

Executive Summary

The Secondary Transition study is part of Connecticut's Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process. The purpose of the study was to address some of those areas identified as "areas in need of improvement", by filling two important gaps in data sources:

1. Determining the post-school outcomes of Special Education students, and
2. The current status of provision of transition services in the state.

Two separate surveys were conducted: A follow-up study of Special Education students who had exited high school in the year 2000, and a Transition Program Status Survey.

The first objective was to design, implement, and analyze the results of a baseline follow-up study of students who exited special education in the year 2000. Three thousand five hundred thirty four (3,534) special education students were identified as having exited high school between January and June of the year 2000 for one of the following reasons: graduation with a regular diploma, graduation with an IEP diploma, ageing out of school, or dropping out. Connecticut had no information regarding the current status of these students. A comprehensive survey was developed to determine the current status of employment, independent living, post-secondary education and community participation of this group. This information will be used to establish a baseline in order to determine if special education services at the high school level are preparing young adults with disabilities to become successful.

The second objective of the study was to design, implement and analyze the results of a Transition Program Needs Assessment survey to determine the current provision of transition services at the secondary level. A comprehensive assessment was conducted to determine if schools employ transition coordinators, provide community-based training opportunities, teach independent living, self-advocacy or self-determination skills, and establish some level of interagency linkages prior to exit from high school. A Transition Program Status Survey was disseminated to all

- 154 Local Education Agencies (LEAs),

- Seventeen (17) Regional Vocational/Technical Schools,
- Six (6) Charter Schools,
- Ten (10) Regional Educational Service Centers and
- Sixty two (62) private special education facilities in the state,

for a total of two hundred and forty nine (249) districts. The survey was designed to collect information on the above listed components in transition program development and service provision, as well as documenting perceived needs for parent training and assistance. The resulting information is intended to guide future training, technical assistance and resource allocation in order to enhance transition programming at the secondary level.

Part 1: follow-up survey of year 2000 graduates/exiters of high school

This study was conducted in order to provide a baseline of the current status of former high school students who received special education services. It is the intention of the Department of Education to repeat this survey every two years in order to assess the effectiveness of improvements in transition programs in Connecticut schools. This section summarizes some of the more significant findings in each section of the survey and offers suggestions for further surveys.

Regarding the current employment status of the cohort, while 67% state that they are currently employed, only 43.4% are working 35 hours or more. While 73% of this group is making above minimum wage (\$6.70 per hour), over half receive no job benefits of any kind. This may be partially due to the fact that 41.7% have been working at their jobs less than one year.

Regarding on-the-job assistance, there were significant differences between diagnostic categories. While 66.2% respondents overall do not receive any help, 8.1% of respondents with Intellectual Disabilities receive no help. This group also has the highest rate of employment (84.2%). Individuals with Social/Emotional Disabilities reported a

low employment rate (52.3%) and only 14.4% of those answering this question reported any form of job support.

The area of job retention held significant differences between diagnostic groups. Overall, 29.1% of respondents had held two jobs, and 22.8% one job. However, the figure for young adults with Intellectual Disabilities was that 42.9% had held only one job since leaving high school as compared with only 2.3% of respondents with Social/Emotional Disabilities, 44.2% of whom had held two jobs, and 20.9% had held three. Difficulties with their boss or co-workers accounted for 18.4% of respondents overall leaving their most recent job, as compared to 30% of respondents with Social/Emotional Disabilities. "Not enough money" was the second most popular response for both groups in relation to why they had left a job. Differences again arose among those reporting that they were currently looking for work; while 81.3% of respondents with Intellectual Disabilities stated they were not, 54.8% of respondents with Social/Emotional Disabilities said that they were.

Regarding post-secondary education, predictably 92.1% of respondents with Intellectual Disabilities responded that they are not in a college or training program. 46% of the respondents overall are in some kind of program; these responses included not only colleges, but also trade schools, apprenticeship programs, and the military. 27.9% of this group are not receiving any form of help, nor feel that it is necessary. 45 former students responded that they had been enrolled in a program that they did not complete. Of this group, 55.6% said they did not receive any support services.

Further follow-up of students who have dropped out of post-secondary programs is warranted in order to further examine causes of non-completion. One possible interpretation is that students are not requesting services. While in high school, students tend to be passive participants in the support provision process. When the students enter into postsecondary education, they have to be the initiator and manager of their supports. Students with disabilities often don't have an opportunity to learn what they need to learn to negotiate this role switch. While self-advocacy is beginning to be included in the

curriculum in some schools, this is far from widespread. Students should be given a greater role in planning their educational goals far earlier, and required rather than invited to attend their meetings.

