

PART I

High School/High Tech
The Basics

CHAPTER 1:

The History and Evolution of HS/HT

This chapter provides a brief history of the HS/HT program, and information on emerging career opportunities and the widespread emphasis on technology in today's economy, as well as an overview of the reasons for focusing on transition-age youth with disabilities. It also introduces the *Guideposts for Success*, a comprehensive framework for providing transition services developed by NCWD/Youth in collaboration with ODEP.

Over the years, HS/HT has evolved from a demonstration program found in a few selected localities to an established program with multiple sites in a number of states. During the 2005-06 school year, nine states (Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, Michigan, Ohio, Oklahoma and South Carolina) had an established state infrastructure supporting local implementation of HS/HT. In those states, a total of 135 local HS/HT sites were serving students in over 350 schools.

The History of HS/HT

HS/HT developed out of concern that too few students, especially those with disabilities, were being prepared for technological and science-based careers. In 1983, business executives and local leaders in Los Angeles, California, became interested in reaching out to students in the early stages of their education to expose them to the skills and knowledge necessary to engage in jobs related to science and technology. With the leadership of the Atlantic Richfield Company, and the support of the Los Angeles Unified School District,

America's first intervention program designed to promote training for science and technology jobs among youth with disabilities was established. This first program grew slowly, as sustainability proved to be a challenge.

In 1986, the program was adopted by the President's Committee on Employment of People with Disabilities (PCEPD). The mission of PCEPD was to facilitate the communication, coordination, and promotion of public and private efforts designed to facilitate employment of people with disabilities. Building upon this mission and the strong public/private partnership that began in Los Angeles, HS/HT program leaders developed relationships with businesses, education and nonprofit organizations, and government agencies. These relationships helped HS/HT grow and expand across the country.

In the mid-1990s the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) supported the expansion of HS/HT through grants to establish projects in California, Florida, Maryland, Ohio, and Texas. Some of these funds were also used to host the first national meeting of HS/HT representatives. Soon afterwards, NASA awarded a grant to establish HS/HT in Georgia.

In the late 1990s, HS/HT grew rapidly. During this time, the initiative's focus shifted from sites with local leadership to sites united by state leadership. The state-based model, first initiated in Georgia, provided HS/HT sites with access to the state-controlled resources they needed to develop and sustain their operations.

The Evolution of HS/HT

In 2000, Congress disbanded PCEPD and aspects of its work were incorporated into a sub-cabinet level policy agency known as the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) housed within the U.S. Department of Labor. Congress established ODEP in order to provide national leadership on disability-related employment policy. Some of PCEPD's programs, including HS/HT, became part of ODEP's research demonstration initiatives.

Through these early research demonstrations, ODEP learned that, in order to successfully move to the world of work, all youth need

- access to high quality standards-based education regardless of the setting,
- information about career options,
- exposure to the world of work,
- opportunities to develop social, civic, and leadership skills,
- strong connections to caring adults,
- access to safe places to interact with their peers, and
- support services to allow them to become independent adults.

In light of this research, and based on input from stakeholders and experience working with local demonstration grants, NCWD/Youth, in consultation with ODEP, developed the transition design features that later became known as the *Guideposts for Success* for transition-age youth. The transition design features/*Guideposts* focus on what all youth, including youth with disabilities, need, and are intended to provide a common language that diverse individuals, organizations and funding streams can use to provide effective transition service delivery and facilitate positive transition outcomes. They provide a common framework around which states and local communities can assess their current workforce development system, plan strategies for improving it, and evaluate the results of implementing these strategies. While the basic tenets of the design features have remained the same, the nomenclature and categorization used have varied slightly over time.

Through funding local HS/HT projects, ODEP learned that truly expanding HS/HT would require the commitment of a state-level entity to provide technical assistance and coordinate programs throughout the state. As a result, beginning in 2001, ODEP awarded grants to a number of states to develop the infrastructure necessary to support the state-wide expansion of HS/HT.

