

PLANNING A TRANSITION FAIR **why?**

Transition fairs connect students and their families to resources that help them build successful lives after high school. Research into transition practices shows that when educators, families, students, community members, and organizations work together, post-secondary outcomes improve for students with disabilities. The purpose of a transition fair is to deliver content and resources that are most likely to benefit the students. Students' opportunities to learn about supports and services that are available to them as they transition to adulthood are increased when they attend a transition fair involving multiple stakeholders (such as employment support agencies, benefit specialists, legal counsel, advocacy organizations, community resources, and representatives from community colleges, universities and career and technical schools).

COMPONENTS of the FAIR

This guide contains information and things to think about when planning a transition fair including:

1. Determining the audience and theme
2. Inviting presenters for keynote and/or breakout sessions
3. Identifying vendors and exhibitors
4. Planning for refreshments, prizes or giveaways
5. Advertising and outreach
6. Evaluating the fair's success

Benefits of PARTICIPATING IN A TRANSITION FAIR

- Exposure to community resources
- Opportunity to learn about colleges and training programs
- Learn about employment services
- Discover options for independent living
- Gain insight about the future to share with the IEP Team
- Gain knowledge about how to apply for certain benefits at age 18

Adapted from the Transition Fair Toolkit, Western Michigan University Career Connections Research Center, NSTTAC, Rashell Bowerman, Lydia Schuck, June Gothberg, Jennifer Coyle, Paula Kohler

THINGS to CONSIDER

1. The Audience, Theme and Team

Selecting a theme or focus for the transition fair can help to shape the content, including what the presenters or breakout sessions will present, what exhibitors will be chosen, etc. Also determine whether the fair will focus on students with IEPs, 504 plans, or the entire student body and whether parents will be invited too.

- Your audience will determine the best time of day to hold your event. Holding the event during the school day means that student participation will be high.
- Evening events lend themselves to greater parent participation.
- Surveying is a good way to identify topics that students and parents are interested in. Simple, topical questionnaires are a quick way to identify areas of interest. (see sample survey p. 8)
- Teachers and other district staff should be encouraged to attend.

Potential Transition INTEREST AREAS or THEMES

- Identifying and reaching long-term career goals
- Assistance with college applications and test preparation
- Special services for students with disabilities at colleges
- Training for families and youth looking for adult living options
- Coordination with other families and youth looking for adult living options
- Financial issues including social security, financial aid, scholarships
- Information from training and education organizations
- Information about legal issues such as guardianship

2. Presenters and Break Out Sessions

Will you have a keynote address, panel presentations, presenters such as alumni or students, break out sessions, or a combination?

- Your own former students may be good candidates to present or co-present.
- Why not consider a staff member or parent speaker to add another perspective?
- Brainstorm with your committee to develop a list of presenters and breakout sessions, then prioritize, inviting your top choice(s) early on in the process.

3. Vendors and Exhibitors

Consider the vendors you want to invite based on who your audience will be.

Exhibitors bring a wide variety of information and resources to the transition fair. Brainstorm to create a list of all possible exhibitors in your area, keeping your theme, content, and space limitations in mind. They will need to know the expectations such as how much time is involved, the venue, materials, etc.

4. Food, Entertainment, Awards and Prizes – It's all about your budget!

The cost to carry out a transition fair varies depending on the circumstance. A successful transition fair can be held with whatever funds are available.

Generally door prizes and donations can add fun to the event; refreshments and beverages are always welcomed.

Some schools have used creative fundraising approaches before or during their fairs to help cover costs. Ideas such as seeking support from the business community, selling raffle tickets for donated items, or even a bake sale have been effective in helping to defray the cost. Another thought is to have students assist with preparing refreshments for the event.

5. Advertising

The most challenging aspect of any school event is getting the target audience to attend. Students and parents have busy lives!

Use multiple forms of media to promote the event such as:

- Posters in hallways
- PSAs in local newspapers
- E-mails and school announcements
- Website and social media
- Community calendars

Vendor and Exhibitor IDEAS

- Local businesses
- Community resources
- Colleges
- Trade and educational institutions
- Employers
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Adult service agencies
- Government entities
- Health care, housing and transportation providers
- Banks and local credit unions
- Vendors of products and services

5. Advertising continued

Who are the BEST Salespeople? YOUR students!

Students pass along information to families and friends so why not provide incentives? Offering extra credit or a small token of appreciation for spreading the word — and then attending — can be motivating.

Again, students might be able to help with graphic design, create written materials, flyers, posters, PSAs and more. Plan on spreading the word as broadly as possible and do it well in advance.

