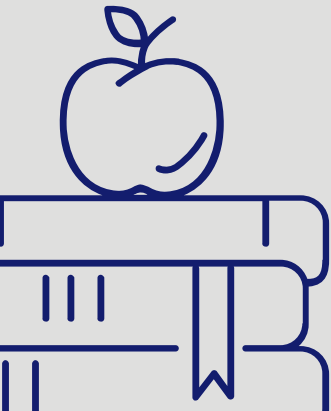
Introduction

What is a transition task force?

A TTF is a group of committed individuals working together to improve transition outcomes for students in a particular school, school system, or region. A TTF brings together stakeholders from the school and community for the specific purpose of creating opportunities, expanding knowledge, supporting families, and setting goals for the school community.

Rationale

There is a great need to establish outstanding Transition Programming within school districts, to develop a vision and mission for improving transition planning for students with ASD, and to develop actionable goals in the quest to implement a best-practices model program. A local TTF will be critical to the success of the planning and implementation required to meet this need.

Initial Steps
to starting a transition task force

- ☑ Building your leadership team

- ☑ Recruiting committee members

- ☑ Defining the scope and establishment of goals

- ☑ Communication plan

- ☑ Sustainability

- ☑ Resources

Building your leadership team

All TTFs start with a small group of dedicated and passionate members. If you are a **classroom teacher** or **transition specialist** who wants to start a TTF at your school or district, it will be important to engage your immediate administrator. If you are an administrator, you will still want to engage your immediate supervisor before beginning. Once you have administrative support, engage a small group (2-3) of other teachers/staff who share your vision of **improving transition planning** for students at your school and in your district.

The **first step** will be to share this toolkit with them and set up a working group to serve as to work as a steering committee to craft your mission and vision of a TTF for your district. Once you have developed your vision and mission, it will be time to share it with other leaders at your school and district and seek approval to begin putting together your TTF.

You may decide to use one or more of the existing Transition Programming outlines as a guide as you work with your Steering Team.The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT:C), for example, highlights the Kohler's Taxonomy for Transition Planning as an excellent outline for **developing a comprehensive Transition Program** that integrates student focused planning, student development, interagency collaboration, program structure, and family involvement. Please refer to our Resources section for links and more information.

Recruiting
Committee Members

Now that you have a vision, scope, and have recruited administrative approval it is time to think about who should serve on your Transition Task Force (TTF).

The following are suggestions that should be considered in the selection of membership to the transition task force

Ability to meet at least quarterly

Commitment to new ideas/ ways of thinking about programming for students

Willingness/ time to attend pertinent trainings

Willingness to teach/train other staff members

Willingness to positively engage community members and families

Values student led engagement and transition planning

Commitment to creating authentic learning opportunities for students

Committee Members

Below are recommended roles to consider when establish a TTF; it is crucial to prioritize sustainability while selecting these roles. Keep in mind that certain locations and resource limitations may prevent the fulfillment of all listed roles. Please be empowered to start small and build and grow over time.

Transition Task Force Chair:
(District Special Education Director or Assistant Director)
Number of People in this Role: 1

The chair will convene meetings, collaboratively set agendas with the TTF, and follow up with TTF members on action items.

High School Representation:
Number of People in this Role: 3 members from each HS and transition specialist (if available)

Each High School should identify an administrator, a teacher who supports students with higher support needs, and a teacher who supports students with lower support needs to join the TTF.

Requirements include a strong working knowledge of current transition programming at the high school, opportunities for growth in transition programming, and systematic challenges for implementation. High School representatives should have excellent relationships with students, families, and educators within the school and school system.

Middle School Representation:
Number of People in this Role: 1-2

Ideally, each middle school in the district will identify at least one representative on the TTF. This representative could come from administration (e.g., Assistant Principal), community-based instruction, or interrelated education.

Career Technical Instruction Coordinator (CTI):
Number of People in this Role: 1

The CTI coordinator will be critical in identifying students who will benefit from work study and internship opportunities in the CTI program as well as identifying opportunities for programmatic changes and professional development/staff training needs.

Committee Members

Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency Representative (GVRA):

Number of People in this Role: 1

The GVRA representative will be integral in the delivery and expansion of VR services, including Pre-Employment Transition Services. If unsure of their GVRA Representative, the District Liaison can find more information at https://gvs.georgia.gov/.

Parent Mentor/Family Liaison:

Number of People in this Role: 1

It is essential that the TTF includes a parent as at least one of its members in order to maintain a family-centered perspective on the mission, vision, and strategic planning goals of the TTF. This position may be held by a formal Parent Mentor within the Georgia Department of Education Parent Mentor Network, or by a parent identified and approved by the administrator of the school.

