

SECTION 6

Assessing Student Needs The Process of Assessment

Gathering and reviewing assessment information is often the first step in planning appropriate transition goals and objectives.

What is Assessment?

Assessment is an ongoing process through which information is gathered about student's strengths, interests, abilities, psychological, social and emotional development, **over a period of time**. It requires looking at how a person functions in different environments from many viewpoints. The assessment process may be different for each student depending upon their needs and should determine what they can do, as well as what they cannot do. The purpose is to open doors of opportunity rather than close off options as the student moves toward employment and greater independence.

Who Does the Assessment?

Assessment requires a team approach that involves the student, his or her parents/guardians, professionals in the school (teachers, therapists, and counselors), employers, and in some instances a trained vocational assessor who has knowledge of disabilities. Parents are an important part of this team because you have a lifetime of experience and knowledge of their son or daughter to share.

When Should the Assessment Be Done?

Because assessment is an ongoing process, and the information gathered should be used for planning appropriate services and supports, the process should begin as early as middle school. Students in special education participate in extensive assessment procedures throughout their educational experience and all of this information can be used to obtain "a picture" of the student's abilities, interests and appropriate career directions. The development of career assessment portfolios is a good way to gather and store assessment information so the experiences a student participates in throughout their educational program is documented.

What Information Should Be Gathered?

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of a student's abilities and strengths, it is important to look at a variety of assessment information:

- Academic Achievement
- Interests, Preferences
- Personal History
- Medical Background

- Social Skills
- Learning Styles
- Daily Living Skills
- Employment Related Skills (Evaluations from job sites both in school and in the community.)

Much of this information is readily available in school records or could be obtained from interviewing students, parents, and school staff. It is important to identify what information is already available, and to develop a plan to obtain any assessment data that might be missing.

What is Situational Assessment?

Situational assessment is the gathering of information about a student's ability in realistic work/community environments. Initial situational assessment may occur through in-school work placements, or participation in technology education classes. As students get older, it becomes best practice to assess students in real jobs in the community. This allows you to determine if a student can achieve the skills necessary for a specific job, what level of independence a student works at, how he/she gets along with co-workers and other general work-related skills. Many schools collect this information when students participate in school or community-based work. In some instances, schools will hire an adult service agency to provide this situational assessment experience.

What Does Assessment Tell Parents?

Ask yourself the following questions. If the answers are "yes," the assessment can be used as a useful tool by those involved in transition planning.

- Does the assessment tell you about things your child can do, not just those deficits and weaknesses which you already know about?
- Does the assessment include testing in a variety of settings?
- Based upon your knowledge of your child, does the assessment give an accurate picture of his/her abilities?
- Is the information consistent from different sources?
- Do the results help you identify what needs to be done next?
- Do they provide you with information to help you write appropriate transition goals and objectives which will address areas relevant to future career plans?

Sections of this fact sheet were adapted from the PACER Center, Inc. of Minneapolis, MN

SECTION 7

Other Assessment Tools

Below are three person-centered planning models available to use as tools to help chart a course to the future. The information gathered is used to develop the IEP (Individual Education Plan). Remember, the plan will not happen if it is not implemented. All three plans should be evaluated periodically to ensure their success.

MAPS - McGill Action Planning System

This is a group of people including family, friends, neighbors, teachers, and community support, who are important to the student for planning their future. A facilitator will lead the group and brainstorm by identifying strengths, abilities, and interests. Eight key questions are raised that are critical to the planning process. MAPS will provide an action plan.

PATH – Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope

Similar to MAPS, this plan also requires a group of people to help identify dreams and goals. This model provides a path to follow. PATH is comprised of eight steps, with action plans to be completed within specific time periods.

COACH – Choosing Outcomes and Accommodations for Children

Also in a group setting, this tool determines the student's educational program. Through this process, outcomes are determined and accommodations are discussed.