

An Educational Journey from Self Discovery to Advocacy

A Handbook for Students



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For the Connecticut State Department of Education
June 2003

Funding provided by:
U.S. Department of Education
Office of Special Education Programs
CFDA # 84.326X

Acknowledgements

Special Thanks to the Members of the Self-Advocacy Subcommittee of the Connecticut Transition Task Force who provided guidance and editorial assistance in the development of this guide:

Dana Bonadies - Bristol Public Schools

Johanna DeZurik - Torrington High School

Heather Harrison - University of Connecticut - Center for Excellence

Liz Kay - Windsor Lock High School

Rose McGurkin-Fuhr - Simsbury High School

Diana Pacetta - Ullmann - Department of Corrections

Diane Peskurich - Windsor High School

Joe Prignano - Manchester High School

Karen Stigliano - Special Education Resource Center

Carol Stocks Prandy - South Windsor High School

Iris Thompson - Yale Center for Children with Special Health Care Needs

And, to Karen Halliday, Consultant, Rehabilitation/Transition Services, Connecticut State Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Services, for her ongoing commitment and passion for improving the lives of students with disabilities.



Introduction

Self-Advocacy means speaking up for yourself. It requires knowledge of your personal strengths and needs and rights as a citizen, and involves acting in an assertive manner to make your needs known to others.

Transition planning involves thinking about your goals after high school and developing a long-range plan to get there. This includes having a high school experience that focuses on developing the skills you will need to achieve your life goals. It also involves helping you identify and link with any post-school adult service programs or supports you may need.

This handbook was created for high school students with disabilities as an instructional tool for the development of self-advocacy skills and transition planning.

It is divided into 5 sections:

- Section 1. Disability Awareness
- Section 2. Learning to Advocate
- Section 3. Career Planning and Community Connections
- Section 4. Participating in PPT Meetings
- Section 5. Resources

The activities within each section are arranged sequentially, and are designed to build upon one another. Each year you will have the opportunity to select and participate in a variety of activities that involve gathering information about your **community** (including other people, programs, jobs, laws, and transition options.) You will also have the opportunity to select and participate in activities that will help you learn more about **yourself** (your likes, dislikes, strengths and weaknesses.) You will then be able to use this information to make decisions, set personal goals, develop transition plans, and begin advocating for yourself.

Many of the activities in this guide require use of the Internet to obtain information. Information is Power. Developing skills in “surfing the web” will allow you to access the information you need to be a powerful advocate throughout your adult life.

The activities labeled Levels 1, 2, 3, and 4 can correspond with grades 9, 10, 11, and 12 if you are following a sequential high school curriculum. Grade levels are only provided as a guide and may need to be adapted to meet individual student needs. For example, although some students will be ready to take a formal learning style inventory in grade 9, few students should finish grade 10 without having a thorough understanding of their learning style. As you participate in the process of self-exploration and advocacy, it is important to remember that everyone is unique, and will progress through various activities at different rates.

A Personal Development Journal is an integral part of your educational journey from self-discovery to advocacy. This “journal” can be a spiral notebook, clothbound book, or binder with loose-leaf paper. It should be durable and large

enough to accommodate all the information that you will gain about your community, yourself and your life options during the year.

Each journal entry must begin with the **date of the entry**. You are encouraged to **personalize your journal** entries with drawings, doodles, photographs, words, poetry, magazine clippings or other things that describe how you are thinking and feeling at the moment. Although you may be graded or given class credit for completing the journal, it is still YOUR journal, and should be a reflection of YOU.

You will create a new journal for each year, grade 9-12, but you must keep the old ones. An important outcome of your educational journey from self-awareness to advocacy involves being able to look back to where you started, and see how far you've come.

Have a great journey!

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SECTION 1

Disability Awareness

Whether your plans after high school involve work or college, it is important that you understand your strengths and limitations, know how they affect your performance, and be able to communicate this to others. Understanding your disability is the first step in the process. There are a number of things you can do to help increase your understanding of your disability:

- **Begin to accept your disability as a description of how you learn or function in a particular environment.** Some students with learning disabilities, for example, may struggle to do work in an algebra class, but have little difficulty participating in a game of basketball or giving an oral presentation.
- **Know what accommodations work for you.** Try out different kinds of accommodations (such as extended time on tests, a laptop computer for writing, or use of a "safe place" when you need time out) and then decide which ones work for you. Make sure your accommodations are listed on your Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- **Understand that your disability designation gives you certain rights to services and protection from discrimination.** The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) entitles you to a free appropriate public education through the age of 21 or until you graduate with a

diploma. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) offer protection from discrimination in some post-secondary education, employment, and housing situations. But did you know that you must disclose your disability in order to be protected by some provisions of these laws? It is important that you understand your rights under these laws, and that you are able to describe your disability clearly to others.

- **Do not let your disability determine your identity.** You are a *person* first, who happens to have learning disabilities, physical limitations or emotional difficulties. You also have many other traits, qualities, and roles that define who you are (e.g. athletic, artistic, kind to others, helpful, son, daughter, friend, etc.)
- **Realize that accepting your disability may take time.** Sometimes the passage of time is necessary in order for you to process all the information you have been given about your disability. Learning about yourself, including your strengths and weaknesses is an ongoing process. You may need to do research, ask questions, and hear the explanations of your disability again and again before you can fully understand it.

The following activities can help you become more aware of your strengths and weaknesses and give you a better understanding of your disability:

✧ THINGS THAT MAKE ME SPECIAL ✧

List 25 things that make you special

Think about:

1. Your strengths
2. Things you know how to do well (your abilities/skills)
3. Things you enjoy doing
4. Things you have done that you are proud of
5. Your talents
6. Important things you have learned
7. Positive things about your personality

REMEMBER: TRY TO COME UP WITH 25 ITEMS ON YOUR LIST.

1. _____	14. _____
2. _____	15. _____
3. _____	16. _____
4. _____	17. _____
5. _____	18. _____
6. _____	19. _____
7. _____	20. _____
8. _____	21. _____
9. _____	22. _____
10. _____	23. _____
11. _____	24. _____
12. _____	25. _____
13. _____	

Reprinted from "A Student's Guide to the ADA", Hospital Industries Program, Maine Medical Center, Portland, Maine

Activity Time

Level 1

Identifying Successful People with Disabilities

Many famous people have achieved their life goals in spite of, or perhaps because of, their disability. Consider what comedian and host of The Tonight Show, Jay Leno, had to say about turning his mild dyslexia into a competitive advantage:

"One thing about mildly dyslexic people - they're good at setting everything else aside to pursue one goal. I go five nights a week every week, no days off, no sick days. I figure that eventually things will go my way. Ambition wins over genius 99% of the time."

Jay Leno's experience may not be common to all people with mild dyslexia, but it demonstrates how his disability has personally affected him.

Begin *your* journey to self-awareness by understanding how other people have overcome their disabilities to achieve success.

Use the web to find out more about successful or famous people who have a disability. For example, you can find a list of *Successful People with LD and AD/HD* by locating the article by the same name at www.SchwabLearning.org. Go through the names and pick out one or two people who share your interests and talents, and research their personal and/or professional accomplishments.

OR

Interview someone with a disability who has been successful in reaching his or her life goals. If you don't know any successful adults with disabilities, contact your local Independent Living Center (ILC) and ask if they could recommend someone for you to interview. Contact information for the Connecticut ILC's can be found in the Resources section of this handbook.

Some interview questions to ask:

- What personal and/or professional goals have you achieved?
- What personal qualities or traits enabled you to reach those goals (e.g. hard work, perseverance?)
- How do you describe your disability?
- How were you able to overcome any (emotional, physical or learning) limitations (e.g. did you need any special accommodations or use any assistive technology?)
- Who were the people who helped you achieve your goals?
- What role did education play in helping you achieve your goals?

Use this information to complete one of the following disability awareness projects:

- Give an oral presentation to your class
- Write an article for your school newspaper
- Create a poster

Think about how this person's disability is similar or different from your own. Are there feelings or experiences you have in common with the person who you interviewed or researched?

Write your thoughts about having a disability in your Personal Discovery Journal.

You will complete a variety of activities over the next several years that will help you better understand yourself and the positive and negative effects of your disability. By the time you graduate from high school it should be interesting to see how your personal awareness of your disability has expanded.

Level 2

Completing a Learning Style Inventory

Everyone has a particular learning style that describes the way they learn best. Some people need to *see* things in writing in order to learn and remember information. We call this style of learning **Visual**. Other people need to *hear* instructions. This style of learning is called **Auditory**. There are also people who learn best by *doing* a task. This style of learning is called **Kinesthetic**. Most people use a combination of these techniques, but you may find that you use one technique more than the others.

In addition to describing the way you learn best, learning style inventories can help you identify whether you work better alone or in a group, and whether you express information better orally or in writing. It is important that you know your own learning style. Knowing information about learning styles can help you determine what types of classroom and future job modifications you will need.

You can begin to better understand your individual learning style by completing a formal learning style inventory. Ask to take one, if you haven't already. Your teacher, counselor, or school psychologist can help you obtain a learning style inventory and review the results with you. There are many different learning style inventories you can take. The C.I.T.E. Learning Styles Instrument from the Center for Innovative Teaching Experiences is one of the more comprehensive inventories. This inventory is included at the end of this section.

You should also discuss what types of program modification strategies you might need to complement your learning style. Modifications to consider include: preferential seating (i.e. sitting closer to the teacher so that you can best see or hear instructions); extended time to complete assignments or exams; auditory or visual cues; oral or taped exams; use of computer with spell-check or voice-recognition capabilities. More examples of program modifications and adaptations can be found on page 8 of your Individualized Education Program (IEP).

With your teacher, decide which types of modifications you would like to "try out", and make sure they are written into your IEP.

Write your learning style and current program modifications in your Personal Discovery Journal.

The C.I.T.E. Learning Styles Instrument

The C.I.T.E. Learning Styles Instrument can assist classroom instructors and support personnel in determining a student's preferred learning style.

The instrument is divided into 3 main areas:

- Information gathering
- Work conditions
- Expressive preference

Information gathering includes auditory language, visual language, auditory numerical, visual numerical, and auditory-visual-kinesthetic. Work conditions focus on whether a student works better alone or in a group. Expressiveness preference considers whether a student is more effective with oral or written communication.

Knowing information about learning styles can be useful when determining which assessment instruments are appropriate to use. It is also useful when developing an Individualized Education Program in determining what classroom and future job modifications will be necessary.

Discuss the importance of knowing one's learning style with the class.

Then, ask students to complete the C.I.T.E. Learning Styles Instrument.

Score the instrument and share the results individually with each student.

Discuss the various learning styles and implications for possible learning accommodations.

