Age Appropriate Transition Assessment

What is transition assessment?

IDEA 2004 states that *"*Beginning not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 16, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP Team, and updated annually, thereafter, the IEP must include—

(1) Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon ***age appropriate transition assessments*** related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills" [§300.320 (b) (1)].

While age-appropriate transition assessment is not defined in the law, there are some clues as to the intent within the NSTTAC Indicator 13 FAQ (www.nsttac.org) that was approved by Office of Special Education Programs, US Department of Education..

- *Transition assessment was defined* using the Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) of the Council for Exceptional Children definition of transition assessment which is "…ongoing process of collecting data on the individual's needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future working, educational, living, and personal and social environments. Assessment data serve as the common thread in the transition process and form the basis for defining goals and services to be included in the Individualized Education Program (IEP)" (Sitlington, Neubert, & Leconte, 1997, p. 70-71).
- *"Age appropriate"* means a student's chronological, rather than developmental age (Wehmeyer, 2002).

What are the types of Transition Assessment?

Transition assessments can be *formal or informal*. Formal assessment typically involves using a standardized procedure for administering, scoring, and interpreting an assessment. By clearly defining how an assessment is administered, scored, and interpreted, this allows a student's score to be interpreted relative to other students (e.g., norms), although not all standardized assessments are norm-referenced. Informal assessment procedures are less structured and do not allow comparison with other students. However, because informal procedures allow assessment of student performance over time, they are useful in designing and evaluating the effects of instructional interventions. In addition, informal assessment includes data to be collected from a variety of individuals (e.g., parents, teachers, employers) using a variety of non-standardized methods.

Formal Transition Assessment Methods

- ***Adaptive Behavior/Daily Living Skills Assessments*** can help determine the type and amount of assistance that people with disabilities may need. This assistance might be in the form of home-based support services for infants and children and their families, special education and vocational training for young people, and supported work or special living arrangements such as personal care attendants. Each assessment relies on a respondent such as a parent, teacher, or care-provider to provide information about an individual being assessed.

- ***General and Specific Aptitude Tests*** measure a specific skill or ability. There are two types of aptitude tests: multi-aptitude test batteries and single tests measuring specific aptitudes. Multi-aptitude test batteries measure a wide range of aptitudes and combinations of aptitudes (e.g., general knowledge, spatial relations, form perception, color discrimination) and provide information that can be used in career decision making. Single aptitude tests measure specific aptitudes such as manual dexterity, clerical ability, artistic ability, or musical ability.

- ***Interest Inventories*** provide information about an individual's preferences for certain careers, occupational activities, or types of work.

- ***Intelligence Tests*** involve a single test or test battery to assess a person's cognitive performance.

- ***Achievement Tests*** measure learning of general or specific academic skills. Results can be linked to occupational requirements while helping to identify potential areas needing remediation.

- ***Temperament Inventories/Instruments*** identify students' dispositions towards various types of careers and work (e.g., careers that emphasize data, people, or things). The reports alone should not be viewed as a predictor of success or failure but rather should be compared with other data, including abilities and interests.

- ***Career Maturity or Employability Tests*** are designed to assess developmental stages or tasks on a continuum.

- ***Self-Determination Assessments*** provide information as to one's readiness to make decisions related to their postsecondary ambitions. Such assessments provide data to help a student identify his or her relative strengths and needs related to self-determination and factors that may be promoting or inhibiting this outcome.

- ***Transition Planning Inventories*** can help identify transition strengths and needs in various aspects of adult living, including employment, postsecondary schooling and training, independent living, interpersonal relationships, and community living. They also question and identify students' goals and awareness of what is needed or required to achieve those goals. Results of questioning parents or guardians (and possibly siblings), and educators can be correlated to create and accurate account of transition goals and steps necessary to attain a satisfying quality of life.

