



# Preparing Students (and Families) for Meaningful Participation in the IEP Process

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# FCSN's Mission and Aspiration

We empower families, engage diverse communities, and eliminate barriers to improve life outcomes for all children and young adults, especially those with disabilities.

Together we are building an inclusive world where every child and young adult experiences belonging and can participate equitably in life's opportunities.



# Learning Goals

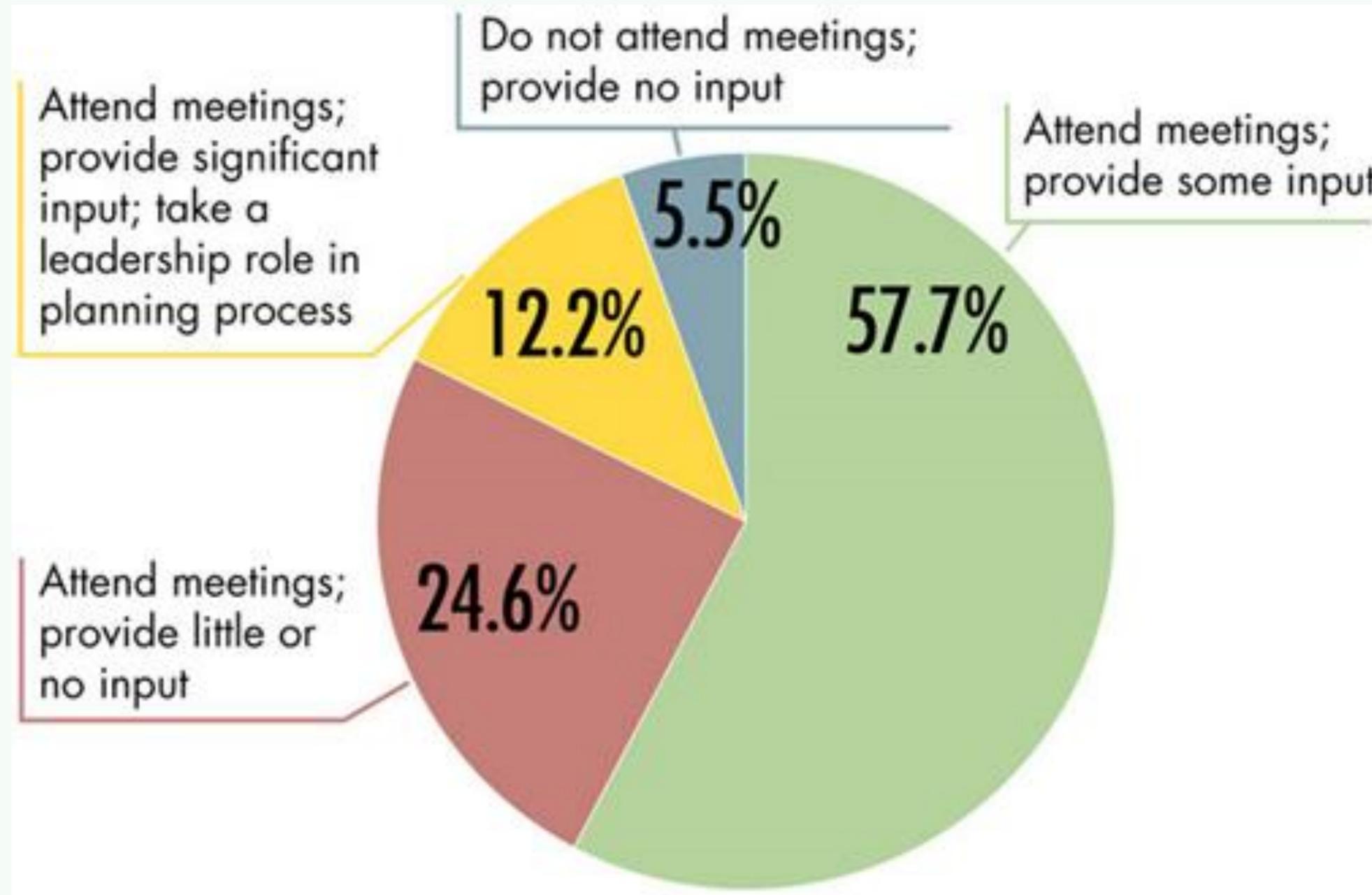
1. Learn the basics around student participation
2. Effectively use the IEP Process – before, during and after the meeting - to bring students into the IEP conversation
3. Identify key postsecondary transition components of IEPs



