

Research Compilation for The *Transition Planning Inventory* and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004

Professionals have long advocated that schools use sound theoretical and research-based methods and materials to measure student progress, but it was the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) that really forced schools to take notice. The Office of Special Education Programs follows NCLB's accountability principle and holds educators responsible for implementing the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) to the same standards as NCLB. The provisions and language in IDEA 2004 pertaining to the age-appropriate measurement of academic achievement and functional performance for the purpose of establishing measurable postsecondary goals in students' Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) raise the bar for schools in identifying assessments that are theoretically sound and based on evidence of effectiveness. This paper describes the *Transition Planning Inventory* (Clark & Patton, 1997a, 1997b, 2006; Patton & Clark, 2014, 2021a, 2021b) and how this assessment instrument meets the NCLB's evidence-based research recommendations and IDEA 2004's mandate for appropriate transition assessment.

Transition Planning Inventory

Overview

The *Transition Planning Inventory* (TPI), from the outset, was designed as a general screening instrument for assessing students' current knowledge and skill performance in a wide range of areas related to adult demands and expectations. The instrument evolved over the past 27 years, and each update or new edition has benefitted from the input of a wide range of individuals, including students, parents, public school professionals, university colleagues, and special education graduate students.

The TPI is not a test, and it does not require direct observation and/or curriculum-based assessment procedures for completion (although recommendations can be made through the TPI for further assessment using these methods); it does, however, represent the first standardized transition planning instrument that specifies that the student, a parent/advocate, and a school representative rate the individual on a series of statements describing knowledge, behavior, and skill in 11 different planning areas. The rating scale's format permits a differentiation in levels of agreement and disagreement regarding the student's current and typical demonstration of knowledge and skills.

The administration of the current print version (TPI-3) may follow one of three administration options: self-administration, guided self-administration, or oral administration. These format options address barriers with respect to student's reading, understanding of English, comprehension of the items, and application of the rating scale. The TPI-3 Online Version (Patton & Clark, 2021b) provides the same administration options as the print version, but includes features such as "Read Aloud" and "More Information" so that users may take advantage of assistance if reading or comprehension barriers are present.

The TPI yields a profile of the ratings obtained by the school in the assessment process and provides information for transition planning for Working, Learning, and Living across 11 areas: Career Choice and Planning, Employment Knowledge and Skills, Postsecondary Education / Training, Functional Communication, Self-Determination, Independent Living, Personal Money Management, Community Involvement and Usage, Leisure and Recreation, Health, and Social and Interpersonal Relationships.

Meeting the Requirements of IDEA 2004

With federal special education law (IDEA 2004) and the law’s transition-services mandate as its legal foundation, the TPI is designed for IEP teams nationwide (including non-English-proficient families) as they begin and annually refine the comprehensive transition planning process. As emphasized in the first edition of the TPI (Clark and Patton,1997b),

the ultimate purpose of conducting transition assessment is to generate information that leads to the development of comprehensive transition plans for students and their families. If executed properly, such activity will maximize the chances that students will be able to deal successfully with the complexities of adulthood. (p. 25)

Use of the TPI represents one method for conducting a comprehensive transition assessment that meets the specific minimal requirements of IDEA 2004. These requirements are presented in the following paragraphs.

- IDEA 2004 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 postschool activities.”

The 57 TPI items are based on results-oriented knowledge and skills. Five items relate specifically to academic achievement, and 52 items relate to functional achievement.

- The IDEA 2004 transition provisions also call for providing transition services, “a set of coordinated activities that is based on the individual child’s needs, taking into account the child’s strengths, preferences, and interests.”

The TPI ratings reflect knowledge- and skill-need areas as well as strength areas. Students and parents are asked to express postsecondary-outcome goals related to further education and training, employment, and type of living arrangement. Students are asked to respond to open-ended items reflecting their interests and preferences. Parents/guardians are invited to respond to similar items, noting their preferences for their sons or daughters.

- With regard to assessment requirements, IDEA 2004 specifies that “the IEP for students 16 and older (and younger when appropriate), must have . . . appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills.”

The TPI assists schools in meeting this IEP requirement by providing an age-appropriate transition assessment (appropriate for ages 12 through 21). The TPI items reflect careful development in expressing knowledge or skill competencies that are not only socially age appropriate for school-age youths in middle school (as young as 14 years) but also up through the young adult years (21–25 years). Reading levels are considered also to address educational age functioning. Areas that represent competencies related to education and training, employment, and independent-living skills are clearly covered in the TPI assessment.

Theory and Research-Based Support for the *Transition Planning Inventory*

Theoretical Support

The transition from school to adult life is a complex and dynamic process that should begin as early as possible for every student. Successful transition planning in schools for students with a

disability should result in either (a) the transfer of support from the school to families and/or an adult service agency, (b) access to postsecondary education, and/or (c) life as an independent or supports-assisted adult. This planning process includes choosing which experiences during their remaining secondary school years would best prepare students with disabilities for what lies ahead in the adult world.

A successful transition from secondary school to life thereafter requires both formal (school- or government-sponsored) and natural family supports (McDonnell, Hardman, McDonnell, & Kiefer-O'Donnell, 1995; Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1996; Szymanski, 1994; Turnbull, Turnbull, Bronicki, Summers, & Roeder-Gordon, 1992). Historically, providing formal supports such as health care, employment preparation, and supported living, had been emphasized – beginning with the Division on Career Development and Transition-CEC (Halpern, 1994). Only recently, however, has society begun to understand the importance of family and other natural support networks, including the student themselves, in planning and preparing for adult life (Shogren & Wittenburg, 2021; Wehmeyer & Webb, 2014).

