

METHODS OF GATHERING INFORMATION

Development of a student's postsecondary goals requires professionals, students with disabilities, and their families to view assessment as an ongoing process. However, this does not mean that new methods and models of assessment are needed. Rather, it is necessary to determine what information is currently available, what additional information is needed and, what methods of assessment would be most effective. Critical transition points for individuals with disabilities, along with relevant assessment information, need to be identified to make appropriate planning and placement decisions. There is a wealth of information collected in a variety of ways in the general education and special education system that can be used to help plan for transition. However, more specific information, especially in planning for employment, usually needs to be gathered.

Transition assessment typically includes some combination of paper and pencil tests, student and family interviews, community or work-based (situational) assessments and curriculum-based assessments. NSTTAC (2013) recommends that these assessments

1. "...incorporate assistive technology or accommodations that will allow an individual to demonstrate his or her abilities and potential.
2. ...occur in environments that resemble actual vocational training, employment, and independent living or community environments.
3. ...produce outcomes that contribute to ongoing development, planning and implementation of "next steps" in the individual's transition process.
4. ...be varied and include a sequence of activities that sample an individual's behavior and skills over time.
5. ...be verified by more than one method and by more than one person.
6. ...synthesized and interpreted to individuals with disabilities, their families, and transition team members.
7. ...be documented in a format that can be used to facilitate transition planning (p.6)."

The transition assessment process should focus on deciding what type of assessment data to collect, who will collect the data, and how the results will be used.

These assessments generally come in two formats-formal and informal. Formal assessments may include personality or preference tests, career development measures, adaptive behavior and independent living assessments, measures of self-determination, achievement tests, intelligence tests, aptitude tests, and on the job or training evaluations.

Informal assessments may include interviews and surveys, behavior observation forms, rating scales, situational assessments, interest inventories, anecdotal records, preference assessments, curriculum-based assessments and checklists.

FORMAL ASSESSMENT

Formal transition assessments usually involve using standardized instrument for administering, scoring, and interpreting an assessment. This allows a student's score to be interpreted compared to other students (e.g. norms). However, not all standardized assessments are norm-referenced. Although these assessments provide useful data in determining aptitudes, skills and abilities, usually, further assessment in "real" environments needs to be done.

Advantages of Formal Assessments include:

- Provide norming process, validity and reliability
- Compares student to others his/her age
- Is often a starting point for determining career development activities
- Is usually enjoyable for students – hands on tests.

Disadvantages of Formal Assessments include:

- Can be costly
- Lack of availability
- May be time consuming to give and take
- May be limited to use by a professional with a requisite qualification.

Examples of Formal Assessments:

- Self-Directed Search Form R or E
- Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB)
- Brigance Transition Skills Inventory
- Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children
- The Vineland – II
- Woodcock Johnson Test of Achievement
- ACT Plan (grade 10)
- Reading Free Vocational Interest Inventory
- Enderle-Severson Transition Rating Scales (ESTR-R and ESTR-III)

INFORMAL ASSESSMENT

Informal assessments provide measures of student performance over time and are useful in determining the effectiveness of instructional interventions. However, they do not allow for comparison to other students. Information accumulated and documented by observing the student as he/she participates in various academic and work experiences, talking with the student about likes and dislikes, and setting up experiences that will allow the student to try something that he/she thinks may be of interest provides a wealth of informal data.

Advantages of Informal Assessment:

- Inexpensive/sometimes free
- Seldom have professional qualifications for use
- Provides good, usable information especially when used on an ongoing basis by more than one person (increases validity)
- Information can be easily attained from questionnaires, interviews, observations, etc.

Disadvantages of Informal Assessment:

- May be time consuming to arrange and/or set up tryouts.
- Some careers cannot be “tried out”- like therapists.
- Expressed interests can be narrow and only reflect the student’s limited experiences
- Lack formal norming process, and reliability or validity information

Examples of Informal Assessments:

- Behavior Checklists
- Transition Planning Inventory
- Curriculum Based Assessments
- Situational Assessments
- Interest Inventories
- Environmental/ecological Checklists
- Job Try Outs
- Interviews and Surveys

HOW DO I DECIDE WHICH INSTRUMENTS AND METHODS TO USE?

