

## VOCATIONAL ASSESSMENT PROCESS OF DISADVANTAGED AND HANDICAPPED STUDENTS IN ARKANSAS

Kathl C. Turner  
Robert L. Madden

**ABSTRACT**

Arkansas has developed a three-level vocational assessment process that is being implemented through the educational service cooperatives. The cooperatives are assisting districts in developing Career Development teams and are responsible for conducting the Vocational Assessment. The process of providing an excellent assessment service to a large number of disadvantaged and handicapped students (primarily in a rural area) is described.

Description of the Process

This process, used in Arkansas, outlines a comprehensive three level school-based vocational assessment which can be initiated in secondary schools for special needs students in the eighth (8th) through the twelfth (12th) grades.

The purpose of the outline is to provide direction to the LEA for the assessment of handicapped or disadvantaged students and limited English proficiency (LEP) students at the secondary level. Since this information is intended to provide a uniform assessment system, yet allow for flexibility to meet the needs of the LEA, it is anticipated that modifications in its content and application will occur.

A "Vocational Assessment Profile" may serve as a worksheet for the assemblage of assessment data to be organized in a single usable document. This document may be helpful in the preparation of the vocational component of the IEP, the IWVP, and/or the Career Development Plan.

The Levels of Vocational AssessmentLevel I: Pre-vocational Assessment

This is the initial phase of the Vocational Assessment process. It can be administered in the eighth (8th) grade, or to students at any grade level who are suspected of having problems in daily living, or job related skills and behaviors, e.g., job seeking and/or job survival skills.

Special needs populations profit most from this service. Regular and gifted and talented students could also profit from a basic evaluation of job knowledge and job related skills and behaviors.

The skills and behaviors evaluated through prevocational assessment are those possessed by an individual prior to vocational development. For example, before a person is trained as a cashier or in the area of retail sales, he/she should first demonstrate the ability to accurately handle money; before training in the trades can be offered, a student must be able to measure; before an individual can successfully be gainfully employed, he/she must understand and be willing to accept the responsibilities of work e.g., punctuality, attendance, grooming and dress, cooperation with others, following rules and regulations.

At the basic level, classroom teachers, counselors and other resource personnel can utilize existing techniques to identify a student's need for a more comprehensive vocational assessment. Observation of a student's functional ability in the classroom and his/her success with daily activities can give excellent clues. Specifically designed classroom exercises related to daily living skills and discussions with the students regarding their responsibilities and activities at home will also provide information on the students' prevocational strengths and weaknesses. Poor achievement levels and disadvantaged backgrounds may indicate a limited opportunity for prevocational exposure of the student. In some cases, this basic screening will be all a student needs.

Level I is designed to provide a summary of pre-existing information about a student's abilities, level of functioning, and other personal characteristics. This

level of assessment requires data collection and interpretation, along with interest testing. Much information needed for Level I for handicapped students should already be available in the LEA files because of the comprehensive evaluations conducted to determine eligibility of a student for special education classes or services and for development of the student's IEP. Cumulative files will contain much of the Level I data for disadvantaged and LEP students. Minimum performance achievement test data, parental interview forms, and interest inventory results are required for all students.

The minimum Level I vocational assessment for special needs students consists of gathering or review and interpretation of the types of data described below:

Cumulative records and transcripts and/or other forms of permanent records should be reviewed to obtain the data to build a student profile. Cumulative records will usually provide grades, group achievement and/or other test data, attendance, discipline records, and medical/health records. Vocational education performance data for academically disadvantaged and LEP students will be available from achievement test scores, e.g., math, reading, writing, and composition. Scores for the current year from the Arkansas Basic Competencies Test should provide adequate data.

Special education data. A handicapped student being considered for vocational placement must have had a comprehensive assessment to determine that student's eligibility and specific need for special education services.

Special education assessment data are found in the student's eligibility folder. The comprehensive assessment data which would be reviewed includes:

- assessment of language, pertinent medical information and physical, sociological emotional/behavioral, and intellectual factors, including assessment of adaptive behavior,
- assessment of the student's educational, developmental, and/or behavioral performance,
- assessment of the student's specific competencies in areas of educational needs and competencies related to vocational education, where appropriate, and
- specific modifications of instructional content, setting, methods or materials required by the student to achieve and maintain satisfactory progress, including those which can be provided only through special education services and those adaptations necessary for the student's progress in regular classes.

