

Executive Summary

Post-School Status Report

2005 Special Education Graduates

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**The Center for Change in Transition Services
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Executive Summary

Post-School Status Report of the 2005 Special Education Graduates

Post-school status data were collected in Washington State for the 8th consecutive year. The 2005 study is the largest to date with 239 school districts participating and contact was made with 3,180 youth that have graduated or turned 21. This study represents over 95% of school districts in Washington State and, for those districts that participated, follow-up contact with 78% of the youth. This is powerful data for program improvement and evaluation, information for training and technical assistance and for community and agency collaboration. Washington State is a leader in the collection and use of post-school outcome data.

The purpose of this study is two-fold. Information is gathered from the transition portion of the final IEP and from the graduate or his or her family six months after graduation. This information is used to determine the relation between the transition plan for the young person and his or her goals for life after high school and if those goals have been reached. School districts can verify if the transition portion of the IEP is complete and if the anticipated outcomes identified on the IEPs are achieved by the youth. School district personnel, regional and state-level educators can provide training, resources and technical assistance in response to this information. Developing community collaboration and agency connections should also be informed by the outcome data.

Who are the youth in the 2005 post-school outcome study?

For the 2005 study, graduation is defined as leaving high school with a diploma or aging out of special education services at age 21. Information was collected from 4,070 IEPs in the 239 participating school districts in Washington State. Attempts were made to contact all 4,070 youth. After multiple attempts, 3,180 youth (78%) were contacted. Larger districts had the most difficulty contacting special education graduates. Of the 3,180 youth that were contacted, 95% graduated with a diploma. There were 181 youth or 4% that reached age 21 and “aged out”. There were 7 youth that were identified as leaving high school with something “other” than a diploma or aging out at age 21. Youth most likely to “age out” or graduate with something “other” than a high school diploma were students with multiple

disabilities (29%) or mental retardation (21%) compared to youth with learning disabilities (0.5%). There are more males than females in special education overall and the 2005 cohort reflects that information. There are 2,655 males and 1,415 females total. Of the 3,180 youth contacted, 2,369 youth are white, 787 are youth of color, including those that selected two or more races and 24 did not report ethnicity.

What information is gathered from the final IEP?

Information gathered from the transition portion of the last IEP includes demographic information about the youth including age, gender, ethnicity, disability, and exit status. Information is gathered from the transition portion of the IEP to identify the goals for the student after high school or the “anticipated post-school outcome.” This includes whether the youth wants to 1) attend postsecondary education or training such as a 4-year, 2-year, vocational/technical or other training program; 2) gain employment (independent or supported); 3) live independently; and/or 4) identifies an adult service agency as a necessary linkage. Information regarding health insurance was gathered for the 2005 graduates for the third time in this study.

From the total number of surveys received, (4,070), information from the final IEPs indicated that 2,737 (67%) selected postsecondary education as a goal, 2,943 (72%) selected employment and 91 (2%) were left blank or marked “not applicable.”

What information is gathered from the youth or his or her family?

The youth or family member is asked if the graduate is living independently, attending postsecondary education or training, and/or employed. Information is gathered regarding hours worked and wages. Those youth for whom agency linkages are identified on the IEP are asked if contact was made with the agency. The 2005 survey included a question to determine if youth have medical insurance and if so, with whom.

How many youth are living independently?

This information is gathered to determine if young people with disabilities are living independently six months after graduation. It is not to suggest that these youth

necessarily should be living independently but rather provides information about their life after high school. Of the 3,180 youth that were contacted in December of 2005, 2,343 (74%) were living with their families. For the others, 806 reported as living outside the family home and 31 did not provide any information about living arrangements. Military was included in “living independently.” The majority of respondents that were attending college said they were living independently. Living independently” is defined as not living at home or with parents or guardians, although there may be financial dependence.

How many youth had the goal of postsecondary education?

Of the 3,180 youth with completed surveys, 2,110 (66%) identified postsecondary education on their IEPs as an anticipated outcome or goal after high school. For those youth that identified postsecondary education as a goal, 809 youth or 39% were attending. Youth with the goal of attending a 2-year community college achieved that goal at a higher rate than those students that identified a 4-year or vocational/technical program.

