

OASIS · AT A GLANCE

Why Your IEP Transition Plan Is Probably Failing (And What to Fix)

Research on IEP transition plans finds an average of roughly three goals per student, with barely more than one and a half addressing life after high school specifically. Most transition plans aren't malicious. They're thin.

BY JIM PALASTY · 10 MIN READ · THIN, NOT MALICIOUS, AND FIXABLE

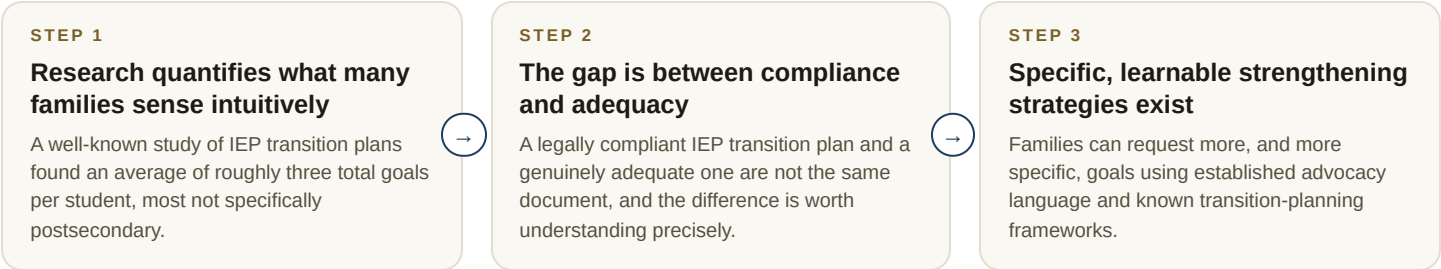
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AVERAGE NUMBER OF TOTAL IEP GOALS RESEARCHERS FOUND PER STUDENT

With barely more than one and a half of those goals specifically addressing postsecondary life. A thin plan, not usually a bad-faith one, and a genuinely fixable problem.

How it works

THREE STEPS



What a stronger transition plan actually includes

Multiple postsecondary-specific goals	Not folded generically into broader academic goals
Measurable, dated targets	Specific enough to know whether they were actually met
Real assessment data behind each goal	Vocational, independent living, and self-determination assessments
A named responsible party	Someone specifically accountable for each goal's progress
Connection to adult service agencies	Explicit coordination with MRS, CMHSP, or other relevant agencies

THE PLAN THAT GREW FROM ONE PAGE TO FOUR

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Deshawn's daughter's IEP transition section had read the same way for two consecutive years, a single vague paragraph about 'continuing to build independence skills.' Armed with the specific research findings on average goal counts, Deshawn requested a formal transition planning meeting citing the NTACT:C framework directly. The resulting plan grew to four full pages, with eleven specific, measurable postsecondary goals tied to actual assessments.

ONE PAGE OF VAGUE LANGUAGE BECAME FOUR PAGES OF SPECIFIC GOALS, ONCE DESHAWN KNEW EXACTLY WHAT TO ASK FOR AND CITED A REAL FRAMEWORK BY NAME.

What matters, at a glance

What the research actually found

A frequently cited study of IEP transition plans found an average of approximately 3.1 total annual goals per student, with only about 1.6 addressing postsecondary life specifically.

Compliant is not the same as adequate

A transition plan can technically satisfy federal IDEA requirements while still offering far too little specificity to meaningfully prepare a student for adult life.

Thin plans are the norm, not the exception

This isn't a story about a handful of bad IEP teams. Research suggests thin, underspecified transition planning is a widespread structural pattern.

Specific, learnable strengthening strategies exist

Requesting measurable, postsecondary-specific goals tied to real assessments and real timelines is a concrete, achievable advocacy step.

National frameworks can anchor a stronger request

Established transition-planning frameworks give families specific, credible language to request a more substantive plan.

This is a fixable gap, not a fixed reality

A thin plan is a starting point for a specific, informed advocacy conversation, not a verdict on what's possible for a given student.

BRING THESE · CHECK AS YOU GO

☐ A current count of your child's total and postsecondary-specific IEP goals

☐ A formal request for a transition planning meeting, in writing

☐ A request for explicit adult service agency coordination within the plan

☐ The research benchmark for comparison (approximately 3.1 total / 1.6 postsecondary)

☐ Familiarity with the NTACTION framework and its specific language

YOUR MOVE

When you're strengthening a thin transition plan, here is where to start

1

Count your child's current total and postsecondary-specific IEP goals.

2

Compare against the roughly 3.1 total / 1.6 postsecondary research benchmark.

3

Request a formal transition planning meeting if the gap is significant.

4

Cite NTACTION or another established transition framework by name.

5

Ask for measurable, dated, postsecondary-specific goals tied to real assessments.

6

Request explicit coordination with adult service agencies like MRS or CMHSP.

A thin transition plan usually reflects a thin process, not bad intentions. A specific, informed request is often what turns one into the other.

TRANSITION PLANNING RESOURCES

The National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative (NTACTION, transitionta.org) publishes the framework and specific language referenced throughout this post.

Wrightslaw (wrightslaw.com) publishes detailed guidance on IEP transition plan requirements and specific advocacy language for strengthening a thin plan.

Informational only. Not legal or medical advice. Verify current program rules before acting.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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