

# A Family Guide to Transition Services in Massachusetts



Published by the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission  
in collaboration with the Federation for Children with Special Needs



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Dear Parent,

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission, in partnership with the Federation for Children with Special Needs, is pleased to provide this Family Guide to Transition Services in Massachusetts to assist you in understanding the transition planning process for students with disabilities. This document was prepared as a result of a federal demonstration grant from the U.S. Department of Education: **“Transition Works: Innovative Strategies for Transitioning Youth with Disabilities from School to Work.”** The goal of this grant has been to improve post-school outcomes for high school students with disabilities in the areas of employment, post-secondary education, and independent living as they transition from school to work and adult life. MRC recognizes the critical importance of families in helping students prepare for adult life, and hopes that the information in this Guide will help you get started with the transition process.

The Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission is a state agency committed to providing comprehensive services to people with disabilities that will maximize their quality of life and economic self-sufficiency in the community. MRC has worked for many years in close collaboration with the Federation, which is a leader in Massachusetts and in the nation in empowering families to participate in the development of quality educational programs for their children that will enable them to become independent adults. Both MRC and the Federation share a mutual commitment to improving the post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. We believe it is essential that transition planning begin early while students are still in school, and that it needs to be a collaborative process with the involvement of the student, family, school staff and state and community partners.

We hope this Guide will give you information about programs and services that will assist your son or daughter and answer some of your basic questions regarding transition and how the transition process works in Massachusetts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles Carr".

Charles Carr  
Commissioner

Dear Friends,

We are grateful for the opportunity to work with MRC to produce this Family Guide to Transition Services, designed to assist both families and professionals. A few years ago, we met with Commissioner Carr of the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission to talk about ways that we might work cooperatively to improve the transition planning process from school to work and independent adult living for students with disabilities in Massachusetts. This guide is the result of that visionary discussion.



FEDERATION FOR CHILDREN  
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004) states that a primary purpose of the education guaranteed to students with disabilities is to “prepare them for employment and independent living” (IDEA’04 Final Regulations, Sec. 300.1(a)). Federal and state initiatives to improve outcomes of youth with disabilities have resulted in significant improvements in graduation rates, access to quality education, and enrollment in postsecondary education and employment over the past decades. Certainly, some youth with disabilities have attained successful careers. Yet, these successes are not yet the norm.

Far too many youth with disabilities continue to grapple with a stubborn dilemma: in spite of supportive legislation, state and federally funded services that offer assistance to youth in transition (e.g., the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), the Rehabilitation Act), as well as a growing body of identified effective practices, these youth continue to experience high unemployment as well as insufficient opportunities to obtain competitive employment with the potential of career growth. These Massachusetts youth face significant challenges as they prepare for their transition to adult life during the school years. Successful transition requires a high level of knowledge, advocacy skills and the ability to endure bureaucratic obstacles.

Since its founding (1974), the Federation has supported and trained parents of children with special needs to advocate for their children to improve their educational, health and social outcomes. The authors of this guide are family members of young adults with special needs who recently were engaged in the transition from school based services to adult supports.

This Guide builds on the Federation’s long history of advocacy for transition age youth and assistance to their families to provide families with a clear, concise and easy-to-follow tool for the transition from school to work and adult life for their children with disabilities and offer resources and links to agencies and community organizations that can be of help in this process.

We wish each and every family of a student with disabilities great success in this journey.

Richard J. Robison  
Executive Director

# A Family Guide to Transition Services in Massachusetts

## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

(And Frequently Asked Questions)

### **Introduction 8**

- What is Transition?
- What are Transition Services?
- Who is eligible for Transition Services?

### **Transition Laws and Guiding Principles 10**

- What does IDEA 2004 say about Transition?
- What does the Rehabilitation Act say about Transition?
- What is Chapter 71B, the MA Special Education Law?
- What is Chapter 688, the MA Transition Planning Law?

### **Parent and Student Participation 12**

- What is the Parent's Role in Transition Planning?
- What is the Student's Role in Transition Planning?
- What is the Student's Vision for the Future?

### **Transition Planning in High School 16**

- How and when do I begin Transition Planning with my son or daughter?
- What is the Transition Planning Form (TPF)?
- How does the IEP Address the Student's Transition Needs?
- What are Post-Secondary Goals?

### **Transition Assessment 19**

- What are Transition Assessments?
- What are formal and informal assessments?
- How are Transition Assessments documented in the IEP?

## **Chapter 688 Transition Planning Process 25**

- Who is eligible for Chapter 688?
- What is the Chapter 688 Referral process?
- What is the Individual Transition Plan (ITP)?