How many youth are attending postsecondary education and/or training programs?

There are 1,160 special education graduates that are attending postsecondary education and/or training programs. This number includes youth for whom postsecondary education was not identified as a goal. This is 37% of the 3,180 youth that were contacted. Of these youth attending postsecondary education, 125 are going to a 4-year university (11%), 622 to a 2-year community college (54%), and 138 to a vocational/technical school (12%). The majority of the youth attended college or training programs in Washington State. There were 68 youth involved with the military, 75 attending a vocational training program, 66 involved with a certification program or union apprenticeship, and 50 identified “other.”

How many youth had the goal of employment?

Of the youth that were contacted, 2,274 or 72% indicated that they wanted employment after graduation. This is up from 1,973 or 68% in 2004. Of those, 1,375 or 61% were employed six months after leaving high school. This is also an increase from the 2004 graduates where 1,145 or 58% were employed six months after leaving high school. The percentage of youth for whom employment is the

anticipated post-school outcome has increased over the past four years from 45% in 2002, 57% in 2003, 68% in 2004, to 72% in 2005.

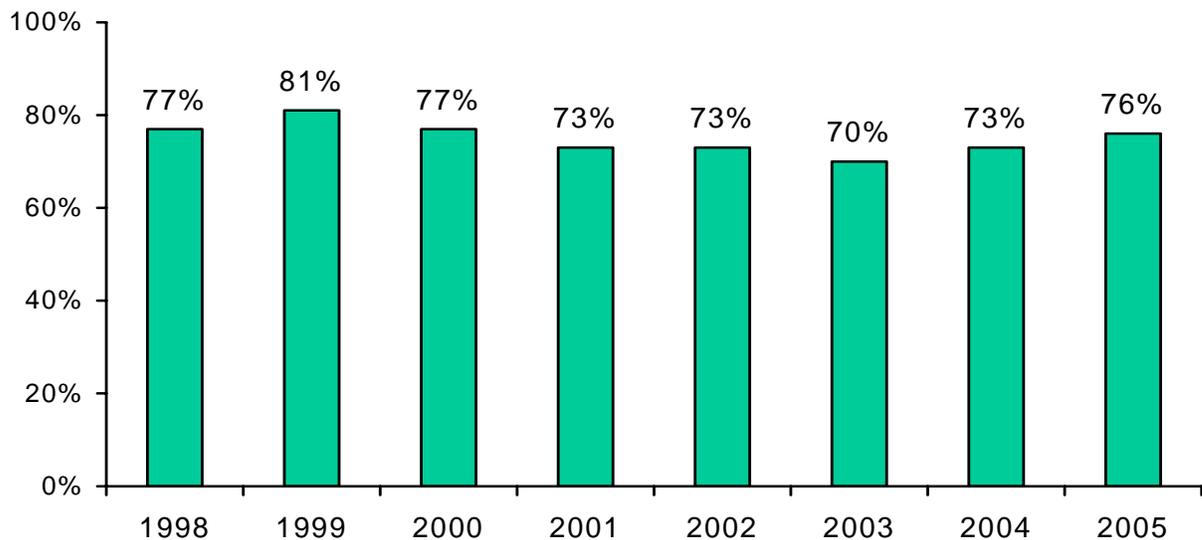
How many youth are employed?

Of the 3,180 youth that were contacted six months after graduation, 1,790 (56%) were employed. This number includes youth for whom employment was not identified as a goal as well as those for whom employment was a goal. This rate has decreased yearly since the 1999 study when 70% of youth were employed. The rate of employment has increased slightly from 2003. From the high of 70%, 65% were employed in 2000, 59% in 2001, 58% in 2002, 53% in 2003, and 55% for the special education graduates in 2004. The rate of unemployment in Washington State has increased by 2.6% from 1999 to 2003, and this might affect the number of graduates who are able to find employment. (Washington State Employment Security Department, Labor Market and Economic Analysis Branch, 2004).

