

Dr. Connor edited

>> Hello, everyone. Welcome to "Disability, Inc." I'm Jane Heaphy, and today, I have the pleasure and honor of speaking with Dr. David Connor on the topic of transition planning for students with IEPs. Dr. Connor has taught in the field of education for over 30 years. He is professor emeritus of Hunter College and the Graduate Center, both part of the City University of New York. He is the author and editor of over 100 articles and book chapters, along with nine books, the most recent being the second edition of "Rethinking Disability: A Disability Studies Approach to Inclusive Practices," which he co-authored with Jan Valle.

As a former high school teacher, Dr. Connor coordinated transition planning in his departments. Over the last few years, in collaboration with Dr. Wendy Cavendish of the University of Miami, he has been publishing research about transition practices in New York City. Thank you, Dr. Connor, for joining us today.

>> CONNOR: My pleasure.

>> HEAPHY: This topic of transition planning is very close to my own heart, really to everyone at Include (INCLUDEnyc). But I speak personally, because I think it stems from having worked with teenagers for many years on post-secondary planning, and seeing how fraught the question of planning for life after high school can be. It's daunting. At Include, we field hundreds of questions every year from families, from young people, navigating this process that gets called transition. I often think of it as transition with a capital T. It's a very formal idea in certain ways.

I'm excited to talk with you today about this topic. Reading from your work, I think one can really understand that you're a triple threat on this issue. You have the research and the data. You have up-close personal experience from your work in schools. And you have an educator's love for teaching. Let's get started, Dr. Connor. What is transition planning? How can we ground our listeners in what it is?

>> CONNOR: Although we will throughout the course of the conversation speak about parents' perspectives, kids' perspectives, teachers' perspectives, I thought it would be interesting if we just started off as how it is defined in the law. Let me read this to you, so everybody is clear. I will also go slow, because we all know, sometimes language can be not-so-accessible to people who aren't in education. So I'll take a couple of minutes reading the law, if that's okay?

>> HEAPHY: Great. And this is the federal law you're going to introduce us to?

>> CONNOR: Yes, this is federal law. Transition services means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be within their results-oriented process that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of a child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities -- including post-secondary education; vocational education; integrated employment, including supported employment; continuing and adult education; adult services; independent living; or community participation.

So bear with me. We have a little more to go. It's also based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests. These can include instruction; related services; community experiences; the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives; and if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and provision of a functional vocational evaluation.

Finally, in the home stretch, transition services for children with disabilities may be special education, if provided as specifically designated instruction or a related service, if required to assist the child with a disability to benefit from special education.

Let me end that by saying this is expected to be done with any child with a disability or identified as having a disability as part of their IEP services. For those who are aged 14 and older, it's mandated. Of course, any groundwork before the age of 14 is also worthwhile considering.

>> HEAPHY: Thank you. So clearly, there's a lot to unpack, as we say these days, of what all of that ends up meaning to a family, to a young person, and to the educators involved. Talk to us about what you think is helpful to know about the transition plan as part of the IEP process.

>> CONNOR: In some ways, it might be good for us to try to demystify the transition plan within the IEP. If we strip down all of the language and try to make it commonplace, conversational language among parents, kids, and school personnel, transition planning is intended to have the student think about, project, and plan for their future. It's kind of straightforward and a universal idea, what is good for kids in terms of helping them think through what they want to do after school.

I think we're going to refer to what I call the triangle throughout different points of our talk today. It's the notion of each point of the triangle, you have a parent, you have a kid, and you have the school, often represented by an IEP facilitator, and each one of them should have their say in the process. That space in the middle is about negotiating what is best for child, bearing everybody's input and ideas.

>> HEAPHY: In an ideal setting, you're pointing out that this is not a simple process. There are multiple players, as it were, that are involved for this to work well. What can get in the way? What can make it difficult to get a really effective, student-focused meaningful plan?