Autistic Self-Advocate
Number of People in this Role: 1 or more

An individual with autism, either a student, recent graduate, or community member will give valuable insights from their lived experience to the TTF.

Business/Community Member:
Number of People in this Role: 1

The inclusion of a representative from a business in the community will be essential in developing community partnerships for vocational skill building, employment, and community participation. Possible sources include the area Chamber of Commerce, Ombudsman, or connections among interested parents in the district.

Post-Secondary Representative:
Number of People in this Role: 1

This role should be filled by someone at the post-secondary level that works with supporting students with disabilities.

Committee Members

School Psychologist
Number of People in this Role: 1

The School Psychologist is the School District expert at assessing the student's need for support in academic, social, and emotional settings, and qualifying for eligibility categories under IDEA.

Middle and High School Counselor
Number of People in this Role: 1 from each school

The Middle and High School Counselors bring vital perspective regarding graduation credit requirements, compliance with Bridge Law, system-wide Career Assessment practices, and planning for post-secondary advisement, including college fairs and campus visitations.

Defining the Scope

TTFs at their very core are meant to be dynamic and individualized to the school district. Now that you have your leadership team in place, it will be time to understand transition needs in your district or school.

The list below are examples of programming, community connections, and expanding expertise that have been shown to improve transition outcomes for students. Consider taking on tasks that would benefit the families of the district to better navigate the transition of students with autism to post-secondary placements and experiences. This following list is not exhaustive and simply serves as a set of examples for areas of change or expansion.

Create new programming at the school level to support successful transition outcomes

- Work Based Learning Programs- The Georgia Department of Education has a comprehensive Work Based Learning Resource Manual. Additionally, your district may have a Work Based Learning Coordinator on site; this person can be a great resource.
- Life Skills/Independent Living Courses – You can find a list of Life skill curriculum resources suggested by the Council for Exceptional Children.
- Internship Programs such as Project Search, or the Big Picture Internship Program
- Job Shadowing programs
- Student led Individual Education Plan (IEP) annual meetings
- Student Transition Portfolio
- A transition handbook/website for parents

Build Community Connections

- Build relationships with community providers by hosting Transition Fairs
- Presenting to local business groups (i.e., Chambers of Commerce, Optimist Club)
- Building relationships with Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency though involvement in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) programming
- Working with local business to create internship/ apprenticeship training programs
- Working with local businesses to create volunteer experiences for students

Defining the Scope

Expanding Expertise

- Family education and training programs
- Transition Talks: Topics could include; SSI and Medicaid Waivers, Ticket to Work Considerations, Vocational Rehabilitation Services and Supports, Post-Secondary Day Programs and Respite Services, Supported Decision Making and Alternatives to Guardianship, and Resources for Upgrading Accessibility Within Your Home
- Transition focused communication and resource sharing (e.g., websites, newsletters)
- Training and professional development for teachers and other staff
- Building a Transition Assessment data base for teachers
- Hiring staff with transition focused roles

Establishment of Goals

The TTF may wish to begin by evaluating current transition programming in your district or school. Additionally, the TTF may want to implement yearly evaluation procedures to monitor the efficacy of the TTF. Listed below are commonly used measures to consider:

Quality Indicators of Exemplary Transition Programming
(QI-2; Morningstar, Lee, Lattin & Murphy,2015)

is a valid and reliable instrument to help identify critical needs in a transition program. The QI-2 measures 47 indicators across seven domains: Transition Planning, Transition Assessment, Family Involvement, Student Involvement, Transition focused Curriculum and Instruction, Interagency Collaboration, and Systems Level Infrastructure.

Predictor Implementation School/District Self-Assessment
(PISA Test; Mazzotti, et al., 2009)

is a checklist for school districts to determine the degree to which their program is implementing practices that support positive post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. The focus areas are Student Skills, Career Development, Collaborative Systems, and Policy.

Establishment of Goals

**SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) Analysis**

Consider taking a page from the business world and conducting a SWOT analysis—looking at Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats.

- Strengths identify your core competencies as a district. D*o you already have a fantastic Culinary CTAE program? Does your DECA Club already have a sales project?* These are strengths that you can build on.