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

Of the 3,180 graduates interviewed, 2,404 (76%) were either working and/or attending postsecondary education programs. The rate of engagement by year is presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Employed and/or Attending Postsecondary by Year



Agency Linkages

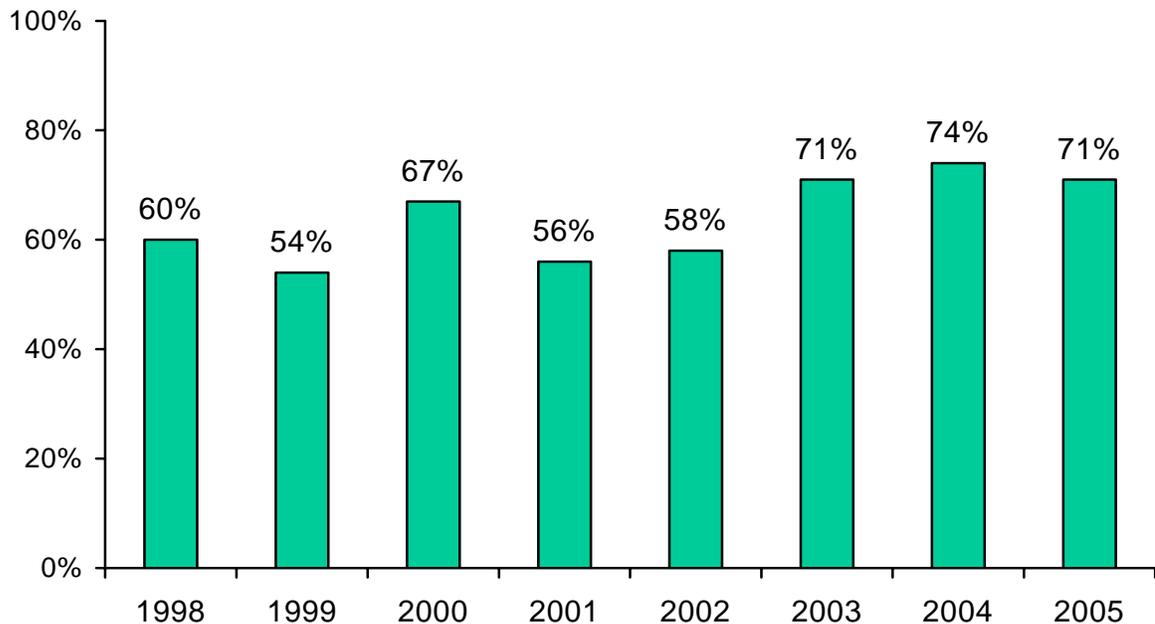
Agencies Identified on the IEP

Information is gathered from the final IEP to determine the number and type of adult agency linkages that were identified. There were 4,070 IEPs in the 2005 post-school data study. Of those IEPs, 2,828 or 70% identified an adult agency.

Of the 4,070 IEPs in this study, 3,180 youth and families were contacted for the follow-up survey. Of those IEPs, 2,248 or 71% identified an agency on the IEP.

There has been a positive increase in the number of agencies identified on the IEP from 1999-2004 with a slight dip in 2005. In the 1998 study 60% of the IEPs identified agencies; 1999, 54%; 2000, 67%; 2001, 56%; 2002, 58%; 2003, 71%; 2004 74%; and in 2005 71% identified agencies. This information is represented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Agency Linkages Identified on the IEP



Agency Linkages

Six months after graduation or aging out, youth and families were asked during the telephone survey if a linkage or connection had been made with the agency identified on the IEP. For the 2,248 youth that had an agency identified on the IEP,

988 of those youth (44%) made contact with the agency. This connection with the agency includes visiting the office and participating in services or classes, initiating or completing the intake paperwork, as well as receiving services. Linkages made with DVR, DDD, DSS, and WorkSource are presented below. More than one agency was recommended on many IEPs; therefore the total of “Recommended on the IEP” is more than the 2,248 youth that had an agency linkage identified.

Table 1: Agencies Recommended on the IEP, Linkages with the Agency

Agency	Recommended on the IEP	Linkage with Agency
Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)	1,675 youth (53%)	592 youth (35%)
Division of Developmental Disabilities (DDD)	463 youth (15%)	255 youth (55%)
Disabled Student Services (DSS)	646 youth (20%)	170 youth (26%)
WorkSource	511 youth (16%)	106 youth (21%)

How many youth had health insurance?