In addition to the movement towards a state infrastructure, HS/HT programs also evolved in other areas. For example, HS/HT evolved from a program that focused primarily on summer employment and internships to a year-round program that incorporated activities conducted in-school, after-school, on the weekends, and during the summer. Another change was the expansion of program activities from primarily work-based learning experiences to a much wider range of activities that encompassed such things as tutoring, computer training, and youth development and leadership activities. Connecting students to community resources became another important part of HS/HT. With the continued refinement of the *Guideposts* and the addition of a fifth design feature/*Guidepost* (i.e., family involvement and support), HS/HT programs expanded their program elements to include activities to engage parents, family members, and other caring adults in various aspects of transition planning.

Program Overview

The HS/HT program was created as a means of improving postsecondary outcomes for transition-age youth with disabilities. Among other strategies, the program achieves its objectives by maintaining high expectations, exposing youth to high growth industries, facilitating youth development and leadership, and encouraging the involvement of family members and caring adults.

1. HS/HT is designed to address the needs of transition-age youth (ages 14-24) with all types of disabilities.
2. HS/HT focuses on exposing transition-age youth with disabilities to careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (the STEM careers) and other technology-related professions.

3. HS/HT is a year-round program that provides a sequential progression of activities that are both age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate. Activities may be conducted in school, after school, on weekends, and during the summer.
4. HS/HT incorporates a variety of activities addressing a wide range of needs identified in the *Guideposts for Success* to create a comprehensive program of transition services.
5. HS/HT provides students with disabilities with appropriate college and career planning information and guidance, and encourages youth to pursue additional training and education to prepare for the STEM careers.
6. HS/HT provides employers with a potential source of educated, qualified employees.

To maximize its impact, HS/HT must continue to enroll more students with disabilities in existing sites, expand the program to new sites, and ultimately be made available to youth with and without disabilities. To that end, the contents of this Guide are driven by the belief that

- multiple public and private stakeholders must act in concert (e.g., forming partnerships and blending and braiding resources) to alter the conditions that inhibit the ability of youth with disabilities to engage successfully in employment; and
- the design of HS/HT programs must be evidence-based, rooted in high expectations, and incorporate promising and effective practices that promote the personal development of young people and expose them to multiple career options.

Why Focus on the STEM Careers?

When the first HS/HT program emerged, people began recognizing that youth with disabilities represented an untapped source of labor. Armed with the knowledge and skills relevant to emerging industries, these youth could help fill important positions in the labor market. To succeed in today's technology-driven global economy, however, these youth must be exposed to the education and training necessary to enter into careers

related to science, technology, engineering, and math (the STEM careers).

The pressing need to fill positions in STEM careers is widely acknowledged. During a 2005 hearing before the Education and the Workforce's 21st Century Competitiveness Subcommittee, members of the U.S. House of Representatives and witnesses outlined current trends hampering advancement in the math and sciences. Witnesses testified on evidence indicating that America's global lead in science and technology was slipping. Witnesses agreed on the importance of effective K-12 science and math education in maintaining America's technological competitiveness. They further noted that American culture does not currently encourage young people to pursue careers in math and science.

Demand for individuals with high-tech skills continues to increase—regardless of the strength of the economy. Some of the fastest growing careers in the world today rely on math, science, and technology skills. “According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, jobs requiring science, engineering, or technical training will increase 24 percent between 2004 and 2014 to 6.3 million jobs nationally” (Texas Education Agency, 2006).

Acknowledging this reality, President Bush introduced the American Competitiveness Initiative in his January 2006 State of the Union Address. This initiative included proposals to improve math and science education in America's schools in order to advance our nation's economic competitiveness. The focus on more rigorous math and science learning follows numerous reports indicating that students in the United States under-perform in relation to their counterparts in emerging growth countries in these areas of academic pursuit. In keeping with this initiative, the Deficit Reduction Act that President Bush signed into law in February 2006 created Academic Competitiveness Grants and National SMART Grants to provide additional need-based aid for first- and second-year college students who complete a rigorous high school curriculum and for third- and fourth-year college students who choose to major in the fields of math, science, engineering, or critical foreign languages. In addition, the Academic Competitiveness Council (ACC) was established in the Deficit Reduction Act to assess the effectiveness of the Federal investment in

STEM education. In April 2006, the President issued an Executive Order creating the National Math Panel to evaluate the scientific evidence related to teaching and learning math, and to make recommendations on how to improve student readiness for and success in, algebra and higher-level math courses. For more information on the American Competitiveness Initiative, visit <http://www.ostp.gov/html/budget/2008/ACIUpdateStatus.pdf>.

