
Introduction

Today, society supports the successful transition from school to the adult world for students. As educators and others in the helping professions, we expect our students and clients to become participating members of the community. This goal applies to all students in our schools, including those with disabilities.

Legislative Mandates for Transition

Significant legislation has been passed to address the transition needs of students receiving special education services. Congress recently updated the nation's special education law, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004), and sought to improve postsecondary results for students with disabilities by requiring public high schools to provide better transition planning.

Congress stated that providing effective transition services to promote successful postschool education or employment is an important measure of a school's accountability for the postsecondary performance of its students. The provisions mandated that the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team must consider all identified students who will reach the age of 16 for the next IEP and identify each student's transition strengths, needs, preferences, and interests in relation to the postsecondary outcome goals of education and training, employment, and independent living. However, many transition experts and advocates feel that age 16 is too late to start transition planning. IDEA 2004's federal regulations make it clear that IEP teams are free to begin transition planning at an earlier age if the team determines it appropriate to do so. Many students with learning disabilities can benefit from transition planning activities that begin in middle school.

New phrases, such as “results-oriented process,” “focusing on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child (300.42(a)(1)), and “appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills” are specific enough to leave little doubt as to Congress's intent for schools. While there is some flexibility in determining “appropriate” measurable postsecondary goals, “age-appropriate transition assessments,” and the individual appropriateness of assessing independent living skills, the language of IDEA 2004 and its regulations mandate a transition assessment process. The nature of that process is also guided by legislative language with the phrases “based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests” (300.42(a)(2)); and, of course, data for schools to provide a graduating or exiting student due to aging out “a summary of the child's academic and functional performance” (300.305(e)(3)).

The IDEA 2004 mandate for considering transition service needs for every student with a disability who is eligible for special services, beginning no later than the age 16 IEP, has the logical (and legal) consequences of directing schools to extend their academic assessment procedures to new kinds of ability and achievement performance

outcome areas (e.g., self-determination, social skills, life skills, employability) and levels of strengths, preferences, and interests across all outcome areas (e.g., strengths, preferences, and interests related to postsecondary education, occupations, self-determination, interpersonal relationships, etc.).

The IDEA 2004 assessment requirements clearly state that present level of performance (PLOP) must include both *academic* and *functional* performance. It is the latter area that is causing the most concern for professionals who have left the teaching of functional knowledge and skills to parents and other teachers or professionals (Clark, in press).

Functional Outcomes

The professional literature related to the functional outcomes for individuals with disabilities once they leave school (i.e., adult outcomes) has focused for some time on three general areas: independent living, personal–social adjustment, and occupational adjustment (Cronin & Patton, 1993; Halpern, 1985; Kokaska & Brolin, 1985; Sitlington & Clark, 2005). Sitlington and Clark elaborated on these three areas, dividing them into nine major transition planning areas: communication and academic performance, self-determination, interpersonal relationships, integrated community participation, health and fitness, independent/interdependent daily living, leisure and recreation, employment, and further education and training. Describing a specific array of skills associated with the transition process gives direction to assessment for all students with disabilities (Clark, in press).

Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, and Leconte (2007) provide the following working definition highlighting the essential elements of assessment for transition planning:

Transition assessment is an ongoing process of collecting information on the student's strengths, needs, preferences, and interests as they relate to the demands of current and future living, learning, and working environments. This process should begin in middle school and continue until the student graduates or exits high school. Information from this process should be used to drive the IEP and transition planning process and to develop the Summary of Performance document detailing the student's academic and functional performance and post-secondary goals. (Sitlington et al., 2007, pp. 2–3)

Current practice in transition assessment includes a variety of approaches. Most state guidelines and professional literature (cf. Clark, 2007; Miller, Lombard, & Corbey, 2007; Sitlington et al., 2007) addressing assessment for transition planning under the new IDEA 2004 requirements suggest that assessment for transition services include tests, interviews, direct observation, and curriculum-based assessment. Using these approaches involves the use of both formal and informal procedures.

The *informal* transition assessment approach particularly lends itself to using assessment information for counseling and guidance concurrently with the assessment and instruction process. Teachers using specific surveys or checklists in instruction can provide individual or group guidance, based on the information students share. Parents can follow up on ideas that were expressed at school, and teachers can do

the same for ideas that were expressed at home. School counselors, teachers, parents, and students can all participate in exploring ideas that emerge from informal transition assessments.

Ideally, schools will seriously and systematically address transition assessment and planning well before the student's sixteenth birthday, perhaps as early as middle school. Early assessment and planning for transition is important. For most students, with the goal of independence comes the need for skill development. Identifying and developing the skills needed in the areas of self-advocacy and self-determination, interpersonal skills, daily living, transportation and mobility, leisure, and community participation facilitates the development of a very relevant and functional curriculum. The motivation to achieve is enhanced when students learn skills that lead to their independence. Early awareness of transition needs helps students and their parents perceive that students have the abilities to be independent citizens of the community. By engaging in early transition assessment and planning, professionals can enhance the number and variety of options that are available to individual students, because there is additional time to provide the foundation needed to access those options.

