



STEP Ahead Newsletter

Spring Edition 2018

From the Desk of the Executive Director

Spring is in the air--finally! There are so many decisions to be made now that the weather is warming up. You may be thinking about what flowers to plant, where to head on vacation, or a new book you want to read as you relax on the deck in the afternoon sunshine. I am making decisions about my first ever trip to Europe and the wisdom of touring Rome on the back of a Vespa! I will keep you posted on how that turns out.

As parents and caregivers of children and youth with disabilities it seems that the number of decisions to be made are endless. In this edition of the STEP Ahead newsletter we are going to focus our information on three areas where parents and young people have lots of decisions to make.

- Individualized Education Program (IEP) planning for goals and objective to lead to good outcomes;
- Graduation options and decisions about college, career, and independent living after high school; and
- Making informed choices

In reality, these areas are not separate but linked. Each decision made at an IEP meeting impacts the life outcomes of the student with a disability. In turn, the life outcomes of each child and young person with a disability is shaped by the choices and decisions that are made.

We will explore current information and recent developments related to:

- How the 2017 Supreme Court decision impacts IEP's
- A new diploma option in TN: The Alternate Academic Diploma
- Recent legislation in Tennessee regarding Supported Decision Making

After reading this information you may have some decisions to make. How will you use it? How can we help? The STEP team is available to provide training, information, and special education assistance!

Happy Spring!

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Supreme Court Ruling Impacts IEPs

Decision are made every day regarding the education of student's with disabilities. Many of these decisions are made at Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings. As a parent or caregiver, it is important to be as prepared as possible to participate effectively in these meetings.

The 2017 Supreme Court [Andrew F. decision](#) addresses issues that many parents face — IEP goals that don't change much from year to year and lack of progress.

This decision provides parents with information that can be used to have an impact on their child's education. Some of the key language in the decision require:

- Appropriately ambitious goals
- Challenging objectives
- That the IEP is reasonably calculated to enable the child to make progress in light of his or her circumstances

Understanding and using the key points of the Endrew F decision can help you go into your next IEP meeting feeling informed and empowered.

There are many great resources available on this topic. One of our favorites is the Endrew F Advocacy Toolkit at www.understood.org.

a brighter future for children and youth with disabilities



Overview of the Tennessee Diploma Options

Diploma Option	Requirements/Details	Postsecondary Options
Regular Education Diploma	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Earn the prescribed twenty-two (22) credit minimum Complete the ACT or SAT Satisfactory record of attendance and discipline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4-year colleges: Each school has its own admissions requirements. Community College Tennessee College of Applied Technology or Trade Schools College Support Programs (See list with contact information on back)
Special Education Diploma *	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Successful completion of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) Satisfactory record of attendance and conduct Students can continue receiving services through an IEP until they receive a regular education diploma or age 22 (21 inclusive) 	
Occupational Diploma *	<p>In addition to the special education diploma requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students must have a strong vocational and career focus It is an IEP Team decision made on or after the conclusion of the 10th grade or 2 years prior to exiting high school Students must successfully complete the Skills, Knowledge, and Experience Mastery Assessment (SKEMA) <p>This is not a regular education diploma but students may continue to work toward their regular high school diplomas while pursuing occupational diplomas or after receiving an occupational diploma.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Employment in job field most closely related to skills acquired. Tennessee College of Applied Technology: TCAT offers programs that both require a high school diploma and programs that do not require a high school diploma. bit.ly/TCAT2018
<p>NEW OPTION STARTING WITH THE 2018-19 SCHOOL YEAR</p> <p>Alternate Academic Diploma (AAD) *</p> <p>Students who earn an AAD diploma within 4-years and a summer will be included in the graduation rate.</p>	<p>Designed to provide access to rigorous and meaningful instruction for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. It is aligned to the coursework and ACT requirements of the regular diploma.</p> <p>In order to earn the AAD, a student must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> have participated in the high school alternate state assessments; earned the prescribed 22 credit minimum; received special education services or supports and made satisfactory progress on an individualized education program (IEP); have satisfactory records of attendance and conduct; and completed a transition assessment(s) that measures, at a minimum, postsecondary education and training, employment, independent living, and community involvement <p><i>Students can receive an Occupational Diploma as well as an Alternate Academic Diploma</i></p> <p>The TN Department of Education has an FAQ about the Alternate Academic Diploma here: bit.ly/2uJNNrJ</p> <p>If you have questions about the Alternate Academic Diploma, please contact Alison Gauld at Alison.Gauld@tn.gov.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> TRC – TN Rehabilitation Center: Residential program designed to help participants gain independence and meaningful employment. Participants must be eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Services to participate. bit.ly/TNTRCSmyrna Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP): Degree, certificate, or non-degree programs for students with intellectual disabilities. (See our Transition Guide on Further Education.) bit.ly/STEPTGPSE