Interviews or other methods of gathering data may be used to obtain information from the student, parent, and teacher.

- Informal interview with the student. The student should be interviewed to determine his or her interest in vocational education and social competence or adaptive behavior related

to performance in vocational education. A teacher or counselor who has good rapport with the student may conduct this part of the assessment.

- Informal conference or interview with the student's parents (if the student is under 18). The parents should be interviewed to determine their career expectations for the student and to discuss their perceptions of the student's social competence or adaptive behavior as it relates to performance in vocational education.
- Teacher interview. Former teachers should be interviewed to collect information related to personal characteristics, behaviors and interpersonal skills. (The teachers may be any teacher or counselor familiar with the individual student.)

In addition to the above information, a review of student behaviors by teachers and/or counselors may be beneficial.

It is possible that Level I data gathering and assessment may reveal a need for additional assessment (Level II) or an obvious need for comprehensive evaluation (Level III).

#### Level II: Basic Vocational Assessment

This second level of the vocational assessment process can be administered to students in the ninth (9th), tenth (10th), eleventh (11th) or twelfth (12th) grades when vocational decision, direction or behavior is in question.

The Level II assessment will include the collection of data and interpretation of additional information about a student's vocational interest, ability and aptitude, including vocational awareness and work-related behaviors. One or more appropriate assessment instruments should be administered to each student. If one test provides adequate information for planning purposes, that may be the only test administered.

Curriculum needs and modifications can be identified and appropriate vocational programming can be made for each student. Ultimately, vocational assessment will be utilized to identify what can be accomplished within a vocational education setting throughout the remainder of the student's public school experience, which will prepare him/her to enter the world of work, or profit from additional services upon graduation.

It is suggested that LEA staff members such as the principal, counselors, and vocational personnel be responsible for collecting these kinds of data. Definitions of vocational interest assessment and aptitude assessment are as follows:

Vocational interest assessment is a measure which assesses a student's preferences for activities or topics. Responses are analyzed by comparing them with the responses of people in a particular occupation. This type of test may require the student to look at pictures or it may be in a written format.

Vocational aptitude assessment is a measure of a student's ability to profit from training or experience in an occupation or skill. This test

may be of the paper/pencil type or it may require performance tasks. Vocational aptitude information is essential in planning an appropriate vocational placement for special needs students. Aptitude will include such things as manual dexterity, spatial ability, eye-hand coordination, physical strength, perceptual abilities, and physical attributes.

#### Selection of Vocational Assessment Instruments

Some assessment instruments may be appropriate for single student populations and others for all student populations. Assessment instruments vary within the following groups: Interest Inventories—either paper/pencil or picture, aptitude—either pencil/paper or performance, and combination aptitude and interest. Some assessment instruments have computer-generated tests and reports. Other instruments must be hand scored and reports written by qualified personnel. Some assessment instruments must be given to individual students. Others may be administered to groups of students. Qualifications and numbers of personnel available for test administration and administration time must be considered when selecting vocational assessment instruments.

Level II assessment data collection may include use of work samples. **Work samples** are tasks or activities that simulate a specific job and are used to assess skills and aptitudes similar to those required in competitive employment situations.

Components of various commercial work sample systems can provide vocationally related information about learning and performance of students who do not perform well on standardized tests or in traditional classroom settings.

**Exploratory vocational experiences** may be arranged for Level II assessment, including;

**orientation** to vocational programs using **on-site visits**

**exploratory participation** in one or more prevocational or vocational classes in which the student has expressed interest.

#### Student Populations and Instruments

**Academically disadvantaged** students typically have reading problems and other educationally related deficiencies. These students will need support in the form of program modifications, instructional support, remedial or tutorial services, and/or career guidance. Since reading skills are lacking, pencil/paper tests may not be appropriate for these students. Some of the following assessment instruments may be considered for the academically disadvantaged:

Combination Interest and Aptitude: APTICOM, COMPUTE-A-MATCH, MESA, OASIS (sixth grade reading level) and

Aptitude: SAM, JEVS, NEW CONCEPTS  
Interest Inventory: AOEIS, CASE, PIC, PIS

**Limited English proficient** students have communication problems. These students may need support in vocational programs in the form of modified program, adapted curriculum, or special assistance such as

interpreter and/or tutorial services. The assessment instruments should be available to the LEP student in his/her native language, require no reading, or when necessary, be administered with the assistance of bilingual school personnel or community members who will translate the instrument for the student.