1. Become familiar with the various types of transition assessments available including their characteristics remembering that you need multiple assessments that are ongoing viewed through a transition lens.
2. Choose assessments that assist students with answering the following questions:
 - a. Who am I?
 - b. What are my unique talents and interests?
 - c. What do I want in life, now and in the future?
 - d. What are some of life's demands that I can meet now?
 - e. What are the main barriers to getting what I want from school and my community? And
 - f. What are my options in the school and community for preparing me for what I want to do, now and in the future?
3. Select assessments that are appropriate for your students considering the nature of the disability, the students' post-school goals, and opportunities in the community.

(NSTTAC, 2013)

Whichever assessments are chosen, the data should inform your decisions in developing realistic and meaningful transition IEPs, guide instructional programming decisions, assist students in making connections between their post-school goals and their academic plan, and finally, inform the Summary of Performance.

Interest Inventories

Interest inventories can provide valuable information regarding a student's interests. However, particularly with career/vocational interest inventories, the information must be considered with caution. The validity of the results is only as accurate as the student understands the world of work. Because students assessed are often teenagers, their understanding is limited to their own job experiences and the jobs they have seen others perform like teachers, lawyers, doctors, professional athletes, police officers, firefighters, waiters, and store clerks – to name a few. Even though these jobs are visible jobs, what the public sees is not necessarily a complete look at the job. The only way to really understand a job is to spend time job shadowing or participating in a tryout of that job. As an example:

A student who struggles with reading and does not like to read and write wants to be a lawyer. This student sees lawyers as people who argue verbally in court, have power and perhaps help people and/or society. It is the assessor's job to determine what it is about this job that is appealing. If this student really understood that lawyers spend a great deal of time researching, reading and writing, this career may not be as appealing.

However, one can learn important information about the kinds of careers a student identifies as interesting from these inventories. The student may be saying that prestige or good salaries are important. He/she may be saying that helping people is important. The student may be saying that moving around, physical work is important. Acknowledging this and considering environments which provide for these values are critical in helping students discover and define interests. Even if a student is interested in a specific job that seems to be a poor match, a job in that environment may fulfill the student's work values and needs. For example:

John wants to be a doctor, but because of cognitive and physical limitations, this is probably not realistic. But other jobs within hospitals and nursing homes exist that would allow John to work in the medical field.

There are a wide range of interest inventories available on the market today. Many address the needs of non-readers, students with low reading skills and students who are fluent readers. Several are computer based and provide the student with a video description of various jobs that may be difficult to visit in the community. Further, there are several that are posted on the internet and students can take them online. Refer to the Resources section of the kit for specific inventories and publishers. There are also some examples of student inventories provided for you in the Tools and Templates section.

Situational Assessment

The most useful strategy for gaining meaningful information about a student's strengths, limitations and interests is to perform an assessment in an actual environment, doing real work tasks. This can be accomplished by defining specific tasks, teaching a student to perform them, and then observing the student while completing them. This must be done in the actual work environment.

Another way to accomplish this type of assessment is to evaluate a work environment based on requirements of the job such as hours, dress and grooming, communication with the public, physical skills, etc. Then, evaluate a student's ability to meet these requirements by observing him/her for a period of time working in the environment. This can sometimes be accomplished by setting up a tryout or unpaid work experience with the employer. Then, if the student is able to meet the requirements, with or without accommodations, he/she may have an opportunity to be hired for pay. The Job/Student Match worksheet included in Tab 7, Tools and Templates section of the kit provides a template for doing an environmental assessment and setting up a situational assessment.

Charlie wants to work at McDonalds. He would be proud to wear a uniform and enjoys being around people, especially children. However, Charlie has difficulty following routine steps and may not have the physical skills to do the job. He has had several in school jobs and is able to complete tasks when the routine is consistent and his time is structured. The employer has agreed to allow Charlie to do an unpaid tryout to determine his continued interest and ability to do the job. If he is successful, he could be hired part time for the remainder of the school year.