*** It is important to note that students can continue receiving services through an IEP until they receive a regular education diploma or age 22 (21 inclusive).**

Getting Help with Making Choices

Supported Decision Making (SDM) is a term used to describe a process that allows people with disabilities to retain their decision-making capacity by choosing supporters to help them make choices. A person using SDM selects trusted advisors, such as friends, family members, or professionals to serve as supporters. The supporters agree to help the person with a disability understand, consider, and communicate decisions. This opportunity to make informed decisions is something that is important to every individual, with or without disabilities.

For too long families have been led to believe that the only way to make sure their son or daughter with a disability is “safe” after they turn 18 is to seek conservatorship. Now, people with disabilities and advocacy organizations have been working to ensure that family members, legislators, educators, and community members have accurate information on subjects around this topic.

A new law about decision making was passed in Tennessee this Spring. You can read more about it at the TN Council on Developmental Disabilities’ State Legislative Policy Priorities page here: bit.ly/2K5D6CG

Learn more about this concept and how it works with these fantastic resources:

- The TN Council on Developmental Disabilities has a SDM resource page here: bit.ly/TNCDSDM
- National Resource Center for SDM: supporteddecisionmaking.org
- Parent Guide to Getting Ready for the Age of Majority: bit.ly/2nssKCX
- Supported Decision Making — Call to Action Video: youtu.be/vqF3NiTeWg
- Supported Decision Making — Gabby’s Story Video: youtu.be/duyJlkZ2mlQ
- STEP’s Transition Guide on Decision Making: bit.ly/STEPTGDM

No Help with Decisions

No “formal” process in place for trusted advisors, friends, family members or professionals to serve as supporters.

Supported Decision Making

- Agreement with supporters in a written plan
- Can be changed as needed
- No court process
- Could include finance, healthcare, education, employment, housing or other area of need
- Person with a disability makes informed decisions

Power of Attorney

- Gives up some of your power
- Person with a disability must be competent to sign this legal agreement
- Person gives decision making authority to someone else in specific areas

Conservatorship

- Individual is determined by a court to be incompetent to make decisions in certain areas
- May be in all areas or only specific areas
- Person may have some say in their daily activities but final decisions are made by someone appointed by the court
- Very hard to change
Costs money and is hard to reverse

Less Restrictive

Supported Decision Making Continuum

More Restrictive



Nonprofit Organization
 U.S. Postage
PAID
 GREENEVILLE, TN 37745
 PERMIT 24

Support & Training for Exceptional Parents, Inc.
 712 Professional Plaza
 Greeneville, TN 37745

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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<p>Resources To Inform and Empower Families</p> <p>In addition to our in-person workshops, webinars, tip sheets, website, facebook page, and eNewsletter — not to mention our STEP Team working across Tennessee — STEP has a robust YouTube page that includes a full Basic Rights Workshop (in English and Spanish), the Instructionally Appropriate IEPs Workshop, and a Planning for Success after High School Workshop.</p> <p>You can find all our videos here: bit.ly/STEPvideos</p> <p>Learn about events in your area, access resources, sign up for our newsletter, or connect with one of our staff members by visiting our website at tnstep.org or by calling our offices at 1.800.280.STEP (7837).</p>	<p>Resources to Inform and Empower Youth</p> <p>For youth with disabilities, additional planning is needed as they prepare to leave high school, move into adulthood, and meet their employment, educational, and/or independent living goals. This process is referred to as “transition.”</p> <p>STEP has a whole series of Transition Guides to help navigate these changes. Topics covered include: College, Decision Making, Dropout Prevention, Employment, Further Education, Job Seeking, Parents’ Role, Self Advocacy, and Self Directed IEPs. Using these guides youth, family members, and teachers can work together to ensure students with disabilities have a smooth and effective transition to life after high school.</p> <p>You can find them all here: bit.ly/2lpywLC</p> <p>Other Transition Services — including the very popular Plan A Perfect Life budgeting activity — can be found on the Transition Services Page of our website here: bit.ly/STEPTransition</p> <p>Help STEP plan the services we offer for youth by completing our survey here: bit.ly/2ru28oa</p>
<p>Resources To Support Educators</p> <p>STEP offers customized Professional Development to Educators. We also provide in-school training for students ages 14-22 in transition and future planning.</p> <p>Contact us to find out more or to schedule an inservice or youth training at your school. We can be reached by visiting our website at tnstep.org or by calling our offices at 1.800.280.STEP (7837).</p>	