TRANSITION OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS WITH HIGH INCIDENCE

DISABILITIES IN ALABAMA

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THE TRANSITION OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS WITH HIGH INCIDENCE DISABILITIES IN ALABAMA

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DaShonera E. Griffin, daughter of Donald and Bessie Griffin, was born September 3, 1972, in Covington, Georgia. She earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology from Albany State College (1996). Upon graduation, DaShonera was employed as a remedial reading teacher in the Newton County School System in Covington, Georgia. She entered the master's program at Bowie State University and earned a Master of Education degree in Special Education in 2002. During her teaching career of seven years, DaShonera taught students with disabilities (in the exceptionality areas of learning disabilities, mental retardation and emotional disturbance) at the elementary, middle and high school levels. She began the doctoral program in 2002. Presently, she is an Assistant Professor and the Program Coordinator for the Exceptional Education Program at Clark Atlanta University in Atlanta, Georgia.

DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

TRANSITION OUTCOMES OF STUDENTS WITH HIGH INCIDENCE DISABLITIES IN ALABAMA

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This study examined factors associated with the engagement of former students with high incidence disabilities in Alabama from rural and nonrural school systems. The investigation was conducted using 119 students with learning disabilities or mental retardation who exited from high school during the 2003-2004. The hypotheses were examined with regard to whether there was a statistically significant difference between *engagement, satisfaction with life now* and *perception of preparedness of school programs and services* of students with high incidence disabilities by *primary disability, exit option* and *school type,* as reported to the Alabama Tracking System, Post School Transition Survey. Students in rural and nonrural school systems in Alabama appear to be equally engaged. Specifically, the majority of former students with LD and MR were engaged in employment, technical school, 2- year and 4- year colleges one year after high

school completion. The differences that were noted occurred due to primary disability, an area which historically has yielded differences in the type of engagement or lack thereof in students with high incidence disabilities. Conclusions, limitations and recommendations for further research are presented.

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I. INTRODUCTION

To regard youth with disabilities as a potential valuable resource requires a belief in human potential and recognition that potential must be discovered, developed, and nurtured. To be certain that each youth with a disability has a chance to discover his or her potential, this belief must be supported by educational programs that are realistically designed to allow all students to pursue options to reach their goals. This requires, of course, a willingness to invest time, effort, patience, and support.

For students, their families, the teachers, and others in the public school system, the investments of time and energy are substantial. Yet, the returns are more than worth it. Assisting youth with high incidence disabilities to discover new feelings of self-worth, to offer better preparation for postsecondary education to students, to provide anxious employers with able workers and to send to nonrural and rural communities more competent citizens all must be a part of establishing transition programs of considerable value (Clark & McDonnel, 1994; Condeluci, 1995; Day & Newburger, 2002; Greenwood, 1992).

Under the educational system in the United States, state education agencies and local school districts are responsible for charting the educational plans for its own population of students. They do this, however, under existing federal and state laws and continuing and changing calls for reform (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, &

Mack, 2002; Kochhar &West, 1995; No Child Left Behind, 2002). At the heart of these laws and reform proposals are attempts for quality education for ALL students. The problem is the lack of agreement on the definition of a quality education.

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 made a clear commitment to the provisions of services for persons with disabilities who needed more than assistance in gaining employment. Although the Act did not mandate independent living or even vocational rehabilitation services, it did provide a permissible foundation for prohibiting discrimination and the denial of services through Section 501, 503, and 504 (Neubert, 1994; Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services [OSERS], 1992; Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2004). Because of the need for more assistance laws governing social aspects of life for persons with disabilities all came about as a logical extension of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The passage of this Act was during the same time as other social movements of the 1970s. Among these were self-advocacy, deinstitutilionalization and normalization, self-care and mainstreaming (Browning, 1997). At the heart of all these efforts, however, has been the theme of discrimination or rejection by the prevailing social system (Szymanski, 1994). The impact of these various Acts and social movements on both educators and rehabilitation personnel alike set for a readiness for the concept of *transition.*

Just as the career education movement of the 1970s was an expansion of the work-study movement of the 1960s, in 1984, Madeline Will, Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, championed the transition movement that extended the career education issue into the realm of transition programs and services in schools and linkages with adult community services (Halpern, 1985;

Rusch & Phelps, 1987; Will, 1984). Like its predecessors, work-study and career education, the early stages of the transition movement owed much of its acceptance to the fact it was introduced in a federal initiative. It emphasized the preparation of people with disabilities for work, and made possible such innovations as supported employment and job coaching.

Fortunately, there has been a broadening of the view of the transition concept beyond merely a transition from school to work, just as there was eventually a broadening of the concept of career education beyond solely an occupational focus (Halpern, 1985; Hanley-Maxwell & Szymanski, 1992). The current perspective of transition held by the Division on Career Development and Transition and framed by Halpern (1994) presents the idea that the transition concept should include concerns for employment, postsecondary education, independent living, community participation, and social and interpersonal relationships. This shift of thinking about transition from the narrow concern about employment to quality-of-life areas was influenced by the state and national follow-up and follow-along studies of the period from 1985 through 1995. During the 1980s studies conducted by Mithaug, Horiuchi, and Fanning (1985), Hasazi, Gordon, and Roe (1985), and Wehman, Kregel, and Barcus (1985) examined the outcomes of students ten years after PL 94-142 was implemented. Studies in the early to mid-1990s were characterized by their impressive samples sizes and systematic inquiry techniques (Affleck, Edgar, Levine & Kortering, 1990; Sitlington & Frank, 1994; Sitlington, Frank, & Carson, 1994) and included the SRI National Longitudinal Transition Study and its numerous analysis reports (Marder, & D'Amico, 1992; Valdes, Williamson, & Wagner, 1990; Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, Hebbeler, & Newman,

1993). Current concerns associated with transition from school to adult living are affected by these results. Another area of concern is how the differences in geographical location of the schools these students are transitioning from are relevant to the results.

Most of these studies focused on high-incidence populations (learning disabilities, mild mental retardation, or behavior disorders) who were in high school special education programs or received special education services while in school. The definition and characteristics of individuals with high incidence disabilities used in this investigation are individuals who have been identified as those in the moderate to mild range on the continuum of severity of a disabling condition, in the categories of specific learning disability or mental retardation. The definitions of the two categories as defined by the Alabama Administrative Code are used in this text.

Individuals with high incidence disabilities should not be considered as the passive focal point of transition but rather as active participants in all aspects of the process. They have an intimate knowledge of their disabilities and how these affect their ability to function in various settings (Luckasson, et al., 1992; Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004). The information they possess concerning their own strengths, weakness, and unique problems can be invaluable in designing, developing and implementing their Individualized Education Program (IEP). Likewise, their input can be vital in evaluating the success or failure of the various components of individual transitions (Kohler, 1993; Kohler, DeStefano, Wermuth, Grayson, & McGinty, 1994; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997).