>> CONNOR: There's a few things. Let's start off by saying that there should be somebody at the school who's responsible for this. It could be a transition linkage coordinator. That's what we called them back in the days when I was doing it. You could have an IEP facilitator, and that could be the special education teacher, or anybody else who's designated to have those skills.

You need to have somebody who has the experience to help kids talk through their study path in high school. But also issues when they are out of high school, such as housing, transport, community life, so on and so forth. You have to have the point person in the school come to know the student pretty well through questionnaires, interest inventories. Be able to

take them on things like visits to colleges, work sites, possibly facilitate internships as part of their high school experiences. Within this, a student is supposed to be an active participant in the planning process. That's pretty much what we're hoping for, best case scenario.

What can get in the way sometimes are there's an assumption in the law that everything within schools is fine and dandy and running in place. We all know from having worked in schools for years that they're often run by very well-intentioned people who are stretched thin, so all of the responsibilities associated with the laws and the local education authority procedures, et cetera, may not be in place in the way they should. Or they might not be running as smoothly as they could.

This is quite a long list, but I think it's worth going through so we put everything on the table at one point, if you indulge me. There's also a documented history of mistrust between parents of kids with disabilities and schools. After all, the major laws came about by parents with disabilities mobilizing and pressurizing the government to have better access to education for their child. This is in the research that some of my colleagues, like Beth Harry and Jan Valle, who do great work in this.

Sometimes, I never want to teacher-bash or anything like that, because I was one and I know they are really overloaded in many ways. Teachers may have a large case load. They might inadvertently neglect some of their responsibilities in organizing things. There's only X amount of hours per day. And if they're not well-versed in this, they can actually forget this component, which is kind of appalling in one way. They don't mean to do it, but sometimes we find out that it happens.

The other thing is it needs a lot of coordination to do this sometimes. There's an assemblage of professionals, and I often don't think we need as many professionals weighing in on this than we actually get. But there are many people at the school sometimes who want to sit at the table. But the school is responsible for making sure the professionals, the parent, and

the student are physically sitting at the same table for this to occur. So you can imagine people's schedules, teachers are teaching, parents have their jobs, kids are in their classes. So it becomes a logistical challenge -- though, of course, it is doable, because it is expected.

On the side of parents, parents aren't always available when the school says "this is when the meeting is going to be." They don't check with them when they're available. Parents have other kids. Parents have jobs. Parent can't often leave their jobs to come to the school, unless they have an employer who is empathetic with them. So all of the assumed ways of doing business when the law was passed have changed quite a bit in terms of everybody having access.

We're about halfway down my list here.

[LAUGHTER]

Sometimes personnel don't inform students of the transition process, because they're not that informed themselves. I have seen in my 30 years, it was once they pushed for this and a really strong focus on doing it, you had a superintendent's office that runs high school, and there was a person who's dedicated to do this, and there was at least one person in every school to do it. I'm not really sure that I've seen that in contemporary time. So I think as more things get put on the table with people, this can get pushed to the edge of the table, and sometimes can drop off the table, which is concerning, like I said.

The process itself is very well-intended, but can be poorly implemented. In other words, it can feel like a mandated procedure rather than an authentic way of bringing people together to talk about the future of the kids. It has been proven that there are sometimes cultural differences among participants, and this can be in the terms of social class, educational level, race, gender, ethnicity. And that can play out in power dynamics.

Sometimes parents feel the odds are stacked against them before they walk into a room, because you have a bunch of middle-class professionals with degrees sitting around a

table telling them about their child. There's often this chasm between who's sitting on one side of the table and who's sitting on the other. The parents' knowledge of their child is often very unvalued or undervalued. So even though they're given the opportunity to speak, they may feel intimidated. They may need an interpreter. They may feel like what they have to contribute is not as much as the quote-unquote formalized and often pseudoscientific language that educators tend to like. We can talk about that later, if you'd like.

