

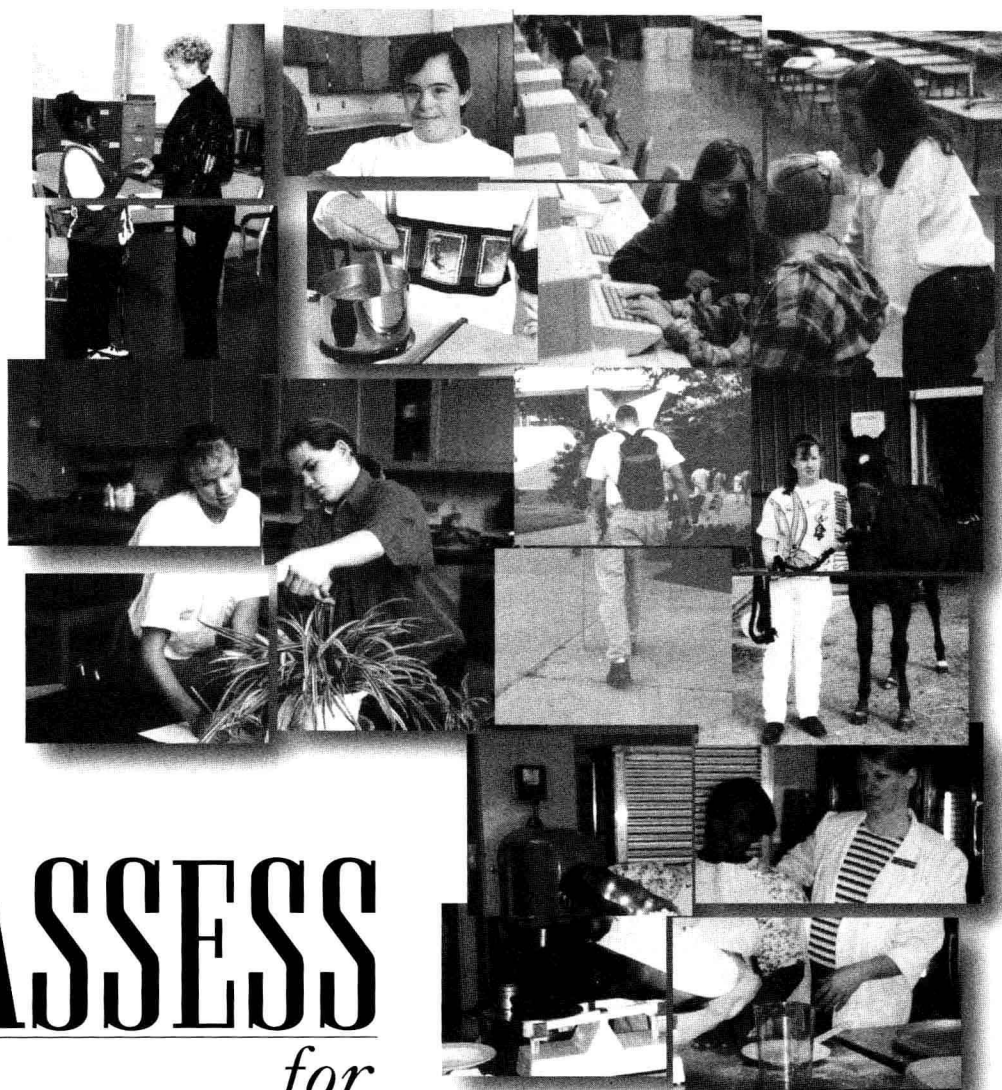
Assess *for* Success

Handbook on Transition Assessment

*Patricia L. Sitlington
Debra A. Neubert
Wynne Begun
Richard C. Lombard
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Developed by the Division on Career Development and Transition
A Division of The Council for Exceptional Children





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Preface

Preparing for transition into all aspects of adult life is like taking a long trip. To proceed effectively it helps to have an itinerary, a timetable, and a map. As with any trip, it is important to make frequent progress checks to be sure you are still on the right road and are moving along at the speed you anticipated. Also, frequent progress checks allow for orderly course corrections, side trips, and changes in destination. Transition assessment is an individualized, ongoing process that helps students with disabilities and their families define appropriate personal destinations or goals and check progress along the way.