The prevalence and incidence of disability conditions is higher in nonrural areas than in rural areas. The reason for this may be an artifact of proportionately more

diagnostic referrals as well as an availability of programs for servicing persons with disabilities. People living in the United States have long been aware of geographical factors related to population characteristics. Interests, values, and life-styles are historical phenomena that persist today in spite of the increases in mobility of the nation's population. Nonrural and rural factors probably have more direct and lasting effects than do regional factors.

Nonrural schools are usually large enough to be able to offer a range of special education programs and services (Benz, Doren, & Yovanoff, 1998; Phillips, Blustein, Jobin-Davis, & Whote, 2002). However, some issues or problem areas for nonrural districts may not be of concern in a rural district (i.e., multicultural populations, language barriers, cultural and value differences, size & complexity, survival barriers). The factors influencing the nature and characteristics of students and families in rural areas are numerous and varied as well. Economically, rural communities may be characterized as conservative and tending to adhere to traditional family values. Some isolated and economically depressed rural communities exhibit certain characteristics similar to those of developing countries (White, 1990).

Rural districts, just as nonrural districts, have poverty, alcoholism, inadequate housing, unemployment, and underemployment but without many resources to remedy or improve the situation. Theses circumstances influence students and families in many of the life decisions they make concerning employment, further education and training, community participation, and health. Consequently, many rural schools find themselves facing the need to offer an increasing number of support services: social work, special

education, bilingual education, and guidance. Most of them face these needs without adequate financial resources.

In recent years, schools have increasingly focused upon providing students with the services they need to develop skills to obtain and maintain employment and to function independently in the community. More often than not, this effort has been focused upon students with disabilities, because these students have historically had greater difficulty achieving such goals once they leave school (Blackwell & McLaughlin, 1992; Bowe, 1980**)**.

Persons with and without disabilities are faced with numerous life changing opportunities and limitations that can affect their life immediately and their future during the early transition years after traditional secondary school. Adolescents may choose to invest in their future by choosing educational opportunities to increase their productivity. Others may obtain too little education due to poor decision-making or other unfortunate circumstances may occur, substantially decreasing the likelihood of independence through transition and increasing the likelihood of dependence beyond the early stages of transition (Albion & Fogarty, 2002; Condeluci, 1995). For example, entering into the labor market or having children during the early stages of the transition to adulthood may hinder one's ability to obtain the successes he or she desires in life endeavors. The transition to adulthood begins in the late teens or even earlier and continues through a good part of the twenties (Furstenberg 2000; Shanahan 2000).

The focus of this study is the period following the end of universal secondary school. During this time, individuals are moving from a period in which they have limited or no options for schooling, work, residing, and when and how they start their families to

one that is almost the complete opposite. Young adults in transition are faced with numerous choices and decisions, but for those young adults with disabilities there are additional obstacles and barriers (Phillips et al., 2002; Tisdall, 2001). This is a pivotal point in the beginning stages of the long-term well-being of a substantial number of young persons. Therefore, it would be in the best interest of society to ensure that youth with disabilities are well equipped and prepared to navigate the years immediately following secondary school.

As states across the nation set high academic standards and commit themselves to the idea that all children can succeed in public schools, a new issue has emerged in state policy debates: How much does it cost to offer all students the opportunity to obtain a high quality education (Browning, 1997; Gajar, Goodman, & McAfee, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1995; Wehmaan, 2001)? This so called "educational adequacy" movement is rapidly gaining momentum. But while the drive for educational adequacy is commendable, its ultimate success for all students will only be realized if state policymakers pay particular attention to the unique circumstances and needs of rural communities, schools, and students.

Facilitating the transition to adulthood for students with disabilities in the 21st century presents both opportunities and challenges, especially for rural school systems (Davis, 2003; Johnson et al., 2002). Every aspect of the special education process — identification, assessment, and service delivery — can be hindered due to the financial, availability of adequate personnel, and geographical constrains in a rural district. Today's schools are in the midst of implementing several initiatives such as site-based management, school-community partnerships, and teacher empowerment. These are

derived from over two decades of reform movement (Sabornie, Cullinan, Osborne, & Brock, 2005; Turnbull, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Park, 2003; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2005).

Schools are faced with implementing changes in special education services required by new federal and state mandates, including new concepts of pre-referral assessments and intervention, collaborative teaming, and full-inclusion (Bouck, Albaugh & Bouck, 2005; Branstad et al., 2002; Cruzeiro & Morgan, 2006; Friesen, 2002). On one hand, because rural schools have fewer specially trained staff and are located in more isolated communities, administrators sometimes experience difficulty in finding the personnel and resources needed to engage in current best practices. On the other, rural schools are found in smaller, closer-knit communities and have less complex infrastructures. Consequently, administrators often find it easier to develop and implement some special education innovations (Bull & Rupard, 1995).

Over the past 50 years the importance of a high school education has changed dramatically (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2001). In particular, the transition from high school has been understood as one of the most difficult developmental challenges confronting adolescents, especially those in rural areas (Branstad et al., 2002; Davis, 2003; Friesen, 2002;). To meet this challenge states have to be willing to implement more career counseling services that are more comprehensive, systematic, and available to all students (Johnson et al., 2002). To create effective programmatic responses, states need to provide educators who work with the students who are transitioning with information on the curriculum strategies and support services that facilitate successful post-high school transitions.

Educational outcomes in both general and special education have become key concerns in educational reform (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997; Ysseldyke, Thurlow, & Briuininks, 1992). Outcomes measured for all students include literacy, independence, citizenship, behavior, mental health, basic academic skills, and critical thinking (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). Research on the transition outcomes of youth with disabilities has been accumulating since the 1980s. Unfortunately, very little of this research has focused specifically on the outcomes of youth with disabilities in rural areas. To improve the prospects of meaningful adult life, the public education system must critically analyze through an outcome-focused process the programs, services and practices it provides to students with disabilities. In this manner, quality programs and practices leading to adult independence can be identified, implemented and refined. One way the state of Alabama has decided to address this is through the development of the Alabama Occupational Diploma and a student tracking system.

During the 1995-1996 school year, in the state of Alabama the academic content standards and course requirements for graduation increased for all students, thus making it harder for students with disabilities to meet the necessary requirements to graduate with a standard diploma (Whetstone, 2002). The adoption of the Alabama High School Occupational Diploma (AOD) in 1997, which is considered an alternate diploma whose main outcome focuses on employment (Whetstone, 2002), does not contribute to the increase in the number of students with disabilities receiving a regular high school diploma, but it does provide an alternative that is accepted by some colleges and the military along with other necessary criteria being met.

