

Courses of Study At-A-Glance

LEGAL REQUIREMENT

Federal law requires that the IEP include “transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching [postsecondary] goals.” [34 CFR §300.320(b)(2)]

WHAT ARE COURSES OF STUDY?

Courses of study represent a multi-year educational plan identifying specific courses and experiences that align with a student’s strengths, preferences, needs, and postsecondary goals. They create a customized pathway connecting current education to future aspirations.

KEY PRINCIPLES

- **Individualized:** Tailored to each student’s unique goals and needs
- **Goal-Directed:** Directly connected to postsecondary goals
- **Comprehensive:** Includes both academic and functional components
- **Forward-Looking:** Spans from current year to anticipated exit
- **Flexible:** Updated annually as interests and plans evolve
- **Opportunity-Expanding:** Maintains and opens options rather than limiting them

ESSENTIAL COMPONENTS

- **Multi-Year Planning:** Current year through anticipated exit
- **Specific Course Names:** Actual course titles from school offerings
- **Varied Settings:** General education, special education, community
- **Experiential Learning:** Work experiences, internships, community instruction
- **Path to Credential:** Connection to diploma requirements
- **Individualized Supports:** Accommodations, modifications, specialized instruction

CUSTOMIZING COURSES OF STUDY

Key Questions to Guide Planning:

1. What are the student’s postsecondary education, employment, and independent living goals?
2. What knowledge and skills are needed to achieve these goals?
3. What courses and experiences will build these skills?
4. What diploma or credential pathway aligns with these goals?
5. How can we maximize access to general education curriculum?
6. What balance of academic, career, and functional content is needed?
7. What specialized supports or settings are required for success?

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BUILDING BLOCKS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Building Block	Examples	Purpose
Core Academic Courses	English, Math, Science, Social Studies, etc.	Build foundational knowledge and skills; meet graduation requirements
Interest-Based Electives	Art, Music, Technology, Languages, etc.	Develop talents and explore interests; build engagement
Career-Related Courses	Business, Technology, Health Sciences, Trades, etc.	Connect learning to career interests; build workplace skills
Skill Development	Study skills, Self-advocacy, Social skills, etc.	Address individualized learning needs; build independence
Community Experiences	Work-based learning, Volunteer work, Community instruction	Apply skills in real-world settings; build connections
Transition Activities	College visits, Career exploration, Agency connections	Build knowledge of post-school options; prepare for transition

CONSIDERATIONS FOR EFFECTIVE PLANNING

Maximize General Education Access:

- Begin with general education curriculum as the foundation
- Consider co-taught or supported general education settings
- Use accommodations to enable access before considering modifications
- Identify specific support needs for success in inclusive settings

Balance Academic and Applied Learning:

- Consider when abstract concepts need practical application
- Identify opportunities to connect classroom learning to real-world contexts
- Look for courses that integrate academic and career content
- Schedule community-based experiences as appropriate

Maintain Focus on Long-Term Goals:

- Regularly revisit postsecondary goals as reference points
- Check that each course or experience connects to future goals
- Keep options open whenever possible
- Consider prerequisites for postsecondary education/training

COMMON PITFALLS & QUICK SOLUTIONS

Pitfall	Quick Solution
Generic course listings ("Math, English, Science")	List specific course names from school catalog (Algebra I, English 10, Biology)
Current year only	Create multi-year plan extending through graduation/exit year
Disconnected from postsecondary goals	Consider how each course component supports specific postsecondary goals
Overlooking functional needs	Include courses addressing life skills, social skills, and self-determination as needed
Not considering credential requirements	Check course selections against graduation requirements for diploma type
Static plan that never changes	Review and update annually based on evolving interests and experiences

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UPDATING THE PLAN

- Review at each annual IEP meeting
- Consider new assessment information
- Reflect on experiences and their impact
- Adjust based on changing interests
- Update as postsecondary goals evolve
- Refine based on course performance

QUICK COMPLIANCE CHECK

- Covers multiple years (current through exit)
- Lists specific courses by name
- Clearly aligns with postsecondary goals
- Includes both academic and functional components as needed
- Identifies appropriate settings and supports
- Incorporates community and career experiences
- Leads to appropriate diploma or credential
- Includes plan for annual review and update

Remember: *Effective courses of study keep the focus on the individual student's goals while building a coherent pathway to post-school success.*