Sara has expressed an interest in working as an administrative assistant or a receptionist. She has good communication skills although her typing speed is slow and she has difficulty spelling. She would like to try a job in an office setting to see if she would enjoy this type of work. Sara's teacher and DVR counselor make arrangements for Sara to spend a day at a busy government office working with the receptionist. She has the opportunity to do some filing, make copies and assemble reports, and answer the phone. She learns that she is pretty good at filing by number, but will need more practice on alphabetizing and taking messages in order to work in this type of job. She learns that there are jobs available as file clerks and in the document production center that may be of interest to her and a better match with her current skills. This experience gives Sara and her teacher valuable information about the kinds of things that she will need to work on during the next year.

Environmental Assessment

Like situational assessment, evaluating an environment and then matching a student's skills and interests to that environment and the job tasks required, provides an excellent means for gathering useful information. Often, a student may express interest in a specific career or in a particular type of environment. In looking at other assessment information, it may be determined that the student would not be able to perform the desired career, but may find great success and interest in working in that environment. Other jobs in that environment should be evaluated with the skills of the student in mind. If an apparent match is found, the student should have an opportunity to participate in a situational assessment.

An 18 year old young man with developmental disabilities has expressed an interest in becoming a doctor. Because of his cognitive limitations, this will not be possible. He likes medical environments. A nursing home and nearby hospital are evaluated for other jobs that may be of interest to him, and require skills he can perform. A job at the nursing home, delivering meals to patients and picking up trays when done, is available. It seems to be a match because it allows the young man to have contact with the patients and medical staff and requires skills that he has. After a short volunteer time, which provides the school and nursing home staff with assessment information and allows the young man to determine his interest in the job, the job is offered to him for pay.

Students are involved in activities at home, in school, and in the community that provide ready assessment opportunities. At these times, parents or the school staff accompanying the student(s) should determine specific skills to be assessed during the activity. Whether the environment is in the school building, at home, in a grocery store or at the mall, a variety of skills and behaviors related to work can be evaluated. Use these opportunities to learn about the student.

A small group of students go to the mall once a week to shop, learn money handling skills and improve abilities to ask for information. During one or more of these outings, assessment of a student's ability to communicate with others, follow directions, find items, and ask for assistance, will provide important information about the student's self-confidence and support the student may need to be independent. All of these same skills are needed in work environments and for living interdependently.

Observations in classrooms and student's reports of their abilities to advocate for the accommodations needed in general education classes can also provide assessment information related to work. The ability to advocate and explain needs to an employer is necessary skills for success.

More information and activities to help you consider jobs in different environments are provided in the Career Development section of the Toolkit.

Job/Vocational Program Tryouts

Tryouts are assessments based on a specific occupation and occur in the actual environment of a job. Students complete a series of hands-on tasks that are required to do a particular job. Tryouts are one of the best ways to assess a student's interest in a particular job and his or her skills to perform the job. The assessor has the opportunity to witness the student's abilities and attitudes about the work while performing various tasks in the actual work environment.

An example of a tryout as a chef occurs in a restaurant or culinary arts career/technical education program. First, the student will learn basic techniques for using a knife for dicing. Then the student will dice carrots, celery and onions for use in the stock for a soup. Next, the student makes muffins using a recipe. During the course of making the muffins, the student uses a balance scale to measure flour. He also uses restaurant size and style equipment. Sanitation and safety rules are taught and followed. From these activities, information about the student's motor and reading skills, measuring, and following directions can be assessed. In addition, the observer is able to assess how quickly the student learns new skills, becomes independent in completing tasks, and his continuing interest in the field.

The following list of components should be included in a tryout assessment:

- **Analysis of knowledge, academic skills and thinking skills required.**

Include opportunities for the student to perform some of the academic tasks required in this job. For example, if forms need to be filled out, the student should complete a sample form. If math calculations are required, the student should have to perform calculations on paper, using a calculator or in their heads in order to complete the task(s).

- **Hands on activities that are actually done in a particular job or program.**

The assessor will be able to evaluate the student's speed in learning new information, frustration tolerance when faced with new material, ability to perform the task, and most importantly, the student's actual interest in the job.

