



Optimizing the IEP: A Comprehensive Guide to Assessment Selection for Alabama Transition Standards

Molly Welch, OTS; Chris Eidson, PhD, OTR/L
 Department of Occupational Therapy | University of Alabama at Birmingham
 Lynn Ponder, OTR/L | Blount County Schools

Introduction

Within special education and related services, each student is entitled to an Individualized Education Program (IEP), a foundation of their educational support. The IEP becomes critical when addressing transition services for students aged 14–21 years because it focuses on skills for independent living (IDEA, 2004). To set appropriate transition goals, age-relevant and individualized assessments must be utilized to determine these skills. Occupational therapy (OT) providers, recognized for their expertise in fostering independent living skills, play a vital role in this process (American Occupational Therapy Association, 2020). Alabama Transition Standards (ATS) guide the development of IEPs for students in the state (Alabama Transition Standards, 2014). Assessments provide the foundation to identify strengths and needs for future life and environment. ATS needs more detailed resources for the selection of assessments when meeting IEP standards, particularly in providing clear guidelines for selecting assessments that align with IEP standards. Using standardized assessments is crucial for reliable educational evaluations and IEP development. A collaboration with school-based OT professionals in Blount County City Schools in Alabama was conducted to propose a comprehensive appendix to enhance the decision-making process for occupational therapists and other educational professionals. This resource aims to facilitate the selection of appropriate assessments, thereby supporting the creation of more effective IEPs for students receiving special education services.

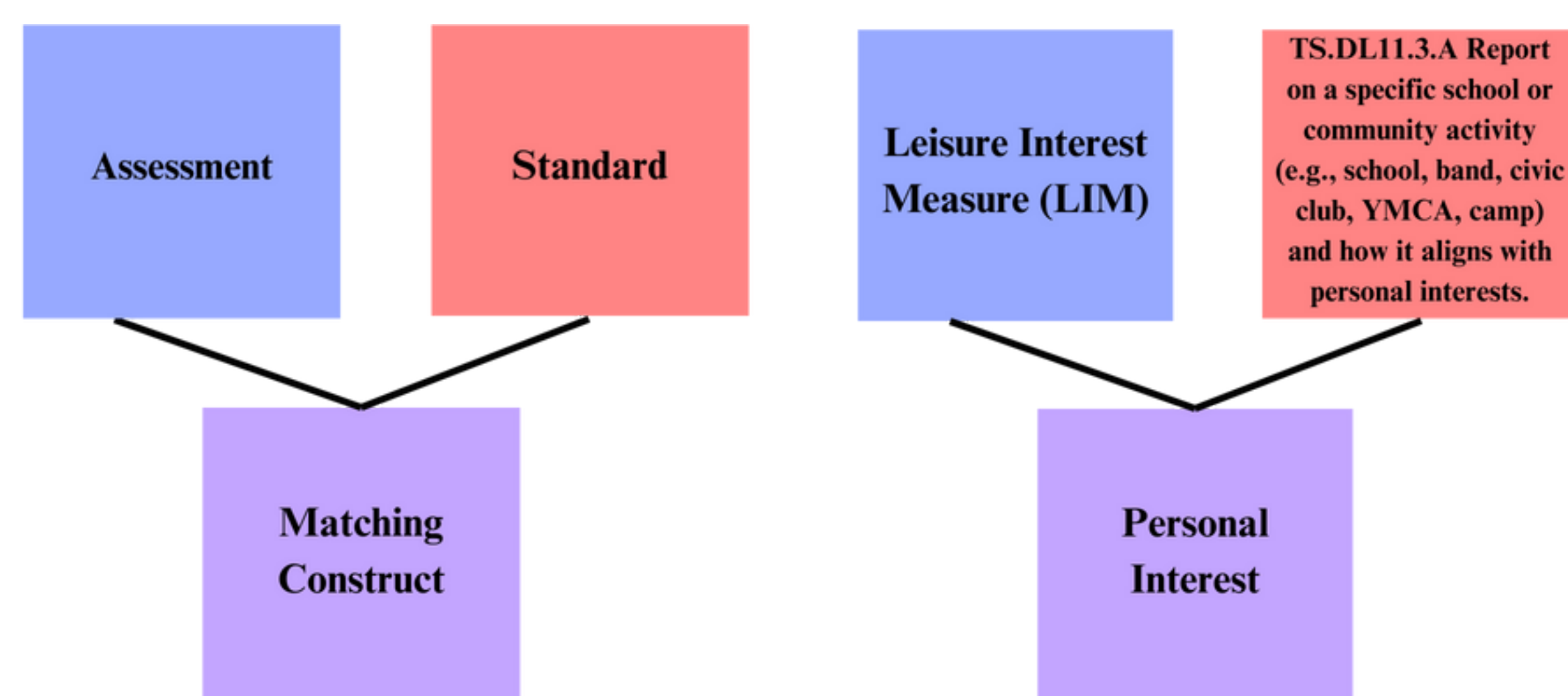
Methods

1. Comprehensive review of assessments from multiple databases
2. Selection process
 - a) 38 assessments
 - b) Criteria

	Inclusion	Exclusion
Completed in School settings or used in parental questionnaire	Identified one or more constructs from the ATS	Published before 1980
Standardized	Domains within the scope of OT practice	Students younger than 14 years or older than 21 years
Task analysis conducted in non-school settings		

3. Assessment analysis
 - a) Identification of domains assessed (constructs) and variables assessed within the domain
4. Qualitative review of the Daily Living section in ATS
 - a) 44 standards
 - b) Identification and isolation of primary constructs
5. Mapping

Figure 1: Construct Matching



6. Development of three-tiered activity suggestions for each standard

Results

Appendix Development:

