



Massachusetts Department of
ELEMENTARY & SECONDARY
EDUCATION

Guidelines for the Transition Specialist Endorsement

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Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

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I. Context and Purpose:

All students, including students with disabilities, “deserve a world-class education that prepares them for postsecondary opportunities, career training options, economically viable careers, and healthy, productive lives”.¹ However, without appropriate, individualized transition planning and services, students with disabilities are falling behind their non-disabled peers in reaching that goal.

Too many students with disabilities are unprepared to live and work independently when they exit high school. Currently, according to the US Department of Labor, only 25% of 20-24 year olds with disabilities are employed, compared with 60% of their non-disabled peers.² Nearly half of all disabled adults who are employed have an income of less than \$15,000 per year.³ In 2012, data shows only 68.6% of Massachusetts students with disabilities graduated on time with their peers, compared to 84.7% for non-disabled students⁴ and the dropout rate for students with disabilities was almost twice as high as the rate for non-disabled students.⁵ The President’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education acknowledged that, “One reason for these outcomes is that educators are inadequately prepared to provide the transition services required under IDEA.”⁶

As the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Taskforce on Integrating College and Career Readiness recognized, “every child deserves an education that nurtures their dreams and lays out a navigable pathway to accomplish them. It is no longer viable for our businesses or our educators to under invest in career readiness education; we have a responsibility to provide our children with a well-rounded education that prepares them not just to begin post-secondary education, but to access viable, living-wage, family supporting careers, and lifelong prosperity.”⁷ Further, research has found integrated competitive employment during high school to be a strong predictor of integrated competitive employment in adulthood.⁸

Special education law⁹ requires specific procedures to prepare youth with disabilities to transition to life after high school. With the reauthorization of IDEA, Congress found that “improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities”¹⁰, and emphasized that one of the purposes of IDEA has been “to ensure that all children

¹ “Technical Assistance Advisory SPED 2013-1: Postsecondary Goals and Annual IEP Goals in the Transition Planning Process,” MA ESE, http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/advisories/13_1ta.html

² “Disability Employment Policy Resources,” United States Department of Labor, <http://www.dol.gov/odep/categories/youth/youthemployment.htm>

³ The ADA, Twenty years later, Kessler Family Foundation/National Organization on Disability (July 2010) P. 91

⁴ Five-year graduation rates increase for students with disabilities in Massachusetts. The 2011 five-year cohort graduation rate for Massachusetts public high schools shows a rate of graduation for students with disabilities at 70.8% compared to 86.3% of nondisabled students. Although gains are being made, gaps in graduation rates for students with disabilities remain a concern. Additional improvement activities are described at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/spp/>.

⁵ In 2012, the dropout rate for all students was 6.9% and the dropout rate for students with disabilities was 12.8%. Additional improvement activities are described at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/sped/spp/>.

⁶ Presidents Commission on Excellence in Special Education (2005)

⁷ “From Cradle to Career: Educating our Students for Lifelong Success - Recommendations from the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education’s Task Force on Integrating College and Career Readiness,” MA ESE, http://www.doe.mass.edu/boe/docs/2012-06/item1_report.pdf

⁸ Test, Mazzotti, Mustain, Fowler, Kortering, & Kohler, 2009.

⁹ IDEA 20 USC 1401 (34)

¹⁰ IDEA 20 USC 1401 (34)

with disabilities have available to them a free and appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and *prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living* [emphasis added].”¹¹ Transition must address the needs of all students with disabilities, include considerations specific to various disability types¹² and provide a continuum of services that are responsive to varying degrees of disability. Additionally in Massachusetts, state law and policy specifically requires school districts to address the complex communication, social, and behavioral needs of students on the autism spectrum, and this requirement extends to the transition process.¹³

Acknowledging the critical role of educators to effectively address transition, the Massachusetts legislature enacted *An Act Relative to Students with Disabilities in Post-Secondary Education, Employment and Independent Living* to provide educators with the opportunity to acquire specific knowledge and skills necessary to address the transition needs of youth with disabilities. The purpose of the Massachusetts transition specialist guidelines is to strengthen the preparation of educators working with youth with disabilities ages 14-22. The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) is issuing these guidelines to support implementation of the new Transition Specialist Endorsement.

