

Transitioning from childhood to adulthood is a major life event. For parents of children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) the process may seem especially challenging. As parents consider their child's support needs, they may have concerns and questions about post-school options, including options related to employment. The Individualized Education Program (IEP) team therefore plays an important role in helping to connect parents with the information they need to support their child's transition to adulthood.

Why are Parents' Perspectives on Employment Important?

Parent expectations are a strong predictor of employment for young people with disabilities (Mazzotti et al., 2021). Although many parents value post-school employment for their child with IDD, the questions, concerns, and goals they have may vary. Soliciting parents' perspectives about post-school employment can illuminate issues that need to be considered when investigating job options. Additionally, pursuing job options that align with student and parent preferences may help ensure families are invested in supporting their child's employment once school ends.

What the Research Says

Parents have acknowledged several concerns about post-school employment for their child with disabilities. In a study by Awsumb et al. (2022), parents identified safety as their biggest concern. They feared their child would be taken advantage of while on the job or get hurt or lost outside the safety of the school building. Parents also expressed concerns about planning for the future, on-the-job support, adult service options in the community, and learning executive functioning and social skills (Awsumb et al, 2022). Other parent concerns about employment relate to obtaining a

job and maintaining that job over time (Sanderson & Bumble, 2023).

Despite these concerns, parents of children with IDD have rated part-time employment as the most important priority for their child after high school (Blustein et al, 2016; Gilson et al, 2018). In addition, parents placed a higher value on the qualitative aspects of a potential workplace (e.g., personal satisfaction, opportunities for social interaction, alignment with child's interests) than on other factors such as salary or number of hours worked (Blustein et al, 2016; Gilson et al, 2018). According to a study conducted by Carter et al. (2012), young people with disabilities whose parents had high expectations of them obtaining post-school employment were more than three times as likely to have a paid job in the community within two years after leaving high school compared to those whose parents did not have the same expectations.

Guidelines for Practice

The concerns and expectations of parents can have a significant impact on whether their children are successful in obtaining paid employment after finishing high school. When parents are less anxious about the skills their child should possess, and when they have high expectations for their child's ability to get a job, the chances of their child finding and keeping paid employment increases. Transition professionals can anticipate, acknowledge, and alleviate concerns that may affect parent expectations and student outcomes by following the guidelines below.

- Do not assume that everyone has the same view on integrated employment. Transition teams need to ask personalized questions to families about their expectations, priorities, and concerns (Gilson et al, 2018).
- Have conversations with families about delivering services and supports that

prepare students for the workforce, while also raising parents' expectations for post-school employment by setting realistic and meaningful post-school goals (Blustein, et al, 2016; Sanderson & Bumble, 2023).

- Provide resources to family members that help them understand available employment options and services (Gilson et al, 2018).
- Identify and build upon student strengths, preferences, and what they can offer to a business, instead of focusing on their limitations (Sanderson & Bumble, 2023).
- Make sure students have work-based learning experiences (paid or unpaid) during their school years where they can receive school-based supports and accommodations (Sanderson & Bumble, 2023).

Additional Resources

The Arc of Illinois

<https://www.thearcofil.org/>

The Arc provides resources, information, and training for people with disabilities, their families, and professionals to support advocacy efforts.

PACER's National Parent Center on Transition and Employment

<https://www.pacer.org/transition/>

PACER is a program designed to offer excellent assistance and support to parents, youth, and professionals on matters regarding the transition phase. Its primary objective is to help youth with disabilities achieve success in their postsecondary education, employment, and life in the community.

References

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