

Executive Summary

Post-School Status Report

2002 Special Education Graduates

Prepared for

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction
Special Education

May 2003

The Center for Change in Transition Services
University of Washington
Brown, P. & Johnson, C.

Executive Summary

Post-School Status Report of the 2002 Special Education Graduates

School districts in Washington State collected post-school status data for the fifth consecutive year. These data provide districts with important information needed for educational decision-making and program improvement. 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. In the study of the 2002 graduates, 134 districts participated, representing 54% of the districts in Washington with secondary programs. The number of districts and graduates that participate has steadily increased over the last five years. There were from 31 districts in the 1998 study, 27 districts in the 1999 study, 112 districts in the 2000 study, and 124 districts in the 2001 study.

Post-school performance is measured in areas of employment, enrollment in post-secondary education, appropriate inter-agency connection and engagement. Rate of engagement is reported, identifying those graduates that are attending post-secondary and/or employed. To answer questions about the post-school status of these students, data were collected on 2,910 special education youth from the 134 school districts. These students graduated between September 1, 2001 and August 31, 2002. .

District staff collected the data in November and December 2002, an average of six months after graduation. The data were abstracted from district records for all 2,910 graduates. Successful telephone contact was made with 2,224(76%) of the total group of 2,910 graduates. More graduates were contacted for the 2002 study than in any one of the previous four years. Among the 2002 graduates, 77% of the white youth were contacted while the contact rate for youth of color was 74%. Multiple attempts were made to contact all of the graduates by telephone. The lowest contacted group was males of color (71%); the highest contacted groups were white males and females of color (78%).

How Many Special Education Students Graduated From These 124 Districts?

A total of 2,910 special education youth graduated from these districts. This represents 4.6% of all the students who graduated from these 134 districts. Since 12.08% of the total school population is in special education and 9.3% of the special education population is between the ages of 17 and 21 (OSPI, 2002) Report 1735T, 1251H, 8/02), we would expect close to 9% of all high school graduates to be in special education. We believe this discrepancy of 4% represents special education dropouts.

The 2,910 graduates in this study consisted of 1,930 males (66.3%) and 972 females (34.4%) females. The gender of 8 graduates (.3%) was unknown. Of these graduates, 2,275 (78%) were white and 605 (21%) were graduates of color. Thirty graduates (1.0%) in this study did not wish to disclose ethnicity and are noted as “Undisclosed” in the data tables (Appendix A).

Special education students predominantly graduated with diplomas (93%). Both males and females obtained diplomas at comparable rates (93% for males, 92% for females). White special education students and students of color obtained diplomas at approximately the same rate (93% and 92%). 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%). These include certificates of attendance. 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 2,910 youth in this study included 1,737 (60%) students with learning disabilities, 531 (18%) were students with health impairments, 253 (9%) were students with mental retardation, 127 (4%) were students with multiple disabilities, 92 (3%) were students with emotional/behavioral disabilities, and 43 (2%) students with hearing impairments.

What was the Employment Rate of the Graduates?

Employment for this study was defined as working for pay, and 1,260 graduates (58%) reported that they were employed. Of these, 790 graduates (63%) reported both hours worked per week and hourly wage. Graduates reported working an average of 31 hours per week at \$8.42 per hour. These hourly wages are above the minimum wage of \$7.01. The hours per week are equivalent to findings in the 2001 study; the hourly wage has increased slightly. Minimum wage has increased from \$6.90 to \$7.01 from the 2001 study to the 2002 study. The employment rates for all groups are lower than for their peers who graduated in the year 2001. This reflects a change in employment rates statewide. The overall unemployment rate in Washington State for November 2001 was 6.4%; the unemployment rate in November, 2002 increased to 6.7%.

There are differences in employment rates between disability groups and by gender and ethnicity. For example, 65% of the youth with learning disabilities were employed compared to 53% of the graduates with emotional/behavioral disabilities, 40% of the graduates with mental retardation and 5% of the students with orthopedic impairments. Females are employed at a lower rate (52%) than males (61%) and youth of color are employed at a lower rate than white youth (54% to 59%).

Employment as part of the transition plan. Of the 2,910 graduates in this study, 1,248 (43%) had a post-school transition goal of employment identified on their IEP. Of the 1,004 graduates with the goal of employment and who were interviewed, 625 (62%) were employed. There is a difference in attaining the goal of employment when analyzing the data by disability. For those graduates with learning disabilities and the goal of employment, 72% were employed. In comparison, for those graduates with emotional/behavioral disorders and the goal of employment, 48% were employed. For those with mental retardation and employment as a goal, 39% were employed. These rates have decreased in comparison to the 2001 study. For those youth with mental retardation in the 2001 post-school study, 50% of those with the goal of

employment were employed 6 months post graduation. With higher unemployment rates, youth with more significant disabilities may have a more difficult time attaining and maintaining employment.