6. Evaluation

After the transition fair it is important for committee members and attendees to complete an evaluation of the planning process and the fair itself. Some planners use a debriefing session; others use a written survey or an electronic format at such as Survey Monkey. The information gathered is important and should inform future planning. (see sample evaluation p. 9)

TRANSITION FAIR Timeline

PRE-PLANNING 6-12 MONTHS before the Event:

Pre-planning includes the initial decisions and groundwork concentrating on four focus areas: Who, What, Where and When.

1. Identify who will be on your Core Team and their roles and responsibilities. Having student and family input on the team is important.
2. Hold an initial meeting to:
 - Consider the target population for the event.
 - Discuss location, date and time.
 - Consider surveying students/families to identify topics of interest.
 - Brainstorm and identify topics and organizations to invite. (see ideas on p. 8)
 - Develop structure of event.
 - Discuss the possible speakers, workshops, exhibitors & vendors.
 - Choose a theme or event name.
 - Review what budget exists to support the event.
 - Consider developing subcommittees for specific tasks.
 - Set up future meetings.

POTENTIAL SUB-COMMITTEES

- Facility (food, accessibility, signs, cleanup)
- Speakers/Exhibits (contacts - initial and follow-up letter, set-up, packets)
- Registration Forms (design) and Evaluation (compile and report)
- Registration (maintaining information)
- Door Prizes
- Publicity
- Purchasing folders, name tags, goodies, etc., for attendees
- Organizing packets for parents, facilitators, and speakers

BEST PRACTICE TIP

Involve a group of students as part of the planning process from the beginning of the process all the way through hosting the event. Solicit and use student input from the start.

Transition Toolkit NSTTAC, page 19 – Western Michigan University, Career Connections Research Center

THREE TO FOUR MONTHS before the Event

- Finalize a date, time and place.
- Review interest survey results and consider the responses in planning the event.
- Determine theme/topics.
- Brainstorm how to reach out to students/youth/families.
- Determine if and how people will register.
- Finalize event name.
- Contact/invite vendors/exhibitors.
- Invite speakers.

BEST PRACTICE TIP

Make the event interactive. This might include agency-related activities, computer kiosks demonstrating career interest inventories/games, inviting community members and students to participate in mock interviews and provide feedback, or an information-gathering scavenger hunt.

TWO MONTHS before the Event

- Finalize the activities and timeline for the event.
- Consider sending out a Save the Date notice.
- Design a flyer.
- Consider using Google Docs or a similar shared way to maintain contact, track progress and contacts.

ONE MONTH before the Event

- Send information out to all parents and students on IEPs and 504s.
- Create press release (perhaps a student could write it?).
- Plan out the specific layout of the event.
- Determine what will be needed and logistics for chairs, tables, audio/visual equipment, assistive technology, outlets for vendors/exhibitors, etc.
- Make arrangements for refreshments, door prizes, raffles, etc. (Student and parent input can be useful.)
- Think about and determine a contingency plan in case weather or an emergency requires the event to be rescheduled.
- Confirm speakers and exhibitors.

BEST PRACTICE TIP

Individualized outreach from school staff to families that they are familiar with builds relationships and results in higher attendance.

MONTH OF the Event

- Send follow-up information to attending vendors/exhibitors with schedule, table tips, directions, a list of other organizations attending, and emergency contact information in the event of inclement weather.
- Consider offering a token gift to presenters, resource agencies, etc.
- Consider developing a brochure/flyer that lists all of the organizations in attendance and their contact information for parents to leave with. This could also include the information on organizations that were unable to attend.
- Ask case managers, other appropriate staff, and planning committee members to reach out personally to families and students to invite them a week before the event.
- Determine and make signs to welcome and direct participants to the event.
- Prepare a sign-in sheet and media release if necessary.
- Assign roles for the event (emcee, greeter, etc.).
- Develop evaluations to be given out at end of event; delineate parent, professional, youth. (see sample p. 9)
- Identify someone to photograph the night of the event.
- Notify teachers and administration about final details.
- Prepare students so they know what is expected of them and how the activities at the event will benefit them.

BEST PRACTICE TIP

Many activities at a transition fair could be linked to post-secondary goals or annual goals in the IEP such as doing a college search or researching affordable housing in your area.

INFORM PARENT and STUDENTS Contact Early and Contact Frequently

- Post it on the school website/calendar
- Mail information home
- Advertise it on local/social media
- Make phone calls
- Include it in the school newspaper
- Post it on the school marquee
- Send information home
- Post flyers
- Emails

Event NIGHT

- Post signs for room locations.
- Have event schedule and/or resource list with contact information, sign-in sheet and media release (if needed), with extra pens close to the entrance/greeter.
- If possible, provide refreshments and a token gift of appreciation to presenters, resource agencies, exhibitors, etc.
- Request attendees complete evaluations before they leave.

