

# **MORE SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION PLANNING**

**20 TOP QUESTIONS & WAYS TO ANSWER THEM**



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### About the Contributors

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Charles Robinson is a consultant in careers and vocational rehabilitation. A certified rehabilitation counselor, he has a doctorate in counseling from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling from Springfield College.

His employment in rehabilitation and education spans four decades and includes increasingly responsible employment as a rehabilitation counselor, vocational evaluator, program director, educator and consultant.

He has taught career assessment, job analysis, job placement, community-based employment and counseling at the graduate level and in a wide range of short-term training programs. He was founder and president of a software company providing case and caseload management systems to schools and agencies.

His current activities focus on new approaches to job-person matching, informed choice, case management, career assessment and job analysis, with an emphasis on school-based assessment for students with disabilities. His customers include public schools, as well as both public and private rehabilitation agencies in a number of states.

Dr. Robinson has authored a number of text and software publications, most recently Career Planning Tools. Based on Ten Questions for Career Planning, this software program identifies areas in which individuals feel unready for career decision-making. Staff can then select from a range of paper, software and Internet resources to develop a career assessment plan.

#### **Jodi Schmon, M.S. in Special Education**

A transition coordinator for the Central Bucks School District in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, Jodi Schmon assists students in special education with making in-district transitions and preparing for desired post-secondary outcomes.

Ms. Schmon has taught in special education for nearly 14 years and holds both a bachelor's and a master's degree in special education. Her graduate work at Penn State University under the Preparation for Adult Life Initiative provided a solid base for teaching students with a variety of disabilities.

Her certification as a special education supervisor, as well as cooperative vocational certification, has enabled a broader perspective in system-wide initiatives that support post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. Past work experiences include direct service in supported employment and residential supported living, work experience coordinator, life skills teacher, and learning support teacher.

Ms. Schmon is involved in local Transition Coordinating Councils and working on state-supported inter-agency communities of practice. She is currently supporting school district goals by facilitating secondary staff development, career education for students in special education and vocational opportunities with secondary students.

#### **LeeAnn Bernier-Clarke M.Ed., NCC, NCCC**

LeeAnn Bernier-Clarke is a career counselor and organization development and career education consultant with Successful Transitions, a private practice that specializes in career transition and change management, based in Louisville, Kentucky. She has provided counseling to clients in career transition, as well as career education and organization development consulting services to clients from business, industry, government, educational institutions, professional and community organizations. Her experience spans over 15 years, in a variety of settings.

A National Board Certified Counselor (NCC) and Career Counselor (NCCC) with a master of education degree in counseling psychology from the University of Louisville and a bachelor's degree from California State University at San Bernardino, Ms. Bernier-Clarke has an extensive background in higher education administration and executive level management.

She has an established reputation in media, a professional presentation and has authored numerous articles, sections of government publications and several workbooks on various career development topics. She is the former director of the career center at the University of Louisville, where she taught career development and counseling psychology courses. A mother of two, her career includes several years as a middle school teacher and executive director of a nonprofit corporation.

Ms. Bernier-Clarke has been actively involved in educational reform for over 10 years in Kentucky, where she has served on the governor's School-to-Work Task Force and the Kentucky Occupational Information Coordinating Committee. A committed parent advocate, she has held several offices, including president in the Parent Teacher and Student Association at her children's high school. She is also a parent representative on its School Based Decision-Making Council.

# Transition Planning

## 20 Top Questions and Ways to Answer Them

### Introduction to Transition

This document has just one major purpose: to answer questions most often asked by students and teachers about preparing for transition to post-secondary education or employment. While this document will help provide similar assistance to any student, our focus is on those students with special needs for whom state and federal laws set specific requirements for transition planning.

#### 1. How is this document organized?

In our experience, most of the resources needed for good transition planning already exist in schools. Therefore, this document is organized around a two-step process.

First, it is necessary to identify the need for assistance as seen by the student and their family. One way to do this is to listen to the questions being asked. For example:

*“How is this course going to help me in my career?”*

(The need: to establish the relationship between the content of the course and the student’s career goals.)

*“I’d like to be a teacher, but how can I afford college?”*

(The need: to locate information about financial aid.)

*“We want Johnny to go to college, but what should he study?”*

(The need being expressed seems to be about relationships between skills and majors; additional information might also be needed in this instance.)

