

TRANSITION ASSESSMENT

*Establishing a Foundation for a
Successful Transition to Adulthood*

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What is transition assessment?

Transition assessment is the foundation for planning what a student will do after graduation from high school. Transition assessments are tools to help students understand their interests, personalities, strengths, limitations, and their present levels of development in important areas. This is knowledge critical to planning courses of study, exploring careers, and gaining important life skills for a successful transition from high school to adulthood. Transition assessment information helps to determine a match between the student and the postsecondary environment into which the student hopes to transition.

What is the purpose of transition assessment?

Transition assessment provides information to help students formulate appropriate postsecondary goals and plans to reach those goals. Students need to consider how they will be employed, whether they will continue their education at postsecondary institutions or in training programs, and how they expect to live as young adults. They need the skills to set and attain goals and to make good choices. The results of transition assessments help them plan courses of study in their secondary school years that will prepare them for their postsecondary goals. Transition assessment helps them answer questions such as the following:

- Who am I?
- What are my unique talents and interests?
- What do I want in life, now and in the future?
- What are some of life's demands that I can meet now?
- What are the main barriers to getting what I want from school and my community?
- What are my options in the school and community for preparing me for what I want, now and in the future? (National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center, 2010)

Is transition assessment required?

Yes. The *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA 2004), and its accompanying regulations, at 34 CFR 300.1 et seq., and state law and regulations, through the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* (the Virginia Regulations), 8 VAC 20-81-0 et seq., require that every student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) receives transition planning for life after graduation. Students must have measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments. There must be evidence in the IEP or the student's file of appropriate transition assessment. Postsecondary goals must be related to the results of the transition assessment. The mandate is in Virginia Regulations as follows:

“Prior to the child entering secondary school but not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 14, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team, and updated annually thereafter, the IEP shall include age-appropriate (1) Measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills; and....” (Individualized Education Program, 2009)

Who is responsible for conducting transition assessment?

The responsibility for conducting transition assessment for students lies with school personnel. Personnel outside the school system may provide functional vocational evaluation or career assessment through rehabilitative services, and, if so, those personnel may be partners in the transition assessment for some students.

What are the types of transition assessment methods?

It is important for the IEP team to utilize multiple types of assessments on an ongoing basis to gain information regarding the student's future living, learning, and working environments after high school. Transition assessment tools are categorized as formal (standardized) or informal (non-standardized); both types provide valuable information that can lead to developing measurable postsecondary goals.

Formal assessments are normed, standardized, and follow a standard procedure for administering, scoring, and interpreting. Students' scores are compared to the average scores of other students from across the nation in grade or age level. These assessments provide information on students' strengths and weaknesses in various content areas and determine whether a student has met a specific standard. For example, an Automotive Technician Core Assessment administered in the Automotive Technology classroom will identify whether or not a student has met the industry standards for this career path. Types of standardized assessments include vocational evaluations, the Brigance Diagnostic Employability Skills Inventory, Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and the ARC's Self-Determination Scale.

Informal assessments are less structured and not normed to a given population. This type of assessment is often more descriptive in nature and useful in designing and evaluating the effects of instructional interventions and student performance over time. For example, informal assessments will identify a student's strengths, abilities, and support needs in a specific work environment. These types of tools may include interviews, questionnaires, behavioral observations in various environments, checklists, task analyses, work-based learning evaluations, rating scales, and workplace readiness skills assessment.

It is recommended that school personnel utilize both formal and informal assessments to obtain a comprehensive picture of a student's strengths, preferences, interests, needs, and abilities to assist in developing a plan of the student's transition service needs.

Authentic assessment

An effective informal assessment for gathering critical information on student performance in natural environments is the use of authentic assessment. Authentic assessment is a method that integrates teaching, learning, and assessment to evaluate student knowledge and skills. In authentic assessments, students demonstrate their knowledge of essential skills and competencies by performing a task or creating a product in a real world environment. This form of assessment is particularly beneficial for students with more complex support needs because it enables students to show what they know in a variety of ways outside of the classroom.