HS/HT programs recognize that today more than ever, youth with disabilities have the potential to meet the needs of our current industries and the employment needs of our emerging economy.

Why Emphasize Technology?

The evolution of computers in the workplace has helped to level the playing field for people with disabilities. Technology that was once uncommon is now commonplace, giving a boost to the productivity of all employees and further allowing individuals with disabilities to readily integrate into the workforce. Technology has also become an aspect of almost every job in today's economy.

Like any future member of the workforce, students with disabilities can benefit greatly from being well versed in basic science, math, and technology. Due to a collective history marked by low expectations, limited exposure to pre-requisite courses, and limited access to individualized supports, youth with disabilities are not generally viewed as good candidates for the STEM careers, despite the fact that many can and have succeeded in such careers.

Helping high school students explore their options and plan for their future is a challenging business. Often, students do not know how to plan for what will happen today, let alone after high school or college. Using a variety of progressive activities throughout the year designed to promote personal growth and development, self-determination, self-advocacy skills, and informed decision-making, HS/HT programs creatively expose youth with disabilities to the world of work with a focus on opportunities found within the STEM careers. Such exposure will assist these students to better prepare for their futures and to compete in a technology-driven society.

Why Focus on Youth with Disabilities?

Transition from youth to adulthood is an awkward period in life which presents challenges for almost every young person today – this is even more so for youth with disabilities. The facts are painfully clear:

- Special education students are more than twice as likely as their peers in general education to drop out of high school.
- Youth with disabilities are half as likely as their peers without disabilities to participate in postsecondary education.
- Current special education students can expect to face much higher adult unemployment rates than their peers without disabilities.
- The adjudication rate into the justice system of youth with disabilities is four times higher than for youth without disabilities.
- The pregnancy rate for youth with disabilities is much higher than the national average; among females with learning disabilities, for example, 50 percent will be pregnant within three years of exiting school.
- Young adults with disabilities are three times more likely to live in poverty as adults than their peers without disabilities.

The picture is even grimmer for youth with significant disabilities: less than one out of ten attain integrated employment; five out of ten experience indefinitely long waits for post-school employment services; and most of these individuals earn less than \$2.40 per hour in sheltered workshop settings (www.ncwd-youth.info).

Add to these statistics that fact that the employment rate of Americans with disabilities of working age in 2000 was only around 56 percent and the situation appears to be bleak. The most viable strategy for reversing these stubborn statistics lies in focusing attention on the transition needs of youth with disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities.

While these facts seem to paint a bleak picture for the future of youth with disabilities, things have improved somewhat over the last decade. A comparison of data from two studies, one completed in 1987 (the National Longitudinal Transition Study), and the second from 2003 (the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2), reveals important findings. In 2003, youth with disabilities were found to be less likely to participate in postsecondary vocational training programs than in 1987. However, by 2003 youth with disabilities showed increased performance in

- school completion rates,
- participation in community groups,
- attendance at postsecondary education facilities, and
- entering and maintaining employment.

We know there are solutions. For example, research shows that work experience during high school (both paid and unpaid) helps youth with disabilities get jobs at higher wages after they graduate. Also, students who participate in occupational education and special education in integrated settings are more likely to be competitively employed than students who have not been educated in such settings. Unfortunately, most young people with disabilities do not have the opportunity to participate in structured high-quality programs designed to help them make informed choices about careers.

We often hear youth with disabilities and their parents lament about the “belief system” problem. Evidence shows that a lack of high expectations for youth with disabilities leads many professionals in schools and other institutions, including businesses, to assume that people with disabilities cannot meet the knowledge and skills requirements of today’s workplace, especially for careers with attractive growth opportunities. There is a serious cost to this lack of high expectations that is difficult to quantify – but is very real nonetheless.



At the HEART of HS/HT is a belief system based on HIGH EXPECTATIONS.

HS/HT programs have found that exposing youth with disabilities to the world of work and the STEM careers assists them in developing self confidence, self-esteem, and leadership skills. Participating students have demonstrated success in advancing to the next grade, graduating from high school with regular diplomas, and moving on to additional training, postsecondary education, and gainful employment.