**From the Center for Innovative Teaching Experiences
C.I.T.E. Learning Styles Instrument**

Babich, A.M., Burdine, P. Allbright, L., Randal, Pl.
Reprinted with permission from Wichita Public Schools
Murdock Teacher Center

	Most Like Me		Least Like Me	
1. When I make things for my studies, I remember what I have learned better.	4	3	2	1
2. Written assignments are easy for me to do.	4	3	2	1
3. I learn better if someone reads a book to me than if I read silently to myself.	4	3	2	1
4. I learn best when I study alone.	4	3	2	1
5. Having assignment directions written on the board makes them easier to understand.	4	3	2	1
6. It's harder for me to do a written assignment than an oral one.	4	3	2	1
7. When I do math problems in my head, I say the numbers to myself.	4	3	2	1
8. If I need help in the subject, I will ask a classmate for help.	4	3	2	1
9. I understand a math problem that is written down better than one I hear.	4	3	2	1
10. I don't mind doing written assignments.	4	3	2	1
11. I remember things I hear better than I read.	4	3	2	1
12. I remember more of what I learn if I learn it when I am alone.	4	3	2	1

	Most Like Me		Least Like Me	
13. I would rather read a story than listen to it read.	4	3	2	1
14. I feel like I talk smarter than I write.	4	3	2	1
15. If someone tells me three numbers to add I can usually get the right answer without writing them down.	4	3	2	1
16. I like to work in a group because I learn from the others in my group.	4	3	2	1
17. Written math problems are easier for me to do than oral ones.	4	3	2	1
18. Writing a spelling word several times helps me remember it better.	4	3	2	1
19. I find it easier to remember what I heard than what I have read.	4	3	2	1
20. It is more fun to learn with classmates at first, but it is hard to study with them.	4	3	2	1
21. I like written directions better than spoken ones.	4	3	2	1
22. If homework were oral, I would do it all.	4	3	2	1
23. When I hear a phone number, I can remember it without writing it down.	4	3	2	1
24. I get more work done when I work with someone.	4	3	2	1
25. Seeing a number makes more sense to me than hearing a number.	4	3	2	1
26. I like to do things like simple repairs or crafts with my hands.	4	3	2	1
27. The things I write on paper sound better than when I say them.	4	3	2	1
28. I study best when no one is around to talk or listen to.	4	3	2	1

	Most Like Me		Least Like Me	
29. I would rather read things in a book than have the teacher tell me about them.	4	3	2	1
30. Speaking is a better way than writing if you want someone to understand what you really mean.	4	3	2	1
31. When I have a written math problem to do, I say it to myself to understand it better.	4	3	2	1
32. I can learn more about a subject if I am with a small group of students.	4	3	2	1
33. Seeing the price of something written down is easier for me to understand than having someone tell me the price.	4	3	2	1
34. I like to make things with my hands.	4	3	2	1
35. I like tests that call for sentence completion or written answers.	4	3	2	1
36. I understand more from a class discussion than from reading about a subject.	4	3	2	1
37. I remember the spelling of a word better if I see it written down than if someone spells it out loud.	4	3	2	1
38. Spelling and grammar rules make it hard for me to say what I want to in writing.	4	3	2	1
39. It makes it easier when I say the numbers of a problem to myself as I work it out.	4	3	2	1
40. I like to study with other people.	4	3	2	1
41. Seeing the price of something written down is easier for me to understand than having someone tell me the price.	4	3	2	1
42. I understand what I have learned better when I am involved in making something for the subject.	4	3	2	1

	Most Like Me		Least Like Me	
43. The things I write on paper sound better than when I say them.	4	3	2	1
44. I do well on tests if they are about things I hear in class.	4	3	2	1
45. I can't think as well when I work with someone else as when I work alone.	4	3	2	1

C.I.T.E. Learning Styles Instrument Score Sheet

Directions - In the first example, look at question number 5 and write down your score. Continue this for each of the remainder of the questions. Total each column and multiply by 2.

Visual Language

5-
13-
21-
29-
37-

Social-Individual

4-
12-
20-
28-
45-

Auditory Numerical

7-
15-
23-
31-
39-

Total ____x2= ____ (Score)

Total ____x2= ____ (Score)

Total ____x2= ____ (Score)

Visual Numerical

9-
17-
25-
33-
41-

Social-Group

8-
16-
24-
32-
40-

Kinesthetic-Tactile

1-
18-
26-
34-
42-

Total ____x2= ____ (Score)

Total ____x2= ____ (Score)

Total ____x2= ____ (Score)

Auditory Language

3-
11-
19-
36-
44-

Expressiveness Oral

6-
14-
22-
30-
38-

Expressiveness-Written

2-
10-
27-
35-
43-

Total ____x2= ____ (Score)

Total ____x2= ____ (Score)

Total ____x2= ____ (Score)

Score: **33-40** = Major Learning Style
 20-32 = Minor Learning Style
 05-20 = Negligible Use

DESCRIPTION OF THE C.I.T.E. INSTRUMENT NINE STYLE AREAS

Auditory Language

- This is the student who learns from hearing words spoken. He or she may vocalize or move his or her lips or throat while reading, particularly when striving to understand new material. He or she will be more capable of understanding and remembering words or facts that could only have been learned by hearing.

Visual Language

- This is the student who learns well from seeing words in books, on the chalkboard, charts or workbooks. He or she may even write down words that are given orally, in order to learn by seeing them on paper. This student remembers and uses information better if he or she has read it.

Auditory Numerical

- This student learns from hearing numbers and oral explanations. Remembering telephone and locker numbers is easy, and he or she may be successful with oral number games and puzzles. This learner may do just as well without his or her math book, for written materials are not important. He or she can probably work problems in his or her head, and may say numbers out loud when reading.

Visual Numerical

- This student must see numbers - on the board, in a book, or on a paper - in order to work with them. He or she is more likely to remember and understand math facts when they are presented visually, but doesn't seem to need as much oral explanation.

Auditory-Visual-Kinesthetic Combination

- The A-V-K student learns best by experience - doing, self-involvement. He or she profits from a combination of stimuli. The manipulation of material along with accompanying sight and sound (words and numbers seen and heard) will aid his or her learning. This student may not seem to understand or be able to concentrate

or work unless totally involved. He or she seeks to handle, touch and work with what he or she is learning.

Individual Learner

- This student gets more work done alone. He or she thinks best and remembers more when the learning has been done alone. This student cares more for his or her own opinions than for the ideas of others. Teachers do not have much difficulty keeping this student from over-socializing during class.

Group Learner

- This student prefers to study with at least one other student, and, will not get much done alone. He or she values others' opinions and preferences. Group interaction increases his or her learning and later recognition of facts. Class observation will quickly reveal how important socializing is to this student.

Oral Expressive

- This student prefers to tell what he or she knows. He or she talks fluently, comfortably, and clearly. Teachers may find that this learner knows more than written tests show. He or she is probably less shy than others about giving reports or talking to the teacher or classmates. The muscular coordination involved in writing may be difficult for this learner. Organizing and putting thoughts on paper may be too slow and tedious a task for this student.

Written Expressive

- This learner can write fluent essays and good answers on tests to show what he or she knows. He or she feels less comfortable, perhaps even stupid, when oral answers or reports are required. His or her thoughts are better organized on paper than when they are given orally.

Level 3

Learning more about your disability

As you grow older and mature, you will begin to have additional questions about the nature of your disability and how it affects you. There are a variety of things you can do to expand your knowledge and understanding of your disability.

- **Meet with your school psychologist, special education teacher or anyone else who is qualified to review the results of your most recent educational and psychological evaluations with you.** Ask questions until you truly understand what each assessment procedure is designed to measure and how you performed on them. Write down the name of each evaluation you were given, and based upon the results, make a list of your learning strengths and weaknesses. Make sure you understand why you were found eligible for special education and related services based upon your performance on these evaluations. Also be sure you understand what types of special education services you receive, and why.

Transfer this information to your Personal Discovery Journal.

- **Use the Internet to obtain additional information about your disability.** There are a number of websites that provide information on specific types of disabilities. You can also use the web to search for general information on topics such as self-advocacy, transition from school to adult life, assistive technology, etc. Here are just a few of the many disability specific web sites:

- <http://www.Ldonline.org> (LD &ADHD)
 - <http://www.nichcy.org> (LD & ADHD)
 - <http://www.schwablearning.org> (LD & ADHD)
 - <http://www.chad.org> (ADHD)
 - <http://www.ucp.org> (Cerebral Palsy)
 - <http://www.aamr.org> (Mental Retardation)
 - <http://autism-society.org> (Autism/Aspergers/PDD)
 - <http://nfb.org> (Visual Impairments)
 - <http://nidcd.nih.gov> (Hearing Impairments)
 - <http://www.hearingexchange.com/newsletter.html> (Hearing Impairments)
 - <http://www.dyslexia-teacher.com/t23.html> (Dyslexia)
- **Read fiction or nonfiction books about people who have disabilities.** You can fulfill English or summer reading requirements and learn more about various disabilities at the same time. The KidZone bookstore includes over 50 titles of books that relate to young people with Learning Disabilities and/or ADHD. You can visit the KidZone bookstore at <http://www.ldonline.org/kidzone/read-up.html>. Check out your local community or school library, or disability web sites, for books that relate to other types of disabilities.
 - If you take medication to alleviate some of the symptoms of your disability, you should **understand what your medication is and why you need it**. You can ask your doctor, or use the library or Internet, to find out more information. For each medication you take, you should find out the following information:
 - What is the name of the medication?
 - What does it do?

- Is a prescription necessary?
- What is my current dosage, and how is that determined?
- Are there any side effects or interaction dangers?

Record this information in your Personal Discovery Journal and update it as necessary.

The National Health Law Program has officially launched a web site dedicated to helping consumers get the most out of their health care. Go to:

<http://www.healthcarecoach.com> to find helpful information about everything from coping with emergencies to dealing with denied claims. It has links to other useful web sites, and provides you with an opportunity to voice your own opinions on issues of national health care.

- **Research the availability of assistive technology or adaptive equipment** you think you may need or currently use on an ongoing basis. Begin by obtaining catalogs (in print or on line) that contain information on a variety of adaptive devices. Work with your teacher and parents to make decisions regarding what equipment you need. Then determine whether it is covered by your family's insurance or if it can be included as a related service to which you are entitled under IDEA. Develop a plan for the replacement or repair of any device or piece of equipment.

It is important that you begin to take responsibility for this aspect of your life now. At a transition workshop for parents, the mother of two young adults with severe hearing impairments spoke about the surprising phone call she received from her son, a freshman in college. Shortly after arriving at school he had

called to ask what kind of batteries his hearing aid took. He had no clue because his Mom had always purchased and installed the batteries for him. Don't let this happen to you! Don't leave high school unprepared to manage your own healthcare and disability needs.

