

## **Manchester-Essex Regional School District Transition Planning for Moderate Special Needs Students**

**Mission:** The Manchester-Essex Regional School District provides a multi-faceted approach to preparing students with disabilities for the transition to post-secondary schooling, employment, independent living, and community and civic responsibilities. This approach includes education of students and parents about the impact of the disability, development of targeted and measurable goals, objectives, and services designed to promote compensatory strategies and maximize independent access to the educational environment, and establishment of a transition plan and personal goals.

**Core Strategies for Transition Preparation:** The MERSD Student Services Department establishes transition plans that are individualized to meet the needs of each student. Beginning in grade 8, student progress is measured and documented through transition assessments and portfolios. Our transition planning K-12 promotes the following core goals and strategies for all students accessing special education programs:

- ❖ Ensure that each student understands his/her disability and can describe his/her strengths, weaknesses, and needs to others within the school community;
- ❖ Educate each child with a disability about his/her IEP goals and objectives and seek input from the child in determining whether goals have been met;
- ❖ Maintain goals for independence, self-advocacy, access to school resources, and community participation;
- ❖ Emphasize skills acquisition and development of compensatory strategies in areas impacted by disability;
- ❖ Integrate assistive technologies that support students' independent access to the curriculum;
- ❖ Offer opportunities for increased independence and inclusion, preparing students in self-contained instruction to transition into mainstream programming as soon as they are able.

**Critical Skills for Transition:** Although the majority of students with moderate disabilities receive special education supports to address a particular academic weakness, research demonstrates that post-secondary measures of success are more dependent on broader skills. These skills are a primary focus in developing transition plans:

- ❖ The ability to take an academic task from any subject area and determine how to access resources;
- ❖ The ability to identify academic and social challenges or confusion, formulate questions, and seek assistance;
- ❖ The ability to create a personal schedule and understand strategies for balancing academic and extracurricular time;
- ❖ The ability to articulate disability related needs and set short and long-term personal goals.

**Parents' Role in Transition Planning:** Parents are an integral part of the special education team and play an important role in transition planning. In addition to providing suggestions and supporting the student's participation in Team meetings, parents can follow up by talking with children about disabilities and special education needs, promoting discussion about future goals and aspirations, and encouraging self-advocacy. Parent support is needed to ensure the child's involvement in all discussions and plans about his/her future.

**Role of the Special Education Team in Transition Planning:** Transition planning is integrated into Team meetings in several ways:

- ❖ Each Team develops a **vision statement** that reflects realistic long-term goals for the student.
- ❖ Each Team creates a **transition plan** that provides a road map for progressing toward long-term goals.
- ❖ Students ages fourteen or older are members of the special education team and active participants in transition planning.

**Role of the Student in Transition Programming:** Students are integral members of the IEP team and must play a pivotal role in establishing and attaining post-secondary, community, and employment goals. The Student Services Department begins working with students early to assist them in preparing for this important role. Developmental benchmarks for transition are as follows:

**By the end of 5<sup>th</sup> Grade:** Each student will learn to describe his/her educational strengths and weaknesses using developmentally appropriate language. The student will have an understanding of the goal and purpose of special education and how and why he/she is receiving services.

**Grades 6 and 7:** Each student will be able to describe his/her disability to classroom teachers using developmentally appropriate language. Students will be aware of which accommodations work best and provide input into IEP meetings through parents or liaison.

**Grade 8:** Each student will be invited to attend his/her IEP meetings. The student will contribute to the vision statement by sharing his/her preferred activities and future interests with the Team.

**By high school:** All high school students will attend IEP meetings, prepare and share feedback on goals and accommodations with assistance from the liaison, and articulate future interests and plans. Students will access the guidance counselor for assistance with post-secondary planning.