BEST PRACTICE TIP

Think about the event from both the planning committee's experience and those who attended. Use this time to set the plan and expectations of anyone that will be involved in planning the next event.

AFTER the Event

- One week after, meet with the Core Team to review the evaluations, and debrief what worked well and what to do differently next year.
- Send out thank you letters to presenters, resource agencies and exhibitors.
- Update/revise the checklist for next year.

BEST PRACTICE TIP

Share the data from your transition fair to build awareness and get support for your next event! Make a presentation to the school board and/or school team meetings; inform parents and community members using email, social media, and the local and/or school paper.

BEST PRACTICE TIP

Make sure there is a greeter at all times to welcome guests, hand out programs and ask people to sign in. Additionally, provide name tags or some kind of identifier for Core Team members in case guests or vendors have questions.

DEBRIEFING What Went Well and Things to Change

- What was the feedback from the attendee evaluations?
- Were the overall goals and objectives met?
- Did you reach your target audience? (outreach and marketing)
- Were you in-line with your budget? Why or why not?
- Think about the conference materials. (packets/programs/signage)
- Were you satisfied with the exhibitors and vendors?
- How was the facility? (flow/layout/access)
- Were the speakers effective in delivering the content?
- What worked well? Did you face any barriers?
- Lessons learned – what could have gone better?
- What recommendations would you make for next time?

For an alternative timeline/checklist please visit

http://www.transitioncoalition.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/NSTTAC_Transition_Fair_Toolkit_Complete1.pdf

Student Planning Interest Survey

Your Name: _____

Please rank your top 6 choices for Transition Fair sessions/vendors/exhibitors 1 through 6 with 1 being the most interesting.

	New Hampshire Vocational Rehabilitation (VR)	These are adult services that can provide assistance in obtaining and maintaining employment along with technical training.
	How Do I Get a Job and Keep It?	This session will cover interviewing techniques, resume writing, and completing applications.
	Rights and Responsibilities	Learn what your rights and responsibilities are.
	Housing Options	Learn about what housing options are available in our area, how to rent an apartment, and get what you want.
	Money – What To Do!	Learning about budgeting, banking, taxes, credit reports, and credit cards.
	Success in College	This will give you information you need to be successful in college.
	Getting What You Want and Need	This session will give you tools to help you advocate for yourself.
	Apprenticeships (Jobs and Training)	How does school relate to getting a job? Come find out.
	Learning Differences	We all learn differently. Come learn about different learning styles and accommodations to assist with learning.
	Getting Around Town	Transportation is a big concern. You will learn about public transportation and getting a driver's license.
	UNH Cooperative Extension Service	This a service that can assist in many areas such as: nutrition, cooking, gardening.
	Community Mental Health	Another adult agency that can assist with counseling, respite, living arrangements, and case management.
	Buying Your First Car	Learn how to purchase a vehicle – not a lemon!
	Staying Healthy	What do you need to know and do to stay healthy and have a productive life? Staying healthy until you're 100!
	Social Security	Do you receive SSI or SSDI? Could you? This session will help you understand the social security system.
	Community College	What classes do they offer and how do you get involved?
	Employment Programs	Employment Service Center, JTPA, MESA and other employment agencies. How can they help you?
	What Do Employers Expect from their Employees?	Once you get your job, what can you expect?
	Legal Aid	Free help if you get taken advantage of. How can you access this service?
	Leisure and Recreational Activities	What to do with your free time? This session will give you ideas of what to do and where to go.
	Career Opportunities	What are the hot jobs of the future? You'll find the answers in this session.

Please list any other ideas you have:

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey. You will be hearing from us again soon.

Sincerely,
Conference Planning Committee
Adapted and used with permission of Eaton Intermediate School District

