

# memorandum

**Date:** August 2013  
**To:** Utah State Office of Education  
**From:** REL West Reference Desk Team  
**Re:** Summary of research/resources on the assessment of students with disabilities transitioning to postsecondary education or careers

---

**Request:** What kinds of assessments are used in transition planning for secondary students with disabilities?

---

## Response:

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law ensuring services to children with disabilities throughout the United States. IDEA governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to more than 6.5 million eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. Transition is one of the many areas supported by the IDEA. IDEA defines transition services as a “coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child’s movement from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation.” (Retrieved on July 25, 2013, from <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/.root.dynamic.TopicalBrief.17>)

States are still developing policy and guidance documents relative to transition assessment. But the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC) recommends using a combination of the following types: Paper and pencil tests, structured student and family interviews, community or work-based assessments (situational), and curriculum-based assessments. (Retrieved on July 25, 2013, from <http://nstattac.org/content/age-appropriate-transition-assessment-toolkit-3rd-edition>) These assessments or procedures come in formal and informal formats. According to NSTTAC, informal measures may include interviews or questionnaires, direct observations, anecdotal records, environmental or situational analysis, curriculum-based assessments, interest inventories, preference assessments, and transition planning inventories. Formal measures include adaptive behavior and independent living assessments, aptitude tests, interest assessments, intelligence tests, achievement tests, personality or preference tests, career development measures, on the job or training evaluations, and measures of self-determination.

This memo includes:

1. **Reports and articles:** Research reports and policy-oriented articles about assessing transitioning students with disabilities. The studies included are primarily descriptive, as REL West was unable to find any rigorous, experimental studies on this topic.
  - Citations include a link to a free online version when available.
  - Citations are accompanied by an abstract, excerpt, or summary written by the author or publisher of the article. For citations that are missing such text, we provided brief summaries instead, just for your information. We have labeled them as “REL West summary.”
2. **Other organizations** that focus on transition that may provide helpful information.

We have not done an evaluation of these resources or organizations, but rather provide them for your information only.

## 1. REPORTS & ARTICLES

Relevant resources as judged by abstracts are included here.

Clark, G. (1996). Transition planning assessment for secondary-level students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 29(1), 79–92.

*Note: We were unable to locate a link to the free full-text version of this resource. Although we typically limit our referrals to publicly available resources, based upon the abstract, we determined that this resource may be of interest to you. It is available for purchase through Sage Journals. If you would like assistance obtaining a copy, let REL West know.*

*Abstract:* This article presents a survey of and recommendations for transition planning assessment for secondary teachers of students with learning disabilities. The author makes a case for redirecting assessment practices in secondary instructional programs to obtain present-level-of-functioning information for IEP planning that extends beyond high school graduation as a single outcome. Critical outcomes in adult adjustment requiring transition planning are presented. Current standardized and nonstandardized assessment procedures that focus on adult outcomes, as well as preferences and interests in planning for the future, are described. The author gives recommendations for planning and conducting transition-needs assessment for secondary schools.

Frank, M. (2008). *Pathways to postsecondary education for students with disabilities*. Williston, VT: Vermont Parent Information Center. Retrieved on July 8, 2013, from

<http://www.vermontfamilynetwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/09/PathwaysToPostSecondary.pdf>

*Excerpt:* As children move to adulthood and advance through school, it's essential to help them identify and realize their hopes and dreams for the future. Some students go directly to work after high school while others choose postsecondary education as their path to personal growth and future employment. Pathways to Postsecondary Education for Student with Disabilities is a guide for youth, their parents, and professionals in planning for the future and in helping students achieve a successful transition from high school. Pathways provides information on the many topics involved in transition planning for youth with disabilities and includes links to resources that can assist in the planning process.

Hamblet, E. (2011). *7 Steps for Success: High school transition strategies for students with disabilities*. Arlington, VA: Council for Exceptional Children.

*Book description:* The transition from high school to college is challenging for any student, but for young adults with disabilities, it can be even more difficult. In addition to adjusting to increased academic demands in an environment where there is less structure and support, students have to navigate a disability services system that is very different from the one they knew in high school. But with the proper preparation, students can enjoy success! This practical guide explains how the system for accommodations works, describes students' rights and responsibilities within that system, and employs the voices of seasoned professionals and college students to explain the skills and strategies students should develop while they are in high school to ensure success when they reach college. As a bonus, it also offers answers to questions students with disabilities frequently ask about disclosing their disability in the admissions process.

Joyce, D., & Rossen, E. (2006). Transitioning high school students with learning disabilities into postsecondary education: Assessment and accommodations. *NASP Communiqué*, 35(3). Bethesda, MD: National Association of School Psychologists. Retrieved on July 16, 2013, from <http://www.nasponline.org/publications/cq/cq353postsec.aspx>

*Excerpt:* An understanding of learning disability criteria for postsecondary education can be important to school psychologists in several ways. First, school psychologists provide high school evaluations that include transition planning goals. Often school psychologists' evaluations are reviewed by colleges when determining if students are entitled to accommodations. Therefore, it is important to be aware that the criteria for substantiating a learning disability in postsecondary institutions can be somewhat different from that of K-12 schools. Secondly, unlike intervention teams in high schools, postsecondary institutions depend on students to initiate and monitor their own educational services. Well-designed transition plans in high school can begin to foster the self-advocacy and self-monitoring skills students will need in college. In addition, school psychologists may be hired privately by colleges and universities or parents to provide evaluations specifically for postsecondary institutions, thus requiring familiarity with college-age assessment measures and criteria for documenting accommodation needs.