Assessment-Specific Information

- Constructed detailed profiles of assessments, including age range, target population, description, administration time, cost status, publication date, and links

Assessments with Constructs and Variables Correlation

- Identified primary constructs and variables linked with each assessment

Standards, Constructs, and Assessment Synchronization

- Identified primary constructs for each standard
- Developed a synchronized overview that pairs each standard with corresponding assessment criteria for better coherence
- Integrated 38 assessments with 44 standards

Task Objective Formulation

- Formulated three adaptive task objectives for each standard, aiming for practicality and applicability within education settings, but noted the need for further research-based validation

Mapping Tools for Precise Reference

- Created tools for mapping individual standards to associated assessments and vice versa, serving as quick reference aids

Optimization of Education Resources:

- Developed a cross-referencing index system to simplify the selection and application of assessment tools

Cross-Reference	TS.DL11.3.A Report on a specific school or community activity (e.g., school, band, civic club, YMCA, camp)
AIR Self-Determination Scale	X
Allen Cognitive Level Screen	X
ARC's Self-Determination Scale	X
Assessment of Life Habits (LIFE-H)	X
Becker Work Adjustment Profile: 2	X
Beery-Buktenica Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration (BEERY VMI)	X
Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function (BRIEF)	X
Behavioral and Emotional Rating Scale (BERS-2)	X
Bruininks-Oseretsky Test of Motor Proficiency (BOT-2)	X
Canadian Occupational Performance Measure (COPM)	X

Figure 2: Standard mapping with associated assessment

Figure 3: Three task objectives with associated standard

Standard	Upgraded Activity Task	Regular Activity Task	Downgraded Activity Task
TS.DL11.3.A Report on a specific school or community activity (e.g., school, band, civic club, YMCA, camp) and how it aligns with personal interests.	Interview Activity: 1. Ask the student about their favorite school or community activity. 2. Formulate five questions designed to gather specifics of their chosen activity. These questions should include what they find most enjoyable, the emotions they experience during participation, and the frequency of involvement. 3. Determine if the student can articulate their experiences with the chosen activity and identify how these activities align with their individual interest.	Discovery Box Activity: 1. Fill a box with items or symbols representing various school or community activities—for example, a mini basketball for sports teams or paintbrushes for art classes. 2. Allow the student to explore the box and discuss or show which items resonate with them and why. 3. Use the prop to facilitate a role-play or pretend participation in the chosen activity if appropriate. 4. Observe the student's choices and reasons for choosing certain items to build a profile of their interests. 5. Assess the student's level of engagement, their communication about preferences, and ability to express certain activities that resonate with them.	Picture Matching Activity: 1. Provide the student with pictures of various school and community activities. 2. Offer a separate set of cards labeled with specific interest areas, such as making friends, playing basketball, or being outdoors. 3. Ask the student to match an activity with a related interest description. If the student needs help reading the correlating interest descriptions, assist them by reading them. 4. Assess the student's ability to discern and link activities to their interest while fostering self-awareness and decision-making skills regarding personal preferences with activities.

Discussion

Interpretation of Results:

Accuracy and Personalization in IEP Development

- Assessment profiles provide a comprehensive understanding of the tools available, enabling a more accurate matching of assessments to student needs.

Simplifying the Process

- Cross-referencing index systems and mapping tools significantly reduce time and effort required to select appropriate assessments for IEPs
- Task activity suggestions allow for more individualized goals within IEPs while enhancing student engagement and success.

Bridging Policy and Practice

- Assessment alignment with ATS bridges the gap between policy and practice and serves as a model for how educational standards can be used practically for educators.

Discussion continued

Legal Diligence

- Creation of the appendix addresses legal accountability by using standardized assessments to reduce accusations of bias and limit the potential for litigation while protecting against lawsuits, ensuring students receive fair and equitable evaluations.

Limitations and Area for Improvement:

- Cost of assessment may impact accessibility and widespread usage
- Availability of assessments may be limited across educational settings
- Parts of assessments may not be applicable to the intended standard
- Interpretation of task activities was subjective
- Assessments and recommendations may have the potential for generalized constraints
- The project encompasses only a subset of ATS
- Continuing monitoring and adaption of standards and assessments due to the dynamic nature of updates and revision

Conclusion

Implications:

- The guide facilitates a tailored approach to meeting individual educational needs and enhances the specificity and adaptability of ATS.
- The task objective suggestions empower educators to evaluate students with greater creativity, ultimately contributing to more personalized and goal-oriented outcomes for students.
- The profile of assessments and cross-referencing index have the potential to save time and increase accuracy for educators and OTs in evaluations of students.
- The alignment with the ATS suggests that statewide educational standards can be successfully operated through such tools, potentially influencing policy toward adopting similar frameworks in other regions.

Future Research:

- Evaluate the practical efficacy of the resource guide in real-world educational settings.
- Longitudinal studies could assess how using these aligned assessments impacts students' progress over time.
- Research into the development of evidence-based task activities would further strengthen the resources available.
- Investigating the extensibility of this approach to other states and regions and its potential adaptability effects on a broader educational landscape.

References

Alabama State Department of Education. (2014). *Alabama Transition Standards*. https://adap.ua.edu/uploads/5/7/8/9/57892141/alabama_transition_standards-2014.pdf

Individuals with Disabilities Education. (2004). *Sec. 300.304 Evaluation Procedures*. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/d/300.304>

American Occupational Therapy Association. (2020). Occupational therapy practice framework: Domain and process (4th ed.). *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74(Suppl. 2), pp. 1–87.

Acknowledgement & Contact information

SPECIAL THANKS TO: Dr. Chris Eidson, PHD, OTR/L and Lynn Ponder, OTR/L

CONTACT INFO: Molly Welch, mwelch2@uab.edu