

# Down Syndrome Advocates in *Action*



## Nebraska Transition Services (Ages 18–21)

### What Families Need to Know

In Nebraska, students with disabilities may continue to receive **special education and related services through the school system until age 21** under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). These years—often referred to as *transition services*—are designed to help students prepare for adult life, including employment, postsecondary education or training, independent living, and community participation.

These services are **not a program you opt into or out of**; they are part of your student’s **individualized education program (IEP)** and must be tailored to *your child*, not a one-size-fits-all model.

---

### Transition Services Are Individualized — Not a “Program”

A common misconception is that ages 18–21 are a separate or fixed “transition program.” In reality:

- Transition services are **IEP-driven**, just like all special education services.
- Services must be **based on your student’s individual needs, strengths, preferences, and interests**.
- Goals should focus on measurable post-school outcomes such as:
  - Employment
  - Post-secondary education or training
  - Independent or supported living
  - Community access and participation

Schools **may offer certain settings or pathways**, but those options cannot replace the legal requirement to individualize services.

## **Related Services Available in Ages 18–21**

### **Speech-Language Pathology (SLP)**

May continue or begin if needed to support:

- Functional and workplace communication
- Self-advocacy and self-determination
- Social communication
- Understanding and using communication in community or employment settings

This can include pragmatic language, alternative and augmentative communication (AAC), and communication for independence—not just articulation.

---

### **Occupational Therapy (OT)**

May address:

- Independent living skills (e.g., money management, meal prep, organization)
- Fine motor skills related to work or academics
- Sensory regulation needed for learning, employment, or community access
- Executive functioning and task completion

OT does not end just because goals become more functional.

---

### **Physical Therapy (PT)**

May support:

- Mobility and endurance for work or community settings
- Safe navigation of school, job sites, or public spaces
- Strength and balance needed for adult activities

PT can remain appropriate when physical access affects participation.

---

## **Transportation**

If required for the student to access:

- School-based instruction
- Community-based instruction
- Work-based learning or internships

Transportation is often critical during transition and must be addressed in the IEP.

---

## **Behavioral Supports / Positive Behavioral Interventions**

May include:

- Behavior intervention plans (BIPs)
- Skill-building for emotional regulation
- Supports for workplace readiness and coping strategies

Behavior support should be proactive and instructional—not punitive.

## **Counseling Services (School-Based)**

May support:

- Anxiety related to transition, employment, or independence
- Social-emotional regulation
- Adjustment to adult expectations

Counseling can remain appropriate when emotional needs affect IEP progress.

---

## **Assistive Technology (AT)**

Includes:

- AAC devices
- Organization and scheduling tools
- Technology that supports communication, learning, or independence

AT should evolve as environments and expectations change

### **Orientation & Mobility (If Applicable)**

For students with visual impairments, services may support:

- Community navigation
  - Independent travel skills
  - Workplace access
- 

### **Nursing / Health Services**

If needed to access education:

- Medication administration
- Health monitoring
- Support for medical needs during the school day

Health-related services do not automatically end at 18.

---

### **What Related Services Are *Not***

A common misconception is that services must stop or be reduced because:

- A student is “done with academics”
- Goals are more functional
- Services are delivered in the community

None of these are valid reasons to deny related services.

## **Important Reminders for Families**

- Related services must be determined individually by the IEP team.
- Services can look different in transition years, but they cannot disappear without data.
- Reduction or removal of a service requires:
  - Discussion at an IEP meeting
  - Data showing it is no longer needed

- Prior Written Notice

## Graduation, Walking, and the Diploma

In Nebraska, students with disabilities:

- **May walk at graduation with their same-age peers**, even if they will continue receiving services. (Often they will receive a certificate of completion or an unsigned diploma).
- **Should not expect to receive their signed diploma until they either:**
  - Meet their IEP graduation goals, **or**
  - Reach the maximum age of eligibility (21).

### May Continuing or Retaking High School Coursework

The transition years can also be used to **continue taking or retaking high school classes**. This may include:

- Retaking required courses needed for credit
- Completing coursework aligned with Nebraska graduation standards
- Receiving additional instruction, accommodations, or supports to access general education content

Needing more time does **not** mean a student has failed or should exit services early. IDEA allows students to use the full eligibility period to meet graduation requirements when appropriate, and IEP teams should plan intentionally for this option when it aligns with the student's needs and goals.

## Important Nebraska-Specific Note

Nebraska issues **the same diploma to students with disabilities as to all other students**. There is **no alternate or modified diploma**.

Once a student receives a diploma, **special education services end**. This makes the timing of diploma issuance a **critical decision** that should be discussed carefully at the IEP table.

## Why Opting Out Early Can Be Harmful

Families are sometimes encouraged—directly or indirectly—to exit school-based services early. In Nebraska, this can create serious gaps in support.

### Day Services Waiver Availability

The **Day Services Waiver is not available until age 21.**

- This means that if a student exits school-based transition services before age 21, there is often **no comparable daytime support** available.

For many students, remaining in school-based transition services until age 21:

- Provides structured skill-building during the day
- Supports employment readiness and community access
- Helps bridge the gap between school services and adult systems

Because of this gap, **it is generally not in a student's best interest to opt out of transition services early** unless a well-coordinated, fully funded adult support plan is already in place.

---

## Helpful Questions Families Should Ask the IEP Team (Ages 18–21)

Families play a critical role in ensuring transition services truly meet their student's needs. The following questions can help guide meaningful IEP discussions and surface whether decisions are being driven by **individual need** rather than convenience or preset structures.

### About Individualization

- How does this proposed plan specifically align with my child's **individual IEP goals**?
- What data is being used to show this plan is appropriate for *my student*, not just typical for the district?
- What alternatives were considered, and why were they rejected? (Ask for Prior Written Notice whenever necessary)

### **About Instruction and Coursework**

- Can my student **continue or retake high school classes** to meet graduation requirements?
- What supports, accommodations, or modifications will be provided to help them access general education coursework?
- How will progress toward graduation requirements be measured and documented?

### **About Graduation and the Diploma**

- What exactly must my student complete to earn a diploma?
- Is the district proposing to issue a diploma now—and if so, **why now?**
- What services would my student lose if they accept a diploma at this time?

### **About Related Services**

- What related services does my student need in order to make progress on their current IEP goals in employment, education, independent living, or community participation?

## **The most important question during 18 to 21 services**

- **How does this plan prepare my student for \*\*employment, postsecondary education or training, independent living, and community participation?**

*For additional guidance or advocacy support, contact Down Syndrome Advocates in Action Nebraska at [info@dsaane.org](mailto:info@dsaane.org).*