

Federal special education law requires postsecondary goals be based on age-appropriate transition assessments as a means for students, parents, and educators to better understand students' unique needs, strengths, and interests to facilitate development of meaningful postsecondary goals (Neubert & Leconte, 2013). The Council for Exceptional Children's Division on Career Development and Transition's policy on transition assessment defines transition assessment as

... an ongoing process of collecting information on the youth's needs, strengths, preferences, and interests as they relate to measurable postsecondary goals and the annual goals that will help facilitate attainment of postsecondary goals. This process includes a careful match between the characteristics of the youth and the requirements of secondary environments and postsecondary environments along with recommendations . . . to ensure the match. Youth and families are taught how to use the results of transition assessment to drive the transition requirements in the IEP process. (Neubert & Leconte, 2013, p. 72)

What are Written Career Interest Assessments?

According to the CareerOneStop website sponsored by the U.S. Department of Labor an interest assessment enables individuals to identify careers matching one's interest. These tools typically ask users to identify if they like or do not like certain job-related tasks or activities by presenting a series of written questions, offering possible answers, and prompting users to mark the answer that matches their preferences. The assessment matches the results to various careers that align with the user's responses. Numerous written interest assessments exist. Interest assessments are also often called interest inventories.

What the Research Says

Written interest assessments provide a useful tool to increase students' awareness of the world of work (Flexer et al., 2013). By using written questions, these assessments promote choice making by asking students their preference (Pulos & Martin, 2019). Written interest assessments also allow students a means to explore different areas of work and hone in on career interest areas they may like to examine in more depth. When used across time, written interest assessments provide a record of the career(s) the student would like to have at a given point in time. This is important because interest inventory results often change across time (Pulos & Martin, 2019).

Many students with disabilities need extended, structured experiences to develop and refine their career interests (Szymanski & Hershenson, 2005). Thus, career education for many students with disabilities needs to begin in grade school and continue through high school (Brolin, 1996). Ongoing career assessment using interest inventories and other methods serve as the foundation for transition planning. The ongoing assessment results provide information needed for the student, parents, and educators to enable students with disabilities to progress through the different career development stages (Sitlington et al., 1985). Brolin (1983) identified four career development stages that overlap across school years that students need to progress through. These stages are:

- Career Awareness (grades K-12)
- Career Exploration (grades 6-12)
- Career Preparation (grades 9-12)
- Career Assimilation (postsecondary to lifelong learning)

Note the first three stages typically begin at different points in time but all continue through high school. Some students with disabilities who are 17 may still be in the career awareness stage learning what is possible while other may already be engaged in career preparation. Critical to each stage are the results of career interest inventories as they

provide a record of students' changing preferences as they become more aware and begin exploring different career options (Madaus et al., 2013).

Guidelines for Practice

Hundreds of written interest inventories exist, so educators need to carefully select assessments that are a good match with each of their students. Factors to consider include:

- Student's reading level
- Student's preference for paper-pencil or on-line interest assessments
- Length of time needed to complete assessment
- Types of careers the results identify

Educators need to also consider the manner in which the assessments provide results. For instance, some assessments will provide results across 16 career cluster categories, such as health science, manufacturing, education and training, or architecture and construction. Other assessments may organize the results by a career development theory, such as that described by Holland, using terms such as realistic, investigative, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional (Luft, 2013). Educators need to select the assessment they believe will provide the most useful results for each student.

To engage students in the process provide them a choice in the assessment they complete as well as the method (i.e., paper-pencil or an online) they use to complete the assessment. When completed, review the results with students, and provide students an opportunity to summarize the results of their interest assessment at their next IEP meeting.

References

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Additional Resources

National Transition Assistance Center on Transition website

Create a free account and then log-in to browse through the Transition Assessment Toolkit.

transitionta.org/transition-assessment/

CEC's Division on Career Development and Transition website

Pay particular attention to DCDT Fast Facts and the organization's journal.

dcdt.org

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