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

Of the 2,226 students interviewed, 739 (33%) 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 schools¹. Of these graduates attending some form of post-secondary education, 65% are attending 2-year community colleges.

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 colleges. Using this definition, 838 youth (38%) reported attending some form of post-high school education education/training program.

Among the year 2002 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 are attending post secondary education programs at a slightly higher rate than white youth (34% compared to 33%).

Post-secondary education as part of the transition plan. Of the total 2,910 graduates, 1,846 or 63% had post-secondary education as a transition goal. For those graduates who were interviewed with post-secondary education as a transition goal, 640 (44%) 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 and 42% of the youth in the 2001 study. Analyzing these data by disability status indicate that youth with emotional/behavioral disabilities were less likely to attend post-secondary education when identified as a goal. Although 63% 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 (70%) are attending at a much higher rate (44%). 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 2,226 graduates interviewed, 1,620 (73%) were working and/or attending post-secondary education programs.

Of the male graduates, 74% were employed and/or attending post-secondary education programs compared to 69% of the females, 73% of the white graduates, and 71% of the graduates of color.

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

Of the 2,910 graduates, 1,684 (58%) had planned contact with an adult agency listed on their transition plan. Interviewers contacted 1,148 graduates who had contacts with adult agencies listed on their transition plans and of these, 654 (57%) reported actually meeting with the planned adult service agency after graduation.

Youth with mental retardation and multiple disabilities connected with adult agencies at a higher rate than youth with significant learning disabilities. The agency listed most often on the IEP was the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation followed by the Division of Developmental Disabilities, which are the agencies to which these youth are connecting. For youth with significant learning disabilities, there were no employment agencies (e.g., Worksource) and few disability services coordinators at colleges identified on the IEP as appropriate agency linkages. Connections may increase with additional appropriate agencies

¹ This includes technical colleges.

identified for these youth on their IEP. Youth with emotional behavioral disabilities, whose outcomes are among the lowest by disability, are making few connections with appropriate adult agencies after graduation.

Conclusions

Gathering and examining the post-school data for 2,910 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 five-year history of collecting data on the post-school status of the special education graduates. These data, as well as drop-out data and academic data gathered from the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL), are important information for program improvement. Administration should encourage and support district personnel to examine post-school outcome data to better understand the effectiveness of transition services in their district. Superintendents, principals and other administrators should become knowledgeable about these data in order to support and develop curricular options for youth with disabilities.
- Large districts should examine district level data and review the surveys in order to analyze outcomes by high school. These surveys are returned to the district office where they can be sorted and returned to individual high schools. Teachers and staff can examine these surveys at the building level in order to inform development of the IEP, provision of transition practices and additional training needs.

- Small districts should participate even with few graduates. These outcomes are important to the state and can provide important information to school staff.
- The percentage of graduates who are employed (58%) 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. It may also indicate that in a competitive labor market, youth with disabilities will require better preparation and support to secure employment. The discrepancy between graduates with learning disabilities (68%), graduates with emotional/behavioral disabilities (51%), and graduates with mental retardation (42%) continues to be of concern. District personnel should examine these outcomes by disability to better understand the course of study provided to these youth in relation to their post-school goals.
- 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. These positive outcomes are not universal to all special education graduates. Although 80.3% of youth with learning disabilities are engaged in employment and/or post-secondary training, only 28% of youth with multiple disabilities are doing so. This percentage represents a total of 106 graduates with multiple disabilities; of which 76 young people are not involved in any type of training program, participating in any on-the-job training, or attending any classes or courses. Further examination is needed at the district level to understand the outcomes for those graduates that are not engaged.

- The low percentage of special education graduates (4.6%) 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. It may be useful to examine the number of students in special education by grade level. Questions would include: How many students in special education are in 8th grade? How many in subsequent years through high school? How many by disability category? How many students are identified as drop-outs? How many students are identified as “unknown” (not transfer students, not drop-outs)?
- 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. Courses of study should be carefully reviewed for youth planning to attend post-secondary programs. These should include college preparatory classes with accommodations and opportunities to develop self-advocacy skills. 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. Post-secondary training programs should be considered if 2- and 4-year colleges do not seem possible.
- Youth with more significant disabilities are connecting with adult agencies at a much higher rate than youth with milder disabilities. For youth with significant learning disabilities, this may be due to inappropriate linkages or need for additional linkages that would

include employment agencies (Worksource). Youth with emotional behavioral disorders are making few connections with adult agencies, yet overall not experiencing positive post-school outcomes. These discrepancies should be addressed at the local, regional and state level as agency councils develop goals and identify barriers.

Follow-up Study Demographic Form and Telephone Survey

- 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.” These guidelines can be found in the graduation exit citation, WAC 392-172-030(5)(b). The state board regulations addressing graduation are in WAC 180-51-115.

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>