

Career and Technical School Education Staff:

What You Need to Know About Students With Disabilities

Many students with disabilities choose employment as their postsecondary goal. Like their nondisabled peers, they need instruction, practice, and mentoring in their chosen field.

A Career and Technical Education Center (CTC) is often an appropriate place to find these opportunities. The decision to enroll in a CTC should be made after consideration by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team.

Who is a student with a disability?

A student with a disability is an individual who has one of the thirteen disabilities listed in the Pennsylvania School Code (i.e., mental retardation, hearing impairment, speech or language impairment, visual impairment, emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, a specific learning disability, deaf-blindness, or multiple disabilities). A student can receive special education services if the student (1) has a disability and (2) requires specially-designed instruction.

How is it determined that a student has a disability?

First, the student's school district conducts an individualized evaluation. During this process, the evaluation team (a group of qualified professionals and the student's parents) reviews information provided by the parents; classroom-based, local, or state assessments; and classroom-based observations. The team can request additional information if needed. Then, based on this review, the team decides whether or not the student has a disability as listed in the Pennsylvania School Code. If the student is determined to have a disability, the evaluation team decides whether the student needs special education and related services. If so, the student is said to be "eligible for special education."

What happens once it is determined that the student is eligible for special education?

A team is identified, including the student's parents, to design an Individualized Education Program (IEP) to meet the student's unique needs. If the student is 14 or older, the student is invited to participate in the IEP team, and transition services are included in the IEP. It is important to remember that special education is a service, not a location, and that it can occur in a variety of locations such as a high school, a CTC, or in the community.

What is an IEP?

An IEP is a written statement of the educational program designed to meet a student's individual needs. It is essentially an agreement between the school district and the student's family that guarantees the services

that will be provided to the student. The IEP has two general purposes: to set reasonable learning goals for the student and to detail the services that will be provided to the student by their school district or public agency. The IEP includes specially designed instruction, related services, measurable annual goals, assessment data, transition services, and other information required by law. If needed, the IEP may contain a behavior support plan and other services to be provided to the student.

What is specially designed instruction?

Specially designed instruction (SDI) is the adaptation of the content, the methodology, or the delivery of instruction to the student. SDI must meet the "unique needs" of the student that result from his/her disability. It must also ensure access to the general curriculum, including that of the CTC, so that the student can meet the educational standards of the school.

Examples of SDI

- Extended test time (30 minutes for a cosmetology quiz instead of the 20 minutes allotted to others)
- Alternative note taking (using a tape recorder or obtaining notes from another student)
- Graphic organizers (a problem/solution map in HVAC lab)
- Frequent comprehension checks by the shop teacher
- Modeling of behavior (demonstrating the proper way to use a mortar tool in masonry)
- Visual prompts (using pictures to list recipe steps in food services class)
- Preferential seating (in the front of the class, away from noise and distraction)
- Alternative assessments (demonstrating understanding instead of giving an oral report)
- Using large print materials
- Student task analysis (asking the student to list the steps he/she should follow to complete a process in carpentry)

What are related services?

Related services include transportation, developmental, corrective, and other support services that assist a student with a disability in benefiting from special education. Some examples are speech and language services, physical therapy, orientation and mobility services, and psychological services.

What are measurable annual goals?

Annual goals are statements of what a student can reasonably be expected to accomplish in a year's time. They must also be able to be observed and counted. The goals must directly relate to areas of need identified in the IEP section entitled "Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance." This section summarizes the student's current achievement and states how the student's disability affects involvement and progress in the general curriculum. The general curriculum includes the curriculum of the CTC.

What assessment information is included in the IEP?

The IEP should include assessment data about each need identified in the student's evaluation report. For instance, if the student has a need in reading, you would expect to see information about the student's current reading level. If the student has a need in computation, the results of assessments in math should be present. Assessments can be formal, informal, or the result of observations or interviews.

What are transition services?

These are a coordinated set of activities that are meant to improve both the academic and functional achievement of the student, as well as to facilitate the student's movement from school to post-school activities. These post-school activities might be employment, postsecondary education, vocational education, or independent living. The IEP for the secondary-aged student is a preparation plan for these post-school activities. Some examples of transition services are job coaching, apprenticeships, and vocational classes. Transition services must include post-school goals so

that the IEP team can plan the appropriate activities and services.

What are post-school goals?

These goals provide information to the IEP team about the student's interests, strengths, and preferences, and reflect the student's goals for life after high school. They are based on a variety of assessments appropriate to the individual student. Having this information allows the IEP team to determine whether or not more assessment is needed, what instruction should be provided, and what experiences would most benefit the student. Some examples might be competitive employment, postsecondary vocational training, or continued career and technical education.

When is a behavior support plan included in the IEP?

If a student has a behavior problem that impedes the student's learning or that of others, the student's IEP will include a behavior support plan. CTC staff is expected to implement this plan by using the positive behavior interventions and strategies identified in the plan. These may include rewarding the student for positive behaviors, encouraging the student to use anger management techniques, or other methods.

If it is determined that a student needs vocational education, who decides if it should occur at a Career and Technical Center (CTC)?

