

Autism Community Connection

Autismcc Yahoo Group Responds!

Our group is comprised of parents, educators and professionals in the autism community. We welcome parents to ask questions so that together we may share our wealth of collected knowledge and insight.

www.autismcommunityconnection.com - <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/autismcc/>

Subject: Transitioning from Middle School to High School

This mom was wondering what kind of curriculum to expect in high school. She was not impressed with the options being provided at the local high school. Her son did well in a full inclusion program in middle school but the high school didn't want to provide anything resembling an academic education. She said, "Everything is now 'functional' and I find myself in a terrible fight." She was looking for advice. Here is how some moms responded:

Julie offered comprehensive information about the transition process:

About January of 8th grade year, your child's team should begin discussing the transition to the new school. Your child should be on the new campus as many times as they can between that January and August before starting 9th grade. That may be attending the Fine Arts Festival, school musical, a basketball game, driving around the parking lot with mom or dad, checking out the layout of the tennis courts, football field, etc. You may want to stop in the main office and pick up a campus map so your child can become familiar with the layout of the school. Your 8th grade team may also take a field trip to the high school campus some time in the spring (if they do, you're lucky!) You may also be able to access the school's website for information related to clubs, map, schedule, etc.

About April, your child should have a transition meeting where the 8th grade team gets to introduce your child to some of the 9th grade team. At this meeting, you should request that your child's new case manager, speech path, OT, social worker, guidance counselor, etc. be present to hear the information. Make sure your middle school schedules enough time for this meeting. I have found that they take a lot longer than expected - 1 to 1.5 hours. Please make sure to get the high school staff's names, phone numbers, email addresses etc. so you can contact them with any questions that you have in the future. You may also want to take the new staff's pictures so your child can look at them at a later time. In the transition IEP, make sure to write down the classes and the order you request them to be in the notes. (Most students with ASD do better with academic classes in the morning and their study skills and PE classes in the afternoon.) Also request that your child be assigned a case manager from day one-see below. Some of the local high schools have peer partner PE. If your child has difficulty in the PE locker room or may have a difficult time transitioning to a new PE teacher every 4 weeks, you may want to request that he/she have Peer Partner PE. Also, if your child has a difficult time with friends, you may want to request that he/she have lunch with specific friends, during Peer Partner lunch, during lunch bunch, or during Best

Buddies lunch.

The week before school starts, your child should have a copy of their schedule and be able to walk through the hallways. Please ask a school adult to show you through the first time - Teach it right the first time. (Ask if you can find out the door that your child's bus will drop them off at and proceed with their schedule from that door, to their locker, and then on to first period. Usually one of the secretaries has a map where all of the buses line up.) That way your child can learn the quickest way to go from class to class. They can learn the staircase that is the least crowded, least noisy, etc. In the cafeteria, have the adult point out where to get the food, condiments, trash, where seniors sit, freshman sit, where you can go after eating, which bathrooms to use during lunch, where a quiet area may be, etc.

Sometimes at the high school level, case managers are not assigned until 2 weeks into the school year. Please request that your child be assigned a temporary case manager during that time period. (Your child has a disability that requires frequent checks for understanding unlike a child with a specific learning disability for instance.) They will check in with your child throughout the days of the first weeks to make sure he/she is finding his locker, got his books, found his classes, etc. Some of the local high schools have developed a freshman orientation that only happens during lunch during the first month of school. As schedule changes are difficult for our kids, the case manager can check that they are finding the room okay and not being marked absent.

Regarding goals - I have found that all of my students with an autism spectrum disorder benefit from organizational goals. So we have goals for filling out their assignment notebook everyday - assignments, dentist appts, work hours, holidays, etc.- goals for organizing their backpack every week - goals for organizing their locker every week. An adult checks these locations daily or weekly. When writing a goal for weekly locker checks, I usually ask the office to place the student's locker close to their study skills class. You can also request a regular school combination lock, bring a combination lock from home, or have a key lock. I also like it when there is a goal for communication like emailing a teacher with questions or writing a teacher a note with questions as many of our kids don't seem to be able to ask the question on the spot but will have lots of questions during down time. This also works with assignments. Many teachers use a computer grading system and can print out a list of missing assignments. If your child doesn't turn in work on time, you may have them have a goal for asking for the missing assignment list every Friday for example.

Also regarding goals, make sure the baselines are accurate. You may also want to include the name of the program that has been successful so far in the goal Ex. Using a program like, Joe will, Sometimes the middle school doesn't communicate what kind of reading program, math program, the child has been using to the high school staff. This especially happens when the student is in a self-contained/Special Day Class setting.

Any time there is a schedule change because of finals, a half day, what have you, your

child needs to be informed and hopefully in writing. On the days that have schedule changes, request that your child's case manager write them into their assignment notebook.

Regarding fire drills, tornado drills, emergency drills, your child should be allowed to know when they will occur. Ask your case manager to get the dates ahead of time - they are available if you know the right person to ask - don't take no for an answer. It's not that your child needs to know the exact time - but to have the right date and prepare them ahead of time to say it might happen today and if it does it is only a drill will help many stress levels.

Schedules change during the second semester so your child may want to walk through the hallways again to find the fastest route. About a week before the semester change, you should be able to get a copy of the next semester's schedule. You should also ask your child at the beginning of first and second semesters of sophomore, junior, and senior years if they want to walk through their schedule the week before school starts. It helps with the stress level.

In the follow-up section of an IEP - you can write that your child's staff be trained on Autism Spectrum Disorders. The district may choose to do that on a case by case basis, offer a staff development class, or send your team to a conference.

