



COLLABORATION BETWEEN SCHOOLS AND CAREGIVERS

RESOURCE GUIDE



About NTCN

The Northeast Transition Collaborative Network (NTCN) was created in response to gaps in communication and collaboration between school districts, agencies/providers, young adults, parents/caregivers, and community groups. NTCN hosts monthly virtual sessions about adult services and opportunities in the community as well as quarterly professional development opportunities for educators on topics related to person-centered transition, and workshops for families/caretakers around the person-centered planning process.

About This Guide

This guide was created by the Community Resource Center at Northeast Arc. We recognize that not every program on this topic may have been highlighted here. Services and programs are constantly changing. This is meant as an overview of services available to people in Northeastern Massachusetts. We may update these resource guides periodically; if you know of a resource that can be highlighted here, please reach out to us at CommunityResourceCenter@ne-arc.org.

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Tools for Collaboration

Bureau of Special Education Appeals: Mediation

<https://www.mass.gov/mediation-at-the-bsea>

Special Education Mediation is a voluntary and confidential dispute resolution process available at no cost through the Bureau of Special Education Appeals. When school personnel and parents disagree about the educational needs of a student with disabilities, either party may request mediation. In mediation, an impartial mediator helps parents and school staff clarify the issues and underlying concerns, explore interests, discuss options, and collaborate to reach mutually satisfactory agreements that address the needs of the student.

This informal, collaborative problem-solving process encourages mutual respect, promotes communication, and often provides the basis for positive working relationships between parents and school staff.

Charting the LifeCourse

<https://www.lifecoursetools.com/>

The Charting the LifeCourse framework was created to help individuals and families of all abilities and all ages develop a vision for a good life, think about what they need to know and do, identify how to find or develop supports, and discover what it takes to live the lives they want to live. The tool is about having conversations, a different way of thinking, encouraging high expectations, and having life experiences to move the trajectory in the desired direction. It is a tool that can be helpful in planning for big life events including transitioning to adult life. The framework is widely used with agencies supporting individuals connected to the Department of Developmental Services to support an individual's visions and interests.

empoweredED

<https://www.empoweredschool.org/>

empowerED School Solutions is a consulting firm focused on inclusion, special education, and systems change. They offer professional development opportunities to school districts, training for parents, and special education program reviews.

Family Engagement and the Special Education Evaluation Cycle

<https://masfec.org/family-engagement-and-the-special-education-evaluation-cycle/>

The tips and strategies included on this document created by Massachusetts Statewide Family Engagement Center are best practices that can help facilitate partnerships between schools and families with students with disabilities. The practices are broken down by steps in the evaluation process (e.g. pre-evaluation, during, post-evaluation, and ongoing), these practices also may serve as helpful reminders in starting the school year with students and families.



Tools for Collaboration

Massachusetts Student-Driven Secondary Transition Model

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/specialeducation/iep/transition/visual-model.docx>

Massachusetts Student-Driven Secondary Transition Model visually represents the movement from school to post-school life for students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) aged 14-22. The model highlights that successful transitions center on students actively shaping their goals, with support from families, educators, and communities. The infinity symbol represents lifelong interdependence, showing the continuous support individuals need from school through adulthood. This model guides collaborative planning across schools, families, and agencies to promote strong postsecondary outcomes.

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition

<https://transitionta.org/>

The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition is a federally funded project by The Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA). The collaborative provides technical assistance, resources, evidence and promising practices, and training to states and other stakeholders to improve postsecondary education and employment outcomes for students and youth with disabilities, including those with high support needs.

Collaborative Assessment Guides for Transition Planning Services

<https://transitionta.org/transition-assessment-guide/>

The Collaborative Assessment Guide for Transition Planning is intended to help develop a coordinated assessment approach for transition planning and service delivery. The guide is designed to help include students, family members, educators, vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors, and human service agencies.

The guides below serve as a supplement to the Collaborative Assessment Guide for Transition Planning:

Collaborative Assessment Guide Definitions

https://transitionta.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/04_CAG24_Definitions-ac.pdf

Collaborative Assessment for Transition Planning: Families

https://transitionta.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/01_CAG24_FamilySupplement-ac.pdf

Collaborative Assessment for Transition Planning: Students

https://transitionta.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/02_CAG24_StudentSupplement-ac.pdf

Collaborative Assessment Guide Regulations and Procedures

https://transitionta.org/wpcontent/uploads/docs/03_CAG24_RegulationsandProcedures-ac.pdf

National Technical Assistance Center on Transition Tools and Resources

https://transitionta.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/05_CAG_SampleTools.pdf

The document lists assessment tools (formal and informal) across domains which may be considered when collecting, analyzing, and using data to support transition planning with students.



Federal Guidance & IDEA

Coordinating Transition Services and Postsecondary Access (January 2025)

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/coordinating-transition-services-and-postsecondary-access-january-2025/>

The Coordinating Transition Services and Postsecondary Access document builds on the U.S. Department of Education's Transition Guide from August 2020 with additional information and resources.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Full Statute and Regulations

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations/>

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Transition Services Requirement Summary

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/a/300.43>

The page provides a summary of the laws related to transition services under IDEA.

A Side-by-Side View: Transition Services

<https://transitionta.org/wp-content/uploads/docs/comparison-side-by-side-transition-services.pdf>

An infographic providing definitions, target populations, and activities/services offered through IDEA, Vocational Rehabilitation Services, and Pre-Employment Services.