Records from August of 2006 clearly demonstrate the success of the HS/HT program. According to a detailed breakdown of data from the seven states where HS/HT was funded by ODEP (Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Maryland, Michigan, Ohio and Oklahoma), only 12 of 2,840 students who participated in HS/HT dropped out of school. This is particularly noteworthy given that the national drop out rate for students with disabilities is 28 percent (National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, National Center for Special Education Research, 2005). Approximately 900 of these 2,840 students participated in some type of formal work-based experience, e.g., internships and/or full or part-time employment. Research has demonstrated the benefits of such work-based learning experiences in improving post-school outcomes for youth (see Exhibit 3.1). Although the percentage of students with disabilities matriculating to postsecondary education increased from 3 percent in 1978 to 19 percent in 1996 (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Dukes & Shaw, 1999), the matriculation rate for HS/HT students far exceeds the rate for student with disabilities in general. Of the more than 750 HS/HT students in these seven states who had graduated from high school as of June 2006, more than 540, or approximately 72 percent, went on to postsecondary education.

Postsecondary education can be a critical factor in leveling the playing field for youth with disabilities. When students complete postsecondary education,

including vocational-technical training, they significantly improve their chances of securing gainful and satisfying employment and achieving financial independence. Students with disabilities who earn Bachelor of Arts degrees have almost equal success in attaining subsequent employment as non-disabled students (Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, November 29, 2000; Harris eSurvey, 2000; HEATH Survey, 1998).

HS/HT is an effective educational and career development intervention that is making a positive impact on the lives of youth with disabilities today. The program sets high expectations for youth and focuses on their skills, abilities, and assets. HS/HT creates a welcoming and encouraging environment by sponsoring peer group activities that are engaging, fun, informative, and that promote personal growth, development, and self-determination.

The Guideposts for Success: The Key Components of HS/HT

The creation of ODEP opened up new opportunities to develop strong partnerships that promoted and supported the expansion of HS/HT programs throughout the country. To further this support, ODEP awarded a five-year contract to NCWD/Youth to, among other things, provide technical assistance and support to HS/HT sites nationwide. It charged NCWD/Youth with identifying the key factors that contribute to the successful transition to adult life for all youth, as well as with finding those additional factors that can positively impact transition outcomes for youth with disabilities. ODEP's intent was to use the results of this effort to create a comprehensive framework for transition services that would then be used as the key components for the HS/HT national program model.

After undertaking an extensive review of nearly three decades of research, demonstrations and promising practices, including the experiences of HS/HT programs, NCWD/Youth, in conjunction with ODEP, created a set of guiding principles and identified a comprehensive set of services, supports and activities that all youth, including youth with disabilities, need to succeed in transitioning from high school to adult life.

The resulting framework, referred to as the *Guideposts for Success*, provides a

- statement of principles,
- direction that will lead to better outcomes for all youth, and
- method for organizing policy and practice.

The *Guideposts* are based on a number of important assumptions, including

- high expectations for all youth, including youth with disabilities;
- equality of opportunity for everyone, including nondiscrimination, individualization, inclusion, and integration;
- full participation through self-determination, informed choice, and participation in decision-making;
- independent living, including skills development and long-term supports and services;
- competitive employment and economic self-sufficiency, which may include supports; and
- individualized, person-driven, and culturally and linguistically appropriate transition planning.

The *Guideposts* describe what is needed for comprehensive transition service delivery at both the program and policy level. They can be used in many ways. For example, the *Guideposts* can be used for resource mapping to determine exactly what transition services are available in a community and to identify gaps in transition services. They can also be used to assist a young person with a disability in determining what should go into his/her IEP, including the special education and related services the school should be providing. In addition, parents can use the *Guideposts* to evaluate whether the services their sons or daughters are receiving are such that they are most likely to lead to post-school success.



The fact that the *Guideposts for Success* are based on a comprehensive review of relevant literature, research, and evidence-based practices is important because there is increasing pressure to invest public dollars only in programs that show reliable results and incorporate effective practices.

The remainder of this section provides a brief introduction to each of the five categories of the *Guideposts for Success*. Exhibit 1.1 provides a chart that displays all five categories of the *Guideposts* and the individual components under each *Guidepost*. More detailed information on each category can be found in Chapters 2 through 6, along with a brief synthesis of the literature review for each category and information on relevant online resources.