## **Graduation-Related Issues 27**

- Graduation requirements
- State Standard Assessment
- Age of Majority
- Guardianship

## **Post-School Options 29**

- Post-secondary education
- Employment
- Independent Living

## **Adult Services 32**

- What is the difference between Entitlement to services and Adult Eligibility for services?
- What are the state agencies that can provide services for students with disabilities after they leave school?
- What other community-based services are available?

## **Glossary 36**

## **Transition Resources 39**

*DISCLAIMER: The information in this guide is not legal advice. Every individual's situation is unique, and the law is always evolving. To see if laws cited here are still current at the time that you are reading this guide, you may check with an advocacy organization, such as the Federation for Children with Special Needs, the Disability Law Center, or Massachusetts Advocates for Children. For legal advice, you should speak to an attorney.*



## A Family Guide to Transition Services in Massachusetts

### Introduction

Massachusetts students with disabilities who receive special education services are entitled under federal and state laws to receive appropriate transition services to support their movement beyond school, beginning at age 14.

Massachusetts has a long tradition of providing transition planning for students with the most significant disabilities to access appropriate adult services as needed under Massachusetts Chapter 688 (1984). In addition, IDEA, the federal special education legislation, and Chapter 71B, the Massachusetts special education law, contain expanded responsibilities for providing for the transition of all children with disabilities that are eligible for special education. This Family Guide to Transition Services in Massachusetts is intended to assist parents, students, and the professionals who serve them to better understand these requirements and improve their access to appropriate transition services.





## **What is Transition?**

Transition is the passage of a student receiving special education services from high school to adult life as they exit from high school because the student has either graduated from high school with a high school diploma or has turned 22 years of age, the age when a school district is no longer required to provide special education services.

According to Madeline Will, parent of an adult son with a disability and former Assistant Secretary, US Department of Education/Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services...

*“Transition is a bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and the opportunities and risks of adult life. Any bridge requires both a solid span and secure foundation at either end. The transition from school to work and adult life requires sound preparation in the secondary school, adequate support at the point of school leaving, and secure opportunities and services, if needed, in adult situations.”*

## **What are Transition Services?**

Transition services are the services school districts must provide to transition-age students in special education to prepare them for post-secondary education, employment, and independent living. The necessary transition services vary from student to student according to their own unique needs.

## **Who is eligible for Transition Services?**

In Massachusetts students between the ages of 14 and 22 who receive special education services and have Individualized Education Programs (are on an IEP) are eligible for transition services.

## Transition Laws and Guiding Principles

### What does IDEA 2004 say about Transition?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines Transition Services as “a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within a results-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including:

- Postsecondary education
- Vocational training
- Integrated employment (including supported employment)
- Continuing and adult education
- Adult services
- Independent Living
- Community participation

These activities are based on the student’s needs, taking into account the student’s strengths, preferences, interests, and vision for adult life.

### What does the Rehabilitation Act say about Transition?

The federal Rehabilitation Act has a similar definition of transition services using an outcome-oriented approach with a focus on career development, competitive employment in the integrated labor market, and self-sufficiency of the individual. The coordinated set of activities “shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post school adult living objectives, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.”

## **What is Chapter 71B, the Massachusetts Special Education Law?**

Chapter 71B is the Massachusetts Special Education Law that, together with IDEA, provides children with disabilities a free and appropriate public education that meets their unique needs. For students eligible for special education an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is developed by an evaluation team that includes the parents/guardian, the student (beginning at age 14), school personnel, and may also include other agencies or individuals invited by the parent or school district. For transition-age students this would include representatives of any involved adult agencies given the consent of the parent/guardian or student.

## **What is Chapter 688, the Massachusetts Transition Planning Law?**

Chapter 688 is the Massachusetts Transition Planning Law enacted in 1984 to address the transition planning needs of students with significant disabilities who will be in need of adult services at the time of high school graduation or turning 22. These students are unable to work in competitive employment without supports for more than 20 hours/week at the time they leave school. The law provides a two-year planning process for eligible students before the student leaves school. The school district is responsible for referring the student to the appropriate adult agency, and the adult agency is responsible for developing an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) for the student. However, this plan is not a guarantee of adult services; services listed on the ITP may be contingent upon agency eligibility, program availability, and funding.



## Parent and Student Participation

### What is the Parent's Role in Transition Planning?

Parents have a key role in preparing their son or daughter for the transition from school to work and adult life. Hopefully, the process has already started when the student was in elementary and middle school, and the student has begun to learn about different jobs and participate in community and school activities. Parents need to provide increasing opportunities to develop the skills needed to become as independent as possible as an adult in areas such as performing household chores, taking care of hygiene needs, making choices, and advocating for themselves and their own needs.