The vision for life beyond school should begin to be conceived in the elementary and middle school years. By age 14 the individualized education program should reflect a clear timetable and itinerary for accomplishing specific goals. Assessment is crucial in establishing this timetable and in keeping the IEP team on track. However, deciding what to assess and how assessment data will be collected and used can be a challenge.

This handbook is designed to be used by everyone on the IEP team, including the student and family members, as they assist a student of any disability and functioning level in defining his or her vision of the future and in reaching this vision. The assessment process described in this handbook builds upon a variety of information emphasizing the use of transition assessment techniques and community-based settings in gathering the information needed for transition planning.

The handbook was developed by CEC's Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT). The first chapter provides an overview of the transition assessment process, including its purpose and the laws requiring that transition assessment be carried out. Chapter 2 approaches transition assessment within the context of career development and provides an easy-to-use checklist and set of assessment questions to help teachers pinpoint where along the awareness, exploration, preparation, and assimilation career path a student is functioning.

The focus of Chapter 3 is on integrating the results of transition assessment into the IEP. Sample case studies and transition goals and short-term objectives are provided. Chapters 4 and 5 discuss the roles of key players in the transition assessment process. Chapter 4 presents the role of the student in the transition assessment process and the development of self-determination skills to assist the student in this role. Chapter 5 discusses the role of family members, special education and general education teachers, support staff, and adult services providers in the assessment process.

Chapter 6 presents an overview of methods that practitioners can use to collect information on the student's strengths, needs, interests, and preferences throughout the transition planning process. This chapter also presents methods of gathering information on the demands of potential future living, working, and educational environments. The final chapter presents a format for making the best match between the demands of these future environments and the strengths, needs, interests, and preferences of the student. This chapter presents questions that need to be asked during the transition process and a procedures for developing an assessment plan.

Transition assessment is not a magical process. It is simply assisting students in identifying where they would like to live, work, and learn when they become adults and in determining the supports, accommodations, and preparation they will need in order to reach their goals. We hope that this handbook will help you as you assist students in this process.

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Overview of Transition Assessment

Transition assessment is an individualized, ongoing process that helps students with disabilities and their families define goals to be included in their individualized education programs (IEPs) as they prepare for adult roles. Adult roles can include employment, postsecondary education or training programs, independent living, community involvement, and social/personal relationships. Valid assessment data serve as the common thread in the transition process and form the basis for planning and placement decisions regarding adult roles. The purpose of this chapter is to

- Tell what transition and transition assessment mean.
- Tell why transition assessment must be done.

Adolescents with disabilities and their families face challenges at critical transition points in their lives, such as moving from a middle school to a high school setting, moving from a high school to an employment setting, entering a postsecondary education program, and/or deciding to live independently in the community. Each of these transition points requires a determination of appropriate experiences, services, and programs that will assist individuals in selecting and achieving goals. Due to the diversity of these goals, various professionals, including special educators, vocational educators, counselors, vocational evaluators, work-study coordinators, support personnel, employers, and community/adult service providers, may participate in the transition assessment process. However, the success of this process depends on the active involvement of individuals with disabilities and their families.

Practitioners, students with disabilities, and their families need to understand what types of assessment data are most useful at different life junctures, who is in the best position to collect the assessment data, and how the results of the assessments will ultimately be used in the transition planning process. Students with disabilities must be encouraged to

assume a greater role in their assessment process. For example, students with mild disabilities can be involved in determining what assessment activities they will participate in and how they can use these activities to identify their strengths and preferences as they prepare for adult roles. Students with moderate and severe disabilities, along with their families, can be involved in planning vocational, community, and domestic experiences that will help identify preferences, strengths, and accommodations needed in various environments.

Practitioners, students with disabilities, and their families need to understand the career development process in order to determine what is developmentally appropriate in terms of assessment practices and realistic postsecondary outcomes during the transition process. A review of the career development process is included in Chapter 2, and the roles of various individuals involved in the transition assessment process are described in Chapter 5.

WHAT DOES TRANSITION MEAN?