The Connecticut Tech Act project can provide you with information on assistive technology services, devices, and funding possibilities. For more information on this project go to www.techactproject.com.

For a database on assistive technology and links and resources go to www.abledata.com.



Level 4

Understanding your rights and responsibilities under disability law

As mentioned previously, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act can protect you from discrimination in some post-secondary education, employment, community, and housing situations, *after you graduate from high school*. However, in some instances, you must disclose (or make others aware) that you have a disability in order to be protected by these laws. This is one of the reasons why it is so important that you develop a good understanding of your disability and accommodation needs, and that you learn how, and when, to communicate information about yourself to others.

It is also important that you know your rights and responsibilities under these laws. Below is a brief description of these two laws:

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) **prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability** in employment, state and local government, public accommodations, commercial facilities, transportation, and telecommunications. However, to receive

protection under the law you need to prove that you have a disability that affects major life activities such as learning or working. To be protected by the ADA as an individual with a disability, you must:

- have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities;
- have a history or record of such impairment; or
- be perceived by others as having such an impairment.

Your rights under ADA:

Title I of the ADA requires employers with 15 or more employees to provide qualified individuals with disabilities an equal opportunity to benefit from the full range of **employment**-related opportunities available to others. For example, it prohibits discrimination in recruitment, hiring, promotions, training, pay, social activities, and other privileges of employment. It restricts questions that can be asked about an applicant's disability before a job offer is made. It also requires that employers make reasonable accommodations to the known physical or mental limitations of otherwise qualified individuals with disabilities, unless it results in undue hardship.

Title II of the ADA says that **public transportation** authorities may not discriminate against people with disabilities in the provision of transportation services, such as city buses, subways, trains, etc. It also covers any state or local government programs such as those run in town hall, public libraries, parks & recreation, etc.

Title III of the ADA covers all **public accommodations** such as restaurants, retail stores, hotels, movie theaters, private schools, convention centers, doctors' offices, homeless shelters, zoos, funeral homes, day care centers, and recreation facilities, including sports stadiums and fitness clubs. Public accommodations must comply with specific requirements to make buildings accessible; make reasonable modifications to policies, practices, and procedures to promote access; and provide effective communication with people with hearing, vision or speech disabilities.

Title IV of the ADA addresses telephone and television access for people with hearing and speech disabilities. It requires telephone companies to provide interstate and intrastate **telecommunications** relay services (TRS) 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It also requires closed captioning of federally funded public service announcements.

Your responsibilities under ADA:

- Make sure that you have the basic qualifications (i.e. education, training, and experience) for any jobs you are applying for.
- **After you are hired**, if you need accommodations to perform the job, you must identify yourself as a person with a disability and be able to describe your specific accommodation needs.
- Make sure you have documentation of your disability (medical records, educational and psychological test results, etc.) ready to provide.
- If you find you have been discriminated against in any public program you should file a complaint with the appropriate government agency. Information on agencies responsible for enforcing the ADA can be found at <http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/adahom1.htm>.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act

Section 504 of The Rehabilitation Act states that “no qualified individual with a disability in the United States shall be excluded from, denied benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under” any program or activity that receives federal financial assistance. Almost all public and private colleges and universities receive federal financial assistance. Therefore, if you are attending college or any post-secondary training program that receives federal funds, you will be protected by Section 504.

The school or college must insure that the programs it offers are accessible to students with disabilities. However, a school cannot provide any service or accommodation if it does not know that one is needed. If you do not require any accommodations you can choose to keep information about your disability private. If you need accommodations, you will need to disclose information about your disability in order to receive them.

Your rights under 504:

- You have the right to go through the regular college admission process without having to identify yourself as a person with a disability.
- You have the right to receive appropriate academic accommodations (such as taped texts, note-takers, interpreters, and specialized computer equipment).
- You have the right to an accessible dorm room *if* dormitories are provided to students without disabilities.

- You have the right to participate in extracurricular activities offered by the school.

Your responsibilities under 504:

- Make sure that you have current (no more than three years old) documentation of your disability and suggested accommodations.
- Contact your school's Office of Services for Students with Disabilities to find out what services and supports are available.
- Ask for classroom and/or testing modifications at the beginning of the semester. Do not wait until after you have done poorly on an exam to disclose your disability and accommodation needs.
- If an instructor refuses to make an accommodation that you have requested you should contact your school's ADA/504 Coordinator to help resolve the situation. You may also file a complaint with the Office of Civil Rights of the U.S. Department of Education within 180 days of the discriminatory action.

You can obtain more information on these laws by completing one or more of the following activities:

- Assist your special education teacher in **conducting an instructional unit on Disability Law**. Working as a class, determine the specific components of the laws that you would like to learn more about. Break into subgroups and decide who is going to research and present specific components of disability law. The Special Education Resource Center (SERC) in Middletown, CT has a variety of curriculum and other publications that focus on the ADA and Section 504.

See the Resources section of this handbook for information on SERC. You can also find information about these laws at your local library and on the web.

- **Arrange for a guest speaker who is knowledgeable about the laws** to give a presentation to your class. You may call the Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy or the University of Connecticut A.J. Pappanikou Center for Disabilities (located in the Resources section of this handbook) for names of possible speakers.
- **Identify former students, or other adults with disabilities in your community, who have experienced advocating for themselves.** Ask your teacher for assistance in locating possible speakers. Arrange for them to make a classroom presentation or develop a parent/student workshop focusing on their personal experiences negotiating disability laws.
- **Attend** workshops that discuss college application procedures and student support services. Ask your special education teacher or guidance counselor to give you an advance notice of these types of workshops.



SECTION 2

Learning to Self-Advocate

Now it is time to learn how to advocate for yourself. It's natural to feel uncomfortable talking about your disability or asking for help. But, with practice, it will become easier. State and federal laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act were passed to give you an equal opportunity to education and employment. These laws allow you to access the same facilities and programs available to individuals without disabilities. The ADA and 504 also give you the right to request specialized services, devices, or instructional modifications to help you work and learn. It is your responsibility to take advantage of these laws by becoming a self-advocate. There are a number of things you can do to learn how to speak up for yourself and get the help you need in order to be successful:

- **Describe your accommodation needs in terms of making things equal, rather than asking for an unfair advantage.** Some teachers or employers may think that giving you special accommodations is unfair or unnecessary. They may worry about the reactions of other students or

employees who think you are getting special treatment. Learn how to describe your accommodation needs in terms of making things equal. It is important that you make it clear that you are not asking for the standards to be lowered, or for extra special treatment, but that you need certain accommodations in order to be successful.

- **Develop an assertive style of communication.** Do not be aggressive, demanding or confrontational. Remember the old adage "You can attract more bees with honey than with vinegar". But, don't be passive either. You can stand up for your rights, and be a role model to others, by being polite, respectful, and prepared.
- **Practice, Practice, and Practice.** Speaking up for oneself is easier for some people than for others. For most people, it takes time to develop good self-advocacy skills. Practicing self-advocacy skills while you are still in high school can give you the confidence you will need to advocate for yourself as an adult.
- **Identify barriers to effective communication and include specific self-advocacy objectives in your IEP.** Think about whether you need to develop skills in specific areas such as listening, asking for help, accepting criticism, etc. These are all skill development areas that affect your ability to effectively self-advocate, and can be easily translated into goals for your individualized education program.

- **Know when you should and should not disclose your disability.** Do not use your disability as an excuse to try to obtain compassion or understanding regarding personal problems. Disclose information about your disability only on a "need to know basis", or when you require accommodations.

Activity Time

Level 1

Developing a Personal Self-Advocacy Plan

The first step in learning how to self-advocate is the development of a **Personal Self-Advocacy Plan**. Through the process of writing a Personal Self-Advocacy Plan, you can begin to think about your individual needs as a learner. The plan can also be used as a script in describing your accommodation needs to others.

In this plan you should describe your **disability, learning strengths and weaknesses**, the **type of teaching style or classroom modifications** that help you learn best, and any other **accommodations or assistive technologies** you need in order to be successful.

Your Personal Self-Advocacy Plan should also list any specific skill or behavior deficits that interfere with your ability to be an effective self-advocate.

Individualized self-advocacy goals should be identified as part of the PPT and transition planning process, and written into your Individualized Education Program (IEP) every year. **Consider whether you need to develop skills in the following areas:**

- Problem Solving
- Asking for help
- Listening
- Understanding communication styles (assertive, aggressive, and passive)

- Understanding body language
- Persuasive communication

A Curriculum Guide for the Development of Self-Determination and Advocacy Skills, which was published in 1994 by the A.J. Papanikou Center for Disabilities, contains over 100 activities to help students develop specific self-advocacy skills. Although the curriculum is currently being revised, the first edition is still available through the Special Education Resource Center (SERC) Library in Middletown, CT, or the University of Connecticut A.J. Papanikou Center.

Your Personal Self-Advocacy Plan should be reviewed and revised on a yearly basis, and can also be used beyond high school as a personal development tool.

My Personal Self Advocacy Plan

Name:

Grade:

Date:

My disability is:

My learning strengths are:

My learning weaknesses are:

I learn best when:

The specific classroom modifications I need are:

I need to develop the following self-advocacy skills:



Level 2

Requesting Academic Accommodations

You can begin practicing your self-advocacy skills by sharing your written **Personal Self-Advocacy Plan** with a classmate, then with a small group of classmates, and then with your parents and special education teacher. You can practice different styles of communication and compare what it feels like to talk in a **passive** (soft-spoken, timid) manner, an **aggressive** (loud and demanding) manner, and an **assertive** (pleasant and polite) manner. You can also **role play** situations in which the teacher refuses to provide any accommodations. This activity will provide you with several opportunities to become comfortable with the process of asking for accommodations.

You should then select the classroom teacher with whom you feel most comfortable, and **present your plan to that teacher**. Schedule an appointment at a time that is convenient for the teacher. Bring some documentation describing your disability. If you are extremely nervous about meeting with the teacher privately, you can ask your special education teacher to accompany you for support and guidance.

Tips for Requesting Accommodations:

- Introduce yourself
- State your disability and any difficulties you are having in class
- Share what you do to accommodate your disability
- Request specific accommodations
- Thank your teacher for his/her time

Ask for feedback on how effective you were in describing your disability and accommodation needs. Remember self-advocacy is a process. Learn from your mistakes, and have the courage to try again!

