

**PRESS RELEASE**

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**DISABILITY RIGHTS NEW JERSEY LAUNCHES ASPYIR TRANSITION  
PLANNING TOOL IN SPANISH, EXPANDING THE REACH OF ITS  
INNOVATIVE, INTERACTIVE SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL AND  
EMPOWERING MORE YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES**

**TRENTON, NJ** – In September 2024, Disability Rights New Jersey, the state’s designated Protection and Advocacy system (P&A) for people with disabilities, launched “ASPYIR Transition Planning Tool,” a self-assessment resource for students with disabilities, provided at no-cost to students or school districts. ASPYIR, which stands for Accessing Strategies to Prepare Youth for Independence and Responsibility, empowers youth to take the lead in planning their futures by defining their interests, needs, and goals in preparation for adulthood. The Spanish language version of ASPYIR aims to be inclusive and reach broader, diverse communities, by ensuring the content is accessible. ASPYIR in Spanish allows users to take the assessment accurately and receive a report of their responses in Spanish.

ASPYIR is an easy-to-use planning tool for youth ages 13 to 21. Once students complete the self-assessment, ASPYIR generates a document identifying the student’s goals related to education, employment, and independent living that can be used to chart their pathway to accomplishing those goals. By utilizing ASPYIR, students gain a resource essential to becoming an active participant at their Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings, job interviews, and more. ASPYIR puts the power in their hands to be able to talk about the important aspects related to life as young adults.

Answering a need in the community, ASPYIR was developed by Disability Rights New Jersey Attorney, Regina Ann Smith, based on a model created by Disability Rights Center of Kansas. “Individual student voice is crucial to the transition planning process, yet many students are rarely included at the table,” said Smith, a special education teacher turned attorney with the nonprofit’s Youth Practice Group. Smith continued, “working directly with students, we found they are often asked broad or abstract questions about the future and have seen first-hand how discouraged they were to process and share their goals with the rest of their team. Disability Rights New Jersey was inspired by the work of other P&As around the nation and wanted to equip New Jersey students with a tool to enhance their participation in planning for their future.”

The federal special education law known as [The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) ensures that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living. ASPYIR centers on these three crucial areas of development for youth as they enter young adulthood.

Based on data provided by the New Jersey Office of Special Education, in the 2023-2024 school year, there were approximately 103,500 students between the ages of 13 and 21 entitled to special education services, including IEPs and 504 plans.

Students with disabilities are entitled to a transition plan the year they turn 14 and may begin creating their plan at age 13. The transition plan must be in place by age 16, when transition services are set to begin. "Transition is frequently overlooked when preparing students for graduation and beyond. ASPYIR aims to put a spotlight on the issue," says Jessica Lax, Disability Rights New Jersey's Youth Practice Group Advocate. "Students with disabilities must be equipped with the essential skills needed to graduate and start young adult life. Through ASPYIR, students can identify the skills they want to develop while in school with resources available to them, seeking support as needed. ASPYIR allows students to take the lead."

Although ASPYIR was initially conceived to help students with disabilities advocate for themselves, the planning tool can benefit all students, regardless of their abilities, to identify possibilities that suit their strengths and interests for the future. By utilizing ASPYIR, school personnel can help students prepare for a future based on their choices and needs. Students may complete the transition planning tool multiple times, as their goals and needs evolve, making ASPYIR an effective and cost-efficient tool for both students and schools to update a student's transition plan. ASPYIR can be an integral part of the transition planning process, fostering autonomy, as students move into young adulthood empowered to make choices about the direction of their lives.

ASPYIR in Spanish is [now available](#). Its launch was made possible through the assistance of The Language Bank at Rutgers University School of Arts and Sciences. Disability Rights New Jersey wishes to acknowledge The Language Bank for its invaluable support and service expanding accessibility and inclusivity for youth and their families throughout New Jersey.

Students can access the ASPYIR Transition Planning Tool at: <https://disabilityrightsnj.org/aspvir>. Once launched, click on ES to begin and complete ASPYIR is Spanish.

Disability Rights New Jersey's Youth Practice Group Advocate is available to assist students with ASPYIR, as well as discuss their results. Call our main intake line at (800) 922-7233, email [intakeunit@disabilityrightsnj.org](mailto:intakeunit@disabilityrightsnj.org), or complete the online intake form on our website at [disabilityrightsnj.org](https://disabilityrightsnj.org) to get started.

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*About Disability Rights New Jersey:*

*As New Jersey's designated Protection and Advocacy system for people with disabilities, under federal law, Disability Rights New Jersey promotes self-determination, independence, and inclusion into all facets of community life. Disability Rights New Jersey advances the human, civil, and legal rights of people with disabilities through a wide array of advocacy services for individuals, their families, and other stakeholders. Accordingly, Disability Rights New Jersey also has statutory authority to pursue legal, administrative, and other appropriate remedies to ensure the protection of people with disabilities and adherence to the law.*

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