

Executive Summary

Post-School Status Report

2001 Special Education Graduates

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Post-School Status Report of the 2001 Special Education Graduates

School districts in Washington State collected post-school status data for the fourth consecutive year. These data provide districts with information needed for educational decision-making. These districts responded to the 2001 LEA Application for Federal Funds for Special Education requiring the applicant to include a plan addressing academic performance, drop-out rates, and post-school performance. Post-school performance is measured in areas of employment, enrollment in post-secondary education, and appropriate inter-agency connection. To answer questions about the post-school status of these students, data were collected on 2,718 special education youth. These students graduated from 124 school districts between September 1, 2000 and August 31, 2001, representing 51% of the districts with secondary programs that serve special education students in Washington State. District staff collected the data in November and December 2001, an average of six months after graduation. The data were abstracted from district records for all 2,718 graduates. Successful telephone contact was made with 2,086 (77%) of the total group of 2,718 graduates. More graduates were contacted for the 2001 study than in any one of the previous four years. Among the 2001 graduates, 78% of the white youth were contacted while the contact rate for youth of color was 73%. Multiple attempts were made to contact all of the graduates by telephone.

How Many Special Education Students Graduated From These 124 Districts?

A total of 2,718 special education youth graduated from these districts. This represents 6% of all the students who graduated from these 124 districts. Since 11.89% of the total school population is in special education, we would expect close to 11% of the high school graduates to be in special education. We believe this discrepancy of 5% represents special education dropouts.

The graduates consisted of 1,786 males (66%) and 932 females (34%). Of these graduates, 77% were white and 23% were graduates of color. Eight graduates in this study did not wish to disclose ethnicity and are noted as “Undisclosed” in the data tables (Appendix A). In the statewide data, males were over-represented in these figures but minority individuals were not. Individual district data may suggest otherwise.

Special education students predominantly graduated with diplomas (94%). Both males and females obtained diplomas at comparable rates (94% for males, 92% for females). White special education students and students of color obtained diplomas at the same rate (94%). Those students who did not graduate with diplomas either aged out of services at age 21 (5%) or received a certificate other than a standard high school diploma (2%). Students of color, white students, males and females all received something ‘other’ than a diploma at nearly the same rates.

Graduates by disability category. The 2,718 youth in this study included 61% students with learning disabilities, 17% were students with health impairments, 9% were students with mental retardation, 3% were students with multiple disabilities, 4% were students with emotional/behavioral disabilities, and 1% students with hearing impairments, 1% students with deafness, and 1% with orthopedic impairments.

What was the Employment Rate of the Graduates?

Employment for this study was defined as working for pay, and 1,237 graduates (59%) reported that they were employed. Of these, 604 graduates (49%) reported both hours worked per week and hourly wage. Graduates reported working an average of 30 hours per week at \$8.17 per hour.

The employment rates for all groups are lower than for their peers who graduated in the year 2000. This reflects a change in employment rates statewide. The unemployment rate in Washington State for November 2000 was 5.5%; in November 2001 (when these data on the graduates of 2001 were collected), the

unemployment rate increased to 7.3%. This increased unemployment rate appears to affect those youth with the most significant disabilities. For example, 68% of the youth with learning disabilities were employed compared to 51% of the graduates with emotional/behavioral disabilities, 42% of the graduates with mental retardation and 10% of the students with orthopedic impairments.

Females are employed at a lower rate (55%) than males (61%) and youth of color are employed at a lower rate than white youth (55% to 61%).

Employment as part of the transition plan. Of the 2,718 graduates, 1,638 (60%) had a post-school transition goal of employment. Of the 1,290 graduates who were interviewed with employment as a transition goal, 819 (64%) were employed. For those graduates with emotional/behavioral disabilities with employment as a goal, 51% were employed compared to 72% of those graduates with learning disabilities and employment as a goal. For those with mental retardation and employment as a goal, 50% were employed.

How Many of the Graduates Were Attending Some Form of Post-Secondary Education Program?

Of the 2,086 students interviewed, 645 (31%) reported attending some form of post-secondary education program. The definition of post-secondary education for this study includes university/4 year college, community/2 year college and/or vocational/technical schools. Of these graduates attending some form of post-secondary education, 67% are attending 2-year community colleges, a 2% increase above last year.