Because of the need for improvement in the effectiveness of programs and services for students with disabilities in Alabama, the state began developing and implementing many transition initiatives. The Alabama Transition Initiative (ATI), a federal systems change grant, was one of the state's most prominent efforts. The purpose was to improve and expand the state systems for providing transition services through five options: (a) local program service, (b) interagency collaboration, (c) postschool linkages, (d) training and dissemination, and (e) student tracking. Through this grant, 47 model local demonstration sites were created. Partnerships between local education agencies and agency service providers, postsecondary education institutions, and employers were developed. In addition comprehensive training, technical assistance and evaluation programs were implemented. This helped with the development of a student tracking system to identify the actual progress and postschool outcomes for youth with disabilities after they exit secondary school (Browning, Rabren & Hall, 2001).

Postschool outcome results for all students with disabilities in Alabama also have given cause for concern. In a recent Kids Count, students in Alabama who are between the ages of 18 and 24 that are disconnected (persons who are not enrolled in school, not working and have no degree beyond high school or GED) account for 20% of the state's population of young persons in this age range. Also, 28% of these same young adults are living in poverty. The number of students who dropped out of high school between the ages of 16-19 during 2001 accounts for 11% of the state's population in this age range. Both of these statistics placed Alabama as 35th in the ranks for dropouts and 41st in the ranks of disconnected students among the other forty-nine states (Kids Count, 2001).

This dissertation investigates some of the factors associated with the successful engagement of former students with high incidence disabilities who exited from nonrural and rural schools during the 2003–2004 school year in Alabama. Comparisons related to engagement, satisfaction with life, perception of preparedness of transition program, with primary disability, exit option and school type one year after high school completion were examined.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to identify factors associated with the engagement of former students with high incidence disabilities in Alabama from nonrural and rural school systems, who exited from high school during 2003–2004. Individuals' engagement was examined in relation to educational, geographical and demographical variables as reported to The Alabama Tracking System's, Post School Transition Survey. The post-school component of the Alabama Tracking System for secondary students with disabilities is an ongoing investigation that collects data on the post-school outcomes of former students with disabilities who exited secondary school in Alabama from the 1998–1999 school year through the 2004–2005 school year.

Research Questions

Specifically, the study investigated the following questions:

1. To what extent is there a difference in engagement (employment, post secondary education, or training) of high school completers based on their (a) primary disability: (learning disability or mental retardation), (b) exit option: (High School

Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, and Graduation Certificate) and (c) school type: (nonrural, or rural)?

2. To what extent is there a difference in the satisfaction of life now of high school completers based on their (a) primary disability: (learning disability or mental retardation), (b) exit option: (High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, and Graduation Certificate) and (c) school type: (nonrural or rural)?

3. To what extent is there a difference in the perception of preparedness of school programs and services of high school completers based on their (a) primary disability: (learning disability or mental retardation), (b) exit option: (High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, and Graduation Certificate) and (c) school type: (nonrural or rural)?

Significance of the Study

This study provides a first time investigation of the results by geographical location (nonrural and rural). These results are an additional assessment of the effectiveness of the various initiatives that were implemented by the state during the early stages of the transition movement. Another purpose was to identify components of the high school experience and the transition planning processes that are related to successful transitions. The state of Alabama will be able to examine the differences in the students' engagement by primary disability, exit option, and school type so that positive aspects of transition can be identified and implemented throughout the state.

Definition of Terms

Engagement: Students are participating in employment, postsecondary education, a training program or any combination of these after completion of high school program.

Graduated: Students have completed all requirements for high school completion and received an exit document.

High Incidence Disabilities: A high incidence disability is a physical or mental impairment that includes the categories of specific learning disabilities, or mental retardation as defined by the Alabama Administrative Code.

High School Exit Option: The documents offered by the local education agency to students who have completed the requirements for high school completion, (i.e., Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, Graduation Certificate).

Least Restrictive Environment: An environment in which to the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including those children in public and private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, in special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of handicapped children from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. (P.L. 105-17, Section 1412[5] [b])

Nonrural Schools: Schools as defined b the total population under 18 in accordance to the National Center for Educational Statistics which include those schools that are mid-size central cities, urban fringe of a large city or small town.

Post-School Outcomes: Post-school outcomes are the real-life experiences that students have after exiting high school.

Rural: Rural is defined as all territory population and housing units located outside of urbanized areas or urbanized clusters as identified by the U.S. Census 2000 with a population less than 25, 000.

Successful Transition: The student is engaged in employment, postsecondary education, vocational training programs or any combination of these after high school completion.

Transition: The process of facilitating postschool adjustment for students with high incidence disabilities.

Transition Planning: A fundamental basis of education that guides the development of educational programs and instructional activities to help the student obtain his or her postschool training goal related to employment or postsecondary education or training.

Unengaged: Former students with disabilities that are not employed, attending postsecondary education, or participating in training.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A transition plan guides the lives of people with disabilities. Major components of the plan consider how the individual is prepared to integrate into the community setting. Transition for secondary students with disabilities is defined as the movement of a person with disabilities from public school to adult life in the community. How do we effectively plan transition for a student with a disability? This question will be difficult to answer in most situations; however, it is rather daunting for parents and professionals in rural communities. When the issue of transition is discussed, the general consensus of opinion is that there is little available in rural communities for individuals with disabilities (Commbe, 1993). Further, there may be a lack of hope, on the part of educators and the families of students with disabilities that the situation will improve in the near future. Approximately 25% of the US population is located in rural areas (Sarkees, 1990).

Barriers in rural areas include lack of occupational diversity, limited industry, limited or no public transportation, and high unemployment. Theobald (1996) suggested a major issue in the transition of students with disabilities is high unemployment and rural poverty. If there is little or nothing available for adults with disabilities in rural areas, parents and special educators are faced with relocation issues or helping parents adjust to being full time care givers during the time they would ordinarily be working.

Some of the barriers that have affected the transition of students in rural special education programs have included: (a) geographical barriers to special education service delivery, (b) lack of jobs in rural areas and (c) national shortages of qualified special education personnel (Montgomery, 1995; Theobald, 1996). Grant initiatives have addressed the need for additional training for rural special educators and the acquisition of additional resources (Green & Kochhar-Bryant, 2003). Suggested solutions have involved the use of traditional and non-traditional business people, recruiters, and human resources personnel to acquaint students and their families with employment possibilities (Clark & McDonnel, 1994; Coombe, 1993; Greenwood, 1992).

Appropriately, this chapter begins with an overview of transition through a review of the more prominent definitions of transition that appear in the literature and the legislative initiatives effecting transition. Next a brief review of the transition process is discussed through an examination of the terminology and best practices associated with transition. This is followed by a discussion of outcomes of individuals with disabilities and factors that affect the transition of students. Finally, a review of the transitions in special education in rural communities and the variables that facilitate these transitions will be provided.