Person-Centered Planning Assessments

Transition assessment and person-centered planning both focus on gathering pertinent information that can be used to assist a student in reaching desired outcomes. Person-centered planning is often characterized as problem-solving processes used to help people plan for their future. Almost always, these processes are conducted by a team of people who know the individual well and/or who can provide this person with the supports they may need to achieve their desired outcomes. While there are multiple tools using a person-centered approach, they are seldom used with youth and adolescents. Reasons for this include, but are not limited to, the time intensity of many of these approaches and the ability of the process to be applicable to students still in the school system.

Person-centered planning assessments include the processes associated with discovering, collecting and verifying information through person-centered planning formats. This on-going assessment involves the collection of personal information and the evaluation of the person in specific situations. Most often, this assessment is used with those who have significant disabilities.

Discovering ME!

Discovering ME! is a youth-focused, person-centered transition assessment intended to build customized work-based learning experiences and help students identify their post-secondary goals. Discovering ME! is usually coordinated by school divisions. The process is intended for middle and high school students with the greatest barriers to employment who do not respond or benefit from traditional assessments and planning processes. The ongoing model is comprised of three meetings focusing on collecting student information, building activities within the home, school, and community to increase skills and opportunities, and exploring careers through work-based learning opportunities. The process emphasizes collaboration among students, family members, school staff, and agency representatives to capture foundational elements of the student's identity as a future employee and unique individual.

How does one begin transition assessment?

What knowledge is needed at a particular point in time to make appropriate planning decisions? What information is needed to help plan for the person's future education and training, employment, independent living, and self-determination? It is important to use assessments that best gather the information needed at that transition point. For example, existing records may be sufficient for a picture of the student's academic achievement. However, the student may be ready to consider career options, yet has not participated in assessment of career interests or aptitude. Transition assessment related to career choice may be a good option at that transition point. Perhaps the student and transition team feel the most pressing need is to assess a student's functional skills, such as the ability to access public transportation, to manage money, or to decide on course placement for the following year.

There are many sources from which assessment data may be obtained. A readily available source of information is existing student records. Another prime source is the student. What are the student's interests and preferences? What are the student's desires for future employment, education, and living arrangements? Other sources of assessment information and assistance may include, but are not limited to, families, teachers,

therapists, counselors, psychologists, vocational evaluators, job coaches, social workers, paraprofessionals, employers, and medical professionals.

Clark (2007) suggests placing assessment documents into students' cumulative files so they are easily retrieved by IEP team members. He recommends compiling assessment data into a portfolio. An example of a portfolio for organizing transition assessment data, developed through the [Shenandoah Valley Regional Program Transition Portfolio](#), is at. A natural time to discuss the collection of data for a portfolio is during the IEP team meeting and the triennial reevaluation meeting, since parents and other professionals, who have information and expertise, are included in these meetings.

How do I know if an assessment is age-appropriate?

Neubert and Leconte (2013) suggest that to be “age-appropriate,” assessments should meet youth where they are intellectually, chronologically, neurologically and in career development. For instance, for a youth who is twenty years old and who has an intellectual disability, assessments might use video or photographs for clear understanding, but should depict concerns typical for peers of similar chronological age, such as options for postsecondary living. Assessments should take into consideration neurological readiness to plan ahead versus gratifying goals immediately. Appropriate assessment may differ according to whether the student is focusing on a specific career path, or is at the beginning stages of career awareness.

What should be assessed?

Assessment is best conducted along several dimensions (Neubert & Leconte, 2013). The first dimension is that of the individual. What are the strengths and needs, interests and preferences of the student? A second dimension, which is often overlooked, relates to the environment into which the person intends to transition. For example, if a student plans to go to college, then a transition assessment of prospective colleges may be made by the student and family. Admissions procedures, support services, and accessibility of housing might be areas to investigate. Analyzing a potential work environment can shed light on skills, aptitude, and personality a student needs for success in that desired career area.

Using the results of transition assessment to create the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students?

Data on student strengths and needs that may affect the realization of postsecondary goals are summarized in the Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLAAFP) of the IEP. Students and IEP teams must determine the extent to which students possess strengths necessary to pursue coursework, co-curricular activities, and extra-curricular activities that match their interests and preferences. Where student strengths do not support postschool visions, the student may use career-related experiences or activities, along with instruction in school, to acquire the desired strengths or to modify the vision. This process of collecting and analyzing data continues over the course of the transition planning years until desirable, realistic visions for post-school lives are in harmony with students' interests, preferences, and strengths. Students' visions for their lives can change with time and experience. IEP teams can strategically identify needs to be addressed as they create coordinated sets of transition activities that move students toward their goals. Needs identified in the PLAAFP drive the remaining components of the transition IEP: transition services, including courses of study

and transition activities, annual goals, related services, and supplementary aids and services (Virginia Department Of Education & Training and Technical Assistance Center at the College of William & Mary, 2014).