- **Task analysis of the hands on tasks that will be performed.**

These tasks should be broken down into step-by-step directions.

- **Self-evaluation**

Students should have the opportunity to evaluate their own abilities to do the job and their interest in the job and the environment.

- **Assessor's evaluation**

The person assessing the student records the student's abilities, work tolerances, observed behaviors and interests. This can be done in the form of a short narrative report, completion of a checklist or a pre-made evaluation form.

SUMMARIZING, REPORTING AND DOCUMENTING THE DATA

Summarizing the Data

All information available should be used to help students develop plans which will help them define or achieve future goals. This includes records, reports from teachers, employers, family members and the student, and formal and informal assessment. The content of the career/vocational assessment summary should include a description of the student's current skills, the student's goals and suggestions for steps which will help the student achieve the goal.

Reporting the Data

Results of transition assessments should be included in the Transition IEP so that the student and family have access to the information. It should be easy to read and understand, and have recommendations for steps to be taken to achieve the student's goals. Comments about accommodations that will be necessary should also be included.

Documenting the data

It is important that all assessment information be documented in the IEP and/or other portfolio collections of student transition activities. This information should be included in the assessment portion of the IEP, and can also be mentioned in strengths and needs, in development of goals and objectives and in related services.

In addition, school staff should have a way of documenting transition skills learned within general education, job shadowing experiences, paid job experiences, volunteer activities, attendance at job or college fairs, participation in recreation and leisure activities both in school and in the community, and other experiences a student has during their years in school. This information can be recorded as part of the Transition Portfolio included with this kit's materials [See the divider in this section, "Maintaining a Body of Evidence"] and on certain areas in the IEP.

EXAMPLES USING FORMAL AND INFORMAL ASSESSMENTS FOR TRANSITION PLANNING

A student with specific learning disabilities

A student may participate in a formal career/vocational assessment in the 11th grade that indicates that she is interested in becoming an auto mechanic and that she has the eye-hand coordination and tool use skills to perform the job. A review of academic grades indicates that she received mostly C's in academic subjects with B's in art and music. She has not taken any mechanical courses. She started Algebra and dropped after the first three weeks when she felt it became too difficult. Her attendance is good and her behavior is generally appropriate. Given the assessment information we have so far, she should actually try out her interests and skills in an auto mechanic environment while teachers, as well as potential employers assess her potential for work in the field of auto mechanics. This could be accomplished by trying a variety of activities that reflect the skills needed to be an auto mechanic. The activities should occur in a technical program or in an auto shop. Sometimes, students get paid jobs working in the environment. Their interest and skills can be assessed while they are working. Sometimes employers will allow a student to spend a short period of time observing and trying various tasks in the environment

A student with developmental disabilities

A student, who participates in a special education program designed for students with developmental disabilities, has no idea what he or she is interested in pursuing as a career. Because of ongoing medical difficulties, this student will not be able to work full time. In fact, it is questionable whether he or she will be able to participate in competitive employment. Currently, the student is a sophomore in high school and is 16 years old. Formal skills assessment may not be appropriate, as it will not reflect true skill or interest. However, an interest inventory that requires no reading, or work tryouts, may offer some ideas about career opportunities that may have various job options in different environments. At this point, the options provided by volunteer experiences would be appropriate for this student. Through these informal assessments (tryouts) interest and ability can be determined. Then a volunteer or paid job can be pursued based on the information gathered.

Combining formal and informal assessments to ensure appropriate career/vocational planning

A student has stated that he is interested in working in the field of auto mechanics. An informal interest inventory supports his interests. However, further information is needed regarding specific vocational skills that apply to this field. A formal skills assessment or work sample may be given to help determine his abilities to perform tasks requiring work with his hands and with tools, his mechanical reasoning, and problem solving skills. The results suggest that the student has the motor and reasoning skills to perform the tasks. Further evaluation or data gathering should be done to assess academic ability as it applies to auto mechanics. To be sure the student is truly interested in this field, based on actual knowledge of the tasks performed and the work environment, he should participate in a job shadow or tryout.