Where to find the new IEP forms, Guidance and Quick Reference Guides:  
<https://www.doe.mass.edu/specialeducation/iep/>



# What Student Participation Looks Like ...



Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study-2



# Meaningful Participation

Foundational principle of IDEA

Family engagement research

when families and schools work together,  
students have better outcomes

Legal guidelines to ensure participation:

Prior Written Notice, Parent Consent, Procedural  
Safeguards

Parents as equal members of the IEP team, AND  
whenever appropriate, the child with a disability

The public agency must invite a child with a disability to attend the child's IEP Team meeting if a purpose of the meeting will be the consideration of the postsecondary goals for the child and the transition services needed to assist the child in reaching those goals



# Let Raise our Expectations and Create Opportunities!

Some families and educators wonder what a student might bring to the IEP conversation or if they could contribute in a meaningful way.

Let's create opportunities:

- Change the way or the logistics of how teams meet
- Students need more than an invitation
- What will engage their presence and participation?
- Find the time in the school day to prepare students
- Provide practice opportunities and feedback

<https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/tran-scp/cresource/q1/p01/>



# Start with Transition Assessment

Individualized, age-appropriate transition assessment is integral to the development of the IEP for students aged 14-22 and is required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

The results of transition assessment inform the development of measurable annual skill-based IEP goals and the delivery of transition services.

**NTACT**  
THE COLLABORATIVE  
*Improving Opportunities & Outcomes*

## Collaborative Assessment for Transition Planning: Families

Supplement to the Collaborative Assessment Guide  
for Transition Planning

Helpful Tool: DESE's advisory on Transition Assessment

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/specialeducation/policy/dese/advisories/2014-4ta.html>



# Transition Planning is Overwhelming for Families

Parents' changing role

Understanding transition planning and steps

Cultural considerations

## What can parents do to prepare for their child's transition?

*"The road leading to a successful transition from childhood to adulthood should begin much earlier than the teenage years. It starts when children learn about themselves, their strengths and weaknesses and, so doing, begin to value themselves. It ends when, as adults, these same children can take control over choices and decisions that impact their lives and take responsibility for their actions. This is called Self-Determination." (Davis & Wehmeyer, 1991).*

### Age 13, 14 & 15:

- Talk about the value of work and teach behaviors that develop employment potential.
- Provide opportunities to see people at work in different settings.
- Give relationships and friendships priority, including friendships with peers without disabilities. The relationships can help build bridges to potential jobs, volunteer opportunities, and a range of community activities. Relationships also help us grow and learn about ourselves and the world around us.
- Allow as much independence as possible; assign responsibility for certain chores to help instill a positive work ethic.
- Teach money management skills, along with shopping experiences and banking skills.
- Promote appropriate behavior at home and in social situations.
- Provide opportunities to make choices and decisions, to explore and take risks, and to learn from experiences of success and failure.
- Assist in good grooming skills and emphasize the importance of physical fitness.
- Think about volunteer job opportunities in the community, paper routes, or other ways to develop job skills.
- Attend parent workshops on Transition to become informed about the process of Transition Planning.
- Help your child to become a self-advocate.
- What is required to happen while students are still in special education? Find out all about Massachusetts laws regarding transition goals and transition services.



Achieve with us.

- Develop a partnership with the school system and become an active participant in the development of your child's IEP.
- Participate in the development of the Transition Planning Form and make sure the VISION/post-secondary goals are reflected in the IEP.
- Develop annual IEP goals that support the student's VISION/post-secondary goals.
- Encourage your school system to conduct appropriate informal and formal transition assessments. At age 14 speak with your school team to refer your student to the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC). Every school in Massachusetts has an MRC Counselor assigned who can help with career and vocational development. Pre-Employment Training Services may be available.
- Help your child to understand his/her disability; when to ask and who to ask for assistance.
- Together with your child, create a vision of their life after leaving school or at age 22 (person-centered planning).
- Continue these activities throughout their teen years.

