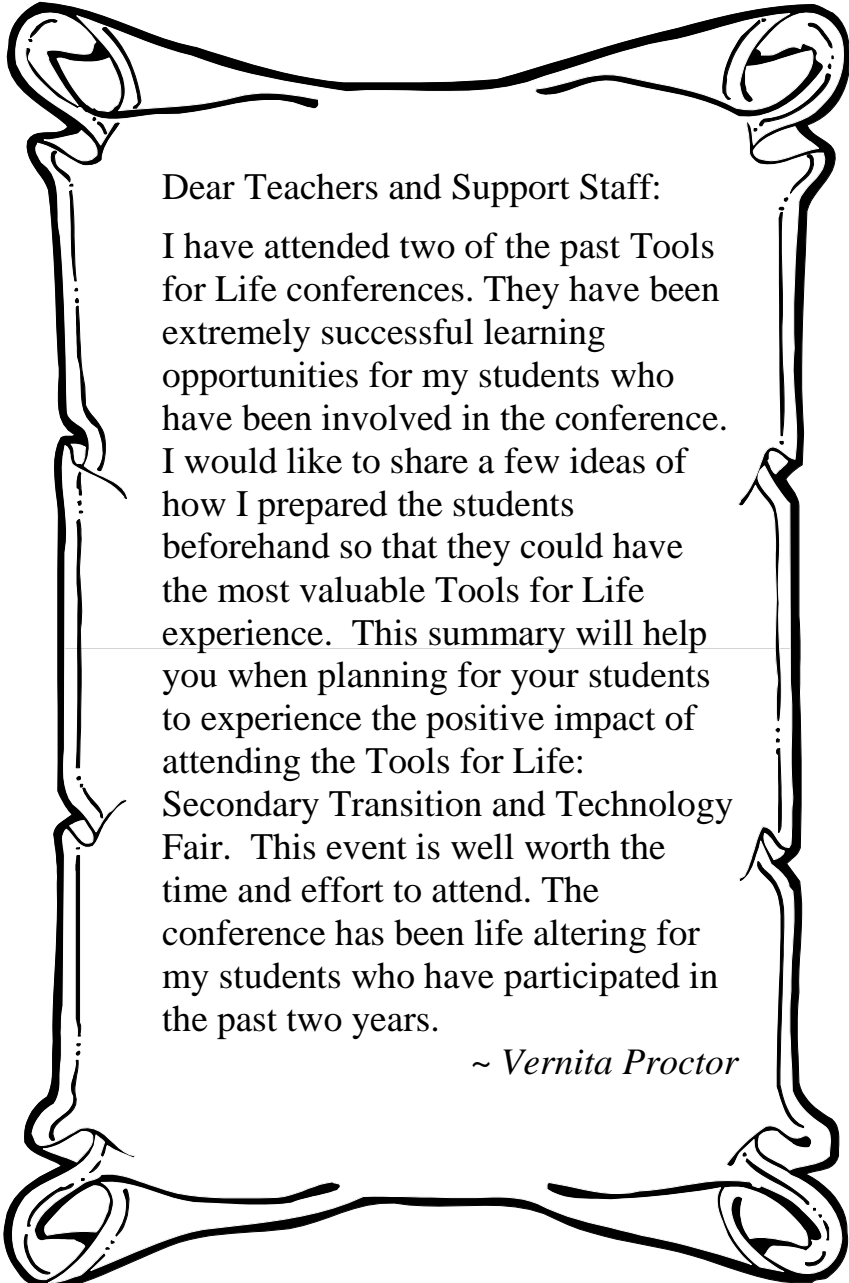


# Get Ready for Tools for Life

## How To Have a Great Conference Experience

*Steps to follow to prepare students to participate in the Tools for Life: Secondary Transition and Technology Fair*



Dear Teachers and Support Staff:

I have attended two of the past Tools for Life conferences. They have been extremely successful learning opportunities for my students who have been involved in the conference. I would like to share a few ideas of how I prepared the students beforehand so that they could have the most valuable Tools for Life experience. This summary will help you when planning for your students to experience the positive impact of attending the Tools for Life:

Secondary Transition and Technology Fair. This event is well worth the time and effort to attend. The conference has been life altering for my students who have participated in the past two years.