Informal Transition Assessment Methods

- ***Interviews and questionnaires*** can be conducted with a variety of individuals for the purpose of gathering information to be used to determine a student's strengths, needs, preferences, and interests relative to anticipated post-school outcomes. In other words, what is currently known about a student, and her or his family, that can be used to help develop postsecondary outcomes and to plan a course-of-study that will help the student reach his or her goals? An important part of this data collection process involves gathering information about a student and his or her family's current and future resources. For example, if a student's future education choice is to enroll in postsecondary education, it is helpful to know as soon as possible the financial resources a family might have or need. Another example might involve current and future transportation needs to get to work or to various activities/places in the community. Finally, families can often provide current and future resources in terms of employment options for their daughter or son or for other students in a high school program.

- ***Direct observation*** of student performance should be conducted within the natural environment, or school, employment, postsecondary, or community setting (Sitlington, Neubert, & Leconte, 1997). Sometimes called "community-based or situational assessment" (Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, & Leconte, 2007), direct observations can be often done by a job coach, co-worker, recreation specialist, general/vocational educator, and/or student. Direct observation data typically includes task analytic data of steps in completing a task, work behaviors (e.g., on-task, following directions, getting along with co-workers), and affective information (e.g., is student happy, excited, frustrated, or bored?). For example, if you are observing at a worksite, and a student quickly and accurately completes his or her tasks, interacts well with co-workers, and appears happy, this could provide evidence that this type of job is one that the student likes. However, after visiting a community residential setting where a student appears withdrawn, this may be an indication that the particular situation may not be suitable or satisfying for him or her.

- ***Curriculum-based assessments (CBA)*** are typically designed by educators to gather information about a student's performance in a specific curriculum and to develop instructional plans for a specific student. To gather these data, an educator might use task analyses, work sample analyses, portfolio assessments, and/or criterion-referenced tests.

- ***Environmental analysis***, sometimes referred to as ecological assessment and/or job analysis, involves carefully examining environments where activities normally occur. For example, a student may express an interest in attending karate classes at the local YMCA. In this case an environmental analysis might be conducted to investigate transportation needs and the expectations at the YMCA for attending (e.g., being a member, using the locker room, taking a shower). In a second example, if a student expressed interest in a specific type of job, a job analysis could be conducted comparing requirements of the job to the student's skills (Griffin & Sherron, 1996). A critical part of the analysis should be to identify types of accommodations that could be provided to help a student perform the necessary functions of a particular job (e.g., job restructuring, modifying equipment, acquiring an adaptive device, re-organizing the work space, hiring a personal assistant; Griffin & Sherron, 1996).

Whatever type of transition assessments you use, remember that the results need to help:

- develop realistic and meaningful IEP goals and objectives,
- make instructional programming decisions,
- provide information for the present level of performance related to a student's strengths, interests, preferences, and needs,
- learn about individual students, especially their strengths outside of academics and their career ambitions (Kortering, Sitlington, & Braziel, 2004),
- help students make a connection between their individual academic program and their post-school ambitions, and
- inform the Summary of Performance.

How do I conduct an age appropriate transition assessment?

The transition assessment process will vary depending on the actual instrument(s) and procedures being used and various student characteristics. Although formal instruments may be easier and quicker to administer, they should be used primarily to verify observations of student behaviors and performances. Students should always be asked to verify results of both formal and informal assessments to determine if their opinions, evaluations, and feelings confirm the results. Following are two examples of different approaches to transition assessment.

- One approach uses three levels of transition assessment (Rojewski, 2002). Level one is for most students and might include a review of existing information (e.g., intelligence and achievement data from the student's most current psychological report), student interview, interest assessment, temperament assessment, and, if indicated (e.g., a student shows promise in a given aptitude), aptitude testing. Level two assessment targets students who are having difficulty making a career choice or clarifying their interests, preparing for adult living, or contemplating leaving school as a dropout. Level two could expand to include assessments targeting information as to one's work-related behaviors, general career maturity, and daily or independent living skills. Level three assessment is for students needing additional assistance with identifying long term employment, education, and/or independent living goals, when earlier transition assessments were inconclusive, or for those with more significant disabilities. This level generally takes several days and is conducted by a vocational assessment specialist (Sarkees-Wircenski & Scott, 1995).

