

What is Transition Assessment?

In Virginia, for students with disabilities, **transition planning must begin by age 14** or earlier if appropriate, for students with an Individualized Education Program (IEP). **Transition assessment** is the process of gathering information about a student's strengths, interests, preferences, and needs related to life after high school.

This includes planning for education or training, employment, and, when appropriate, independent living. **Transition assessment is not a single test.** It is an ongoing process that helps the student, with support of the IEP team, make thoughtful, individualized decisions about their future.

Why Transition Assessment Matters

Transition assessment is the **foundation of a strong transition plan.** Without it, IEP goals and services may be too general or not connected to what the student actually wants and needs.

Good assessment helps ensure that:

- **Post-secondary goals** reflect the student's real interests and abilities
- **Transition services** are meaningful and practical
- **Course of study** (classes your child will take) aligns with future plans
- The student is building **skills needed for adult life**

When transition assessment is done well, it leads to better outcomes after high school.

What Does Transition Assessment Look Like?

Transition assessment should **happen over time and use a variety of tools and strategies.** It should include both formal and informal approaches.

Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Interest inventories to identify career preferences
- Observations in school, community, or work settings
- Student interviews and discussions about goals
- Input from families and teachers
- Real-world experiences such as job shadowing or internships
- Evaluations of daily living, social, and work skills

For some students, especially those preparing for employment, a **functional vocational evaluation** may be used. This type of assessment looks at how a student performs in real or simulated work environments.

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How the IEP Team Uses Transition Assessments

Transition assessment results should directly guide the IEP. They are used to develop:

- **Measurable postsecondary goals** in education, employment, and independent living
- **Annual IEP goals** that build toward those outcomes
- **Transition services**, such as instruction, community experiences, and employment supports
- **Course of study**, including classes that prepare the student for their goals

If the assessment says one thing but the IEP reflects something different, that is a signal to **ask questions**.

Questions Families Can Ask

Families play an important role in making sure transition assessment is meaningful. These questions can help guide conversations with the IEP team:

- ✓ What transition assessments have been completed, and what did they show about my child's strengths and interests?
- ✓ How were my child's preferences and goals included in the assessment process?
- ✓ How often are transition assessments updated?
- ✓ Do the results clearly connect to my child's postsecondary goals?
- ✓ How are the transition services in the IEP based on assessment results?
- ✓ Are there assessments that would give us better information, especially about employment or independent living?
- ✓ Has my child had opportunities for real-world experiences to help inform planning?
- ✓ Are assessments being provided in a way my child can understand and fully participate in?
- ✓ If my child's goals have changed, how is that reflected in updated assessments?

When Families May Want to Ask More Questions

There are some common indicators that may indicate transition assessments are not being used effectively:

- ✓ The **same transition assessment** is repeated every year without new or updated information, or only one assessment is completed.
- ✓ **Post-secondary goals are vague** or do not reflect the student's interests.
- ✓ There is **little or no documentation of how assessment results were used** to develop the IEP.
- ✓ The **student has not been meaningfully involved** in the process.
- ✓ Assessments rely **only on paper-and-pencil tools** without real-world or in-school experiences.
- ✓ Transition **services and activities are generic** and not clearly tied to assessment results.

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- ✓ There is **no focus on employment or independent living** when those areas are appropriate. If marked not appropriate at this time, should additional assessments be done?

If you notice these issues, it is reasonable to ask for **additional or different assessments** and an explanation of why the transition section of the IEP is not specifically targeted to your child's needs, preferences, and strengths.

The Student's Role in Transition Assessment and Planning

Students should be **active participants** in transition assessment whenever possible. This process is not just about gathering information about the student, it is also about helping **the student learn about themselves**. When students are involved, they begin to understand their strengths, interests, and needs, and they build the skills they will need to make decisions as adults.

Student involvement should grow over time. A younger student may participate in simple ways, while an older student may take a leading role in discussions and decision-making. The goal is to help the student gradually take more ownership of their future.

Students can be **involved in transition assessment** in many meaningful ways. For example, a student might complete an interest inventory and then talk with the IEP team about what the results mean to them. A student might share what they enjoy doing at home, what classes they like or dislike, or what they imagine for their life after high school. Even simple input like this helps ensure that planning reflects the student's voice.