*~ Vernita Proctor*

## Selection of Attendees

The school staff who work with the students should discuss the purpose of and expectations for attending the Tools for Life (TFL) Transition Conference. This includes pre-requirements for students such as:

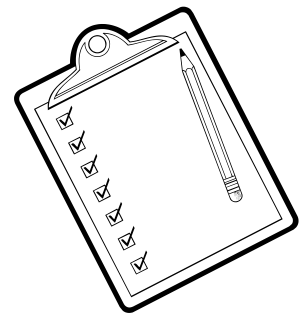
- Maintaining passing grades
- Showing effort in their academic courses
- No recent discipline issues
- Having a need that could be met by attending the conference

## Pre-Conference Preparation

### Step 1

#### Select a student who:

- May have never had the opportunity to travel
- Would benefit from meeting new peers
- Has a high need to learn about transition to life after high school
- Might be interested in developing leadership skills



### Step 2

#### Meet with students

Once you have students in mind to attend TFL, meet with each student individually and explain what the conference is about and why you feel they should attend as well as what benefits they will receive from attending TFL.

### Step 3

#### If a student shows an interest in attending:

1. Send a letter to the parents explaining the conference for the parents to review.
2. The parents need to give written permission for their child to attend.
  - a. Have the parents return a signed form giving their child permission to participate by a date that allows you enough time to complete your list of students and finalize the arrangements.

3. Scholarships are available for students to attend. You can get an application from the Idaho Assistive Technology Project (IATP) website at [www.idahoat.org](http://www.idahoat.org).

## Step 4

### Set a Schedule for Preparation Activities

Schedule ongoing discussions in the classroom about the trip as a reminder for students to start preparing and thinking about the upcoming event. A countdown calendar is a good tool for this. Help students set goals to determine what activities need to occur by what date, such as applying for a scholarship or registering.

## Step 5

### Conference Schedule and Session Planning

1. Download the Tools Program with conference schedule, session descriptions, and hotel maps from the IATP website ([www.idahoat.org](http://www.idahoat.org)) when available. Students should each have their own Program.
2. Develop an itinerary of the trip and review it with the students.
3. Talk to each student individually about the sessions at the conference.
4. Help students choose what sessions they would like to attend, taking into consideration each student's personal needs and interests.
5. Students should learn to locate the sessions they plan to attend on the maps included in the Program.
6. Students should complete an assignment in class explaining what they expect to learn from attending the conference as relates to their post-high school goals.

## Step 6

### Student Conduct at the Conference

1. Discuss conference conduct expectations with students. What is appropriate behavior? Give examples. Role play works well to practice appropriate behavior in certain situations.
2. Talk about showing respect for others at all times. Remember, there will be a lot people attending the conference including those of different age, race, culture, and disability.

3. You will want to address the subject of manners before attending the conference, such as saying “please” and “thank you”. Help students determine discussion topics can be used in the conference setting. Students should be aware of the difference in language that may be used at home and school versus the kind of language one uses in public places such as a conference.
4. I planned a formal dinner with the students one evening during the conference. A possible pre-conference activity is to have the students set up a formal table setting and then practice how to use the silverware and dinnerware. Let the students know that if all else fails they can observe and follow your lead. Remind them to begin eating only after everyone has been served.
5. Discuss leaving tips if they are going to eat in a restaurant. Teach the students how to calculate a tip.
6. Role-play different scenarios such as ordering, asking someone to pass the bread and butter, getting a server’s attention to request more water, etc. These seem like small things, but remember, this might be the first time some of your students have eaten a meal in a setting more formal than home.
7. As a group, discuss the bus ride. If your students have never ridden on any type of bus other than a school bus, explain to them what to expect.

## Step 7

### **What to Bring and How to Dress**

1. Discuss what items students should and should not take to the conference. For example, take medications but leave video games at home. You will want to have a camera to take photos of the students participating in conference activities.
2. Discuss how much money students need to take. Prepare a budget that includes the cost of food, snacks, coffee/soda, souvenirs, and unexpected items. Some of the students may want you to keep some or all of their money to make sure they have enough for the return trip. Talk about how to make sure they get the foods they need if they must follow a special diet.
3. Students may want to wear their nice school clothes for the conference or at least avoid sweats. Remind students to follow the rules of appropriate school dress, for example, no stomachs showing, skirts appropriate length, etc. This activity should be considered a field trip so the same expectations apply.

4. You may want to suggest that the students dress up for the social night of the conference. There is a dance on Monday night for the students and they will probably want to dress up for the dance. This does not mean the students need to go out and buy new clothes but if they have a nice dress or slacks this is an opportunity for them to wear them.
5. The students might want to wear comfortable clothing for the bus trip to and from the conference.

