NEBRASKA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

From Knowing to Doing:

Prior Written Notice (PWN) in IEP Transition Planning

Training Handout

Most educators are familiar with PWN requirements. This training focuses on **practical application**, especially in the context of transition IEPs.

As you work through this handout, keep **your own recent transition IEPs** in mind.

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Why PWN Matters to Teachers

PWN is often viewed as paperwork completed after the meeting. In reality, it documents the **thinking behind instructional and transition decisions**.

Strong PWN:

- Supports families
- Reflects strong professional practice
- Protects teachers and teams if decisions are questioned later

Reflection:
Which part of PWN do you find most challenging to write?

What PWN Is Meant to Do

Prior Written Notice explains:

- **What** the team proposed or refused
- **Why** the decision was made

At its core, PWN should answer the family's unspoken question:

> *"How did the team arrive at this decision for my child?"*

IDEA Requires Explanation, Not Just Documentation

IDEA requires that parents are informed **in writing** when decisions are proposed or refused.

In transition planning, PWN must:

- Explain the **rationale** behind decisions
- Identify the **data and information used** (student interests, assessments, performance)
- Describe **options considered and rejected**

When done well, transition planning is:

- Thoughtful
- Individualized
- Student-centered

Required Components of PWN (High-Level)

PWN must include:

- A description of the action proposed or refused
- An explanation of **why**
- The information used to make the decision
- Options considered and rejected

✔ Accuracy matters
✔ Explanation matters just as much

Why Transition Planning Raises the Stakes

Transition decisions affect life after high school.

These decisions often involve:

- Student preferences
- Family expectations
- Graduation pathways
- Adult services and agencies

Because of this complexity, **transition PWNs are more likely to be questioned** and require clear, thoughtful explanations.

Common PWN Pitfalls in Transition

PWNs often fall short when they include:

- "The team discussed…" with no explanation
- No clear rationale for decisions
- Rejected options not documented
- Weak or missing connections to postsecondary goals

Reflection:
Which of these do you recognize from your own practice?

From Knowing to Doing

Strong PWNs don't start after the meeting—they start **during** it.

Key idea:

> If it's important enough to discuss, it's important enough to explain.

Think of PWN as a **mirror of the IEP discussion**.

PWN & Postsecondary Goals

When a postsecondary goal is proposed or revised, PWN should explain:

- What data informed the goal
- How it aligns with student strengths and interests

Avoid simply restating the goal—**explain the reasoning behind it**.

PWN & Course of Study

Course of study decisions often raise family questions.

PWN should explain:

- How the course of study supports postsecondary goals
- Why alternative options were not selected

Avoid vague statements like *"appropriate for the student."*

PWN & Transition Services

Transition services are more than a list.

PWN should explain:

- Why specific services were selected
- How they build independence and readiness

This is where instructional expertise is clearly demonstrated.

PWN & Outside Agencies

Whether agencies are invited or not, the decision must be explained.

PWN should document:

- What agencies were considered
- Why consent was or wasn't obtained

This becomes especially important as students approach exit.

What Strong Transition PWN Looks Like

A Teacher-Friendly Checklist

Ask yourself:

- What decision did we make?
- Why did we make it?
- What information did we use?
- What options were considered and rejected?
- How does this support the student's transition goals?

Making PWN Easier in Real Life

Practical strategies:

- Capture rationale **during** the IEP meeting
- Use transition-focused prompts or templates
- Collaborate with transition staff and case managers
- Avoid writing PWN days later when details fade

Why PWN Matters in Transition Planning

Transition meetings involve:

- Student voice
- Family priorities
- Multiple options

PWN ensures:

- The written notice reflects the discussion
- Families can understand decisions even after the meeting

Key Idea:
If it mattered in the transition discussion, it should be explained in the PWN.

PWN Protects Students, Families, and Teachers

Strong transition PWNs:

- Reduce confusion and misunderstandings
- Show alignment between decisions and student goals
- Demonstrate IDEA compliance if questioned later

Strong PWN reflects **strong professional practice**, not just legal compliance.

PWN Supports Meaningful Family Participation

IDEA emphasizes parent participation.