Definitions of Transition

Transition can mean something different to students, parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, and the public. In addition, transition can have multiple meanings for an individual. With regard to youth with disabilities, Szymanski and Parker (1996) defined transition as the life changes, adjustments, and cumulative experiences

that occur in the lives of young adults as they move from school environments to independent living and work environments.

A federal initiative in 1984 began the transition movement. At that time, Madeline Will, the Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), U.S. Department of Education, provided a definition of transition in the landmark document *"OSERS Programming for the Transition of Youth with Disabilities: Bridges from School to Working Life."* In that document transition was defined as follows:

> The transition from school to working life is an outcome-oriented process encompassing a broad array of services and experiences that lead to employment. Transition is a period that includes high school, the point of graduation, additional postsecondary education or adult services, and the initial years of employment. Transition is a bridge between the security and structure offered by the school and the opportunities and risks of adult life. Any bridge requires both a solid span and secure foundation at either end. The transition from school to work and adult life requires sound preparation in the secondary school, adequate support at the point of school leaving, and secure opportunities and services, if needed, in adult situations. (Will, 1984, p. 30)

This definition was instrumental in establishing the intent of new policy and providing guidance to demonstration projects. It was the cornerstone of the transition initiative, which was established "to strengthen education, training, and support services for youth with disabilities, and to support their successful transition from school to the adult world of independent work and living" (Will, 1984, p.12). The definition included

specific recommendations to create secondary school curricula with relevancy to the workplace, to improve postsecondary services, and to develop incentives for employers to hire youth with disabilities. The recommendations were based on three areas of perceived need that guided the formulation of OSERS transition policy during the 1980s: (a) a need to focus on all students with disabilities, (b) a need to address the complexity of postschool services, and (c) a need to prepare for the goal of employment and independent living.

Will's definition focused attention on the 'shared responsibility' of the school and school-linked agencies (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, mental health services, public health, and independent living centers) for improving outcomes for youth as they exit secondary education for employment and adult life (Kohler, 1998). These broader conceptions of shared responsibility of transition outcomes helped shape transition policy in the United States and have been reflected in legislation since 1990.

In 1990, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (PL 94-142), the primary legislation for the education of students with disabilities, was amended and the name was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (PL 101-476). IDEA included a new focus on planning for life after the secondary school years, with plans to include the participation of adult service agencies and other community services, as applicable. For the first time, IDEA required that the issue of transition be addressed and that planning be initiated by age sixteen through all students' Individual Education Program (IEP). Many school-based transition programs use the definition from Section 602(a) of IDEA:

> A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), and community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests, shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (P. L. 101-476, Section 602 (a))

With the addition of the transition services requirements in the IEP, planning for youth with disabilities took on a longer time period, with goals spanning several years. This was the first time educators at the high school level were required to orient their planning towards student lives after secondary school, including statements of needed transition services, agency responsibilities, and linkages to services within other agencies. By defining transition services, the agencies, and requiring a statement of such services in the student's IEP, IDEA 1990 did more than any of the previous amendments to promote the development of educational programs focused on postschool goals (Kochher & West, 1995).

A major criticism of the earlier definitions of transition has been the predominant emphasis on employment. Many researchers and professionals have argued that the outcome or goals of transition should be broader, and not confined solely to employment (Bates, Suter, & Poelvoorde, 1986; Green & Albright, 1995; Polloway, Patton, Smith, & Roderique, 1991; Wehman, Kregel, Barcus, & Schalock, 1986). They have sought to

focus transition planning on other domains of an individual's life, such as community participation, independent living, and recreation.

In fact, in 1994, the Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) of the Council for Exceptional Children, the primary transition-related professional group of special education service providers, presented a definition that reflects professional consensus on this broader view of transition. According to this definition:

> Transition refers to change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community. These roles include employment, participating in post-secondary education, maintaining a home, becoming appropriately involved in the community, and experiencing satisfactory personal and social relationships. The process on enhancing transition involves the participation and coordination of school programs, adult agency services, and natural supports within the community. The foundations for transition should be laid during the elementary and middle school years, guided by the broad concept of career development. Transition planning should begin no later than age 14, and students should be encouraged, to the full extent of their capabilities, to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for such planning. (Halpern, 1994, p. 117)

This newer definition of transition reflected advancements in the conceptualization and practice of transition. It combined the concepts of continuous career development from early schooling through high school, recognized the multiple life domains encompassed by the term, and emphasized the central role of the individual in the planning process (Halpern, 1994).

Browning (1997), as shown in Table 1, profiled these two contemporary definitions. First, while both definitions call for student input into the development of the transition plan, Halpern's position (DCTD) is that the student should be held accountable for the majority of the responsibility for the development of his or her own plan. By contrast OSERS's definition subtly implies that someone other than the student is primarily responsible for determining the student's needs and developing the plan to address them (Browning 1997).

Table 1

A Comparison between OSERS's and Halpern's Transition Definitions of the 1990s

Criteria	OSERS 1990	Halpern 1994
Transition	Movement from school to post-school	Change in status from behaving primarily as a student to assuming emergent adult roles in the community
Services	• Instruction • Community experiences • Development of employment • Other post school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation	Coordination of • School programs • Adult agency services, and • Natural supports within the community
Outcome Goals	An outcome-oriented process that promotes • Postsecondary education • Vocational training • Integrated employment (including supported employment) • Continuing and adult education • Adult services • Independent living, or community participation	• Employment • Participating in post-secondary education • Maintaining a home • Becoming appropriately involved in the community • Experiencing satisfactory personal participation successfully • Adult living • Interacting with others • Working

(table continues)

Table 1 (continued)

Criteria	OSERS 1990	Halpern 1994
Time frame	School to postschool activities	Foundations for transition should be laid during • Elementary and middle school years, • Guided by the broad concept of career development • Transition planning should begin no later than age 14
Person Centered	Activities shall be based upon the individual student's needs, taking into account the student's preferences and interests	Students should be encouraged, to the fullest extent of their capabilities, to assume a maximum amount of responsibility for such planning.

Note. From *Transition-in-Action for Youth and Young Adults with Disabilities* (p.41), by Philip L. Browning, 1997, Montgomery, AL: Wells Printing. ©1997 by Philip Browning with permission.

Two other noticeable differences are that Halpern's outcomes are more student-oriented in adult roles and transition success is to be determined by the student's active involvement in the process. The fourth difference is the transition process. Halpern's definition focuses on the student going through life stages from adolescence to adulthood. In contrast, OSERS's definition refers to the transition movement as the relocation from school to postschool. The emphasis on the former definition is how students should behave in those settings; whereas, the latter signifies where they will reside. Finally, Halpern includes a starting point of no later than 14 years of age and OSERS's time frame is left to the more stationary points of school to postschool.

