



# Kansas RTAP Fact Sheet

A Service of The University of Kansas Transportation Center for Rural Transit Providers

## Transitioning Students With Disabilities to the Workforce

*Schools and transit can work together for a more successful transition.*

By Pat Weaver

**H**ave you ever flown into a strange city for the first time and thought about riding the bus to get around? If only you had the bus schedule to learn if buses would take you where you needed to go, you could avoid the expense of a rental car and pricey downtown parking, or an expensive cab ride. If only you knew the locations of the bus stops, where the routes travel through, and if can you get to where you need to go in a reasonable amount of time. And you certainly don't want to get lost!

For students with disabilities attempting to transition to more independent living, this uncertainty and fear may be a reality in their own hometown. Some of these students may not have the ability to drive. While transit service is available to them, they might find learning how to use it too intimidating. The adults at school who provide training for them in lots of other areas may not know how to use the bus system either.

The transition from high school to work or post-secondary education is a big step, and can be an even bigger challenge for individuals with disabilities. Families, school district and other support personnel have developed programs and processes, some formal, some less formal, to help those students make smoother transitions. These students may need special attention in planning to use public transportation to be successful in whatever direction their life takes after high school.

Is there a role for your transit agency to contribute to the success of these transitioning students? With the school year just under way, this is a good time to think about whether a stronger partnership between your agency and the school district could make a difference in the lives of students who will be transitioning from high school—and that work needs to be done before they



leave school. This article describes information on some of the training needs of these students, examples of transition programs around the country, and how you can be more involved to help the students in your community.

### What are the needs?

Approximately 6.6 million students with disabilities in the U.S., approximately one-third of those of transition age, are currently in our nation's schools, according to a report by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) in July 2012. Transition age is defined in the GAO report as youth between the ages of 14 and 25, served by key programs providing transition services to youth with disabilities. This same report indicates that the employment rate for young adults ages 20 to 24 with disabilities is less than half the rate of their peers without disabilities. In Kansas for 2011, approximately 67,000 students ages 3-21 received services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, with nearly 19,000 students of transition age. (Digest of Education Statistics, Table 51 and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Data, Table B1-1).

Students are eligible for transition planning and services until they exit high school; once they are out of high school, they may apply and become eligible for other services important to transition, including transportation services. The GAO report found, however, that these individuals face major difficulties (for themselves and their families) in navigating multiple programs that provide transportation services. "Limited access to reliable public transportation to and from employment programs and service providers—especially in rural areas—was frequently highlighted as a major challenge...."

## Look for opportunities to help

So, what can your agency do? Here are a few suggestions.

**Increase awareness of your services.** One strategy is to increase awareness of your transit services to organizations directly involved in transition. For example, in a survey conducted as part of the GAO report, stakeholders said that teachers and other high school personnel may not always be aware of post-high school service options for students with disabilities. Others said that Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) counselors and local workforce agencies' one-stop center staff need more training to help students. If you have not already done so, consider reaching out to high school staff, to VR counselors, and to your local workforce centers to make sure they know more about your transit service and how it might meet the transportation needs of transitioning students.

Brian Ramsey of Independent Living Resources in Wichita, Kansas, said that each high school in Wichita is assigned a transition specialist and vocational counselor to assist transitioning students. In Wichita, setting up a meeting with those individuals could provide a basis for assessing needs and gaps for students in that school. Every area is different; contact your local school district(s) for appropriate contacts.

**Discover the gaps in your community.** The key to establishing meaningful relationships with school systems and assisting with transitioning students is finding out what needs and services exist and where gaps exist. So in addition to sharing what you already offer, you may want to work with groups and individuals working with transitioning students, as well as the students and their parents, where appropriate. You may want to contact your local Kansas Transition Council regional contact for assistance on who to contact in your service area. To view a list of transition council contacts visit <http://www.kcdcinfo.com/DocumentCenter/View/48>

**Support travel training for transitioning students.** Travel training, or mobility training, teaches individuals how to ride public transportation. Travel training programs are often targeted to individuals who may have more difficulty understanding how the system works or who may rely more on paratransit services exclusively, e.g. senior citizens or individuals with physical or cognitive disabilities. Travel training can include either group-based or individualized instruction, or both.

