

Interagency Collaboration

Why is it Important?

The school is the main provider of services for students and families until the student graduates. Once a student leaves school, much of his/her support for job seeking, training and help with living needs comes through state social service agencies.

Many families are unaware that, unlike the educational services that are **entitlement services** through state and federal legislation, adult agencies are **eligibility services** and are not automatically available to all individuals. Even if a young adult is eligible for an adult service agency, if resources (i.e. funding) do not exist, the agency may not provide services. In addition, the family that is used to interacting with one entity (the school) suddenly is faced with a bewildering array of agencies, each with its own eligibility criteria and funding resources. Families must understand the differences between the entitlement of special education and the eligibility of adult agencies. The earlier they understand this in their child's educational experience, the more likely they will take transition planning very seriously.

Differences Between Public Schools and Adult Service Agencies:

EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM (Entitlement)	ADULT SERVICE SYSTEM (Eligibility)
All eligible individuals identified as having a disability and requiring specialized instruction, must be served under IDEA.	Just because an individual has a disability, they may not meet the eligibility criteria for a specific adult agency.
Waiting lists are not allowed.	Waiting lists may exist and may be very lengthy.
Broad (yet specific) eligibility criteria exist.	Narrow eligibility criteria exist.
Services are designed based on the needs of the individual.	Some services may not be available or exist.
One provider: The school system	Agencies/services must be sought out to meet individual needs.

Here are some practical suggestions for enhancing interagency collaboration at the local level:

- Get to know the individuals who are responsible for coordination transition efforts for each agency.
Find time to meet informally to foster a better understanding how each of the “systems” work.
- Learn the planning approaches and documents used by each of the agencies. How are they similar and/or different? Who has responsibility for completing them, and when?
- Learn about the referral processes and eligibility criteria. What does each agency need from the school (i.e. evaluations) in order to determine eligibility? Who will be responsible to ensure that proper releases of information are signed and this information is transferred in a timely manner?

Collaboration with the other agencies takes time and commitment from all parties concerned. Remember...not only is it the law to ensure appropriate linkages are made to adult service agencies, but without this support after high school, many of our students will simply fall through the cracks. The work and progress that has been accomplished in high school may be lost if every effort is not made to put available supports in place.