



Nebraska's Journey to Inclusion

A Guide for Secondary Schools

INTRODUCTION

All students deserve a high-quality education that prepares them for future success, and all students are entitled to a high quality high school education that prepares them for success in their post-secondary education and careers. To realize this vision, all students with disabilities must have equitable access to the full rigor of grade-level instruction in high school to best prepare for life after graduation. The challenges facing districts, schools, classrooms, and families in providing a quality high school education and plan for a post-secondary life are often overwhelming. Students need support related to quality academics, plans and preparations for their post-secondary lives, and addressing their social-emotional and cognitive needs. To mitigate the challenges, districts, schools and classrooms can adopt an [Inclusive Education](#) approach.






INCLUSIVE EDUCATION DEFINED

All students have **access to equitable educational opportunities**
All students have **viable pathways** to postsecondary success
All students have **access to the individualized supports** they need to succeed

UNIQUE CHALLENGES IN SECONDARY SETTINGS

Supporting students to **meet rigorous academic requirements**
Supporting **student independence and self efficacy**
Creating and implementing **legally required transition plans**
Mitigating the **abrupt decline of scaffolds and supports** upon graduation

Inclusive Education offers a new approach that ensures school communities focus on student learning as well as their growing independence. This guide is meant to serve as a resource with recommendations for best practices for implementation to ensure all students are prepared for post-secondary success. This guide, offers the following:

-  **Innovative Approaches to Graduation Pathways**
-  **Fostering Student Independence and Self-Advocacy**
-  **Effective Practices for Transition Planning**
-  **Wrap-Around Services and Supports**
-  **Increased Access and Engagement in CTE and Life Skills Coursework**

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO GRADUATION PATHWAYS

DEFINED

Prior to reaching the transition process and preparing for what comes next after high school, students must first reach the milestone of graduation as defined in the state of Nebraska, and can do so in a variety of ways. In Nebraska, there are **three potential pathways** for students with IEPs to complete high school, all of which end in receiving a signed diploma. Students with IEPs have both the standard academic course of study requirements (200 credits, 80% of which are core curriculum) and they have IEP and the transition goals written within. The pathways leading to a signed high school diploma include:

1

200 credits + IEP Transition Goals
80% are core curriculum courses

2

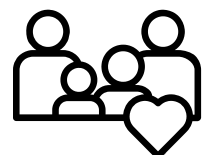
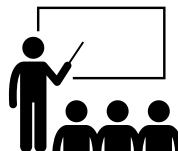
200 credits
80% are core curriculum courses

3

Meets IEP Transition Goals

KEY ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

Starting in 9th grade, all students must have a **clear pathway** to reach the state mandated 200 credits, 80% of which must be core curriculum classes. The **creation of IEP and transition goals** are crucial to ensuring that a graduation pathway is viable for all students and must be created with care and appropriate attention to the individual student's needs. Below is a suggested list of key actions to be taken by the appropriate parties to ensure innovative approaches to graduation pathways result in Inclusive Education in secondary schools.



KEY ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

DISTRICTS

Collect and analyze student and school performance data on an ongoing basis through an equity-driven lens. Focus on student growth and trajectory within the context of the different available pathway options across the district.

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Define and reflect on **accountability systems** to ensure they prioritize learning and growth towards grade-level mastery for all learners and toward post-secondary preparation, especially those that are historically underperforming.

Set meaningful and aligned goals and develop a corresponding year long **action plan** for the upcoming school year based on trends in historical performance.

SCHOOLS

Collect and analyze **student performance data** on an ongoing basis through an equity-driven lens. Focus on student growth and trajectory within the context of the different available pathway options at a given school.

Collaborate with families and students to solicit input related to the desired graduation pathway(s) to inform subsequent decisions regarding appropriate pathway recommendations

Develop and implement a clear annual process wherein all necessary team members (students, families, and educators) are included in determining the current **appropriate graduation pathway and services** for the student

Prepare for all IEP meetings by **including a pre-meeting with support for families** to discuss progress towards graduation pathway goals

Evaluate student progress towards their graduation pathway and make scheduling adjustments as needed to support continued progress, as well as **communicate progress** with student, family, and school-based stakeholders about this progress

KEY ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

CLASSROOMS

Develop a **deep understanding of individual students** through observation, IEP information, and **communication with students, their families** and previous teachers or school staff members with prior experiences with the student.