The decision is part of the IEP process and is made by the IEP team, including the student. Transition planning (preparing for a student's post-school life) occurs within the context of the IEP. If the student has employment as a postsecondary goal, the team considers whether or not the student would benefit from a CTE program, or receive employment training through an alternative method such as work-based learning activities. The team bases this decision on the results of assessment of the student's interests, strengths, and preferences.

With regard to the education of students with IEPs in career and technical education programming, faculty from the CTE programs will participate as members of the IEP team.

IEP team meetings, when scheduled by the school district, must give timely notice to the career and technical education representative assigned and shall be attended by the career and technical education representative. (Title 22, Chapter 339.21(5)(6))

How do students with special needs benefit from CTE Programs?

National Longitudinal Transition Survey 2 (NLTS2) data show that about 60 percent of youth with disabilities hold jobs at some time during high school and gain valuable experience in the world of work. NLTS2 findings showed that students who were enrolled in occupationally oriented CTE were significantly more likely than nonparticipants to do well on school and post-school outcomes. These students had significantly lower absenteeism from school and a lower probability of dropping out of school. CTE training was related to a higher likelihood of finding a paid job and of attending a postsecondary CTE school in the early years after high school.

Data and Accountability for Performance Improvement

The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) in recent years has fully implemented the Pennsylvania Information Management System (PIMS). This system utilizes a unique student identifier commonly referred to as the PASecureID. This identifier now enables PDE to pinpoint and analyze data for all federally mandated subgroups, including students with IEPs in Career and Technical Education Centers. PDE's baseline data year is 2007-2008, which established proficiency results in both reading and math PSSA scores. Through data collection in PIMS, PDE will continue to monitor annual growth in proficiency for CTE students. Recent Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) results for this subpopulation are making gains according to Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS) data. Local districts hold the responsibility to improve reading and math scores through their local remediation programs. In addition, Transition Services required in the State Performance Plan need to be monitored insuring appropriate supports, accommodations, and modifications are being offered and implemented for all students with IEPs attending area Career and Technical Education Centers.

What should a student do if considering enrollment in a CTE Program?

- Participate in formal and informal assessments that target interests, strengths, and preferences. In addition to the standardized formal tests, examples of informal assessments include curriculum-based assessments, observational reports, situational assessments, structured interviews, personal-future planning activities, and functional skill inventories. Transition assessment should provide a match between the student's abilities and CTE programs and occupational outcomes. This assessment can be provided by either the school district operating the CTE program or the CTC.
- Be involved in activities identified in the Pennsylvania Academic Standards for Career Education and Work such as: identifying interests, preferences, and abilities; participating in career days; developing an awareness of career acquisition (e.g., preparing resumes, using the internet, interviewing) and career retention and advancement (e.g., communication, personal appearance, good attendance, punctuality).
- Be aware of skills needed for specific career and technical programs of interest.

What should CTC staff do to prepare for the arrival of a student with a disability?

- Participate in IEP meetings when asked to do so. A representative of the CTC is an essential member of the IEP team. This individual can share information about CTC programs and curricula, and review transition assessment information specific to the student.
- When the student visits the CTC, the student should attend classes in different career clusters targeted to the student's specific interest areas.
- Ask for and review the student's IEP. Look at the goals listed. Remember, goals are not guarantees of student performance, rather they are statements of what the student plans to achieve within the present school year. Consider how the IEP will

be implemented: do you have all the assessment data you need, do you know how to provide the accommodations listed, do you need to request help in learning techniques identified? It is your right to ask for the resources or training that you need to implement the student's IEP.

- Identify who will be providing reading and math instruction to the student. Integrating their instructional techniques with yours will improve the student's chance for success in both academic and technical areas.
- If the IEP has a behavior support plan, follow it. If you do not know how to use the strategies recommended, talk to your principal about resources available to you.
- Implement the specially designed instruction listed. This is particularly important, because the specially designed instruction is one of the key components of special education for this student.
- Establish a procedure for communicating with the sending school after the student enrolls in the CTC program. This will allow CTC staff to discuss progress toward the student's IEP goals as well as to collaborate with staff who already know the student well.

As a member of the IEP team, what should you discuss if a CTC is being considered?

- Does the IEP include appropriate data such as reading and math levels, functional performance information, and mobility?
- As part of the IEP process, the student, parents/guardians, and teacher should review the competencies, requirements, and task lists for the desired program. There should be a match between these and the student's interests and aptitudes as determined by assessment. As needed, accommodations and adaptations should be identified.
- Has the IEP team reviewed CTE curricula and task requirements as outlined in the state developed Program of Study task grid?
- Does the IEP detail the specially designed instruction, modifications and accommodations that the student will need to be successful in the CTC? Ask for specific examples of the specially designed instruction being recommended.
- Is there a process for coordination and articulation of student progress between academic and career education contacts?

Career and technical education programs motivate students to get involved in their learning by engaging them in problem-solving activities and by providing opportunities to apply that knowledge. They are vital to the range of alternatives that prepare students with disabilities for employment.

Resources

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National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center
www.nsttac.org

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www.pattan.net

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