By using the “frequently asked questions” (FAQ) format for this document, you can simply skim the table of contents of the 20 questions guide for each product to find the question you want answered. For each question, we will give you specific suggestions for transition activities. We also provide an estimate of the average amount of time, in minutes, that students will need to complete the activity.

Second, once you know the need, the right resources must be identified and used. For each question, we will identify resources in three products: Choices Explorer, Choices Planner and Choices CD Edition. At least one of them is very likely to be available to students and families you are assisting. A few questions require use of alternative resources, however. We have included several such resources that are useful in transition, and are low-cost or free.

Most of the activities encourage the student to create a printout or some permanent product. Some of the activities suggest that the student discuss ideas with a teacher or parent. Using the activity boxes will work well for a student who is capable of using the computer, follows written directions easily, works independently to get an answer, and is able to process the results.

For students who require more explicit step-by-step instructions and process time, consider using the supplementary worksheets rather than the activity boxes. The worksheets will support the student with a process-oriented fill-in-the-blank format. This will result in a permanent product to share with the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) team.

## 2. What are the transition requirements for students with special needs?

Transition services are defined as, “a set of coordinated activities based on the needs, preferences and interests of the student.” (P.L. 101-476, 34 CFR 300.29) Transition services are provided to assist the student in preparation for employment and other post-school, adult objectives.

Identification of needed transition services for each student is based on assessment of:

- Present level of performance
- Preferences and interests
- Student needs, which are the differences (gaps) between the post-school objectives and present level of performance

Active student participation in assessing transition needs is paramount. Selecting assessment tools that fit their individual needs increases the likelihood that students will use the resulting information to refine and further develop their goals. In turn, this means that assessment should be an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. Finally, assessment tools must be appealing to students. They must be presented in ways that are within their capabilities and that encourage understanding of themselves and the world of work. Carryover to classroom activities is also very important. Therefore, suggestions are included with every section.

Any assessments on which transition planning is based must be student-centered and ongoing. Active participation by students helps them understand the relevance of school. This results in greater academic gains. As they gain knowledge of themselves and the world of work, they will modify their objectives. Such changes reinforce the need to see assessment as an ongoing process.

Using information from assessments, the student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) then describes the coordinated set of activities to be provided in terms of:

- Instruction and other in-school interventions and activities
- Community experiences
- Adult services, acquisition of activities of daily living skills and assessment of functional behaviors (as needed)
- Relationships between services and post-school goals, resources required to achieve the objectives, and the responsibilities of IEP participants

### 3. Who are the stakeholders in transition, how do they benefit, and what is the role of special educators in that process?

Everyone has a vested interest in – and benefits from – successful transition:

**Students** develop a “map” that connects what they will do during high school with what they want to do later. That map helps students see the relevance of activities included in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Understanding that relevance is apt to result in more academic and transition-related gains.

**Families** benefit from opportunities to share and examine their goals for their student in light of needed and available resources. Getting everyone on the same page increases the likelihood of success.

By focusing on the big picture, **educational staff** can better link instructional activities with preparation for adult life.

**Employers** benefit when students develop skills and behaviors appropriate to jobs they understand and want.

**Taxpayers** benefit by recouping much of the cost of special education when students contribute to the economy.

Special educators with case management responsibilities have unique opportunities to assist everyone in developing transition goals and services. They have a very broad and thorough understanding of the student and services they receive. They generally coordinate the three-year evaluations and synthesize information from all sources into the present level of performance statements. They also coordinate IEP meetings and ensure that decisions of the team are implemented and reported. They are thus in a good position to hear the questions being asked and to suggest activities.

Case managers may need to consider five major constraints in selecting assessment activities:

- A. Student time for transition planning may come from other activities such as class or support time. Selecting and fitting activities into student schedules requires careful planning by the case manager. As much as possible, assessment data should be part of mainstream activities. For example, if all 9th graders take the Interest Profiler assessment (in Choices Planner and Choices CD Edition), extra time for interest assessment may not be needed for a student with special needs.
- B. Each student’s learning style should be considered in selecting assessment activities. For many students, combining both visual and auditory styles work best.
- C. Similarly, the level at which a student comprehends written material must be compared with the requirements of activities. XAP products include activities with a range of reading levels.
- D. An increasing percentage of career planning activities – and all the XAP products discussed in this document – involve use of computers. Therefore, it is important to gauge student computer usage skills.
- E. All of the above contribute to the final constraint: available time from special education staff. Becoming skilled in refining transition planning questions and selecting from the range of assessments available will conserve that valuable resource.