Three-quarters (2,296 or 74%) of the youth contacted in this study reported having health insurance. Of those, most (1,669) had health insurance through their families and 627 had health insurance through something other than family (employment benefits, SSI, Medicaid, etc.). This is an area that is not addressed on the IEP but may be considered during transition planning. This is the third year that this information has been collected.

Conclusions

Transition services are provided to help students with disabilities acquire the skills that will support them to lead productive and independent adult lives. Post-school status data are used by state and local school systems and lead agencies to determine whether their programs are producing the desired results. Less than half of the states across the nation collect some type of post-school data for employment and postsecondary training. Many of the states use other sources rather than collecting these data within the educational system. With a history of over 20 years of research in the area of post-school data and consistent collection over the last six years, Washington State is a leader in post-school outcome research. Participating school districts’ contributions are critical to this effort and they are commended for their work. Districts that gather these data through the

examination of IEPs and telephone surveys with the youth and families report that this is powerful information in which to evaluate and improve programs.

Data were collected from 216 school districts, representing 4,070 special education graduates. Of those youth, 3,180 or 78% were contacted. These districts responded to the LEA Application for Federal Funds for Special Education requiring the applicant to include a plan addressing the post-school performance of special education graduates. The areas addressed include: employment, enrollment in postsecondary education, employment and /or enrollment in postsecondary (engagement), and connection to appropriate adult agencies based on the 1998 data. The data collected in these 4 areas for the 1998, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005 graduates follows:

Comparison of Four Outcomes for Years 1998-2005

Cohort	Employed	Enrolled in Postsecondary Ed	Engaged	Adult Agency Connection
1998	66%	31%	77%	53%
1999	70%	30%	81%	50%
2000	65%	28%	77%	51%
2001	59%	31%	73%	56%
2002	58%	33%	73%	57%
2003	53%	30%	70%	53%
2004	55%	29%	73%	46%
2005	56%	28%	76%	44%

Conclusions and recommendations are identified in the following areas: 1) outcomes; 2) participation in the study and collection of the data. Goals are identified for each area.

Outcomes: The number of school districts that participated is steadily increasing. This is a positive result of this study and provides information that can be used for policy, procedures and practices at the state, regional and local level. There are additional outcomes that are positive as well as areas that need improvement.

1. Students with developmental disabilities should consider staying in the school system until age 21 unless leaving with employment or training. IEPs should be carefully developed to transition the young person to employment

or a training program with employment as the goal. District policy should be reviewed so that students are aware of the linkages with Division of Developmental Disabilities and the possible gap in services if youth leave prior to age 21. The rate of engagement for youth with mental retardation has increased from 46% for the 2004 cohort to 55% for the 2005 cohort. These data should be carefully examined at the district level for continued program improvement.

2. Agency linkages identified on the IEP continued to increase from 56% in 2001 to 74% in 2005. These percentages should represent the youth and families that have received information about adult service agencies. Additional work must be done to increase the number of youth that receive services from the identified agencies after leaving high school. Community councils may assist in strengthening the connections between the school system and the adult agencies. State level collaboration continues to be a goal to support practice and policy to increase these linkages.
3. School districts should identify appropriate agencies for students based on the post-school goals. The district should assist the youth and family to connect with the agency and provide necessary and required documentation. Agencies in addition to Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Division of Developmental Disabilities and the Disability Student Services should be identified on the IEP. Before identifying the agencies, the post-school goals and the needs of the student must be determined in order to select appropriate agencies. Agencies can be determined based on goals of employment or postsecondary education, but also recreation and leisure, health and emergency care, transportation and housing. In addition to the name of the agency, district personnel can include specific information regarding location and contact information on the IEP. This information is found at the website:
http://www.seattleu.edu/ccts/agency_connections/agencyconnections.asp.
4. Fewer IEPs are left blank or “undecided” than in previous years for the anticipated outcome. School personnel should examine their data to determine if this is true for all IEPs in their district.
5. Fewer youth are attending postsecondary education than four years ago. Attendance has decreased over the last 3 years from 33% in 2002 to 30% in

2003 and 29% in 2004. Many youth with the goal of postsecondary education are not attending the year following graduation. This may be due to a lack of preparation for postsecondary education including academic skills, knowledge of disabilities and needed accommodations as well as late planning and inadequate documentation. School districts can further investigate this outcome by examining the surveys and discussing the outcomes. Special education should collaborate with guidance and counseling in order to align the course of study to the college for the student for whom postsecondary education is a goal and assure that the goal of postsecondary education (4-year, 2-year or technical college) is appropriate for the student.