Set meaningful, aligned and individualized **goals** for student academic and social-emotional skill development for the upcoming school year with the individual student's trajectory in mind.

Get to know students by developing **deep and trusting relationships** where students can **share needs**.

Develop **curricular materials with the understanding** of instructional strategies, accommodations, and modifications that positively impact the learning of individual students according to their individualized graduation pathway requirements.

STUDENTS

Ask questions to develop an understanding of the various graduation pathways available to them and how each might impact **post-secondary opportunities**

Advocate for the graduation pathway **they feel is most appropriate** to reach their goals

Request to enroll in the necessary courses to meet graduation pathway requirements

Engage in coursework and request support when needed to meet academic goals

FAMILIIES

Develop **an understanding of the various graduation pathways** available to their child and how each might impact post-secondary opportunities

Advocate for the graduation pathway they feel is most appropriate to reach their goals

Request their child to enroll in the necessary **courses** to meet graduation pathway requirement




Engage in regular check-ins with teachers to ensure their student is on track and receiving necessary supports

INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO GRADUATION PATHWAYS

SUMMARY

In creating and implementing a system that appropriately identifies the individualized academic course of study alongside IEP and Transitional goals, district leaders, school leaders, and educators demonstrate their belief that, with the aligned support(s), all educators can be successful in supporting all students towards achieving the goal of graduating with a diploma.

By adhering to these systems with fidelity, schools ensure that:

-  Students are appropriately challenged and have **clear goals and objectives** to guide them to graduation and postsecondary success
-  Families feel supported by the school community through **increased transparency** related to their students' trajectories
-  All learners have **access to intentional and aligned resources** and regular checkpoints that meaningfully support understanding of their own success.



FOSTERING STUDENT INDEPENDENCE AND SELF-ADVOCACY

DEFINED

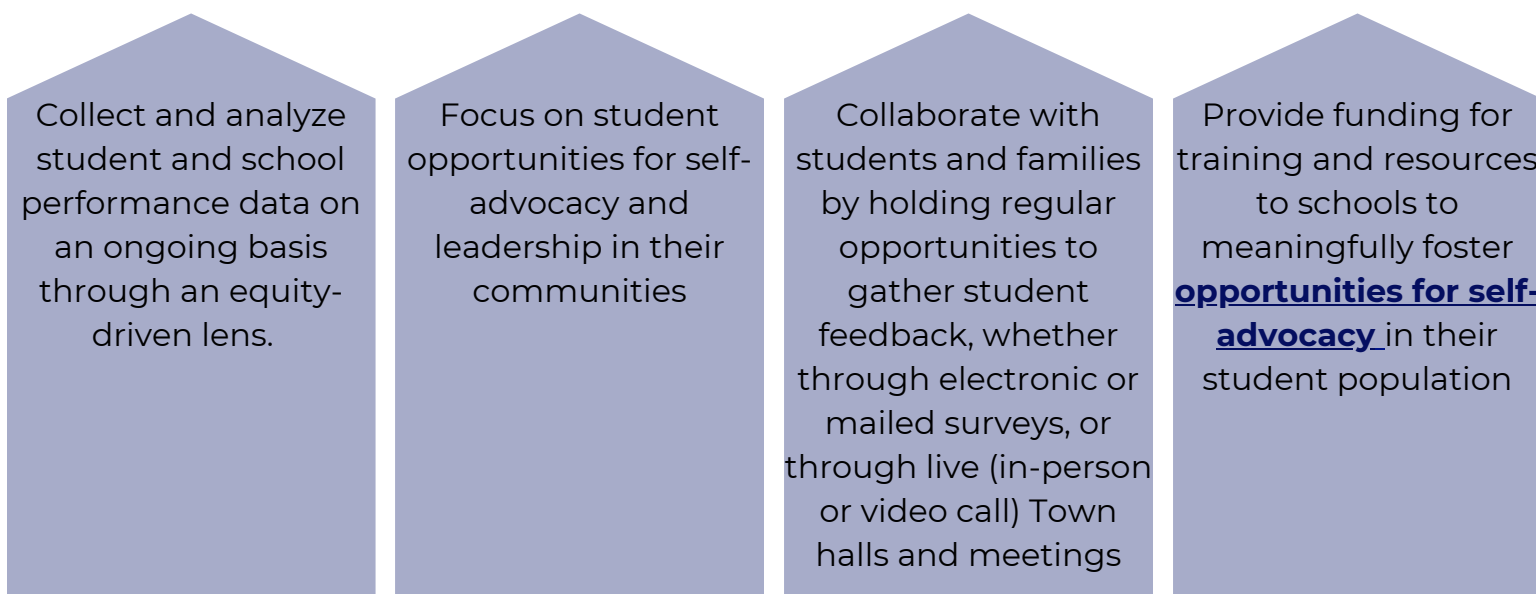
As students advance in their educational trajectory through high school and towards graduation, they also are advancing toward adulthood. It is crucial for districts and schools to create opportunities for all students to have scaffolded opportunities to practice building their skills in independence and self-advocacy, and to do so both in classrooms and in other school community spaces. While this is supportive for all students, this is even more critical for students with disabilities as they will need to develop the skills to identify what supports they need and how to access them as they navigate post-secondary life without the structures provided by their K-12 experiences.



