



A Seamless Transition Timeline: When to Engage Professionals and What to Expect from Their Services Your Step-by-Step Guide

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INDIANA INSTITUTE ON DISABILITY AND COMMUNITY
**CENTER ON COMMUNITY
LIVING AND CAREERS**

A Seamless Transition Timeline: When to Engage Professionals and What to Expect from Their Services

Your Step-by-Step Guide

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The Center on Community Living and Careers (CCLC) is one of seven centers located at the Indiana Institute on Disability and Community, Indiana University, Bloomington. The mission of the Center on Community Living and Careers is to promote partnerships between schools and support organizations to bring about positive changes in the lives of individuals and families as they live, work, and participate in their communities.



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A Seamless Transition Timeline: When to Engage Professionals and What to Expect from Their Services

Introduction

This is the third guide in a four-part series on seamless transition, [A Seamless Transition Timeline: When to Engage Professionals and What to Expect from Their Services](#). Here, we outline primary transition activities and provide a practical tool kit. The first guide, [Understanding and Implementing a Seamless Transition Program](#), established a foundational understanding of the key components and processes. The second guide, [Understanding and Expanding Interagency Team Membership](#), shared key insights and practical interagency team-building strategies. We conclude this series with a final guide that examines the crucial role of family team membership as the hallmark of our evaluation. We share key insights from the Indiana Seamless Transition Pilot throughout each guide in the series.

Indiana’s Department of Education and the Division of Disability and Rehabilitation Services hope to increase the number of individuals with disabilities in competitive and integrated employment from 23% to 38% by 2027. To further this mission, the Division of Disability and Rehabilitative Services partnered with [TransCen](#), a nationally renowned organization dedicated to inclusive education and employment, to pilot seamless transition programs across the state. The [“Improving Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities in Indiana”](#) seamless transition pilot began in the spring of 2023. Eight schools joined the pilot, representing diverse regions across Indiana. The pilot aimed to improve team capacity, engagement of employers and families, and employment outcomes for students with significant disabilities. Schools were tasked with developing interagency teams that included, at a minimum, the student, their family, and external partners like Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR).

At each pilot site, the Center for Community Living and Careers at Indiana University’s Indiana Institute on Disability and Community evaluated seamless transition activities along with the perceptions and experiences of family members and professionals. The research revealed areas of excellence and areas for improvement. In this guide, we give a brief overview of seamless transition and provide a seamless transition timeline that includes service needs from early childhood to adulthood.

Overview of Seamless Transition

TransCen (2023) defines seamless transition as a coordinated process with the culmination of special education services for all students with disabilities, including paid employment or a defined career path, where the first day of a student's adult life looks like the last day of their

school-to-work program. To accomplish this, seamless transition prioritizes many important practices (Test, et al., 2009; Carter, et al., 2012; Luecking & Luecking, 2015).

- **Full inclusion in general education with a defined program of study.**
- **Diverse interagency team membership that includes school personnel, adult-serving agencies, and families.**
- **Open and active Pre-Employment Transition (Pre-ETS) and Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Services.**
- **Benefits planning with the assistance of a navigator or liaison.**
- **Early onset of varied student-driven work-based learning experiences**
- **Independent living and self-advocacy skill development.**
- **Obtain and maintain Competitive, Integrated Employment (CIE).**
- **Graduation with an alternative or high school diploma.**

These are best practices that can be used to support students' goal attainment through coordinated service delivery, early intervention, and technical assistance. Models of seamless transition emphasize full community inclusion beginning at age 16 (in Indiana, this starts at age 14) and extends through high school graduation. Students are encouraged to develop work experiences and build resumes during this time. Collaboration with non-education and adult-serving agencies is central to creating tailored curricula across service sectors. The end-goal is for students to leave high school employed and with community-living skills that promote and sustain independence (Certo & Luecking, 2011).

Agency-Involved Transition Timeline

These practices take time; starting early is crucial for a seamless transition. Figure 1 shows a seamless transition roadmap with comprehensive details for each step along the journey. Use the infographic on the following page to visualize the entire transition timeline.