Individualized Education Program (IEP) Modification/Adaptations

The following program modifications/adaptations have been approved on my IEP meeting dated _____:

Materials/Books/Equipment:

- Alternative Text Consumable Workbook Modified Worksheets
- Manipulatives Access to Computer Tape Recorder
- Supplementary Visuals Large Print Text Spell Check
- Calculator
- Assistive Technology: (specify) _____ Other: (specify) _____

Tests/Quizzes/Time:

- Prior Notice of Tests Preview Test Procedures Test Study Guide
- Simplify Test Wording Oral Testing Limited Multiple Choice
- Student Write on Test Shortened Tasks Hands-on Projects
- Reduced Reading Alternative Tests Objective Tests
- Extra Credit Options Extra Time-Written Work Extra Time-Tests
- Extra Time-Projects Extra Response Time Modified Tests
- Test Read Pace Long Term Projects
- Rephrase Test Questions/Directions Other: (specify) _____

Grading:

- No Spelling Penalty No Handwriting Penalty Grade Effort + Work
- Grade Improvement Course Credit Base Grade on IEP
- Base Grade on Ability Modified Grades Pass/Fail
- Audit Course
- Other: (specify) _____

Organization:

- Provide Study Outlines Desktop List of Tasks
- List Sequential Steps Post Routines Post Assignments
- Give One Paper at a Time Folders to Hold Work
- Pencil Box for Tools Pocket Folder for Work
- Assignment Pad Daily Assignment List Daily Homework List
- Worksheet Formats Extra Space for Work Assign Partner

Other: (specify) _____

Environment:

- Preferential Seating Clear Work Area Study Carrel
- Other: (specify) _____

Behavior Management/Support:

- Daily Feedback to Student Chart Progress Behavior Contracts
- Parent/Guardian Sign Homework Positive Reinforcement
- Collect Baseline Data Set/Post Class Rules
- Parent/Guardian Sign Behavioral Chart Cue Expected Behavior
- Structure Transitions Break Between Tasks
- Time Out from Positive Reinforcement Proximity/Touch Control
- Contingency Plan Other: (specify) _____

Instructional Strategies:

- Check Work in Progress Immediate Feedback Pre-teach Content
- Have Student Restate Information Extra Drill/Practice
- Review Sessions Review Directions
- Provide Lecture Notes/Outline to Student Use Manipulatives
- Modified Content Assign Study Partner
- Computer Assisted Instruction Monitor Assignments Provide Models
- Repeat Instructions Support Auditory Presentations with Visuals
- Multi-Sensory Approach Highlight Key Words Oral Reminders
- Display Key Vocabulary Visual Reinforcement Pictures/Charts
- Visual Reminders Provide Student With Vocabulary Word Bank
- Mimed Clues/Gestures Concrete Examples Use Mnemonics
- Personalized Examples Number Line Other: (specify) _____

These program Modifications/Adaptations have been approved for the following classes:

Level 3

Learning when and how to disclose information about your disability

Although self-advocacy means speaking up for yourself, it does not mean that you need to disclose information about your disability in all situations. **Remember that your disability is, in large part, a function of your environment.** For example, a farm laborer with dyslexia (a reading disability) would probably not experience much difficulty with his disability on the job. On the other hand, a college student with the same disability would probably need specialized supports and accommodations in order to do well in class.

You will need to make decisions about how and when to disclose information about your disability throughout your entire life. It is best to think about disclosing information about your disability on a “**need to know**” basis. Generally speaking, if you will not need any accommodations as a result of your disability it is probably best to keep the information private. If you will need accommodations, the only way you will be able to get them under disability laws (ADA and Section 504), is by making your disability known. As an adult, the primary responsibility for requesting accommodations falls on your shoulders.

As a class or in small groups, discuss the pros and cons of disclosing your disability. Offer personal examples of **situations in which you have had to talk about your disability.** How did you feel? Were you confident, uncomfortable or anxious in describing your strengths, weaknesses and need for accommodations? How was the information received? Also talk about various **situations in which no one knew**

you had a disability. Explain why it was not important for you to disclose your disability in those situations.

Situations can include:

- Dating or socializing
- Classroom or PPT experiences
- Work or job application procedures
- Extra-curricular or recreational activities
- Community activities such as church or volunteer experiences
- Medical procedures or treatment

As a group discuss **things to think about when applying for a job or college** (see below). Then, individually, come up with **three examples** of situations in which you might want to disclose your disability in the future. When thinking about these situations, you might want to consider the areas of **employment, housing, post-secondary education, transportation, and health services**. Decide **when and how** it would be best to disclose the information.

Record this information in your Personal Discovery Journal.

Things to think about when applying for a job:

- **Employers may not ask whether you have a disability during a job interview,** although they may ask probing questions such as "This job is stressful for many people as it involves tight deadlines and coordinating multiple projects. How

would you handle this?" If you disclose your disability, however, an employer may ask you follow-up questions regarding your disability.

- **Does the job require a pre-employment examination?** These tests must measure your ability to do the tasks required by the job (e.g. a proofreading test would be an appropriate skill measure for an editorial assistant position, but probably not for a job as a server in a restaurant). An employer is only allowed to give you a pre-employment exam if this is something they do with **all** prospective employees.
- **Will you need accommodations in order to take the test?** The employer must provide reasonable accommodations (such as extended time, use of a reader, etc.) in pre-employment examinations, but you may have to provide proof of your disability in order to receive them.
- **Is a medical exam required?** If all job applicants are required to take a medical examination, an employer may give you a medical examination, but only **after** an employment offer is made. Do you have any physical limitations that would get in the way of your ability to do the job? Can you perform the job with appropriate and reasonable accommodations?
- **Will drug testing be done?** Some employers may test applicants for illegal drugs. If you take prescription medication for your disability, ask your doctor whether these are likely to show up in the test results. Decide whether or not you should disclose information on your prescription drugs prior to taking the drug test.

- **Will you need accommodations to perform the essential functions of a job?**

In most cases, if you need accommodations to perform the essential functions of a job, the best time to disclose your disability is after you receive a job offer, but before you begin work.

For more information on employment rights and disclosure considerations see the article *The Americans with Disabilities Act: Civil Rights for You* by Dale S. Brown at http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/adult/dale_brown_ada.html.

Things to think about when applying to college:

- **The college admission form cannot require you to disclose whether or not you have a disability.** The application form may, however, *invite* you to indicate that you have a disability.
- **If you decide to disclose your disability to the college, this information cannot be used to deny admission.** Colleges and universities cannot discriminate solely on the basis of disability.
- **Disclosing a disability does not guarantee admission.** Colleges and universities do not have to alter their admission requirements or standards. Students with disabilities must meet the same admissions criteria as all prospective students.

- **Disclosing a disability can provide you with an opportunity to explain possible discrepancies in your academic record.** For example, it is typical for students with learning disabilities to have good high school transcript grades and low SAT scores or vice versa. Does this describe you? If so, you may want to consider disclosing your disability during the application process either through the required essay or during a personal interview, if there is one. You can put your self-advocacy skills to good use by explaining how your academic strengths and weaknesses relate to your proposed course of study.
- **If you choose not to self-disclose during the application process, you may still do so at any time after you have been accepted to a college or university.** At that point you will need to go to the Office of Disability Support Services (or person responsible for coordinating services for students with disabilities) and request services. You will also need to provide recent documentation of your disability.

For more information on preparing for college and disclosure considerations see the article *Getting Ready for College: Advising High School Students with Learning Disabilities* from the HEATH Resource Center, November 1995, at http://www.ldonline.org/ld_indepth/postsecondary/hrc_gettingready.html.

✂ SHOULD I TELL THAT I HAVE A DISABILITY? ✂

PROS

+ _____
+ _____
+ _____
+ _____
+ _____
+ _____
+ _____

CONS

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Under what conditions should you self-disclose regarding your disability?

Under what conditions should you keep your disability to yourself?



Level 4

Using Written Information to Support Your Advocacy Goals

Developing the ability to advocate for yourself requires more than just good oral communication skills. The written word can also be a valuable tool in helping to convey information to others. In fact, using written instead of oral communication is often better if you need to create a paper trail. A paper trail can provide a record of events that have occurred as well as requests that were made. Written information is also required in order to provide documentation of your disability and progress in school.

There are two important skill development areas involved in using written information to support your advocacy goals. The first area involves the use of **letter writing** to make your needs/concerns known. The second involves **record keeping**, so that you'll have ready access to important papers that can help document your need for services and/or accommodations.

Letter Writing

The Wrightslaw web site and its on-line newsletter *The Special Education Advocate* offer accurate, up-to-date information about special education law and

advocacy for children with disabilities. The following information on letter writing was adapted from the *12 Rules for Writing Great Letters* article. A complete copy of this article is available at:

http://www.wrightslaw.com/advoc/articles/12rules_letters.htm.

Letter writing is a useful life skill. You write letters to:

- (1) make a request
- (2) clarify an event
- (3) decline a request
- (4) express appreciation
- (5) create a paper trail

Some letters have more than one purpose. It is important that you learn to do it right!

The following activity can help you develop skills in letter writing:

Select one of the reasons for writing a letter that is described above (1-5).

Decide what this issue is and who you are going to write to (your teacher, your boss, your parents, etc.)

1. Before you write a letter, answer these questions.

Why? Why am I writing? What am I trying to accomplish?

What? What do I want? What are my goals?

2. Get three blank sheets of paper.

On the first sheet write **"WHY?**

Why am I writing this letter?"

On the second sheet write **"WHAT?**

What are my goals in writing this letter?

On the third sheet write **"Other Thoughts."**

Brainstorm. Write down your thoughts. Make lists.

Don't worry about writing in complete sentences or prioritizing. Your goal is to dump your thoughts from your brain onto these sheets of paper. Write down any additional ideas and thoughts on the third sheet of paper. It doesn't need to take a long time for you to write down all your important thoughts. Do not allow yourself to obsess about details. Don't worry about spelling. You should focus on the Big Picture.

3. Write your **first draft**. Tell your story chronologically, weaving in the facts, and keeping your opinions to a bare minimum. Make your letter clear and easy to understand. Then, **put it away for a few days**. Many times letters are written in anger, and require "cooling off" and revision time.

4. Read your letter aloud. Think about whether your letter is:

- Brief
- Clear
- Interesting
- Accurate

Then, make the necessary edits.

5. Give your letter to at least one other person to read. Your "reader" should be someone who will tell you the truth, especially when you don't make things clear or you need to tone the letter down. Ask the person if they understand:

- What you are trying to accomplish
- What you want
- What your goals are

If you haven't expressed yourself clearly and you find yourself explaining your real point to the reader, *STOP*, and write down the explanation. Fit this information into your letter.