Since the early 1980s, special education has focused increased attention on the need for transition processes to facilitate better postsecondary outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Documentation of poor postsecondary outcomes for individuals with disabilities through follow-up and follow-along studies has led to development of secondary and postsecondary transition models, identification of “best practices” to include in these models, and training of personnel to provide transition-related services across a continuum of secondary and postsecondary programs. As a result, legislative mandates and secondary special education have evolved rapidly in the past 10 years. Will’s (1984) definition of transition, which focused on moving “from school to employment,” has been broadened considerably to include diverse outcomes related to employment, postsecondary education and vocational education programs, independent living, community involvement, and social/personal relationships. For the purposes of this handbook, the term *transition* is defined as follows:

Transition refers to a change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent roles in the community. *These roles include employment, participating in postsecondary education, maintaining a home, becoming actively involved in the community and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships.* The process of enhancing transition involves the participation and coordination of school programs, adult agency services and natural supports within the community. The foundation for transition should be laid during the elementary and middle school years, guided by the broad concept of career development. Transition planning should begin no later than age 14, and students should be encouraged, to the full extent of their capabilities, to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for such planning. (Halpern, 1994, p. 117)

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF TRANSITION ASSESSMENT?

The literature pertaining to transition models and effective transition practices reveals that assessment should provide the foundation for the transition process. For the purposes of this handbook, assessment is conceptualized broadly as an ongoing process that draws from many methods and practices in career education, vocational evaluation, vocational education, rehabilitation, and curriculum-based assessment. Assessment methods should be varied depending on the purposes of the assessment, where the individual is in the career development process, the individual's characteristics, and the individual's postsecondary goals.

Methods for assessing individuals and environments are described in detail in Chapter 6, and a framework for determining appropriate matches between individuals and environments is presented in Chapter 7.

While the purposes of transition assessment vary depending on the individual and the setting, the broad purposes include the following:

1. To determine individuals' levels of career development when planning transition assessment activities.
2. To assist individuals with disabilities to identify their interests, preferences, strengths, and abilities in relation to postsecondary goals, including employment opportunities, postsecondary education and training opportunities, independent living situations, community involvement, and personal/social goals.
3. To determine appropriate placements within educational, vocational, and community settings that facilitate the attainment of these postsecondary goals.
4. To determine and facilitate students' self-determination skills.
5. To determine the accommodations, supports, and services individuals with disabilities will need to attain and maintain their postsecondary goals related to employment, postsecondary education/training programs, independent living, community involvement, and social/personal roles/relationships.

ASSESSMENT FOR TRANSITION—IT'S THE LAW

Since the early 1980s, legislative mandates in the fields of special education, vocational-technical education, job training, and rehabilitation have addressed the need for transition goals, services, and activities to facilitate movement from secondary to postsecondary settings. These mandates and initiatives have provided funds for research, personnel training and model demonstration programs in secondary special education, transition programming, and supported employment. While the mandates also called for interdisciplinary efforts to coordinate services, actual practices concerning the transition process have varied widely since they were left to the discretion of state and local agencies.

Legislation in the 1990s has moved toward more specific language regarding the inclusion of transition goals in students' programs and in designating personnel responsible for the transition process. This language is most evident in Public Law 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) for students with disabilities and in Public Law 103-239, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994 (STOWA) for all students. Language from each of these Acts and the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1992 concerning transition and assessment is reviewed briefly in the following sections. Language concerning assessment and transition from the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) Amendments of 1992 and Public Law 101-342, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Amendments of 1990 (Perkins Act) is summarized in Table 1-1.

At the time of this writing, several new bills have been introduced to Congress. While these bills may change the scope of some of the mandates reviewed in this section, it is important to understand previous legislation and assessment practices that have helped students with disabilities gain access to a variety of programs.

Amendments to IDEA (The Individual Education Act Amendments of 1995) were introduced during the summer and fall of 1995. These amendments would restructure the federal education programs for students with disabilities. Changes to the IEP have been introduced that call for more parental involvement, earlier transition planning, and fewer standard evaluations once an individual has been determined eligible for special education services.

Significant changes will also take place in vocational training legislation and the structure of most vocational programs. In fall 1995, the Senate passed the Workforce Development Act and the House of Representatives passed the Careers Bill. These bills are likely to go to conference and may repeal certain Acts, including the Perkins Act Amendments of 1990 and the JTPA Amendments of 1992. Vocational training service delivery systems will be largely decided upon by state and local entities. Vocational education programs will most likely remain a part of the restructured training systems. These bills, like the School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994, continue to emphasize the need for access to programs by all students, including those with disabilities. Therefore, it is important that special educators understand how to collect assessment data that will support access to vocational options and better postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990

IDEA mandated for the first time that the IEPs of all students with disabilities include transition-related services and goals by the time those students have reached age 16. The following language is taken directly from the final regulations regarding the implementation of IDEA:

TABLE 1-1
Legislation

<i>Law</i>	<i>Language Concerning Assessment/Transition</i>	<i>Possible Assessment Activities</i>
IDEA (P.L. 101-476) Transition Requirements	A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to postsecondary activities including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Various career exploration activities • Student/family interviews to identify goals • Situational assessments in variety of environments • Interest inventories
IDEA Assessment Requirements	<p>Activities must be based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and include</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instruction. • Community experiences. • Development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives. • Acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest inventories • Situational assessment in paid/unpaid job sites • Situational assessment in community sites • Functional academics assessment • Behavior observation • Student/parent interviewing
Perkins Act (P.L. 101-342) Transition and Assessment Requirements	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assist students who are members of special populations to enter vocational education programs, and with respect to students with disabilities, assist in fulfilling the transition requirement of Section 626 of the IDEA. 2. Assess the special needs of students participating in programs with respect to their successful completion of the vocational education program in the most integrated setting possible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interest inventories • Record review • Situational assessment in vocational technical courses • Exploratory rotation in vocational technical courses • Work samples
Rehabilitation Amendments of 1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing assessment data that can be provided by the individual with disability, the family, an advocate, or an educational agency can be used to determine eligibility. • Definition for transition services duplicates IDEA. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background review • Summary of paid and nonpaid vocational experiences (skills, interest, needs, accommodations) • Interviews • Portfolios • Vocational evaluation reports • Vocational profiles
JTPA Amendments of 1992	Assessment of basic skills and supportive services needs of each participant, which may include a review of occupational skills, prior work experience, employability, interests, and aptitudes. However, a new assessment is not required if personnel determine it is appropriate to use a recent assessment conducted in another education or training program as long as the information is current and relevant to the individual's career goals (e.g., a regular high school academic program).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background review • Summary of paid and nonpaid vocational experiences (skills, interest, needs, accommodations) • Interviews • Portfolios • Vocational evaluation reports • Vocational profiles

The IEP for each student, beginning no later than age 16 (and at a younger age, if determined appropriate), must include a statement of needed transition services as defined in 300.18, including, if appropriate, a statement of each public agency's responsibilities or linkages, or both, before the student leaves the school setting. If the IEP team determines that services are not needed in one or more of the areas specified in 300.18(b)(2)(i) through (b)(2)(iii), the IEP must include a statement to that effect and the basis upon which the determination was made. (300.346)

In addition, the definition of transition was broadened from Will's original (1984) definition to include

A coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability, designed within an outcome-oriented process, that promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. (300.18)

In terms of transition assessment, it is important to note that

Activities must be based on the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, and include:

- Instruction
- Community experience
- Development of employment and other postschool adult living objectives
- Acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation

IDEA also made it clear that secondary special educators are responsible for inviting students and their families to their IEP meetings when transition goals are discussed and for inviting personnel from other agencies to ensure that transition services are coordinated. Thus, IDEA reinforces self-determination and choice for students with disabilities to the greatest extent possible.

If a purpose of the meeting is the consideration of transition services for a student, the public agency shall invite:

- the student
- a representative of any other agency that is likely to be responsible for providing or paying for transition services.

If the student does not attend, the public agency shall take other steps to ensure that the student's preferences and interests are considered; and

If an agency invited to send a representative to a meeting does not do so, the public agency shall take other steps to obtain the participation of the other agency in the planning of any transition services.

A final point from IDEA concerns the need for secondary personnel to identify other agencies that can provide services to individuals with disabilities as they make the transition from school into the community. In terms of transition assessment, this means that special educators must first understand the individual student's needs concerning postsecondary goals and then work with the student and family to identify the range of services different agencies and community groups can provide to meet these goals. It also means that individuals with disabilities and their families must be aware of eligibility requirements of adult service and community programs and must be prepared to advocate for their inclusion in appropriate adult services.

School-to-Work Opportunities Act of 1994

President Clinton signed STOWA in May 1994. This landmark legislation has important implications for all adolescents in terms of developing a more effective transition process, and it serves as a foundation for educational reform in many U. S. schools. It is important that special educators and related service personnel be aware of this legislation and advocate for students with disabilities to be included in the school-to-work programs currently being developed or reconceptualized for all students. Some of the language in this law specifically addresses the need for assessment and transition activities that are already included in many secondary special education programs, such as identifying students' interests, conducting ongoing assessment in the workplace, renewing emphasis on career education activities, and identifying postschool linkages with other agencies as students leave the school system.