### Age 16 & 17:

- Be sure your child's IEP addresses all the areas where skills are needed to make the biggest difference in your child's ultimate independence.
- First job experience ought to be considered if your child is not already working.
- Think about how your child will participate in IEP meetings in a meaningful way.
- Develop a transition portfolio of your child's interests, activities and daily experiences to help them create their vision and support active participation in their IEP development.
- Encourage self-determination and self-advocacy skills.
- Continue to have transition assessments done to determine preferences, interests and abilities.
- Encourage independence in all areas of life such as self-care activities, money management, and travel in the community.
- Talk about the value of work. Teach and support behaviors that develop employment potential.
- Help your child to think about and envision his/her future.
- Attend transition-related workshops, fairs, conferences, seminars, webinars, etc.

- Encourage relationships and nurture friendships.
- Explore volunteering, paid work experience, and connections to community-based activities.
- Develop a long-term plan (5 year) to cover educational, vocational, community experiences, and independent living skills.
- Find out what a 688 referral is.
- If your child is expecting to meet all graduation requirements at the age of 18 and terminate special education services ensure that a 688 referral is made if they are in need of continued services as an adult.
- If your child leaves school before age 22, make sure all transition goals are met.
- If you are planning to apply for Social Security Insurance (SSI), get information about eligibility. Students who have assets exceeding \$2,000 are not eligible for SSI benefits. Consult an attorney or financial planner about a special needs trust or other arrangement that will protect eligibility for benefits. Check the availability of the ABLE Act. ABLE allows individuals to save up to \$100,000 and does not affect benefits.
- Investigate the need and type of decision making supports for your child. Not all individuals need to have a guardian, and less intrusive alternatives may be preferable. These include power of attorney, health care proxy, conservatorship, and supported decision making.
- Investigate Adult Family Care (AFC), a MassHealth Program that provides a taxfree stipend to caregivers (including family members), as long as assistance is provided with daily care and you are not a legal guardian.
- Have interest surveys and vocational assessments done to determine interests and abilities.

### Age 18:

- Apply for SSI/Mass Health. If SSI eligible, an individual will automatically be eligible for MassHealth. If not eligible for SSI, apply separately to the Division of Medical Assistance for MassHealth.
- Help your child actively participate in his/her IEP meeting. He/she should be part of planning their learning and life goals.
- Apply for Section 8 Housing Vouchers.
- Make sure emphasis on IEP is on post-school goals that will make the biggest differences in the life of your child.
- Understand Age of Majority. At age 18, all people are presumed to be legally competent to make all life decisions.
- Register men for Selective Service.
- Apply for eligibility for adult services, if you have not already done so. These include the Department of Developmental Services, Department of Mental Health, Mass. Commission for the Blind, and Mass. Rehabilitation Commission. If your son or daughter is diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Smith-Magenis Syndrome or Prader-Willi syndrome, they do not need have a diagnosis of an intellectual disability to receive services from DDS.
- Apply for Adult Family Care (AFC).
- Have your child register to vote.
- Make sure your child has some work experience.
- Continue to consider transition assessments to clarify student's continued skill development needs.

- Invite a representative from a human service agency, (example: Transition Coordinator from DDS or MRC) to attend your child's IEP meeting.
- Network with other families who have been through the Transition process.

### Age 20 & 21:

- By age 20 (or 2 years prior to terminating special education), the school special education administrator initiates a Chapter 688 referral to the appropriate human service agency to serve the student as an adult. Individuals who receive Social Security/ Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are automatically eligible for Chapter 688, others must go through an eligibility determination process.
- Individual Transition Plan (ITP) Meeting. No later than 9 months prior to graduation (usually around the student's 21st birthday), the Chapter 688 Liaison from the human service agency convenes the ITP meeting where the plan is developed. The student, family, school team, and any involved adult service agencies need to think about the programs and support needed (short-term, 1-2 years) when the student leaves school. The Chapter 688 Liaison is responsible for writing the ITP and submitting it to the Transitional Advisory Committee (TAC), which must approve, modify or reject the ITP. The TAC decision can be appealed by the student/ parent.
- Visit different day programs (and residential programs, if determined those services will be available) that provide services and supports to determine an appropriate placement for your child, or consider options such as self-directing your child's services or selecting Agency With Choice, a co-employment model.
- Try to ensure your child has had either an after-school job or weekend job with pay.
- Make sure your child has REAL work experiences in the community with local businesses.
- Find an adult primary physician and dentist.

### Age 21½:

- 3-5 months before leaving school, the student/family should call DDS (or other adult agency) area office to see if a service coordinator has been assigned and is beginning to develop your child's adult services.