- A second process is called the Assess, Plan, Instruct, and Evaluate (APIE) model for transition assessment (Test, Aspel, & Everson, 2006). In the first step (assess), educators assess the student's interests, preferences, and needs related to his/her postschool outcomes using both formal and/or informal assessments. The second step (plan) involves interpreting the results from these assessments and incorporating them into the student's transition plan. In the third step (instruct), students learn the skills they will need to reach their postschool goals. In the last step (evaluate), students and educators evaluate whether progress has been made toward achieving the transition activities and IEP goals and objectives. It is important for assessment information to be collected continuously with periodic checkpoints, because students may change their minds (e.g., interests, preferences) and attributes (e.g., skills, knowledge, strengths).

Whatever the process followed, Sitlington, Neubert, and Leconte (1997) suggest the following when conducting a transition assessment:

1. Methods must incorporate assistive technology or accommodations that allow an individual to demonstrate his or her abilities and potential.
2. Methods must occur in environments that resemble actual education/ training, employment, independent living, or community environments.
3. Methods must produce outcomes that contribute to ongoing development, planning, and implementation of "next steps" in an individual's transition process.
4. Methods must be varied and include a sequence of activities that sample an individual's behavior and skills over time.
5. Data must be verified by more than one method and by more than one person.
6. Data must be synthesized and interpreted to students with disabilities, their families, and transition team members.
7. Data and results must be documented in a format that can be used to facilitate transition planning.
8. Methods should be appropriate for learning characteristics of the individual, including cultural and linguistic differences.
9. Information should be current, valid or verified, and relevant to transition in order to better inform the Summary of Performance.

How do I select assessment instruments?

- Become familiar with the different types of transition assessments and their characteristics. **It is recommended that you use multiple assessments on an on-going basis.**

- Select methods that assist students by helping them answer the following questions:
  1. Who am I?
  2. What do I want in life, now and in the future?
  3. What are some of life's demands that I can meet now?
  4. What are the main barriers to getting what I want from school and my community?
  5. What are my options in the school and community for preparing me for what I want, now and in the future?

- Select approaches that are appropriate for your students in terms of cognitive, cultural sensitivity, and language comfort.
- Always interpret and explain assessment results in formats that students and families can understand easily.

References

Griffin, C., & Sherron, P. (1996). Finding jobs for young people with disabilities. In P. Wehman (Ed.), *Life beyond the classroom: Transition strategies for young people with disabilities* (2nd ed., pp. 163-187). Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.

Kortering, L., Sitlington, P. & Braziel, P. (2004). The use of vocational assessment and planning as a strategic intervention to help keep youths with emotional or behavioral disorders in school. In *Transition of Students with Emotional or Behavior Disorders: Current approaches for positive outcomes*. (Ed. Doug Cheney). Arlington, VA: Council for Children with Behavior Disorders and Division on Career Development and Transition.

Rojewski, J. (2002). Career assessment for adolescents with mild disabilities: Critical concerns for transition planning. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 25*, 73-95.

Sarkees-Wircenski, M. & Scott, J.L. (1995). *Vocational special needs* (3rd Edition). Homewood, IL: American Technical.

Sitlington, P. L., Neubert, D. A., Begun, W. H., Lombard, R. C., & Leconte, P. J. (2007). *Assess for success: A practitioner's handbook on transition assessment* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Sitlington, P. L., Neubert, D. A., & Leconte, P. J. (1997). Transition assessment: The position of the Division on Career Development and Transition. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals, 20,* 69-79.

Test, D. W., Aspel, N. P., & Everson, J. M. (2006). *Transition methods for youth with disabilities*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Wehmeyer, M. L. (2002). *Teaching students with mental retardation.* Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

This Fact Sheet is a collaborative effort between DCDT and the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC). NSTTAC is funded through the Office of Special Education Programs, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education (Grant #H326J050004). However, the contents do not necessarily represent the policy of these agencies and endorsement by the federal government should not be assumed.