Lewis, C. (2008). *Making the transition from high school to college for students with disabilities: Knowing the differences*. New York: National Center for Learning Disabilities. Retrieved on July 8, 2013, from <http://www.nclld.org/images/stories/Publications/Forms-Checklists-Flyers-Handouts/checklist-transitioningfromhs-college.pdf>

*REL West summary:* This checklist offers a side-by-side look at the ways high schools and colleges differ in terms of services and supports for students with learning disabilities.

Lissner, L. (2006). *Transition to college: Strategic planning to ensure success for students with learning disabilities*. New York: National Center for Learning Disabilities. Retrieved on July 16, 2013, from [http://www.lausd.net/lausd/offices/spec\\_ed/dots/Options\\_While\\_In\\_School/Parent\\_Advocacy\\_Brief\\_Transition\\_to\\_College.pdf](http://www.lausd.net/lausd/offices/spec_ed/dots/Options_While_In_School/Parent_Advocacy_Brief_Transition_to_College.pdf)

*Excerpt:* Congress made substantial changes to [IDEA] to increase opportunities for more students to graduate with a regular diploma and then make the successful transition to college. For students with learning disabilities who want to go to college, it is imperative that strategic planning takes place as early as possible. This brief can help you understand the requirements and opportunities included in the law so that you can successfully plan and help your child prepare for his or her future.

Morningstar, M., & Pearson, M. (2009). *Transition assessments for students with significant disabilities*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas, Transition Coalition. Retrieved on July 22, 2013, from

[http://transitioncoalition.org/transition/tcfiles/files/docs/Final\\_SDassessment\\_form1259890618.pdf/Final\\_SDassessment\\_form.pdf](http://transitioncoalition.org/transition/tcfiles/files/docs/Final_SDassessment_form1259890618.pdf/Final_SDassessment_form.pdf)

*REL West Summary:* This document is a list of assessments in the areas of general transition planning: Functional Skills/Independent Living; Vocational/Career Assessments; Preferences and Supports; and Communication.

National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center. (2013). *Age appropriate transition assessment toolkit, Third edition*. Charlotte, NC: University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Retrieved on July 16, 2013, from <http://nstattac.org/content/age-appropriate-transition-assessment-toolkit-3rd-edition>

*Summary:* This toolkit provides background information and resources relating to how best to conduct and employ transition assessments.

Solberg, V., Wills, J., & Osman, D. (2013). Promoting quality individualized learning plans: A “How to guide” focused on the high school years. Washington, DC: National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth, Institute for Educational Leadership. Retrieved August 2, 2013, from <http://www.ncwd-youth.info/sites/default/files/NCWDYouth-ILP-How-to-Guide-Feb2013.pdf>

*Summary:* This guide is designed for schools, educators, and other professionals who assist youth with college and career readiness and transition planning. This guide was developed in response to feedback from schools indicating a need for curriculum and implementation guidelines to support whole-school buy-in for implementing individualized learning plans (ILPs). A key goal of the guide is to help schools develop a bridge between college and career readiness efforts through the use of ILPs and help youth achieve prosperous and productive lives. The career development activities and resources in this guide are also useful for youth service professionals in the workforce development system.

Sopko, K. (2010). *Preparation for postsecondary life for students with disabilities*. Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Directors of Special Education. Retrieved on July 8, 2013, from [http://nasdse.org/DesktopModules/DNNspot-Store/ProductFiles/81\\_ac40fa7c-d960-4593-98da-7d43fc4373c5.pdf](http://nasdse.org/DesktopModules/DNNspot-Store/ProductFiles/81_ac40fa7c-d960-4593-98da-7d43fc4373c5.pdf)

*Summary:* This brief policy analysis was designed to identify collaborative strategies that states have implemented to address the needs of students with disabilities whose IEP transition services specify postsecondary career and technical education, vocational rehabilitation and/or immediate employment upon departure from secondary school. Project Forum collaborated with staff from the other organizations and agencies to identify eight states and interviewees. Findings describe states’ policies, definitions of competitive employment, vocational rehabilitation and career technical education entry criteria, funding/resources used, professional staff development and other key areas. Barriers and recommendations are discussed.

U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2011). *Transition of students with disabilities to postsecondary education: A guide for high school educators*. Washington, DC: Author.

Retrieved on July 8, 2013, from

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/transitionguide.html>

*Excerpt:* For students with disabilities, a big factor in their successful transition from high school to postsecondary education is accurate knowledge about their civil rights. The purpose of this guide is to provide high school educators with answers to questions students with disabilities may have as they get ready to move to the postsecondary education environment.

