

Transition Assessment Process for Students with Complex Support Needs

Effective transition assessment and planning are critical to increasing students' successful outcomes, especially for those who face the most significant barriers to employment. Assessment is the process of gathering relevant information to plan, evaluate, and make decisions regarding a student's current and future needs in the transition from high school to postsecondary environments.

Many students with complex support needs have unique abilities and skills that are not necessarily obvious during the assessment process. Oftentimes, these assessments miss the students' interests, contributions, and, most importantly, strengths. Identification of these strengths and skills should occur through interviews with people who know the student well, observation within natural environments, and the development of coordinated activities that will move the students closer to reaching successful postschool outcomes. These methods will provide a fair and accurate assessment of skills that are crucial to a student's future success.

Components of Transition Assessment

Students with complex support needs require a collaborative assessment process that takes into consideration the unique learning style of the student. No single instrument or person can provide a comprehensive set of information that can be used for future planning.

Components of a successful transition assessment process must include:

- Gathering existing data on strengths, preferences, interests, and needs from a variety of collaborators within the home, school, and community.
- Identifying assessment needs to increase a student's self-awareness, career exploration, and preparation.
- Analyzing the data with the student, family, and IEP team to identify strengths, preferences, and interests in order to develop a vision of the future.
- Developing coordinated transition activities within home, school, and community to move the student closer to reaching his or her vision.
- Monitoring performance of transition activities to collect data on progress towards post school outcomes.
- Documenting results of the assessments in the student's IEP.

Strategies for Assessing Students with Complex Needs

Assessing students with complex needs requires a willingness to utilize a broad array of strategies. The following guidelines can help educators create a comprehensive transition assessment process.

- Identify assistive technology needs to ensure active student participation in the assessment process.
- Use a variety of assessment tools to consider the support needs in all areas of a student's life.
- Use questionnaires to collect data from multiple collaborators.
- Utilize a person-centered planning process such as [Discovering ME!](http://centerontransition.org/DiscoveringME.html) (centerontransition.org/DiscoveringME.html) to discover student interests and abilities.
- Assess students in natural environments.
- Address each transition domain: employment, education and training, independent living, and self-determination.
- Create a portfolio for each student to build upon information over time.
- Coordinate assessment and transition services with families and adult services providers.
- Use assessment methods which produce outcomes that contribute to ongoing development, planning, and implementation of "next steps" for the student.

Conclusion

Transition assessments serve as the foundation and driving force to identify measurable postsecondary goals and determine the transition services and activities needed to pursue each goal during the secondary school years. Educators must have the knowledge of the transition assessment process in order to build transition plans that will support the best possible outcomes for students with complex support needs. The plan must reflect high expectations and assess multiple skills. The ultimate goal is to identify services and supports to achieve postsecondary goals and improve quality of life.