A significant question that bears further investigation is that of connection to Adult Service or Community Agencies. 60.9% of respondents stated that they had no contact with any agencies since leaving high school. When analyzed by disability category, there were significant differences, in that a majority of young adults with Learning Disabilities (70.5%) reported no agency contact compared with only 1 individual (2.6%) with Intellectual Disabilities. This is a clear reflection of the lack of available services and funding for the former population, and the existence of a dedicated state agency (Department of Mental Retardation) for the latter.

The clearest differences between diagnostic populations came in the section of the survey on independent living and community participation. While 63.2% of respondents overall report that they are living in their parents' or relatives' home, 92.1% of those with Intellectual Disabilities do so. 83.2% of this group spends most of their time with family members, 28.6% spend time alone, and fewer than half report having any hobbies, fun activities or other recreational activities. The highest reported level of social activity among this group was 27% who reported getting together with friends or relatives they do not live with less than once a week. It appears therefore, that although the majority of this population does receive services from an adult service agency, the impact of this is seen much more in the area of employment than in their involvement in social and community activities, or their residential situation.

From the original letter sent out to Directors of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services on February 7, 2002, to the final receipt of all addresses at the beginning of April, over 8 weeks and 214 hours of clerical staff time were expended to create a mailing list for the survey. As the intent is to repeat this survey every two years, it would greatly add to the efficiency of the process to have a centralized database of students accessible for this purpose. If this is not possible, we recommend asking school districts

to submit addresses of exiting students at the end of each school year, when this data is more readily available.

Many of the results of this survey are consistent with findings by the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education, despite the relatively low return rate of 13.38%. A recommendation for future surveys is to follow up survey mailings with telephone interviews and face-to-face interviews in order to: 1. Increase the response rate, 2. Obtain more detailed information regarding specific areas such as community support, independent living and community participation. A number of findings warrant further investigation. These include further follow up on employment and employment supports for individuals with Learning Disabilities and Social/Emotional Disabilities; differences in wages by ethnicity; the extent of support services received by students in college or training programs, and the impact of this support on program completion; the role of schools in developing social skills and community connections; and the role of adult service agencies in the transition planning process.

Part 2: Connecticut Transition Program Status Survey

This survey was intended to provide a baseline to be used in conjunction with the Bureau of Special Education and Pupil Services Continuous Improvement Plan for Special Education and Transition Action Plan. This baseline is intended to increase the provision of quality transition services and programs. A number of outcomes are already in place to improve transition services, such as increasing the number of transition coordinators and establishing competency standards for Job Coaches. It is the intent of the Department to replicate this study in the future in order to assess changes and improvements in the system.

While a response rate of 42.2% is relatively high, future surveys could increase this rate by being conducted in the Fall rather than Spring months. Telephone conversations with Special Education Directors or their staff indicated that many did not have the time to fill out a survey of this complexity at a time of year when PPTs were being conducted on a

frequent basis. In addition, beginning in June many staff were off for the summer, so that it was not possible for a team to be convened to fill out the survey as originally intended. The more significant findings of this study are summarized as follows:

Transition Planning: The first item of significance is that 62.9% overall of school districts in Connecticut responding to this survey do not employ transition coordinators at this time. For public schools, that figure is 53%. If the district has no transition coordinator, the primary responsibility for transition services is given to the special education teacher in 58.8% of districts or the Special Education Department Head in another 16.2% of districts.

In the development of goals and objectives, besides the student and parent, primary staff involved are the special education teacher and the guidance counselor. Transition Coordinators were only involved 34.3% of the time. This may be due to the number of schools that do not employ Transition Coordinators.

While 104 out of 105 respondents said that students actively participate in the PPT process, attendance by students at their PPT meetings is not consistent. As seen in Table 9, the highest rate of student attendance is 93.2% for students with visual/hearing impairments at age 18. Other disability groups and ages were lower, and children with Intellectual Disabilities and Multiple Disabilities were the least likely to be included in the transition PPT meetings at any age. The highest frequency for students with Multiple Disabilities was 71.2% attendance at age 18. At age 15 this frequency was 58.9%. There is a clear pattern of attendance increasing overall as students get older.

Assessment: It would appear from the survey data that students with Intellectual Disabilities, Multiple Disabilities and Autism are more likely to receive assessments in all areas than are the other three disability groups. Additionally, students with Learning Disabilities, ADD/ADHD and Visual/Hearing Impairments are more likely to receive vocational assessments than they are assessments in independent living, recreation/leisure and community participation. 58.1% of districts indicated that they send students to

rehabilitation facilities for vocational evaluations, and 78.1% contract with outside agencies to conduct evaluations.

Curricula: In middle school, the majority of students in all disability categories are taught in either integrated or self-contained classrooms, as opposed to community environments. Social skills (28.6%), independent living skills (28.6%) and recreation/leisure skills (26.9%) taught to students with Intellectual Disabilities provide the highest percentages of skills taught in community settings. Transportation skills appear to be taught little in middle school, the highest percentage being 24.5% for students with visual/hearing impairments who are apparently taught these skills in integrated regular classrooms.

