Table 8.1. Transition Program Evaluation Process

Program Evaluation Questions[a]	*Uses for Data and Analyses*
What is the purpose of the evaluation? What types of decisions is the evaluation expected to support?	*Process evaluation*
	Revise and update transition program curriculum.
What type of evaluation is best for the decision-making process?	Clarify transition program goals.
	Develop new resources and materials for IEP teams.
Who is the audience for the evaluation?	
	Outcome evaluation
When should information be collected?	
	Examine whether current delivery of the curriculum leads to desired program outcomes.
What kinds of information are needed, from what source(s), and how will it be collected?	Examine the effectiveness of the transition program.
What resources are available to assist to collect information?	Plan long-range transition services.

*McNamara, 2006.

meant by *high-quality education* and *success in life after high school*. For both concepts, the specific components of the definition must be operationalized in order to measure whether a program is accomplishing its goals.

For example, components of a high-quality education could include to give knowledge; to teach problem-solving and higher-level thinking skills; to provide students with a specific set of skills to live independently; and to provide students with the skills and attitudes of self-assurance, self-reliance, and self-determination. *Success in life after high school* might be defined as positive progress in postsecondary education or training programs; employment, social and emotional maturity; independent living arrangements; positive social relationships; and civic and community participation.

Who is the Targeted Audience for a Transition Program Evaluation?

The constituencies for whom transition program evaluation information may be collected include:

- Students participating and who have participated in the program.
- Parents of students with disabilities.
- Public school staff and administrators.
- Adult service providers.
- General public interested in schools (e.g., taxpayers and employers).
- Policy makers (e.g., school, community, state or federal government).
- Interagency transition team.

Assessing program effectiveness can be accomplished at various levels. One level is evaluation of *individual outcomes*, such as an increase in the use of appropriate social skills for a student whose IEP goals and objectives are written for this outcome. Another level is to evaluate a specific *program component* such as the variety of jobs or the satisfaction of students in a work experience program. Transition program curriculum might also be evaluated. All these types of evaluations are considered *internal assessments*; they rely on information generated within the school system. They can also be viewed as *formative* or *process assessments* because they relate to evaluating a phase or level of the transition program. The purpose of formative or process evaluation is program improvement.

Transition program evaluation might also include *external assessments* such as follow-up studies of students who have exited the program, employer satisfaction surveys, or surveys of parent satisfaction with their children's educational preparation. External assessments are assessments that occur outside of schools and are most often *outcome* or *summative assessments*. Outcome assessments are designed to answer the question: Is the program accomplishing what it purports to be accomplishing?

What Data Should Be Collected and How?

Transition services provide the bridge between the educational system and a successful adult life; outcome assessment and student follow-up data are vital information needed to design, improve, and/or revise educational curriculum and transition planning. These important data are collected by various methods. (Table 8.2)

There are several reasonable and realistic methods of collecting information for program evaluation (McNamara, 2006) that can be used as the basis for transition

Table 8.2. Program Evaluation Strategies

Interview...	Parents and students (postschool)
	Educational staff
Review...	Student employment records
	Promotion/advancement of student son the job
	Student postsecondary education admissions
Get feedback on...	Services previously provided to students
	Services students anticipate they may need in the future
	Adult agencies still providing student services
	Agencies regarding services requested by students and services provided
Survey...	Employers regarding strengths and limitations of program completers
	Postsecondary representatives regarding the success of students enrolled in their programs

program evaluation:

Questionnaires, surveys and checklists. Many programs have instituted a follow-up survey of program completers on a 1-, 3-, or 5-year follow-up rotation.

Interviews with parents, students, and employers. Some educational programs complete "exit interviews" with both dropouts and program completers to gather ongoing information regarding the perceived strengths and limitations of programs as a data set for program evaluation. (See Appendix E for sample exit interview.)

Cumulative record and IEP record review. Test, Aspel, & Everson (2006) suggest systemic evaluation of the quality of student IEPs, using specific IEP evaluation tools and strategies. To evaluate transition-related IEPs as a component of program evaluation, evaluators might use an instrument such as the Transition Requirements Checklist (Storms, O'Leary, & Williams, 2000) or otherwise assess the transition component of the IEP for compliance with best practices and IDEA mandates.

Observation of students provides tangible data on how well they are applying skills learned. For example, a structured observation of employment skills during community-based work placement might reveal areas requiring further instruction and practice.

Focus groups of parents, students, educators, or adult providers can provide important information for program evaluation. It can be helpful to convene focus group of parents regarding the public school experience of their students both during and after completion of high school.

Case studies. Consider asking an interagency transition team to review case studies of specific students to explore how the system of adult services is functioning to meet their needs as well as to identify unmet needs.

When is Information and Data Collected?

Program evaluation is an ongoing process. Although IDEA does not require that transition planning begin before age 16, many experts advocate that transition planning begin at age 14 or earlier (Miller, Lombard, & Corbey, 2007). In transition program evaluation, information must be gathered from students, parents, and other constituencies throughout the transition process and continuing into young adulthood. Information and data should be collected as students begin the transition process (e. g., eighth or ninth grade as students begin high school). It is also important to collect information during the transition process (e. g., sophomore, junior, and senior years); and as students exit the transition program (e.g., exit interviews for program dropouts and completers).

