

# TRANSITION ASSESSMENT

Establishing a Foundation for a  
Successful Transition to Adulthood



*“TRANSITION  
ASSESSMENT  
is the foundation  
for planning what  
a student will do after  
graduation from  
high school.”*



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# TRANSITION ASSESSMENT

## *What is transition assessment?*

Transition assessment is the foundation for planning what a student will do after graduation from high school. Transition assessments are tools to help students understand their interests, personalities, strengths, limitations, and their present levels of development in important areas. This is knowledge critical to planning courses of study, exploring careers, and gaining important life skills for a successful transition from high school to adulthood. Transition assessment information helps to make a match between the student and the postsecondary environment into which the student hopes to transition.

## *What is the purpose of transition assessment?*

Transition assessment provides information to help students formulate appropriate postsecondary goals and plans to reach those goals. Students need to consider how they will be employed, whether they will continue their education at postsecondary institutions or in training programs, and how they expect to live as young adults. They need the skills to set and attain goals and to make good choices. The results of transition assessments help them plan courses of study in their secondary school years that will prepare them for their postsecondary goals. Transition assessment helps them answer questions, such as the following:

- *Who am I?*
- *What are my unique talents and interests?*
- *What do I want in life, now and in the future?*
- *What are some of life's demands that I can meet now?*
- *What are the main barriers to getting what I want from school and my community?*
- *What are my options in the school and community for preparing me for what I want, now and in the future?* (National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center, 2010)

*“The first dimension is the individual. The second dimension could be called environmental.”*

Research indicates several primary motivations that students report for coming to school. The most influential one is that they perceive that staying in school and graduating from high school prepares them to be productive adults (Kortering & Konold, 2005). Transition assessment clarifies even further how students can shape their courses of study and experiences while in school for positive post-school outcomes.

## *Is transition assessment required?*

Yes. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 2004), and its accompanying regulations, at 34 CFR 300.1 et seq., and state law and regulations, through the *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia* (the Virginia Regulations), 8 VAC 20-81-1 et seq., require that every student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) receives transition planning for life after graduation. Students must have measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments. There must be evidence in the IEP or the student's file of appropriate transition assessment. Postsecondary goals must be related to the results of the transition assessment. The mandate is in Virginia Regulations as follows:

*“Prior to the child entering secondary school but not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child turns 14, or younger if determined appropriate by the IEP team, and updated annually thereafter, the IEP shall include age-appropriate (1) Measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and where appropriate, independent living skills; and....”*  
**8 VAC 20-81-110.G.10.a.1**

## *Who is responsible for conducting transition assessment?*

For students, the responsibility for conducting transition assessment lies with school personnel. Personnel outside the school system may provide functional vocational evaluation or career assessment through rehabilitative services, and, if so, those personnel may be partners in the transition assessment for some students.

## *What are the kinds of transition assessments?*

Transition assessments may be completed with pencil and paper, on a computer, in work setting or with work samples. They may be standardized (formal) or non-standardized (informal). Standardized assessments compare how one person performs compared to other people in the population. They measure achievement. Comparisons can help us understand how one student compares to other students with similar characteristics. A standardized assessment can provide information about a student's strengths and weaknesses. It also helps us understand whether a person has met a specific standard. For example, a standardized assessment will help determine whether or not a person has met industry standards for a specific career. Standardized assessments have established reliability (the information is dependable and accurate) and validity (tests what it is supposed to test). They are generally available from commercial publishers and administered by qualified professionals. Examples of standardized assessments are the Brigance Inventory of Essential Skills, Stanford Achievement Tests, and the ARC's Self-Determination Scale.

Nonstandardized assessments are not normed to a given population. For example, they may assess how well a student has learned academic content. Nonstandardized assessments are content driven. They are often used to help determine appropriate instruction. Often these assessments provide valuable information about individual needs. They may include portfolios of student work, behavioral observations,

rating scales, situational assessments, interviews, or analysis of future work, school, or living situations in which the student is interested. Examples of nonstandardized assessments are those in the Life Centered Career Education (LCCE) curriculum (Council for Exceptional Children, 2012) and Informal Assessments for Transition Planning (Clark, et al, 2000).

Standardized and nonstandardized assessments are acceptable for transition planning. "Many professionals recommend a combination of formal and informal assessment in order to identify the overall picture of a student's preferences, strengths, and needs, and to assist in developing a plan to prioritize the student's transition needs." (Field & Hoffman, 2007; Sitlington, 2008 in Mazotti et al, 2009, p. 46)

## *How does one begin transition assessment?*

What knowledge is needed at a particular point in time to make appropriate planning decisions?

