

What is a Vocational Assessment?

One of the techniques used to determine a student's interests, aptitudes, and skills is a vocational assessment. A vocational assessment has been called the critical beginning point for transition planning and services. Vocational assessment can be defined as a comprehensive process conducted over a period of time, usually involving a multidisciplinary team, with the purpose of identifying individual characteristics, education, training, and placement needs, serving as a basis for planning an individual's educational program and which provides the individual with insight into vocational potential. A vocational assessment is the responsibility of a school district's special education program. The planning of transitional services includes the development of transitional employment goals and objectives based on a child's needs, preferences, and interests. These will be identified through the child-centered vocational assessment process.

Although vocational assessment and transition may be focused upon more closely in the latter school years, it is beneficial if the process can begin as soon as students enter school and ideally the process should incorporate a K-12 career development plan. This does not mean that early elementary students should be subjected to in depth assessment batteries. It is more plausible that vocational assessment and transition in the early school years should encompass career exposure and educational activities geared to a level which is developmentally appropriate to younger students. For younger children it is important to emphasize the development of self-awareness, occupational awareness and good decision making skills. Early transition planning is also an excellent opportunity for educators and parents to introduce non-traditional employment opportunities and thereby dispel gender bias as it relates to children's understanding of traditional and non-traditional employment roles. As students approach the middle and secondary school level the need for a more formalized vocational assessment occurs

A good vocational assessment should include the collection and analysis of information about a child's vocational aptitudes, skills, expressed interests, and occupational exploration history (volunteer experiences, part-time or summer employment, club activities). The collection of this information should also take into account the child's language, culture, and family.

Through the assessment process, parents and professionals learn about the student, and the student learns about himself or herself. Students generally emerge from the vocational assessment process with increased self-awareness and a better understanding of their skills. When students are being assessed, a number of interesting changes can be observed in what they say and do. For example, students often:

- want to discuss their vocational or career futures or specific vocational education plans;
- are able to say things they can do;
- may show excitement about the vocational activities on which they are working;
- may enthusiastically talk with their families and friends about what they are doing in school
- may develop new, realistic career interests;
- may show more self-confidence and/or self-esteem; and
- may show more interest in school and in their academic performances.