PWN supports this by:

- Using clear, understandable language
- Explaining decisions in context
- Allowing families to respond knowledgeably

In transition planning, this support is critical.

Takeaways: Turning Insight Into Practice

- PWN is a **communication tool**, not just compliance
- Transition decisions deserve clear explanations
- Strong PWNs reflect thoughtful, student-centered teaching

Final Reflection:

> *If this PWN were the only document a family read, would it clearly explain the transition plan?*

Sample PWN Language for Common Transition Scenarios

> **Note:** These examples are models, not scripts to copy word-for-word. They demonstrate the level of explanation IDEA expects in transition-related PWNs.

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1. Postsecondary Goal Change (Education/Training or Employment)

Scenario: The team revises a postsecondary education goal based on updated assessments and student input.

Sample PWN Language:

> The IEP team proposed revising the student's postsecondary education goal to focus on certificate-based training rather than a four-year college pathway. This decision was based on recent transition assessments, classroom performance data, and the student's expressed interest in hands-on learning environments. The team considered maintaining the previous goal; however, that option was rejected because it did not align with the student's current strengths, learning needs, or stated preferences.

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2. Postsecondary Goal Remains the Same (Despite Family Questions)

Scenario: A family questions whether the postsecondary goal should change, but the team determines it remains appropriate.

Sample PWN Language:

> The IEP team proposed continuing the current postsecondary employment goal. This decision was based on ongoing progress toward related annual goals, consistent student interest, and teacher observations indicating readiness for competitive employment with supports. The option to revise the goal was considered but rejected because available data did not indicate a need for change at this time.

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3. Course of Study Selection

Scenario: The team selects a functional or alternative course of study aligned to transition goals.

Sample PWN Language:

> The IEP team proposed a course of study focused on functional academics and community-based instruction. This decision was made to support the student's postsecondary goals related to independent living and employment. The team considered a general education course of study; however, that option was rejected because it would not provide sufficient instruction in daily living and vocational skills needed to support the student's transition goals.

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4. Transition Services Added or Revised

Scenario: New transition services are added to support independence and readiness.

Sample PWN Language:

> The IEP team proposed adding job coaching and community-based vocational instruction as transition services. This decision was based on the student's need for structured support to develop workplace behaviors and job skills. The team considered continuing school-based instruction only; however, that option was rejected because it would not provide opportunities to practice skills in real-world settings aligned with the student's employment goals.

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5. Transition Services Not Added

Scenario: A family requests a service that the team decides not to include.

Sample PWN Language:

> The IEP team considered adding independent travel training as a transition service. This option was rejected at this time because the student is still developing prerequisite safety and self-regulation skills. The team determined that these skills will be addressed through current transition services, with the option to reconsider travel training in a future IEP.

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6. Outside Agency Invitation (Consent Obtained)

Scenario: An agency is invited to the IEP meeting.

Sample PWN Language:

> The IEP team proposed inviting representatives from Vocational Rehabilitation to participate in transition planning. This decision was made to support the student's postsecondary employment goals and to begin coordinating adult services prior to exit. Parent consent was obtained to allow agency participation.

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7. Outside Agency Not Invited (Consent Not Obtained or Not Yet Appropriate)

Scenario: An agency is discussed but not invited.

Sample PWN Language:

> The IEP team considered inviting outside adult service agencies to the meeting. This option was rejected at this time because parent consent was not provided and the student is not yet within the recommended age range for agency involvement. The team plans to revisit this decision as the student approaches exit.

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8. Graduation Pathway Decision

Scenario: The team determines a student will work toward a specific graduation pathway.

Sample PWN Language:

> The IEP team proposed that the student continue on the modified graduation pathway. This decision was based on credit completion, academic performance, and the student's postsecondary goals. The option of pursuing a standard diploma was considered but rejected because it would not be achievable within the student's remaining time in high school while still supporting meaningful transition outcomes.

Using These Examples Effectively

When writing PWN for transition planning:

- Focus on **explaining reasoning**, not just stating decisions
- Tie decisions to **student data, interests, and goals**
- Clearly note **options considered and rejected**
- Use **plain, family-friendly language**

Final Check

Ask yourself:

> *If a family read only this PWN, would they understand what was decided—and why?*

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