Regarding an academic class that your child may or may not succeed in. You can put in the follow ups that your child's progress be monitored at the 4-6 week mark and if found to not be successful, will be dropped to the next lower class without an F. For example, if you are considering Geometry or Geometry Survey, you may have your child take Geometry and put that in. However, please understand that if classes change there may be a schedule change that your child has to deal with in September or October.

Regarding social things at the school, please ask if there are any social stories or social descriptors that have been developed. Sometimes there is a video/DVD from previous social events that your student may be able to check out from the library. Some schools do these for Homecoming Week, Homecoming Dance, Turn About Dance, Prom, Red Ribbon Week, etc. It's just another way for your child to be involved in their high school.

In the IEP, please make sure to include how your child shows that he/she is nervous or anxious. Common things that have been written in past IEPs include: leg shaking, picking at fingernails or hangnails, pacing, sleeping in class, eating specific foods, wanting to run before school time or during lunch.

Please make sure to ask how each high school teacher will be given information about your child. Do the case managers send copies of your child's entire IEP to each teacher, do the teachers get a profile/handout about your child, do they all gather the first week of school to discuss the IEP? If it is a profile, you may want a copy for yourself. If it is a meeting, you may want to attend.

If any social stories have been successful with your child, please have your 8th grade team include a copy in the transition IEP.

Laurie admitted that the high school experience has been “uneven.” There is no one 'curriculum'; every student is different and the makeup of their day depends on IEP goals. The emphasis shifts between middle and high school toward building what I'd call 'employability' and 'citizenship' skills. Partly because our school are so overcrowded and partly because the kids need to gain exposure to a variety of jobs and work environments, the kids are out of the classroom more than they're in it; and by the time they're sophomores they are out in community job-training sites in addition to in-school jobs.

They can also work on social and communication skills a number of different ways. Due to extremely poor generalization skills, Sarah needs to practice new skills in the environment where she'll need to demonstrate them. So, she practices communication in a variety of settings, both in and out of the building and situations involved in job training (ie. simple problem-solving, telling someone when she needs a break or asking a question when she doesn't know what to do next)

This mom has an 18-year-old high school senior diagnosed with high functioning autism and an IQ of 77. Once we went into High School I had to really fight for academics. Our school, Lockport Township, has a really great program, but if you want anything outside of the standard program, you really have to keep on it.

My daughter wanted art and childcare classes to prepare for a satisfying job in later life. I wanted her to continue with higher math because she is capable there and even if she never uses it, I wanted her brain to be challenged. Some years we had 3 IEP's before we could come to a compromise, but it was well worth it. One year I had to get an advocate on the phone, and suddenly there was a possibility!!!! She got some satisfying classes and was not bored.

Lockport has a new Transition program for kids staying more than 4 years. They go to a separate office space off campus where they work on job preparation and acquisition, independent living skills (transportation, shopping, cooking, budgeting, meal planning, banking, social life development). I think it is a good program. I have taught her much of this, but this gives her an opportunity to "try it out" without my support, and with a third party's eyes. Hope this helps.

Other than curriculum, I have always had speech, social skills and transportation on our IEP. Speech and social skills work together so that the goal of "initiating and continuing conversation" is worked on from many angles. They both do individual work each week with my daughter, working on subjects to talk about, role playing conversation, and appropriateness. They also attend her classes, sometimes working with the group on interrelating, sometimes observing so they can work on real situations during individual time.

She also is in a work program where she worked one year in a hospital doing inventory work, and one year doing office work. They work on appropriate behavior, which is

where my daughter will lose jobs. She can be taught to do work, but she acts childish, impulsively, loses time, distracted, all of that stuff. The job coaches work individually on these issues, pointing out when they occur, why they are inappropriate, etc., because she denies that she does any of them (does she know she is doing them?).

We have had "Peer buddies" assigned to help redirect her in gym, and when she is in "Regular" classes like Drivers Ed or Art. They help her when she doesn't understand what is happening (we've taught them to recognize her facial expressions and stimming signals). They are also available in the locker rooms to avoid problems. They are not "friends" but they are good kids who are willing to help out.

I also brought the Best Buddies program to our school. She got paired up with a couple of buddies. I then contact them, tell them what I can to help them communicate with my daughter, and encourage them to do things with her, like go to the mall, ice skate, go to a show and get something to eat. This has been very successful for us. We even got someone to go to Great America last summer. It was well worth the cost of admission for her to see my daughter having fun with a friend rather than hanging out with mom (which I enjoy, but I know she had more fun with her Buddy).

I also strongly suggest that you be aware that the school will usually put a good face on everything, saying what great progress is being made, etc. This can be very harmful when you go for adult services. Do everything you can to document and have testing done to confirm what you believe to be the things that will keep your child from being able to fully participate in society.

If they are not physically disabled, and their IQ is 70 or over you will probably have great difficulty getting them the help they need. You will have to prove 3 areas where they are functionally disabled and that is very difficult. If you have social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, speech therapists, etc., have them write up periodically where your child is and what deficits they face.

Sadly the harder we work to help our kids be functional, the more difficult it is to prove that they are not. They look like a duck, act like a duck - they must be a duck. It's when that duck has to find it's own food, or maneuver around the pond that we see the difficulty they encounter, and that is usually only seen by parents. We have taught them how to "fake it" for the world. Most of the people who make decisions for services do not even meet them. They only see the paperwork.

I hope all of this helps. It would have helped me a lot. I flew mostly by the seat of my pants, made many mistakes, missed some opportunities, but it is doing well right now.