Use this year to perfect your letter writing skills. You can work on developing cover letters to accompany:

- Employment Resumes
- College Applications
- Grant and Scholarship Applications

You can also use letter writing for the purpose of advocating for yourself or "systems" (like school, work, community). This can include:

- Supporting disability or other legislation
- Filing a grievance/complaint
- Participating in community forums

Record Keeping

As you prepare to leave high school it is important that you obtain, organize and keep copies of all papers that document your disability. This information will be necessary to help you get accommodations either on the job or in post-secondary education settings. These documents will also help determine if you are eligible for many adult services. You should be aware that, other than your school transcripts, your school system is not required to keep most documents in your school file after 6 years. Once these records are destroyed, you will no longer be able to get them. Make sure you have copies of the following information before you leave high school:

- Your most **recent evaluations** given by the school or an independent evaluator. These may include educational, psychological, neuro-psychological, speech and language, physical or occupational therapy evaluations. Most colleges require documentation of your disability that was done within the past three years.
- Your **report cards** and any **progress reports**
- **Standardized test results** such as the CAPT (Connecticut Academic Performance Test)
- Your most recent **IEP**, and any behavior or service plans

- **Medical records** related to your disability

If you have difficulty with organizational skills, ask your Transition Coordinator, Resource Room Teacher, or parents to help you develop a record keeping system.



SECTION 3

Career Planning/Community Connections

Did you know that most people find their jobs through family and friend connections? Having a broad network of family and friends who can support you in developing and reaching your goals is important. Friends and family members can help you make decisions, assist you in obtaining needed services, and refer you to others who can help with the career planning process. The wider the network, the better. For example, your *Great Uncle Harry* just might know someone who works for the Department of Public Health who can help you explore your interest in food safety. There are a number of things you can do to expand your social network, receive help with career planning, and practice your advocacy skills:

- **Develop a support network.** Identify those family members and friends who can encourage and support you in reaching your goals. There are also many state and national advocacy groups you can join to help you become a better self-advocate.
- **Develop mentoring relationships.** Mentors are people who provide information, support and encouragement. You can be on both the giving and

receiving end of a mentoring relationship. Studies have shown that students who have mentors are more successful in achieving their goals.

- **Seek out information on person-centered planning tools that can help you plan for the future.** There are a variety of person-centered planning tools you can use to help you develop life and career goals. Tools such as MAPS, Essential Lifestyle Planning, Personal Futures Planning, PATH, and Circles of Support can assist you with identifying the supports and services that can help you reach personal goals.
- **Take career interest inventories.** These paper/pencil or computer generated inventories can help you identify your interests and skills, and match them to various occupations.
- **Have a variety of real, community-based work experiences.** While career interest inventories can help you obtain some beginning information about the types of jobs you might be interested in, there is no substitute for on-the-job experience. Job shadowing, situational assessments, part-time jobs, and volunteering can all provide you with the experiences and information you will need to narrow down your career choices.
- **Identify adult service provider and advocacy agencies.** Making the transition from school to adult life involves leaving an educational system that **must** provide you a free and appropriate education and entering a system that is based upon **eligibility** and the **availability** of resources. Be sure to seek out

organizations and agencies that can help you get the adult services you will need.

Activity Time



Level 1

Thinking about what you want to be when you grow up

Although you may think it's too early to decide what you want to be when you grow up, it is critical that you start exploring various career possibilities NOW. It is helpful to begin the process of career exploration by thinking about your skills and interests. There are no good or bad jobs, only good or bad job matches. The primary focus of your career planning process should be on finding a good match between your interests and skills and the requirements of the job. To help you **explore your vocational skills and interests**, begin by making a list of:

- the school subjects you like and do well in
- your personality traits (e.g. are you patient, friendly, talkative, organized, etc.?)
- your physical traits (e.g. are you strong, good with your hands, athletic, etc.?)
- any extracurricular activities you participate in (including clubs, sports, hobbies)
- any past or present work or volunteer activities

Also, think about the following:

Do you prefer being inside or outside? Do you like to sit, stand or move around?

Do you like to work with data (e.g. numbers, written information), people, or things?

Are you willing to go to college or trade school to receive additional education and training beyond high school?

Write a statement regarding your current career interests and record this information in your Personal Discovery Journal. It should be interesting to see whether your career interests stay the same or change over the next several years.

There are a variety of **career interest inventories** you can take to help you determine your interests and possible career choices. There are also tests that will match your aptitude and values to specific career fields. Your school's guidance department can direct you to these inventories. Some career interest inventories to check out include the:

- Harrington O'Shea Career Decision Making System
- AGS Interest Inventory
- Job O
- Career Key
- Reading Free Vocational Interest Inventory
- Transition Planning Inventory
- CHOICES

- CAPS, COPS, COPEs

Do an Internet search to find out more information about career interests inventories. Just type in the words *career interest inventories* in your search box, and click on *search*. Have fun taking some of the online inventories, completing personal checklists, and learning more about yourself.

Record the types of inventories you completed and the results of these inventories in your Personal Discovery Journal. Put a check mark next to the jobs or career clusters that you plan to explore further.

To help you further identify careers you might be interested in, check out the *CBIA Career Exploration Video Series*. These videos, produced by the Connecticut Business and Industry Association, will give you a "real-life" look at career opportunities that are particularly available in Connecticut. For more information on the video series go to www.cbia.com and click on *Education and Training*, then on *Education and School to Career*, then on *School to Career Guides*. These videos should also be available in your Guidance office.

All career exploration activities should be done as part of the **Transition planning process**.

Transition planning looks at your strengths, interests and preferences and helps you identify post high school goals, and the high school experiences you need in order to reach those goals. **The Planning and Placement Team (PPT) develops transition goals, as part of your Individualized Education Program (IEP).**

Federal law, IDEA, requires that you develop a statement of transition service needs at the PPT meeting following your 13th birthday. This statement of transition service needs defines your **long-term goals** and the **courses of study** that you will participate in during your high school years.

Developing a long-term goal gives you something to work toward. For example, if you are planning to go to college, it is important that you take certain courses in high school. But, developing a long-term goal does not mean that you are stuck with that goal for the remainder of high school. The statement of transition service needs must be reviewed and updated each year, usually at your annual PPT meeting. This gives you the opportunity to change your goals and/or courses of study if you find that you are on the wrong track. Transition planning activities, which you will participate in over the next several years, should provide you with enough academic and work experiences to enable you to make informed decisions about your future.

Now, think about your own long-term goals and write a statement of transition service needs in your Personal Discovery Journal. Be sure to include it in your next IEP.

Remember that this statement should be reviewed every year, and updated, as appropriate, in your IEP.

Level 2

Developing Transition Goals

At your annual PPT meeting following your 15th birthday, in addition to the statement of transition service needs, you must develop transition goals and objectives. Unlike academic goals that are developed to help you do well in school, transition goals focus on what you plan to do after you leave high school. There are four basic life areas to think about when developing transition goals:

- **Post-secondary training and education**
- **Employment**
- **Independent living**
- **Community participation**

You may not need to develop goals in all areas, but you must *consider* each of these areas when developing your IEP goals and objectives.

The publication *Building a Bridge from School to Adult Life for Young Adults with Disabilities in Connecticut* is a transition manual that can help you take an active role in developing transition goals and objectives. Your school may have copies of this manual, or you can download a copy free of charge from the Connecticut Department of Education's web site at <http://www.state.ct.us/sde>. Click on "Special Education".

Building a Bridge contains checklists and other information that can assist you with developing transition goals and objectives. Use this manual to help you develop and update your goals on an annual basis.

If you are having difficulty coming up with goals, there are a variety of **person-centered planning** activities that can help. MAPS, Essential Lifestyle Planning, Personal Futures Planning, PATH, and Circles of Support are all examples of person-centered planning tools that can help you identify and communicate your goals for the future. Person-centered planning attempts to identify and highlight the unique talents, gifts, and capabilities inherent in everyone. It assumes that **you** are the foremost expert on your wants and needs, and focuses on building a "community" of people who can help you move closer to your goals. An on-line course on person-centered planning is available at <http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/ped/tsal/Enable/courses.html>. The SERC library also has information on many of these planning tools.

Write your transition goals and objectives/activities for post-secondary education, employment, independent living, and community participation in your Personal Discovery Journal. Bring these to your next PPT meeting.

It is important to remember that your goals in each of these transition areas may change over the next few years as you learn more about yourself and various work and adult living options. That's OK! Take advantage of the next several years of high school to explore all your options. Although career development is a lifelong process, changing careers in mid life can be difficult. The financial and time demands of obtaining further education and training are likely to conflict with

other adult responsibilities such as paying the rent and supporting a family. It is therefore important that you give a great deal of thought over the next several years to the area of career planning, and what you would like to do when you leave high school.

There are a number of hands-on and research-related activities that can provide you with some of the information you will need to make career and life decisions. **Select from the following activities, or come up with your own ideas, to help you learn more about employment and post-secondary education options and develop your leadership skills:**

- **Get a part-time job** such as babysitting, lawn-mowing, bagging groceries, delivering newspapers, office work, farm work, etc. Write what you like and don't like about the jobs in your *Personal Discovery Journal*.
- **Volunteer** - contact CT's Community Service Network at www.cns.gov/stateprofiles/ct_intro.html for information on volunteer opportunities.
- **Begin researching post-secondary education and training options** (including 4-year colleges, community colleges, business and trade schools, military service, etc.) Be sure to find out about the entrance requirements and application procedures. Record this information in your *Personal Discovery Journal*. If you're not sure where to pursue training or advanced education in Connecticut, go to www.ctdhe.commnet.edu. This site has links to all Connecticut colleges and universities, and the programs they offer.

- **Participate in job shadowing or community-based training experiences** coordinated through your district's Transition or School to Careers Program. It is important to have as many different types of work experiences as possible during your high school years. Your work experiences should give you the opportunity to try out jobs you are interested in, as well as jobs that are available in your local community. So even if you have little interest in working in the insurance industry, if your community has a large number of insurance companies, try it! You might discover aspects of the industry that you like, or become aware of other jobs (such as office assistant, accountant, or cafeteria manager) that exist within the company.

Check out www.jobshadow.org for more information on job shadowing.

Record all work experiences in your Personal Discovery Journal.

List the dates you worked, the type of work you did, the name of your supervisor, and any personal comments regarding the nature of work (e.g. what you liked/disliked about it?) Also note whether it was a paid job, internship, situational assessment or job shadow experience.

If you do not know the difference between these types of work experiences ask your Transition Coordinator. Keeping a record of work experiences will help you with career planning, as well as with resume development. Job Shadow forms are located at the end of this section.