Data were also gathered to include any type of post-high school education programs, including Job Corp and apprenticeship programs in addition to 4-year college, 2-year college and vocational/technical school. 773 youth (37%) reported attending some form of post-high school education education/training program.

Among the year 2001 graduates, more females than males are attending post-secondary education programs. For the first time since this study was initiated in 1998, youth of color and white youth are attending post secondary education programs at equivalent rates.

Post-secondary education as part of the transition plan. Of the total 2,718 graduates, 1,689 or 62% had post-secondary education as a transition goal. For those graduates who were interviewed with post-secondary education as a transition goal, 557 (43%) were attending some form of post-secondary education program. In comparison, only 36% of the youth contacted in the 2000 study with a goal of post-secondary education were attending. Analyzing these data by disability status indicate that youth with mental retardation and emotional/behavioral disabilities were least likely to attend post-secondary education when identified as a goal. Although 61% of the youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities indicated post-secondary education as a transition goal, only 26% of these graduates are attending within 6 months of school leaving. Youth with learning disabilities who identified post secondary education as a goal (68%) are attending at a much higher rate (42%). These discrepancies by disability category should be examined at the district level.

How Many of These Students Were Productively Engaged (Working and/or Attending Some Form of Education)?

Of the 2,086 graduates interviewed, 1,551 (74%) were working and/or attending post-secondary education programs.

Of the male graduates, 76% were employed and/or attending post-secondary education programs compared to 71% of the females, 75% of the white graduates, and 72% of the graduates of color.

How Many of the Graduates had Planned Contact With an Adult Agency on Their Transition Plan?

Of the 2,718 graduates, 1,523 (56%) had planned contact with an adult agency listed on their transition plan. Of the 961 graduates

interviewed who had such contacts listed on their transition plans, 56% reported actually meeting with a planned adult service agency after graduation.

Conclusions

Gathering and examining the post-school data for 2,718 special education graduates in Washington State provides valuable information for administrators, educators and parents. These data reflect positive outcomes for many of the youth in this study. However, the picture provided by these data also indicates a need for improvement and specific areas to consider:

- OSPI now has a four-year history of collecting data on the post-school status of the special education graduates. Administration should encourage and support district personnel to examine these data for their own district. Superintendents, principals and other administrators should become knowledgeable about these data.
- The percentage of graduates who are employed (59%) has decreased considerably from previous years. While this may reflect changes in the local economy, it may also indicate a shift away from preparing students for gainful employment and an increased focus on academic programs. The discrepancy between graduates with learning disabilities (68%), graduates with emotional and behavioral disorders (51%), and graduates with mental retardation (42%) continues to be of concern.
- The percentage of graduates who are employed and/or attending some form of post-secondary education program has decreased slightly from previous years but continues to be high. However, the discrepancy in outcomes between males and females has narrowed dramatically, not because females with disabilities are experiencing better outcomes in employment and/or attending post-secondary education, but because males are experiencing poorer outcomes. This is a cause for concern at the district and state levels.

- The low percentage of special education graduates (6%) when compared with the percentage of all graduates continues to be a serious issue. Districts need to review their data concerning the number of special education students who are not completing high school.
- There continues to be an inflated number of transition goals associated with attendance at post-secondary programs. Staff, students and families should review the feasibility of such goals.
- For students with a goal of attending post-secondary education programs, districts need to align the secondary programs with this goal and develop a better “hand-off” to post-secondary programs. Districts should consider following graduates who enroll in post-secondary education programs in order to determine which students are successful and what barriers hinder graduates from success in these programs.
- Districts awarding “Other” certificates need to assure that they are knowledgeable of state and district policy concerning graduation requirements and practicing these policies. Graduates receiving a diploma based on meeting their IEP should be included in “Diploma.” A sample of the protocols indicated that some of the graduates receiving a diploma based on their IEP were identified as “Other.” We will continue to refine and clarify this finding in the 2002 study.

This report can also be found on the Center for Change in Transition Services web page at <http://depts.washington.edu/ccts> or the OSPI website: <http://www.k12.wa.us>