

## Guest Blog: Setting Our Peers Up for Success

By Noah Beaufford and Elijah Lee

SchoolTalk DC believes that all youth benefit from support in thinking about and planning for their futures after high school. The transition from school to adulthood is especially important for youth with disabilities. One year after graduating or leaving school, [two-thirds](#) of youth with disabilities in DC are not in college or working. Individual transition plans help youth with disabilities figure out how to take steps towards their personal aspirations for college, career, and independent living. Youth do better when they start transition planning earlier—before choosing their high school—and when they have robust support from their schools, families, and stakeholders. DC needs to “set youth up for success,” and fully fund earlier transition planning to make it law, so that all students and schools start these crucial conversations at age 14.

The youth that SchoolTalk collaborates with through our programs support earlier transition planning. Please read on for the invaluable perspectives from two DC youth.

As members of the DC Voices of Change Peer Network, we advocate that DC fund the 2014 Special Education Reforms, so that DC students with disabilities can start planning for life after high school at 14, instead of having to wait until age 16.



We’ve included our stories below to show how starting transition planning earlier would have helped us:

### Noah Beaufford - Eastern Senior High School, Senior

I believe transition planning would be very helpful at age 14 because students would have more time to think about their future and career prospects. Throughout my years in DCPS I have struggled trying to figure out what I wanted my career to be, because I was never given the opportunity to explore my professional interests until I was older. I strongly believe transition planning at age 14 is needed because students would have lots of time to explore potential career fields and they also would have time to change or revise their goals if they want to.

### Elijah Lee - Anacostia Senior High School, Graduate

I started my transition planning at 16 years old. My goal was to prepare for a position as a Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC) technician—because that was one of the career paths I was exposed to at the time and interested in. When I chose HVAC as my goal, I had limited knowledge about all

of the other career options available to me. After I participated in multiple after-school and internship programs, I discovered that I was interested in some other career paths. Starting my transition planning at 14 years old would have given me more opportunities to explore different career paths, make different choices, and participate in more programs.

I believe starting the transition planning process earlier would give youth time to think through what goals they want to pursue after high school. When students are 14 they have big plans for life after school, but they may not understand the steps it takes to get there. Students with more planning time will have a better chance of knowing what they want to do after high school. With more time to plan and the support of adults, students can test out their plans and explore their options throughout high school. The more time they have to plan and try out new things before leaving high school, the better. This is especially true for students like me, who discover they would like to pursue new goals, as their interests change. Now, I am a Program Assistant at a nonprofit in DC, and I am taking classes in Project Management at University of the District of Columbia Workforce Development Program.

As DC youth, we strongly believe that the DC transition age should be lowered from 16 to 14 years old, to ensure our peers have time and support to explore their options and set themselves up for success.