In Massachusetts transition planning starts at age 14 (age 16 under federal law). The best advice for parents beginning this process is to **START EARLY!** There is a lot of information available about the transition process and your rights under special education laws as well as about post-school options and adult agencies. It can seem really overwhelming, especially at the beginning. But the good news is that there



is help and support available to you—from your local school district, from state agencies, from community and family organizations like the Federation for Children with Special Needs, and from other families who have been through this process with their children. An example of an activity that can help to educate parents about available transition resources is the “Planning A Life” Transition Workshop offered by the Federation at various locations across the state during the school year.

Parents have so much information to share about their child’s strengths, needs, interests, and dreams. This is important information to discuss at annual IEP meetings and to use in designing appropriate transition services. The parent has always been an essential partner with the school district throughout the entire special education process, and this is especially true during the transition planning process. The parent’s most important role in the transition process is to ensure that the student’s voice is heard, and that all team members listen and support him/her in developing the skills he/she needs to live as independent and meaningful an adult life as possible.

### **What is the Student’s Role in Transition Planning?**

Students are at the center of the transition planning process, and need to be encouraged and supported to take an active role in this process. This can be done through activities such as:

- Participating, or even leading, their annual IEP meeting
- Developing their own Vision Statement to share at the IEP meeting
- Identifying career options that match their interests and skills
- Taking courses in school to prepare them for postsecondary goals

Students need to begin to explore post-school options while still in school. This may include: developing a portfolio of interests and experiences; visiting college programs; job-shadowing at a work-site; or contacting an adult agency to apply for services.



One of the most helpful activities that students can pursue while still in school is to get work experience during high school—a summer job, an internship, volunteering at a local community organization. Research has shown that students who have work experience during high school are more likely to get and keep a job after high school, and they will earn more money after they leave school. This is where networking with family, friends, neighbors, teachers, and local businesses can help to locate job possibilities in the community. The student will have the opportunity to learn work habits and new skills as well as develop self-confidence and friends in the workplace.

**Self-advocacy skills need to be taught and practiced at home, in school, and in the community as early as possible so that students have the opportunity to problem-solve, make choices, and advocate for themselves.** This will be of enormous help when it is time for them to find a job or go to college or apply for adult services. An example of a program that teaches self-advocacy skills—and is a lot of fun for participants!—is the Youth Leadership Forum (YLF) for high school juniors





and seniors with disabilities in Massachusetts. YLF is a 3-day experience currently held in the summer at Bridgewater State University. Students have the opportunity to stay on a college campus, learn from peer mentors about self-determination and self-advocacy skills, and practice these skills with each other and adults from the disability community.

### **What is the Student's Vision for the Future?**

The student's vision of his/her future drives the transition planning process. The vision statement is part of the IEP and is also included in the Transition Planning Form (TPF). This statement reflects the student's strengths, preferences, interests, future plans, and long-term goals. The long-term goals then become part of the student's IEP. These postsecondary goals should include the student's future plans in three outcome areas: Education/training, Employment, and Independent Living.

Because it is sometimes difficult for students to determine what they want to do "when they grow up," a good starting point can be a discussion about their interests, strengths, and dreams. At this stage age-appropriate transition assessments can be helpful to assist in developing measurable postsecondary goals. For example, there may be a need to do career exploration through Career Interest Inventories before it is possible for a student to identify possible jobs that he or she may be interested in. It may also be helpful to use a process called Person-Centered Planning to help develop the Student's Vision. With the help of a facilitator, this process gives the student an opportunity to share his/her hopes and dreams for the future with the important people in his/her life. They all work together to develop an Action Plan to help move the student toward his/her vision.



## Transition Planning in High School

### How and when do I begin Transition Planning with my son or daughter?

In 2008 Massachusetts passed a state law (Chapter 205 of the Acts of 2008) requiring school districts to initiate special education transition planning and transition services at age 14, rather than at age 16 as required by federal law (IDEA 2004). Work with your school team to ensure that transition planning begins with the IEP when the student turns 14. Every school year until he/she graduates or turns 22, there needs to be a thoughtful and comprehensive transition planning discussion either at the IEP meeting or in conjunction with it. This transition discussion must be documented annually on a form called the Transition Planning Form (TPF).

When the student turns 14, the school district will begin to invite him/her to the Team meeting. It is important to discuss with the student how he/she wants to participate in the transition planning process and make these planning meetings meaningful. It is helpful to prepare the student for the meeting by discussing the purpose of the meeting and



determining the student's role in the meeting. For some students it is also helpful to have a pre-meeting with a member of the team to prepare a Vision Statement about his/her interests and goals for the IEP meeting.