Postschool follow-up is also an important component of a transition program evaluation (e.g., follow-up surveys of students 1, 2, 3, or 5 years after program completion). Test, Aspel, & Everson (2006) note that IDEA requires school systems to collect postschool outcome data as part of the State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report within 2 years of students leaving high school to compare the outcomes of youth who were on IEPs with nondisabled youth no longer in secondary school in terms of employment outcomes, enrollment in some type of postsecondary school or both (20 U.S.C. § 1416(a)(4) and 1416(a)(2)(A)).

Transition program evaluation is relevant only if it is used to improve the transition services and transition outcomes for students, families, educators,

Figure 8.1. Model of Transition Program Evaluation
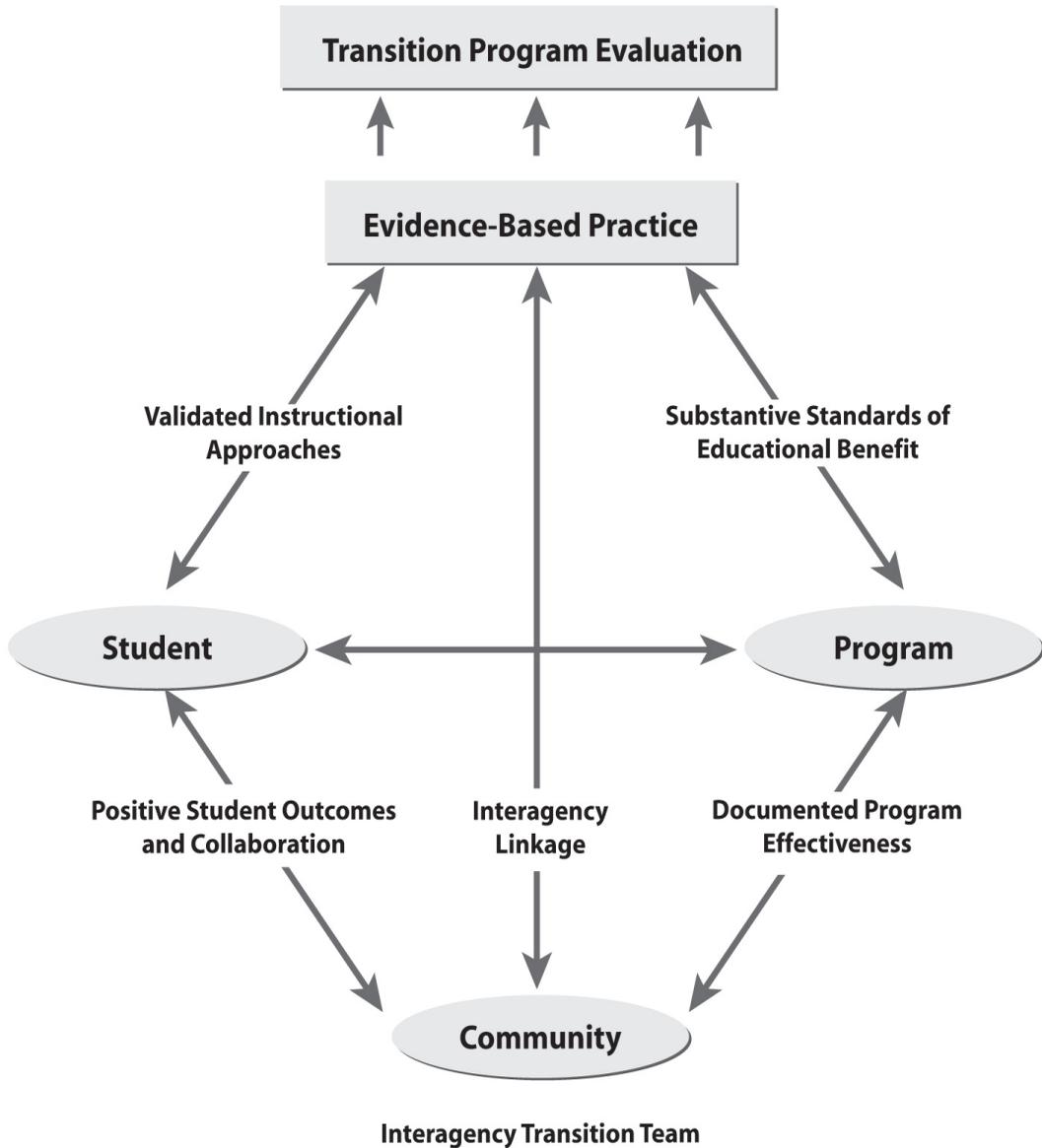
employers, and adult service providers. It is through program evaluation that the student, the program and the community are tied together into an evidence-based practice model which uses data to evaluate both the transition process and transition outcomes (Figure 8.1). Program evaluation provides data and documentation that the transition program is effective, and that students are achieving appropriate transition outcomes. Interagency collaboration and linkage is improved through transition program evaluation.