

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: INFORMED CHOICE IN TRANSITION PLANNING

A Guide for Families of Students with Disabilities, Ages 14–21

YOUR FAMILY HAS THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE

When your child approaches the transition from school to adult life, federal law gives your family a powerful role in the process. You are not required to accept the first option presented, or the only option presented.

“ You have the right to be informed. You have the right to explore. You have the right to choose. ”

WHAT THE LAW SAYS

IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)

- IDEA is a federal law ensuring a free, appropriate public education. Transition planning must begin by age 14, based on your child's strengths and interests, not district convenience.
- Your child's IEP team, which includes you, must consider a full range of transition services and post-secondary goals.
- You may request that specific programs or providers be discussed and documented at the IEP meeting.
- ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act): Protects against discrimination and requires equal access to programs, including reasonable accommodations so your child can participate effectively.

WIOA (Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act)

- WIOA is a federal law that funds workforce development and training programs, including transition services for youth with disabilities.
- Students with disabilities are eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS), including job exploration, work based learning, workplace readiness training, and self advocacy instruction.
- The Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) supports informed choice, meaning eligible individuals have the right to select from available service providers, not simply be assigned to one.

QUESTIONS FAMILIES HAVE THE RIGHT TO ASK - AT ANY TIME

You do not have to wait for an IEP meeting.

- What transition programs and providers are available to my child, including options outside the district?
- Can we document in the IEP that we were informed of all available options?
- How does each option provide real work based learning, not simulated experiences?
- What accommodations will my child get to participate effectively—and who will provide them?
- If a program isn't accessible, what equal-access alternative will you offer?
- Can we visit each program before making a decision?

TIP

Put your questions in writing, and ask that the answers be documented in an email, a letter, or the IEP meeting notes. A written record protects your child's interests.

YOU ARE ALLOWED TO LOOK BEFORE YOU DECIDE

No family should feel pressured to accept a placement without seeing it first. Visiting programs, meeting staff, and comparing options is not being difficult, it is exactly what the law intends.

Options may include district operated services, county programs, and community based providers. Whatever exists in your area, you have the right to explore all of them.

WHERE TO LEARN MORE

- Your school district's Director of Special Education — request a list of all transition options
- Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) — ask about Pre-ETS services and approved providers
- Your county's Office of Developmental Programs (ODP) — ask about eligibility and supports
- The PEAL Center — Pennsylvania's parent training and information center for families of children with disabilities