Students with Learning Disabilities, ADD/ADHD, Visual and Hearing Impairments and Social/Emotional Disabilities are taught skills such as career planning, self-advocacy skills and study skills in integrated regular classrooms. However, the percentage of study skills taught in integrated classes to students with Social/Emotional Disabilities is 67.2% compared with 81.8% for students with ADD/ADHD, and frequency of self-advocacy skills is 58.1% for students with Social/Emotional Disabilities versus 68.3% for students with ADD/ADHD. The greatest difference is in teaching of Computer skills in integrated classes: 68.7% for students with Social Emotional Disability as compared with 83.6% for students with ADD/ADHD. For students with Intellectual Disabilities and Multiple Disabilities and Autism the data is fairly evenly divided between integrated regular classes and self-contained classrooms. This indicates that close to half of the responding districts teach these disability groups in self-contained classroom settings.

In high school, a greater percentage of high school students overall are taught skills in community settings than in middle school, particularly students with Intellectual Disabilities, Multiple Disabilities and Autism. Additionally, there is an average 5% to 10% increase in the skills taught in self-contained classrooms for all disability groups. This is higher for students with Intellectual Disabilities, Multiple Disabilities and Autism.

Career Counseling and Vocational Training: 90.5% of respondents indicated that career counseling and guidance was provided to students by the special education teacher, with 83.8% also listing the guidance counselor. Job development is shared among a variety of professionals, with 54.3% of districts overall indicating that this was done by the special education teacher, in addition to the guidance counselor, transition coordinator or job coach. 56.1% of districts employ job coaches. Regarding job coaches' background and qualifications, while 43.2% of job coaches employed in public schools have a high school diploma, and only 10.8% have either a 2 or a 4-year college degree. The RESCs and Private schools report 100% of their job coaches have 4-year college degrees.

Vocational alternatives were not readily available to students in middle school. Vocational education classes and visits from career speakers provided the most common vocational exposure. More students with Intellectual Disabilities and Multiple Disabilities appear to be involved in a wider variety of experiences than other disability groups in middle school, but these percentages are still low (see Table 25).

In high school, a greater proportion of students are involved in a range of vocational training alternatives than in middle school. Additionally, a greater percentage of students with Intellectual Disabilities and with Multiple Disabilities are involved in some form of vocational training than any other disability group. This includes simulated classroom training, in-school job sites, field trips, internships, work-study experiences, and so on. The only areas equal for all groups were competitive employment and participation in Adult Day programs. The range for competitive employment was 9.1% to 16.7%.

Finally, career portfolios are developed by 46.7% of respondents.


Linkages to Adult Service Agencies and Providers: Schools report that referrals are made to an adult service agency with a frequency as high as 93.3%. However, attendance by adult service agencies at PPT meetings is not consistent, with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services reported the highest "sometimes" at 62.9%. Highest in the "often" category is the Department of Mental Retardation with 46.7%. Most districts do

not participate in a local community inter-agency planning team. Adult agency involvement in the development of transition goals and objectives is reported at 59%.

Parent Training and Participation: 93.8% of schools report that they provide information to parents about adult service agencies. 91.5% of districts encourage parents to apply for adult services at least 2 – 3 years prior to exiting the school system. However, when asked if the district provides an orientation for students and parents on the key elements of transition planning, only 48.5% said they did so, and that the primary method of dissemination of information to parents is the PPT meeting (91.4%). The special education teacher is listed as the individual most likely to conduct the information dissemination (76.2%). Considering the wealth of issues usually discussed at a PPT meeting, this would not seem to be the most conducive environment in which critical information about adult services should be provided.

Recommendations: Based on the data from this survey, there are a number of gaps in transition programming to be addressed. These include:

1. Increasing the number of Transition Coordinators, particularly in public schools.
2. A greater emphasis on student participation at PPT meetings prior to age 18, especially for students with Intellectual Disabilities, Multiple Disabilities and Autism.
3. Implementation of uniform standards for training of job coaches.
4. More vocational training opportunities need to be provided for students with Learning Disabilities and Social/Emotional Disabilities
5. Adult Service Agency involvement in the development of transition goals and objectives and attendance of representatives at PPT meetings are both low, despite schools reporting a high rate of referral to these agencies. This is an area of significant need, given the information from the Follow-up Survey of former special education students, that 61% of those who left school in the year 2000 two years out of school have had no contact with counselors from any adult service or community agency.

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6. Parents need information on transition planning at an earlier age, outside of PPT meetings. Knowledgeable personnel should conduct orientations for both students and parents on the key elements of transition planning at least 3 years prior to exiting the school system.

School districts are asking for technical assistance and training particularly in the areas of Futures Planning, development of goals and objectives, and all areas of assessment and evaluation.