

TRANSITION TEA TIME Newsletter



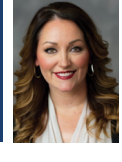
NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT AWARENESS MONTH

National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) is celebrated every October to recognize the contributions of America's workers with disabilities and promote disability employment issues. This year's theme is Advancing Access and Equity. The Institute for Disability Studies (IDS) will provide a Mississippi version of the national poster that includes photos of Mississippi youth and young adults with disabilities who are on the path to employment. This year, IDS is partnering with the MDRS to host a virtual employment summit, promote success stories and complete a social media awareness campaign. In addition, IDS will host in-person employment summits in Hattiesburg and Long Beach.

For more information or to order some posters, please contact Transition Coordinator Beth Robertson at beth.robertson@usm.edu or 228.214.3422.

Jennifer L. Boykin, Ed.D.

Executive Director, Office of Special Education • Mississippi Department Of Education



Why is secondary transition important?

As students with disabilities prepare to transition to adult life, it is essential they have the skills necessary to achieve their post-secondary goals. It is important that those who provide services to students with disabilities carefully consider their unique needs, abilities and goals for independent living. Of course, the goal is for students to be able to live as independently as possible so they can lead a fulfilling life after leaving high school. To achieve this, we must be diligent in preparation and planning alongside students and their families.

How, in your position, can you assist districts with transition needs?

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), Office of Special Education (OSE) stands ready to provide support and resources to school districts to assist in the planning and development of effective transition plans for students with disabilities. Our programmatic staff possesses an incredible depth of knowledge to help

build the capacity of teachers, transition coordinators and administrators.

What are some ways to engage families in the transition planning process?

As soon as a student is identified as a student with a disability, the school district should engage the student and family in discussions about post-secondary goals. While the requirement is to develop and implement a transition plan as described in the IEP when the student is 14 years old, those conversations need to happen early and often. The IEP committee could and should begin considering the student's unique needs for adult living as soon as the student is eligible for services. Additionally, making intentional connections to your support agencies such as the Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services (MDRS) will assist families in understanding what resources are available. Taking a proactive planning approach will assist students and families in achieving positive post-secondary outcomes.

What advice can you give to districts in the state as it relates to secondary transition planning?

Think of a student's post-secondary goals as the final destination on a very long road trip. When we take that road trip, we don't just start driving and hope we get to the desired location. No – we enter that final destination into the GPS and take intentional routes to get there. In the same way, districts must be intentional about how transition planning occurs for students with disabilities. Teachers and administrators should familiarize themselves with the resources available so they can assist families with accessing those resources to meet the student's post-secondary goals. Transition planning cannot be an afterthought, but rather the driving force behind the services and supports given to students with disabilities to assist them in developing necessary skills for a positive and productive post-secondary experience.

Tanya Keck

Curriculum and Instruction Coordinator for Special Education, Desoto County Schools



Why is secondary transition important?

Secondary transition is important because it allows us to ensure that we are providing each student the courses, supports and services they need to prepare them to meet their post-secondary goals.

What are some school-based transition activities or programs that lead to post-secondary goals?

MajorClarity not only provides transition assessment data through the Learning Styles Inventory and Career Interest Inventory, it allows the students to create their own academic and career path plan and teachers can assign students Career Path Test Drives which allow them to learn more about careers they are interested in pursuing after exiting high school. MajorClarity also provides teachers [who completed MajorClarity's] professional development ways to build IEP transition plans. We provide direct instruction in job and career exploration, work based learning, post-secondary training, workplace readiness and self-advocacy through our high school Learning Labs. We partner with MDRS and the ARC to provide pre-employment transition services for students 14 and up to work on prevocational skills. DCS has two Career Tech campuses with the following 2-year programs: Educator Preparation, Fire Sciences, Health Sciences, Industrial Maintenance, Law and Public Safety, Digital Media, Engineering, Information Technology, Culinary Arts, Automotive, Construction, Welding, and Transportation and Logistics. Upon successful completion of a program, students will earn four credits toward graduation. Through these programs, students will learn valuable skills needed to pursue a career in the selected field post high school.

What partnerships with local businesses and state agencies do you have for the 2023-24 school year?

We work with MDRS, Ability Works, summer internship program and Project Search at Baptist DeSoto. We also work closely with Sephora warehouse to inform and prepare students about their six weeks of on-the-job training to prepare them for full time employment. We provide information to parents and students about the ARC NWMS parent meetings, fundraisers, summer programs, etc.

How do you engage families in the transition planning process?

We conduct transition interviews and assessments, provide brochures for elementary, middle and high school transition activities and services available in the community and give information about outside agencies and the services they offer (e.g., MDRS, Ability Works, Project Search, Sephora, the ARC NWMS, Get2College, ACCESS Program, etc.). We provide information to parents on FAFSA nights, college fairs, MDRS parent meetings, etc. We also have local family business owners who come into our significant cognitive disability classrooms and talk about their business and the job opportunities they have available.