### Age 22:

- Transition from school to adult services should be complete. Adult services are not an entitlement. Adult services are based on availability and are subject to funding by the legislature.
- Continue to attend family meetings, trainings, list serves to learn more about new and existing services.



Health and Fitness

<https://thearcofmass.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Transition-Timeline-Factsheet-1019.pdf>



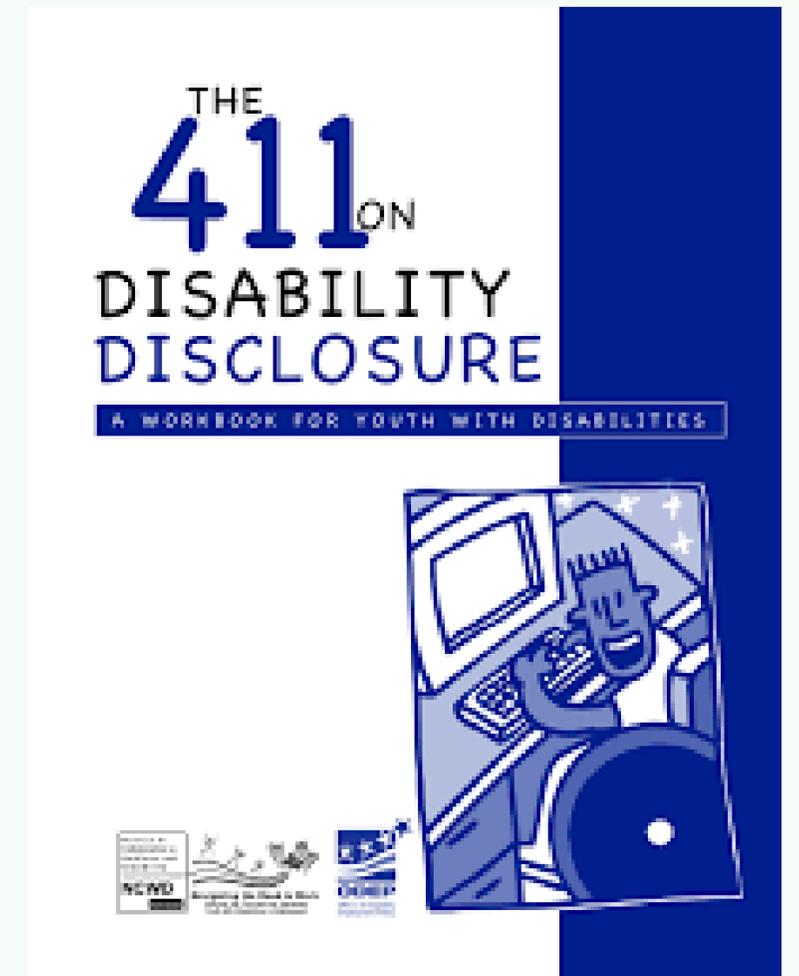


## Before the Meeting: Developing Student Voice

- Disability Awareness
- Self-advocacy Skills
- Knowledge of IEP Process
- Attitude

Free Curriculum

<https://www.ou.edu/education/zarrow/resources/curriculum>



Workbook

[https://iel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/411\\_Disability\\_Disclosure\\_complete.pdf](https://iel.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/411_Disability_Disclosure_complete.pdf)





# Educators: Learning through IEP Preparation

Data Collection  
Report Summaries  
Staff Collaboration  
Draft Agenda  
Family Communication  
Student Preparation



# Students: Learning about the IEP Process

What an IEP is

What are special education services

Who attends the meeting

What is the student's role

Crafting a Concern statement

Exploring Vision Ideas

NEW DESE Guidance

Discussion Questions to Get Ready for my Yearly IEP Meeting (students aged 13-22)

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/specialeducation/iep/discussion-questions.pdf>



# During the Meeting:



## Students:

- Share concerns
- Clarify vision for life after high school
- Identify strengths
- Review accommodations
- Gain understanding of goal areas



## Educators:

- Build Trust
- Direct questions to the student
- Listen
- Identify student strengths
- Align goal areas with vision and needs
- Identify planned course of study



# IEP Present Levels

## Start with Strengths – set a Positive Tone

Involve the student in the conversation about their current performance (in academics or other areas), and how their disability impacts their learning

Ask the IEP Team to highlight the student’s strengths

Ask the student to share their strengths, interest areas and preferences



<p>Briefly describe current academic performance. Check all that apply:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> English Language Arts</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> History and Social Sciences</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Math</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Science, Technology, and Engineering</li> </ul>	<p>Strengths, interest areas, and preferences</p>	<p>Impact of student’s disability on involvement and progress in the general education curriculum or appropriate preschool activities</p>
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# Involve Students in Plans for Graduation

Projected date of graduation/program completion:	
Projected type of completion document (diploma, certificate of attainment, or other locally defined completion document):	

## *Planned Course of Study*

What requirements does the student need to meet to receive the type of completion document above? What is the student's planned course of study?

