

Introduction

OVERVIEW

What's next? This is the question, the concern, and the need that underlies transition planning. Much of the time, we go through life responding primarily to our immediate needs, especially during childhood and adolescence. The overall purpose of this curriculum is to teach high school students how to begin planning for their lives after they leave school. We call the curriculum NEXT S.T.E.P. S.T.E.P. is an acronym that stands for "student transition and educational planning."

Because long-range planning is an activity in which students probably have very little experience, the two main purposes of this curriculum are to

1. Teach students the skills they need for transition planning
2. Engage students successfully in this process

With the help of this curriculum, students eventually will take a leadership role in their own planning efforts, with teachers, family members, and other concerned people in the community playing supportive, facilitative roles. Furthermore, we hope that the skills that students learn through this curriculum will generalize into a strategy that they will be able to use at later times in their lives when other transitions emerge as new challenges.

What Will This Curriculum Do for Your Students?

Everyone knows that adolescence and young adulthood are times of floundering as young people struggle with the demands of growing up. Adolescents and young adults typically experience many difficulties as they gain ever-increasing responsibilities for the many decisions that affect their lives. Through this curriculum, students will begin to learn how to take charge of their own transition planning. We structured the lessons to help students accomplish the following goals:

1. Become motivated to engage in transition planning
2. Engage in meaningful and useful self-evaluation
3. Identify and select feasible and personally desired transition goals and activities
4. Monitor the implementation of their transition plans and make adjustments when needed
5. Take responsibility for conducting their own transition planning meeting

This type of curriculum is needed in both general and special education. In general education, the current buzzwords are *school-to-work* or *career education*. In special education, we hear much about the need for “transition” programs and services. We chose the word *transition* to characterize our curriculum because we like the connotations of this word, but we constructed the lessons in a way that will work with all students, with or without disabilities.

How Does the Curriculum Work?

We developed the curriculum in a manner that is both comprehensive and easy to use. The NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum

1. Consists of 16 lessons
2. Contains most of the materials that a teacher will need to implement the lessons, including lesson plans, blackline masters for overhead transparencies, student workbooks, and all the assessment tools, plan sheets, and other forms that students will need to produce their transition plans
3. Includes entertaining and instructive video vignettes that play a motivational and instructional role within several of the lessons
4. Provides guidelines for involving parents, family members, and other support persons in the student’s transition planning process
5. Provides an approach and materials for tracking student progress through the curriculum

We also field-tested the curriculum with more than 1,000 students and their families prior to the first edition and with an additional 1,000 prior to this second edition. We can assure you that the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum really works!

The components of this curriculum consist of materials for both teachers and students and include the following:

1. Teacher Manual
2. Student Workbook, containing all worksheets and forms that the student will need to complete the curriculum
3. Instructional videotape
4. Program information brochures briefly describing the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum
5. *Teachers Talking to Teachers*, a manual of teacher recommendations concerning how to use this curriculum

RATIONALE AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CURRICULUM

Adolescents are not naturally inclined to engage in transition planning. The “future” seems far away and much less interesting than what to do this afternoon or next week. Adolescents also tend to believe that they have much more control over short-range decisions than over long-range plans. “Why bother worrying about something,” they ask, “since the future is far away and you probably can’t do much about it anyway?” This is the real-life context that we faced and acknowledged as we began the development of the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum.

Why Should Students, Parents, and Teachers Be Concerned About Transition Planning?

Student transitions will occur with or without planning. Students will or will not graduate from school. Students will or will not get a job or continue their education. Students will or will not learn how to function independently as young adults. Much evidence suggests that many students do not make these transitions successfully for a wide variety of reasons. The underlying assumption of this curriculum is that planning can make a difference.

Who Should Be in Charge of the Planning Process?

Ultimately, the student should be in charge of the planning process. As much as teachers, family members, and other concerned people in the community may want to help out, each student is eventually responsible for his or her own life. A student’s ability to exercise such “self-determination,” however, will not just happen. Students must be taught how to engage in transition planning, and they must want to use the tools of planning to provide new direction in their lives. This presents a delicate dilemma. While students are still learning how to assume increasing levels of responsibility for their own life decisions, teachers are still exercising substantial control through the very structure of the curriculum. As students become more and more skillful and responsible in planning their lives, teachers must let go and provide ever-decreasing amounts of support and guidance. Parents, of course, face a similar dilemma as their children begin to show interest in “leaving the nest.”