II. Guidelines to Develop a Transition Specialist Endorsement Course of Study:

The Transition Specialist Endorsement regulations, 603 CMR 7.14(4), set forth requirements including a prerequisite license and experience, field-based experiences, and subject matter knowledge competencies for Transition Specialists that include a thorough understanding of (a) the foundations and implementation of transition education and transition services, (b) individual transition assessment and system evaluation, (c) transition systems and supports, and (d) effective collaboration. These Guidelines provide further detail on these subject matter competencies and required field-based experience and are intended to represent the content of four or five master’s level courses, as one option for designing a program.

Note: Sample field-based assignments are included in each substantive area of study as examples of meaningful field-based experience but are not required as written.

Prerequisite license and experience

Transition Specialist Endorsement candidates must have a minimum of two years of experience under one of the following licenses 603 CMR 7.14(4)(a)(1)&(2):

- An Initial or Professional license as a Teacher of Students with Moderate Disabilities, Teacher of Students with Severe Disabilities, Teacher of the Visually Impaired, Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, School Guidance Counselor, or School Social Worker/School Adjustment Counselor.

¹¹ IDEA 20 USC 1401 (34)

¹² Massachusetts disability categories are defined by the Code of Massachusetts Regulations 603 CMR 28.02 at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr28.html?section=02#start>

¹³ Autism IEP Act - MGL Ch.71B sec.3

- A license as a Rehabilitation Counselor (as described in 262 CMR 4.00 *Requirements for Licensure as a Rehabilitation Counselor*), or certification as a Rehabilitation Counselor as determined by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC).

Field-based experience

- Completion of a 150 hour field-based experience that includes providing transition services for transition-aged students with disabilities with IEPs, in collaboration with their families, community members, and other relevant professionals. 603 CMR 7.14(4)(c)

The need for special education teachers and vocational rehabilitation counselors to gain practical experience in working with transition-age students and to understand the transition process from school to work and adult life is an integral component of the Transition Specialist Endorsement. Diverse and varied field-based experiences build upon the knowledge and skills acquired in the coursework, and provide the range of practical experience necessary to learn about local school/district college and career readiness initiatives, other agencies and community-based systems critical to the transition planning process.

Candidates for the Transition Specialist Endorsement are required to complete 150 hours of field-based experience involving active participation with transition-aged students with disabilities, their families, school faculty, community members and other relevant professionals. It must also involve active participation with students at different phases of transition (14-18 & 18-22) and with varying degrees and types of disability in order to gain practical experience working with a wide range of students.

A minimum of 100 hours of the field-based experience shall be completed within a Massachusetts public school, approved private special education school, educational collaborative, or a in a school setting that is supervised by a professional who holds one of the above prerequisite licenses and has experience in secondary transition. At least 50 hours of the remaining field-based experience must be completed in a community based setting working with transition age youth in order to gain experience assisting youth transition from school to adult life.

Transition Specialist Endorsement field-based experiences should be organized, coordinated and assessed by the Sponsoring Organization. A plan for providing candidates field-based experiences must be included by the Sponsoring Organization in the program submission and approved by ESE. The 150 hours of field-based experience must include multiple experiences in the school and community, include students with varying degrees and types of disability, and cover a range of time periods within the school year. Each field-based experience must be of sufficient duration to provide for the development of meaningful connections with school/district staff, human service agencies, community service agencies, higher education, employers, and/or work force development organizations. These experiences must be comprehensive, including a variety of classrooms, employment sites, and community-based experiences. In the case of candidates who are currently employed in a MA school or district, the Sponsoring Organization may accept equivalent field-based experiences at the school and/or district in which the candidate is employed to satisfy the minimum 100 school-based field hours.