## Step 8

### Preparing to Stay in a Hotel

1. Talk to the students about what is expected while staying at the hotel such as keeping their noise level down, not running in the hallways, and otherwise showing respect for other guests.
2. You may want to set up the teacher hotel room as the headquarters for the group. Let them know they can come to your room 24/7.
3. Designate a meeting place in the hotel so if anyone gets lost or needs to wait for the others they know where to go.
4. Talk about the rules, such as lights out after 10:00 PM, no cell phones after 10:00 PM, no charging expenses to their room tab, etc. Students may want to help develop additional ground rules. Follow through with a bed check to make sure the students are settled for the night.
5. Have a plan for a wake up time so the students can be prepared and on schedule for each day.

## Step 9

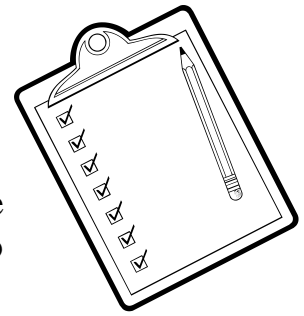
### On the Bus Ride to the Conference

To help the students feel more relaxed and overcome their insecurities on the bus ride to the conference, sit together as a group on the bus and bring games and items such as movies to help keep each student engaged during the trip. This is especially true if you are traveling with other students that you might not know. When they are comfortable, encourage them to invite others to join in the activities with your group. This is a great time to make new friends.

## At the Conference

### Get to Know the Area

1. To help students know how to get around the facility, take them on a tour through the hotel where they are staying so that they can get comfortable with the layout.
2. To help students navigate the conference, take the students around the conference site and help them to find the meeting room where their first session will take place. You will also want to show them where the keynote speakers, meals, and exhibit tables will be set up.
3. Show students the designated meeting spot.
4. Never leave students unattended.



### Your Hotel Room as Headquarters

Hold “meetings” in your room to discuss the students’ events, meal arrangements etc. You might also invite them to come to your room to play games and have popcorn in the evening. Designate a time at the end of the day to meet with your students and have them share with the group what they learned during the day.

### Extra-Curricular Activities

If time and money allow, you might plan one or two extra activities after conference hours for sightseeing, shopping, and/or exploring places your students would not normally get to experience. Some of your students will have had a very limited exposure to places other than their home community and this can be an opportunity to expose them to things they would not otherwise have a chance to see. Charter buses contracted by the Tools for Life organizers may be available for these local trips. Contact conference organizers at the registration desk for more information.

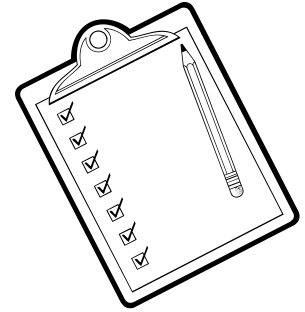
### Keeping Conference Materials Organized

Let the student know that they are responsible to keep the handouts they receive in the sessions or any other information they feel is important. Explain that they will use those materials when they are back at school. You might want to bring your camera and take pictures of the students during the conference as well.

## Post-Conference Activities

### Step 1

Print the pictures that you take at the conference and have the students construct personal scrapbooks using the pictures and the conference materials to keep as memory of the conference.



### Step 2

Require the students to write thank you letters to the Tools for Life staff thanking them for their hard work, time, and money that was given for students to be able to attend TFL. This is especially true if your students are attending the conference on scholarships. If your school district or community helps with the funding for your students to attend the conference send them a thank you note as well.

### Step 3

Have each student write a paper summarizing the conference which includes their pre-conference thoughts, what they learned from attending the conference, as well as any personal thoughts concerning the experience.

### Step 4

Have each student start using the *Moving On Transition Binder* if they are not already using them in their classes. The binders will be available at the conference or you can order them through your regional special education consultant. The transition binder is a great tool to help the students organize documents for getting a job, adult services, getting the support needed at college, and it can include their own personal information to be used for possible employers and college. Some of the materials that students got at the conference may be added to the appropriate section of their binder.

### Step 5

Students may want to present at a faculty and/or school board meeting to share what they learned from attending TFL. This is an incredible experience for these students and it is good to have the chance to receive recognition from the staff and administration. The students might also want to invite their parents to attend the school board meeting when they present. This will help parents understand what the students had gained from the experience as well as see what the students are capable of learning and doing.

Most importantly enjoy the conference. It is a wonderful opportunity for students and parents as well as teachers.