A Transition Guide to Postsecondary Education and Employment for Students and Youth with Disabilities

<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/idea-files/policy-guidance-transition-guide-postsecondary-education-employment-students-youth-disabilities-august-2020/>

The transition guide was created by the US. Department of Education to aid in the transition from school to post-school activities. The guide addresses transition planning: opportunities and programs; transition services and requirements, as authorized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the Rehabilitation Act; education and employment options for students and youth with disabilities after leaving secondary school; and supporting the decisions made by students and youth with disabilities.



Massachusetts State Guidance

Chapter 688 Referral

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/specialeducation/iep/688/>

A Chapter 688 referral is a way to help adult agencies, schools, and families to identify and plan for needed adult services for students with high support needs. Schools send a Chapter 688 referral electronically to the adult agency (e.g. Department of Developmental Disabilities, Department of Mental Health) that the IEP Team thinks might be able to meet a student's needs when the student graduates from high school or turns 22.

A 688 referral is not an application for agency eligibility. Schools submit the 688 referral and families are responsible for submitting a completed application to the agency. Agencies must receive a complete application so they can decide whether the student will be eligible to receive adult services.

Chapter 688 Referral Transition Agency Guidelines

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/iep/688>

A table to help IEP teams (including parent/guardian) understand the Transitional Agency to submit the Chapter 688 referral to based on student profile and disability category.

Massachusetts Special Education Laws & Regulations

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr28.html?section=all>

The complete text of all Massachusetts-specific special education laws and guidelines.

Special Education Policy Memo: Graduation and Transition Planning for Students with IEPs

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/specialeducation/policy/dese/advisories/memo-sy2025-2026-2.html>

This memo is intended to clarify the impact of the passage of Question 2 in November 2024. This question eliminated passing the MCAS test as a requirement for graduation. This memo includes best practices for schools, students, and parents in planning secondary transition services and student graduation, and reducing the potential for disputes for students on IEP's.



Resources for Parents

A Parent's Guide to Selecting a Special Education Advocate in Massachusetts

<https://fcsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/Selecting-an-Advocate-English.pdf>

The brochure was written collaboratively by the Federation for Children with Special Needs and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. It was developed to assist parents in choosing an advocate in the Special Education process when needed.

Exceptional Lives

<https://exceptionallives.org/massachusetts/>

Exceptional Lives provides tools, information, and support for families of children with disabilities in Massachusetts. Their resources use clear, accessible language to help families navigate local, state, and federal systems.

Federation for Children with Special Needs (FCSN)

<https://fcsn.org/pti/>

The Federation for Children with Special Needs empowers families so that they have the information and resources they need for their children. They work with families with children from birth to adulthood, providing individual assistance, training, leadership development, and support. The Federation provides free information and assistance related to special education laws and procedures as well as workshops and resources to determine the appropriate placement for children.

Massachusetts Advocates for Children

<https://www.massadvocates.org/>

Massachusetts Advocates for Children's (MAC) mission is to remove barriers to educational and life opportunities for children and youth. MAC advocates for and partners with students and families; transforming school cultures to be inclusive, safe and supportive. They provide resources to families and caregivers to help them understand information from schools, education laws and policies, and information on how to support their learner.

Parent's Notice of Procedural Safeguards

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/specialeducation/families/prb/>

Procedural safeguards are used statewide in school systems to inform parents of specific rules related to special education services and their rights as the caregiver. The document is available on the website in multiple languages. This is a document provided to parents/guardians of the student annually.



Other Literature

The Down Syndrome Transition Handbook: Charting Your Child's Course to Adulthood

Author: Jo Ann Simons and Stephanie Meredith

<https://downsyndrometransition.com/book/>

Jo Ann Simons originally published this landmark book about transition in 2010 with Woodbine House covering issues ranging from accessing education supports for transition goals to building communities to applying for adult services like Medicaid and Supplemental Security Income. Jo Ann has over 40 years of experience in the intellectual and developmental disabilities field. She is currently the President/CEO of Northeast Arc. Recently, Jo Ann teamed up with Stephanie Meredith to update the book and add more stories and update information about federal policy changes, technology, and supported decision making.

The Down Syndrome Transition Handbook outlines the steps of transitioning, emphasizing the child's need to be active in the process. It considers everything families need to know—from meeting broad, basic needs such as finding meaningful ways to fill one's days (work, volunteering, leisure activities, training/education, exercise) and how to get around (driving vs. using public transportation). The book is available for download for free.

Legal Planning for Special Needs in Massachusetts: A Family Guide to SSI, Guardianship, and Estate Planning, 2023 Edition

Author: Barbara Jackins, Attorney

<https://disabilitiesbookspress.com/product/legal-planning-for-special-needs-in-massachusetts>

A practical guide to legal planning for parents of children with special needs. In a relaxed, conversational style, Attorney Barbara Jackins explains the essentials of SSI, guardianship, and estate planning when there is a family member with a disability.

Wrightslaw Special Education Law, 3rd Edition

<https://www.abebooks.com/9781892320179/Wrightslaw-Special-Education-Law-3rd-1892320177/plp>

The laws governing special education for children with disabilities are confusing to parents, school personnel, related service providers, and even to many advocates and attorneys. *Wrightslaw: Special Education Law, 3rd Edition* provides a roadmap to the laws and how to get better services for all children with disabilities.