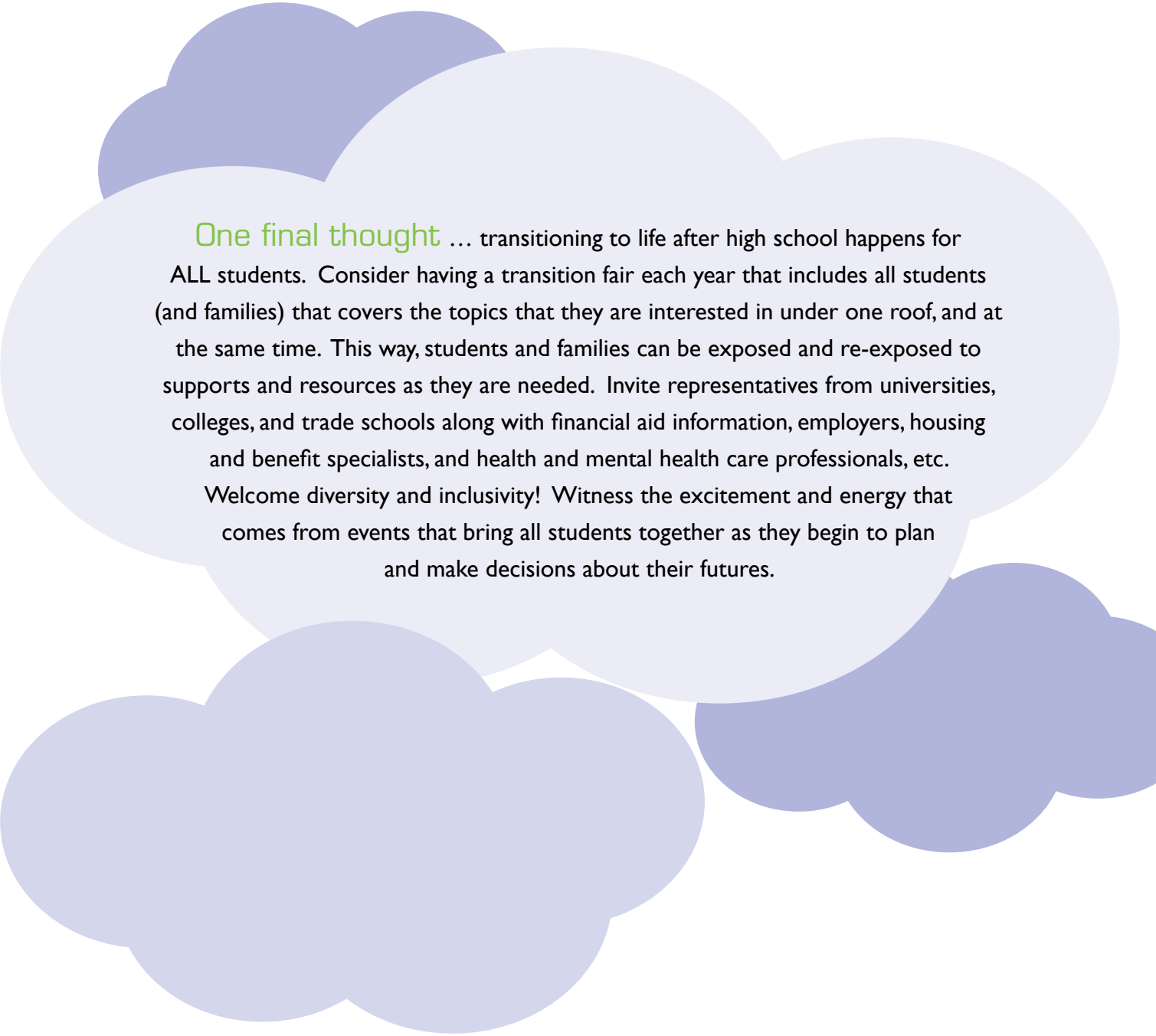
Sample Parent/Student Evaluation

My experience	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The event was organized in a professional manner.	1	2	3	4	5
The time allotted for the event was appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5
The information provided was useful.	1	2	3	4	5
I am interested in participating next year (if applicable)	1	2	3	4	5
How did you hear about the Transition Fair?					
In your opinion, what were the most positive aspects of the Transition Fair?					
How could we improve the Transition Fair next year?					
Please include your name, email address and phone number if you'd like to be involved in planning similar events with the school.					

Sample Exhibitor Evaluation

Exhibitor _____	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
The event was organized in a professional manner.	1	2	3	4	5
The time allotted for the event was appropriate.	1	2	3	4	5
I was able to provide information to students and parents/guardians.	1	2	3	4	5
The information provided to parents/guardians and students was well-received.	1	2	3	4	5
I felt participants were genuinely interested in my business/agency.	1	2	3	4	5
I am interested in participating next year.	1	2	3	4	5
I am interested in making stronger connections with the school.	1	2	3	4	5
In your opinion, what were the most positive aspects of the Transition Fair?					
How could we improve the Transition Fair next year?					

Adapted in part from Baugher, R., & Nichols, J. (2008). Conducting a rural school district transition fair: Successes and challenges for students with disabilities. *Education*, 129 (2), 216-223.



One final thought ... transitioning to life after high school happens for ALL students. Consider having a transition fair each year that includes all students (and families) that covers the topics that they are interested in under one roof, and at the same time. This way, students and families can be exposed and re-exposed to supports and resources as they are needed. Invite representatives from universities, colleges, and trade schools along with financial aid information, employers, housing and benefit specialists, and health and mental health care professionals, etc. Welcome diversity and inclusivity! Witness the excitement and energy that comes from events that bring all students together as they begin to plan and make decisions about their futures.

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