The bottom line is, in many cases, and this is historic, the professionals at the school may have made up their mind about every aspect of the IEP. What are the goals? What are the objectives? What are the advice in terms of the labeling, the placement, the classes that a kid can take? So parents often attend -- but all of this predetermining, so they're ready with paperwork, often precludes the genuine conversation where they want to get to know about the kid and the parent, and then they speak within this triangle of equality, that I like to think of it.

>> HEAPHY: Thinking about -- you mentioned this history of mistrust, and I think you gave us examples of what led to that, what comes into that history. One of your points around the intimidation that families can feel, or parents can feel, and that young people can feel. You described that first of all, they're just outnumbered. But more than that, there can be this question of predetermination, as you said, that it feels like it's done, so how do I really fit in here as a parent?

And they're using all of this language that feels alienating to me as a parent; that it is not accessible to the average parent walking into a room. A lot of acronyms can happen, can confuse people that aren't part of that community, as you say, of educators. You raise so many interesting points of where this can go wrong.

I think the other thought I had as you were talking was thinking about the pressures that you describe that schools are under, that there is more put on schools every day that we see.

This question of transition is very future-oriented. They have fires they have to put out today. They have tests kids have to pass tomorrow. They have compliance issues that have to be put in yesterday. This question of a child's future could feel very far away in some cases, and it can feel outside of the school. But we know how important it is.

>> CONNOR: That's one of the well-intentions of the law is not to see kids as some units on a conveyer belt that are going from 9th through 12th grade and passing their exams, but they're actually three-dimensional people with thoughts, fears, dreams. And the more they are involved in this process, the more that they can understand what's out there, see things, have input, learn to navigate certain things, learn self-advocacy skills, the more they will be better for the world. Otherwise, it's sink or swim, and the world can be a tough place when you leave. I think that's the intention of the law.

I think you're right. Schools want to do what they need to do in the day, and they are doing the long run for the exams, which can be overemphasized. Then there's the life after school. So this is what happens sometimes. At the same time, we both know it's crucial to help kids envision their life after school, so that they are functioning members of society, that they feel comfortable, they can contribute, they have access to all aspects of society as people without a label of disability.

>> HEAPHY: That's really good for all of us in society, that all of our kids leave school ready to participate. One other thing I wanted to just ask you about. You mentioned interpreters, and I think there's interpreting that happens on a literal language level, where families may not speak English or may not be comfortable in English, so have to request an interpreter. Legally, they're entitled to that support. We know in practice that's often difficult to have work very well. I wondered if you had more thoughts about. Then the question of interpreting all the jargon. There are different levels of interpreting that may need to happen for everybody -- for teachers

also to understand how to interpret parents' contributions. It feels like it's a very dense idea of interpreting.

>> CONNOR: It is. I don't wish to stray too far off the topic. I think parents need to be able to ask or feel comfortable if they don't understand an acronym, "What is that?" I don't care if the IEP has a buzzer on the table with "press this if you don't know the word." So they break it down so they're aware, otherwise they might not be aware of what the parent is processing and understanding or not.

The other thing with interpreters, in an ideal world, I would love to see a proper qualified interpreter to do this, and have ones who are versed in the law, and knowing the acronyms and so on and so forth. Because sometimes the interpreter are the nearest paraprofessional who can speak another language. They're doing the best that they can, but then they feel the pressure is on them to be the conveyer of meaning. And also in some circumstances, the child is the interpreter, which is kind of well-intentioned, but working the best with what you get, but sort of inappropriate if everything is done to how the law was intended. I do think there needs to be greater mobilization to get professional interpreters in there who are parent advocates, too.

>> HEAPHY: You're starting to talk about what can make it an effective process. Share with us what you see as some really promising practices for transition planning done well?

>> CONNOR: What might be useful today is if I try to break this down to what might be useful for parents, students, teachers, and then schools as institutions. I do think everybody plays a part, if this process is supposed to go according to plan.