A basic theoretical assumption is that good, comprehensive transition assessment leads to good, comprehensive transition planning and, in general, successful movement to adulthood will not occur in the absence of either piece. Definitions by Clark (2007); Miller, Corbey, and Lombard (2007); Sax and Thoma (2002); and Sitlington, Neubert, Begun, Lombard, and Leconte (2007) took positions that support the theory that transition assessment be student-centered and designed to identify and emphasize an individual's strengths, interests, and preferences in relation to appropriate adult outcome goals.

The TPI has been based on both the legal framework of IDEA and the evolving literature on transition services since the mid-1980s. The legal definition from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA, 1990) actually came from theoretical positions regarding the critical determination of what adult outcomes were important to address for individuals with disabilities and what preparation and supports they needed to move from school settings to adult settings (Brolin, 1989; Clark, 1980; Cronin & Patton, 1993; Dever, 1988; Halpern, 1985; Knowles, 1990; Kokaska & Brolin, 1985; Smith & Schloss, 1988).

Beyond the legal and theoretical views of transition planning, a number of states issued guidelines to local school districts for developing and implementing transition services after IDEA's reauthorization in 1990. Clark and Patton (1997b) presented data from 17 state guidelines available in 1994 that indicated that the number of transition planning areas ranged from 4 to 23. Clearly, some of the lists of planning areas differed primarily in organization and clustering rather than in content. Still, there was general agreement that planning for postsecondary education, employment, community participation, and other adult-related outcomes were the essence of transition services planning.

These original lists of state guidelines served as the starting point in item development to ensure content validity for the TPI. The item pool generated from state guidelines was augmented by a variety of sources in the transition and career development literature. Practitioners in secondary special education programs then validated the importance of the items selected for final inclusion in each of the new editions of the inventory.

Research Support

Evidence-based data from the psychometric field-testing of the TPI was the initial source of validation of the TPI. Specific data analyses for reliability, both internal and test-retest, were part of the TPI standardization process as well as a targeted group analysis for criterion validity (Clark & Patton, 1997b, 2006; Patton & Clark, 2014, 2021a; Smith, 1995). An additional study demonstrated translation integrity and reliability for the Spanish version of the TPI Home Form (Stevens, 2006).

Linn and Gronlund's (2000) position that validity determination should consider use and interpretation of an instrument is important to address at this point. The basic purpose of the TPI was to provide a basis for appropriate planning for students receiving special education services in IEP development. Two independent investigations have supported the TPI. Each is described briefly here.

Carter, Trainor, Sun, & Owens (2009) studied the planning areas of the TPI using exploratory factor analysis and found a unidimensional structure for each of the TPI planning domains. They reported that their data's variance explained by each of the factors ranged from 67.7% to 78.2%, suggesting that the items for each domain shared a substantial amount of common variability. They provided empirical support for the notion of soliciting input from multiple stakeholders and promoting both student and parent involvement in the assessment process. They also noted that students often deviated from others' views of themselves in transition-related competencies.

Rehfeldt (2006) reported on an investigation of the efficacy of using the TPI and a structured IEP planning process using TPI data versus non-TPI assessment in three midwestern high schools. They reported significantly more transition-related goals for the experimental TPI/structured IEP planning process group and that parents of students in the experimental group were likely to report more satisfaction with the IEP process.

The most recent professional reviews of the second edition of the TPI were included in Volume 20 of the highly respected *Mental Measurements Yearbook* (Cox & Schneck, 2017). In summarizing their reviews, Cox stated:

The TPI-2 appears to be a useful instrument for professionals who work with adolescents and youth with special needs as they transition to postsecondary living, employment, and educational options. The test manual, administrative, interpretation, and supplemental materials are easy to follow and minimize scoring and interpretation errors. The instrument could be readily used by special education and other educational personnel who may be involved in student educational planning.

Schneck said that

In this reviewer's opinion, the TPI-2 appears to be one of the most well developed and comprehensive informal assessment tools available at this time, one that has been based upon an extensive amount of knowledge and research as well as field testing in the area of school to work and community transition. It provides users with guidance as to the incorporation of the included assessment tools and resources into the efforts of schools and the community. It is also a very practical assessment system in that it provides understandable and directly applicable information that can be used by students, parents/guardians, teachers, and others.

These findings add to the growing literature demonstrating the benefits of active parent and student participation in the transition assessment, planning based on student needs and interests, and an IEP development process based on appropriate assessment. They reinforce the long-held assertion that the TPI can be used as an effective tool to identify necessary transition-related goals for the IEP.

Key Points Regarding the TPI

The careful development and standardization of the TPI and the evidence from a well-designed study of the effects of using the TPI in the transition planning process for students' IEP meetings

provide strong support for its use in schools with students 14 years of age and older. More transition goals are likely to provide students with direction and support for their futures; students, when they are true participants in this process, are more likely to feel empowered by the assessment and planning process, and parents are likely to be more satisfied with the IEP meeting when discussion involves data-based information related to transition services. The TPI should be considered for general transition assessment screenings. Not only does the TPI meet the spirit and letter of the IDEA and NCLB provisions for using evidence-based assessments and interventions, but also provides an efficient and effective way to assist students and their families in planning for the future.

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