**Handicapped students** have a variety of handicapping conditions. A variety of vocational assessment instruments are available to vocationally assess handicapped students. Some of the following assessment instruments are available to vocationally assess handicapped students. Some of the following assessment instruments may be considered for use with the handicapped students:

Mildly Mentally Retarded: Combination Interest and Aptitude: APTICOM, COMPUTE-A-MATCH, MESA, OASIS, (sixth grade reading level), SAGE, NEW CONCEPTS

- Aptitude: SAM, CAPS  
- Interest Inventory: AOEIS, COPS, CASE, PIC, PIS

Moderately Mentally Retarded with Low IQ:

- Aptitude: VALPAR work samples  
- Interest Inventory: Becker Reading Free Vocational Interest Inventory, PIS, PIC

Psychometric tests and work samples alone do not possess sufficient vocationally related predictive validity. These techniques require well trained personnel who can blend instrumentation with appropriate techniques to develop meaningful short-term and long-term goals for students. A particular skill needed by assessment personnel is the ability to perceive the general functioning level of the student so that existing instruments and techniques can be modified to meet that student's specific needs.

If a more comprehensive vocational assessment is needed, a referral to a vocational evaluator can be made. This assessment process would take three to twenty hours depending on the student's needs and involve the use of a wide range of instruments and techniques designed to test interest, dexterity, aptitude and achievement.

#### Level III: Vocational Evaluation

This final level is designed to be administered to students in the tenth to twelfth grades or as needed.

Level III assessment is a comprehensive vocational evaluation, which is conducted when the assessment team cannot identify long range goals or place a student in a vocational program based on the information gathered from the first two levels of assessment. Additional data are then needed to make a decision regarding appropriate vocational planning to and/or placement of the student. The evaluation at this level may include any or all of five categories or data:

review of medical, psychological, education and social data,  
formal assessment instruments,  
work samples,  
exploratory vocational course tryouts  
observation of work behavior

Upon review of the medical, psychological, educational and social data, the LEA may wish to update this information as part of the referral process. Recommendations for further assessment or updating of that data may also result from Level III vocational assessment.

The assessment team plays an important role in assessment of handicapped and disadvantaged students. It is imperative that referral requests for further assessment be made specific, clear, and be accompanied by adequate referral information. It is also imperative that the formal evaluation results be communicated to the team and be utilized effectively by them in the vocational planning process.

Many students in this final phase of their secondary education have received the bulk of the remedial, vocational and educational services available to them. Therefore, in some instances, this evaluation will not focus on the provision of school-based services, as is the goal of Levels I and II of the vocational assessment process, but rather on identifying and recommending programs and services available to the student upon graduation (e.g., job placement, supported work, training,

further education, vocational rehabilitation). The same instruments and techniques utilized by teachers, staff, and evaluators in both Level I and II assessments can be used in Level III "Vocational Evaluation". However, the outcomes and recommendations will frequently differ by virtue of their purpose and time of administration.

It is important to remember that vocational assessment is not a "one shot" process, anymore than achievement testing should be. Once vocational assessment has identified services and program needs, future assessments will be critical in determining how the student is progressing and where he/she should go from here. As students mature and improve, their personal goals and abilities change, meaning that goals and services identified through previous evaluations are no longer valid and require updating through additional assessments. Precise assessments will contribute to more accurate IEP development and student placements, and this will ultimately lead to fewer failures and a greater opportunity for each student to realize his/her optimum potential in the transition from school to work.