What difficult challenge have you faced in your district? How did you undertake the arduous task?

Probably the most difficult challenge we face is encouraging parents to collaborate with outside agencies on the resources available in this area. We work very hard to offer information about outside agencies at every annual meeting as well as send home flyers and brochures about programs and resources available in DeSoto County. Furthermore, we encourage special education teachers to tour many of these agencies, and they often take class field trips to Ability Works and Sephora.

What advice can you give to other districts in the state regarding secondary transition planning?

Continue to present parents with information on resources available in your area even when they think it is something that would not benefit their child. We offer MDRS referrals annually for every student 14 and older with an IEP until we have documentation that one has been completed.

What do you enjoy most about your position within your district?

My current position involves providing support for general education and special education teachers who are working with students with disabilities. Engaging with all ages and grade levels of students, teachers, administrators and parents gives me the opportunity to discuss the importance of transition from the very beginning of a student's education. I also supervise the Adapted Resource and Community Based Classrooms (about 60 classrooms) and select the curriculum and train the teachers on providing instruction to students with significant cognitive disabilities that helps prepare them for life after high school.

Raven Ramirez

Special Education Teacher at North Panola High School



Why is secondary transition important?

Planning what will be needed and who can help provide that assistance is so important to successful transition. Transition planning encourages students to become familiar with occupational choices, vocational preparation and career planning at an earlier age to ensure maximum opportunity of curricular choices and involvement of secondary school resources.

What are some school-based transition activities or programs that lead to post-secondary goals?

We offer basics like career day programs, college sponsorships and tours, and career counseling. We are fortunate to have both a Graduation Coach and Career Coach in our building who we partner with to be able to get students moving into either college or workforce areas. Delta Tech also comes to the school and signs seniors into the workday program. Almost half of our students graduate with certificates for trades, such as a forklift license.

What partnerships with local businesses and state agencies do you have for the 2023-24 school year?

We've partnered with the MDRS for years. They are a great asset to our students who are going straight into the workforce. They offer not only connections to employers in the area, but also provide glasses, shoes, clothes and pretties much anything students need to start a job.

How do you engage families in the transition planning process?

Parent involvement is one of the biggest challenges in our district. Don't get me wrong, we have some great parents. However, the community as a whole lacks resources to assist with educating parents and guardians on how to help a child's special education needs. This leads to a disconnect between the school and the families.

What difficult challenge have you faced in your district? How did you undertake the arduous task?

Working in an economically disadvantaged district brings a wealth of challenges not only for me, but also the teachers that serve our students. Much of the time, our students struggle with family problems or trauma experiences stemming from the home and community that impact their ability to focus and succeed in the classroom. I can honestly say that I have not been able to rectify this challenge, but I do make every effort to foster success within my students. Whether it be creating a safe space, structuring and restructuring my time, collaborating with related service providers, assisting with the provision of uniforms for students who don't have them, or just being a shoulder to cry on. Every day, I work to rectify as many of the challenges my district, students and the community face.

What advice can you give to other districts in the state regarding secondary transition planning?

Start early and stay on top of it. Students change their minds so often. It's so important to be sure we have them on the right track. You also need to have hard conversations with them. Sometimes their goals aren't attainable. We spend all this time trying to protect them and give them what they need to be successful, then send them out into the world and hope for the best. If we have the right relationships with our students, we will be able to guide them to a post-secondary path that would best fit their goals and abilities.

What do you enjoy most about your position within your district?

My students, I know it sounds cliché, but they really are the reason I do what I do. We have laughed, cried and grown together over the years, and they are all my babies.

Erin Jostes

Transition Coordinator and Behavior Support Teacher, Pearl Public School District



Why is secondary transition important?

The concept of secondary transition plays a pivotal role in preventing our students from a passive post-high school existence (also known as becoming couch potatoes). Instead, it offers them a sense of purpose and, ideally, a means to become self-sustaining and contributing members of society. Prioritizing post-high school planning not only fosters the development of our students, but also positively impacts their mental well-being, as well as that of their families. This approach ensures an all-inclusive approach to their growth and future prospects.

What are some school-based transition activities or programs that lead to post-secondary goals?

While tailoring activities and programs to meet the specific needs and objectives of individual students and their families is paramount, there exists a set of fundamental components that should be universally integrated. These include acquiring essential identification documents such as state-issued IDs or driver's licenses, comprehensive career exploration-encompassing options that require further education or certification – as well as those that do not – and the development of crucial social skills. In particular, fostering the ability to effectively interact with colleagues and, often, the public is of great significance. Equally essential is instilling the knowledge of proper etiquette during communal meals and the importance of personal hygiene, as these are indispensable life skills that extend beyond the confines of one's home.