### **What is the Transition Planning Form (TPF)?**

The Transition Planning Form is a state mandated form to be used starting when the student turns 14. It is separate from the IEP, and is updated on an annual basis, usually when the IEP is reviewed. The TPF documents the transition planning discussion and includes the following sections:

- **Postsecondary Vision** (corresponds to the vision statement in the IEP) reflecting the student's strengths, preferences and interests, and desired outcomes for postsecondary education/training, employment, and adult living.
- **Disability-related Needs** documenting the skills that require IEP goals and/or related services. This section identifies the skills that students need to develop or improve in order to achieve their postsecondary goals and that require special education and/or related services. IEP goals/objectives need to be developed for these skill areas (for example, the student may need to develop skills in the area of travel training or resume writing).
- **Action Plan** outlining how the student will develop self determination skills and be prepared both academically and functionally to transition to post-school activities in order to achieve his/her postsecondary vision. Specific areas to be addressed in the Action Plan include: Instructional needs (specific courses or a course of study in high school to enable the student to reach postsecondary goals); Employment (providing work opportunities and skill development in activities such as resume writing, interviewing, and other "soft skills"); and Community Experiences/Post-School Adult Living. The role and actions of the involved school personnel, family members, adult service providers, and others in the community who can help the student develop the necessary skills should be listed.

## **How does the IEP Address the Student's Transition Needs?**

In order for transition services to be provided by the local school district, they must be documented in the student's IEP and accepted by the parent/guardian or student (if 18 or older). The Transition Planning Form can help to identify the transition services needed by the student, specifically using the student's postsecondary goals and the student's disability-related needs. There needs to be a clear link between the student's IEP annual goals and his/her postsecondary goals. The TPF should document the student's disability-related skills that require IEP goals and/or related services.

It is important to remember that the IEP is a legal document guaranteeing services to the student. The TPF is not; it is an organizational tool to ensure that a comprehensive discussion about transition planning occurs on an annual basis with input from the student, parents, and IEP team. This discussion may generate IEP goals/objectives based on the student's disability-related needs and postsecondary goals that should be incorporated into the student's IEP. Transition planning is an ongoing process throughout the high school years, and all IEP goals/objectives should be reviewed and updated or changed on an annual basis.

## **What are Postsecondary Goals?**

Postsecondary goals are measurable goals that focus on three specific areas: 1) Postsecondary Education and/or training (where and how is the student going to continue to learn new skills after graduation?); 2) Employment (where is the student going to work or engage in productive activities after graduation?); and, 3) Independent Living (where is the student going to live and how is he/she going to access adult services and participate in community activities?).

These are long-term goals that will be achieved by the student after leaving high school. They need to be appropriate to the student's needs, and be based on age-appropriate transition assessment. The IEP team must be able to measure progress toward these goals. They are part of a student's IEP beginning at age 14 and need to be reviewed annually until the student graduates or turns 22.

## Transition Assessment

### What are Transition Assessments?

The Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) defines transition assessment as “the process of collecting data on the individual’s needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future working, educational, living, and personal and social environments. Assessment data serve as the common thread in the transition process and form the basis for defining goals and services to be included in the Individualized Education Program (IEP).”

The results of age-appropriate transition assessments provide the student, parents, and other members of the IEP team with information about how the student is currently functioning and form the basis for the development of measurable postsecondary goals and the transition services needed to help the student achieve these goals.

Transition assessments should be individualized based on the student’s strengths, preferences, interests, needs, and desired post-school outcomes. It is often helpful to use multiple



assessments rather than a single test to ensure that the assessment chosen supports the student’s learning style. Like other assessments, transition assessments may be requested verbally or in writing by the parent/guardian to the school district. This assessment process should be ongoing during the high school years.

### **What are formal and informal assessments?**

Transition assessments can be formal or informal. Formal assessments involve standardized testing measuring specific skills. Some examples of formal assessments include:

- Achievement tests—measuring academic skills
- Aptitude tests—measuring specific abilities in skill areas (for example, mechanical ability)
- Psychological testing—intelligence tests to assess cognitive performance
- Career interest inventories
- Adaptive behavior and independent living skills evaluation

In addition to formal assessment through standardized testing, it is often useful to identify individual strengths and needs through informal assessment. Some examples of informal assessments include:

- Teacher and/or parent observation
- Self evaluation
- Situational assessments of work skills on job sites
- Portfolio of student’s work

### **How are Transition Assessments documented in the IEP?**

Results of transition assessments should be documented in the IEP and reviewed with the student and parents. The information learned from transition assessments can assist in the ongoing development of the student’s transition goals in the IEP, and help to define his/her “next steps” in the transition planning process. Assessment results can provide direction to the student and his/her team, support changes in goals and objectives, and introduce options that the student had not yet considered.





# Massachusetts

## Age 14

Conduct age appropriate transition assessment related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills to develop measureable postsecondary goals.

Provide students the opportunity to learn self determination skills.

Conduct person-centered planning with student, family, and friends.

Student and parent are invited to IEP meeting. If student attends, prepare student to participate. If student does not attend, ensure that student's interests are known.