Figure 1

Guide to Seamless Transition for Students with Disabilities

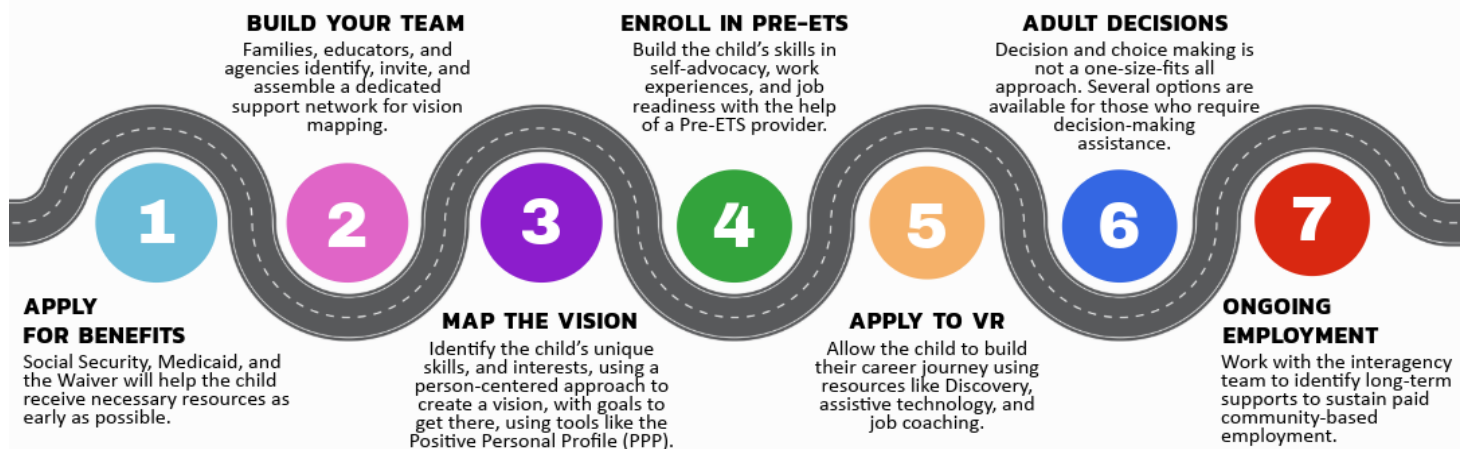
A GUIDE TO SEAMLESS TRANSITION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Need help navigating your student's employment journey? Paving the road starts today!

Seamless Transition is a program of services developed to create employment awareness and opportunities for students with disabilities, culminating in competitive integrated employment, ensuring the last day of high school looks like the first day of adulthood.



SEAMLESS TRANSITION ROADMAP



SEAMLESS TRANSITION FOCUSES ON:

- Connecting With Resources
- Promoting Family Engagement
- Building An Interagency Team
- Establishing a Vision
- Creating a Positive Personal Profile
- Exploring Paid Employment Options

Learn more about Seamless Transition at:

<https://instrc.indiana.edu/transition-resources/seamless-transition/index.html>



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1. Apply for Benefits

Applying for Social Security and Medicaid

Students may be eligible for Social Security cash benefits and work incentives as soon as they receive documentation of their disability. There are [two types](#) of Social Security benefits: Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Students could be eligible for one or both based on their family's situation. Students under 19 years old and enrolled full-time in K-12 may qualify for SSI. Students with a parent who is retired, disabled, or deceased may also be eligible for SSDI. To apply, head to the [Apply for Social Security Benefits webpage](#).

If a student has SSDI, as long as they still have a qualifying disability, they will remain eligible for SSDI and continue receiving their benefits from their parent's record. When a student who already receives SSI turns 18, Social Security will contact them to complete an Age 18 Redetermination. This redetermination form must be completed to determine if eligibility for benefits remains the same. Do not delay contacting the local Social Security office. It is best to promptly open all mail from Social Security to avoid missing any deadlines. Visit the Center on Community Living and Careers' [Benefits Information webpage](#) to learn more.