One of the things for parents is to come prepared to the meeting, having discussed the goals and the aspirations of their child, including with questions about what steps the child and/or the parent may need to do to get the kid to where the kid wants to go. Better still, a parent come and present with their child in unison. If they come as a team, as to what the

desires of the child is for the future -- and I know with teenagers, that's not always amenable to be on the same page with your kid -- but it does provide a good way to think about of how can we go into this as a team?

If parents sometimes feel a little isolated in attending IEPs and advocating for themselves and other parents who are going through the process, one suggestion I have is for the parent to work closely with the PTA. Make sure you're represented on the PTA. Explain the situation, and have them back up and engage with the school, so it's a school-wide issue, and it's not a singular issue, which I think is important. Because everybody sometimes feel like they have to battle everything on their own. Whereas it's good to get your allies and your pressure points ready in a respectful way to get the things in place that should be there by law.

I think parents, and I say this very respectfully, need to reconsider their role in going into that room. It's worthwhile to think, "I cannot and I should not be passive here. I am an equal partner according to the law. How can I go in there knowing that?" You can do your homework about whatever your intended issues are. You can speak with a parent advocacy group, such as INCLUDEnyc. I'm not sure Parent to Parent, the statewide network, is still in place. But doing an outreach and running things by to get the information.

And wherever possible, and I don't want to be contentious, but where you think there might be quite a lot of dissension on what you want and what the school is asking for your child, it's always good to go with an advocate. The bottom line, and I certainly don't want to put a cat among the pigeons here, it's your right to go with a tape recorder and record the meetings and say, very respectfully, "I would like to record the meeting to help me better understand the process and the decisions that are being made here today." I will assure that the words that are used in that meeting will be chosen very carefully and in your favor. So this is something that I have learned by working with parents in the past. It's not to be confrontational in any way. It's really to help you learn the process.

Should I go into students, or what would you like to ask any questions?

>> HEAPHY: You brought this idea of the advocate up. I think that's something that we talk about when parents call and they use our help line at INCLUDEnyc to talk through often before they go into an IEP meeting, that we are part of their preparation. They get to think through. They get to share all their worries, and then strategize to clarify what their priorities are, and what they hope to get out of the meeting.

Then we do encourage them to identify somebody who could be there as a support. Sometimes parents think an advocate has to be somebody with a lot of expertise, a lawyer. But in our experience, we've seen that an advocate can be somebody who can just help you stay on track, who's there for your own moral support as well. We've seen parents use that opportunity in lots of effective ways for them. Just thinking that through our help line lens is interesting.

>> CONNOR: I'm going to bring something up that will be controversial, but it's based upon my friend Jan Valle's studies with parents. It's really sort of -- it's about power and inequalities. But mothers have said if they take a male with them to the IEP meeting, the dialogue is very different. It's all these unspoken things society about who gets respect and who gets listened to, and who gets talked down to, and who gets things assumed about them, which is a separate conversation to unpack. But even if a man goes in does not say that much.

That's what she found. I'm just reporting findings of one of her studies, which is really so problematic on so many levels. But on the other hand, if you want to go to maximize equality of input into the discussion, it's something to consider. Can there be representation of other members in the family if possible?

>> HEAPHY: Very loaded idea, but points to how complex some of the power dynamics are in our larger society that are going to play out in a very high-stakes kind of meeting like this. A lot for us to think about, and maybe a conversation for another day. You talked about the triangle, and you've given us some ideas for how parents, as one point on that triangle, can best prepare

themselves, and steel themselves, and stay open to possibilities going into that meeting. Do you want to talk to us about students?

>> CONNOR: I do, because I think the transition language that the transition process opens up a lot of opportunities for kids to become self-advocates, and I think it's an under-utilized process for them. I think the strength of the meeting can come from the kid. I think the child or the young adult can lead the meeting or co-lead the meeting.

I've seen the work of a wonderful teacher in a school, and I'll talk about her in a little bit, in which she preps the children -- she preps the young people to co-run the meeting with her. They practice it before they do it. The parent knows their child is going to present. The other people, members of the team are going to know that the young person is going to present. For example, for whatever reasons, if the kid falters or gets nervous, the teacher is there for a shout-out or a re-direct, "Remember when we talked about this?" So it really is scaffolded support for kids to be partners in meetings.