Who Are the Intended Beneficiaries of This Curriculum?

Almost any high school or postsecondary student, and some middle school students, can benefit from the process of transition planning. We developed this curriculum with both general and special education students in mind. Although career education is not mandated by legislation in most states, some school reform efforts are beginning to address this area for all students, with or without disabilities. At the federal level, the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments require that all students with disabilities must begin to address transition issues no later than age 14. Appendix C in this manual addresses connections between the outcomes of this curriculum and requirements for doing transition planning within the Individual Education Program (IEP) process.

We do not mention the word *disability* anywhere within the curriculum because our intention is to provide a curriculum that works for a broad array of students, whenever

possible, within inclusive classes that contain students with and without disabilities. To accommodate most students, however, including the “forgotten half” that are not college bound, we have skewed the difficulty level downward to address the needs of those students who are not the automatic high achievers. We have found that the curriculum also works well for high achievers if the pacing of the lessons is increased. It is also possible for higher level students to work as peer tutors for students who need assistance.

When Should a Student Begin To Do Transition Planning?

No one would disagree that the day after a student leaves school is too late to begin planning about what to do after leaving school. Some have argued that students can and should begin to attend to career development during the elementary school years. Between these extremes, there are a lot of possibilities.

Student age is only one of the contexts that must be considered when debating a starting time for transition planning. Does a student come from a family and cultural environment that values and supports such planning? Is there a good match between the cognitive demands of the curriculum and the cognitive abilities of the student? Is there a good match between the content of the curriculum and the kinds of questions that a student is ready to address?

Taking all of these factors into consideration, most students can begin using the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum somewhere between the ages of 14 and 21. Below or above these ages, the content of the curriculum may begin to lose relevance. Teachers will have to make a judgment call when thinking about the possibility for any given student. If a student has been lucky enough to participate in career development activities during elementary school years, this may also affect the age at which he or she is ready to begin working on this curriculum.

INSTRUCTIONAL DESIGN

The structure underlying the flow of this curriculum assumes that most students will begin the curriculum with nothing more than a dim interest and awareness of the nature and purpose of transition planning. As students progress through the curriculum, they gain knowledge about transition planning and skills for doing transition planning. We have identified the following five desirable components of any transition planning curriculum including ours. Such a curriculum must

1. Build upon a foundation of student self-exploration and self-evaluation
2. Address the most important areas of student transition in a manner that is responsive to student interests and needs
3. Teach students how to set goals and develop a concrete transition plan
4. Teach students how to implement and monitor their own transition plans
5. Provide students with an opportunity to direct their own Transition Planning Meeting involving other significant people

Self-Exploration and Self-Evaluation

The commonly used literary phrases “know thyself” and “to thine own self be true” serve as reminders that we all need an accurate understanding of who we are as a foundation for considering who we might become. Early in the curriculum, we include rudimentary exercises in helping students to think about their likes, dislikes, hopes, dreams, strengths, and weaknesses. Later in the curriculum, we introduce a highly structured self-evaluation process through an instrument called the Transition Skills Inventory (TSI), which guides students into an examination of many skills that are directly related to subsequent transition outcomes. We also ask parents and teachers to fill out the TSI, providing the student with some additional perspectives on their strengths and weaknesses. Students then use all of this information as a foundation for the development of their transition plans.

Four Essential Areas of Concern for Transition Planning

Because most students have not thought much about transition planning when they enter this curriculum, they do not have even a working vocabulary for identifying transition goals. Early in the curriculum, we introduce students to the four areas that they will consider as they begin to develop their transition goals:

1. Personal Life
2. Jobs
3. Education and Training
4. Living On Your Own

Students learn initially what kinds of goals and activities are encompassed within each of these areas, and they address these same four areas repeatedly throughout the curriculum.

