

## Elementary Ideas

It can be difficult to imagine how elementary teachers fit with transition planning. The reality is that elementary school teachers play a vital role in transition planning. Our mission is sometimes foiled in secondary because of the habits students learned or didn't learn in their early years. Here are some things elementary schools do or could do to help with transition readiness.

### Already Do

Reading Instruction. Students who can't read at a 4<sup>th</sup> grade level will struggle in postsecondary education and employment. The work our elementary school teachers do in reading instruction is, therefore, a critical component in transition readiness. The same can be said for writing, which builds critical thinking and reasoning skills.



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## Age-Appropriate Transition Assessments

The first part of any transition plan is age-appropriate assessment. Age-appropriate assessments means that the assessment aligns with where that student is in the transition planning process. For example, I may not interview a student about grants and scholarships for college when they are about to turn 14. This may come later when they are a sophomore in high school. I may, however, ask them or their parent about their experience with money (earning, spending, etc.). Age-appropriate assessment also means that we keep the student's ability levels in mind when selecting assessments. I wouldn't hand a three-page questionnaire in front of a student who barely knows how to read, or who is non-verbal with low cognitive abilities.

Some frequently asked questions are: "what counts as an assessment," and "how many do I need to give?" The amount of assessments will vary by student. The key there is covering all of the areas from which we need data and information. If we can gather that from two assessments, then great. If we need more, that works too. However, we do need at least one formal assessment on file.

What counts as an assessment is a bit more concrete than the amount that we need. There are formal and informal assessments. The definitions of these vary among professionals. Generally, an assessment is considered informal if it is not guided by any type of form or protocol, or if it is self-created. Formal assessments range from standardized tests to structured interviews, or questionnaires, that were created by outside institutions or agencies. These questionnaires have typically been used on a national level as well.

When choosing assessments, it is important to consider parent forms of said assessments. Parent forms can often provide us with a well of information for students with more severe disabilities. It also allows parents to be more active participants in the transition planning process. Parent participation has been a point of emphasis in research over the last few years. Successful post-school outcomes often come because of a strong collaboration between families, communities, and educators.

We cannot tell you what assessments to use. Consider using assessments that are used nationally, offer student and parent versions, and ones that specifically address the missing information needed to create a quality plan.

## Elementary Ideas (cont.)

### Behavior & Social Skills.

Teachers are always helping students learn classroom rules and how to get along with others. The abilities to follow the directions of your boss and get along with coworkers are key to successful long-term employment. These skills are especially important in elementary as they tend to be more difficult to teach in teenage years.

### Can Do

Disability Awareness and Advocacy. It is never too early for students to learn about their strengths and weaknesses, and how to advocate for their wants and needs. In fact, starting these skills at an early age often leads to better long-term outcomes. The ideal place to start is with parent training at the initial eligibility meeting.

Combating Learned Helplessness. Students can easily get discouraged if they fail to see success. We traditionally combat this by our efforts to get our students to succeed. While that approach is absolutely needed, we can do other things as well. We can teach students what their strengths are and how those strengths are valuable. We can help our students see what value they bring outside of test scores, and how to better react to hardship.



## Goals: Long-Range and Annual

How do we set these goals, what are the differences, and what are some examples?

Assessments inform our long-range goals for students. Long-range goals refer to what the student wants to do after public school, in terms of further education, employment, and independent living. These goals are not directly measured by us as educators (though there is data collected after they leave us). Rather, these goals set up a target for us to aim our efforts.

Long-range goals are “will do” statements. Wording the goals this way make them easier to follow because there is less ambiguity. Wording such as “pursue” or “apply” can have many different interpretations, creating a hazy picture of longitudinal transition goal data. By using “will do” statements, we are easily able to say either yes or no as to whether a student met a long-range goal.

There needs to be at least one long-range goal for post-secondary education and employment. Independent living is optional since not all students need help in that area (and not all cultures value

“independent” living). Multiple long-range goals can be included for each area. However, independent living is most likely the only area you would consider having more than one long-range for.