Applying For Medicaid Waiver

A [Medicaid Waiver](#) can help offer long-term assistance for the student during and well past their school years. The most used Medicaid Waivers are the Family Support Waiver and the Community Integration and Habilitation Waiver. A Medicaid Waiver provides coverage for costs such as transportation, personal care staff, communication devices, behavioral therapy, and more. The [Family Supports Waiver Fact Sheet](#) explains Indiana Waivers, the services offered, and how to apply. Given the lengthy waitlists, often spanning years, apply as soon as a disability is documented.

2. Build the Interagency Team

Building cohesive interagency teams is vital for students with disabilities over many lifetime transitions. Before school enrollment, students with developmental delays should be enrolled in [First Steps](#), this program helps build a team connecting families with the appropriate services. After the student turns three years old, and the school determines the child is eligible for special education services, a new team of professionals is created. These interagency teams will include professionals with diverse professional knowledge to help the student be successful while in school and in preparation for life after high school.

Team Membership

- **Student + Family:** The team begins with the student and family. They are experts and self-advocates who share personalized insight with team members along the way.
- **Transition Coordinator:** A transition coordinator is the liaison between the school, non-education professionals like case managers, Pre-ETS, and VR, and the community. They instruct staff, students, and families on the transition to life after high school. They also assist students with assessments, job applications, employer meetings, and community agency access.
- **Teachers:** Special education and general education teachers support the student in school from early childhood to senior high. If the student’s team determines that a transition program is needed after 12th grade, the special education teacher, or equivalent, will support them until they graduate or till their 22nd birthday.
- **Behavioral Therapist:** If the student needs to develop their skills, a behavioral therapist can create and implement a Behavior Support Plan tailored to the student’s specific needs. Progress toward the Behavior Support Plan goals should be reviewed at each meeting to determine if skills are developing as expected or if they require adjustments.
- **Other Service Providers:** As the student ages, other service providers become necessary. For example, when the student turns 14 years old, Pre-ETS and VR professionals should be invited. Others are based on individual needs. Some examples may be a physical therapist, occupational therapist, speech therapist, mental health professionals, guidance counselors, or direct support staff.
- **Medicaid Waiver Case Manager:** If the student has a waiver, their case manager should be a regular member of the interagency team. This professional supports the mission of a seamless transition by ensuring that waiver services evolve with not only the student’s age, development, and achievements, but also the family’s needs. Case managers keep the student’s person-centered plan up to date, document interests, goals, and needs, and offer choices, or “pick lists,” of service providers that support goal attainment. To learn more, read [“Person-centered planning: Putting you in control”](#) in the November 2021 issue of *What Next?* Newsletter.

3. Map the Vision

Identifying the student’s unique skills, interests, and areas for growth using a person-centered approach with tools such as the Positive Personal Profile (PPP) can help create a vision for the life they most desire. Understanding where the student is and where they want to go can help the team guide the goals needed to get there. This shared vision, when supported and tracked by team members, can help the vision grow or change as the student develops.

A student receiving services before age 3 typically transitions to [Early Childhood Special Education](#), which serves children ages 3 to 5 who are not yet in kindergarten. At this transition, there is a formal reevaluation to determine eligibility for services and the plan moves from an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP), created in [First-Steps](#), to an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Services often take place in a preschool setting, but the team determines what will be best for each student. As a child enters kindergarten, there is another transition from preschool to elementary. Services may change again at this stage.

The next “big” transition occurs when the student enters middle school or junior high. Once a student is 14 years old or in the 9th grade, the IEP focuses on transition or preparing the student for life after high school in the areas of employment, further education/training, and independent living. Transition assessments, like the PPP, can determine a student’s strengths, interests, and skills.

If a student’s team agrees there are still needs to be addressed beyond the age of 18, the student can move into the school’s designated transition program until the she/he is 22 years old. The student continues to have an IEP focused on independent living and employment goals, which are practiced and refined in the community.