Guidance issued from the U.S. Department of Education as a result of the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97, P.L. 105-17) included travel training as part of special education. The guidance states that "Travel training

is often integral to ensuring that some children with disabilities receive free, appropriate public education and are prepared for post-school activities such as employment and independent living." (Federal Register, Vol. 65, No. 111, 2000, page 36591). This means that a student's IEP team (Individualized Education Program) may need to consider a student's need for travel training while the student is in school—and your transit vehicles and facilities are likely to be needed for that training, regardless of who provides the training.

## *Transitioning students face multiple difficulties in navigating multiple programs that provide transportation services.*

An article in Project Action's UPDATE, "Technical Assistance for School Systems Looking to Partner with Local Transit," suggests travel training as an option to prepare students for transitioning. Travel training can be built into the student's classes in place of driver's education. Another idea is holding a bus familiarization program

through a field trip using public transit.

The Greater Cleveland RTA offers half or full-day travel training sessions for students with disabilities in both middle and high schools. At the end of the session, the students, many of whom have never used transit prior to the training, participate in a field trip that includes a bus transfer.

Laketrans, the regional transit authority for Lake County, Ohio, provides a tab on their website titled "Transition Students and IEPs." Laketrans, in partnership with the schools, provides a transit staff member to be present during the development of an IEP "to assist in clarifying transit-related goals." Travel training is provided for students preparing to finish school and enter job training, and can either include destination travel training to go to and from a specific destination, or general travel training to make use of the entire system. Another example, in Convoy, Ohio, involved a service learning project matching students with and without disabilities to determine current and potential accessible transportation options for individuals with disabilities.

**Educate educators.** Teachers and other school professionals themselves may have limited knowledge of transportation options in their community, and thus, may not readily implement transportation education in their classrooms. Judy Shanley, Director of Student Engagement and Mobility Management at the Easter Seals Transportation Group, suggests using materials such as the curriculum developed by Project ACTION to help educators learn about how they can infuse content about transportation into school programs so students learn about transportation services early (see link to the curriculum materials on page 3). She suggests collaborating with pupil transporters to develop informational opportunities, build school-transit

relationships, and establish a seamless transportation transition for students as they leave high school.

### What's next?

Students with disabilities sometimes face a difficult job outlook. Better coordination among service provider agencies, including transit, can go a long way in helping them succeed. One way to help build a stronger workforce is to partner with school systems to benefit transitioning students. Executive Director Martha Gabehart of the Kansas Commission on Disability Concerns advises rural transit managers to “approach schools with a willingness to work with students with disabilities—to provide information [on transit] and training on things to expect.”

The new school year has just started; you have an opportunity to reach out and offer your agency's services to students who will be transitioning out of school in the coming year. If you make your transit services more available to a young person just starting out, it might make all the difference.

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## Resources for Providing Transition Services

- **Curriculum to Build the Knowledge of Educators, Human Services, Families, and Transit regarding Transportation Education and Travel Instruction**, Project Action. <http://www.projectaction.org/Initiatives/YouthTransportation/TransportationEducationCurriculum.aspx>
- **Public Transportation: The Route to Freedom. A Transportation Education Program for Students with Disabilities in Grades 8-12**. Washington, D.C.: Project Action, 2005. CD and DVD. <http://www.projectaction.org/ResourcesPublications/BrowseOurResourceLibrary/ResourceSearchResults.aspx?org=a2GSpnDbrul=&query=Freedom>
- **Travel Training for Student Success: The Route to Achieving Post-Secondary Student Outcomes**. A website with resources for school administrators and other stakeholders. <http://www.projectaction.org/Training/TravelTraining/TravelTrainingforStudentSuccess.aspx>
- **Association of Travel Instruction**. An association to support providers of travel instruction for the purpose of teaching people with disabilities and seniors to travel safely and independently. <http://www.travelinstruction.org/index.html>
- **Accessible Transportation Resource Mapping Service-Learning Project, Convoy, Ohio**. Project Action. <http://www.projectaction.org/ResourcesPublications/BrowseOurResourceLibrary/ResourceSearchResults.aspx?org=a2GSpnDbrul=&query=Inclusive%20Transportation%20Service-Learning>

## Sources

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- GAO Report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Education and the Workforce, House of Representatives. (July 2012) Students with Disabilities: Better Federal Coordination Could Lessen Challenges in the Transition from High School. GAO-12-594.
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- Digest of Education Statistics, National Center for Education Statistics, Table 51. [http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12tables/dt12\\_051.asp](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12tables/dt12_051.asp), accessed August 14, 2013.