Subject Matter Knowledge requirements for the Transition Specialist Endorsement

1. The foundations and implementation of transition education and transition services

Foundations and implementation of transition education and transition services, including but not limited to: state and federal legislation; inclusive models, research, best practice, community

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based education and post-school options; and knowledge of transition planning and service delivery for all students with Individualized Education Programs, including culturally and linguistically diverse youth. 603 CMR 7.14(4)(d)(1)

In order to be effective in assisting students with disabilities to be prepared for adult life, candidates for the Transition Specialist Endorsement must understand the foundations and implementation of transition education by demonstrating a range of up-to-date, evidence-based transition practices, including practices that support college career readiness standards, i.e. MA Curriculum Frameworks aligned with the Common Core, and an understanding of complex adult services systems. Educators also need to understand the unique challenges that students with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face in attempting to pursue satisfactory postsecondary outcomes.

Transition Specialists who understand the foundations of transition education will demonstrate and provide evidence of the following knowledge and skills:

Knowledge:

- The historical foundations of the transition movement
- State and Federal transition-related legislation and policies, and implications for providing transition services at the local level, including but not limited to: policy issues related to Social Security benefits and work incentives, workforce laws and regulations, and accommodations for individuals with disabilities
- Knowledge of self-determination principles and self-advocacy skills
- Understand the skills necessary for postsecondary success, including but not limited to time management, planning and prioritizing, study skills, social skills, healthcare skills, and safety in school and community environments
- The Massachusetts definition of College and Career Readiness¹⁴ and other state and national college and career readiness initiatives
- Evidence-based transition practices (e.g. person-centered planning, collaborative teaming, community-building, resource mapping) including whole school college and career readiness practices
- Understanding of complex adult services systems (e.g., higher education, vocational rehabilitation, SSI and Medicaid, developmental disability services, workforce development, benefits specialists, and community rehabilitation providers)
- The rights and responsibilities of the student and family in the transition process
- Fundamental issues that influence secondary transition, including but not limited to: healthcare or mental health challenges, foster care placement, involvement in the justice system, socio-economic challenges, cultural and linguistic diversity, residency status, guardianship, and issues faced by students who are at risk of dropping out of school
- Understanding of various models for the role of Transition Specialists, including nationally accepted standards for experienced professionals in special education

Skills:

- Plan, develop, implement, evaluate and promote culturally responsive transition services for youth with a wide range of abilities and disabilities
- Promote self-determination and self-advocacy skill building

¹⁴ See the MA ESE Office of College and Career Readiness website located at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/ccr/>

- Facilitate resource mapping and program goal-setting to create district and community policies and agreements that will support transition-aged youth
- Facilitate training, professional development and technical assistance to colleagues and families related to transition law and practices
- Develop and disseminate transition information to transition-aged students and their families, including those in out-of-district placements
- Develop effective outreach strategies to reach underserved youth and families and coordinate the translation of all transition materials into appropriate languages

Sample field-based assignments:
• Design/provide professional development and technical assistance to colleagues regarding federal and state transition requirements
• Prepare culturally responsive student and family guides and checklists regarding district transition procedures and services
• Conduct resource mapping of all available college and career readiness resources for district's students
• Disseminate transition guide or checklist and resource list to students in out-of-district placements
• Prepare and deliver presentation for the district special education Parent Advisory Council (PAC) meeting(s) to inform parents of transition rights and requirements, as well as district transition policies and programs
• Facilitate person-centered planning with students and assist them to present their postsecondary goals at IEP meetings

2. Individual transition assessment and system evaluation

Individual transition assessment and system evaluation, including conducting, interpreting, and overseeing individualized formal and informal transition assessments to ascertain interests, strengths, preferences, aptitudes and needs related to competitive employment, education, training, and independent living; developing individualized appropriate measurable postsecondary goals, and annual IEP goals based on the individualized transition assessment results; and transition service delivery. 603 CMR 7.14(4)(d)(2)

