



TOOLKIT TOPIC 8

*Utilizing
Transition
Planning to
Support
Behavioral
Needs*

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Utilizing Transition Planning to Support Behavioral Needs

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Special education students in Illinois receive secondary transition planning, but disparities exist in discipline and law enforcement involvement. Behavioral skills are crucial for workforce success, yet often overlooked. The Illinois Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Standards address these needs. Effective transition planning must prioritize behavioral support, SEL development, and mitigating law enforcement involvement for equitable outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

Students who are eligible for special education services in Illinois must also have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), including a transition plan. This plan must be in effect when the student turns 14 ½ (or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team). The IEP must include measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments and other information available regarding the student that are related to employment, education, and/or training, and independent living skills as well as the transition services needed to assist the student in reaching those goals, including courses of study. Secondary transition planning includes age-appropriate assessments related to training, education, employment, and independent living skills. Secondary transition planning also includes instruction; related services; community experiences; the development of employ-



ment and other post-school adult living goals; and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. Simply put, secondary transition planning should include detailed plans and support to enable students to be a meaningful part of their community and live as independently as possible. In addition, secondary transition planning includes behavior support and social-emotional skill development.

INDIVIDUAL TRANSITION PLANS AND BEHAVIOR SKILLS

Behaviors that hinder school success also will hinder students' success in work and community environments after they leave school. Students need to graduate with socially validated behavioral skills if they are to be ready to meet the needs of employers after they leave school. There have been multiple studies spanning decades now that indicate social skill deficits, not lack of employment-specific skills, are the leading reasons employees with disabilities lose their jobs.ⁱ Employers believe that employees with disabilities should enter the job market with job-ready social skills so that employers can focus on training them to do specific skills required for the job. Behaviors like yelling, invading the privacy of others, complaining about tasks, and interrupting meetings will lead to the termination of their employment more often than making a job-related mistake.ⁱⁱ Unfortunately, the main focus of employment-readiness training in schools is often technical vocational skills, not job-related social skills.ⁱⁱⁱ Schools that fail to teach students how to behave in socially acceptable school and work settings set students up for a lifetime of hardship. Therefore, acquisition of behavioral skill and the support that goes with it must therefore be meaningful parts of transition planning.



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CONSIDERATIONS OF INDIVIDUALIZED TRANSITION PLANNING FOR SAFETY

Too often, involvement with law enforcement and the criminal justice system is the outcome for students who did not receive the support they needed and failed to master behavioral expectations in school. Students whose behavior infractions result in suspensions

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and expulsions are less likely to graduate from high school, are less likely to enroll in college or technical school, and are more likely to have continued contact with the justice system in their adult lives.^{iv}

Transition planning should include how to interact with police and other law enforcement officials safely, especially since individuals with disabilities are more likely to have interactions with law enforcement that end with incarceration, injury, or death than their counterparts without disabilities.^v This probability is further compacted by factors related to race, gender, and disability. For example, recent studies on autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and policing suggest that youth and adults with ASD interact with law enforcement at higher levels than their peers without ASD. Race further compounds these iniquities, as Black youth with ASD were 2.5 times more likely than White youth and 1.7 times more likely than Hispanic youth to have contact with police.^{vi} In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention,^{vii}(endnote location ok?) while Black people make up only 13% of the U.S. population, they experience 23% of lethal encounters with law enforcement officers nationally.^{viii} Educators must acknowledge these realities and make sure their students get all of the behavioral support available to them in school, so they can successfully stay in school and live healthy adult lives outside the criminal justice system. This should include instruction related to behavior concerns and setting additional IEP goals, when necessary.

INTERVENTIONS

There are several resources available for Illinois educators to utilize when planning for behavior support and skills instruction. First, Illinois has 10 SEL Standards. These standards are arranged in three overarching goal areas broken down into specific standards and scaled by grade level.

- **Goal 1:** Develop self-awareness and self-management skills to achieve school and life success.
- **Goal 2:** Use social-awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and maintain positive relationships.
- **Goal 3:** Demonstrate decision-making skills and responsible behaviors in personal, school, and community contexts.

More specifically, each of these three goals is broken down into three or four standards, then described as 10 indicators that span five periods of personal and academic development (Early Elementary, Late Elementary, Middle School/Junior High, Early High School, and Late High School). Each of the standards moves from focusing on the personal (identifying and controlling one's own emotions and behavioral choices) to the social (understanding how our choices and behavior impact others and our community), along a continuum of developing empathy and social skills required for successful integration into the workforce community. Students with skill deficits in these SEL areas sometimes encounter difficulties pertaining to school success and future employability. Therefore, educators must integrate SEL Standards into instruction as early as possible to give students every opportunity to become proficient in the skills that will help them live successful independent adult lives.