Setting Goals and Developing a Plan

A working vocabulary is only a useful starting point for transition planning. There are many possible concrete goals that one might choose to address within each of the four areas. To minimize potential confusion that might then become a stumbling block for students, we identified specific goal choices and very concrete activities for students to identify and select as they develop their transition plans. This “catalog” of goal and activity choices was developed and field-tested very carefully. We found that most students are able to identify their personally relevant choices from within our selection. We also encourage students, however, to invent their own goals and activities if the ones that we have presented are not adequate.

Implementing the Plan

Planning is not a static event. No one is able to foresee the future with total accuracy, and students are likely to encounter varying degrees of success in their chosen activities. The ultimate success of a plan, therefore, will require

1. Following through on commitments
2. Self-monitoring accomplishments
3. Making adjustments to the plan when things do not work out as first envisioned

To encourage students to engage effectively in this implementation phase of the transition planning process, we have developed some lessons focusing on plan implementation along with some self-monitoring tools and procedures for students to use under the guidance of teachers.

In an important sense, the ultimate goal of the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum is to teach students a transition planning process. When students emerge into the self-monitoring phase of the curriculum, they will find that transition goals and activities frequently require modification for a wide variety of reasons. As students become proficient in making such modifications, they also will become more empowered to engage in transition planning with decreasing levels of support from their parents and teachers. To the extent that this occurs, the ultimate intent of the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum will be accomplished. Students will have learned an approach to problem solving, in the context of making transitions, that will serve them well for the rest of their lives.

The Transition Planning Meeting

The culminating event in the process of developing a transition plan is a student-directed Transition Planning Meeting. The student, teacher, and parents typically attend this meeting, although others may be invited as well, such as friends of the student or people in the community who might be able to help the student to reach his or her goals. During this meeting, the student presents his or her transition plan and accomplishments and receives helpful feedback from the others who are present. We have found this event to be a very powerful part of the total transition planning process. Students feel empowered to make choices. Teachers and parents are often amazed by the skill and maturity students show as they “take charge” in a socially desirable manner. Everyone present becomes highly involved in addressing transition issues and concerns that in the past may have been swept under the rug.

For students who are involved in special education programs, the outcomes of this meeting also can be incorporated into the transition segment of the student’s IEP. Appendix C provides some guidelines for doing this. For students without disabilities, the outcomes are equally powerful even though there is no requirement to produce a formal IEP.

OVERVIEW OF THE LESSONS

The NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum contains 16 lessons that are designed to teach students about transition planning and how to do transition planning. In this section of the manual, we describe the

- General structure of the lessons
- Content of the lessons
- Lesson format
- Importance of a Transition Planning Meeting

For most students, it will require between half an academic year and a full academic year to complete all components of the curriculum.

General Structure of the Lessons

Students will learn how to do transition planning only by doing transition planning. Although the planning process is similar for all students, the content of each student's plan is individualized. This calls for an intricate mixture of teaching general concepts about planning to students and then providing them with structured opportunities for developing their own plans.

The early lessons in the curriculum tend to focus mostly on learning *about* transition planning, whereas the later lessons tend to focus more on learning *how to do* transition planning. This organization has strong implications for the logistics of instruction. When the focus is on learning about transition planning, a group-oriented lecture, discussion, and activity format often works best. For a change of pace, we also incorporated short instructional videos into some of these lessons. As the lessons progress into how to do transition planning, however, each student begins to move down a somewhat unique pathway. At this stage of the curriculum, teachers must individualize their instruction, working with individual students (or small groups of students) on their own plans. The balancing of group and individualized instruction is ultimately a teacher judgment, depending on the needs of the students and the availability of instructional aides for assisting the teacher.

Content of the Lessons

The 16 lessons contained within the curriculum have been clustered into four broad units. Unit 1 provides students with an introduction and overview of the broad area of transition planning along with an opportunity to explore their likes and dislikes as well as their hopes and dreams. The four lessons in this unit are primarily explanatory, exploratory, and motivational. If these lessons are successful, the students will begin to understand the nature and purpose of transition planning, and they will begin to feel motivated to participate.