Another thing is, and this is easier said than done, but how can we all re-think any feelings of stigma related to a disability status? I think it behooves teachers and parents to re-think even what it means when we talk about disability, so that kids can see themselves as different or neurodivergent and accepting of who they are, without always having to think in deficit terms. Often when I speak with kids or adults or parents, I use the term "dis/ability," because it applies to many people. We have to stop putting the disability before the assets of a kid.

This is what this meeting is supposed to be doing. We must go in from a strengths-based position, knowing what area they need to improve, and to have a healthier sense of who they are, because if a kid is just -- the word disability is just used all the time in front of the child, without their learning disability being explained to them in detail, and what kind of things they themselves can do to make their school experience succeed, I think it's disingenuous and

everything's on deck at these meetings without the child having to think, "Who am I? What does this mean? What are the implications from me? I can get services for this. I can determine when I choose to disclose or not to disclose. When I go to college, I have to disclose if I want to receive the services that I'm having now."

I think I mentioned to you in a previous conversation. Kids who go to college and don't disclose and get the support that they may need at the Office of Accessibility, or whatever the equivalent language at the college, try to do their best. They want to quote-unquote shed the label, but halfway through the semester, many of them are struggling, and then they go to the office when it's a little bit too late. So how do we get kids to feel comfortable enough to ask for services when they do get to college? That's one thing I would like for us to think about.

If we can think of the idea of a kid co-facilitating their own meeting with the teacher, that means that the student will be talked with and not about. That's a simple premise that I think we should all keep in mind. There is some literature, there are some books out there. That's one called "The Self-Directed IEP" by a researcher called Martin and other colleagues.

But I want to leave this with kid need to be talked about their difference. It's because schools aren't configured with them in mind, but there's nothing wrong with them. So we have to stop making them feel there's something wrong with them, and think the school, the way it's set up, the expectations, the pace, all that kind of stuff, it's not good for every human that exists. So they've been identified as maybe having struggled because of the way our practices are set up. How can they just be happy with who they are, own it, and be able to ask for things in the future as they self-advocate? Those are some of my thinking about what we can do with kids.

>> HEAPHY: Kids certainly feel like square pegs, trying to go through round holes, often through their school experience. Then take that on as their own problem. I think so that's a really important core point you're making. This idea of co-facilitating the meeting, the way you're

talking about it, it sounds like that's what we're really preparing them for adulthood, to take control of their own processes, their own education. They have to start some time, and why not when they are thinking about life after high school?

>> CONNOR: Kids often feel powerless at school. If you took a survey of school, half the people in the population couldn't wait to get out of school, because they feel like it's kind of oppressive to them and who they are, their identity -- "All in all, we're just another brick in the wall." So the kids who are a little bit outliers, it's double hard.

Schools, we don't want think of them this way as teachers, but they can be actually very oppressive places to kids if they don't fit, if they don't feel comfortable, if they can't perform in the expected way. Every day going to school can be an ordeal. Whereas for us, who probably did well in school, we kind of like it, because we were good at what they were asking for, and we could do it. But it's not the same for all kids, and we should respect that.

>> HEAPHY: You said you wanted to talk to us about teachers and school personnel. What are your thoughts there?

>> CONNOR: I think the cogs in this have to be the teachers. They're the ones that are bringing this all together. They're the ones that are going to facilitate the meetings at the school. I have a couple of thoughts that I wanted to share.

The first one is use this process as an opportunity to teach students self-advocacy skills, so that they would facilitate their meeting. Have them role-play. Have them practice before the real event. Have them ask questions, so they're comfortable when they go up for it.

Be mindful that different experiences, realities come to play during the meeting. What may be something pro forma that you have to show up with, and make sure that the compliance is done? Is really a cultural space in which the other people don't have the same power as you. And yet, in terms of their own child, it's really the crucible that will set a path for

the child's life, at least their educational life, and then potentially beyond. So don't underestimate these meetings.