KEY ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

Effectively fostering self-advocacy requires collaboration between district and school leaders, educators, families, and students. Below are the key actions that district leaders, school leaders and educators should take in this process.

DISTRICTS



FOSTERING STUDENT INDEPENDENCE AND SELF-ADVOCACY

SCHOOLS

Provide training and resources to staff to meaningfully foster opportunities for self-advocacy in the classroom

Analyze and select High Quality Instructional Materials and best practices to explicitly teach students self-advocacy skills to be delivered in resource room, general ed classroom, or informal advisory setting

Collaborate with families and students to collect input related to student performance, outcomes, and current needs on an ongoing basis (through electronic or mailed surveys, or through live in-person or remote events)

Facilitate self-advocacy and leadership opportunities through non-academic school programming, such as student government or student-run action committees

Prepare for all IEP meetings by intentionally including students in their own meetings, and preparing students to share their thoughts and voice their questions/concerns at multiple points in IEP meetings

CLASSROOMS

Solicit input from students in setting meaningful, aligned and individualized goals for student academic and social-emotional skill development for the upcoming school year

Get to know students by developing deep and trusting **relationships** where students can share needs

Use High Quality instructional Materials and Universal Design for Learning to annotate existing materials to further embed choice and metacognitive reflection opportunities to build independence for future choices

Facilitate conversations that explicitly discuss student strengths and areas of need

Provide ample opportunities for **student feedback on support and needs**

Set clear **norms and parameters** around **communication and self-advocacy** and include resources (such as sentence starters or prepared questions) to allow students to practice these skills with scaffolds

FOSTERING STUDENT INDEPENDENCE AND SELF-ADVOCACY

STUDENTS

Develop an understanding of current IEP services and identify if those provided both match what is mandated and are providing appropriate support

Advocate for the **services** and accommodations they feel are most appropriate to reach their goals

Actively participate in opportunities presented to advocate for needs in forums, surveys, or other settings

Proactively **communicate** with teachers or staff members for support when needed to meet academic goals

FAMILIES

Develop an understanding of current IEP services and identify if those provided both match what is mandated and are providing appropriate support

Advocate for the services and **accommodations** they feel are most appropriate to reach their goals




Include student in all interactions with teachers and staff members, whenever possible

Engage in regular check-ins with teachers to ensure their student is on track and receiving necessary supports, including the student in these communications whenever possible

SUMMARY

In fostering the opportunity for students to engage in self-advocacy in their education, district leaders, school leaders and educators demonstrate their belief that, with the aligned support, all students can achieve the goal of ownership and independence in their education and prepare themselves to drive their future goals in a post-secondary setting.

