

VOCATIONAL TRANSITION ASSESSMENT

The transition from school to work and/or community adult living can be difficult for all students—and uniquely so for those with disabilities. The tasks of choosing a job and preparing for work, deciding to go to college or trade school, deciding where to live and with whom and other areas of decision making present youth with disabilities the challenge of having to make complex decisions. Professionals can assist students in making these decisions by involving students in meaningful assessments that will assist in matching the students' abilities and preferences to appropriate academic, vocational and functional education programs.

One area of particular challenge to staff working with students with disabilities is assessing vocational skills and abilities. Obtaining meaningful employment is too important to leave to chance. It requires “thinking up front” to assist the student in being motivated to develop his or her potential and to view meaningful employment as a viable option for **ALL** students with disabilities.

An Operational Definition of Transition Assessment

“Transition assessment is a planned, continuous process of obtaining, organizing, and using information to assist individuals with disabilities of all ages and their families in making all critical transitions in students' lives both successful and satisfying.”

—Assessment for Transitions Planning (Clark, 1998)

Purpose of Transition Assessment

A clear understanding of the student's strengths and needs is critical to developing and implementing effective transition plans.

The purpose of transition assessment is to help Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams determine the appropriate courses of study and community/vocational experiences that the student will need to be successful in postschool goals. Whether a student is interested to pursue postsecondary education, trade school, employment (supported included) or other activities associated with adult living, assessments will provide valuable information about the student's abilities and deficits.

Transition assessment can assist teams to:

- Determine strengths, abilities, and deficits
- Identify interests and preferences
- Determine appropriate instructional settings
- Determine level of self-determination skills
- Determine necessary accommodations, supports, and services

Vocational Assessment

“Vocational assessment is a systematic, ongoing process designed to help students and their parents, [and other adults involved in the transition process] understand a young person’s vocational preferences and potential” (NICHY, 1990)—the primary purpose of which is to gather “employability” information about the student.

The assessment process can include:

- Observations
- Anecdotal information
- On-the-job tryouts
- Classroom performance examples,
- Tests
- Work samples
- Apprenticeships
- Paid work experiences
- Work student program

These assessments provide valuable information about the student’s interests, aptitudes, needs for accommodations/modifications, attitude toward work, work habits and behaviors, tolerance for work, and self-concept. And the assessment process provides a circle of feedback where the student learns about him/herself and the parents and professionals learn about the student.

The vocational assessment process can take place at different points in a student’s life. However, IDEA '97 requires the IEP team to consider the vocational needs of all students and to address these needs in IEP development and implementation.

Uses of Vocational Assessment Data

Category	Description
Determination of Career Development	To find out where the student stands in terms of: career awareness, orientation, exploration, preparation, placement, or growth/maintenance. Appropriate for middle school/early junior high and beyond (Neubeert, 1985).
Measurement	To identify abilities, interests, capabilities, strengths, needs, potentials, and behaviors within the areas of personal/social functional/academic, community/independent, employment and employability areas. Initial testing appropriate for middle school; more involved analyses appropriate for high school and beyond (Neubeert, 1985).
Prediction	To match an individual’s interests and abilities with appropriate vocational training, community employment, or postsecondary training. Appropriate for high school (Neubeert, 1985).
Prescription	To identify strengths and needs, and to recommend types of adaptive techniques and/or remedial strategies that will lead to improved career development and vocational preparation. Appropriate for high school and young adults and beyond (Neubeert, 1985).

Exploration	To “try out” different work-related tasks or vocational activities and to determine how interests match abilities for vocational education programs, community jobs, postsecondary, or other adult activities. Appropriate for high school and young adults (Neubeert, 1985).
Intervention	To implement the techniques or remedial strategies that will help a student explore vocational or work options. Appropriate for high school and beyond (Leconte, 1986).
Advocacy	To develop a vocational profile to help students, their families, and others identify concrete ways to assist students in achieving their goals. Appropriate for high school and beyond (Leconte, 1986). -NICHCY, Interstate Research Associates, Washington DC

Assessment Instruments for Transition Planning

The following list of resources is intended to provide a “starting point” for IEP teams to use when determining what type of vocational assessment tool to choose. (No endorsement of any instrument is intended or implied.)

Arc’s Self-Determination Scale

The Arc of the United States
500 E Border St, Suite 300
Arlington TX 76010

BRIGANCE

Life Skills Inventory
Curriculum Associates, Inc.
PO Box 2001
North Billerica MA 01862

Enderle-Severson Transition Scales

Practical Press
PO Box 455
Moorhead MN 56561

Checklist of Adaptive Living Skills (CALs)

Riverside Publishing Co.
8420 Bryn Mawr Blvd
Chicago IL 60631

Functional Skills Assessment and Programming Catalog

Milligan Catalogs
11212 S Hawk Hwy
Sandy UT 84094

Inventory for Client and Agency Planning (ICAP)

Riverside Publishing Co.
8420 Bryn Mawr Blvd.
Chicago IL 60631

Life-Centered Career Education (LCCE) Knowledge and Performance Batteries

Council for Exceptional Children
1110 N Glebe Rd
Arlington VA 22201-5704

Self-Determination Knowledge Scale

Wayne State University
Office of the Dean
441 Education Bldg.
Detroit MI 48202

Independent Living Behavior Checklist

West Virginia Research and Training Ctr
One Dunbar Plaza, Suite E
Dunbar WV 25064