1. School-Based Preparatory Experiences

School-based preparatory experiences include the activities and services undertaken in collaboration with and in support of the youth's educational program. Activities under this *Guidepost* include participating in academic programs based on clear state standards; using curriculum and program options based on universal design for school and work; participating in community-based learning experiences; and receiving support from and by highly qualified staff. While HS/HT does not have control over what happens within the educational environment, it can actively promote the things that are needed to create a high quality education environment and support activities that complement what students are learning and experiencing in school. The HS/HT activities undertaken in support of this *Guidepost* should be conducted in environments where youth feel accepted

and nurtured, and should facilitate academic pursuits that provide exposure to and encourage pursuit of the STEM careers. This *Guidepost* is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

2. Career Preparation and Work-Based Learning Experiences

Career preparation and work-based learning experiences include a range of activities that expose students with disabilities to the STEM careers and build towards participation in on-the-job experiences. These experiences include such things as vocational exploration, career assessments, industry site visits, job shadowing, internships, entrepreneurial ventures, and paid employment (full or part time). For youth with disabilities, activities designed to help them learn to find, formally request, and secure appropriate supports and reasonable accommodations in education, training and employment settings fall under this *Guidepost*. Whatever the activity, the lessons learned during such activities should be reviewed to ensure that the young person makes the connection between what s/he is learning in the HS/HT program and in school generally, and what is expected in the world of work. This *Guidepost* is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

3. Youth Development and Leadership

Youth development and leadership activities help young people become self-sufficient and productive members of society. The activities and services under this *Guidepost* include such things as developing relationships with supportive adults, developing independent decision-making skills, engaging in service-learning opportunities, and learning self-determination and self-advocacy skills. Each of these elements is also interwoven and fostered throughout all of the *Guideposts*. This *Guidepost* is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

4. Connecting Activities

This *Guidepost* examines the need to connect youth to the programs, activities, services, and supports they will need to access as they transition to the next phase in life. The ultimate goal is to engage in employment

that will provide for economic self-sufficiency. The focus is on services and activities requiring support from other organizations, such as tutoring, mentoring, assistive technology, personal assistance services, and transportation. Youth participating in HS/HT programs must connect with other agencies and services, particularly as they pursue options in postsecondary education and the STEM careers. This *Guidepost* is discussed in detail in Chapter 5.



5. Family Involvement and Supports

The involvement of parents, family members, and other caring adults promotes the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth, which usually translates to better post-school outcomes. The activities and services under this *Guidepost* include having parents and caring adults take an active role in transition planning, and having knowledge of the rights and responsibilities under various disability-related laws. This *Guidepost* is discussed in detail in Chapter 6.

EXHIBIT 1.1: GUIDEPOSTS FOR SUCCESS

GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
<p style="text-align: center; font-size: 2em; font-weight: bold;">1</p> <p style="text-align: center; font-weight: bold; color: #0056b3;">School-Based Preparatory Experiences</p>	<p>In order to perform at optimal levels in all education settings, all youth need to participate in educational programs grounded in standards, clear performance expectations and graduation exit options based upon meaningful, accurate, and relevant indicators of student learning and skills. These should include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic programs that are based on clear state standards; • career and technical education programs that are based on professional and industry standards; • curricular and program options based on universal design of school, work and community-based learning experiences; • learning environments that are small and safe, including extra supports such as tutoring, as necessary; • supports from and by highly qualified staff; • access to an assessment system that includes multiple measures; and • graduation standards that include options. <p><i>In addition, youth with disabilities need to</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use their individual transition plans to drive their personal instruction, and use strategies to continue the transition process post-schooling; • have access to specific and individual learning accommodations while they are in school; • develop knowledge of reasonable accommodations that they can request and control in educational settings, including assessment accommodations; and • be supported by highly qualified transitional support staff that may or may not be school staff.