Related Legislative Initiatives

Legislation designed to assist individuals with disabilities in making a successful transition to post school life can be found in a variety of fields, including vocational education, vocational rehabilitation, and special education. The legislation has generally

focused upon providing these individuals with adequate assessment, counseling, training, and placement services, in addition to whatever related social or community services these students may need to make a successful transition to post school life. The purpose of this section is to review the laws and policy initiatives that give states and local educational agencies the mandate and authority to implement transition service systems for students with disabilities.

Vocational Education

Efforts for addressing the need to prepare students with disabilities for employment can be found in vocational education law. The Vocational Education Act of 1963, PL 88-120, sought to improve existing vocational education programs and develop new programs for serving all students. Those included are students with disabilities and those who were considered academically and socially disadvantaged. An important aspect of this Act was establishing work-study programs for students with disabilities as well as money for area vocational schools.

Unfortunately, even though there were provisions for the development of programs for students with disabilities, funding was not provided for such programs until the Vocational Education Amendments of 1968, PL 90-576, was passed. These amendments authorized up to 10% of the funds for vocational and rehabilitation programs for persons with disabilities and 15% for academically and economically disadvantaged students. Also, funds for cooperative work study programs were earmarked.

The Vocational Education Amendments of 1976, PL 94-482, continued to emphasize the expansion and the development of new programs that maintained focus on

providing services to students with disabilities. Also, set asides for academic programs increased to 20%. This law called upon states to develop plans that (a) created an interface between special and vocational education, (b) ensured that secondary school students with disabilities received the vocational services they needed, (c) facilitated the mainstreaming of students with disabilities into general education classes with their peers, (d) improved vocational guidance and counseling services, and (e) emphasized accountability through the development of a Vocational Education data system.

The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (Public Law 98-524) further refined and refocused the need for successful preparation from the educational environments to adult work environments for youth with disabilities. The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act was passed in 1984, amending the Vocational Educational Act of 1963. This legislation strengthened provisions and assurances to access the provision of vocational assessment prior to students with disabilities entering vocational education and the full range of vocational program offerings in the least restrictive environment.

This legislation also mandated increased services for both students with disabilities and individuals who were disadvantaged. The Act required that information about eligibility requirements for enrolling in vocational education programs be provided to parents and students. Also, once enrolled in vocational education, students were to receive the following: an assessment of interest, abilities, and special needs; special services including variations of curriculum, instruction, equipment, and facilities; guidance, counseling, and career development training conducted by a professionally trained counselor; and individually designed counseling services to facilitate transition from school to postschool employment or training. This Act was passed with the intent to

assure that individuals who were inadequately served under vocational education programs would obtain access to quality vocational education programs.

The 1990s broadened the purpose of vocational education by moving away from the traditional job-skills orientation to focus on integrating vocational and academic skills training. The passage of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act Amendments of 1990 (PL 101-392) eliminated set-aside funds for supplemental services, assessments, adaptations of curriculum and counseling services. Federal resources were also provided to those districts with the highest proportion from low-income families. The 1998 Amendments impacted the structure of education and employment training programs.

The Amendments of 1998 highlighted work experience in community jobs as a key ingredient in career preparation as well. Although significant funding changes were made in this legislation, assurances for special populations were maintained with the increased emphasis on transition support. Finally, vocational education was expected to coordinate efforts with special education and vocational rehabilitation legislation.

Rehabilitation Legislation

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (PL 93-112) was landmark legislation initiated to impact the lives of all persons with disabilities. Persons with mental and physical disabilities were supported federally by (PL 93-112). Specifically, businesses with federal contracts were to initiate an affirmative action plan for the purpose of hiring, recruiting, training, and promoting persons with disabilities. The goal of these services was to assist the individual with disabilities in obtaining employment and full participation in society (OSERS, 1992).

This law required that the counselor and the individual with a disability participate in developing an Individualized Plan of Employment (IPE) that incorporates a description of the services to be provided to the individual with a disability and identifies what agency or agencies are responsible for providing each of the services. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 included section 504 which provides the first legislation guarantee of civil rights of persons with disabilities. This section (Section 504) stated that:

> No otherwise qualified individual with a disability in the United States … shall, solely by reason of her or his disability, be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance. (29 U.S.C.§ 794).

By virtue of this section, all individuals within schools regardless of age received a guarantee prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability. The Act required that vocational counseling and guidance and placement services be provided to students with disabilities on a nondiscriminatory basis. This legislation was amended in 1978 by PL 95-602. This amendment encouraged the development of joint cooperative relationships among professionals in the fields of special education, vocational education, and vocational rehabilitation and emphasized the provisions of independent living arrangements for individuals with disabilities.

The 1992 Amendments, PL 102-569, represented a significant change in the relationship between rehabilitation professionals and the consumers (Browning, 1997). The Act, which promotes the full inclusion in employment and independent living for all people with disabilities, represents profound changes in the relationship between

vocational rehabilitation services and consumers of services (West, 1995). Whereas the previous Act required assessment for *prospective* clients for rehabilitation *potential*, Title I of the Act now states "that all individuals, regardless of the severity of their disability, are presumed to be capable of gainful employment in integrated settings given the necessary services and supports, and therefore are presumed to be eligible for VR services" (p. 282). Also, the Act reflects a strategic shift toward client *empowerment* and *choice* (Wehmeyer & Ward, 1995). The amendments address youth and young adults with disabilities, in that the Act includes IDEA's definition of transition. As well, it states that

> interagency collaboration is required to facilitate the transition from the provision of a free and appropriate public education to the provision of vocational rehabilitation services … including the specification of plans for coordination with education agencies in the provision of transition services … which is consistent with the individual's written rehabilitation program. (Policy Update, 1993b, p. 2)

The Rehabilitation Amendments became a part of the Work Force Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 (PL 105-220). The inclusion of rehabilitation legislation within workforce development reflected an attempt to integrate employment and training programs on a federal, state, and local level. WIA is a comprehensive job-training bill that consolidates over 45 previously federally funded programs. The intent of the bill was to simplify the job-training system. Meeting skills shortages in the labor market and career individualization were the prominent features emphasized in this legislation. Therefore, needs of local businesses and needs and preferences of individuals served were the major

factors to determine what education and services were provided and how the delivery system would be set up. The WIA was meant to combine, synchronize and advance employment, preparation, literacy and vocational rehabilitation programs. The main activities supported by this legislation were work-force employment and school-to-work activities.

WIA provides federal dollars, matched by state dollars, to all 50 states to give people with disabilities the opportunity to obtain employment and independent living assistance as needed. In addition, this legislation provides new opportunities for people with disabilities to gain access to vocational rehabilitation services and to choose the specific services needed for them to achieve their individualized employment goal. Recipients of vocational rehabilitation services have control over the contents of their Individualized Education Plan for Employment (IPE) and have information made available to them in order to make informed choices about specific services they will receive. This information includes (a) the cost, duration, and accessibility of potential services; (b) consumer satisfaction with these services; (c) qualifications of potential service providers; (d) types of services offered by potential service providers; and (e) the degree to which services are provided in integrated settings (Federal Register, 2000).