*Note:* This guide includes sections on the admissions process; post-admission: documentation of a disability; and keys to success: attitude, self-advocacy, and preparation.

## 2. ADDITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS/WEBSITES TO CONSULT

In addition to these resources, a number of websites provide information about students with disabilities transitioning to a wide variety of postsecondary options:

### **Association on Higher Education and Disability (AHEAD)**

<http://www.ahead.org/>

*From the website:* AHEAD is a professional membership organization for individuals involved in the development of policy and in the provision of quality services to meet the needs of persons with disabilities involved in all areas of higher education. AHEAD produces a wide variety of publications that address disability challenges and solutions in higher education and beyond.

### **Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT)**

<http://www.dcdt.org>

*From the website:* The mission of DCDT is to promote national and international efforts to improve the quality of and access to career/vocational and transition services, increase the participation of education in career development and transition goals and to influence policies affecting career development and transition services for persons with disabilities.

### **HEATH Resource Center**

<http://www.heath.gwu.edu/>

*From the website:* Since 2000, the HEATH Resource Center has served as a national clearinghouse on postsecondary education for individuals with disabilities, managed by The George Washington University Graduate School of Education and Human Development. Now, the HSC Foundation has partnered with the George Washington University to expand the content of this resource and to designate it as the official resource website of The HSC Foundation's National Youth Transitions Center. The HEATH Resource Center is a web-based clearinghouse that serves as an information exchange of educational resources, support services, and opportunities. The HEATH Resource Center gathers, develops, and disseminates information in the form of resource papers, fact sheets, website directories, newsletters, and resource materials. HEATH Resource Center is a collaborative effort among a network of professionals in the areas of disability, counseling, transition, and postsecondary education.

- *Advising High School Students with Disabilities on Postsecondary Options.* This 192-page resource contains answers to counselors' most frequently asked questions about postsecondary opportunities for students with disabilities. Students and their families are encouraged to use the toolkit to help guide their transition planning for college and career. It has been vetted by the U.S. Department of Education.
- The *Career Investigations for Transitioning Youth (C.I.T.Y.) Program* is a partnership among the George Washington University, the Kingsbury School, a school for students with learning disabilities, and the HSC Foundation. The C.I.T.Y. Program was developed to provide a "how to" model for schools and universities to positively impact the transitioning of youth with high incidence disabilities.

### **College & Career Readiness & Success Center**

<http://www.ccrscenter.org>

*From the website:* The CCRS Center was launched October 1, 2012, under a five-year grant from the United States Department of Education to the American Institutes for Research (AIR) along with our five lead partners—the American Youth Policy Forum, the College Board, Quill Research Associates, the National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, and the Forum for Youth Investment. The Center's mission is to help states and other CCRS stakeholders better inform, align, and support efforts to ensure that all students are ready for success in college and careers.

### **The National Center for Secondary Education and Transition**

<http://www.ncset.org/>

*From the website:* The National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET) coordinates national resources, offers technical assistance, and disseminates information related to secondary education and transition for youth with disabilities in order to create opportunities for youth to achieve successful future.

### **The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability**

<http://www.ncwd-youth.info/>

*From the website:* The National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth) assists state and local workforce development systems to better serve all youth, including youth with disabilities and other disconnected youth. The NCWD/Youth, created in 2001, is composed of partners with expertise in education, youth development, disability, employment, workforce development and family issues. Funded by a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), the NCWD/Youth is housed at the Institute for Educational Leadership in Washington, D.C. NCWD/Youth offers a range of technical assistance services to state and local workforce investment boards, youth councils and other workforce development system youth programs.

### **National High School Center at the American Institutes for Research**

[www.betterhighschools.org](http://www.betterhighschools.org)

*From the website:* The National High School Center has served as a central source of information on high school improvement for the Regional Comprehensive Center network from 2005 until 2013. This technical assistance network supported state education agencies and the districts and schools they served as they worked to implement the goals of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). This website contains all of the Center's work on College and Career Readiness, Early Warning Systems (EWS), students with disabilities, English Language Learners, high school dropout, and other high school improvement topics.

## Methods

### **Keywords and Search Strings Used in the Search**

“assessment” AND (“students with disabilities” OR “special education”) AND “transition”

### **Search of Databases**

ERIC, EBSCO, Google, and Google Scholar

### **Criteria for Inclusion**

When REL West staff review resources, they consider—among other things—four factors:

- **Date of the Publication:** The most current information is included, except in the case of nationally known seminal resources.
- **Source and Funder of the Report/Study/Brief/Article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols.
- **Methodology:** Sources include randomized controlled trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, and policy briefs. Priority for inclusion generally is given to randomized controlled trial study findings, but the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: numbers of participants (Just a few? Thousands?); selection (Did the participants volunteer for the study or were they chosen?); representation (Were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?).

**Existing Knowledge Base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is limited or nonexistent. In these cases, we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, and other sources.

This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by educators and policymakers in the Western region (Arizona, California, Nevada, Utah), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory West (REL West) at WestEd. This memorandum was prepared by REL West under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-12-C-0002, administered by WestEd. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.