Unit 2 contains four lessons that deal with student self-evaluation. As students move through these lessons, they will learn about their strengths and weaknesses in different areas

of endeavor that are relevant for the roles that they will eventually assume as they transition from high school into their adult communities. This unit culminates with a highly structured self-evaluation, using an instrument that we have developed called the Transition Skills Inventory (TSI). Students, parents, and teachers all provide ratings of student skills included on the TSI. Strengths, weaknesses, and differences of opinion are all considered as students lay a foundation for selecting specific transition goals to include in their plans.

Unit 3 contains six lessons that help students to identify specific goals and related activities that will eventually become part of their transition plans. Student choice is the underlying value that permeates these lessons. To make good choices, however, students must first learn the “landscape” of possibilities. The structure of the curriculum provides substantial help in this area. As mentioned previously, the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum asks students to consider transition goals in the following four areas:

1. Personal Life
2. Jobs
3. Education and Training
4. Living On Your Own

Within each of these areas, three specific goals have been formulated for students to consider as possible choices. Students are guided to make selections from among these 12 possibilities. Students choose and implement one goal in each area.

Unit 4 contains two lessons that prepare students for their Transition Planning Meetings and provide students with a structure for following up on the commitments that emerge from this meeting. These lessons provide a time for celebration and a time for closure. Whether or not all of the planning and implementation lessons in Unit 3 have been completed, it is important to leave time for the two lessons in Unit 4.

Lesson Format

We designed each lesson with a similar basic format. Each lesson begins with a statement of goals to be accomplished by the student as a consequence of participating in the lesson. Next, we introduce new vocabulary contained in the lesson. We then list all materials the teacher will need to complete the lesson. For many of the lessons, the teacher will need to create transparencies to use during the lesson presentation. Masters for these transparencies are included at the end of any lesson that requires the use of transparencies. A section titled “Teacher Information” provides an overview of the lesson and any precautions that we think the teacher might want to observe.

The core of the lesson plan is a description of teacher and student activities that make up the lesson. This description always begins with a review of the past lesson and is followed with specific instructions for the lesson at hand. The lesson ends with some suggestions for wrap-up activities, record keeping, and parent involvement, when appropriate. Copies of student workbook pages that are used during a lesson are included at the end of the lesson, for teacher reference.

Throughout the lessons in this manual, you will find comments called “Tips.” These tips reflect suggestions that we received from teachers who field-tested the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum. We think that you will find them informative and helpful.

At the end of most lessons are some enrichment activities that you can offer to students as they are working their way through the curriculum. We designed these activities to enhance student knowledge and enjoyment of the concepts being taught throughout the curriculum.

Importance of a Transition Planning Meeting

The student’s Transition Planning Meeting will emerge as the key “milestone event” that the student will experience as a consequence of participating in the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum. For students with disabilities this meeting often occurs within the context of a federally required IEP meeting during which transition issues are discussed. For students without disabilities, the meeting will occur in some other context. Appendix C contains some suggestions on how to coordinate NEXT S.T.E.P. outcomes with IEPs.

The power of this planning meeting stems almost entirely from the student’s demonstrated ability to think meaningfully about his or her future and to assume responsibility for influencing that future. As a consequence of skills learned through the curriculum, students begin to take charge of their own lives in a manner that is socially desirable. Their self-esteem grows as they realize that they can make good decisions and that their teachers and parents appreciate their efforts. Teachers and parents have often expressed amazement at how empowered the students have become.

This does not mean, of course, that the students have fully arrived and that there is nothing left to do but celebrate. Rather, it seems to symbolize a turning point in perceptions, from the student being a dependent to the student becoming a collaborator and eventually a controller over the values and major directions that will characterize his or her life. This transformation of perceptions does not occur in every case, of course, but we have been impressed with the large number of times that it has happened.

TRACKING STUDENT PERFORMANCE

If students are to become involved with the transition planning process in a manner that promotes ever-increasing amounts of student control over the process, some sort of tracking system is essential to allow students to monitor their own performance as they move through the curriculum and as they develop their own transition plans. Similarly, teachers also need to keep track of the progress of all the students in their class to modify the pace of instruction based on student performance and to provide a foundation for assisting students with the development and implementation of their individual plans.

We developed a tracking system for users of the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum that works for both students and teachers. This system includes both monitoring student *accomplishments* throughout the curriculum and documenting their *progress* through the lessons of the curriculum.