Annual goals are designed to be yearly steps that help the student reach the long-term goals. These goals focus on the skills needed to achieve the long-term goals, not the long-term goals themselves.

Annual goals align with a student’s present levels of performance. They tell us what is next. Present levels of achievement and performance give us detailed information on the transition assessments, what skills the student has, and the next appropriate steps the student needs to take. We should see a logical flow from long-range goals, the information that supports those goals, where the student is currently in reaching those goals, what is the next step for the student (and why), and how the student will get there.

Below you will find some examples of long-range and annual goals (present levels can be covered another time).

### Long-Range Goals

Upon graduation from high school, Gus will attend a four-year college or university studying graphic design.

Gus will work in the retail sales industry (e.g., Walmart, GameStop) upon graduation from high school.

Upon graduation from high school, Gus will live in an apartment with roommates in Utah County.

Shawn will attend a vocational training school/program for welding, upon graduation from high school.

Upon graduation from high school, Shawn will work in the food service industry as cook.

Shawn will live with his parents for two years upon graduation from high school, before moving into an apartment with friends.



## Goals: Long-Range & Annual (cont.)

### Annual Goals

Gus will advocate for his needs by informing his teachers (in writing or verbally) of accommodations each month by the end of the current IEP, with 0% current achievement and 80% target achievement.

Gus will demonstrate functional life skills by bringing all needed materials to class, and ready to be used, 4 out of 5 days per week for two school terms by the end of the current IEP.

Shawn will independently use AAC to communicate his needs (e.g., use bathroom, take a break, ask for help), without any prompting, in 3 out of 5 school days for a full school term by the end of the current IEP.

Shawn will demonstrate appropriate work and education social skills by not engaging in disruptive classroom behavior (such as talking out of turn, running out of the classroom, or making up stories) in 4 out of 5 school days for two consecutive school terms.

Jules will, when presented with grade-level problems, solve multi-step equations independently with 80% accuracy in 4 out of 5 trials. (this can be a transition goal if it aligns with long-term goals).

Jules will, when presented with a text at her reading level, independently explain the main ideas (orally or in writing) with 80% accuracy in 4 out of 5 trials.

Jules will demonstrate self-efficacy skills by completing the MyIEP slides (or similarly formatted presentation) and presenting it at her next IEP.

## This Month's Classroom Tip

### Q: How do I do all these assessments when I have 20+ students?

A: One way to cover all the assessments you need to do is to go broad before going individual. All students can benefit from inventories or assessments that target multiple domains, such as education and employment. All students are likely to benefit from assessments that look at self-determination, self-advocacy, and self-efficacy. Some of the finer points of independent living, such as mobility or dexterity, can be given on a more individual basis. With this approach in mind, it is easier

to find time for assessment. Giving assessments as bell ringers each month to an entire class can help ease the stress. We want assessments to be as recent as possible (~30 days of the IEP meeting); however, there are ways to do both formative and summative assessment at the same time. In other words, you can have some students taking a formative assessment while others are completing more indepth summative assessments all on the same target area. We will have an entire section on this in a future edition of the newsletter. Contact us if you need ideas right now to make this happen.

### Research Spotlight

#### Mental Health & Self-Determination

This 2022 article from Walden and colleagues looked at females with disabilities and mental health issues and the barriers for career development, specifically with self-determination. The authors point out that females with disabilities are at higher risk for mental health issues and that this can be a significant barrier to self-determination skills. The researchers used *Paths 2 the Future* (which teaches some emotion regulation skills) to increase self-determination skills. Results showed an increase in self-determination regardless of mental health issues. However, those with mental health issues did not close the gap in self-determination skills with the intervention. This suggests that more is needed for these students to be ready for the transition to adulthood.

### Mindset Minute

"A verbal assault doesn't have quite the same power when it merely repeats what you've already said to yourself."

"...self-criticism was strongly related to depression and dissatisfaction with life."

-Kristin Neff, PhD., *Self-Compassion*

It isn't always a matter of fact, but a matter of perception. Our perception of students, ourselves, the work we do, and transition outcomes matter the most. Self-compassion vs self-criticism can make a difference.