#### ARKANSAS\*

##### Levels of Vocational Assessment

Levels	Pre-Vocational I	Basic Vocational II	Vocational Evaluation III
<b>Student Population</b>	All handicapped & disadvantaged students	All handicapped & disadvantaged students enrolling in vocational courses following Level I assessment	Handicapped and disadvantaged students for whom more information is needed following Level I or II assessment
<b>Objective</b>	Acquire enough information about the student's ability and behavior to make vocational planning, placement and programming decisions.		
<b>DATA Gathered</b>	Special Education information, Student/parents interest interviews, Interest/Achievement test data, "Significant others" and Cumulative records information	Vocational interest inventories, Vocational aptitude test, Achievement tests, Work samples, Exploratory experiences, Learning Styles questionnaires	Comprehensive vocational evaluation, based on student needs
<b>When</b>	Gathered prior to vocational programming in grade 8 or above	Administered prior to vocational programming, and in grade 9 or above	Refer prior to or during vocational programming, on-going and in grades 11 and 12
<b>Responsible Personnel</b>	Career Orientation teacher, Educational diagnostician, Special Education teacher, Counselor	Principal, Counselor, or vocational teacher	Principal, Counselor, vocational teacher, or vocational evaluator
<b>Outcomes</b>	Career Development Plan	Career Development Plan, Update and Transition Goals	Career Development Plan, Update and Transition Goals

### Implementation of Vocational Assessment

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act of 1984, coupled with the new Standards for Accreditation of Arkansas Public Schools, the development of Course Content Guides and Competency Based Curriculum is providing guidance and support to implement the Vocational Assessment Process. Act 349 of 1985 authorized a statewide network of educational cooperatives. In Arkansas, there are sixteen (16) education service cooperatives that are owned and controlled by the local schools they serve. The schools that belong to the Co-op decide what services are needed and how these services can be offered through the Co-op.

The Crowley's Ridge Education Service Cooperative serves twenty-seven (27) school districts in rural Northeast Arkansas. Local education agencies relinquish Carl Perkins Special Needs Funds to the cooperative for assessment services of special needs students. There are 18,041 secondary students and 1,314 secondary teachers in this six county cooperative area. Of this number, there are approximately 3,000 disadvantaged and handicapped

students who require special services to succeed in their vocational programs.

The Special Needs office consists of one special needs coordinator, two vocational evaluators and two vocational paraprofessionals. Services provided by this office include vocational evaluation/assessment, in-service to vocational teachers, special education teachers, counselors and administration, and a Vocational Special Needs Resource Center. Materials in the resource center may be checked out by teachers or counselors and are delivered and picked up by the Co-op's delivery service.

A primary role of vocational support personnel, counselors, and vocational teachers is to provide students with an assessment of their interests, abilities and special needs with respect to completing successfully their vocational education programs. A multi-disciplinary team approach is strongly recommended. Vocational evaluators play an important role in the team to recommend appropriate vocational placement or referral to agencies upon graduation. The team is responsible for the development and maintenance of a Career Development Plan. It is the vocational guidance plan for special needs students and all special supplemental services must be provided in accordance with this plan. It is used to structure the student's vocational experiences beginning with vocational assessment, then class scheduling and leading to post-graduation career decisions.

The new education standards require all 7th or 8th grade students be enrolled in a Career Orientation class. Most activities that are mandated by the Carl Perkins legislation before the student enters vocational programs are begun in the Career Orientation class. Notification to parents and students concerning vocational opportunities and eligibility requirements are distributed and discussed. Also conducted are vocational Interest Inventories, parental interviews, teacher interviews, student interviews and career development plans are begun.

The Crowley's Ridge Education Service Cooperative provides in-service concerning the mandates, career development plan and assistance in IEP/IWVP writing. The multi-disciplinary team is developed in each local education agency in the service area.

The CRESC has two (2) mobile labs (34 foot Honey Recreation Vehicle) that have been adapted for the SAGE System. Students are evaluated in groups in the school classrooms and in the mobile labs.

The CRESC uses the System of Assessment and Group Evaluation for vocational evaluation. Interest Inventories were administered by the coordinator and evaluators to 1800 students in the service delivery area. Each student and/or teacher received a copy of results indicating interest areas. Information is entered on the Career Development Plan concerning three (3) highest and lowest interest areas. Students are encouraged to explore job potentials in their highest occupational areas.