Are accommodations allowed when conducting transition assessment?

Standardized tests generally indicate allowable accommodations on the basis of disability. If non-approved accommodations are used, standardized scores, norms and percentiles should not be used to report scores, or the accommodation must be referenced when reporting scores.

Are there transition assessments that work especially well for students from certain geographic areas or with certain disabilities?

Students with more significant disabilities have benefitted from an assessment process termed “Discovery,” within an Individualized Career Planning Model (Condon & Callahan, 2008). Morgan and Openshaw (2011) offer a transition assessment model for students with disabilities who live in rural areas and who plan on remaining in that area upon graduation. This targeted transition assessment model matches student interests and skills with jobs likely to be available in the local area and incorporates contacts with friends and family to increase opportunities for employment.

How does self-determination relate to transition assessment?

Self-determined people have skills and attitudes that help them take control of their lives and become contributing adults in society. They understand their strengths and needs and have strategies to succeed despite limitations. Self-determined individuals have gained knowledge and skills, such as goal-setting, self-advocacy, and self-awareness. Self-determination skills are important for a successful transition from high school and throughout life. As a result of research findings and advocacy, teaching self-determination has become a best practice in special education.

Self-determination need not be seen as a separate component or activity in a student’s educational programming. Rather, it is most useful when regarded as an organizing concept throughout all aspects of transition planning, including transition assessment. The IDEA requirement for postsecondary goals “based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests [34 CFR 300.43 (a) [20 U.S.C. 1401(34)]” affirms the central role of the student.

Students and families are central to transition planning and should be involved from the beginning in determining what assessments will be most useful to move the student toward their chosen life goals. Transition assessment that incorporates the student’s voice and family’s input might include self-reports, interviews, self-evaluation of progress through checklists, questionnaires or other devices for self-monitoring and self-assessment. As students gain experience and self-knowledge related to their transition goals, they and their families can continue to be involved in choosing transition assessments.

Is consent required to conduct transition assessment?

If decisions about which transition assessments will be given are reflected in the IEP document, then consent for those transition assessments is considered given at the time that the IEP is signed. If the assessment is administered outside of an IEP requirement and is administered to all students, consent may not be required unless the school division requires consent from the parent of all children (8 VAC 20-81-170.E.2.b).

Any other assessments require consent before administration, unless the assessment is a review of an existing record. For example, if the IEP team determines that assessment of “motor skills” or “functional capability” are necessary to transition planning, since these assessments (evaluations) are designed to measure the student’s specific needs, consent is required before administering (8VAC 20-81-170.E.1.a). Further clarification may be found at 8VAC 20-81-170.E.1 and 2.

Local policies on obtaining parental consent to administer assessments may vary. Those conducting transition assessments should check local policies.

How does transition assessment relate to other required documents?

During a student's secondary school experience, other documents related to their future endeavors will be developed, including the Academic and Career Plan and Summary of Performance (SoP).

Academic and Career Plans are required for all students starting in 7th grade with periodic reviews. Each student’s individual plan should include two major components: (1) their program of study for middle and high school and (2) a postsecondary career pathway based on their academic and career interests. A student’s program of study includes the type of diploma he/she is working toward achieving and the middle and high school courses they should take. Also included are the student’s participation in extracurricular activities; career and technical student organizations; work-based learning opportunities and community service. Each student’s program of study should be directly related to their career goal. The development of the student’s postsecondary career pathway and program of study should include the reviews of transition assessment data and relate to the interests, contributions, and strengths identified therein.

A SoP is a document that is required and provided to each student upon graduating with a standard or advanced studies diploma or reaching the age of 22, (8 VAC 20-81-90F.1). It outlines the student’s academic and functional performance and offers recommendations for meeting postsecondary goals. The SoP offers a means for school divisions to organize and share assessment data with rehabilitation counselors, adult agency service providers, college disability support services offices, and others who may work with the students in the future. Sharing assessment data can be helpful for determining eligibility for services and to avoid duplicating assessment services. A summary of transition assessment results should be included in the SoP.