Students can also participate by **reflecting on their experiences**. After a job shadow, volunteer activity, or class project, the student can talk about what they liked, what was challenging, and whether they would want to do something similar in the future. This can be a powerful form of assessment because it is based on real-world experience.

In some cases, students may take part in **more structured activities**. They might complete career exploration activities online, participate in a situational assessment at a job site, or work with a teacher or counselor to identify skills they need to develop. Students can help track their progress, such as improving attendance, learning to follow a schedule, or building communication skills in a work setting.

Students can also be involved by **helping to set their own post-secondary goals**. For example, a student might say they want to work with animals, attend a community college, or learn to live more independently. The IEP team can then use a transition assessment to develop measurable IEP goals and identify the steps needed to reach them.

Another important way students can participate is by being **involved in their IEP meetings**. This might begin with attending part of the meeting and sharing a few thoughts. Over time, students may help lead the meeting, present their goals, or explain what supports help them succeed. Some students use a short presentation, video, or written statement to share their ideas.

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Students can also **practice self-advocacy** as part of transition assessment. This includes learning how to explain their disability, ask for help, request accommodations, and make decisions. For example, a student might practice emailing a teacher to ask for extra time on an assignment or explaining to a supervisor what support they need to complete a task.

Families can support student involvement by encouraging their child to share their opinions, try new experiences, and reflect on what they learn. It is okay if students are unsure about their future or change their minds. Transition assessment is meant to help them explore options and learn over time.

If a student is not meaningfully included in transition assessment, families can ask the IEP team **how the student's voice is being gathered and used**. Every student, regardless of disability, should have opportunities to participate in ways that are appropriate and meaningful for them.

Choosing the Right Assessments

There is **no one-size-fits-all** assessment. The IEP team should consider the individual student when selecting tools.

- For students **exploring career options**, interest inventories and career exploration activities may be helpful.
- For students planning to **attend college or other post-secondary education programs**, assessments may help identify academic strengths and needs, self-advocacy skills, accommodations, assistive technology needs, and supports that may be helpful in postsecondary settings.
- For students **preparing for work**, situational assessments or vocational evaluations may provide valuable information.
- For students **with more significant disabilities**, assessments may focus on independent living skills, employment skills, communication, and other support needs.

Assessments should always **be accessible**. This may include, but is not limited to, accommodations such as simplified language, visual supports, or assistance with reading and responding. Instructional or assessment **accommodations already included in the IEP** should be reviewed to help determine what accommodations will help the student complete their transition assessments. **Some assessments will not be appropriate**. For example, a non-verbal child should not be assessed on an instrument designed for verbal responses.

Schools must ensure that **parents can understand assessment information**, including providing translation or interpretation when needed.

Examples of Transition Assessments

VCU's Center for Transition Innovation (VCU-CTI) has compiled a list of some free transition assessment resources. These are not the only resources available—there are many more-- and they may not all be suitable for the student's unique needs.

- Adolescent Autonomy Checklist
- I'm Determined One Pager tool

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- Indiana University Transition Assessment Matrix
- O’Net Interest Profiler
- Pathful (available through the Virginia Department of Education)
- PEATC Life Skills Checklist
- Photo Career Quiz
- Pictorial Interest Inventory
- Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery
- Virginia Wizard Career Interest Assessment
- Who R U (online career interest inventory) Assessments

It’s important to note that parents cannot request that a specific transition assessment be conducted with their child. However, they can discuss with the IEP the types of assessments that would be appropriate and most useful.

Resources

A Day in Our Shoes – Transition Assessments for Students with Blindness or Severe Disabilities

Edutopia – Effective Transition Assessment for Students with Disabilities

Iris Center - What is the Transition Planning Process for Students with Disabilities

PEATC - [Guide to Transition for Families of Youth with Disabilities in Virginia](#)

Project 10 – Transition Assessments for Students with Disabilities

VCU-RRTC Center on Transition Innovations – Assessment

Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Students with Disabilities in Virginia

Virginia Department of Education - Webpage on Secondary Transition Resources

Assessments



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