What information is needed to help plan for the person's future education and training, employment, independent living and self-determination? It is important to use assessments that best gather the information needed at that transition point. For example, existing records may be sufficient for a picture of the student's academic achievement. However, the student may be ready to consider career options, yet has not participated in assessment of career interests or aptitude. Transition assessment related to career choice may be a good option at that transition point. Perhaps the student and transition



team feel the most pressing need is to assess a student's functional skills, such as the ability to access public transportation, to manage money, or to decide on course placement for the following year.



There are many sources from which assessment data may be obtained. A readily available source of information is existing student records. Another prime source is the student. What are the student's interests and preferences? What are the student's desires for future employment, education and living arrangement? Other sources of assessment information and assistance may include, but are not limited to, families, teachers, therapists, counselors, psychologists, vocational evaluators, job coaches, social workers, paraprofessionals, employers, and medical professionals.

Clark (2007) suggests placing assessment documents into students' cumulative files so they are easily retrieved by IEP team members. He recommends compiling assessment data into a portfolio. An example of a portfolio for organizing transition assessment data, developed through the Shenandoah Valley Regional Program Transition Project of Virginia, is at [http://www.rockingham.k12.va.us/rcps\\_sped/SVRP/svrp.htm](http://www.rockingham.k12.va.us/rcps_sped/SVRP/svrp.htm). A natural time to discuss the collection of data for a portfolio is during the IEP Team meeting and the triennial meeting, when a child is re-evaluated, since parents and other professionals, who have information and expertise, are included in these meetings.

### ***How do I know if an assessment is age-appropriate?***

Neubert and Leconte (2013) suggest that to be "age-appropriate," assessments should meet youth where they are intellectually, chronologically, neurologically

and in career development. For instance, for a youth who is twenty years old and who has an intellectual disability, assessments might use video or photographs for clear understanding, but should depict concerns typical for peers of similar chronological age, such as options for postsecondary living.

Assessments should take into consideration neurological readiness to plan ahead versus gratifying goals immediately. Appropriate assessment may differ according to whether the student is focusing on a specific career path, or is at the beginning stages of career awareness.

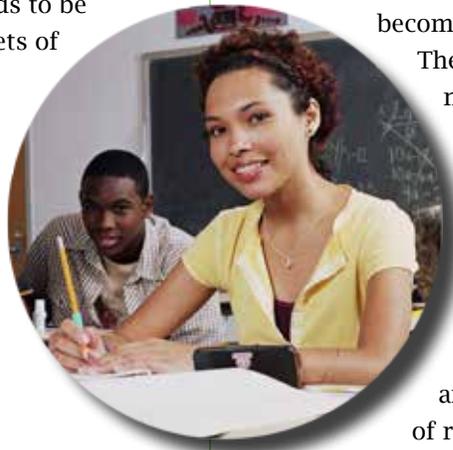
### ***What should be assessed?***

Assessment is best conducted along several dimensions (Neubert & Leconte, 2013). The first dimension is that of the individual. What are the strengths and needs, interests and preferences of the student? A second dimension, which is often overlooked, relates to the environment into which the person intends to transition. For example, if a student plans to go to college, then a transition assessment of prospective colleges may be made by the student and family. Admissions procedures, support services, and accessibility of housing might be areas to investigate. Analyzing a potential work environment can shed light on skills, aptitude and personality a student needs for success in that desired career area.

### ***How are the results of transition assessment used in creating the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students?***

Data on student strengths and needs that may affect the realization of postsecondary goals are summarized in the Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance (PLOP) of the IEP. Students and IEP teams must determine the extent to which students possess strengths necessary to pursue coursework, co-curricular activities, and extra-curricular activities that match their interests and preferences. Strengths are the knowledge and skills students possess that

support their visions for adult life (Kochhar-Bryant, 2004). Where student strengths do not support postschool visions, the student may use career-related experiences or activities, along with and instruction in school, to acquire the desired strengths or to modify the vision. This process of collecting and analyzing data continues over the course of the transition planning years until desirable, realistic visions for post-school lives are in harmony with students' interests, preferences, and strengths. Students' visions for their lives can change with time and experience. IEP teams can strategically identify needs to be addressed as they create coordinated sets of transition activities that move students toward their goals. Needs identified in the PLoP drive the remaining components of the transition IEP: transition services, including courses of study and transition activities, annual goals, related services, and supplementary aids and services (VDOE, T/TAC at the College of William & Mary, 2013).