Use transition assessment to develop the Transition Planning Form (TPF) required by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education ([www.doe.mass.edu/sped/links/transition.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/links/transition.html)) to:

- Develop post-secondary vision based on student needs, preferences, and interests.
- Identify disability related needs around individual's goals and preferences.
- Develop action plan based on desired outcomes in adult living, postsecondary education, and employment.

Integrate transition needs and activities into IEP goals, objectives/benchmarks, and services if appropriate for the student.

Student/parent provide written consent to invite outside agencies to IEP meeting.

Reconvene IEP team if an agency contacted by LEA is unable to meet the transition objectives for the student in the IEP. Identify alternate strategies to meet transition needs.

## Age 15 and 16

Take into account that all IEPs subsequent to the one developed when the student is 14 years old must reflect the student's needs to address issues related to his/her disability in the area of transition.

Update the transition assessment based on the youth's current preferences and needs.

Use the transition assessment and input from the team to update the TPF.

Submit a Chapter 688 referral, if the student is likely to require services from an adult service agency. The referral must be made at least two years before the student is expected to graduate from school or turn 22 years of age.

Apply all transition requirements for age 14 to ages 15 & 16.

Hart, D., Nemeth Cohen, R. Hurley, N., & Dragoumanos, M. (2012). Massachusetts transition timeline. [Chart]. Boston, MA: University of Massachusetts Boston, Institute for Community Inclusion.

# Transition Timeline

## Age 17

Give notice to the student and parent regarding the Transfer of Parental Rights the year before the student reaches the age of majority: age 18.

Take into account that all IEPs subsequent to the one developed when the student is 14 years old must reflect the student's needs to address issues related to his/her disability in the area of transition.

Update transition assessment including the student centered plan based on the youth's current preferences and needs.

Use the current transition assessment and input from the team to update the TPF.

Submit a Chapter 688 referral, if the student is likely to require services from an adult service agency. The referral must be made at least two years before the student is expected to graduate from school or turn 22 years of age.

Apply all transition requirements for age 14 to ages 15 & 16.

## Age 18

Confirm that a Transfer of parental rights has occurred, or a formal Guardianship process has been completed.

Apply all transition requirements for ages 14 through 17 to age 18. Acknowledge that the student now has the legal authority to act as an independent adult (unless a formal Guardianship process has been completed).

Promote student rights in the special education process and in relation to transition requirements. Continue until:

- The student is determined to be no longer eligible for special education,

or-

- The student graduates from school with a regular high school diploma or turns 22, whichever occurs first.

Provide the student with a summary of the student's academic achievement and functional performance, which includes recommendations on how to assist the student in meeting her/his desired postsecondary outcomes.







## Chapter 688 Transition Planning Process

### Who is eligible for Chapter 688 transition planning?

To be eligible for Chapter 688 a student must meet the following criteria: 1) Be receiving special education services paid for by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; 2) Need continuing adult services at the time of high school graduation/turning 22 due to severity of disability; and 3) Be unable to work competitively without supports for more than 20 hours/week at the time of leaving school. A student is automatically eligible for Chapter 688 if he/she is receiving SSI or SSDI, or if he/she is registered with the Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB).

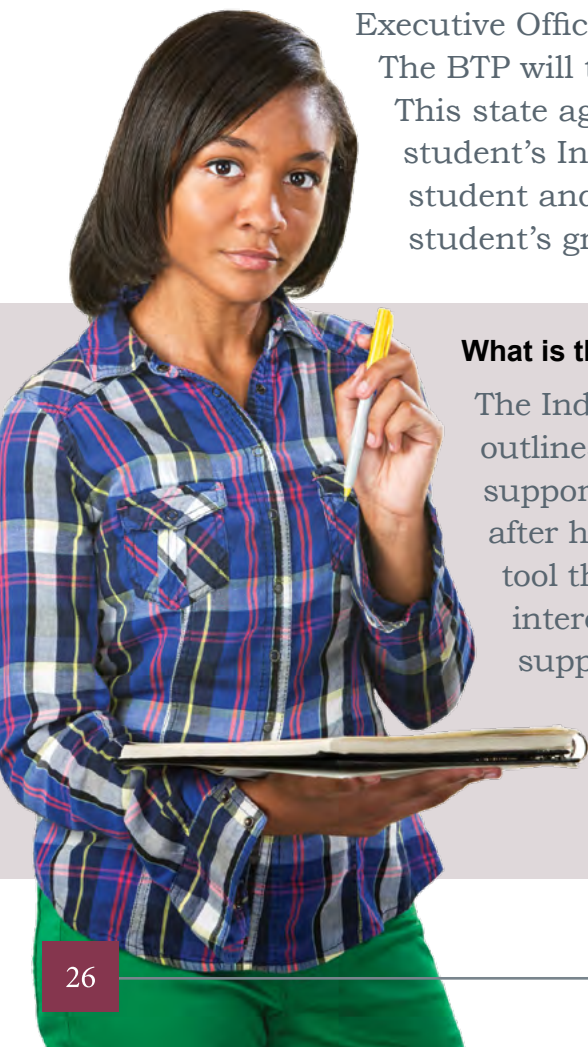
### What is the Chapter 688 Referral process?