Assessment of student interests, strengths, preferences and needs is essential in order to provide appropriate, individualized and meaningful transition services to students. Candidates for the Transition Specialist Endorsement must demonstrate, thorough knowledge of a range of up-to-date, robust, and student-centered assessment methods as well as practical application of that knowledge in providing individualized transition assessments that will lead to the inclusion of appropriate, measurable, annually updated postsecondary goals, annual IEP goals related to the student's transition service needs and transition services that will reasonably enable the student to meet those postsecondary goals in the IEP. Assessment data must address the skills, abilities and corresponding supports necessary to address educational, employment, independent living needs, and the social, communication and functional skills that can impact success for all students with disabilities.

Transition specialists will demonstrate and provide evidence of the following knowledge and skills regarding assessment and system evaluation:

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Knowledge:

- Legal requirements and rationale for conducting comprehensive, individualized, ongoing formal and informal secondary transition assessments
- Familiarity with a variety of culturally responsive formal and informal secondary transition assessment instruments for students aged 14-22 to ascertain interests, strengths, preferences, aptitudes and needs related to integrated competitive employment, postsecondary education/training, independent living, and community participation
- Role of assistive technology and individualized accommodations in the assessment process
- Knowledge of self-determination and self-advocacy assessment tools
- Strategies for recruiting and engaging a team in individualized transition assessment, including the student, family, school personnel, and community agencies
- Use of assessment data to determine the interests, skills, abilities and corresponding supports necessary to address educational, competitive employment, independent living, and community participation needs, including social, communication and functional skills (including work ethic and professionalism, effective communication and interpersonal skills, and other employer identified soft skills¹⁵)
- Content and process to develop annually updated, individualized, appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals and annual IEP goals, and transition services, based on the individualized transition assessment results

Skills:

- Administer a variety of culturally responsive formal and informal tools, including assistive technology where appropriate, to assess students' individual strengths, preferences, interests and needs directly related to: academic, vocational, independent living, and community participation, including but not limited to social skills, functional behavior, and self-determination abilities and self-advocacy skills
- Conduct and manage transition assessment activities across domains of self-determination, academic, vocational, independent living, and community participation
- Include students in assessment planning, interpretation, and analysis activities to promote self-awareness, self-determination, and self-regulation
- Interpret results of assessments, provide educationally relevant recommendations and develop individualized, measurable postsecondary goals and annual IEP goals based upon assessment results
- Integrate information from transition assessments into students' Transition Planning Form and IEP, and also to the Summary of Performance
- Report results in appropriate language and terms to facilitate student and family understanding
- Create work-based learning plans and individual learning plans based on appropriate assessments¹⁶

Sample field-based assignments:
• Oversee person-centered planning process for transition-aged students.
• Assist special education teachers to coordinate/implement transition assessments for students that include both formal and informal methods and culturally responsive

¹⁵ The Massachusetts Definition of College and Career Readiness is further described at <http://www.mass.edu/library/documents/2013College&CareerReadinessDefinition.pdf>

¹⁶ The Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan is further described at <http://www.skillslibrary.com/wbl.htm>

practices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and offer training to team members on effective ways to interpret transition assessment results to students and families using universal design strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete transition planning forms and develop IEPs that result from conducting person-centered planning and transition assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Oversee the use of the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan (WBLP) for all working students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct assessment of school/district transition practices using national transition standards and evidence-based practices with interagency team. Analyze results, develop goals to improve services for all students with disabilities ages 14-22

3. How to develop transition systems and supports

*How to develop **transition systems and supports** which include best practices in postsecondary education, competitive integrated employment (including supported employment), independent living, and community participation including, but not limited to, implementation of social skills training, positive behavioral supports, assistive technology as related to transition goals, and development of self-determination skills across all settings. 603 CMR 7.14(4)(d)(3)*

Transition systems and supports involve the provision of services to students in order to prepare them for life after high school. Transition systems and supports must be comprehensive in order to effectively address the unique needs, strengths, interests and preferences of a range of students with disabilities. Candidates for the Transition Specialist Endorsement must demonstrate a solid understanding of the following knowledge and skills related to the development of appropriate transition systems and supports:

Knowledge:

- Understanding of the Massachusetts Definition of College and Career Readiness
- Understanding of best practices and methods to evaluate existing transition-related services and systems including but not limited to disability specific considerations and vulnerable populations e.g. students with autism, intellectual disabilities, and emotional disabilities; students involved in the foster care or justice system; and students facing economic, cultural, and linguistic barriers.
- The rationale for and elements of self-determination as the foundation of successful postsecondary outcomes including self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-monitoring, self-advocacy and the philosophy of ‘dignity of risk’
- Methods to develop evidence-based transition-specific materials and curricula that promote self-determination and self-advocacy, are aligned with MA Curriculum Frameworks/Common Core Standards and include soft skills development across secondary and postsecondary settings
- Awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of commercially available transition-specific curriculum/training methods and materials
- Knowledge of postsecondary learning options, admission and disability documentation requirements, the role of ADA, 504, and Disability Services in higher education and the range of supports and accommodations available to all students with disabilities, including students with autism and intellectual disabilities.
- Vocational education and career preparation methods, models, and curricula including career development, job development, facilitating natural positive supports on the job, job placement

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and training, models of supported employment and awareness of social and interpersonal skills identified by employers that promote job retention

- The role of adult agencies and support personnel including but not limited to the MA Rehabilitation Commission, independent living programs, and Personal Care Attendants, and knowledge of community-based recreation and leisure opportunities
- Knowledge of how to use positive behavioral supports in work, college and community settings
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) devices, the range of devices, and related best practices
- Awareness of age of majority options and family resources, including decision-making alternatives and guardianship.

Skills:

- Develop a coordinated set of individualized activities aligned with students' assessments, postsecondary goals and annual IEP goals
- Apply techniques to help students develop a course of study related to their postsecondary education and career interests and plan to build related necessary skills
- Implement a variety of methods and strategies to support the full participation of students with disabilities in college and career awareness, exploration and immersion activities as identified in the MA Career Development Education Guide and Glossary¹⁶
- Perform job matching, job carving, and job placement including identifying supports in community-based work training environments and facilitating students' self-advocacy for accommodations within work and community environments
- Connect students with adult service, community providers, and vocational rehabilitation services as part of student career plans
- Use the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan (WBLP)¹⁷ to support competitive employment
- Develop community-based independent living activities and provide community-based instruction
- Connect students and families to community resources and provide assistance regarding effectively hiring, supervising, and utilizing PCAs
- Implement culturally responsive social or soft skills training in a range of postsecondary settings as they relate to students postsecondary goals in employment, education, independent living and community participation.
- Train students on use of educational and assistive web-based tools and technology designed to improve functional skills and independence in college, jobs, and community
- Assist students in understanding the relationship between their individual strengths and desires and their future goals, identifying accommodations, and provide opportunities to make choices, set goals, and self-advocate
- Manage transition services and activities across domains of self-determination, academic, vocational, independent living, and community participation

¹⁶ The MA Career Development Education Guide and Glossary is located at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/connect/cde-guideglossary.pdf#search=%22MA%22>

¹⁷ See the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan located at <http://www.skillslibrary.com/wbl.htm>

Sample field-based assignments:
• Conduct market analysis of community employment opportunities for youth
• Recruit business partners for interagency transition team
• Prepare school and transition staff to support students in community (college, jobs, travel) using best practices in coaching, peer, and/or natural support
• Provide training and technical assistance to colleagues on the integration of self determination and self advocacy strategies and opportunities into school and community settings
• Oversee training and implementation of independent learning plans for all students to ensure appropriate course of study in preparation for post-school goals
• Facilitate positive behavior assessment for students with disabilities as they relate to transition goals and activities, and develop related action plans
• Coordinate professional development workshop on universal design and assistive technology to support transition-age youth in education, employment, and community settings
• Provide information to students and families about post-secondary education options and guidance regarding appropriate course of studies during high school to meet their postsecondary learning goals and support students through the process of applying for, enrolling, and completing a post-secondary course