Documenting Student Accomplishments

Throughout the curriculum, students are required to document their accomplishments in developing and implementing their own transition plans. The types of information that they document include

1. Their likes and dislikes
2. Their hopes and dreams
3. Skills that they do well and skills that they need to improve
4. Goals that they choose to pursue and activities that will lead to accomplishment of their chosen goals
5. Small “Next Steps” that they can perform *each week* as they move toward accomplishing their chosen goals

All forms that they need to document these accomplishments are included in their Student Workbooks.

Documenting Student Progress

As students progress through the lessons and experience success in developing and implementing their own transition plans, they are given the opportunity to document this progress on the Record of Milestone Events. The *type* of event is the same for all students, even though the *content* of each event is unique for each student. The list of milestone events, along with a chart for documenting when they are achieved, is printed on the last page of the Student Workbook. A classroom version of the milestone events chart is also available in Lesson 3 for teacher use, so that the teacher can evaluate student progress collectively for all students in the class.

CLASSROOM LOGISTICS

Although there is no single correct way of delivering the curriculum, we have found from our experiences a few guidelines that we would like to propose. These guidelines address the following:

- Class size
- Class composition
- The setting for teaching the lessons
- The length of a typical class session
- The duration required for teaching the entire curriculum
- Personnel requirements that are implied by an instructional design that mixes group and individualized instruction

Class Size

Class size in our demonstration sites ranged from 5 to 25 students. After using the curriculum, most teachers in our demonstration sites believed that the maximum class size should be 15 to 20 students. This small class size allows most students to participate in group discussions and activities, even if they need to be nudged by an attentive teacher who notices reluctance to participate. This size class also permits clustering students into small groups of 3 to 5 each during the parts of the curriculum that require students to develop their own unique plans.

Class Composition

A wide array of students participated in our field demonstrations. General education students without any special needs participated, as did special education students with many different classification labels, including students with specific learning disabilities, serious emotional disorders, vision or hearing impairments, mild to moderate mental retardation, autism, and an array of physical or health-related disabilities. A variety of “at-risk” students without disabilities also participated, including adjudicated youth who were incarcerated in juvenile detention facilities. The effectiveness of the curriculum did not seem to vary strictly as a function of disability, although additional individualized instruction often was necessary for students with moderate cognitive or behavioral problems. We believe that many different kinds of students can benefit from the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum, including the mainstream general education students. After all, transition planning is a fairly universal need for most adolescents.

Setting

This curriculum can be presented as a separate class, as part of some other class, or within the context of a counseling or guidance program. Our experience thus far suggests that the best format involves embedding the curriculum within the context of some other relevant class, such as career development, life skills, or even transition skills. There are several reasons for this recommendation. First, in our field studies, the curriculum has always been embedded in something else. The types of accompanying instruction have varied immensely, ranging from relevant and related topics to somewhat tangential topics such as study skills or remedial English. Although creative teachers have found a way to bridge almost any gap between transition planning content and whatever else they are teaching, it is much simpler if the other content is conceptually related to transition planning.

When NEXT S.T.E.P. was embedded within some other class, our field study teachers typically scheduled the lessons twice a week. The “homework” between lessons often requires a fair amount of time, especially during the lessons of Unit 3 when students are working on their own individualized transition plans. Some lessons also call for parental involvement, which obviously requires finding a time when parents and students can get together.

Class Length

Many of the lessons can be completed within a 50-minute class period, although others are sufficiently complex that they take longer to complete. A lesson can take longer than one class period for two primary reasons: (1) the teacher may decide to embellish a lesson with enrichment activities or (2) the students may need extra or individualized instruction in order to complete the activities within a lesson. Teachers may choose to enrich the lessons for several different reasons. Some activities we propose in our lessons may not seem appropriate for a particular class, so teachers may modify or replace a suggested activity with one of their own. In other situations, teachers may want to add new activities simply because they are fun for the students to do. We encourage this type of creativity as teachers use our curriculum.

Some students may need extra attention to complete their lessons. Students may not be motivated, may have behavior problems that lead to distraction, or may have cognitive limitations that require extra effort to accommodate. The curriculum has been used in all of these situations, and teachers have usually been able to compensate for these difficulties. The consequence of longer lessons is that it takes more time to complete the entire curriculum.