Only the student's local school district can make a Chapter 688 referral. It is typically made by the Special Education Director or his/her designee, who may be a special education teacher or transition coordinator, to the appropriate state



agency. The 688 referral must be made while the student is still in school. It is strongly recommended that the 688 referral be made at least two years prior to high school graduation or turning 22 in order to provide adequate planning for adult services, including applying for adult agency eligibility, if necessary. The 688 referral form requires the signature of the student (if 18 or older) or the parent/guardian before it is submitted to the state agency.

The need for a Chapter 688 referral is usually discussed at the student's IEP meeting. Based on the student's identified needs, the local school district will send the 688 Referral to the appropriate state agency that can best meet those needs, referred to as the Transitional Agency. If the school district cannot identify an appropriate agency, the 688 referral is sent to the Bureau of Transitional Planning (BTP) at the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EHS). The BTP will then designate a Transitional Agency. This state agency is responsible for developing the student's Individual Transition Plan (ITP) with the student and/or parent/guardian prior to the student's graduation/turning 22.



### **What is the Individual Transition Plan?**

The Individual Transition Plan (ITP) is a plan that outlines the day/vocational, residential, and support services that the student will require after he/she leaves school. The ITP is a planning tool that identifies the post-school goals, interests, and needs of the student and the supports necessary to achieve these goals. It is not an entitlement to services. Services and supports listed on the ITP are contingent upon funding, agency eligibility, and program availability.



## Graduation-Related Issues

### Graduation Requirements in Massachusetts

High school graduation is an important milestone in the life of every student. To receive a high school diploma in Massachusetts, a student must meet the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) Competency Determination standard, in addition to meeting all local graduation requirements. For students receiving special education services it is important to note that entitlement to special education services and transition services will end when the student receives his/her high school diploma.

### State Standard Assessment for Graduation

Currently the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) is the state's student testing program. Future tests may be known by a different name because of the implementation of the Common Core Curriculum. Tests are given at different grade levels to measure performance based on the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Science and Technology/Engineering. All students in Massachusetts receiving public education, including students with disabilities must participate in state assessment, and pass the Competency Determination in grade 10.



As part of the IEP process, the team determines how the student receiving special education services will participate in MCAS testing. There are several options available: 1) taking the standard MCAS tests without accommodations; 2) taking the standard MCAS tests with accommodations (usually the same accommodations necessary for the student's classroom instruction); or 3) an MCAS Alternative Assessment (a portfolio of the student's work demonstrating his/her academic knowledge and skills). If students don't earn the necessary scores to achieve the Competency Determination, they can retake the test or request an appeal.

### **Age of Majority**

Under Massachusetts law 18 years of age is the "age of majority." Unless there has been court action giving guardianship to another adult, at 18 years of age students are considered adults legally competent to make their own decisions, regardless of the severity of their disability. Parents and students must be notified by the school district about this transfer of rights to the student and the educational impact on the student and the parents at least one year before the student turns 18. If the student is not ready to take on full decision-making responsibility when he/she turns 18, there are other options such as shared decision-making that can be explored.

### **Guardianship**

Guardianship is a legal process in which the court appoints a person or agency to make decisions on behalf of another person and is the most restrictive form of legal protection for an individual. Only individuals with mental health, intellectual, or medical disabilities so severe that they cannot make informed decisions for themselves would meet the criteria for guardianship. The process begins with a petition to the court to create a guardianship. It is recommended that an attorney with expertise in this area be consulted if there is a need for guardianship to explain the various guardianship options. Advocacy organizations also offer specific trainings on this topic.

## Post School Options

As students begin to plan for the future, they need to explore post-school options in the areas of postsecondary education, employment, and adult living while they are still in school. Transition planning in high school should include preparation in all three areas:

### Postsecondary Education

Students with disabilities who are interested in postsecondary education and training may want to apply to 4 year or 2 year college programs or pursue specialized training at a vocational or technical school. Like all students, they will need to consult with their guidance counselor, visit college programs, learn about financial aid options, register for SAT's, and fill out college applications during high school. It will also be important for students and their parents to understand the important legal and programmatic differences between high school and college. There is no IEP/ special education in college! While laws such as the



Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act provide access with accommodations, students must meet admission criteria defined as “otherwise qualified.” These are civil rights protections, not entitlements to services. Students must self-identify if they want reasonable accommodations provided, and they must request services such as a note-taker from the Disability Services office at the college. They will need to provide appropriate documentation of their disability as defined by the college. The student is an adult expected to make his/her own decisions and to self-advocate when he/she moves on to college. Learning these skills is essential in the transition planning process.