What partnerships with local businesses and state agencies do you have for the 2023-24 school year?

The MDRS stands as an invaluable resource for our district. We have established partnerships with esteemed organizations, such as Project Search at UMMC and analogous initiatives at USM, alongside collaboration with the Pearl Chamber of Commerce, the Mississippi Braves, Chartwells Food Service and Prewitt Contract Services. These alliances continue to expand and strengthen on a weekly basis, strengthening our capacity to provide comprehensive support and opportunities for our students.

How do you engage families in the transition planning process?

I consider this aspect of the planning process to be both the most challenging and critically significant. The initial step involves educating parents about transition services and outlining our strategies to support their child and family effectively. Once parents are well-informed about the available services and comprehensive offerings, a collaborative discussion ensues to chart the appropriate course of action. The establishment of clear communication channels – encompassing telephone conversations, email correspondence and face-to-face meetings – serves as a foundation for nurturing the essential trust and support required for seamless collaboration among parents, students and other relevant [stakeholders].

What difficult challenge have you faced in your district? How did you undertake the arduous task?

One of the primary challenges we encounter pertains to transportation for post-high school completers. Within our community, the absence of public transportation infrastructure poses a significant hurdle for many of our families. In addressing this issue, I have discovered that a hands-on approach is essential. It involves establishing partnerships with local companies situated within walking distance of our students' residences or in proximity to workplaces of family members, thereby mitigating transportation difficulties. Fortunately, the Pearl community has demonstrated remarkable cooperation and a willingness to collaborate in overcoming these obstacles, all in the pursuit of ensuring the success of our students.

What advice can you give to other districts in the state regarding secondary transition planning?

Utilize the agencies in your area. Go and talk with businesses in your town. Many places are eager to help their community and want to assist in employing our students. There are many incentives available for businesses and there are many agencies that can help with these transitions and trainings.

What do you enjoy most about your position within your district?

The most rewarding aspect of this role is witnessing the sense of purpose that our students acquire upon their departure from Pearl High School. Among our diverse student body, we observe a spectrum of paths unfolding: Some embark on journeys toward higher education at universities or two-year colleges, while others pursue specialized certifications, such as those in electrical or welding fields. Many transition seamlessly into gainful employment, securing positions in grocery stores or prominent companies like Nissan. Some find fulfilling opportunities in sheltered employment environments, while others gain admission to enriching day facilities where they can continue their personal development and enjoy meaningful interactions with their peers.

Alison Gilmore

Transition Coordinator at Canton Public School District



Why is secondary transition important?

Most of our students and events of exceptional education students are unsure of where to even begin life after graduating high school. It is imperative that we have a plan for each of our exceptional education students at Canton High School before they graduate.

What are some school-based transition activities or programs that lead to post-secondary goals?

Transition activities that I like to do with our students are dressing for success, mock interviews, preparing a resume and visits to local junior colleges and trade schools.

What partnerships with local businesses and state agencies do you have for the 2023-24 school year?

Some of the agencies and businesses we have partnered with are Wal-Mart, Piggly Wiggly, Canton Discount Drugs, Madison County WIN Job Center, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation Services, and Ability Works.

How do you engage families in the transition planning process?

We offer many parent meetings during the school year. We discuss various topics and have lots of booths present for parents to ask and obtain more information. Listed are a few who attended during the 2022-23 school year: Holmes Community College GED Program, Hinds, Jackson State University Disability Services Division of Student Affairs, Mississippi Department of Rehabilitation, Hudspeith, Madison County WIN Job Center, Get 2 College, Cantons Parental Involvement, and Ability Works.

What difficult challenge have you faced in your district? How did you undertake the arduous task?

In the Canton Public School District, I have found it is so difficult to get parents involved. We have encouraged students' general education teachers to offer a grade (100) if the student and their parents attend our Transition Nights. I also find it works to call and remind the parents the day of the event.

I collected pamphlets and informational packets from all the booths to send home to the parents who were unable to attend.

What advice can you give to other districts in the state regarding secondary transition planning?

My advice would be to collaborate with the middle schools to start guiding the students. An Interest Inventory must be given to collect the student interest and data. You must begin earlier for transition to be beneficial.

What do you enjoy most about your position within your district?

I enjoy providing my students with the services and support he or she needs to make a successful move into adult life. I especially enjoy the moment – whether it be one or five years from now – I see them out in the world working hard and being successful. That grateful smile and hug from a previous student is everything!

Check out our NEW Transition Training site!

Transition to Adulthood Center on Learning – Because everyone has the right to meaningful employment!

idstraining.org



MISSISSIPPI
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

Kendetric Bradley
State Transition Coordinator
kbradley@mddek12.org • 601-359-3498