Sometimes students complete one or more of our lessons in less than a 50-minute class period. This occurs most frequently when the class is composed primarily of bright and motivated students. In such situations, teachers need to embellish the lessons with enrichment activities or combine lessons. Creative teachers will always find a way to deal with these variations.

Duration of the Curriculum

Most teachers who assisted us in the development of the curriculum chose to present the lessons twice a week. This schedule seemed to provide sufficient time for students to complete their homework between lessons without feeling rushed. If you implement this twice-a-week model, and if you choose to provide students with time to work on all four of their transition goals (all of the lessons in Unit 3), the entire curriculum will probably require an entire academic year to complete. This amount of time can be shortened to a semester if you choose to work on fewer goals, if you modify the amount of time you allocate for Transition Planning Meetings (Lesson 15), or if your students are especially competent and are able to move through the lessons quickly. Some teachers have also delivered the lessons three times a week to shorten the overall duration of the curriculum. Many options are possible and appropriate, which provides teachers with a fair amount of flexibility for using the curriculum.

Personnel Requirements

The minimum personnel requirement for implementing the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum is a single teacher who assumes overall responsibility for delivering the instruction. Team teaching is also possible. As the lessons move from primarily group instruction to large amounts of individualized or at least small group instruction, the personnel needs increase. In other words, as students become more involved in developing their own transition plans, they typically need individualized or small group instruction. In special education classrooms,

this extra support can often be provided by teacher aides. Peer support, whereby students help each other in developing their plans, can also be explored. Once again, flexibility and creativity go a long way in helping to ensure that instruction is successful.

PARENTS OR SUPPORT PERSONS?

Although each student is ultimately responsible for engaging in his or her own transition planning, and the teacher is taking responsibility for delivering this curriculum to teach students how to do transition planning, we are convinced the ultimate success of the program will be greatly enhanced if parents are actively involved in the process. Important life decisions are rarely made in a vacuum. Parental support can be invaluable when adolescents begin to struggle seriously with their emerging adulthood.

We have designed the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum to include special parental involvement. At one level of thinking, the need for such involvement seemed obvious. Parents typically exercise a profound influence over their adolescents, for better or for worse. Parents typically want their adolescents to succeed in life and typically struggle with issues of control over their children's lives. Do parents let their son or daughter "learn from living," or do parents try to prevent them from making obvious mistakes? Adolescents, on the other hand, struggle with growing needs for independence. They want to take charge of their own lives, yet they usually are not quite certain how to do this effectively.

These strong undercurrents surrounding the issue of control are a powerful context within which the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum must operate. Some parent-student combinations work well, and others do not. Most troublesome are those situations where the student is totally and unreasonably rebellious or the parent is dysfunctional or abusive. When the problems are not extreme, however, we have observed situations when discordant relationships between parents and their children have actually improved through participation in this curriculum. We would therefore encourage parental involvement in the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum whenever possible and potentially beneficial.

In other words, we believe the best context for transition planning involves cooperation and collaboration between parent and student. Certainly there will be some exceptions, and teacher and student judgment will be required to identify these exceptions. Because the curriculum has been designed to provide a variety of opportunities for parental involvement, some adaptations will be needed in those cases where the teacher and student decide that such involvement is simply impossible.

We have discovered a variety of reasons why parental involvement may not work for some parent-student combinations. Parents may be reluctant to participate in any school activity, regardless of attempts to entice them. Some parents may be too busy to participate. Other parents may be experiencing extreme conflict in their relationships with their children that make it difficult, if not impossible, for them to work well together. A few parents may even be abusive with their children.

Likewise, some students may be reluctant to involve their parents and the problem may reside with the student. Perhaps the student does not trust his or her parents to be supportive without being controlling. The student may have behavior problems that have led to

alienation from his or her parents. The student may simply need to be free of parental oversight for a period of time in order to begin exploring the possibilities of self-determination.

These various possibilities present a dilemma as you begin to implement the curriculum. Should you support and encourage parental involvement, or should you support and encourage the involvement of a support person who is different from a parent? Many people, in addition to parents, can serve the role of support person. Examples include other relatives, friends, teachers, or almost any significant adult in the student's life, such as a clergy person, an employer, or even a parole officer.