Teachers and parents can develop a wide variety of performance tasks that simulate “real-world” job tasks that students can perform to assess their knowledge, skills, and aptitudes as well as reveal interests in career areas. Some examples might include:

- classroom messenger
- office assistant
- copier assistant
- technology monitor
- cafeteria worker
- snack bar
- coaches assistant
- jobs at home
- community volunteer

Many of these opportunities can be developed in the school for younger students or when it is difficult to make arrangements for students to be away from the school building. In addition to helping students develop important work place skills through these activities, parents and teachers can use the assessment data collected in this way throughout the transition planning process.

FAMILY / PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS

Parents are an integral part of the assessment and transition planning process from the very beginning. They have an important part to play before, during, and after the evaluation. Just as each professional assesses the student's functioning and prepares an assessment report, so should parents. Providing them with a worksheet that asks them to note their child's strengths and areas of difficulty at home and in the community can facilitate their involvement. Questionnaires, checklists and inventories provide parents with a structured way to think about their child's strengths and needs.

Use the following letter and the questionnaire designed for parents in Tab 7, Tools and Templates, (Parents – Sample Questionnaire) as examples and tools to assist you:

Dear Parents,

In order for us to get a better understanding of your child's strengths and areas of difficulty, it would be helpful if you and your family would provide the information listed on the attached questionnaire. Your child may function differently at home than he or she does in school, and it is important that we know and understand these differences.

Please complete the questionnaire and bring it with you to the meeting so that your information is included as we discuss your child's current level of functioning and needs. Thank you for taking the time to participate with us in this important step in the planning process. We look forward to working with you.

It is important that parents have the opportunity to think through and record their thoughts on their own and not through an interview process with a professional. It becomes particularly critical that the meeting be structured in such a way as to encourage and support parents to contribute their thoughts and observations. Parents report that there is nothing more degrading and humiliating than to have a professional report for them.

Providing parents with an assessment structure accomplishes several things. First, recording their specific observations may help them conceptualizing the reality of their child's abilities. It also facilitates communication among family members. Second, it gives credibility to parent's perceptions during the meeting when assessments and observations are discussed. Often when a parent disagrees with a professional observation, professionals may interpret this as parent denial of reality or an emotional reaction. However, when parents have been involved in the data collection process, the information they contribute is seen as more credible. Finally, any of these parent reports should be included in the student's profile in conjunction with the professional assessment reports.

ASSESSMENT AND TRANSITION MEETING TIPS FOR PARENTS

Suggestions for ways parents might be involved before, during and after the transition planning meeting:

Before the meeting, parents:

- May initiate the evaluation process by requesting that the school system evaluate their child for the presence of a disability and the need for special education.
- May want to ask:
 - What assessments are you considering for my child and why?
 - Could you give me some examples of some of the things my child will be doing?
 - What information will be gained from these assessments and how will the results help plan for my child's education and future?
 - Are the assessments fair and the examiners qualified?
- May wish to talk with the person responsible for conducting the assessment and the meeting to find out what it will involve.
- May wish to learn more about the assessment in general and specific issues relevant to their child.
- Might need to advocate for a thorough assessment that investigates all skill areas and uses multiple means of collecting information.
- May help prepare their child for the assessment process by explaining what will happen and where, thus, reducing any anxiety the child may have about the process. Being assessed may be a new experience for your child. It is important for the child to know that the assessment will help his / her teachers make learning easier and help plan for his / her future more effectively.
- Should complete and bring any assessment information they have to the meeting.
- Should inform the school if they need an interpreter or other accommodations for themselves during any of their discussions with the school.

During the assessment process and transition meeting, parents:

- Share their insights about their child's functioning and background with the school.
- May share any prior school records, reports, tests or assessment information available on their child with the school.
- May need to share information about cultural differences that can illuminate the *Individualized Education Program* [IEP] team's understanding of the student
- Need to make every effort to attend interviews and meetings the school sets up with them and provide information about their child.