It is our intention to provide age-appropriate informal transition assessments addressing independent living skills. We hope that the assessment tools in this book are useful for teachers, counselors, special educators, and others and expect that the instruments can be implemented in a wide variety of settings and delivery models. Some users are likely to have minimal time allocated for transition programming; others will have group sessions, class periods, or entire courses in which to work with students. Table 1 illustrates some of the delivery models frequently used.

Whether you have a few minutes a week for an individual session or a semester- or year-long course dedicated to transition, the informal assessments offered here can be used to involve your students systematically in a transition plan. In addition, within each section of the informal assessments, we have included multiple offerings on the same topic, designed to range from simple to complex to facilitate your selection of age-appropriate assessments. Informal assessments that are designed for students to complete as well as those designed to solicit teacher and parent input about the student's strengths, abilities, knowledge, preferences, interests, and progress are included. We provide these assessments and the ideas about delivery models to illustrate the variety of tools and settings available for use to address the transition needs of all students. Professionals will, of course, use their judgment to select the settings and methods most appropriate for students' life skills needs.

Selected Informal Assessments

This book provides 65 informal assessment instruments that have come to our attention and for which permission to reprint has been granted. The informal assessments included in this book are organized into six sections:

- Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination
- Interpersonal Skills
- Daily Living
- Transportation & Mobility

Table 1 Informal Assessment for Transition Delivery Models

Individual assessment	<p>One on one with individual students</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • who have special needs • who have unique interests • as a part of counseling and educational planning
Small-group assessment	<p>In group sessions organized</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • around specific transition needs and interests • to promote in-depth transition planning • for outside of the school day • at community sites
Class assessment	<p>Class assessments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to address basic information that all students need • to integrate the information into the academic content • to assist large groups of students in transition planning in an inclusive setting
Grade-level or school assessment	<p>In advisories or homerooms, conduct informal assessments as a pre- or postactivity for</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a school-wide transition fair • course selection for the following school year • selecting community/adult agency speakers • a needs assessment for transition curricula

- Leisure
- Community Participation

These sections represent six areas of assessment that are critical to transition planning, decision making, and instruction. The following paragraphs describe each section in more detail.

Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination

The informal assessments in the “Self-Advocacy and Self-Determination” section focus on measures that describe the individual’s self-awareness and self-knowledge of abilities, needs, and rights as well as the individual’s ability to plan for short- and long-term goals, to set short-term goals, and to realize his or her goals. Assessments also cover the student’s abilities to speak for his or her interests; knowledge of his or her preferences, needs, and satisfaction with life; and ability to act as his or her own advocate. Individual assessments address the various issues of self-esteem, fears, and anger. The assessments may identify personal issues that for some students will require further processing, either in the group or individually. Being aware of the content of each assessment and knowing your students are always helpful in selecting the most appropriate tools. Additional follow-up or services may be needed from support staff at school or in the community.

Interpersonal Skills

The informal assessments in the “Interpersonal Skills and Communication” section provide information to help understand the student’s strengths and weaknesses in relating to others in a variety of settings, including home, school, and community. Specific assessments include positive social behaviors such as sharing, cooperation and collaboration, respecting others’ privacy and property, knowing socially appropriate and inappropriate behaviors, sensitivity to others’ feelings and preferences, sensitivity to multicultural diversity, and environment-specific social behaviors. Some of these assessments will seem more appropriate for individual students rather than group use. Care should be taken to ensure a safe climate for discussion of the important issues tapped by these assessments. A variety of methods for increasing skills in this area should be available through collaboration with school and community support services.

Daily Living

From personal hygiene to basic home maintenance, the “Daily Living Skills” section includes informal assessments to analyze students’ functional skills, define attitudes, and establish readiness for independent living. Assessments target such skills as more advanced dressing skills, personal hygiene skills, basic food preparation, and care and maintenance of clothing.

Transportation & Mobility

Accessing public transportation, navigating in the community, and displaying safe driving habits are skills addressed by informal assessments in the “Transportation & Mobility” section.

Leisure

The informal assessments in the “Leisure” section focus on determining preferences for leisure activities and assessing skills in enjoying entertainment and social situations.

Community Participation

The informal assessments in the “Community Participation” section cover topics such as knowing about and being able to access community services, government, and agencies. Further assessment topics in this area include the nature and extent of the student’s activities outside the home and school settings.

A Final Note

Transition planning is critical for all students and is a shared responsibility among all educators, students and their families, and their communities. The literature and the legislation have shown that successful transitions are related to a multitude of factors that include independent living and community participation. From early in elementary school through graduation from high school and involvement in postsecondary, career, and community activities, there are many opportunities to favorably influence

the successful transition of students. It is our desire that these informal assessments assist you in your efforts.

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