The broad purpose of STOWA is to reform educational and vocational programs. In addition, this law is intended to expose *all* students to a broad array of career opportunities and to facilitate the selection of career majors based on individual interests, strengths, and goals. Another key purpose is to increase opportunities for minorities, women, and individuals with disabilities by enabling these individuals to prepare for careers in fields where traditionally they have been underrepresented.

While there will be no final regulations to implement this law, some states are receiving implementation grants to develop comprehensive school-to-work systems for all students. Under Title II of this law, states must describe how their school-to-work system will coordinate with or integrate existing local school-to-work programs with funds from the Perkins Act Amendments of 1990, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994, the National Skills Standard Act of 1994, IDEA, JTPA, and the Rehabilitation Act.

The three components to be included in school-to-work programs are school-based learning, work-based learning, and connecting activities. Each component includes language concerning assessment and transition activities.

School-Based Learning Component. School-based learning activities target career awareness and career exploration and counseling to help students identify, select, or reconsider their interests, goals, and career majors, including those options that may not be traditional for their gender, race, or ethnicity. These activities should begin as early as possible, but not later than the 7th grade. Interested students should make an initial selection of a career major not later than the beginning of the 11th grade.

Students and school dropouts need to be provided with regularly scheduled evaluations involving ongoing consultation and problem solving to identify strengths and weaknesses, academic progress, workplace knowledge, goals, and the need for additional learning opportunities to master core academic and vocational skills.

Procedures should be in place to facilitate the entry of students participating in a STOWA program into additional training or postsecondary education programs, as well as to facilitate the transfer of students between education and training programs.

Work-Based Learning Component. This component includes activities such as job shadowing, on-the-job training, and work experience. Many of these activities may already be in place in school systems and can be revised or expanded to meet the mandates in this law. Assessment should include ongoing monitoring while the student is involved in work activities. This can include direct observation of skills, interests, and work behaviors. For some students with moderate and severe disabilities, work-based learning provides an opportunity for continued career exploration and for the identification of needed supports and accommodations.

Connecting Activities. Connecting activities include matching students with employers to promote work-based learning opportunities and linking students with other community services that may be necessary to ensure a successful transition from school to work. Other connecting activities may include

- Providing training to work-based and school-based staff on new curricula, student assessments, student guidance, and feedback to the school regarding student performance.
- Providing career exploration and awareness services, counseling and mentoring services, college awareness and preparation services, and other services to prepare students for the transition from school to work.

Many school-to-work programs will include existing vocational programs such as “tech prep,” apprenticeship programs, on-the-job training, and academic skill development in the workplace. These programs can be included in students’ IEPs as related transition activities and contribute to more effective postsecondary outcomes. Most important, assessment should form the basis for identifying placements, planning support services, and updating transition goals for all students participating in this new initiative.

Rehabilitation Amendments of 1992

Assessment forms the basis for determining eligibility for rehabilitation programs and in planning individual written rehabilitation plans (IWRPs), which outline services and goals for the individual during the rehabilitation process. The Rehabilitation Amendments of 1992 contain important language concerning transition services and alternate forms of assessment to be used in the eligibility determination process. First, existing assessment data, which can be provided by the individual with a disability, the family, an advocate, or an educational agency, can now be used for determining eligibility. A comprehensive assessment may be undertaken if additional information is needed. The statute, however, limits the extent of any comprehensive assessment to specific information needed to develop a program of services. Individual choice is also emphasized in these amendments: The IWRP must be jointly developed between the counselor and the individual with a disability. Finally, the definition for transition services duplicates the definition in the IDEA. Hopefully, this can assist educators and rehabilitation counselors in the collaboration process. Educators and individuals with disabilities need to realize that the rehabilitation system serves only 8% of the 43 million people with disabilities in the United States, so it is important to be aware of and understand what other service systems can offer in terms of postsecondary services (F. Schroeder, personal communication, January, 1995).

SUMMARY

Deciding what to assess and how assessment data will be collected and used in the IEP and transition planning process is critical in determining appropriate postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities. While there are a variety of methods, models, and processes associated with assessment, it is important for practitioners to determine what assessment data are needed at each transition point for each student and family. Most important, students need to participate in assessment—from choosing activities to understanding how the assessment data can be used to determine their strengths, needs, and preferences in the transition process. Finally, all personnel involved in the transition process need to understand how to collect and use assessment data for transition planning.

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