Ways To Start Mapping the Vision

The following is a snapshot to map the vision. To learn more about essential planning tools that support the transition from high school to employment, read the [June 2024 issue](#) of the *What’s Next?* Newsletter.

- **IFSP:** An Individual Family Service Plan is a formal special education plan for children from birth to age 3 who qualify for early intervention due to a lag in developmental skills. This document lists direct services and what families need to support the child’s progress.
- **IEP:** An Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a formal special education plan for children from ages 3 to 22 who need specialized instruction to meet discrete goals based on their current level of performance. Beginning at age 14 or in grade 9, the IEP is written from a transition perspective with a focus on employment, independent living, and education and training.
- **Transition Assessments:** These are methods used to gather or document information about the student’s strengths, interests/preferences, skills, and needs for making informed decisions about life after high school. Examples of transition assessments include the PPP, interviews, portfolios, and situational assessments. Visit the Indiana Secondary Transition Resource Center website to learn more about the [Transition Assessment Matrix](#).

- **Volunteering:** Students can use their free time to explore areas of interest. Students should keep track of places they volunteered and what they liked and disliked as that will help them determine job preferences.
- **Community Engagement:** Student development and the broadening of interests are supported through participation in local groups, which may include religious or spiritual centers, government or advocacy councils, or sports teams.
- **Person Centered Individual Support Plan (PCISP):** A plan developed annually for adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities that describes their hopes, desires, and needs. This is done through person-centered planning (PCP) with the Individualized Support Team (IST).

4. Enroll in Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)

Students are eligible for [Pre-ETS](#) services from ages 14 to 22. They must also be enrolled in an educational setting, like high school or college, and have a 504 plan or IEP. Pre-ETS services create the foundations for the student’s last day of school to look like their first day of adulthood. Pre-ETS providers complete activities with the student during the school year, with some exceptions outside of the school calendar, like summer work-based learning experiences. The Pre-ETS providers, student, family, and team members develop employment goals and outline supports in a PPP. This plan is based around five core services: job exploration counseling, work-based learning experiences, counseling on post-secondary learning experiences, workplace readiness training, and self-advocacy.

Skill Building with a Pre-ETS Provider

Below, we have listed important skills students learn from these core services.

- **Job Exploration Counseling:** Discussion of vocational interests, review of local labor market, in-demand industries, and occupations; non-traditional employment options; identification of career pathways of interest to the students.
- **Work-Based Learning Experience:** Job shadowing, paid and non-paid internships and work experiences, informational interviews, and volunteering.
- **Post Secondary Counseling:** Gaining awareness of career pathways; promoting participation in postsecondary education; attending college fairs and tours.
- **Workplace Readiness Training:** Receive training on communication, problem-solving, time management, and other specific social and interpersonal skills and independent living skills.

- **Self-Advocacy:** Training on self-awareness, disclosure of disability, and knowing individual rights and responsibilities.

4. Apply to Vocational Rehabilitation Services

[Vocational Rehabilitation](#) (VR) supports students' long-term employment goals. It's important to know that students can receive services from [VR and Pre-ETS](#) at the same time. Like Pre-ETS, VR services can begin as early as 14 years old, but we encourage starting no later than the student's junior year of high school.

Students are assigned a VR Counselor to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), which outlines services to support individualized employment. Some services may seem similar to Pre-ETS. However, when working with VR, students identify sustainable long-term employment or career goals. Additional VR services like job coaching, driver's training, workplace accommodations, and Social Security benefits analysis can also be provided.

The Life of a Vocational Rehabilitation Case

Each case is different as services are based on the needs of individual students. Here is what the life of a Vocational Rehabilitation case could look like.