What is the student's current status regarding meeting those requirements?

Under IDEA, an IEP's planned **course of study** is a critical component of transition planning.

The section outlines the specific classes (including core courses for graduation) and educational experiences a student needs to complete to prepare for life after high school. This section should be reviewed and updated annually to reflect changing goals and progress towards graduation.





## Current Graduation Challenges

MCAS is no longer a requirement for graduation in Massachusetts. Starting with the Class of 2026, Massachusetts has a new “Competency Determination” standard based on “satisfactorily completing coursework that has been certified by the student's district”.

- Wide range of state standards
- Students who accept a diploma are not longer entitled to special education
- Students who exit at age 18 (accept diploma) cannot access DDS services until age 22 (students with autism may receive some services)
- Students who exit with a diploma are not eligible for MAIPSE



# After the Meeting: Using Information to Improve the Process

Student and Family Experience  
Professional Culture  
Clarity of roles  
Equity – cultural considerations

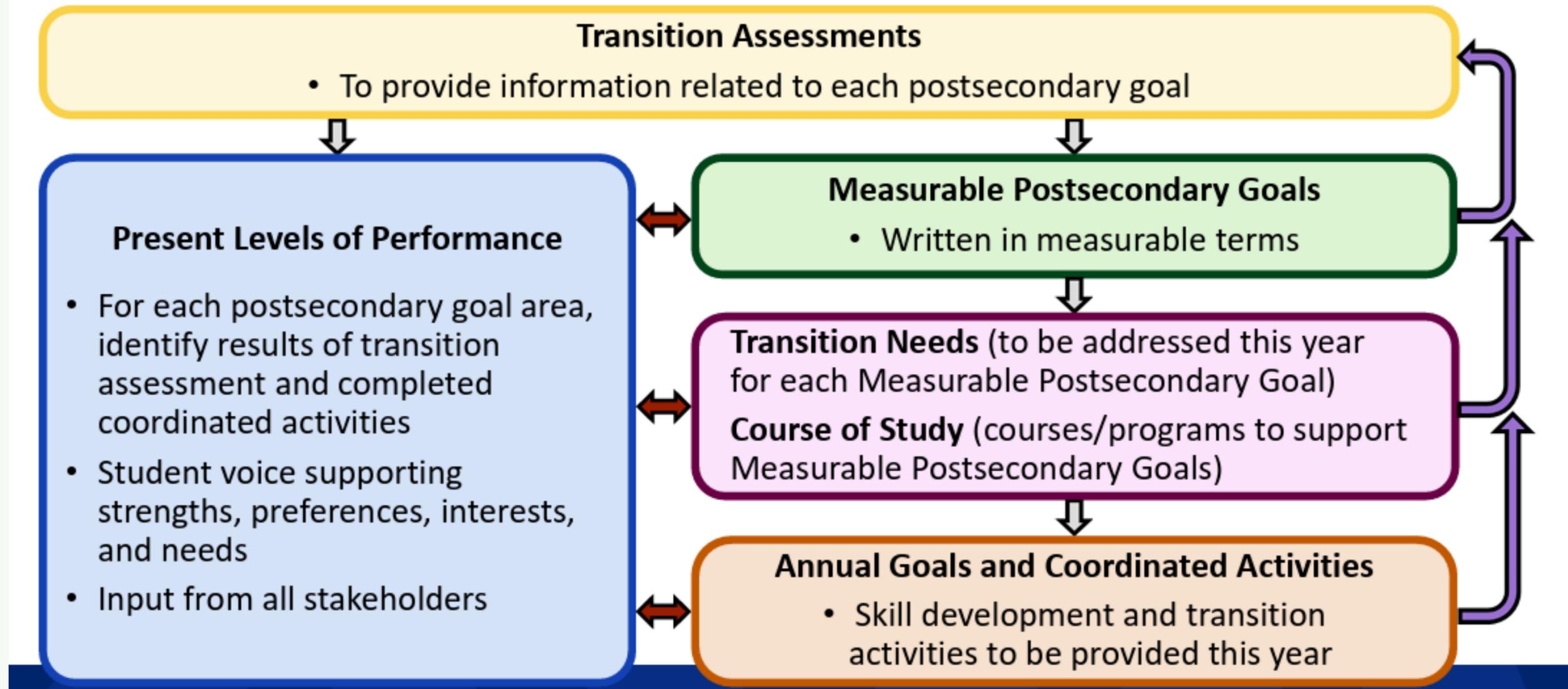
## Ongoing:

Review services - working for the student?  
Check in on accommodations – general ed  
Progress Monitoring  
Continued communication



# Transition Planning Across the IEP

## Connected Transition Plan in the IEP



# Students can Inform the Team (about what they need to be successful)

## ACCOMMODATIONS AND MODIFICATIONS

**Accommodations:** List the accommodations the student needs to make progress in the areas of academic achievement and functional performance. Leave blank any boxes that are not appropriate for the student.

	<b>Presentation of Instruction</b> The way information is presented.	<b>Response</b> The way the student responds.	<b>Timing and/or Scheduling</b> The timing and scheduling of the instruction.	<b>Setting and/or Environment</b> The characteristics of the setting.
Classroom accommodations				
Nonacademic settings (lunch, recess, etc.)				
Extracurricular activities				
Community/workplace				

**Modifications:** List the modifications, if any, that are needed to the student's program so they can meet their goals, make progress, and participate in activities alongside students with and without disabilities. Leave blank any boxes that are not appropriate for the student.

	<b>Content</b>	<b>Instruction</b>	<b>Student Output</b>
Classroom modifications			
Nonacademic settings (lunch, recess, etc.)			
Extracurricular activities			
Community/workplace			

Students need to understand the accommodations they regularly use and be able to talk about them with a teacher.



# Who signs the IEP?

The parent(s) **or the student at age 18** has the right to:

- Fully accept the IEP as developed
- Reject portions – all other portions will be considered accepted and implemented immediately. Partial Rejection can be for an omitted service
- Reject the IEP as developed.

If no response for 30 days, it is treated as rejected.

**Stay-put Rights** – student stays in last IEP approved program until IEP disputes are resolved. Not a long-term solution.



# Planning their Futures



Students who are engaged in the transition planning process are more likely to:

- Work toward accomplishing their goals (Bentz et al., 2000)
- Be invested in their learning and stay in school (Smith, 2008)
- Are more likely to be employed and/or enrolled in higher education after graduation (Morningstar et al, 2010)



# FCSN Transition TIPS Brochures



- TOPICS:
- The Secondary Transition Planning Process
  - Assessment
  - Autism
  - Chapter 688 Referral
  - Decision-Making
  - Disclosure
  - Graduation
  - Pre-ETS
  - Self-Determination

In English, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, Vietnamese and Haitian Creole



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



# RESOURCES

Facilitating Student-led IEPs

<https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/documents/Facilitating%20Student-led%20IEPs.pdf>

Simmons, Kate, et al. (2023) It's About Me: Student Participation in IEP Development. *International Journal of Social Policy and Education*, Vol. 5, No. 3.

Student Involvement in the IEP – Video Modules

<https://www.imdetermined.org/tool/student-involvement-in-the-iep-modules/>

Transitions to Adulthood Center for Research (Transitions ACR)

Adulting Shorts – Comic series, The “TEA” on IEPs

<https://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR/publication/comic/2021/09/tea-on-ieps-part-1/>

<https://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR/publication/comic/2022/09/tea-on-ieps-part-2/>

<https://www.umassmed.edu/TransitionsACR/publication/comic/2022/12/tea-on-ieps-part-3/>





## Vision of a Graduate

New statewide vision outlines six key skills and competencies to prepare high school students for college, career and civic life.

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/vision-of-a-massachusetts-graduate>

Next Steps: Where do you see an opportunity in your district to increase student engagement with their IEP?



# Thank You

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Online Intake Form

<https://fcsn.org/fcsn-intake-form/>





# Questions?

*Federation for Children with Special Needs*

*Engaging Educating Empowering Families*

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