According to legislation passed by Congress, teachers, administrators, and schools have a responsibility to ensure that the transition process is a shared responsibility that does not end until an initial postsecondary placement goal has been achieved. Thus, the role of these stakeholders and others in the transition planning process has been strengthened under rehabilitation, vocational and special education, and career technical legislation.

Special Education Legislation

The special education legislation that has had the most influential impact on the educational opportunities afforded students with disabilities is the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL 94-142). In 1975, this legislation was passed to reduce the disparities in educational opportunity between children with disabilities and other children. States received partial federal funding to ensure that all students between the ages of three and twenty-one who were identified as "handicapped" — according to criteria set forth in the legislation — received a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). One of the implications of FAPE was the development of an Individualized Educational Program (IEP) for each child with a disability. For adolescents and young adults with disabilities, the IEP could include career and vocational objectives, if such an education was deemed appropriate by the IEP team. Further requirements of P.L. 94-142 centered on guidelines for ensuring the rights of children with disabilities and their parents and guardians. As well, the law outlined due-process procedures for parents to express concerns or complaints with respect to student identification, evaluation, placement, and educational programming.

In 1983, PL 94-142 was amended by PL 98-199, with a new Section 626, entitled "Secondary Education and Transition Services for Handicapped Youth." This section authorized federal funds for grants to exhibit support and organization among education and adult service programs. These programs were designed to assist youth with disabilities transition from secondary schools to community service, employment and post secondary education. The purpose of the section was to stimulate improvement and development of programs for youth with disabilities in secondary schools. Also, it was

intended to strengthen the link between secondary education, training, and related services: assisting with the transition to postsecondary education, occupational training, viable employment, or adult services.

Previous legislation began the provision for transition and the preparation of students for adult life. However, the increased responsiveness to transition planning was significantly increased by the passing of IDEA. In 1990, the EHA of 1975 (PL 94-142) was amended and the name of the Act was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, PL 101-476). IDEA included a focus on planning for life after the secondary school years for all students with disabilities, with plans to include participation of adult service agencies and other community services, as applicable.

From the standpoint of transition, this legislation is perhaps the most significant and far-reaching of any ever passed and undoubtedly will have the greatest impact on the transition services afforded individuals with disabilities. The law includes transition services as a special education issue that must be addressed in a student's IEP. Under the law, plans for a student's transition from school to work and community living must be included in the student's IEP by the time the student reaches age sixteen.

The passage of the law implied that there should be a constant flow of non-duplicated services that are corresponding and focus on the attainment of practical postschool outcomes such as education, employment, independent living, and community participation. These are all vital for these outcomes to occur from secondary school to adulthood. Additionally, the law specified that if the IEP team determines that services are not needed in one or more of the areas specified in the legislation, the IEP must include a statement to that affect and the basis upon which the determination was made.

In June 1997, President Clinton signed new amendments to IDEA (PL 105-17) that made subtle but substantive changes to the law (deFur & Patton, 1998). Specific changes included the following:

- "Related services" were added to the list of required transition services.
- Students with disabilities were to participate in statewide testing.
- Functional behavior assessment was required.
- Increasing student self-determination was added as a goal of transition.
- Transition planning was to begin at age fourteen.

The latter change is primarily a function of the high dropout rate among students with disabilities. As deFur and Patton (1998) suggested if such excessive dropout rates are to be reversed, transition planning must be initiated prior to age sixteen because many students have already dropped out of school by that age.

The reauthorized *Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act* (IDEA) was signed into law on December 3, 2004 by President George W. Bush. With the exception of the definition of a "highly qualified teacher", the provisions regarding secondary transition and all other provisions of the Act became effective with the signing. "Further education" of children with disabilities is added to the IDEA's purposes.

Another was a change in some of the language. The term "transition services" now refers to a "child" instead of a "student with a disability," [602(34)]. The term "transition services" means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that

> is designed to be within a results-oriented process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post-school activities, including

postsecondary education; vocational education; integrated employment (including supported employment); continuing and adult education; adult services; independent living or community participation.

There were some changes made to the secondary transition requirements in the individualized education program (IEP) as well. One of the most important to highlight would be the change in the age of implementation. Beginning no later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child is 16 and updated annually thereafter, the IEP must include:

- Appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment and, where appropriate, independent living skills;
- The transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals; and beginning no later than one year before the child reaches the age of majority under state law, a statement that the child has been informed of their individual rights under IDEA, if any, that will transfer on reaching the age of majority under Section 615(m). [614(d)(1)(A)(VI).

Related Legislation

Reform of the public education system has been a relevant topic of discussion, since the early 1980s. General education academic content and career technical education are important because many students with disabilities receive their education within these two systems. Access to curriculum in these systems in many instances constitutes an appropriate education for students and reflects transition services that students need to transition toward their postschool goals. The rights of people with disabilities in all segments of society have been affirmed and protected by federal law; in other words,

constitutional rights have also been reaffirmed through the passage of other related legislation.

After the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Congress continued to enact various laws to expand protections for persons with disabilities. Subsequently, a concern developed among people with disabilities, their families and others that these statutes were too fragmented and too limited to provide adequate protection. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed to address this issue. According to First and Curcio (1993), the intent of the ADA was to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

Through its five titles, the Act, among other things, identified who was protected by its provisions, identified the illegal practice of biased employment and discrimination in both public and private sectors, and made it mandatory to install telecommunication relay services. This Act also addressed all areas of employment, education, and recreation services. Title II relates to the operation of elementary and secondary public schools and institutions of postsecondary training. The ADA mandates that practical adjustments be offered to individuals with disabilities within the civic and employment settings. Thus, the ADA, like Section 504, prohibits discrimination based on disability by schools and requires that reasonable accommodations be developed and implemented throughout all aspects of the educational program (Pierangelo & Giuliani, 2004).

Although, the majority of the ADA requirements for the schools already existed through Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the ADA clarified issues in question and clearly established that individuals with contagious diseases are protected from discrimination as long as they do not directly threaten the health or safety of others.

Additionally, the ADA extended protection to individuals who are associated with someone with a disability.

