

Key Transitions and How to Prepare

Throughout childhood and adolescence, all children experience many transitions. Transitions occur each year as a child moves from one grade to another, and also occur when children move from one school or program to another.

We know that transitions sometimes cause uncertainty and stress for students and families. Planned transitions allow for smooth movement from one program, grade and/or school to another. As you prepare for transitions, be proactive, work closely with your child's educational team to identify what supports your child will need as he/she transitions to a new environment, and educate yourself about program options.

Each year, Arlington Public Schools (APS) hosts Kindergarten, Middle School, High School and College Information Nights. These large gatherings are designed to provide information about school options and programs for all families. In addition to APS Information Nights, the professionals at the Parent Resource Center (PRC) offer sessions and information for various transitions related specifically to children with disabilities, and are pleased to help connect families with resources and parent liaisons to inform decision-making during transition processes.

Every elementary, middle and high school in Arlington offers a continuum of services for students with disabilities, and there are also specialized countywide programs available from Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) through age 22. To learn more about APS' special education programs, please visit: <https://www.apsva.us/countywide-programs/>

Specific transitions that are predictable for families to prepare for include:

Early Childhood to Pre-K

In Arlington, children may transition from early intervention services (often referred to as the Parent Infant Education (PIE) Program) and enter the public school Child Find system for Pre- K if they are:

- 2 years old by September 30th of the upcoming school year, and
- found eligible for special education services by Arlington Public Schools and/or another public school system in the United States.

Children are no longer eligible for (PIE) early intervention services once they turn 3 years old. APS offers a continuum of programs and services for students found eligible for special education. Most elementary schools have a Pre-K special education program (among a variety available in the continuum), and the majority of students in need of a Pre-K program attend their neighborhood elementary school. However, from time to time, another placement may be recommended by the IEP team. The staff at the PRC can answer questions and offer information to help families make informed decisions about placement and services as part of their child's IEP team.



Pre-K to Kindergarten

Most children transition into Kindergarten programs the year they turn 5 by September 30th, although some parents elect to have their children wait until the year they turn 6 by September 30th. Once your child is found eligible for special education, you and other members of the IEP team will work together to determine the appropriate placement for your child based on his/her unique learning needs. Families should attend PRC workshops about transitioning to Kindergarten, and may also choose to visit elementary schools during Open Houses for prospective families. The PRC staff can help answer questions to help families prepare for this transition.

Elementary to Middle School (Rising Sixth Graders)

In Arlington, elementary schools include Pre-K through Grade 5. Rising sixth graders will attend one of Arlington's middle schools. As your child approaches fifth grade, your IEP team will begin discussing your child's needs in middle school and planning for your child's transition. Families are encouraged to attend Middle School Information Night to learn about Arlington's middle schools and programs, and should contact the PRC for information and support.

Middle School to High School (Rising 9th Graders)

Arlington's high schools encompass Grades 9 through 12, with the exception of the Stratford Program and the HB-Woodlawn Program, which include Grades 6 through 12. Toward the end of middle school, the IEP team will begin planning for your student's transition to high school. Parents may also contact the PRC for additional information and support.

Age 14

The Virginia Department of Education *Regulations Governing Special Education* indicate that before your child enters secondary (high) school, but no later than the first IEP to be in effect when your child reaches age 14 (or younger, if the IEP team decides that it is appropriate), your child's IEP must include:

- Post-secondary goals related to training, education, employment, and, if appropriate, the student's independent living skills; and
- Transition services, including courses of study, and activities such as instruction, related services, and community experiences.

Age of Majority

At least one year before your child reaches the age of majority (18), the IEP must include a statement that you and your child have been informed of the rights that will transfer from you to your child at age 18. You may, however, make arrangements to continue to make educational decisions for your adult child through guardianship procedures, a power of attorney, or certification. For additional information, refer to:

www.doe.virginia.gov/special-ed/index.shtml

- Students with disabilities may continue to receive special education until they receive a standard or advanced studies diploma, and/or reach the age of 22. (*Students who have not yet earned a standard or advanced studies diploma, and become 22 after September 30 remain eligible to receive services for that school year.*) Many students remain at their neighborhood schools or, based on IEP Team decisions, may also receive services in a county-wide program such as the Stratford Program or the



Program for Employment Preparedness (PEP). The Program for Employment Preparedness (PEP) is a community based class for supported work experience, supported travel training, and independent living training located at the Arlington Career Center.

Beyond High School to College or Vocation

Planning for the post-secondary transition begins several years prior to this transition. Through the IEP process, families, students and staff begin to discuss post-secondary goals based on age-appropriate assessments, taking into account the student's strengths, preferences and interests. IEP teams also discuss diploma options. Each Arlington high school has a Transition Coordinator to support this process. Transition Coordinators provide technical assistance and support to IEP teams. Contact your school or the PRC to learn how to access your school's Transition Coordinator, and sign up for one of the PRC's Post-Secondary Transition workshops. Also, please refer to information on the APS Transition Services webpage at:

<http://www.apsva.us/page/20922>

How can families prepare for Transitions?

- Contact the Parent Resource Center (PRC) to learn about steps students and families can take to prepare for smooth transitions.
- Subscribe to APS School Talk to receive notices about parent education opportunities and APS Information Nights (Select APS School Talk at www.apsva.us/ - be sure to select Parent Academy and Special Education/Parent Resource Center as preferences). The PRC offers several parent education sessions on transitions. Sign up to attend.
- Visit the APS website and search the "School Options" page for information on school options, countywide programs, and school transfer options at: <https://www.apsva.us/school-options/>
- Early in the year, begin conversations with your child's IEP Team. Make lists of questions your family has and seek input about your child's needs during the transition. From time to time, IEP teams may consider alternative programs for students with disabilities. Information on countywide special education programs can be found at: <https://www.apsva.us/student-services-special-education/special-education-office-of-countywide-programs>
- Review APS' *Virginia Diploma Options and Possible Outcomes* (included in this guide).
- Visit Virginia's *I'm Determined* Project's website at www.imdetermined.org
- Families of students seeking postsecondary educational experiences can learn more about college supports and programs for students with disabilities at www.going-to-college.org and www.thinkcollege.net
- Learn more about person-centered planning at: http://www.personcenteredpractices.org/launch_vpbs.html



- Attend APS Information Nights, School Open Houses, PRC Transition Sessions, and “Future Quest” (a free, regional, biennial career and college forum for students with disabilities, parents and professionals). To learn more about Future Quest, visit <http://futurequest.gmu.edu/>.

