

PINS (Preferences, Interests, Needs, & Strengths) At-A-Glance

WHAT IS PINS?

PINS is a student-centered approach to transition planning that focuses on identifying and incorporating a student's Preferences, Interests, Needs, and Strengths into their IEP and transition plan. PINS forms the foundation for meaningful, personalized transition planning that leads to better post-school outcomes.

LEGAL CONNECTION

Federal law requires transition services to be "based on the individual child's needs, taking into account the child's strengths, preferences, and interests" [34 CFR §300.43(a)(2)].

KEY COMPONENTS

Preferences:

- What the student likes/dislikes
- How the student prefers to learn
- Environmental preferences
- Social interaction preferences
- Daily routine preferences

Needs:

- Skill development requirements
- Accommodation needs
- Support services required
- Transition preparation gaps
- Areas requiring instruction

Interests:

- Activities the student enjoys
- Topics that engage the student
- Potential career areas
- Leisure and recreational interests
- Aspirational goals and dreams

Strengths:

- Academic/cognitive abilities
- Social/interpersonal skills
- Talents and natural abilities
- Character traits and soft skills
- Existing knowledge and experience

GATHERING PINS INFORMATION

Assessment Methods:

- Formal transition assessments
- Student interviews and conversations
- Family input and observations
- Interest inventories
- Environmental observations
- Person-centered planning activities
- Trial work experiences
- Community-based assessments
- Portfolio development

DOCUMENTATION STRATEGIES

- Use direct quotes from the student
- Include specific examples and observations
- Document in student-friendly language
- Update regularly as preferences evolve
- Ensure all four PINS components are addressed
- Connect directly to postsecondary goals

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PINS IN ACTION: CONNECTING TO THE IEP

PINS Component	Transition Planning Connection
Preferences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shapes courses of study • Informs learning environments • Guides accommodations design
Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directs postsecondary goal areas • Identifies potential career paths • Shapes community experiences
Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drives measurable annual IEP goals • Determines necessary services • Identifies agency connections
Strengths	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highlights abilities to leverage • Identifies potential accommodations • Guides self-advocacy development

COMMON PITFALLS & QUICK SOLUTIONS

Pitfall	Quick Solution
Generic descriptions without specifics	Use direct quotes and concrete examples from student's life
Missing one or more PINS components	Use a PINS checklist during planning to ensure all areas are addressed
Static PINS that never change	Schedule regular PINS updates through both formal and informal methods
PINS disconnected from goals and services	Create explicit documentation linking PINS elements to specific goals and services
Adult interpretation overriding student voice	Prioritize student's direct input and verify interpretations with the student

SAMPLE PINS DOCUMENTATION

"Maria prefers hands-on learning activities and working in small groups rather than independently (preferences). She has strong interests in cooking and food preparation, particularly baking, and spends her free time watching cooking videos (interests). Maria needs support with reading comprehension, time management, and transportation navigation (needs). Her strengths include following multi-step instructions when presented visually, attention to detail, and strong interpersonal skills with peers and adults (strengths)."

Remember: *Authentic PINS information comes directly from the student and forms the foundation for meaningful transition planning.*