- **Identify a mentor** who can help you with the career planning process. Find out if your school has a formal mentoring program, or ask your Transition Coordinator or Guidance Counselor to help you locate a mentor. Your local chamber of commerce, civic organizations, or independent living center may be able to help.
- You may also wish to **become a mentor to others**. The act of mentoring can increase your own self-awareness. Helping other people develop and reach their goals can give you the skills you need to direct your own transition planning process.

As an individual or class project, you can develop a school-wide mentoring program. The LEAD Group (Learning and Educating About Disabilities) in Colorado has developed a program where high school students with disabilities mentor students in upper elementary and middle school grades. The practices they use in working with each group differ. The focus at the elementary level is on providing support and normalizing the experience of having a learning disability. With middle school students, the mentoring emphasis is on preparing for high school and what participating in the LEAD Group will entail. For more information on the LEAD program go to <http://www.uncc.edu/sdsp/lead.asp>.

If you decide to become a mentor to another student be sure to record this information in your Personal Discovery Journal.

This type of leadership activity is helpful to include on college applications and resumes.

- **Ask your parents, mentor, or other adults you know how they chose their first job or career.** Are they working in that same occupation now, or have they changed careers? Did they need additional training or education to obtain a job or advance in their career? Are they satisfied with their vocational choice? If given the opportunity to go back in time, what would they change or do differently?

Take notes during your interview, and write a paragraph or two in your Personal Discovery Journal that describes this person's career development process. Be sure to include your own thoughts about career development.

You may also wish to participate in a class discussion about how people choose their careers.

- **Conduct informational interviews** with people who have jobs you are interested in. This differs from the previous activity in that it focuses more on learning about a specific occupation rather than the general career development process. You should not use informational interviews to ask for a job. Instead, use this opportunity to obtain information, and develop a future contact in the field. Scheduling the interview, preparing for and conducting the interview, and writing a thank you note upon the completion of the interview are all ways to practice your self-advocacy skills.

Record information about the informational interviews in your Personal Discovery Journal. Include the name of the person interviewed, the date and time of interview, and any information obtained.

- Look in the dictionary to find definitions for the following words: vocation, occupation, career, and job. How are they alike? How are they different?

Record this information in your Personal Discovery Journal.

Be aware that you may hear these words being used interchangeably in PPT meetings or in other career guidance situations.

- **Develop Leadership Skills.** Leadership training programs are vital to ensure that you are prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the future. The **Connecticut Youth Leadership Forum (YLF)** has been operating on the grounds of the University of Connecticut campus in Storrs, CT since 1999. The Youth Leadership Forum is a program of the Governor's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities. Each year 36 high school sophomore and juniors with various disabilities are selected, through a competitive process, to participate in 4 days of educational and motivational leadership activities. YLF applications are distributed to every school district in October or November of each year or you can go to their website www.ctylf.org to get one. Applicants must complete a required essay and are selected on the basis of demonstrated leadership skills in their communities and schools. Students who are selected to participate are required to develop a leadership activity to implement in their school or community during the upcoming year.

If you are interested in participating in the Youth Leadership Forum, see your Transition Coordinator or Director of Special Education for an application.

- **Join a local self-advocacy group.** Self-advocacy groups can provide you with the support you may need to speak for yourself. Some self-advocacy groups tend to have a membership that is disability specific (e.g. CHADD for individuals with ADHD, People First for individuals with Developmental Disabilities). Other groups may focus on a specific legislative issue (e.g. The Olmstead Coalition, which focuses on issues of supported living), or specific gender issues (e.g. The Connecticut Women with Disabilities Network). Some groups are even age specific. The new Connecticut chapter of KASA (Kids As Self-Advocates) is comprised of youth with disabilities ages 12-22 and their friends. The goal of KASA is to spread helpful, positive information amongst their peers on issues related to living with special health care needs, education, employment, etc. Information on the national KASA organization can be found on their website at www.fvkasa.org. For information on Connecticut's chapter, contact the University of Connecticut A.J. Pappanikou Center for Disabilities. Use the Internet or call your local Independent Living Center (see the Resources Section of this handbook) to find an advocacy group to meet your individual needs.

JOB SHADOW - INTERVIEW FORM

Business Visited: _____ Date: _____

Position of Person Interviewed: _____

Find out the following information about the job you shadowed:

1. How did you get started in this field? _____

2. What are the specific job requirements you are responsible for?

3. What do you like most about your job? _____

4. What do you like least about your job? _____

5. What educational requirements are needed for this job?

6. What is the beginning salary range for this type of job?

7. What are the hours you work at this job? _____

8. Do you have to work overtime or on weekends? _____

Other important information about this job: _____

Post Job Shadow Rating Form

Student Name: _____

Name of Business: _____

Type of Job: _____

Rate your interest in the specific job you shadowed:

Excellent

Good

Fair

Poor

Write down what you liked and or disliked about this job visit:

LIKES

DISLIKES

Level 3

Exploring Transition Options

This year the focus is on exploring residential options, making decisions about post-secondary education & training, having additional community-based work experiences, and identifying adult service options. If you are 17 years old, your school district should also notify you that all rights provided to your parents/guardians under federal special education law, IDEA, will transfer to you when you turn 18. For more information on your responsibilities as a legal adult, refer to *A Student Guide to Understanding your Rights and Responsibilities under IDEA* which is available from the Connecticut State Department of Education (see Resource section of this handbook for contact information).

Exploring Residential Options

Where you live as an adult depends on two things:

1. How well you are able to live and support yourself;
2. Your personal preferences as to where and how you want to live.

It is important that you become aware of the kinds of living situations that may be available in your community.

Living situations can include:

- Homes/apartments

- Dormitories
- Supported living
- Supervised apartments
- Group homes
- Room and board
- Rent-subsidized apartments
- Adult foster care

Visit and get to know these types of living situations. Determine whether you are eligible for any of the supported residential living arrangements. Also develop a proposed timeline for movement from one residential situation to another. Be aware that many students without disabilities plan to live at home throughout college and for a few years beyond.

Record this information in your Personal Discovery Journal.

Exploring Post-Secondary Education and Training Options

Last year you began to explore various post-secondary educational and training options. What did you learn? Does the career you wish to pursue require additional training or education? If attending a 4-year college or university is your goal, will you have taken all the required courses necessary for admission by the end of next year?

If college is your goal, you should continue to **explore different colleges and universities**. The following activities can help:

- **Use the Internet to obtain information on college planning** (Collegeboard.com is one site that can assist you in planning for college). You should seek information on specific colleges that you think you might be interested in, and begin comparing them in terms of location, student population, cost, program and course offerings, and support services available to students with disabilities.
- **Attend** workshops that can answer your questions about going to college.
- **Tour colleges** to determine preferences. You might request that a student with a disability similar to yours gives you the tour (or meets with you during that time) so you can ask about their experience on campus.
- **Take the PSAT.**
- If you are applying to college through the **Early Admission** process, you will need to make your decisions and complete the applications this year.
- Visit the following websites. Both are great resources if you are planning to attend college:
 - www.heath.gwu.edu
 - www.ahead.org

Exploring Community-Based Work Options

Since you will probably turn 16 years old at some point this year (if you are not already), it is important for you to obtain working papers so that you can have a greater variety of paid employment experiences. Research has shown that students who perform paid work during their high school years have a better chance of finding and keeping a job after graduation. You can receive job training as part of your school's Transition or School to Careers Program, or get an after-school job.

The Connecticut Department of Labor has a fun, easy to use web site, designed specifically for students. ***The Pathways to the World of Work for Young Adults*** web site provides information on child labor laws and will answer your questions about preparing for work and college.

Go to <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/youth> for information on:

- Rules for Working
- Self-Assessment
- Career Exploration
- College Exploration
- Interviewing
- Resumes and Cover Letters
- Finding a Job
- Job Applications

Although the goal continues to be career exploration, it is helpful if you can begin to **narrow down your career choices to one or two occupational areas or clusters.**

Although last year it was acceptable to try out jobs that you were not particularly interested in, this year **it is important to focus primarily on jobs that you like.** Do not waste your time in work experiences that you have absolutely no interest in just because the jobs are available! If getting a full time job immediately upon graduation from high school is your goal, make sure you receive a variety of on-the-job training experiences in your preferred career area over the next two years. You should graduate with some specific vocational skills, but your training should also be broad enough to enable you to change jobs within your career area.

Be sure to record all your jobs and work experiences in your Personal Discovery Journal, and include them in your professional resume.

Exploring Adult-Service Options

Work with your Transition Coordinator to **determine if you might be eligible for any adult services.** Many adult agencies have waiting lists, and all have eligibility requirements. State agencies that provide services to individuals with disabilities include the:

- Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)
- Department of Mental Retardation (DMR)
- Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)

- Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)

There are also a variety of private, not-for-profit agencies that can provide direct services. Information on private provider agencies in your area may be obtained from the Connecticut Community Providers Association (CCPA). Address and telephone numbers for the state agencies and CCPA can be found in the Resources section of this handbook.

Be aware that special education law, IDEA, states that **the PPT should include adult service agencies or providers who may be providing or paying for services once the student exits school.**

Write down the names of adult service agencies that might be able to help you. Find out how and when you will need to apply for services. Decide whether representatives from these agencies should be invited to your next PPT meeting to help with transition planning.

Record this information in your Personal Discovery Journal.

Level 4

Making the transition from school to adult life

This is the year when you need to **finalize your plans for life after high school**. What will you do when you graduate in June? Do you plan to get a full or part-time job, go to college, enter the military, or receive further vocational training? Will you live at home, in a college dormitory, in your own apartment, or in some other supported living situation? Have you acquired the skills you need to be successful in work, school, and independent living environments? Have all your IEP goals been met?

It is important for you to know that special education law, **IDEA**, provides you with an opportunity to receive special education and related services through the age of 21. These rights are detailed in a *Student Guide to Rights and Responsibilities under IDEA* that is available through the Connecticut State Department of Education. If you feel that the special education services you've received from your local school district have not provided you with the skills necessary for adult life, **you may want to consider staying in school for an additional year or more.**

Talk to your parents, teachers, or other adult mentors to help you decide whether you would benefit from additional years of public education. Your friends/peers are probably not the best people to help you make this decision. It is important that you talk with people who have experienced the responsibilities of adulthood, and who can better appreciate the importance of a good education.

If you decide to stay in school, **you do not necessarily have to receive your 13th year of education in your local high school.** Exemplary school districts are now allowing some students to attend their high school graduation ceremony with their classmates, while withholding the actual diploma until the IEP objectives are met or the student turns 21. These students can then receive an additional year (or more) of community-based vocational training, or educational services within an age-appropriate setting such as a college campus. Be aware that most districts do not offer this option on a routine basis. This may be something you will have to advocate for. Remember that **once you leave the public school system, you are no longer eligible for a free, appropriate education under IDEA.** Determine whether it is worth your while to take advantage of this opportunity to stay in school.

