

A note to school Administrators,
Special Education Directors & Team members

Join us March 19th and let us help you consider
one way to think about the Future

The entitlement of public education ends for students with special needs when they meet the graduation requirements or when they turn twenty-two years of age. Preparing for the inevitability of one of those two options weighs heavily on the minds of parents if they believe that their son or daughter will need supports after public education. With the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2007, the need to plan for this transition was emphasized along with a recent court case, in Massachusetts, that interpreted a set of issues that should, in some cases, be part of the analysis by the Individual Education Program (IEP) team.

The example that follows is not for everyone. However, it might be for individuals not likely to continue an education after high school or who may not yet be ready to enter the workforce directly. For those individuals who are Medicaid eligible and will need on going support in their adulthood this example may encourage creative ways of developing supports for individuals with severe disabilities. The example may also provide a bridge from the school-based supports to community based supports when services are needed into adulthood.

It was with this backdrop that the Auburn Public Schools (APS) and the parents of an almost twenty-year-old young man began to examine what the most likely supports needed were, approximately two years prior to the end of the entitlement to create a solution to the dilemma of what happens when the entitlement ends. With APS and the IEP process fully engaged i.e. parents to guide supports with the goal of both fulfilling the requirement of providing a “free and appropriate public education” (FAPE) and providing a smooth transition into on going services we began to identify the elements needed to prepare for support after the end of public education.

The parents and school district identified two agencies best known for providing adult services, contacted the local office of the Department of Developmental Disabilities’ (DDS) and invited all parties to a preliminary meeting to discuss defining a new set of supports for the young man and his family. Through a series of four or five meetings facilitated by Auburn Public Schools, a plan evolved that included one agency providing a “shared living” set of supports and the other agency providing educational, habilitative and vocational services. The four parties---i.e. the parents, Auburn Public Schools, Horace Mann Educational Associates(HMEA) and Nonotuck Resource Associates, continued to share information, review records and get to know the young man through visits and observations of his then current program. In addition, all parties reviewed an independent evaluation that had been conducted as part of the preparation for developing a new plan and services.

The array of supports included placement in at a Day Hab facility for part of his day with transportation provided by Medicaid and a partial education and vocational program funded by the Auburn Public Schools. In addition, the shared living arrangement created was funded by the Auburn Public School. Two separate budgets were negotiated and reflected in contracts one with each agency. It was agreed that the current IEP would be implemented in the new settings for 30-60 days and then a new IEP would be created that reflected any changes in the student's needs and changes in expectations that usually exist in more of an adult setting.

Once plans were developed, contracts negotiated and signed the parents "withdrew" approval of the current placement and the residential school was notified with approximately 30 days notice of the impending move. All parties agreed to work cooperatively through this transition.

Months before all this came to furious the Auburn Public Schools contacted the Department of Elementary and Secondary (DESE) to outline what was being planned for the Auburn students and to anticipate how to obtain approval for what had been called "sole source of care approval" that was now referred to as "authorization for pricing". The DESE staff was helpful and guided the Auburn Public Schools through the process that led to full approval by both DESE and the Operational Services Division whose approval was also needed.

Five months after the first planning meeting (May 2012) to define a new set of supports designed to bridge the transition from public education into adult services the young man in question moved (October 2012) and began his new life.

Over the next few months adjustments in behavioral plans, scheduling of visits and community options were explored and recorded in a new IEP. Regular communication systems were established using the Internet and face-to-face meetings continued on a regular basis to continue the progress made to improve the quality of life for the student.

Please join us for a presentation and panel discussion on Tuesday, March 19 at 7:00pm for "22 at 20: A non-traditional Transition Story" at Auburn High School auditorium. For more information or to register for this free evening, email cherylrchan@gmail.com. Please share this information with your colleagues; all are welcome.