By embodying this mindset, schools ensure that:

-  Students are appropriately challenged and have a supported environment to take risks while they practice their independent self-advocacy skills
-  Families feel supported by the school community through shared support of fostering their students' independence
-  All learners have access to supportive members of the community who will encourage them to develop their confidence and communication skills

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR TRANSITION PLANNING

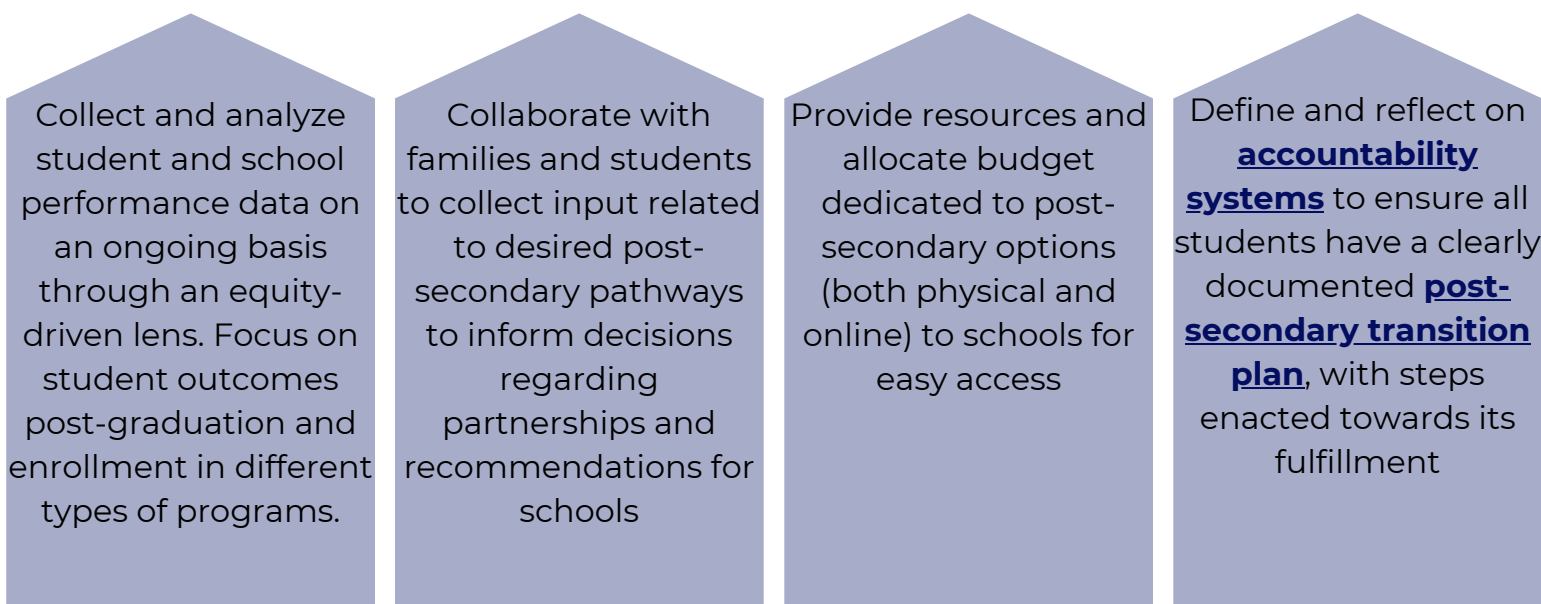
DEFINED

Planning for what comes next after high school can be daunting for families of students with disabilities. However, when this work begins early in a student's educational experience, students are able to leverage a supportive, structured community and create an individualized plan of action. For the first time, there is not a required next grade to enter, and students and families might struggle with the varied and numerous choices and sudden lack of support beyond a K-12 setting. It is crucial that, as students approach graduation, they are given significant support in exploring, weighing, and pursuing those potential next options. And, while this is a beneficial practice to implement with all students, it is required for students with disabilities as they transition from the support afforded through IDEA and begin post-secondary life, and need a plan to do so.