6. Youth that are white are attending postsecondary education and/or training programs at the rate of 38% and youth of color are attending postsecondary education and/or training programs at 32%. Attendance at postsecondary education (4-year, 2-year, vocational/technical colleges) is 30% for youth that are white and 28% for youth of color. The discrepancy between attendance of youth of color and white youth was of concern in the earlier years of this study (1998-2000). Although rates of attendance were nearly equal for the last two years, the outcome data for the 2004 graduates indicates that this is an area that school districts should continue to examine.
7. Employment rates for all youth decreased from a high of 70% in 1999, increasing slightly from 2003. Districts should examine their data and surveys to determine which of the graduates have the goal of employment and which of those students are not working. The surveys will provide information to the district that will assist in improving work-based learning programs, career technical access and training, job finding skills and linkages to employment services including WorkSource.
8. There are noteworthy differences in outcomes when analyzed by disability category. Youth with learning disabilities are experiencing better outcomes in postsecondary training and education and employment than youth with emotional/behavior disabilities, youth with mental retardation and youth with multiple disabilities. These outcomes should be discussed and analyzed at the district level.

Goals to consider:

- 1. Increase the number of IEPs that identify an appropriate adult agency.**
- 2. Increase the agency linkages to include WorkSource and other agencies for employment and community support.**
- 3. Increase the number of youth that contact the adult agency within 6 months of graduation.**
- 4. Increase post-school outcome goals on the IEP to 100% by assuring that every student has identified a post-school goal of postsecondary education, training or employment.**
- 5. Increase the number of youth with more significant disabilities that are employed (supported employment is considered “employment”) and/or in training or educational programs.**
- 6. Increase the number of youth with emotional behavioral disorders that are attending postsecondary education, training and/or employed.**
- 7. Increase the engagement rate for youth of color in postsecondary attendance or training and/or employment as compared to youth that are white.**

Participation: There is additional work needed in order to enhance this statewide effort. The goal of this project is that every school district in the state with special education graduates participates in this study. Additional efforts need to be made to increase the contact rate with special education graduates. This report may present the most positive outcomes for youth in special education as these may be the young people that were the easiest to contact. These are likely young men and women with disabilities that have intact families, stable contact numbers and positive experiences with the school district. Surveys that were not completed have comments written including “won’t talk with school,” “disconnected number,” and “family doesn’t know where (student) is.”

It is important that both small and large districts participate. Small school districts with one or two graduates are as important to the research as are large districts requiring extra effort to gather these data. The following are recommendations for data collection:

1. School district personnel identify students in special education that will graduate or turn 21 in the spring prior to their leaving. This should be completed at the individual high school for larger districts.
2. Gather information from these students while they are still in the high schools regarding contact information. The Student Demographic form is available for use in Appendix B. It is also available on the Center's website at: (<http://www.seattleu.edu/ccts>).
3. Gather demographic information from the IEP and complete the first portion of the survey PRIOR to archiving the IEPs. This is considerably more efficient than gathering this information in November after the student has graduated. The survey is included in Appendix C and on the Center for Change in Transition Services website.
4. Attach the contact information to the surveys and file for use in late November of the following year.
5. Divide the surveys (completed with demographics and contact information) among special education personnel. It is recommended that people familiar with transition services, resources and special education make the phone calls. If the calls are made by an administrative assistance, information regarding agencies should be readily available.

Goals to consider:

1. **Increase the contact rate with special education graduates.**
2. **Increase the number of surveys with complete information.**
3. **Encourage teachers or other professionals that are knowledgeable of community resources and adult agencies to make the calls. This is an opportunity to provide final case management and information to the youth and the family as well as gather information for program improvement.**

The post-school data are available by county and are provided to the community councils in those counties. For the 2004 graduates, the data will be disaggregated by high school as well as district. This report can also be found on the Center for Change in Transition Services web page at: www.seattleu.edu/ccts, or the OSPI website: <http://www.k12.wa.us>.