Tests for Everyday Living

CTB/McGraw-Hill
20 Ryan Ranch Rd
Monterey CA 93940

Transition Behavior Scale

Hawthorne Educational Services, Inc.
PO Box 7570
Columbia MO 65205

Transition Planning Inventory

PRO-ED, Inc.
8700 Shoal Creek Blvd
Austin TX 78757

Transition Skills Inventory

PRO-ED, Inc.
8700 Shoal Creek Blvd
Austin TX 78757

Work Adjustment Rating Form

Educational Testing Service
Princeton NJ 08541

Work Adjustment Scale

Hawthorne Educational Services, Inc.
PO Box 7570
Columbia MO 65205

Taken in part from Assessment for Transitions Planning, Clark, 1998, PRO-ED.

Professionals in the Vocational Assessment Process

It is important for professionals to collaborate in the assessment process. There are many professionals, with various areas of expertise, who can contribute at some level. These professionals may include:

- Parents
- Special education teacher
- Guidance counselors
- Vocational educators
- Vocational evaluators (also referred to as Vocational Assessment Specialists)
- Rehabilitation professionals
- School psychologists
- Social workers
- Employers

Each of these professionals will play a different role in the assessment process. For example:

Special education teacher - She/he will work closely with the student and family in identifying an individual's needs and areas of interest and in collaboration with the family and other IEP team members, and will work to develop IEP goals for the student. The special education teacher will likely be responsible for planning what vocational assessments are needed, and will collect information formally and anecdotally about the student's academic strengths, employability skills, interpersonal skills and other skills related to career awareness and aptitude.

Guidance Counselor – In some schools this is the person responsible for working with students to plan their future, including students with disabilities. A counselor may assist students by giving the assessment, or by helping students explore college/trade school or employment options through programs available on computer, e.g., Career Information Systems (CIS). The counselor may also be the case manager responsible for collecting and coordinating assessment information from teacher, parents and others.

Vocational educators – Vocational educators are those teachers who teach such classes as auto repair or data entry. They can assist by working with vocational evaluators, special education teachers and counselors to assess students in the vocational classroom or work site. They may also monitor student progress in vocational programs through curriculum-based vocational assessments.

Vocational Evaluators/Vocational Assessment Specialists – These are the professionals most likely to do vocational assessments of a student. They may also serve as consultants to others, or they may coordinate the assessment activities of others. These are professionals who frequently work within secondary or vocational school settings, within community-based programs, in industry, adult rehabilitative

services, adult job training services, and community colleges or other postsecondary educational settings.

Parents – Parents play a vital role in assisting their students to achieve their desired postschool outcomes that include finding and maintaining employment. Parents are the foremost advocate and advisor for their student and they can provide valuable support and resources during the assessment process. Parents know their child! One simple example of how a parent can support the process is by providing transportation to a work site when other means of transportation are unavailable or limited.

Transition Assessment Sources

The Individuals with Disability Education Act of 1997 (IDEA '97) permits all available evaluation data to be considered when determining assessment needs for eligibility and/or IEP development. Frequently standardized assessments are viewed as providing the more “valued” data for defining a student’s strengths and deficits. However, other sources of assessment have relevance to the process and should be considered by the team in proportion to standardized assessments.

Some sources of non-standardized assessments include:

- Informal interviews with student and parents
- Vocational assessments
- Interest inventories
- Teacher observations
- Information from guidance counselors
- Formal assessments
- Previous IEP’s and diagnostic summaries
- Permanent record

Results of Student-Centered Assessments

Student-centered assessment assists teams to develop and implement quality transition programs and experiences. The results of student-centered assessment are:

Individualized ongoing process for success
Defines goals
Drives curriculum and instruction
Areas of assessments may include:

- Work/job skills
- Basic skills
- Communication skills
- Ability to follow directions
- Personal hygiene and grooming
- Ability to work with others

- Work habits
- Preferred learning style

All of this information can then inform and be articulated in the Present Level of Educational Performance (PLEP) that is a required content area of the Individualized Education Program (IEP).

Present Levels of Educational Performance (PLEP)

Oregon Administrative Rule 581-015-0068 states:

(1) The individualized education program shall include:

- (a) A statement of the child's present levels of educational performance, including how the child's disability affects the child's involvement and progress in the general curriculum.

A good portion of the information contained in the PLEP is derived from the assessments given. The PLEP must include how the student is currently functioning and is based on information derived from assessments such as classroom tests and assignments, standardized tests, observations, feedback from parents, students, teachers, related service providers, outside agency participants and other involved parties. This statement must also include how the child's disability affects his or her ability to participate and progress in the general curriculum and how the disability affects the student's ability to learn.

A clear understanding of the student's present level of performance is critical to developing an effective special education program that includes the appropriate accommodations and modifications necessary for the student to learn. The PLEP should be consistent with the information derived from assessments conducted and/or observations made of the student.

Conclusion

Early vocational skill building and ongoing vocational assessment can and will support students to make a successful transition from school to the world of work. Vocational assessment can assist parents, professionals and the student to think strategically and plan thoughtfully and carefully about the future.