KEY ACTIONS TO CONSIDER

While college and joining the workforce are generally the most commonly considered options after high school, it is also important to note that there are many other choices available to students. Developing a clear transitional plan with students and their families wherein they know how to and have practiced being able to access these resources and forming a plan before graduation facilitates a smoother, more scaffolded approach as students leave the familiar K-12 setting. Below are the key actions that district leaders, school leaders and educators should take in this process. (Nebraska Department of Education, 22)

DISTRICTS



Set meaningful and aligned goals and develop a corresponding year long action plan for the upcoming school year based on trends in historical performance

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR TRANSITION PLANNING

SCHOOLS

Provide training and resources to staff to discuss post-secondary plans and options with students in an advisory capacity

Collaborate with families and students to collect input related to student performance, outcomes, and possible post-secondary plans

Develop and implement a clear annual process wherein all necessary team members (students, families, and educators) are included in determining the current **appropriate graduation pathway** and **services** for the student

Devise and track student progress towards clear action steps during 11th and 12th grade years for students and families to take to ensure they have available options for post-secondary plans after graduation

Include post-secondary transition goals and plans in all preparation for and execution of IEP meetings for high school students

CLASSROOMS

Provide opportunities to discuss multiple post-secondary tracks and avoid prioritizing them as “best”

Discuss different options for post-secondary plans with students prior to IEP meetings, presenting multiple options and self-service resources for exploration

Provide examples of “non traditional” transitional post-secondary success and resources to further research them

Provide resources regarding post-secondary plans and steps for achieving them

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES FOR TRANSITION PLANNING

STUDENT

Develop an understanding of the various post-secondary plans available to them and how each might impact career opportunities

Advocate for the transition plan they feel is most appropriate to reach their goals

Request resources to learn about differing transition plans prior to deciding which is best for them

Follow through on taking any steps necessary towards engaging with post-secondary resources

FAMILY

Develop an understanding of the various post-secondary plans available to their child and how each might impact career opportunities

Advocate for the transition plan they feel is most appropriate to reach their child's goals

Request **resources** to learn about differing transition plans prior to deciding which is best for their child

Engage in regular check-ins with teachers to ensure their student is on track and receiving necessary supports

SUMMARY

Having a clear sense of all available options after high school enables students and families to make the most appropriate choices for them.

By providing formal and systematized transitional planning for all students, schools ensure that:



Educators can better support their students in knowing their goals



Families feel supported by the school community through ongoing and consistent conversations related to their students' post-secondary goals and how they can achieve them



All learners have consistent support in determining their next steps and have increased autonomy in directing their educational trajectory

WRAP-AROUND SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

DEFINED

While classroom experiences and curriculum comprise a significant portion of a student's time and involvement with their school, the school community is a key component of their environment that can significantly improve their outcomes. **Engaging all stakeholders, and providing students and families** in settings and activities that go beyond academic core subjects but are integrated throughout the school community, and **expanding in extracurriculars and other community activities** has evidence-backed results for improving student outcomes.

Of particular note, students with disabilities are often excluded from these community activities in the service of devoting more time to their academic support; however, this approach limits a student's ability to build skills that lead to improved outcomes that expand beyond academic domains and supports student transitions to post high school success.

KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

Student involvement in their school community is often driven by family involvement, and schools and districts must take special care to provide equitable opportunities for involvement for students, with deliberate outreach to both children and families, to avoid certain opportunities being missed by large portions of the student population. Community involvement and extracurriculars should also be accessible from a physical, financial, and social-emotional standpoint to all students, so that partnerships and investment in these programs should be decided with these in mind. Further, schools and districts are responsible not only for ensuring that all students and families have access to existing resources, opportunities, and partnerships, but for identifying and pursuing those that will meet the needs of each student represented in their population.