The Illinois SEL Standards provide a framework for evaluating the social and interpersonal skills and perspectives required for successful integration into the workforce. Standards and indicators for each goal develop across the student's academic and chronological development pertain to the impact of individual decisions and behaviors, not only on the student themselves, but on those around them, on the structure of the community itself, and on more long-term considerations of responsibility to the community and to the society in which we function. This shift in focus from identifying and expressing the individual's emotions and perceptions to concern with the impact of our behaviors on others reflects the course of social development as a growing awareness and accommodation of the needs of others and of our community that are essential to successful employment as a member of

a team. For this reason, SEL goals form an important measure of student readiness for the transition from school to employment and form the basis for meaningful transition plans that include job-based behavior skills training.

Please refer to the [Illinois Social Emotional Learning Standards](#).

COMMUNITY STRENGTHS

Illinois is a state rich in population and geographic diversity. We are home to one of the largest cities in the country while still boasting large swaths of rural farmlands and ancient forests. This state is a microcosm of the United States, and each region boasts unique strengths. Transition services for those students in rural Illinois have been more diffuse and informal than those available in urban centers, which have much higher concentrations of potential employers and service providers to create a far broader and more resilient support system than is available to their rural peers.

An example of this was the Local Area Network (LAN) program, which operated 1996-99. In this model, which focused on the needs of students with IEPs in southern Illinois, the case manager for a student was the team leader of a collaborative group of representatives of the school system, social services, law enforcement, the student and family, and any other entity, agency, or interest that might have some service, good, or insight to benefit the family, and a commitment to invest in the community. These small networks of wrap-around services met regularly to exchange information and resources, and for a time revolutionized transition planning in the region. This remains an example of what is possible given organizational tools for such efforts in rural Illinois.

Students in rural Illinois confront uniquely daunting challenges that may include poverty, lack of reliable transportation, lack of employment opportunities, lack of social services and mental health supports, violence, and constant disruption, in addition to the potential obstacles that their personal disabilities and trauma pose. In such circumstances, the creativity and cooperation of the school personnel in advocating for the student's interests become paramount. People involved in this process can include professional agencies, like school-based transition specialists, vocational rehabilitation counselors, driving instructors, and job coaches. Additionally, families and educators can utilize more informal systems to create transition-based opportunities for the student rather than leveraging formal resources like school-based professionals, administrators, paraprofessionals, and clerical staff. For example, they may use preexisting rural networks, such as churches or civic orga-

nizations, or make resources of longstanding relationships with others in the community, including those who may serve as gatekeepers for area resources. These informal networks, while often extraordinarily effective -- even lifesaving -- are subject to the blind spots and affections of those operating them; however, students from marginalized backgrounds may not be afforded the same degree of effort on the part of uncompensated advocates in the school system.

In more urban and suburban areas of Illinois, the creativity and cooperation of all transition stakeholders are likewise necessary for youth with disabilities to achieve the transition outcomes of which they are capable. Formal transition resources, like school-based transition specialists, vocational rehabilitation counselors, driving instructors, and job coaches, should be a part of the student's transition team, as well as informal resources like family and community-based resources. Transition planning in urban and suburban areas can include teaching students how to safely and effectively use public transportation to get to places they plan to live, work, and see friends. From a behavior standpoint, this should include how to behave on buses and trains, how to use ride-share apps safely, and skills to navigate large groups of people in public spaces.



NOTES FROM THE FIELD

Mr. Green's Insights

Extensive experience in the classroom is the closest approach to an experimental technique in education. It enables us to observe students from strongly similar backgrounds and similar challenges across settings in which the variables are those of investment in the kind of classroom infrastructure essential to ensuring successful transitions. It makes it possible to compare outcomes across multiple scenarios. We may have opportunities to witness the educational outcomes of numerous siblings, even of similar genetic and socio-economic backgrounds, and compare with some degree of inter-observer reliability the various impacts of changing education policy and allocation of resources on those outcomes. It is undoubtedly the closest we are ever likely to come as educators to be able to replicate the process.

I have had that opportunity. I have watched as the statistics take on form and identity in-classroom experience. I have watched as the oldest brother carried his burdens through classrooms equipped with social services, abundant staff with years of relevant expertise, and meaningful avenues for vocational training and opportunities to achieve a new life in a different environment.

I have watched the younger sibling struggle through classrooms with few support services, high turnover in staff and student populations, one or two inexperienced and overwhelmed aides, and an exhausted teacher. I have seen the youngest repeatedly suspended for the same behaviors we accommodated with more resources until they were given a “change of placement” that translated into a few hours of tutoring at home and vast amounts of unstructured time to lose one’s way in. The school no longer had the resources to provide the structure and behavioral support needed in the classroom.

And I have done this long enough to observe the impact of these kinds of variables, these moral choices about whether our children matter, across decades, across vocational and economic horizons, across marriages and parenting, and years lost to incarceration and broken, desperate people making life-or-death decisions for themselves and those around them.

BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION EXAMPLES

BEHAVIORAL MOMENTUM

Behavior momentum is a strategy that increases the likelihood of appropriate behavior by asking a student to do two or three things they typically want to do and then following up with a request for a behavior the student typically does not want to do. This strategy builds momentum toward appropriate behavior. By following a pattern of easy-easy-hard, easy-easy-hard, you increase the learner's motivation to engage because you are building in many opportunities for success.



BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION EXAMPLES

MODELING

Modeling involves demonstrating a specific behavior, skill, or action for others to observe and imitate. It is a powerful instructional strategy that can be used to teach new skills, reinforce desired behaviors, and even address undesirable behaviors through the presentation of alternative, more appropriate behaviors. Modeling serves as a visual and experiential learning method that allows learners to observe and learn from others. To address undesirable behavior, modeling should include the following considerations:

Clear Demonstration: The model should clearly and explicitly demonstrate the desired behavior or alternative response. This involves breaking down the behavior into smaller steps and highlighting the important components.

Reinforcement: After the demonstration, positive reinforcement, such as praise or a reward, can be provided to reinforce the learner's imitation and engagement in the appropriate behavior.

Consistency: Modeling should be consistent and repeated over time to reinforce the learning and promote behavior change. Multiple opportunities for modeling and practice can be provided to ensure learners have ample exposure to the desired behavior.

Examples of Modeling:

Demonstrating Alternative Behaviors: A teacher, staff member, family member or peer can model and demonstrate the desired behavior that serves as an alternative to the undesirable behavior. By showcasing the appropriate behavior, learners can observe and learn how to engage in a more desirable action. For example, if a student has difficulty with aggression during conflicts, a teacher can model and demonstrate effective problem-solving and conflict resolution strategies.

Providing Visual Examples: Modeling can be used to provide visual examples of desired behaviors in various situations. For instance, videos or recorded scenarios can be used to show how individuals handle challenging situations or manage their emotions in appropriate ways. These visual examples help learners understand and imitate the expected behavior.

Role-Playing: Role-playing allows learners to actively participate and practice the desired behavior. In this approach, one person can model the undesirable behavior, while another models the appropriate response or behavior. This interactive process provides learners with the opportunity to practice and apply the alternative behavior in a controlled setting.

Peer Modeling: Peers can also serve as models to address undesirable behavior. If a student is struggling with a specific behavior, a peer who demonstrates the desired behavior can be paired with them. The peer model can engage in the appropriate behavior, allowing the struggling student to observe and imitate their actions.

BEHAVIOR INTERVENTION EXAMPLES

SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING

A structured and systematic approach to teaching learners the skills necessary to effectively interact and communicate with others in various social situations. It is commonly used to help individuals, especially those with social difficulties or challenges, acquire and improve their social skills to enhance their relationships, navigate social interactions, and thrive in social environments. The goal of social skills training is to teach individuals a repertoire of social skills that can be generalized and applied across different settings and with different people. Social skills training can be conducted in individual or group settings, depending on the needs, skills targeted, and preferences of the participants. Group offers the added benefit of providing opportunities for individuals to practice social skills with peers and receive feedback from multiple perspectives.

Examples of Social Skills Training:

A student struggles with initiating and maintaining conversations with peers. The initial assessment identifies the student has difficulty starting conversations and keeping them going due to a lack of appropriate topic choices and difficulty with active listening. Skills targeted included selecting appropriate conversation topics, using open-ended questions, active listening, and responding appropriately. The student is taught how to choose appropriate conversation topics based on the context and interests of the other person. They learn how to ask open-ended questions to engage the other person in conversation. Active listening skills are also taught, such as maintaining eye contact, nodding, and providing appropriate verbal and non-verbal responses. The student participates in role-playing exercises where he practices initiating conversations, asking open-ended questions, and actively listening to his peers. The teacher provides feedback and guidance on their performance, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement. Positive reinforcement, such as praise or rewards, is provided when he demonstrates effective use of the social skills. The student is monitored to see if the newly learned social skills are used in various settings, such as during recess, lunchtime, or group activities. Additional opportunities are provided for him to practice the skills with different peers and receive ongoing support and reinforcement.

Non-examples of Social Skills Training:

In contrast, a non-example of social skills training would involve a situation where a child's social difficulties are ignored or dismissed without providing any structured instruction or support. Assessments are not used to identify the specific social skills deficits or areas of improvement for the student and in turn, the child is not taught any specific social skills or strategies to improve their social interactions.

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Expanding on Major Themes, Action Plan video:



RESOURCE LINKS

- » [ISBE STEP Secondary Transition](#)
- » [IDHS: Transition/STEP Program](#)
- » [STEP Program Brochure](#)
- » [ISBE Local Parent Advocates](#)
- » [Illinois Autism Training and Technical Assistance Program](#)
- » [Illinois Center for Transition and Work \(ICTW\)](#)
- » [National Technical Assistance Center on Transition](#)

This is not an endorsement nor an exhaustive list of possible resources. Please consult with your individual district, Regional Office of Education, and the Illinois State Board of Education for additional resources. [Illinois State Board of Education](#)

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ENDNOTES

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