



**Utah Parent Center**  
Special needs, extraordinary potential

## Entitlement versus Eligibility: The Big Shift

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What happens when the school bus stops coming? This question is asked by many parents of youth with disabilities as they near the end of his or her public school years. There are some other common questions, too:

- How will my son or daughter spend his or her days?
- What supports are available in the areas of employment, postsecondary education or housing?
- Whose responsibility is it to investigate and access resources my son or daughter might need as an adult?
- Will my child be able to use the adult services in the same way he or she did in special education?

These are important questions and parents of youth with disabilities need the right answers. That is why transition planning is so valuable. When parents start thinking about adult services they need to know that there is a significant difference between mandated special education programs and adult services based on eligibility.

Parents are accustomed to the intense level of support and participation that is part of special education. Under IDEA a student is entitled to a free appropriate education. School districts are also required by law to identify youth with disabilities who they feel may benefit from special education services, this is called child find. After high school, adult services are based on eligibility and FAPE and child find no longer exist. While your child was in school you met with one agency, the school.

Adult services are based in several different agencies and must be accessed separately with different eligibility criteria for each agency. Waiting lists for services are allowed. Not all youth will qualify for adult services, even if they have a disability and have received special education services.

Students and their families need to plan ahead and be able to effectively collaborate with schools in transition planning. At age 16, parents might want to ask the IEP Team to start including needed adult agencies such as Vocational Rehabilitation. Educators or parents may collect literature on each adult agency that includes information about the agency, eligibility requirements and a form to apply for services. This way at age 18 students have filled out applications and are ready to qualify for services. Parents will need to sign a school permission form to invite an adult agency.

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During transition planning, these key questions need to be answered:

- What will the student do for employment?
- Where will the student live as an adult?
- What type of training or postsecondary education does the student need to pursue his or her employment goal?
- How will the student travel from place to place?
- How will the student's medical needs be taken care of?
- Does the student currently have the skills to do the things he or she wants to do?

Support comes in the form of involvement from school, parents, the youth and various community agencies, with each organization offering one or two pieces for the puzzle. Teamwork and group effort among individuals involved will prepare parents and youth to enter the world of adulthood.

For more information you can contact The Utah Parent Center at 801-272-1051 or call toll free and 1-800-468-1160.

Information used with permission and gathered from Minnesota Secondary Transition Toolkit for Families, "A Guide to Preparing Your Child with a Disability for Life Beyond High School," pgs. 38 – 42, 2013 PACER Center, Inc., retrieved <http://www.pacer.org/publications/MDE-Toolkit-2013.pdf> 7/16/2013