## **Employment**

After leaving high school, some students may choose to begin working right away. They have, hopefully, been provided with career exploration activities during high school to help them match their interests and skills with an appropriate job match. A comprehensive vocational assessment may be necessary to assess the student’s current vocational skills and need for accommodations such as assistive technology. If individuals





have a physical, mental, emotional, or learning disability that interferes with their ability to work, they may be eligible for vocational rehabilitation (VR) services from the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC). If eligible for VR services, the student may receive vocational counseling, evaluation, job placement, and/or job coaching to help him/her become competitively employed. Another area to explore is how working will impact benefits from the Social Security Administration such as SSI or SSDI and health insurance from Medicaid/Mass Health and Medicare. It may be helpful to contact a benefits planning counselor at Social Security to obtain individualized help with these questions.

### **Independent Living**

A part of the transition planning process for students is thinking about where they want to live after they leave school, and what residential supports, if any, they will need in order to live in their own apartment or in a supported living situation. The student needs to learn the skills necessary to live as independently as possible. Independent living skills include skills such as money management and paying bills; preparing meals; doing laundry; managing medications and health care; and using public transportation.



## Adult Services

### **What is the difference between Entitlement to special education services and Adult Eligibility for services?**

When students receiving special education services in Massachusetts graduate from high school and/or turn 22 (whichever comes first), their entitlement to special education ends. They may be eligible for adult services if they meet the eligibility criteria for adult agencies and programs. It is important to understand the difference between entitlement to special education services and eligibility for adult services. Entitlement is a guarantee of access to services to everyone who qualifies. Under state and federal law special education services are an entitlement. This entitlement to special education services in Massachusetts terminates when a student graduates with a high school diploma or turns 22, whichever comes first.





Adult eligibility for services is **not** an entitlement so students who are eligible for services from an adult agency are not guaranteed access to services. Unlike special education, human services for adults with disabilities are contingent upon program availability and funding, and there may be waiting lists for services.

That is why it is important to start the application process for agency eligibility early. (Note: if your child has been receiving children’s services from an agency such as DDS or DMH, you will need to re-apply because the criteria for adult services can be different from the criteria for children’s services.) It is strongly recommended that the eligibility process begin two years prior to the projected date of high school graduation or turning 22 to allow for sufficient planning and budgeting by the adult agency. Contact the appropriate agency if you have questions about their eligibility process.

Please note that for some students—those with significant disabilities who require adult services and meet the Chapter 688 eligibility criteria—the local school district is responsible for referring the student to the appropriate adult agency two years prior to high school graduation or turning 22.

Students with disabilities and their parents can also contact these state agencies directly and apply for services (outside of the Chapter 688 referral process). It may be helpful to learn more about an agency’s programs and services by calling or visiting the local office and discussing your child’s future needs.



## What are the State Agencies that can provide services to students with disabilities after they leave high school?

Here are the links to the Agency Home pages:

### **Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services (DDS)**

[www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/department/dds](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/department/dds)

### **Massachusetts Department of Mental Health (DMH)**

[www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/department/dmh](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/department/dmh)

### **Massachusetts Department of Public Health (DPH)**

[www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/department/dph](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/department/dph)

### **Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC)**

[www.mass.gov/eohhs/department/mrc/](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/department/mrc/)

### **Massachusetts Commission for the Blind (MCB)**

[www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/department/mcb](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/department/mcb)

### **Massachusetts Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (MCDHH)**

[www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/department/mcdhh](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/gov/department/mcdhh)

### **Massachusetts Office on Disability**

[www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services](http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/consumer/disability-services)

### **Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE)**

[www.mass.gov/DESE](http://www.mass.gov/DESE)

On each agency's website there is information about the programs and services offered by the agency and the eligibility process in order to obtain services. Most state agencies have local Area Offices statewide so you can contact your local Area Office for more information.

## What other community-based services are available?

There are many community-based services available that can provide information, resources, and services for transition-age students. Here are a few examples:

### **One Stop Career Centers** (Career One Stop Service Locator: [www.servicelocator.org](http://www.servicelocator.org))

These centers provide assistance to anyone seeking employment and offer job search workshops, local job postings, and career counseling. They also offer job fairs with local employers and are a good resource for job information.

### **Independent Living Centers** ([www.masilc.org](http://www.masilc.org))

ILC's offer a range of services to people with disabilities including peer mentoring, skills training, information and referral, and advocacy. Young adults with disabilities can get help with housing, employment, transportation, equipment, and other transition-related issues.



## GLOSSARY OF TRANSITION TERMS

### **Age of Majority:**

Age at which student, regardless of severity of disability, is considered to be an adult competent to make his/her own decisions; in MA this age is 18. Unless there is a court-appointed guardian or the student chooses to share decision-making with parents, student has the right to make decisions and must sign all consent forms.