### ***Are accommodations allowed when conducting transition assessment?***

Standardized tests generally indicate allowable accommodations on the basis of disability. If non-allowed accommodations are used, standardized scores, norms and percentiles should not be used to report scores, or the accommodation must be referenced when reporting scores.

### ***Are there transition assessments that work especially well for students from certain geographic areas or with certain disabilities?***

Students with more significant disabilities have benefitted from an assessment process termed "Discovery," within an Individualized Career Planning Model (Condon & Callahan, 2008). Morgan and Openshaw (2011) offer a transition assessment model for students with disabilities who live in rural areas and who plan on remaining in that area upon

graduation. This targeted transition assessment model matches student interests and skills with jobs likely to be available in the local area and incorporates contacts with friends and family to increase opportunities for employment. Entrepreneurship has also been a route to successful employment.

### ***How does self-determination relate to transition assessment?***

Self-determined people have skills and attitudes that help them take control of their lives and become contributing adults in society. They understand their strengths and needs and have strategies to succeed despite limitations. Self-determined individuals have gained knowledge and skills, such as goal-setting, self-advocacy, and self-awareness. Self-determination skills are important for a successful transition from high school and throughout life. As a result of research findings and advocacy, teaching self-determination has become a best practice in special education.

Self-determination need not be seen as a separate component or activity in a student's educational programming. Rather, it is most useful when regarded as an organizing concept throughout all aspects of transition planning, including transition assessment. The IDEA requirement for postsecondary goals "based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests [34 CFR 300.43 (a) [20 U.S.C. 1401(34)]" affirms the central role of the student. Within a self-determination framework, students and families are central to transition planning, including transition assessment (Field & Hoffman, 2007).

Students and families should be involved from the beginning in determining what assessments will be most useful to move the student toward their chosen life goals. Transition assessment that incorporates

the student's voice and family's input might include self-reports, interviews, self-evaluation of progress through checklists, questionnaires or other devices for self-monitoring and self-assessment. As students gain experience and self-knowledge related to their transition goals, they and their families can continue to be involved in choosing transition assessments. Thus, self-determination is practiced in assessment and students are strengthened in self-determination skills as they participate in transition assessment (Field & Hoffman, 2007).

### ***Is consent required to conduct transition assessment?***

If decisions about which transition assessments will be given are reflected in the IEP document, then consent for those transition assessments is considered given at the time that the IEP is signed. If the assessment is administered outside of an IEP requirement and is administered to all students, consent may not be required unless the school division requires consent from the parent of all children. (8 VAC 20-81-170.E.2.b).

Any other assessments require consent before administration, unless the assessment is a review of an existing record. For example, if the IEP team determines that assessment of "motor skills" or "functional capability" are necessary to transition planning, since these assessments (evaluations) are designed to measure the student's specific needs, consent is required before administering (8VAC 20-81-170.E.1.a). Further clarification may be found at 8VAC 20-81-170.E.1 and 2.

Local policies on obtaining parental consent to administer assessments may vary. Those conducting transition assessments should check local policies.

### ***Where do I find transition assessments?***

The following online sources provide guidance on choosing assessment tools, conducting transition assessments, and using the information from them: Age-Appropriate Transition Assessment Toolkit from the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) discusses transition assessment and provides guidance for implementing an ongoing assessment process. It suggests formal and informal assessments for various transition purposes, as well as provides links to other sources of information. A proposed timeline for transition assessment takes students from eighth to twelfth grade. Assessment tools are given for academics; self-determination; vocational interests, exploration and career development; and adaptive behavior/

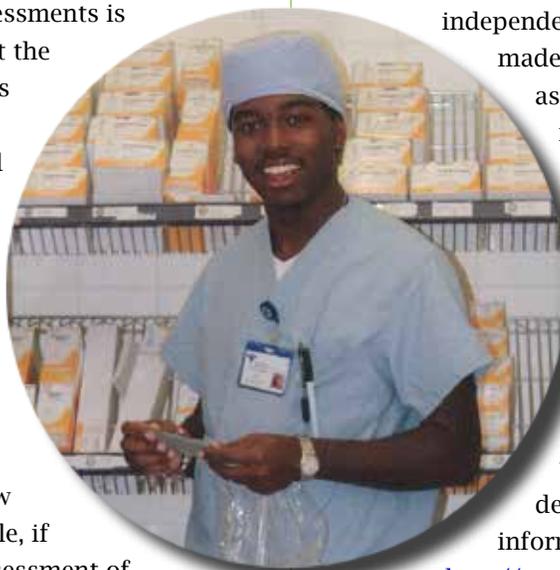
independent living. Recommendation is made for frequency and timing of the assessments in relation to the IEP meeting. The toolkit lists free online assessments, as well.