1. **Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE):** Every case with VR starts with an IPE. This document is created with the VR counselor once the student's case has been opened. The IPE will follow three main themes: discovery, job readiness/supports, and stabilization. In line with these themes, there are three main parts to the IPE: 1) the vocational goal, 2) the services being offered, and 3) a responsibility acknowledgement section. The student's first IPE will have a general vocational goal. However, this will be updated with a targeted vocational goal after Discovery activities have been completed. Students meet monthly with their VR counselor to update them on progress and identify next steps.
2. **Discovery:** After the student has an IPE, Discovery begins. Discovery activities allow the student to visit employers and try jobs that fit their interests. The student's job coach will use different measuring tools during discovery to determine if a job meets the student's interests and skill set. Discovery helps the student determine work-related details such as best-fit job, number of work hours, and types of support while at work. These details are given to the student's VR counselor and used as justification for moving towards their vocational goal and eventual stable employment.
 - a. **Job Shadowing:** Following an employee in their workplace to identify their job tasks, needed skills, work culture, and other factors.

discussed with the student, job coach, and VR counselor, as well as any additional natural support such as guardians or parents. If expectations are being met, the student's VR case enters the stabilization phase. The student's job coach will check in less and less frequently, and after 90 days of stabilization, the student's case can be closed.

5. **Extended Services:** If the student has a Medicaid Waiver, they can elect to receive extended supported employment services. This allows them to keep their job coach even without VR. The VR counselor will send an Extended Service notice to the student's case manager detailing their job, need for continued supports, and case closure date. The student's case manager will contact the student and their guardians or parents to see if they want to continue working with their job coach or another eligible coach to sustain their employment. With supported employment, the job coach will work with the student for a limited number of hours each month to ensure job stability and address minor concerns. If there are bigger employment concerns, their job coach will help them reapply to VR to get more support hours for the job coach to work through the new issues from sustaining employment. The job coach can also help apply to VR if the student's job tasks change or if the student would like to apply for a new job.

5. Adult Decision-Making

Some students may not need much support to manage their adult life. Others may require more or intensive supports, like another individual to make legal decisions for them. Still other students are somewhere in between and need a combination of decision-making supports. View [Adult Guardianship in Indiana: The Basics Guide](#) to learn about guardianship and alternatives to guardianship. Conversations about adult decision-making should begin no later than 9th grade.

Guardianship is the most restrictive on the spectrum of supported decision-making. It requires a court hearing and culminates with another person appointed over the student to make their health, safety, and/or financial decisions. If considering guardianship, an attorney can file documents with the court.

In contrast, supported decision-making ensures that students make their own decisions but with the help of trusted individuals. This plan can also be formalized in writing, but it does not go through the courts.

Additional options, like a health care representative, power of attorney, and/or a representative payee, help the student make adult decisions but are less limiting than guardianship. When considering any option, it is important to understand who has the final decision – is it the

student or someone else? The best plan for a student may be a combination of different decision-making supports.

6. Employment Impact

After securing employment with the appropriate long-term supports, seamless transition activities will also include financial literacy for parents and students.

Financial Decisions

Having a bank account is necessary in most employment scenarios. The employer needs to know where to deposit earnings. It is important that wherever money is deposited, it is available to pay bills and purchase items. Students can learn about these responsibilities and decide how to best manage their money. Creating a budget and practicing money management can be done at home, with the help of their transition team, and they may decide there is a need for a [representative payee](#).

Benefit Impacts from Working

As previously discussed in the VR section of this guide, benefits may be impacted by earnings from work. If the student had a BIN completed by VR, then the student's file will be transferred to the local Work Incentive Planning and Assistance coordinator (WIPA). The WIPA will follow the student's case and guide to inform Social Security, Medicaid, Food Stamps, and/or housing organizations about additional income. It is important to be transparent with these organizations to avoid having to repay benefits or become ineligible for services.

Conclusion

Families with children transitioning to adulthood and the professionals who work with them often report this process, with its many to-dos, as confusing and overwhelming (Hansen and Bowen, 2025). For these reasons, we believe a well-planned road map eases all team members' concerns. This guide provides a stepwise timeline and centers on the early initiation of necessary services. What a student needs at one stage will change along the way, but preparedness will keep everyone on the team knowledgeable and adaptable.

Our fourth guide, [Student-Family Centric Seamless Transition](#), offers a framework to understand the family's experience and to provide a decision-making tool to strengthen parent partnerships.

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