The School-to-Work Opportunities Act (STWOA) provides a national framework that is designed to facilitate an all-inclusive school-to-work transition program that will prepare all students with and without disabilities for employment, post secondary education, thus increasing their proficiency in being able to obtain high-wage careers. The STWOA has referenced students with disabilities as a target population that should be included in the expansion and delivery of school-to-work programs for all students. School-to-work programs should provide opportunities in school-based and work-based learning sites through out secondary schooling. Some suggestions are: investigating different career paths through counseling, focusing on high academic achievement standards, and participating in numerous planned employment experiences that teach extensive, transportable workplace skills (Ohler, Levinson & Hays, 1996; Ohler, Levinson, & Sanders, 1995; Shaw, Brinckerhoff, Kistler, & McGuire, 1991). All of these provisions are consistent with and reinforce special education transition requirements.

ADA and STWOA represented a pivotal point in the disability rights movement and the transition movement. Respect, inclusion and support are the philosophical and value base of the ADA. Interaction and communication on equal ground are necessary to create positive attitudes and open doors to increased opportunities. Transition was the underlying and defining principle in the STWOA. This Act caused states to plan and implement transition systems that enabled all youth to transition from school to post secondary school environments.

In summary, legislative progression has focused on appropriate education for special education youth and access as well as accommodations for all persons with disabilities, including adults. The major disability legislation reflects the broad values of community inclusion, full participation, self-determination with meaningful and informed choices, and involvement of families and community members as natural supporters in all phases of life (First & Curcio, 1993). Transition was introduced to the general field of special education through legislation. Major amendments, national policy debates, federal initiatives, intense interdisciplinary activity and new bills were passed across every disability-specific and transition-related area. However, federal initiatives did not equate with quality transition programs in every community. The general framework tied together all the relevant legislation to include vocational education, rehabilitation, special education and other related legislation to focus on career education and brought special education and general education together after years of separation. Career development that focuses on outcomes addresses the implications of education beyond pure academics needed by all students. Further, integration and participation in the mainstream of schools, communities and society were center to all the special education, disability and related legislation.

Legislative Terminology

Included in the laws previously discussed is terminology that is crucial to understand. Presented below are some of the key concepts and terms used in IDEA 97.

What Is Meant by "Post-School Activities"?

The legislation includes the following in its description of "post-school activities": *postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation*. Plainly, then, transition is meant to address not just employment needs, but future needs within the broader focus of life within the community.

What Is Meant by "Coordinated Set of Activities"?

According to federal regulations, the term coordinated set of activities means the linkage between the activities that comprise transition services and the relationships among agencies involved in the terms of transition services provided to the student. Because the transition process involves professionals from many different agencies in the community, the regulations require that activities and services be complimentary and non-duplicating in nature and that agencies and professionals be aware of what their and others' responsibilities are.

What Is Meant by "Outcome-Oriented Process"?

The term outcome-oriented process describes the major goals and objectives of the transition process. As specified by the legislation, these are: *employment, postsecondary education, vocational training, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation.*

What Activities Are to Be Considered Part of Transition?

The legislation states that the coordinated set of activities must include: *instruction, related services, community experiences, the development of employment and*

other postschool adult living objectives, and, if appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional evaluation. The student's IEP is required to address or consider all of these provisions. Moreover, specific objectives must be established for each student in each of these areas, based upon the personal needs of the individual student.

When Must Services Be Provided?

Services must be provided to students no later than age fourteen or earlier if deemed appropriate for that particular student. At age 14, and updated annually, a transition services needed statement that focuses on the child's course of study must be included in the student's IEP. At age 16 a statement of needed transition services for the child, including, when appropriate, a statement of interagency responsibilities or any needed linkages should be addressed.

Who Determines What Services Are Needed?

The law states that the following individuals must be involved in transition planning during the IEP process: the student; the student's general and special education teachers; a representative of the local education agency (LEA); the parents; a school psychologist or someone that is capable of interpreting the results from assessments, which could be a teacher; and others, as appropriate from outside agencies that will be involved which, could be a coach, employer, or others in planning or providing services needed by the individual student.

How Does the Team Determine What Services are Needed?

IDEA does not specifically identify how the IEP team determines what services a particular student needs. Since transition is a component of the IEP, however, it naturally follows the process used to identify other educational or related services needed by

students with disabilities within the context of the IEP development that would apply. Hence, needed services would be identified based upon a comprehensive assessment of the individual student. This assessment would focus upon, but not be limited to, issues such as employment, postsecondary education, adult services, independent and community living, and the student's preferences and interests.

Who Provides the Services?

One public agency, typically the LEA, is primarily responsible for the provision of transition services; though the law is clear in indicating that other community agencies need to be involved as well. According to the law, the LEA's responsibilities in service provision must be clearly stated in the IEP. Also the responsibilities of the other agencies that are involved must be stated in the IEP. Linkages among participating agencies should be agreed upon by agencies beforehand and formalized in cooperative interagency agreements.

Where Are Transition Services Provided?

Though the legislation does not specifically mention where transition services are to be provided, it implies that they should be provided in a variety of settings. Some settings include, but are not limited to, school, community, employment, and the individual's residence.

In particular, it is important to note that the legislation's definition of transition, as well as other definitions, suggests that the transition planning process must include professionals from agencies outside of the schools who have expertise in areas other than education. That is, planning must occur jointly among professionals from such fields as education, mental health, social services, and vocational rehabilitation. Educators may

carry the major burden of transition planning as a result of IDEA. It becomes imperative to involve professionals from the fields previously mentioned because those are the agencies that are primarily responsible for providing services to individuals with disabilities once they leave the school environment. It is unlikely that transition planning that fails to include professionals from those agencies will be successful (Knott & Asselin, 1999).

The central goal of transition planning is to increase the likelihood that all youth with disabilities can and will participate in their communities via work, leisure, and living experiences. Transition components that encompass best practices throughout the transition process further develop a process that can lead to success. It is in the best interest of educational institutions to increase direct assistance in transition from school to adult life and constructive citizenship throughout the transition process via the implementation of best practices.

The Transition Planning Process

Transition planning is an ongoing process that begins the moment the student sets foot in school. Szymanski (1994) noted that our existing awareness of professional development of persons with disabilities plainly imply that transition services should integrate a life-long, career-oriented focus, rather than a one-time, job-related choice examination. She also argued that a major goal of transition planning should be to empower individuals. That is, individuals need to be presented with the opportunities that allow for an increase in knowledge and skills essential to transitioning throughout the entire life span, not just during the initial move from the school environment to the

community at large at the point of school exiting. The transition planning process is composed of two components, phases and best practices.

The following phases combine to make up transition planning: assessment, planning, school-based training, community-based training and follow-up. These phases are not conceptualized as separate courses of action, each of which occurs at only one distinct point in time. Rather, they are considered to be ongoing, interacting processes that affect each other. Also note that the entire process may be repeated at different points during the school years. The following model is an adaptation of the Transition Model from the South Carolina State Division on Career Development and Transition (South Carolina State Division on Career Development and Transition, 2004).

