

BACKGROUND: The time frame when a young adult exits high school and enters emerging adulthood is often considered one of the most difficult transitions a person can experience. In order to help young adults with this transition, known as the postsecondary transition, effective transition planning and preparation beginning in middle school and continuing during high school is crucial. For students with disabilities, this planning and preparation should include supports tailored to their individual needs and engagement in meaningful activities that helps lead them to postsecondary activities of their choosing. For many young adults with autism, the postsecondary transition is a particular challenge.

Autism is a complex developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication, and behavioral challenges.

CURRENT ISSUES:

- People with autism often experience prejudice, discrimination, & other forms of societal stigma.
- Myths and misconceptions about their job performance, productivity, and safety can lead to employers' resistance to hire autistic applicants. (Scott et al., 2017; Solomon, 2020; Unger et al., 2002)
- Some people with autism may exhibit certain behaviors (like avoiding eye contact or repetitive movements) that others may interpret as problematic and can affect securing a job or achieving other postsecondary goals.

POSTSECONDARY OUTCOME FACTS:

- Fewer than 60% of young adults, ages 21-25, with autism work in paid employment, outside the house hold—their paid employment is often part-time and at low wages. (Roux et al., 2015)
- Only 36% of high school graduates with autism have attended any form of postsecondary education (such as college or university) before their early 20s compared to more than 60 percent of all high school graduates. (Roux et al., 2015)
- People with autism are less likely to live on their own leaving high school compared to people with learning disabilities, intellectual disabilities, or emotional disturbances. (Anderson et al., 2013)

RESEARCH-BASED RECOMMENDATIONS:

The overwhelmingly lower postsecondary outcomes experienced by people with autism compared to all high school graduates has led researchers to take greater interest in understanding predictors of positive postsecondary outcomes:

***Predictors:** Experiences in high school that are empirically linked to different post-school outcomes, like getting a job, enrolling in college/university, or living on one's own or with roommates after high school.*

Evidence from Cornell University’s Project ATTAIN (Autism Transition to Adulthood Initiative) Year 1 findings, along with prior predictor research, empirically document that the majority of known predictors of successful transition for youth with disabilities hold true for youth with autism, including:

Predictors	Outcome Areas		
	Employment	Postsecondary Education	Independent Living
Career Awareness	X	X	
Career Technical Education	X		
Goal Setting		X	
Inclusion in General Education		X	
Interagency Collaboration	X		
Paid Employment/ Work Experience	X		
Parent Expectations	X	X*	
Psychological empowerment		X*	
Self-Care/ Independent Living	X	X*	
Self-determination/Self-advocacy	X	X	
Social Skills	X	X	
Transition Program	X	X*	
Travel Skills	X		
Work Study	X		
Youth Autonomy/Decision-Making	X	X	

Note: An asterisk indicates the entries that apply to the PROMISE data used in Project ATTAIN

A Call to Action

Districts are urged to embed transition predictors as components of their secondary transition programs. Knowledge of predictors can help a) inform and strengthen transition programs and practices in high school, b) develop and evaluate transition programs at various levels (including school and district levels), and c) guide individualized education program (IEP) team members in creating transition activities in support of the acquisition of students’ post-school goals. For more information, access the following three resources:



National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: Predictor Implementation School/District Self-Assessment Instructions and Action Planning Guide

National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center: Predictor Implementation School/District Self-Assessment (PISA)



Complementary tools to use alongside the PISA can be found on Project ATTAIN’s website

Districts are urged to engage in research to evaluate their transition programs to determine the extent to which these programs incorporate predictors, how they incorporate predictors to benefit the individual needs of each autistic student, and to learn whether newly created programs/changes to existing programs based on predictor research improves outcomes for young adults with autism.

Project ATTAIN is a multi-year research initiative, designed to obtain a greater understanding of transition predictors of positive post-school outcomes for youth with autism. Year 1 of ATTAIN used existing data from New York State (NYS) PROMISE (Promoting the Readiness of Minors in Supplemental Security Income). NYS PROMISE was one of six model demonstration projects funded by the United States Department of Education dedicated to encouraging positive post-school outcomes for youth and their families receiving SSI.