

Transition to Adulthood in Maryland

In Maryland, students can receive special-education services until age twenty-one, but the process of planning for transition starts long before that. Here are five things to do to help you prepare for your child's transition to adulthood in Maryland and make sure there's something waiting after school is done.

1. Expect transition planning to be a part of your child's IEP by his or her fourteenth birthday if not before. To start thinking about what your child will need to get ready for life after school, read the Transition Planning Guide downloadable from the Maryland State Department of Education site, and visit the Maryland Transitioning Youth site and the transition section of the Maryland Learning Links site. Your child should be involved in IEP meetings at this point if at all possible, even if it's a brief appearance to talk about work or post-high-school educational goals.
2. Prepare for the transfer of rights to your child at age 18, the age of majority in Maryland. For more on this transfer, read "Parental Rights: Maryland Procedural Safeguards Notice" (page 15) and "Resource Information on the Transfer of Rights at the Age of Majority," both downloadable from the Maryland State Department of Education site. If your child will need you to continue to be in charge of his or her educational program, you will need to consult with a lawyer to look into guardianship or power of attorney. Your school district may continue to include you and consult with you, depending on how your relationship has been, but legally they only have to get your child's approval from this point on unless you have created a legal standing for yourself.
3. Work with your child's IEP team and the school's transition coordinator to determine whether your student should graduate with his or her age peers or stay in school additional years or all the way until eligibility ends at age 21. Be sure to ask what sorts of work programs are available, what your child would be doing in the classroom with those extra years, and what your child's options will be after leaving school.
4. Investigate state organizations that can help your child transition to work and independent living when school is over. These may include the Department of Disabilities, the Department of Human Resources, the Developmental Disabilities Administration, and other agencies listed on the Maryland Transitioning Youth site. If your student will be going on to college, the Transition to College site offers "information and resources on college options for students with intellectual disabilities" in Maryland.
5. Contact The Parents' Place of Maryland, a parent advocacy organization that offers support and services for families of children with special needs, for advice on helping your child through this transition.