- Weaknesses are areas where you can improve... d*o you need to re-visit your policies so that everyone is aware of the skills required to qualify for the internship program?*

- Opportunities are elements that you could potentially use to your advantage. *Can you assign students to help the parent volunteers sell concessions at the basketball games?*

- Threats are elements that could potentially set up failure or dangerous situations in the future. *Are all of your buses going to be current on safety standards in five years?*

Businesses use this as a systematic way to analyze, weigh the risks, and plan for success. Several electronic templates are available for free online, such as this one from Wordstream.
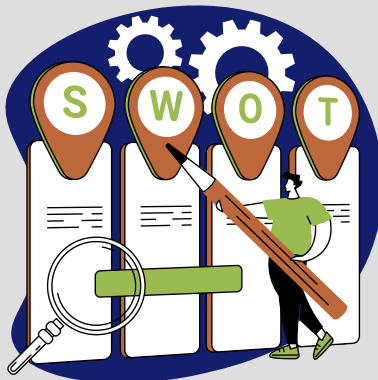
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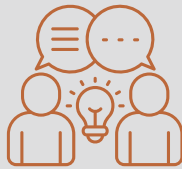
At each **checkpoint** along the way, it will be vital to check in with leadership within the district. Keeping your administration informed about your progress will make sure that your project is aligned with your district's larger strategic goals. This may position your project to receive resources that you may not have been aware of, such as partnering businesses that would be open to more creative partnerships. The **TTF Chair, District Parent Mentor, or Transition Coordinator** could take on this role, but it would be up to the TTF to decide, and approval with the district is essential.

Another key responsibility would be for the TTF Chair to coordinate key dates with district leadership. Regular meetings of the TTF, setting dates for any Transition Fairs, College and Career Fairs, Industry Tour Days, Mentoring Days, or similar events will need to be coordinated with other important district events, and care taken to avoid conflicting with testing schedules, graduation practice, major competitions, pep rallies, and the myriad of other happenings that are woven into the tapestry of tradition within a school culture. Getting these dates on the central calendar will be key to the success of a TTF.

Finally, continual communication with district leaders to approve any material to be published and distributed, such as a Transition Handbook, website, or timeline, will be important, and will speed up the process of getting important information out to the families who need it. Regular communication in the form of emails or frequent update meetings can keep designated district leaders informed, and issues related to the TTF a high priority.

This TTF Chair will likely want to establish a **Communication Committee** to assist with communication, organization, and promotion around approved events, in order to engage the larger community. This Communication Committee should be familiar with how the stakeholders and influencers operate. If a school district has a robust Parent Mentor Partnership or similar advocacy-aligned group, they can often fill this role well. See the **Sustainability section** next for more ideas.

Sustainability

The benefits of a TTF could be lost if the initial hard work is not sustained by ongoing organization. Consider implementing one or more of the following:

- Determine a member to be responsible for setting the agenda, maintaining meeting summary notes, and sending out meeting invitations.

- Create a shared electronic drive for all important documents, agendas, and meeting notes.

- Consider setting an annual date to initiate an internal progress monitoring process, such as the above-mentioned QI-2, PISA, or SWOT analysis and set yearly goals based on the findings of the assessment.

- Set at least quarterly dates to assemble as a TTF. Make sure these dates are placed on the District Calendar and provided to all the TTF members in advance. Decide which meetings the TTF would prefer to hold in-person, and which may be better held virtually. Appoint someone to be in charge of rescheduling any meetings that have to be cancelled.

Sustainability

⚙️ Determine together if the TTF will be responsible for organizing and hosting an annual (or more frequent) College and Career Fair or Transition Fair for the school district. This can be an excellent way to engage families, and having an ongoing purpose can contribute to the sustainability of a TTF.

⚙️ Include a mechanism to appoint new members and/or interim leadership as the original members move to different positions. Consider including membership on the TTF in the job description of district members, and designate an administrator (principal or Director of Special Education) who takes on the responsibility of ensuring that there is always an active Chair of the TTF, in case the current Chair has to vacate their position.

⚙️ Consider including in the responsibilities of the TTF an annual appreciation/awards event to recognize community supporters, including Community-Based internship sites, funding supporters, and TTF members from the community.

Resources

Georgia Parent Mentor Partnership:

The Georgia Parent Mentor Partnerships is an alliance of parents and professionals working together to improve outcomes for students with disabilities by enhancing communication and collaboration between families, educators, and the community.

Link: https://parentmentors.org/our-work/

Resource tools

- Quality Indicators of Exemplary Transition Programming (QI-2) - https://transitioncoalition.org/quality-indicator-survey/
- Predictor Implementation School/District Self-Assessment (PISA) - https://transitionta.org/pisa-self-assessment/

Interagency Collaboration the Groundwork

Is a free, self-paced module that gives examples of interagency collaboration and provides strategies for ongoing collaboration

Link:TransitionCoalition.org

The Iris Center- Interagency Collaboration

Link: https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/tran-ic

A note about resources:
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.

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Acknowledgements

Notes