If you have achieved your IEP goals, however, and no longer require special education, there are a few activities that will ensure a smooth transition from school to adult life:

- If you plan to attend college, **take the SAT.** If you need accommodations to take the test, make sure all the appropriate paperwork is completed. Your guidance counselor should be able to help you with this.
- If you did not apply to college through the Early Admission process, you must **submit your college applications now.**

- Make sure to **apply for any adult services** for which you are eligible, and develop a service plan to begin immediately upon graduation from high school.
- **Seek out the services of your local Independent Living Center (ILC).** ILC's assist persons with physical and/or mental disabilities to live independently in their communities. Services may include assistance in obtaining modifications to a home or vehicle, adaptive equipment, personal care assistance, advocacy, peer counseling, and independent living skills training. The locations and phone numbers of the Connecticut Independent Living Centers are listed in the Resources section of this handbook.
- **Familiarize yourself with the services of the Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy (P&A).** This office advocates for the civil rights of people with disabilities. If you're having trouble finding services or are not satisfied with the services you receive, P&A can help. Contact information is available in the Resources section of this handbook.
- **Obtain assistance in finding a job through your local Connecticut Works/Department of Labor Career Centers.** The Career Centers feature these cost free services:

Self Service and Career Resource Areas

- Job listings
- Newspapers
- Phone, fax, copier
- Computers

- Internet access, word processing
- Resource information, books, videos
- Information on education and skills training
- Information and referral to other support services
- Information on employment, wage and economic trends

Core Workshops Include:

- Job Search
- Networking
- Resume writing
- Internet job search
- Career exploration
- Interviewing Techniques
- Overcoming Age Barriers

A list of the CT Works Career Centers that can assist you in your job search is available on their web site at www.ctdol.ct.us.

- **Register to vote.** If you are 18 years of age, you can further develop your self-advocacy skills by registering and getting out to vote. For a short but thorough course on the history and process of voting in America, see the Freedom's Answer web site at <http://www.freedomanswer.net/school.curriculum.shtml>. This site also has links to Kids Voting USA which provides an even more in-depth course of instruction on voting.



SECTION 4

Participating in PPT Meetings

Developing the ability to effectively self-advocate involves not only learning new skills, but also seeking out places where you can practice your self-advocacy skills.

Your annual Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meeting is one of the best opportunities you have to develop your self-advocacy skills. It is important that you attend these meetings and become an active participant in the planning process. Realizing that every student's experience participating in PPT meetings is different, these activities do not come with suggested grades for implementation. You should begin these activities in grade 9 and continue to work on them, as needed, throughout the remainder of high school. There are a number of things you can do to increase your ability to speak up for yourself at PPT meetings:

- **Understand your rights and responsibilities as a member of the Planning and Placement Team (PPT).** PPT meetings are held in order to develop an appropriate Individualized Education Program (IEP) for YOU. The PPT has the responsibility for deciding your educational and transition goals for the upcoming year, and for determining what special education and related

services you need in order to reach those goals. You have a right, and a personal responsibility, to participate as a member of the PPT!

- **Attend each and every meeting held to discuss and plan your Individualized Education Program (IEP).** By law, IEP's must be reviewed and updated at least once per year. This is usually done at your annual PPT meeting. You can, however, request additional meetings to help you develop your IEP. It's been said that, "80% of success is showing up." Increase your chances for success by being an active participant in all planning meetings.

- **Be prepared.** Before attending your next PPT meeting you should:
 - review the meeting agenda (**see sample agenda, page 84**)
 - review your latest IEP and progress on goals
 - compile a list of questions, concerns, and goals for the future
 - practice talking about your goals, strengths, weaknesses, and accommodation needs

- **Take an active role in leading or facilitating your PPT.** Throughout the country, students are being given more responsibility for leading their own PPT meetings. Take advantage of your high school years to develop and practice the skills necessary for leading your own PPT.

The following activities can help you become a more active participant in your PPT meetings:

Activity Time

Activity 1

Understand your rights and responsibilities as a member of the Planning and Placement Team (PPT)

Although you may feel uncomfortable attending a meeting where the entire focus of the discussion is on you, **it is vitally important that you participate in all of your Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings.** After all, it is your life and educational goals that are being discussed and agreed upon during these meetings. Do you really want your parents and teachers to plan *your* life without your input?

To help you participate more fully in your PPT meetings it is important to have a basic understanding of your legal rights to special education and related services.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that gives you the right to participate in planning activities related to your education and transition from school to adult life.

For a more detailed review of special education law and the PPT process, please refer to the publication titled *A Student Guide to Understanding Your Rights and Responsibilities under IDEA*. This guide is available through your special education department or can be downloaded from the Connecticut State Department of Education's web site at <http://www.state.ct.us/sde>. Click on "Special Education".

Below is a brief description of IDEA legislation and considerations for transition planning:

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that requires that special education and related services be provided to eligible individuals with disabilities. Under IDEA, the public school district where you reside is responsible for making sure that you receive special education and related services appropriate to your individual needs. How and where the services are provided is determined by the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) and should be included in your Individualized Education Program, or IEP. IEP's must be reviewed and updated at least once per year.

The **Planning and Placement Team** consists of an interdisciplinary team of teachers, school administrators, parents, and other specialists that make decisions regarding each student's education. The Planning and Placement Team members are different for each student receiving special education.

As the most important member of your PPT, you have the right to participate in meetings held for the purpose of:

- Planning and reviewing evaluation and reevaluation results
- Developing, reviewing and revising your Individualized Education Program (IEP)

- Transition Planning.

Although you may attend your PPT meetings at any age, it is especially important that you participate if the purpose of the meeting is to discuss **Transition Planning**. IDEA defines transition services as "a coordinated set of activities, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promote a student's movement from school to post-school activities." Transition goals and objectives are written into your IEP and are usually developed at your annual PPT meeting.

If you would like to increase your involvement in the development of your IEP, *The IEP Coach* is an interactive web site designed to help students write their own IEP's. To participate in this process go to http://www.people.virginia.edu/~pmc2r/web_class/iepcoach.html

Transition Planning

IDEA mandates that beginning at the Annual Review following your 13th birthday, the PPT must develop a "Statement of Transition Service Needs". **This statement will define your long-term goals and the "Courses of Study" that you will participate in during your high school years.** At each annual PPT meeting following your fifteenth birthday (or younger, if determined appropriate) more specific transition planning will occur.

Transition service areas that must be considered when developing long-term goals and objectives include:

- Post-secondary education
- Vocational training
- Integrated employment (including supported employment)
- Continuing and adult education
- Adult services
- Independent living
- Community participation

Transition services must be based on your individual needs, taking into account your preferences and interests. They may include:

- Instruction
- Related services
- Community experiences
- Development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives
- Acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation

In other words, transition planning requires you to think about what you would like to do after high school. Will you go to college or trade school? What kind of job would you like? Where will you live? What will you do for fun and relaxation? Answers to these questions comprise your long-term goals. Transition services refer to the methods used to achieve those goals.

By law, if the meeting is to discuss transition services, then **you must be invited to attend**. Because **your goals** for the future are being discussed, it is important that you attend these meetings and become an active participant in the planning process.

If you choose not to participate in your annual meeting, the PPT is still required to make transition decisions based on your individual needs, taking into account your interests and preferences. Therefore you will have to develop alternative ways to make your interests, needs and preferences known to members of the team.

Either individually with your special education teacher, or as part of a special education class, **review and discuss the purpose of the annual PPT meeting and transition planning.** Then **discuss the concept of active participation.**

Take a count of how many students in your class have **attended** their PPT meetings. Then count how many students feel they have **actively participated** in the meetings.

Think about the following questions:

- Can you attend your PPT meeting without participating?
- Can you participate in your PPT meeting without attending?

Then **think about other ways in which you can make your wants and needs known at your PPT meeting.** For instance, you may want to prepare a list of your goals to bring to the meeting, develop a collage of pictures showing your goals for the future, or bring a friend to help support you in describing your goals.

In your *Personal Discovery Journal*, write what active participation in your PPT meeting means to you. Be sure to describe how you will ensure that your needs, preferences and interests are taken into consideration when developing your IEP.

Activity 2

Review the PPT Meeting Agenda

To help you understand the steps involved in a Planning and Placement Team meeting, you should **obtain a copy of the PPT meeting agenda** used by your school district. If your school district does not have a standard meeting agenda you can refer to the agenda used by Windsor Locks High School which is provided below. This agenda lists the areas that should be covered at each PPT meeting. As a class, or individually with your Resource Room Teacher or Transition Coordinator, review and discuss each of the steps involved. Make sure you ask questions about any terms you do not understand such as "procedural safeguards" or "triennial results".

Sample PPT Agenda

1. Introductions
2. Purpose
3. Procedural Safeguards
4. Current Spec. Ed. Program
5. Triennial Results (if, appropriate)
6. Eligibility for Spec. Services
7. Academic Progress
 - A. Report card
 - B. Teacher reports
 - C. Number of credits earned

8. Related Services

- A. Social work
- B. Speech therapy
- C. Occupational therapy
- D. Physical therapy
- E. Outside agency

9. Strengths and Weaknesses

10. Program for Coming School Year

- A. Goals/Objectives - Remember to discuss your long term transition goals first! This should guide the development of your IEP.
- B. Classroom modifications
- C. Classes
 - **Algebra 1 requirement
- D. Special Ed. Program
 - **Resource support for credit?
- E. Related services program
 - 1. Social work
 - 2. Speech therapy
 - 3. Occupational therapy
 - 4. Physical therapy
- F. Summer school/tutoring
- G. Outside agency referral
- H. Transportation
- I. School day/year

11. CAPT/SAT

- A. Standard administration/modifications

B. Exemptions

12. Triennial Testing For Coming School Year (if appropriate)

13. Summary

A. Assistive technology

B. Behavior plan

14. Transfer of Rights under IDEA - Year before student's 18TH birthday

15. Senior Annual Review/Exit PPT

A. Confidentiality of records

B. Availability of school services after graduation

Activity 3

Understanding the importance of being able to lead your own PPT meeting

One of the goals of self-advocacy is that you are able to lead your own PPT meetings (either independently or with support) by the time you are a senior in high school. Remember that self-advocacy skills take time to develop. Speaking up for yourself may be hard to do, but it will become easier with practice. Taking an active role in all of your PPT meetings is an excellent way to practice those self-advocacy skills.

It is also important for you to consider that during your PPT meetings you will have the support of others who care about your future, such as your parents or guardians and school personnel. This type or intensity of support will not be available in most work or post-secondary education settings where you will be required to speak up for yourself.

