

### Tips for Transitioning to High School for Students with Disabilities

#### Factsheet for Virginia's Parents

#### Moving On Up

Moving from middle school to high school is an exciting and sometimes overwhelming milestone. Students will face new expectations, more independence, and different routines. For students with disabilities, planning ahead and building the right supports can ease the transition and help set them up for success.

#### Tip #1: Start Early

Transition planning should begin months before the move to high school. Use your child's middle school IEP or 504 meetings to start the process. If your student has more complex needs, consider starting the planning process even earlier.

#### Tip #2: Learn About the High School

Attend orientation sessions or open houses. Schedule a tour during the school day to explore the building. Review the school handbook, course catalog, and bell schedule. Locate key areas like the nurse's office, counseling center, and resource room. Talk with the principal, case manager, or school counselor about your child's specific needs and supports.

#### Tip #3: Review and Update the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan

Your child's IEP or 504 plan should reflect the new environment and expectations of high school. For students with IEPs, make sure the Present Levels of Academic Performance and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) accurately describe your child's academic and functional strengths and needs. In addition to academics, develop goals (if needed) that focus on additional skills like independence, organization, communication, and planning. Update accommodations and services (e.g., how they'll be delivered across multiple classrooms).

#### Skill Building Ideas

**Practice Organization and Routines.** High school often requires students to manage multiple classes, teachers, and assignments. Practice using planners, checklists, calendars, or phone reminders. Do trial runs of routines like opening lockers, switching classes, or asking for help. Build independence by teaching your student how to keep track of homework and self-monitor their schedule.

**Build Self-Advocacy Skills.** High school is a great time for students to start speaking up for themselves. Help your child understand their IEP, accommodations, and learning style. Role-play how to ask teachers for help or explain what supports they need. Consider including self-advocacy goals in the IEP. Introduce the idea of student-led IEP meetings, even in small steps.

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## Tip #4: Strengthen Communication

Students will now have multiple teachers, so home-school communication may feel more complex. Identify the case manager or special education teacher assigned to your child. Set up a plan for regular check-ins or progress updates. Keep communication clear and in writing when possible. Encourage your child to develop relationships with trusted adults at school.

## Tip #5: Support Social and Emotional Growth

Help your child feel connected by encouraging participation in clubs, sports, or interest-based groups with the accommodations they need to succeed. Talk about what to do if they feel anxious, lost, or overwhelmed. Make sure your student knows where to go for support—such as a counselor, special education teacher, or school psychologist. Prepare them for the emotional ups and downs of this new chapter and celebrate successes.

## Tip #6: Start Talking about the Future

Middle to high school is the start of transition to adulthood—think about what comes next. Discuss options like college, job training, or employment. Include career exploration, soft skill development, and independent living goals in the IEP. Ask about Pre-ETS (Pre-Employment Transition Services) if your student has an IEP or a 504 plan and is at least 14. Encourage activities like volunteering, internships, or job shadowing.

## Tip #7: Ensure Continuity

A successful transition requires collaboration between the middle and high school teams. Request a transition meeting with both schools involved. Share what strategies have worked well in middle school. If your child has a Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP), be sure it is adjusted for high school settings. Keep familiar supports in place when possible to reduce anxiety and increase stability.

With preparation, teamwork, and the right supports, students with disabilities can build confidence, thrive academically and socially, and begin shaping their future.

### ADDITIONAL INFORMATION/RESOURCES:

[Guide to Transition for Families of Youth with Disabilities in Virginia – PEATC](#)

[Making the Move to High School - MSPTI](#)

[Successful-Transition-Making-the-Move-to-High-School- Utah Parent Center](#)

[Supporting the Transition from Middle to High School - Vanderbilt Kenedy Center](#)

[The Transition from Middle School to High School for Students in Special Education - AMLE](#)

PEATC's mission focuses on building positive futures for Virginia's children by working collaboratively with families, schools, and communities to improve opportunities for excellence in education and success in school and community life.

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