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5-Step Process for Successful IEP Transition Planning

Our Friends · Tuesday, October 13th, 2026

Putting a transition plan in place for an Individualized Education Program (IEP) student requires time and patience. With a five-step process, educators and specialists can help frame out the work for each of their students.

Step 1: Understand Transition Planning Legal Requirements

Providing transition planning for IEP students is a federal requirement that can have a major effect on their futures. There are two specific laws that come into play:

- IDEA: The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) requires collaboration between schools and applicable students/families. Schools must specify transition services, along with helping students write their postsecondary goals.
- WIOA: The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) provides applicable students with pre-employment transition services and vocational rehabilitation pathways.

As an important consideration, assessment should be based on a student's developmental level and chronological age. Any planning that focuses on just one aspect may be a detriment to the student.

Step 2: Create a Student-Focused Foundation

Researchers have discovered that some IEP transition planning leaves out a vital voice: the student's (McConnell et al, 2021). Transition planning must place students at the center of the process and go over the following:

- what the student's goals are for the future;
- what a student's current interests, abilities, and needs are; and
- what must happen to move the student from point A (where they are) to point B (where they want to be as an adult).

Hearing from the students themselves provides foundational input, as it highlights perceptions of their own strengths, challenges, dreams, and preferences.

Step 3: Draft an Assessment Blueprint

Drafting an assessment blueprint requires taking what's already known about the student, then combining it with input from the student, their family, therapists, coaches, and teachers. Using

existing data, including three-year evaluation results, IEPs, and report cards, offers a good starting point, but without additional input, the blueprint won't become fully successful.

An assessment strategy should incorporate employment, vocational training, postsecondary education, and, when appropriate, independent living. Students should also have access to accommodations and assistive technologies during the assessment process.

Step 4: Use Well-Chosen Assessment Tools

With so many different assessments available, it's vital to select trusted tools. The six domains that cover most of what a transition assessment must capture are as follows:

- transition and career;
- disabilities and differences;
- self-determination;
- academic and cognitive;
- adaptive behavior and independent living; and
- mental health and communication.

For example, the **Social Responsiveness Scale, Third Edition (SRS®-3)** offers clarity on what support needs an autistic student may have based on their level of social responsiveness. Additionally, the **Adaptive Behavior Assessment System, Third Edition (ABAS®-3)** indicates what the student will need to successfully function across settings such as school, home, community, and work.

Step 5: Incorporate Data Into the Plan

Both informal and formal assessment data, combined with a student's preferences, interests, strengths, and needs can help provide a better understanding of their future goals. Including perspectives from multiple people in the student's life can also enable an evaluation team to move from data to goals, followed by goals to services.

Federal guidelines state that every step of the process must contain the student's voice—any plan that does not include the student must be revised.

Simplify Transition Assessment Planning

Building an IEP **transition assessment plan** involves multiple moving parts than any summary can fully capture. Fortunately, there is a **prebuilt planning form** that can help a team go over every necessary category. This form includes prompts for documenting all accommodations and modifications, assessment deadlines, responsible team members, and informal and formal tools used. By using this form, your team can quickly get on the same page and improve the success of your IEP transition plans.

Research and Resources

McConnell, A., Sanford, C., Martin, J., Cameto, R., & Hodge, L. (2021). Skills, Behaviors, Expectations, and Experiences Associated with Improved Postsecondary Outcomes for Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 46(4), 240–258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/15407969211053810>

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