In Lesson 1 you will ask students to identify a parent or a support person to participate with them throughout the curriculum. We recommend that, as often as possible, parents be chosen. When this is not possible or desirable, students should select a different support person. Acknowledging these variations, we have decided to use the phrase *support persons* throughout the lessons of the curriculum, referring primarily to parents while acknowledging that some students may need another person to serve in this role.

SUPPORT PERSON INVOLVEMENT

We envision five possible and useful roles that support persons might play during student participation in the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum:

1. Participating in an orientation meeting in order to become aware and generally supportive of what the student is doing with respect to transition planning (see Appendix A for details)
2. Participating actively in the student's self-evaluation efforts, particularly by completing the Transition Skills Inventory (TSI)
3. Helping the student to begin developing his or her transition plans
4. Supporting the student in the implementation of his or her transition plan
5. Participating in the student's Transition Planning Meeting

We have proposed some concrete activities for support persons as they participate throughout the curriculum.

TEACHERS TALKING TO TEACHERS

For a 5-year period beginning in 1994, approximately 250 teachers in Oregon, Utah, Arizona, Wisconsin, and New York participated with us in the development, evaluation, and revision of the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum. During interviews with these teachers, we gained many thoughtful and helpful suggestions about how to use the curriculum most effectively. We have organized the teachers' comments into a manual titled *Teachers Talking to Teachers*, which is included in the kit of curriculum materials.

We invite you to peruse this manual frequently as you are teaching NEXT S.T.E.P. It consists almost entirely of teacher quotations on a variety of topics that pertain to use of

the curriculum. These topics include such themes as working with parents, motivating students to participate, handling student diversity, maximizing the impact of transition planning meetings, and taking advantage of school and community connections when appropriate. As you read their comments, you will find a rich collection of suggestions, but you will also notice that teachers do not always agree on a single solution to a problem. This confirms our sense that the curriculum is not a cookbook. It is more like a structured set of guidelines that good teachers will modify and adapt to meet their unique circumstances and teaching styles.

NEW FEATURES OF THE SECOND EDITION

A major benefit of our extensive collaboration with teachers during the development of NEXT S.T.E.P. has been their constructive criticism of the curriculum. Based largely on their input, we discovered many ways for improving the curriculum which are all reflected in this second edition. We cannot describe these improvements in detail here; we can, however, provide an overview of what is new, organized around the following topics:

1. Revision of individual lessons
2. Restructuring the scope and sequence of the lessons
3. Tightening the connections between self-evaluation and goal development
4. Lessening paperwork for students and removing redundancies
5. Updating the connections between NEXT S.T.E.P. outcomes and IEP requirements

The information we present in this section will probably be most useful and relevant for those of you who have already used the original version of the curriculum.

Revision of Individual Lessons

As we stated earlier, each lesson in the curriculum has a similar structure and layout even though the content varies from lesson to lesson. There are three basic changes that we have incorporated into the lessons. The central part of each lesson is called “Teacher and Student Activities,” which lays out the instructional design for that lesson. As teachers in our field sites worked with the lessons, they shared with us numerous specific suggestions for improving the design and flow of the instruction. These suggestions are incorporated into the revised lessons.

Another feature of the original lessons was the placement of occasional tips in appropriate spots within the lessons, offering teacher-generated suggestions about the logistics of instruction at a given point in a given lesson. In our revision, we have added many new tips and, when appropriate, referenced them to a section of *Teachers Talking to Teachers*. This will allow you the opportunity either to consider the tip in its brief form or to explore it in greater depth.

Perhaps the greatest changes within individual lessons are the enrichment activities that are located at the end of most lessons. One of the strongest recommendations that teachers shared with us is the need for keeping students “active and involved” during the lessons. As the teachers responded to this need themselves, they provided us with many ideas for innovative and engaging activities that could be incorporated into the lessons. We have included many enrichment activities in the revised lessons, both as specific suggestions and as prototype ideas for new activities that you may want to design for your students.