There is such a thing that doctors do, and it's called practicing cultural humility. It means you are there to listen first of who the person is, who they are, what they want; and then striving to have an empathetic approach when you're engaging with the people -- who ostensibly, you are getting paid to serve, because they're often different than yourself in terms of your views, in terms of your education, in terms of your social class, in terms of your culture, your race, your immigrant status, so on and so forth.

Really practicing this cultural humility lets you take a step back, and it leads to what we call cultural cognizance, this striving to understand in a genuine way the perspective, the location, the context of the people that you're engaging with, because you do share their child at this important meeting.

Often it helps you understand and be respectful of differences among parents. We have social norms. If you're a teacher there, you're carrying out the social norms of the school. The parents' view of disability could be very different. Many of these disabilities that we have in the U.S. do not exist formally in other countries. Italy doesn't have the title learning disability. Learning disability in the U.K. actually means intellectual impairment. So all the terms and the things we take for granted really are a product of our culture, and they have to be thought of that way.

I've said this before, but I'll say it again, teachers should actively work against deficit-based dispositions about students with IEPs. Our professional discourse is saturated in deficit terminology. Often medicalized when it's not really medical. Often made to sound scientific when it's not really scientific. These are the things that can sort of allow professionals to feel they have the power and the knowledge, and distance parents.

But if we bring it down to it, we're talking about the same kid. We have two perspectives, and the parent is spending more time with the kid than any of the professionals at that table. So who should have the input in that conversation? It's the parent.

Please reduce the jargon and education-ese, if we can use plain language. We shouldn't hide behind acronyms. It's not enough to just send a list. It's enough to talk them through. It's maybe enough to kind of prepare. Maybe if a school did their job, they could do a preparatory meeting to help the parent know what's expected, and what are the options at an IEP meeting.

I guess, do your best to schedule a visit from the parents. Is there a way that we can find a preferred day, time, a first, second, third choice, so that meetings actually occur? Because when the plate falls off the table, and it doesn't get done properly, professionals will meet without the child or the parent there sometimes, and sign off the goals, the objectives, the child's plan, without the child present -- which defeats the purpose, even though compliance has been ensured.

>> HEAPHY: This idea you raise around cultural humility, and the importance of listening, I think reminds us that teachers can actually take some pressure off themselves as having to be the experts, if they can pause and open up the conversation and really hear from parents. It can be a little daunting to get more opinions there on the table. I think for some people, that sounds complicated. But I think you're reminding us that it allows you to, as a teacher, as an educator, to work with more material and to not have to be the only expert.

>> CONNOR: Absolutely. It all shouldn't be on the teacher. The teacher is one of the facilitators, perhaps the prime facilitator, to do this. But if teachers consider some of the suggestions that I've been making so far, their experience in doing this should be far more of an ally with the parents, and far richer than it sometimes is, thinking in terms of the compliance conveyor belt that this process is often related with.

>> HEAPHY: You reminded us that teachers are parts of schools, which are really institutions. If you break it down and ask what can a teacher or an educator sitting at that table in an IEP meeting think about or bring to his or her role? What do you see around promising practices for schools as their own entities, as institutions?

>> CONNOR: The last area that I want to touch on, coincidentally, was this one, the nature of the school as an institution. What is an institution in terms of their practices, their policies, the support that they give their teachers, the expectations for IEP meetings to occur? Transition to be part of the IEP meeting.

So schools should really think about how they can educate parents in parent-friendly ways about IEP meetings coming up. Can they call them? Can they give them information? Can they give them a video? Can they provide them web pages? But the whole notion of this is a very important meeting that will determine your child's future, and together we will talk with your child at the center. What is the direction that your child envisions for him or herself?

