

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004, Section 1414) requires that Individualized Education Program (IEP) teams develop appropriate, measurable postsecondary goals for students ages 16 and older that are based upon age-appropriate transition assessments. To understand how the federal courts interpret this requirement, Prince and colleagues (2014) examined district court transition education rulings. Based upon their analysis, the judicial decisions indicate, among other findings, IEP teams need to use multiple transition assessments across transition domains (i.e., employment, postsecondary education, and independent living) and use at least one transition assessment that has ample supporting validity evidence. Validity refers to the degree to which the assessment measures what it is designed to measure. This typically means that assessments should report data on:

- Test content
- User responses to assessment items
- Internal structure of the assessment
- Relations to other variables, such as family income
- Consequences of testing (AERA et al., 2014)

Educators need to determine, based upon examination of available evidence, if ample validity evidence exists for their planned use of an assessment.

## What is Transition Assessment?

Neubert and Leconte (2013), speaking on behalf of the Council for Exceptional Children’s Division on Career Development and Transition, crafted a useful description of transition assessment based upon mandates in IDEA (2004) and established best practice.

Age-appropriate transition assessment is an on-going process of collecting information on the youth’s needs, strengths, preferences, and in-

terests as they relate to measurable postsecondary goals. This process includes a careful match between the characteristics of the youth and the requirements of secondary environments and postsecondary environments requirements along with recommendations for accommodations, services, supports and technology to ensure the match. Youth and their families are taught how to use assessment results to drive the transition requirements in the IEP process . . . and advocate for needed or desired supports to succeed in meeting postsecondary goals. (p. 74).

Neubert and Leconte (2013) also indicate the term age-appropriate needs to consider both chronological and developmental ages and identify self-determination skills to facilitate attainment of transition goals.

## What the Research Says

Transition assessments have been described as the “cornerstone of the transition planning process” (Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2018, p. 91). It is imperative to include students and their families in the transition assessment process to understand and plan for students’ futures, considering their strengths, preferences, interests, and support needs (Kochhar-Bryant et al., 2007; Morningstar & Clavenna-Deane, 2018). Educators, however, have reported difficulty assessing transition skills (e.g., employment, life) for students with significant cognitive disabilities (Deardorff et al., 2020). To address this concern, educators may consider using formal transition assessments that follow these three suggestions: (a) provide technical data about the assessment (i.e., reliability, validity); (b) are accessible to students through a variety of assistive technology; and (c) support a student responding through a variety of ways (Deardorff et al., 2020). In addition, educators may consider using informal assessments, situational assessments, and person-centered planning approaches (Carter et al., 2015; Thoma & Tamura, 2013).

Martin and McConnell (2017) suggest several questions that educators may find helpful when deciding if a transition assessment has ample validity evidence (see Table 1). Decisions about whether an assessment has ample validity evidence should be made based upon how the assessment will be used. At a minimum, there should be a match between the assessment and the proposed use of the assessment for questions 1–5.

**Table 1**

*Questions to ask when selecting transition assessments.*

Questions
1. What is its purpose? Does this purpose match the planned use of the assessment?
2. Who was the assessment designed to be used with?
3. Where did the assessment items come from?
4. Will the results tell the IEP team what it needs to know?
5. Will the results be understandable and useful to identify strengths, needs, or interests?
6. Do the results of this assessment vary depending upon students' gender, race or ethnicity, or family economic status?
7. Does other validity evidence support the use of this assessment?

## Guidelines for Practice

The most important task IEP teams need to accomplish with transition age students is identifying students' transition strengths, needs, and interests; and developing postsecondary and annual transition goals. To do this, IEP teams need results from well-developed assessments with appropriate validity data supporting their use. Thus, IEP teams need to examine various transition assessments and determine if assessments have ample validity evidence supporting their use for students of transition age.

When reporting results of transition assessments, Carter et al. (2014, 2015) suggest using a strengths-based approach that emphasizes the skills possessed by students with significant cognitive disabilities. Highlighting a student's strengths (e.g., persistence, honesty, optimism, gratitude, compassion) may help employers recognize these traits as desirable in an employee. These skills are also important for community engagement for students with significant cognitive disabilities (Carter et al., 2015).

## Additional Resources

### Practical Tips for Transition Assessment

[www.nsttac.org/products\\_and\\_resources/tag.aspx](http://www.nsttac.org/products_and_resources/tag.aspx)

### Transition Assessment Toolkit

[transitionta.org/transition-assessment/](http://transitionta.org/transition-assessment/)

## References

- American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, & National Council on Measurement in Education. (2014). *Standards for educational and psychological testing*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Carter, E. W., Boehm, T. L., Biggs, E. E., Annandale, N. H., Taylor, C. E., Looock, A. K., & Liu, R. Y. (2015). Known for my strengths: Positive traits of transition-age youth with intellectual disability and/or autism. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities, 40*(2), 101-119. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796915592158>
- Carter, E. W., Brock, M. E., & Trainor, A. A. (2014). Transition assessment and planning for youth with severe intellectual and developmental disabilities. *The Journal of Special Education, 47*(4), 245-255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022466912456241>
- Deardorff, M. E., Pulos, J. M., Suk, A. L., Williams-Diehm, K. L., & McConnell, A. E. (2020). What do transition assessments look like for students with a significant cognitive disability? A multistate survey of educational stakeholders. *INCLUSION, 8*(1), 74-85.
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 et seq. (2004). <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-118/pdf/STATUTE-118-Pg2647.pdf>

Kochhar-Bryant, C. A., Shaw, S., & Izzo, M. (2007). What every teacher should know about transition and IDEA 2004. Boston, MA: Pearson.

Martin, J. E., & McConnell, A. E. (2017). Transition planning. In M. L. Wehmeyer & K. A. Shogren (Eds.), *Research-based practices for educating students with intellectual disability* (pp. 151-166). New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis.

Morningstar, M. E., & Clavenna-Deane, B. (2018). *Your complete guide to transition planning and services*. Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.

Neubert, D. A., & Leconte, P. J. (2013). Age-appropriate transition assessment: The position of the division on career development and transition. *Career Development and Transition for Exceptional Individuals*, 36(2), 72-83. doi:10.1177/2165143413487768

Prince, A. M. T., Plotner, A. J., & Yell, M. J. (2014). Postsecondary transition and the courts: An update. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 25, 41-47. doi:10.1177/1044207314530469

Thoma, C. A., & Tamura, T. R. (2013). *Demystifying transition assessment*. Baltimore, MA: Paul H. Brookes.

---

*This research brief was developed by the Illinois Center for Transition and Work at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign through a contract with the Illinois State Board of Education. Information presented may not reflect the position or policy of the Illinois State Board of Education.*