The second phase of vocational assessment conducted by the Co-op is the Cognitive and Conceptual Abilities Test (C-CAT) which includes reasoning, math and language. This is done in a classroom on the school campus. The aptitude areas are administered in groups of four or five. The C-CAT is normally given in a group situation of up to 30 students. If possible, the evaluators go into the school before the mobile unit arrives. Ten students will be given the math, ten the language, and ten the reasoning section of the examination. When the fifteen minute time limit has elapsed, the test booklets are rotated among groups until each group has had all three sections. At this time, work attitudes and job temperament factors are also administered.

The eleven aptitude area examinations are administered in the mobile lab. They include, general learning, verbal, numerical, spatial, form perception, clerical perception, motor coordination, finger dexterity, manual dexterity, eye/hand/foot coordination and color discrimination. In order to keep interest up and mental fatigue down, the evaluators move students between book (pencil-paper) examinations and hands-on examinations.

Once students complete the evaluation, the computer cards are returned to the office for the paraprofessional to enter data and run print-outs while evaluators move the labs to the next scheduled school. Once reports are complete, the coordinator returns the evaluation information and meets with the team to discuss results and enter information on the career development plan. The team follows up with students and additional counseling services are given.

Each student receives information on specific scores in the cognitive and conceptual abilities and the aptitude levels. Once the profile is run, the Compute-A-Match System matches students aptitudes to the vocational training programs at the local high school and the area vocational centers.

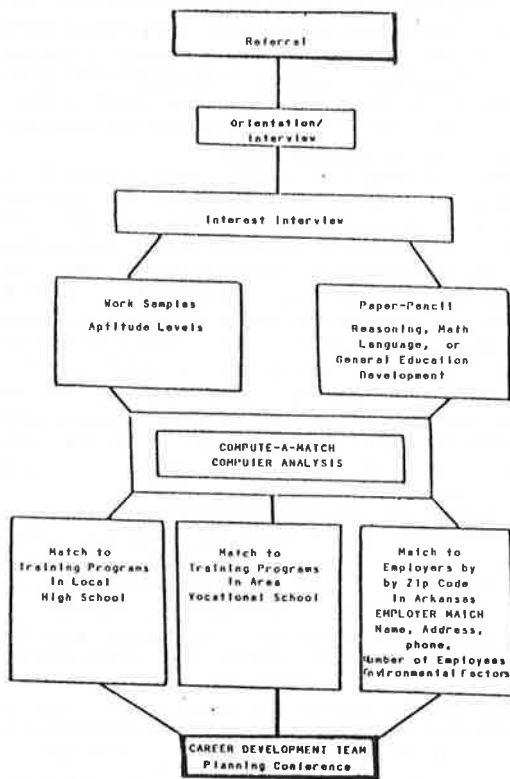
The students can also be matched to jobs in the Dictionary of Occupational Titles. To aide in transition planning, a list of employers including name, address, phone number, number of employees, environmental factors, etc.

The students are evaluation and matched to local training programs, indicating areas of needs (for aide in IEP/IWVP and Career Planning) then to job matches and the employer bank.

Each team member receives a list of jobs trained for in his/her vocational service area, including job description, levels of required skills for entry level, and list of tasks for each job. Upon request, each team may receive a list from the employer bank of any geographic area in Arkansas (matched by zip code).

The assessment process is a student centered process conducted over several years to identify vocational strengths, interest, aptitudes, and needs in relation to the vocational programming. It is a realistic approach which considers many factors in considering influencing an individual's total career development.

## ARKANSAS' VOCATIONAL EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT PROCESS



Implemented through Education Service Cooperatives using  
SAGE and COMPUTE-A-MATCH PROGRAM

AUTHORS:

Kathi C. Turner  
Vocational Special Needs Coordinator  
Crowley's Ridge Education Service Cooperative  
P. O. Box 377  
Harrisburg, Arkansas 72432

Robert L. Madden  
Area Supervisor  
Vocational Special Needs Programs  
Vocational Technical Division  
Arkansas Department of Education  
2020 West 3rd., Suite 220  
Little Rock, Arkansas 72201

## References

- Challenge: A Handbook for Serving Special Needs Students, July, 1986
- The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act P. L. 98-524, (1984). U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.
- The Education for All Handicapped Children Act P. L. 98-142, (1975). U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C.
- Sarkees, Michelle Donnelly & Scott, John L. Vocational Special Needs, Second Edition (1986). American Technical Publishers