<http://www.nsttac.org/content/age-appropriate-transition-assessment-toolkit>

The University of Kansas Transition Coalition provides user reviews of more than 40 transition assessments, as well as descriptions of the assessments and information on where to obtain them.

[http://www.transitioncoalition.org/transition/assessment\\_review/all.php](http://www.transitioncoalition.org/transition/assessment_review/all.php)

Transition Planning for a Brighter Future: Designing IEPs for Secondary Students with Disabilities-2nd Edition is from the Virginia Department of Education's Training and Technical Assistance Center at the College of William & Mary. This considerations packet treats the topic of transition planning in detail. The appendix holds templates for transition planning for five hypothetical students with varying transition goals. This considerations packet gives examples of tools for environmental assessment of





possible employment sites; assessment of student strengths, preferences and needs; of career options; for postsecondary planning; for community participation; and for independent living. Included are links to free online assessments. It presents a Present Level of Performance (PLOP) for each hypothetical student that incorporates transition assessment data that might be collected for each.

<http://education.wm.edu/centers/ttac/resources/considerations/index.php>

Virginia Department of Education Transition Assessment Matrix, Sample Assessments (2008). This matrix lists age-appropriate assessment tools geared to employment, education/training, and independent living/community participation, as well as information on where to obtain the assessments.

<http://vadcdt.org/index.php?resources/entries/16/>

## Self-Determination Assessments

**The AIR Self-Determination Scale** measures individual capacity for and opportunity to practice self-determination. Educators, parents, and students assess students' level of self-determination. <http://books.google.com/bkshp?hl=en&tab=pp>

**The Arc Self-Determination Scale** reports students' perceptions of their self-determination skills. It was designed for use by adolescents with disabilities, particularly those with mild cognitive and learning disabilities. <http://www.beachcenter.org> ChoiceMaker measures student skills and opportunities related to choosing goals, expressing goals, and taking action. It is intended for use with middle and high school students with emotional or behavioral disabilities and mild or moderate learning

disabilities. It is available for purchase as six instructional packages.

<http://store.cambiumlearning.com/choicemaker-self-determination-series>

### Self-Determination Assessment Battery

includes three Web-based instruments that measure cognitive, behavioral and affective

traits associated with self-determination. These characteristics are assessed from the perspectives of students, parents and teachers. The self-determination assessment approach focuses on and delineates those variables that are within the individual's control and are potential targets for instructional intervention. (Ages 14-22). <http://www.ealyeducation.com>

See also Virginia's I'm Determined Project Web site <http://www.imdetermined.org> for more information on self-determination efforts in Virginia.

**Transition Portfolio Resource.** The Shenandoah Valley Regional Program Transition Project of Virginia has created forms for many kinds of informal transition assessments in key areas of transition. It catalogues them in a suggested timeline beginning in seventh grade and ending in twelfth grade. [http://www.rockingham.k12.va.us/rcps\\_sped/SVRP/Transition-Portfolio.htm](http://www.rockingham.k12.va.us/rcps_sped/SVRP/Transition-Portfolio.htm)

Virginia Education Wizard. The Virginia Education Wizard contains informal self-assessments of Skills, Interests and Values. In addition to information related to careers, it offers guidance on choosing and paying for college and on transferring from community college to a university. <http://www.vawizard.org>

### *How does transition assessment relate to the Summary of Performance?*

A Summary of Performance (SoP) is a document that is required and provided to each student upon graduating with a standard or advanced studies diploma, or reaching the age of 22, (8 VAC 20-81-90F.1). It outlines the student's academic and functional performance and offers recommendations for meeting postsecondary goals. The SoP offers a means for school divisions to organize and share assessment data with rehabilitation counselors, adult agency service providers, and college disability support services offices, and others who may work with the students in the future. Sharing assessment data can be helpful for determining eligibility for services and to avoid duplicating assessment services. A summary of transition assessment results should be included in the SoP.

### *Final words*

Throughout the transition years, multiple evaluations administered on an ongoing basis and covering education and training, employment and independent living, will yield the best data. The continuous process of collecting and using assessment data to shape students' visions for adult life should result in the eventual development of postsecondary goals that reflect realistic, satisfying plans for the future (Sitlington et al., 2007)



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