DISTRICT

Collect and analyze student and school data

related to student engagement in community, extracurricular, and partnership programs, as well as family involvements, through an equity-driven lens.

Collaborate with families and students to collect input related to community partnerships and extracurriculars and encourage involvement

Provide resources and guidelines to establish inclusive extracurricular programs and community partnerships

Define and reflect on accountability

systems to ensure all students have access to community partnerships and extracurricular programs

Set meaningful and aligned goals for student engagement and participation in community partnerships and extracurriculars

WRAP-AROUND SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

SCHOOL

Create and clearly communicate opportunities for a variety of inclusive extracurricular opportunities and pursue **partnerships with community organizations** who prioritize equitable experiences for all students

Collaborate with families and students to collect input related to community partnerships and extracurriculars and encourage involvement

Oversee school-based extracurriculars to ensure all students have opportunities to join and feel meaningfully included

Define and reflect on accountability systems to ensure all students have access to community partnerships and extracurricular programs

Set meaningful and aligned goals for student engagement and participation in community partnerships and extracurriculars

CLASSROOM

Encourage engagement and involvement in extracurricular activities and community partnerships through conversations with students

Celebrate student involvement by asking students about their involvement and acknowledging accomplishments (in announcements, decorations, one-to-one interactions, and more)

Provide resources for students to pursue extracurriculars and involvement in community partnerships

Establish communication with school-based extracurricular sponsors to support student involvement and improvement in both courses and extracurricular opportunities

WRAP-AROUND SERVICES AND SUPPORTS

STUDENT

Research and identify potential extracurriculars and community partnerships that are of interest

Attend events and meetings to gauge interest and fit in various extracurricular or community partnership offerings

Follow through on commitments to extracurricular programming

Form and maintain connections with sponsors of and participants in extracurricular and community programming

FAMILIES

Research and identify potential extracurriculars and community partnerships that are of interest




Encourage engagement and involvement in extracurricular activities and community partnerships through conversations with students

Celebrate student involvement by asking students about their involvement and acknowledging accomplishments

Provide resources for students to pursue extracurriculars and involvement in community partnerships

SUMMARY

By providing ample extracurricular opportunities and engaging in community partnerships, schools ensure that:

-  Schools are more fully woven into the fabric of their communities by forming meaningful and impactful connections with partners
-  Families feel supported by the school community through both academic and non-academic opportunity and support for their students
-  All students have access to opportunities to grow holistically

INCREASE ACCESS & ENGAGEMENT IN CTE & LIFE SKILLS COURSEWORK

DEFINED

Inclusive curriculum is curriculum that engages all learners equitably and provides learning opportunities with the express purpose of post-secondary career and life readiness. Qualified contractors in the state of Nebraska may provide these opportunities, such as [Career and Technical Education Programs](#), or schools may embed independent life skills such as financial literacy and consumer education into core instructional programming. Researching and investing in these [High Quality Curricular Materials](#) ensures inclusion at the systems-level for all students and provides opportunities for individualized needs to be addressed.

KEY POINTS TO CONSIDER

The logistical challenges of running approved CTE programs within a school or district are many, and including these programs must be accounted for in the budgeting and logistical planning for the school or district. In the absence of capacity to invest enough resources into a full-fledged CTE program, embedding inclusive alternative curriculum for post-secondary readiness is another option to ensure all students have access to information and skills that will benefit them outside of the classroom, regardless of whether they pursue post-secondary schooling, employment, or an alternate pathway after graduation. Avoiding forced “tracking” and providing these options to all students, into which they all have mandatory for all or opt-in systems, creates an equitable environment where students have voice in their educational trajectories and all students have access to the learning opportunities provided.