**Chapter 71B:**

Massachusetts Special Education law providing free and appropriate public education for all children, regardless of disability, in the least restrictive environment.

**Chapter 688:**

Massachusetts Transition Planning law enacted in 1983 that provides two-year transition planning process for students with severe disabilities who will need adult services upon graduation/turning 22.

**Guardianship:**

Court action in which an individual is appointed by probate court to make decisions for another individual.

**IDEA 2004:**

Most recent reauthorization of Federal special education law, also known as Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, includes transition requirements for students receiving special education.

**Individualized Education Program (IEP):**

A written education plan developed by a school-based team in accordance with state and federal special education laws that describe a student's special education needs and the services to be provided to meet those needs.

**Individual Transition Plan (ITP):**

A written transition plan for Chapter 688-eligible students developed by the adult service agency designated as the Lead 688 Transitional Agency.

**Transition Planning Form (TPF):**

State mandated form to be completed by school staff to document transition planning for students receiving special education starting at age 14 and continuing on an annual basis until graduation/turning 22.





## TRANSITION RESOURCES

Here are additional Transition Resources that you may find of help:

### **National Websites**

**Beach Center on Disability at the University of Kansas:**

[www.beachcenter.org](http://www.beachcenter.org)

**Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)/Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT):** [www.dcdt.org](http://www.dcdt.org)

**Disabilities, Opportunity, Internetworking and Technology (DO-IT) at the University of Washington:**

[www.washington.edu/doit](http://www.washington.edu/doit)

**HEATH Resource Center at the National Youth Transitions Center at George Washington University:** [www.heath.gwu.edu](http://www.heath.gwu.edu)

**National Center on Secondary Education and Transition:**

[www.ncset.org](http://www.ncset.org)

**National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth:** [www.ncwd-youth.info](http://www.ncwd-youth.info)

**National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center:** [www.nsttac.org](http://www.nsttac.org)

**PACER Center (Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights): Transition and the Rehabilitation Act**

[www.pacer.org/tatra](http://www.pacer.org/tatra)

**Think College:** [www.thinkcollege.net](http://www.thinkcollege.net)

**Transition Coalition:** [www.transitioncoalition.org](http://www.transitioncoalition.org)

## **Massachusetts Resources**

The **Federation for Children with Special Needs** offers transition training for families including **“Transition 101”**, a workshop addressing effective use of IEP and MA TPF for students 14-22, and **“Planning A Life”**, an intensive 2-day transition training offered at 5 different venues across the state during the school year: [www.fcsn.org](http://www.fcsn.org)

**Planning for Life After Special Education in Massachusetts (2nd edition, Dec. 2012)**, revised and edited by the Disability Law Center (DLC): [www.dlc-ma.org](http://www.dlc-ma.org)

**Youth on the Move: A Roadmap for Transition**, a transition website from the University of Massachusetts/Institute for Community Inclusion (ICI): [www.youth-move.org](http://www.youth-move.org)

**Youth Leadership Forum (YLF)**, an annual 3-day event for high school students with disabilities sponsored by MRC and Easter Seals at Bridgewater State University to develop self-advocacy skills, an activity of the Easter Seals Youth Leadership Network which provides opportunities for youth with disabilities under the age of 26 to develop leadership, self-determination, and independent living skills: [www.ma.easterseals.com](http://www.ma.easterseals.com)

**Family Ties of Massachusetts Directory of Resources for Families of Children and Youth with Special Needs (16th edition—March, 2013)**: [www.massfamilyties.org](http://www.massfamilyties.org)

**Parent/Professional Advocacy League (PPAL), the Massachusetts Family Voice for Children’s Mental Health and Youth MOVE**: [www.ppal.net](http://www.ppal.net)

**Partners for Youth with Disabilities (PYD) offers mentoring and skill building programs for youth ages 14-22**: [www.pyd.org](http://www.pyd.org)

**The Road Forward: A DDS Guide for Transition Planning, a DDS publication for families of transition-age youth**: [www.mass.gov/dds](http://www.mass.gov/dds)

## Summary Statement

This Family Guide to Transition Services in Massachusetts was developed by the Federation for Children with Special Needs (Federation) and the Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission (MRC) as a product of the MRC Transition Works Grant: Innovative Strategies for Transitioning Youth with Disabilities from School to Work, a federal grant funded by the Rehabilitation Services Administration of the U.S. Department of Education. For further information you are welcome to call the Federation Call Center at 1-800-331-0688 or go to the Federation website at [www.fcsn.org](http://www.fcsn.org). More specific information about dates/locations of the Federation transition trainings, as well as electronic versions of this Guide (in English and Spanish), are also available on the website.