Final words

Throughout the transition years, multiple evaluations administered on an ongoing basis and covering education and training, employment and independent living, will yield the best data. The continuous process of collecting and using assessment data to shape students’ visions for adult life should result in the eventual development of postsecondary goals that reflect realistic, satisfying plans for the future (Sitlington et al., 2007)

Resources

Guidance on choosing assessment tools, conducting transition assessments, and using the information:

[**Age Appropriate Transition Assessment Toolkit –4th edition**](#), developed by NTACTION, offers information on selecting transition assessment instruments and methods, and on conducting age appropriate transition assessments. (free)

[**AIR Self-Determination Scale**](#) produces a profile of the student's level of self-determination, identifies areas of strength and areas needing improvement, and identifies specific educational goals that can be incorporated into the student's IEP. (free)

[**Assistive Technology Protocol for Transition Planning**](#) is designed to provide the transition team with specific questions that will help determine if additional assistive technology may be needed in a future environment. (free)

[**Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery \(ASVAB\)**](#) is an assessment used by the military to measure skills needed for military service. This website provides information and links to sample questions. (free)

[**Career Occupational Preference System Interest Inventory \(COPS\)**](#) and related assessments are appropriate for middle, high, and college students based on interests, abilities, and values. Additional tests are available for non-readers and those with limited English language skills (cost).

[**CareerZone**](#) provides several online transition assessments including money choices and interests, work importance and skills profilers along with a quick assessment. (free)

[**C.I.T.E.**](#) helps educators and students determine the learning styles preferred by the students. (free)

[**Community Based Functional Skills Assessment for Transition Aged Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorder**](#) was designed to help parents and professionals assess skill levels and abilities of individuals with autism beginning at age 12. (free)

[**Find My Strengths**](#) is an online multiple intelligence assessment that provides an opportunity for individuals to determine which intelligences are strongest. (free)

[**A Guide to Assessing College Readiness**](#) assists students and families in determining college readiness over 5 domains. (free)

[**Holland Occupational Themes \(RIASEC\)**](#) uses personality questions that focus on career and vocational choice. It groups people on the basis of their suitability for six different categories of occupations. (free)

[**It's My Choice**](#) is a self-guided workbook on person-centered planning by William T. Allen published by the MN Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. (free)

[**The Environmental Job Assessment Measure \(E-JAM\)**](#) allows an educator to rate students across descriptors in job areas using a job analysis format. The job areas are: general work behaviors, physical demands of the job, working conditions, educational demands, and social interaction on the job. (free)

[**Employability/Life Skills Assessment**](#) is a criterion-referenced checklist used to assess a student's level of performance in the twenty-four critical employability skill areas identified by Ohio's Employability Skills Project. (free)

[**Employability Pictures**](#) provides free downloadable pictures that relate to: Jobs, tasks and activities; Objects; People; Places and other related illustrations. (free)

[**Life Skills Inventory: Independent-Living Skills Assessment Tool**](#) is an assessment that can be completed by a parent or educator to address the domains of money management, health, independent living, transportation, employment, postsecondary education, and social/interpersonal skills. (free)

[**Listen to Me**](#) is a workbook to assist students in moving towards the life that they want to lead. (free)

[**Mapping Your Future**](#) is designed to help students, families, and schools navigate the higher education and student loan processes and includes assessments for career exploration. (free)

[**O*NET Interest Profiler**](#) helps students identify career interests and how they relate to the world of work. (free)

[**Picture Interest Career Survey**](#) offers a visual way to identify career interests in either paper/pencil or electronic formats. (free)

[**Transition Planning Inventory \(TPI\)**](#) provides a systematic way to address critical transition planning areas that take into account the individual student's needs, preferences, and interests. Information is gathered from the student, parents or guardians, and school personnel. (cost)

[**Transition Assessment and Goal Generator \(TAGG\)**](#) is an online assessment which provides a norm-based graphic profile, present level of performance lists of strengths and needs, and suggested IEP annual transition goals for secondary-aged youth. (free)

[**WATI Assistive Technology Assessment**](#) is a process based, systematic approach to providing a functional evaluation of the student's need for assistive technology. (free)

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