DISTRICT

Collect and analyze student and school data related to CTE and life skills curriculum to identify demand and allocate resources appropriately

Collaborate with families and students to collect input related to CTE and life skills curriculum

Research and identify CTE programs with High Quality Instructional Materials with which to partner within schools

Define and reflect on accountability systems to ensure all students have access to CTE and life skills courses

Provide resources and allocated funding for schools to implement these curricular programs and partnerships

Set meaningful and aligned goals for student engagement and participation in CTE and life skills courses

INCREASE ACCESS & ENGAGEMENT IN CTE & LIFE SKILLS COURSEWORK

SCHOOL

Create opportunities for variety of inclusive education opportunities and pursue options that meet student and family needs

Collaborate with families and students to raise awareness of CTE and life skills curriculum to encourage enrollment. **Define and reflect on accountability** systems to track effectiveness of CTE and life skills classes in terms of post-secondary outcomes

Provide resources and allocated funding for implementation of these curricular programs and partnerships. Oversee implementation CTE and life skills classes to ensure all students have opportunities to join and feel meaningfully included

Facilitate student participation in **Career and Technical Student Organizations** to provide students with meaningful, hands-on experiences

Set meaningful and aligned goals for student engagement and participation in CTE and life skills courses

CLASSROOM

Encourage engagement and involvement in CTE and life skills courses where appropriate through conversations with students

Connect traditional course curriculum to applicable life skills such as personal finances, decision-making, and problem-solving.

Provide resources for students to pursue CTE and life skills courses, as well as to research their options independently

Ensure that college and career education are both equally valued in language and presentation of information

INCREASE ACCESS & ENGAGEMENT IN CTE & LIFE SKILLS COURSEWORK

STUDENT

Identify post-secondary programs and opportunities of interest

Research and identify potential CTE and life skills courses that are of interest and aligned with their post-secondary goals

Advocate for enrollment in CTE or life skills courses best aligned to post-secondary goals

Engage in CTSOs to gain further hands-on career experience

FAMILIES

Identify post-secondary programs and opportunities of interest and discuss them with their students




Research and identify potential CTE and life skills courses that are of interest and aligned with their students' post-secondary goals

Encourage engagement and involvement in CTE and life skills courses through conversations with students

Celebrate student involvement by asking students about their involvement and acknowledging accomplishments

SUMMARY

By providing inclusive educational opportunities, schools ensure that:

-  All learners have access to career and life readiness resources to ease their post-secondary transition
-  Families and students are invested in their educational experience through having choice regarding how they prepare for their post-secondary transition
-  Educators have the resources necessary to meet their students' needs related to both traditional and non-traditional academics

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

To ensure an equitable and supportive high school experience for all students, districts, schools, and classrooms should begin by prioritizing the following:

Innovative Approaches to Graduation Pathways



Strategies for Fostering Student Independence and Self-Advocacy



Effective Practices for Transition Planning



Non-scholastic Community Supports



Inclusive Curriculum: Career and Technical Education and Life Skills Courses



Beginning with proactively researching and implementing inclusive, High Quality Instructional Materials and systems for addressing the holistic needs of each student, high school programs can ensure that all students have access to the resources and support they need to graduate and find success in their post-secondary lives. Perhaps just as crucial as this systems-level planning is also the intentional inclusion and centering of the student perspective. Student voice must be considered more centrally in any and all support plans, and students and families must be more fully empowered to access and take advantage of resources both internal and external to the school and district to meet the student's needs. In fostering a true partnership between students, families, their school and their district, high school students will not only be able to successfully complete their graduation requirements, but will have the tools they need to identify and prepare for next steps beyond.

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INCLUSIVE EDUCATION GUIDE FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Pursuant to IDEA, students with IEPs aged 16 and above are required to have an IEP that includes appropriate measurable postsecondary goals that are annually updated and aligned to age-appropriate transition assessments and transition services.

As per Rule 51, codified in Nebraska State Statute, all students with disabilities eligible for special education services, ages 14-21, are required to have a **transition plan** as a component of their Individualized Education Plan (IEP). These plans must include:

- annual IEP goals related to the student's **transition services' needs**,
- evidence indicating that the student was invited to the IEP team meeting where transition services are to be discussed, and
- evidence that the students were provide ample opportunities to serve as active participants and contributors to the final transition program on the IEP.

Before age 14, transition plans may be included with student and parent/guardian approval.