After the assessment and transition meeting, parents:

- Need to carefully consider the results that emerge from their child's evaluation, in light of their own observation and knowledge of their child. Do the results make sense in terms of behaviors, skills, needs and attitudes they have observed in their child? Are there gaps, inconsistencies, or unexpected findings in the results that parents feel are important to address?
- Share their insights and concerns about the assessment and meeting results with the school and suggest areas where additional information may be needed. Schools may or may not act upon parent's suggestions, and parents have certain resources under law, should they feel strongly about pursuing the matter.
- Participate fully in the development of their child's IEP Transition Plan, using information from the assessment.
- Follow through with any activities agreed to in the meeting and reinforce school efforts at home.

CAREER/VOCATIONAL TRANSITION ASSESSMENTS

Interest Inventories:

Career Game / Red Hot Jobs
Rick Trow Productions, Inc.
(800) 247-9404
www.careergame.com/

COPS Interests
EdITS
(800) 416-1666
www.edits.net

Reading Free Interest Inventory
ProEd Publishers
1-877-897-3202
www.proedinc.com

CAB (Career Assessment Battery)
Video format
Piney Mountain Press, Inc.
(800) 255-3127
www.pineymountain.com

Skill Inventories:

SAM (Skills Assessment Module)
Work Samples
Piney Mountain Press, Inc.
(800) 255-3127
www.pineymountain.com

TAP
(Talent Assessment Program)
Talent Assessment, Inc.
(800) 634-1472
www.talentassessment.com

CAPS Abilities
EdITS
(800) 416-1666
www.edits.net

Social Skills Assessments:

The Walker-McConnell Scale of
Social and School Adjustment –
Adolescent Version
Pro-Ed
www.proed.com
OR
Amazon
www.amazon.com

Social Skills Improvement System
(SSIS)
(800) 627-7271
www.pearsonclinical.com

Skillstreaming Checklist
Research Press
800-519-2707
www.skillstreaming.com

Learning Styles Inventories:

PMT (Perceptual Memory Task)
McCarron-Dial Systems, Inc.
(214) 634-2863
www.mccarrondial.com

Learning/Working Styles
Piney Mountain Press, Inc.
(800) 255-3127
www.pineymountain.com

Transition-Adults: Life Skills/Functional Behavior:

SSSQ (Street Survival Skills
Questionnaire)
McCarron-Dial Systems, Inc.
(214) 634-2863
www.mccarrondial.com

On-Line Assessments

Keirsey Temperament Sorter
www.advisorteam.com/user/ktsintro.asp

Holland Test - Career Keys
www.careerkey.org/english/you/

O*Net
<http://mynextmove.org>

AIR Self-Determination Assessment	http://education.ou.edu/zarrow
ARC Self-Determination Assessment	http://education.ou.edu/zarrow
ChoiceMaker Self-Determination Assessment	www.sopriswest.com
Transition Planning Inventory (TPI)	www.proedinc.com
Scales of Independent Behavior - R	www.riverpub.com
Informal Assessments for Transition Planning	www.proedinc.com
Enderle-Severson Transition Rating Form	www.estr.net
Casey Life Skills	www.caseylifeskills.org
ACT Explorer and Plan Tests	http://www.act.org/
O*Net	mynextmove.org
SDS Form R	www.parinc.com
My Future	www.myfuture.com/toolbox/workinterest.html
I Oscar	www.ioscar.org
Career Voyages	www.careervoyages.com
Your Employment Selection (YES!)	http://yesjobsearch.com/
E -JAM	www.proedinc.com
Brigance Transition Skills Inventory	http://www.curriculumassociates.com/
C.I.T.E. Learning Styles	http://www.harding.edu/arc/pdf/cite.pdf
CIPSI	http://www.proedinc.com
COPS-PIC	http://www.edits.net/
Reading Free Interest Inventory II	http://www.proedinc.com
Functional Independence Skills Handbook (FISH)	http://www.proedinc.com
Transition Behavior Scale	http://www.hawthorne-ed.com
LCCE Performance and Knowledge Batteries	https://www.cec.sped.org
College in Colorado	https://secure.collegeincolorado.org/

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