Restructuring of Scope and Sequence

Another major change in the second edition of the curriculum is a significant restructuring of the lessons within Units 3 and 4. In the original version of NEXT S.T.E.P., students developed one goal plan within *each* of the four goal areas (Personal Life, Jobs, Education and Training, and Living On Your Own) *before* they began working on the implementation of any single goal. Most teachers told us that this was an inappropriate scope and sequence because students found it repetitious or boring to spend so much time on planning before they began the serious business of actually attempting to achieve their goals. Based on this input from teachers, we completely revised the scope and sequence of Unit 3 to allow students to work on implementing a goal as soon as they have developed it. This results in a cyclical structure for the lessons in Unit 3, which is a departure from the linear structure of the lessons in Units 1 and 2. You should examine carefully the introduction to Unit 3 in order to visualize how this cyclical structure works.

The two lessons in Unit 4 are also construed as falling outside of a linear structure. Lesson 15 deals with helping students to conduct their own Transition Planning Meetings as a celebratory and closure event within the curriculum. The timing of these meetings ideally would occur as the semester or term draws to a close and students have had maximum opportunity to plan and implement one or more transition goals. But this may not always be practical. Perhaps a student’s IEP meeting will occur during the middle of the term in which NEXT S.T.E.P. is being taught. If you want to include transition planning as part of this meeting, you may have to adjust the timing of Lesson 15 as well as the specific content from NEXT S.T.E.P. that you are able to address, which will depend on how far you have progressed through the curriculum at the time when you schedule the planning meetings.

Regardless of the timing of Lesson 15, the content of Lesson 16 should be addressed as a closure event when your NEXT S.T.E.P. instruction draws to a close. The content of this lesson explores what students can do to continue their own efforts in the area of transition planning, once instruction ceases, using what they have learned over the course of instruction within the curriculum.

Tightening Connections Between Self-Evaluation and Goal Development

From the beginning, we have envisioned a close connection between student self-evaluation and the process of selecting appropriate goals and activities to include in a student’s transition plan. In the original edition of NEXT S.T.E.P., however, we did not do an adequate job of making this connection clear through the specific assignments and forms that students used

during the process of developing their individualized transition plans. In the second edition, we have tightened up this connection with the introduction of a Skills Summary Sheet (in Lesson 8) that students use both to summarize their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses and to develop their transition plans. There are basically two ways in which students can use this information: (1) to choose activities that build upon their strengths, and (2) to engage in activities that teach them how to overcome or circumvent a skill deficit that presents an obstacle to them in their pursuit of a chosen goal.

Lessening Paperwork for Students and Removing Redundancies

Paperwork is never fun, especially when it seems unnecessary. Within the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum, students use numerous forms to document their progress as they engage in self-exploration, self-evaluation, and transition planning activities. In this second edition, we have decreased this paperwork and enhanced the clarity and relevance of record keeping in two ways.

In the original edition, students first recorded their own Transition Skills Inventory (TSI) ratings on a separate form and then transferred this information to a TSI Profile Report on which they transferred their teacher and support person ratings. Several teachers pointed out that it was redundant for students to have to record their own ratings twice. In the second edition, students do their initial self-ratings directly on the TSI Profile Report (Lesson 7), and transfer the teacher and support person ratings to the same form.

The second major clarification and simplification pertains to goal development and implementation. In the original version, students were asked to identify activity details on their Student Plan Sheets and then specify Next Steps as they began to implement a chosen goal. As students used this conceptual structure, it became apparent that there was very little difference between activity details and Next Steps. In the second edition, we use only the term *Next Steps* for both planning and implementation purposes.

Updating Connections with IEP Requirements

Since the initial publication of NEXT S.T.E.P., Congress passed the 1997 amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These amendments change somewhat the transition planning requirements within the IEP process. We have incorporated these changes into Appendix C, where we point out connections between NEXT S.T.E.P. accomplishments and IDEA requirements for transition planning within the IEP process.

Summary

Transition planning is an obvious need for all adolescents, and the NEXT S.T.E.P. curriculum provides one effective way for addressing this need. Throughout its development, the curriculum has benefitted immensely from teacher collaboration and constructive criticism. We are confident that you will find this second edition to be a significant and useful improvement as you continue to work with your students in this important endeavor.