

**Virginia Department of
Education**

**Transition
Assessment
Packet
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Transition Assessment

Transition assessment is an integral component of the secondary transition process for students with disabilities. Because the term “transition assessment” is new in the re-authorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), many transition practitioners, parents, and youth wrestle with questions related to assessment:

- What does “transition assessment” mean?
- How often should a student be assessed?
- What kinds of assessments are available and/or useful?
- How is assessment data infused into the Individualized Education Program (IEP)?

A comprehensive understanding and implementation of transition assessment is critical to the successful transition of youth with disabilities to adult life.

Regulatory Requirement

IDEA 2004 includes a requirement to conduct transition assessment. The mandate is stated as follows:

Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16 and then updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and independent living skills, where appropriate. (§300.320)

Definition of Transition Assessment

Transition assessment is a structured, coordinated effort that involves collecting data on students’ strengths, preferences, and interests related to their postsecondary goals (Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, & Leconte, 2007) as well as needs that may impact the realization of postsecondary goals. Clark (2007) sums up transition assessment as a continuous process that includes “obtaining, organizing, and using information” (p. 2) to support students with disabilities and their families in making critical decisions related to transitioning successfully to adult life.

Scope of Transition Data

Part A of the Definition of Transition Services in IDEA 2004 (§300.43) identifies seven areas of adult life for which secondary schools may need to prepare students, as determined by the IEP Team. It may be necessary to gather information in any or all of the areas listed.

- Postsecondary Education
- Vocational Education
- Community Participation
- Continuing/Adult Education
- Adult Services
- Independent Living
- Integrated Employment

Types of Transition Assessment Data to Be Collected

According to IDEA 2004, students' strengths, preferences, and interests must be included in the IEP, and subsequently translated into measurable postsecondary and annual goals. To comply with federal regulations regarding transition assessment, schools must ensure that this information is collected, measured, and reported. Systematic use of formal (standardized) and informal (non-standardized) transition assessments provides the foundation for developing postsecondary goals and supporting annual goals and services (Clark, 2007).

Formal assessments are standardized instruments backed by data showing that they are reliable, valid measures. They typically contain standardized procedures for administration, scoring, and interpretation, and scores may be compared across student populations.

Clark (2007) identifies the following types of formal assessments:

- Academic achievement tests
- Cognitive functioning assessments
- Adaptive behavior scales
- Aptitude tests
- Interest inventories
- Personality scales
- Quality-of-life scales
- Social skills inventories
- Self-determination scales
- Prevocational/employability scales
- Vocational skills assessments
- Transition knowledge and skills inventories

In contrast to formal assessments, informal assessments are non-standardized measures that often do not contain reliability and validity measures. Criterion referenced assessments measure performance against a specific criteria. Informal assessment procedures are typically less structured and do not allow for score comparisons across student populations.

Clark (2007) lists the following examples of informal/non-standardized assessment measures:

- Learning styles inventories/observational assessments
- Curriculum-based assessments
- Observational reports from various sources (parents, teachers, employers, etc.)
- Situational assessments in home, community, and work settings
- Environmental assessments (specific to the student's placement options)
- Medical appraisals
- Structured interviews with students, parents, teachers, etc.
- Adaptive, behavioral, or functional skills inventories or checklists
- Social histories
- Rating scales and checklists for general and specific planning areas
- Applied technology/vocational education prerequisite skills assessments
- Personal future planning activities/procedures

Transition Assessment Process

The transition assessment process begins with the collection of data on students' interests and preferences in relation to the seven areas of transition planning listed in Part A of the Definition of Transition Services in IDEA 2004 (§300.43). Data pertaining to students' visions for adult life provide the basis on which all further assessment activities are conducted. These data are gathered using formal and/or informal assessments such as those listed above. Assessment results inform the next steps in gathering transition assessment data related to students' potential for realizing their post-school vision.

Kochhar-Bryant (2007) identifies the following guiding questions to consider as part of this process:

- What knowledge and skills does the student need to successfully enter employment, postsecondary education, adult services, independent living, or community participation?
- What knowledge and skills does the student currently demonstrate in each of these areas?
- What knowledge and skills does the student still need to acquire over the next few years? (p. 37)

Before considering a process to embrace, it is a good idea to determine where a division currently is in relation to capacity. In *Assessment for Transitions Planning* (Clark, 2007) capacity is discussed in terms of minimum, intermediate, and advanced capacity. The table below is adapted from this book.