EXHIBIT 1.1: GUIDEPOSTS FOR SUCCESS

GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
<h1 style="font-size: 48px; margin: 0;">2</h1> <p style="margin: 10px 0;">Career Preparation & Work-Based Learning Experiences</p>	<p>Career preparation and work-based learning experiences are essential in order to form and develop aspirations and to make informed choices about careers. These experiences can be provided during the school day or through after-school programs and will require collaboration with other organizations. All youth need information on career options, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • career assessments to help identify students’ school and post-school preferences and interests; • structured exposure to postsecondary education and other life-long learning opportunities; • exposure to career opportunities that ultimately lead to a living wage, including information about educational requirements, entry requirements, income and benefits potential, and asset accumulation; and • training designed to improve job-seeking skills and work-place basic skills (sometimes called “soft skills”). <p>In order to identify and attain career goals, youth need to be exposed to a range of experiences, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities to engage in a range of work-based exploration activities such as site visits and job shadowing; • multiple on-the-job training experiences, including community service (paid or unpaid) that is specifically linked to the content of a program of study and school credit; • opportunities to learn and practice their work skills (“soft skills”); and • opportunities to learn first-hand about specific occupational skills related to a career pathway. <p><i>In addition, youth with disabilities need to</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand the relationships between benefits planning and career choices; • learn to communicate their disability-related work support and accommodation needs; and • learn to find, formally request, and secure appropriate supports and reasonable accommodations in education, training and employment settings.
<h1 style="font-size: 48px; margin: 0;">3</h1> <p style="margin: 10px 0;">Youth Development & Leadership</p>	<p>Youth development is a process that prepares young people to meet the challenges of adolescence and adulthood through a coordinated, progressive series of activities and experiences which help them gain skills and competencies. Youth leadership is part of that process. In order to control and direct their own lives based on informed decisions, all youth need</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentoring activities designed to establish strong relationships with adults through formal and informal settings; • peer-to-peer mentoring opportunities; • exposure to role models in a variety of contexts; • training in skills such as self-advocacy and conflict resolution; • exposure to personal leadership and youth development activities, including community service; and • opportunities that allow youth to exercise leadership and build self-esteem. <p><i>In addition, youth with disabilities need</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mentors and role models including persons with and without disabilities; and • an understanding of disability history, culture, and disability public policy issues as well as their rights and responsibilities.

EXHIBIT 1.1: GUIDEPOSTS FOR SUCCESS

GENERAL NEEDS	SPECIFIC NEEDS
<div style="font-size: 48pt; font-weight: bold; color: white;">4</div> <div style="color: #0056b3; font-weight: bold; margin-top: 10px;">Connecting Activities</div>	<p>Young people need to be connected to programs, services, activities, and supports that help them gain access to chosen post-school options. All youth may need one or more of the following</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mental and physical health services; • transportation; • tutoring; • financial planning and management; • post-program supports through structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies; and • connection to other services and opportunities (e.g., recreation, sports, faith-based organizations). <p><i>In addition, youth with disabilities may need</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • acquisition of appropriate assistive technologies; • community orientation and mobility training (e.g., accessible transportation, bus routes, housing, health clinics); • exposure to post-program supports such as independent living centers and other consumer-driven community-based support service agencies; • personal assistance services, including attendants, readers, interpreters, or other such services; and • benefits planning counseling including information regarding the myriad of benefits available and their interrelationships so that they may maximize those benefits in transitioning from public assistance to self-sufficiency.
<div style="font-size: 48pt; font-weight: bold; color: white;">5</div> <div style="color: #0056b3; font-weight: bold; margin-top: 10px;">Family Involvement & Supports</div>	<p>Participation and involvement of parents, family members, and/or other caring adults promote the social, emotional, physical, academic, and occupational growth of youth, leading to better post-school outcomes. All youth need parents, families, and other caring adults who</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have high expectations that build upon the young person’s strengths, interests, and needs and foster their ability to achieve independence and self-sufficiency; • remain involved in their lives and assist them toward adulthood; • have access to information about employment, further education, and community resources; • take an active role in transition planning with schools and community partners; and • have access to medical, professional, and peer support networks. <p><i>In addition, youth with disabilities need parents, families, and other caring adults who have</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an understanding of their youth’s disability and how it affects his or her education, employment, and/or daily living options; • knowledge of rights and responsibilities under various disability-related legislation; • knowledge of and access to programs, services, supports, and accommodations available for young people with disabilities; and • an understanding of how individualized planning tools can assist youth in achieving transition goals and objectives.