ICTW RESEARCH BRIEF

# Parent Involvement and Interagency Collaboration

The transition from school to adulthood is a complex process for youth with disabilities, often marked by a shift from school to adult services. Parents play a critical role in this transition, yet they frequently report limited involvement and low awareness of available adult services. Strengthening parent involvement and building coordinated partnerships among schools, families, and community agencies is critical to ensuring students with disabilities are prepared for meaningful, connected adult lives.

## What is Parent Involvement and Interagency Collaboration in Transition?

Parent involvement and interagency collaboration are critical components of high-quality transition planning for students with disabilities. Parent involvement refers to families actively participating in the planning and decision-making processes that shape their child's path to adulthood. This includes contributing to the development of individualized transition goals and advocating for appropriate supports and services. Parent–professional collaboration builds on this by fostering mutual respect and shared responsibility among families, school personnel, and adult service personnel, ensuring that the transition process reflects both the student's and family's perspectives. Interagency collaboration extends this work by bringing together schools and community-based adult service providers—such as Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) or Centers for Independent Living (CILs)—to coordinate services and ensure a smooth handoff as students exit the school system. These practices, required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), are essential for creating comprehensive, student-centered transition plans that lead to meaningful adult outcomes.

## What the Research Says

Research highlights the essential role of parent involvement and interagency collaboration in supporting successful transitions for youth with disabilities. However, findings from Francis et al. (2018) and Sanderson and Stout (2025) indicate that many families experience significant barriers in these areas. Francis and colleagues found that parents of young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) often felt exhausted from years of advocacy, only to face new challenges navigating postsecondary settings where legal protections like the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) restricted their involvement. These parents reported breakdowns in communication, feelings of being dismissed by professionals, and a lack of transparency that led to disappointment and distrust. Despite their critical role, parents frequently felt disconnected from the very systems meant to support their young adult's transition.

Sanderson and Stout's (2025) national survey echoed these concerns, revealing that the majority of parents had limited awareness of adult disability services, such as VR and CILs. Over 75% of respondents indicated that no adult service representatives attended their child's most recent transition meeting—signaling weak interagency coordination. However, both studies also identified promising practices. Parents who were actively involved in transition planning and who had children participating in structured work experiences demonstrated greater awareness of available adult services. Likewise, when professionals built trusting relationships, provided clear information, and defined roles and expectations, families were more engaged and optimistic. These findings suggest that while systemic barriers persist, meaningful collaboration and proactive engagement can significantly improve outcomes during the transition to adulthood.

## Guidelines for Practice

Effective transition planning requires active involvement from families and collaboration across systems. Schools should invite adult service providers—such as VR, postsecondary education program coordinators, and CILs—

to participate in transition planning meetings to help ensure continuity of services. Families benefit from clear, accessible information about available adult services, including brochures, videos, or dedicated web pages that outline local supports and how to access them. Educators should engage parents as active partners in the development of individualized transition goals, encouraging meaningful input that reflects the student's strengths, preferences, and needs. It is also important to prepare families for the shift from school-based services, which are provided as a legal entitlement, to adult services, which require eligibility and may vary by community. Providing information about legal changes such as FERPA—can help families adjust to new roles and responsibilities. Schools should also prioritize work-based learning opportunities, such as job shadowing, internships, or paid work experiences, which help students develop critical skills and establish early connections to employment services. Finally, implementing structured models of interagency collaboration, where schools and adult agencies meet regularly with families, can ensure smoother transitions and reduce service gaps.

## Additional Resources

### Family Engagement

https://transitionta.org/topics/family-engagement/

*This webpage from the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition (NTACT:C) provides a rich array of tools to help educators and service providers involve families in transition planning.*

### Family and Community Engagement Framework Guide

https://www.isbe.net/Documents/Family-Comm-Engage-Framework-Guide.pdf

*This guide from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) outlines a research-based framework for schools and districts to develop sustainable family partnerships.*

## References

Francis, G. L., Regester, A., & Reed, A. S. (2018). Barriers and supports to parent involvement and collaboration during transition to adulthood. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals, 42*(4), 235–245. https://doi.org/10.1177/2165143418813912

Sanderson, K. A., & Stout, K. (2025). Parent awareness of adult services during transition planning. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 72*(2), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1177/10522263251325971

This research brief was developed by the Illinois Center for Transition and Work at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign through a contract with the Illinois State Board of Education. Information presented may not reflect the position or policy of the Illinois State Board of Education.