Minimum	Intermediate	Advanced
All students receive at least one general transition screening instrument every year	All students receive at least one general transition screening instrument every year	All students receive at least one general transition screening instrument every year
All students participate in their district and state wide assessment program	All students participate in their district and state wide assessment program	All students participate in their district and state wide assessment program
When called for, students receive functional evaluations	When called for, students receive functional evaluations	When called for, students receive functional evaluations
	Supplemental assessments are administered for any student, as needed	Supplemental assessments are administered for any student, as needed
		Specialized assessments are provided as necessary

Because these assessments vary widely and serve individual needs, they are completed by many people with differing credentials. The following people may be involved in completing appropriate transition assessments:

- | | |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Parents | Family members |
| Teachers | VR counselor |
| Students | Job coach |
| Paraprofessionals | Psychologist |
| Occupational Therapist | Vocational evaluator |
| Speech and Language Therapist | School nurse |
| School counselor | Employment vendor |
| Social worker | Physical Therapist |

Although IDEA 2004 prescribes that transition assessment must begin no later than the IEP completed when the student turns 16, Clark (2007) suggests starting this planning process as early as elementary school. Furthermore, he recommends organizing the assessment activities by age/grade level.

The chart below identifies areas to be assessed across students' lifespans. It is important to remember that this process is continuous, since educators must take into consideration changes in students' interests, preferences, and strengths as they mature.

Adapted (Clark, 2007) transition assessment timeline.

(This timeline is only a guide. Assessments can occur earlier and/or continue later.)

Elementary	Middle	High	Adult
Student/family interests and preferences →			
Physical health and fitness →			
Motor skills →			
Speech/language development	Communication skills and pragmatics →		
Cognitive development	Cognitive performance →		
Basic skills	Academic achievement →		
(MS through HS)	Learning styles and study strategies →		
Adaptive skills →			
Socialization skills →			
Emotional development	Emotional development and mental health →		Mental health
Independent and interdependent living skills →			
Play skills	Recreation skills	Recreation and leisure skills →	
Pre-employability skills →		Employability and vocational skills →	
Self-determination skills →			

Community participation	—————▶
Supports, linkages, and services	—————▶

Natural times to discuss the collection of this type of information are during the IEP Team meeting and the triennial meeting, when the child is re-evaluated. Parents and other professionals who have information and expertise are included in these meetings. Additionally, if parental consent is needed to gather certain types of information, they can provide written consent at the meeting.

Incorporating Assessment Data into the IEP

Data pertaining to students' interests, preferences, and strengths are used to develop appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals. Data on postsecondary goals, interests, and preferences, and data pertaining to student strengths and needs that may impact the realization of the postsecondary goals are summarized in the Present Level of Performance (PLoP) on the IEP. Needs identified in the PLoP drive the remaining components of the IEP transition services, including courses of study and transition activities, annual goals, and accommodations.

Organization of Transition Assessment Data

Clark (2007) identifies the following methods for organizing data gathered through the transition assessment process:

- Place documents in students' cumulative files so they are easily attainable to IEP team members.
- Compile transition assessment data in a portfolio. An example of a portfolio used for transition assessment data collection may be found at www.rockingham.k12.va.us/rcps_sped/SVRP/svrp.htm. This is a free website designed by the Shenandoah Valley Regional Project.

Summary of Performance Requirements

The SoP is required under IDEA 2004, as follows:

For a child whose eligibility under special education terminates due to graduation with a regular diploma, or due to exceeding the age of eligibility, the local education agency shall provide the child with a summary of the child's academic achievement and functional performance, which shall include recommendations on how to assist the child in meeting the child's postsecondary goals (§300.305).

According to Sitlington et al. (2007), the SoP offers a means for school divisions to organize and provide assessment data for students as they leave the school system. This final compilation of transition assessment data is intended to assist students in self-advocating for appropriate accommodations in postsecondary settings and similar situations.

Consent to Assess

There are variations in the procedures local education agencies use to obtain parental consent to conduct assessment. Always follow the local education agency's policies and procedure for obtaining consent. If your local education agency does not have a policy about when to seek written consent to assess, consider asking that one be developed.

References

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- Kochhar-Bryant, C.A. *What every teacher should know about transition and IDEA 2004*. Boston: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Sitlington, P. L., Neubert, D. A., Begun, W. H., Lombard, R. C., & Leconte, P. J. (2007). *Assess for success* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.