To help you begin to appreciate the importance of self-advocacy, brainstorm and **develop a list** of all of the environments and situations in which you may need to advocate for yourself upon leaving high school. This list can include things like:

- job interviews
- college entrance interviews
- meetings with college professors or job supervisors to discuss accommodation needs

- meetings with adult vocational services providers, such as the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, to discuss eligibility and service issues
- meetings with bank personnel to discuss credit qualifications for a home or auto loan

Think about how your active participation in the PPT process might help prepare you for some of these adult situations. For example, you might consider whether you are developing skills in any of the areas described below:

- Speaking about your strengths and needs
- Setting goals
- Problem solving
- Speaking in a group setting
- Listening

Activity 4:

Observing students leading their own PPT meetings

After much discussion of the PPT process and the importance of your input in the development of your Individualized Education Program (IEP), it is likely that you may still feel uncomfortable taking a primary role in the meeting. At this point it may be helpful for you to observe others who have successfully directed their own meetings.

Martin, Huber Marshall, et.al. have developed a multimedia program called the *Self-Directed IEP* that is designed to teach students how to manage their own IEP meeting. The videotape from this program shows an experienced high school student explaining how he directed his last IEP meeting. It is available through the Special Education Resource Center (SERC) library (see the Resource section of this handbook) or can be ordered through the Choice Maker Instructional Series - University of Colorado website at <http://www.ed.uiuc.edu/sped/tri/iep.html>.

While you **view the *Self-Directed IEP* videotape**, be aware that the videotape will be using the word "staffing" to refer to what we in Connecticut call the "PPT meeting". Also, you will notice that the videotape portrays very self-determined and confident young people leading their PPT meetings. Remember that this is the long-term goal, and not something you will be expected to achieve right away.

As you watch the videotape, think about the degree of student involvement in the meeting. **Make a list of all the self-advocacy skills you observe the student**

using. After viewing the videotape, **discuss the advantages of student directed meetings.**

Activity 5:

Determine how involved you will be in leading your next PPT meeting, and what types of support you will need

With your Transition Coordinator or Resource Room Teacher **discuss the role you will take in leading your next PPT meeting.**

You may wish to begin your journey to self-determination simply by introducing the PPT members and stating the purpose of the meeting. Your Transition Coordinator or School Administrator can then lead other parts of the meeting by asking appropriate questions and making sure that the conversation remains **student-centered** (focused on YOU). Each year, as you become more comfortable with the role of self-advocate, you should begin to assume more responsibility in leading the meeting. You should maintain responsibility for determining how much and what types of support you will need to participate fully in the planning process. At no point in the meeting should you feel that your opinion is not being heard.

The following **checklist** was developed to help you determine how involved you will be in leading your next PPT meeting. The following **worksheet** was developed to help you develop a narrative for leading your next PPT meeting.

PPT Self-Determination Checklist

Place a check mark next to each activity you will assume responsibility for.

- I will attend my next PPT meeting
- I will participate in the following ways:
 - Introduce myself
 - State the purpose of the meeting
 - Introduce the other PPT members (or)
 - Ask the other PPT members to introduce themselves
 - Ask someone to take notes for my IEP
 - Ask PPT members to report on my academic progress and related services
 - Describe my disability, strengths and weaknesses, and how I think I did in school this year
 - State my transition goals in the areas of employment/post-secondary education, independent living, and community participation
 - Describe my educational program for the coming school year, including goals and objectives, classroom modifications
 - State my concerns/needs and ask PPT members for input
 - Thank everyone for coming
- I will not attend my next PPT meeting, but will make sure my interests, preferences, and needs are taken into consideration by the Planning and Placement Team when they develop my Individualized Education Program. I will do this by completing the following activities:

PPT Self-Determination Worksheet

Place a check mark next to each activity you will assume responsibility for and fill in the blanks to help you prepare for your next PPT meeting.

- I will attend my next PPT meeting
- I will participate in the following ways:
 - Introduce myself

Hi my name is _____ . I want to welcome and thank you all for coming to my PPT meeting.

- State the purpose of the meeting

The purpose of this meeting is to

- Introduce the other PPT members (or)
- Ask the other PPT members to introduce themselves

Would everyone please introduce themselves?

- Ask someone to take notes for my IEP

Mr./Mrs. _____ would you please take notes for my IEP?

Thank you.

- Ask PPT members to report on my academic progress and related services
- I would like an update on my progress this past year. Who would like to begin?*

- Describe my disability, strengths and weaknesses, and how I think I did in school this past year

As you all probably know, I am receiving special education and related services because I have been identified as having (describe your disability).

Overall, I think I did _____ in school this past year.

My favorite subjects were:

My least favorite subjects were:

The vocational evaluation or career exploration activities I participated in were:

I needed the following accommodations/modifications:

Assistive technology I used included:

- State my transition goals in the areas of employment/post-secondary education, independent living, and community participation

My employment/post-secondary education goals for next year are:

My independent living goals for next year are:

My community participation goals for next year are:

- Describe my educational program for the coming school year, including goals, objectives, and classroom modifications

My educational goals for next year are:

- State my concerns/needs and ask PPT members for input

I am most concerned about:

I believe I will need the following related services and accommodations/modifications/assistive technology to be successful:

Does anyone have any suggestions to help me meet my goals?

- Thank everyone for coming

Thank you all for coming and participating in my PPT.

- I will not attend my next PPT meeting, but will make sure my interests, preferences, and needs are taken into consideration by the Planning and Placement Team when they develop my Individualized Education Program. I will do this by completing the following activities:

Activity 6

Having a Successful PPT meeting

You can increase your chances of having a successful PPT meeting by being prepared and actively involved in the meeting.

Before your next PPT meeting complete the following activities:

- Find out who will be attending, and determine whether you would like to invite anyone else.
- Decide what parts of the meeting you will be leading/directing.
- Review your last IEP and progress on goals.
- Identify your concerns and develop a list of questions.
- Think about new education, transition and self-advocacy goals you want to work on.
- Practice talking about your goals, strengths and weaknesses, and accommodation needs.
- Find out what jargon or acronyms are likely to be used at the meeting (IEP, CMT, BRS, etc.) and make sure you understand what they mean.

During the meeting:

- Speak up if you don't understand something.
- Ask team members to refrain from using any jargon or acronyms that you don't understand.
- Make sure that PPT members are talking to you, not about you.
- Get answers to the list of questions you prepared.
- If you disagree with some of the statements made about you, speak up and present your point of view.
- If you don't agree with the final decision made at the meeting, ask your parents to take the IEP home so that you can review it together and discuss your concerns in more detail.

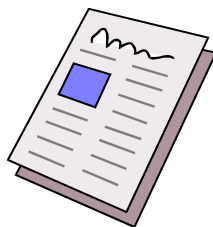
Participating in your PPT is just one of the many ways to develop your self-advocacy skills while you are still in high school.

We hope that all the activities provided in this handbook have assisted you in taking that educational journey from self-discovery to advocacy.

As you begin your transition from school to adult life, please look over your **Personal Discovery Journals** to see how far you've come in the past four years. We hope that this journey has given you the opportunity to learn more about

yourself and the resources available in your community. We also hope that the activities in this handbook have helped you become a more effective self-advocate.

We wish you luck as you continue your journey. Put your education and talents to good use, continue to reach out to others, and have a great life!



SECTION 5

Resources

The following is a list of Connecticut agencies and organizations that can provide you with information and/or services as you make the transition from school to adult life:

Connecticut Board of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)

184 Windsor Avenue

Windsor, CT 06095

(860) 602-4000 or 1-800-842-4510

www.besb.state.ct.us

Connecticut Commission on the Deaf and Hearing Impaired (CDHI)

1245 Farmington Avenue

West Hartford, CT 06107

(860) 561-0196 or 1-800-708-6796

Interpreting Services (860) 566-7414

www.state.ct.us/cdhi

Connecticut Community Providers Association (CCPA)

35 Cold Springs Road, Suite 522

Rocky Hill, CT 06067-3165

(860) 257-7909

Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS)

Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)

25 Sigourney Street, 11th Floor

Hartford, CT 06106

(860) 424-4844 or 1-800-537-2549

Call for the address and phone number of your local BRS office or visit their web site at www.brs.state.ct.us

Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL)

200 Folly Brook Boulevard

Wethersfield, CT 06109

(860) 262-6067 or (860) 263-6074 (TDD/TTY)

Call for the address and phone number of your local Career Center, or look in the blue pages of your phone book under State of Connecticut

www.ctdol.state.ct.us

Connecticut Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS)

410 Capitol Avenue

Hartford, CT 06106

(860) 418-7000

Call for the address and phone number of your local DMHAS office, or look in the blue pages of your phone book under State of Connecticut

www.dmhas.state.ct.us

Connecticut Department of Mental Retardation (DMR)

450 Capitol Avenue

Hartford, CT 06106

(860) 418-6000

Call for the address and phone number of your local DMR office, or look in the blue pages of your phone book under State of Connecticut

www.dmr.state.ct.us

Connecticut's Independent Living Centers (ILC's):

Center for Disability Rights (CDR)

764A Campbell Avenue

West Haven, CT 06516

(203) 934-7077 or (203) 934-7078 (TDD)

Disability Resources Center of Fairfield County (DRCFC)

80 Ferry Boulevard

Stratford, CT 06497

(203) 378-6977 or (203) 378-3248

Disabilities Network of Eastern Connecticut (DNEC)

107 Route Thirty-Two

North Franklin, CT 06254

(860) 823-1898 (V/TDD)

Independence Northwest (IN)

Route 63 Professional Center-Suite 200

1183 New Haven Road

Naugatuck, CT 06770

(203) 729-3299 (V/TDD)

Independence Unlimited (IU)

151 New Park Avenue

Hartford, CT 06106

(860) 523-5021 or (860) 523-5603 (TDD)

**Connecticut Office of Protection and Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities
(P&A)**

60B Weston Street

Hartford, CT 06120

(860) 297-4300 or (860) 566-2102 (V/TDD) or 1-800-842-7303

www.state.ct.us/opapd

Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE)

Bureau of Special Education/Pupil Services

25 Industrial Park Road

Middletown, CT 06457

(860) 807-2025

www.state.ct.us/sde

Special Education Resource Center (SERC)

25 Industrial Park Road

Middletown, CT 06457

(860) 623-1485

www.ctserc.org

**University of Connecticut A.J. Pappanikou Center for Excellence in
Developmental Disabilities, Education, Research and Service (UCE)**

263 Farmington Avenue

MC-6222

Farmington, CT 06030-6222

(860) 679-1500 or (860) 623-1315 (TTY) or Toll free (866) 623-1315