## 4. What knowledge base is required for good transition planning?

Matching characteristics of a chosen career with those of a student is central to carrying out transition planning. Information about both careers and students can be obtained in various ways. A common language to describe both is essential. Regardless of the assessment approach used, the inevitable gaps between the goal and the student can then be identified and addressed in the Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Once the gaps are known, they can be addressed in a number of ways:

- A. Enhance the student's skills through instruction and community experiences. ("Develop the person")
- B. Select another goal with characteristics closer to those of the student and/or through job modification, reasonable accommodations, etc. ("Modify the goal")
- C. Rehabilitation technology, job coaching, etc. may be used to reduce the gap without modifying the characteristics of the goal or student. ("Address only the gap")

Regardless of the approach, helping students develop and work toward transition goals begins by identifying the knowledge areas in which members of the IEP team need assistance. This assistance generally falls within three broad areas:

- A. Knowledge of the world of work, including the rewards and requirements of careers and post-secondary educational programs.
- B. Knowledge of the student as a (potential) worker, including their abilities, skills, knowledge, behaviors, values and reward needs.
- C. Knowledge of the student's decision-making skills, including their ability to clearly state options, identify and assign weights to appropriate criteria, and gather information needed to choose between options.

To get the most out of this document, begin by asking questions in each of the three areas above. If your questions are not addressed in the subsequent sections of this document, talk to your XAP representative.

## 5. Where can I get information about other XAP products?

The products featured in this guide are similar in that they focus on two aspects of post-secondary life in which most students are interested: careers and education. For a complete listing, go to **www.xap.com**.

1. Click on the link to **Products and Services** towards the top of the screen.
2. Click on the links to **Choices Explorer** or **Choices Planner** for an overview of each.

## 6. What topics are covered in this document?

### **Knowledge of the World of Work**

(The focus is on having sufficient, accurate information about careers and occupations and how they relate to secondary and post-secondary education.)

1. I am thinking about a career in \_\_\_\_\_. What do workers actually do (tasks), and what are the requirements and rewards (abilities, knowledge, earnings, benefits)?
2. If I major in \_\_\_\_\_ in college, what careers will that prepare me for?
3. Everyone keeps asking “What are you going to be?” and I just don’t know. What should I do?
4. If I want to go to college, what courses do I need to take in high school?
5. If I don’t want to go to college, what careers are still open to me?

### **Knowledge of Self as Worker**

(The focus is on having sufficient, accurate and career-relevant knowledge of personal factors such as interests, values, abilities and functional limitations.)

6. I know what I like. How do I find careers that match my interests and values?
7. How do I figure out what I would be good at doing?
8. I know there are some things I am not very good at. What changes do I have to make? What things can I avoid or work around in my career planning?
9. How do my work behaviors match up with those required of most workers?
10. What skills do I need to live independently?

### **Knowledge of Career Decision-Making**

(The focus is on being able to use a known, structured process for making career decisions and explaining them to others, particularly when support from others is needed.)

11. What information do I need about careers and myself before choosing an occupation or job?
12. After learning about careers and myself, how can I organize the information to help me decide between my options?
13. What information do I need about schools and myself before deciding on college or training?
14. After learning about schools and myself, how can I organize the information to help me decide between my options?
15. If I decide to get a job right out of high school, how can I pick one that will help me with long-range goals?

### **Questions Teachers Ask**

(The focus is on helping staff clarify relationships between subjects and careers, and identify resources needed for successful transition planning.)

16. How can I show students the relationships between the subjects I teach and their career goals?
17. Many of my students have difficulty reading. How can I use Choices Explorer, Choices Planner or Choices CD Edition with them?
18. Some students have difficulty using a computer. How can I use Choices Explorer, Choices Planner or Choices CD Edition with them?
19. How can I get families appropriately involved in transition planning?
20. Can transition activities be part of lesson plans for my courses?

### **Student Worksheets**

Many of the questions addressed in this document have at least one printable student worksheet and can be used in an IEP or in a paper-based portfolio. Download these worksheets from Professional Tools in Choices Planner or Choices Explorer. You can also download them from: [www.xap.com/tpg](http://www.xap.com/tpg).