4. Effective collaboration with all stakeholders

Collaboration including strategies for active participation of students and families in IEP development, transition education and services, and support networks; development of partnerships with employers, institutes of higher education, public agencies, and community service agencies; and provision of technical assistance and professional development to school personnel. 603 CMR 7.14(4)(d)(4)

According to the national technical assistance and information center funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs, “Today, the focused and committed efforts of a wide range of agencies are essential to establishing and maintaining the quality programs and practices need to help youth achieve positive school and post-school results...Formal service coordination among collaborating entities is...now understood to be crucial to the transition success of many youth with disabilities ...”²⁰ Organizations and agencies must work cooperatively and have clarity concerning their own and each other’s responsibilities. Effective transition programs include a great deal of collaboration with families, community resources, employers, institutes of higher education, adult service providers, and amongst school personnel.

Candidates for the Transition Specialist Endorsement must demonstrate and provide evidence of the following knowledge and skills regarding collaboration:

²⁰ *National Standards and Quality Indicators: Transition Toolkit for System Improvement*; by National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition (2011) found at <http://www.nasetalliance.org/>

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Knowledge:

- Methods for increasing student leadership in transition planning, student and family knowledge and engagement related to transition, including IEP development, transition education and services, self-determination, support networks, referral to adult service agencies, benefits planning, health benefits, and social security
- Techniques for identifying and linking appropriate learning environments to increase cooperative transition service delivery through whole-school initiatives, interagency agreements, braided funding, and partnerships with employers, institutes of higher education, public agencies, and community service agencies
- Systems improvement, conflict management and consensus building methods, and recognition of the impact of language, diversity, culture, and religion on transition

Skills:

- Initiate/participate in transition-focused interagency coordinating bodies
- Match community resources with student needs and help students and families establish a support network
- Develop and manage collaborative partnerships with school/district college and career readiness staff, human service agencies, community service agencies, higher education, employers, and work force development organizations, making referrals as needed
- Build cooperative systems that promote student self-determination and self-advocacy skill building
- Develop coordinated interagency strategies to collect, share, and use students' information, ensuring confidentiality and consent of students and families
- Facilitate trainings, professional development, technical assistance and information dissemination related to transition laws, practices, and establishing support networks e.g. adult services, post-school options, integrated employment options, self-determination, guardianship and other transition related issues
- Initiate opportunities and learning experiences in employment and community settings, including working with employers to negotiate job customization and accommodations to meet students' individual needs
- Provide educators, guidance staff, community agency personnel, employers, and other community partners with disability awareness training and information in collaboration with students and family members e.g. universal access and design, auxiliary aids for youth with disabilities, reasonable accommodations, assistive technology, funding streams, employer tax incentives, and other pertinent topics
- Coordinate individualized student guidance regarding appropriate course of studies during high school to meet postsecondary academic, vocational and community/adult living goals and match local area college and career readiness initiatives, employment opportunities, and community resources with student needs

Sample field-based assignments:
• Establish an interagency transition team for the school or district that includes but is not limited to representatives from school, workforce, higher education, adult service agencies, community providers, independent living, student and family
• Oversee mapping of available college- and career-related resources for transition-aged youth with disabilities
• Conduct an assessment of school or district transition practices and facilitate the development of interagency team goals related to transition systems and supports for the school or district, developing data collection systems to track progress
• Facilitate the team's support of transition-aged youths' postsecondary plans
• Present a summary of transition related improvement activities to the community (e.g., special education administration, Special Education Parent Advisory Council (PAC), school committee, chamber of commerce) and solicit feedback/assistance
• Work collaboratively with students and families regarding transition education and activities, adult services and post-school options, self-determination, guardianship and other transition related issues
• Create career mentoring opportunities and a plan for effective collaboration
• Collaborate with all school staff to provide transition training to middle and high school teachers

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