The transition component, I think, should be made explicit at the IEP meeting. Before 14, it's not really there. After 14, it is required. It's embedded within the IEP. So people shouldn't think of it as an extra set of boxes or section to be checked off, but really an essential component in the whole of the IEP.

Also to be able to explain to parents what their rights are. Occasionally, because I worked in teacher ed, teachers would come to me and explain difficult situations all the time. Sometimes, they would know what the parent was asking for would be pretty good and right for their child. But they were frightened to maybe advocate publicly and ally with the parent because they weren't tenured. So there's all kinds of power plays that we have to acknowledge. There's a way for teachers to speak off the record with parents, to get information to the parents, to put them in touch with parent advocacy groups who could then tell them the

information. But the bottom line is, I think, all teachers should be allies of the students that they're paid to serve.

Some other things, I've repeated them a little earlier, be mindful of cultural beliefs about educational responsibility. Some cultures believe schools know best. Teachers know best. They're very trusting. "I'm the parent at home, you're the teacher at school," and pass them back and forward. In other countries, the school-to-parent to school-to-home link isn't there, or isn't expected. So how can we induct people who don't have that experience or vision into these are the processes of the law and our community? So the more we work with you, the better, because we do have the same individual in common.

Some things that schools may want to think about is using technology for the process if parents can't physically attend. We mentioned all of the good reasons why parents can't attend, and I don't like it if school personnel assume the parents don't care, which sometimes can be the case, but we have Zoom. We have Skype. We have the good old phone to still go through the procedures, but be welcome of the parent. Having them stop the information flow if they don't know the acronym, et cetera, can be done through these technological means.

I guess the bottom line is, considering the ways that we do business in school. Are we engaging with kids and parents, or are we alienating them in our practices? I know that sounds like a harsh term to put it on the table, but sometimes this is what parents -- that research has shown, parents find schools intimidating, alienating, and not that friendly. So how can we go the extra mile to make sure that we can reach out to them, and make sure that our procedures and things we have to do are more friendly, instead of just thinking they're something we have to finish.

I have a couple more, then we can wind down. Once again, schools as an institution, can they work against deficit-based dispositions within IEPs? I think for kids, for parents, for teachers, for schools as institutions, I think this would be my underlying message? Can we work

against a deficit-based view of kids, and know that this process that they're undergoing is meant to help clarify their future, recognize who they are, what they want to bring to the table, and start the process of them being self-advocates, self-directed, self-determined, all of that kind of terminology, which really is, do they know what they're doing in the future? Do they have good choices that are realistic for them? Can they explore before they make big decisions? All that kind of stuff.

I guess the last one is, provide meaningful choices to the students. Make sure they go to visit colleges. Make sure they go to visit job sites. Make sure you have people in visiting. Make sure you have career days. Make sure that this is an ongoing activity with them throughout their years in high school, so it's not a once-a-year thing, where you kind of go down a list. That's what I would like to encourage schools to do, with full respect for how difficult it is to be in and work in a school with all the demands and challenges, and the rewards that it has.

>> HEAPHY: So we can, when we start to talk about IEP meetings, think about them as their own entity, as opposed to -- as you say, it's a year-round, everyday kind of process we're talking about for young people. These meetings are a moment in time to pause and think about what these programs look like, and the services, how they're aligned, and how they're seeing young people.

>> CONNOR: To clarify, to check, to make sure, to listen to any new potential directions, any new information learned. They should be ongoing. There's a great quote by Maxine Greene, who's an education philosopher, and it's like, "Everybody is in the process of becoming." We all are. And that includes kids, and the transition focus within an IEP allows them to think about who they are, and who they want to become.

>> HEAPHY: What a beautiful way to end. Thank you so much for talking with us today. Really grateful for your sharing your insights on transition planning -- what can make it hard, but what

can be done to make it a really meaningful, thoughtful, productive experience for young people, which will help all of us.

>> CONNOR: Great, yes, everybody can make sure something works in that right direction.

>> HEAPHY: Perfect, thank you, and thanks to all our listeners for joining in the conversation today.