Assessment

The first step in transition planning is assessing skills and individual needs of the student. Numerous areas should be assessed, including: intellectual, educational, social, vocational, independent living, and physical. Varying measurement approaches and methods can be employed to obtain information about a student and different domains may be targeted for assessment at different points in the student's educational career. Finally, an important component of transition assessment is the development of learner profiles that delineate the skills and attributes of the student being assessed (Berkell & Brown, 1989).

Planning

The purpose of transition planning is to identify realistic postschool options for students, including desirable postsecondary educational, employment, and community living outcomes. Additionally, the school and community agency services that will be

needed to generate those outcomes should be identified. Clearly, those outcomes emanate from an assessment of the student's skills in the areas identified. Transition planning for students should list those outcomes as long-term goals and should cite sequential actions to be taken to accomplish those long-term-goals. Miner and Bates, (1997) have suggested that formal planning be initiated at least four years prior to the student leaving school.

School-Based Training

Once transition goals have been identified and included in the individuals IEP, preparation and training are initiated. The persons responsible for the training of individuals can include educators and other staff as well as specialized professionals from a wide range of agencies. This training may take place in a variety of settings, including, but not limited to, vocational education, general education, or special education classrooms. As public schools become more inclusive, it is in their best interest to be deeply concerned about implementing proven strategies that enhance learning for all students (Stainback & Stainback, 1992).

Community-Based Training

At the end of preparation and instruction, the individual is equipped to experience "real-life" opportunities in varying employment, living, vocational, as well as postsecondary educational settings for additional training. Numerous opportunities to cultivate additional training in these various aspects of adult life are available to students. However, which option is best for a student would depend on the individual functioning level of that particular student.

Employment options include competitive, supported, and sheltered employment. Residential living options include independent, supported, and institutional. Community

colleges, 2-year and 4-year colleges, and universities, as well as, public and private technical or trade schools can serve as post secondary educational vocational choices. The intent is for the community-based placement to be an environment in which youth will not only learn job-specific tasks for entry level positions, but also acquire community-related skills including employment, social and communication skills, as well as wide-ranging knowledge of adult life (Norman & Bourexis, 1995).

Follow-up

During the final phase, an assessment should be made so that a determination of how successful the student is functioning in the various placements. Some support services may need to be terminated and others may need to be initiated, as well as the changing the location and/or type of placement my need to occur due to the follow-up assessment. This follow-up is not mandated by the law but has proven to be beneficial to all stakeholders (Haring & Lovett, 1990). In order to help facilitate a positive and successful outcome when doing transition planning it is critical for the team to incorporate best practices.

Best Practices

The primary purpose of transition programs is to provide educational and career development services to youth and to prepare them for postschool functioning. Goals of such programs include opportunities to prepare for competitive employment, postsecondary education or training, and the development of skills necessary for community living. In line with this initiative, a number of "best practices" have evolved

as part of efforts to plan and implement programs to assist secondary students with disabilities as they transition from school.

Best practices in transition refer to a number of specific recommendations for facilitating successful movement from secondary school to adult life for individuals with disabilities (Green & Kohlar-Bryant, 2003). The term best practice in transition appears frequently throughout the literature in special education, vocational education and vocational rehabilitation. One must be advised to proceed with caution when discussing best practices in transition because the majority of the literature on the subject is not empirically based (Green & Albright, 1995; Johnson & Rusch, 1993***).***

In 1993, Kohler conducted a review of the literature on best practices in transition and found that only 4 out of 11 key components of transition considered to be "best practices" were supported by empirical data. She noted, however, that those that were not supported by empirical data were endorsed by professionals. Halpern (1999) made a similar argument concerning best practices when he suggested that the practices that have been identified in demonstration projects can be considered as best practices. A review of the literature reveals several different listings of best practices; common across all are the following: vocational assessment, individualized transition planning, family participation in transition programs, interdisciplinary partnership, on-the-job-training via paid work experiences, and social and personal skills development training. Each will be discussed.

Vocational Assessment

Vocational assessment of student interests, abilities, and special needs are typically recommended in the descriptions of supplemental services for youth with disabilities (Albright & Cobb, 1988; Leconte, 1994a). The purpose of vocational

assessment is to assist students in exploring vocational options, making recommendations for vocational placement, identifying instructional and other supports, and facilitating transition planning in the move from school to adult roles (Benz & Halpern, 1993; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1994). Approaches to vocational assessment have also varied over the years and tend to fall into one of the following categories: (a) levels of vocational assessment, (b) curriculum-based vocational assessment, (c) formal or vocational evaluation services, and (d) community-based or ecological assessment (Neubert, 1994; Sarkees-Wircenski & Scott, 1995).

Successful transition programs include a comprehensive assessment of a student's job skills, level of communication, and computational skills (Botterbusch, 1989; Morgan, Moore, McSweyn, Salzberg, 1992; Rusch &Phelps, 1987; Schloss, McEwen, Land, & Schwab, 1986). Results from a transdisciplinary vocational assessment are used to assist in individual transition planning and to develop transition goals to be included in the student's IEP. In many successful transition programs, a part of the assessment is conducted in the natural environments, such as personal residence, job sites, and so forth, and focuses upon skills that are "functional" for the student.

Individualized Transition Planning

The IEP is the plan for implementing the transition provisions specified in IDEA Amendments of 1990 and 1997. In defining transition services, the legislation focused on outcomes through the student's preferences and interests, and student, parent, and service provider involvement. A comprehensive approach to developing outcome-focused transition planning, therefore, must be addressed through IEP development, student (and family) participation, and specific planning strategies. Student participation in this

process is essential, and self-determination skills are critical for participation (Schloss, Alper, & Jayne, 1994; Van Reusen & Bos, 1990; Wehmeyer, 1992).

The IEP should reflect activities and services relevant to achieving postschool goals in the areas of postsecondary education and vocational training, residence, recreation and leisure, community participation, and employment, as well as the persons or agencies responsible for conducting the activities and providing the services. As a result, there is a fundamental relationship among the IEP content as reflected in the document, assessment data on student abilities and interests, the educational activities in which the student participates, and student outcomes (Stodden, Meehan, Bisconer, & Hodell, 1989; Trach, 1998).

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement in the development and implementation of transition plans is a key characteristic of effective programs (Kohler, DeStefano, Wermuth, Grayson, & McGinity, 1994). Research on the impact of parental participation has indeed shown that the role of the family in the vocational planning and transition process is critical (Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1996). Izzo and Shumate (1991) offer the following reasons for involving parents in the transition process (a) parents know their children better than anyone else does, so they can serve as a critical resources in planning; (b) parents can be extremely effective in maintaining continuity of training and of purpose; (c) parents can act as system advocates, often facilitating changes professionals desire but are constrained from accomplishing; (d) parents can act as role models and teachers, instilling in their children positive learning that makes job success more likely; and (e)

parents can act as community supporters and messengers to the community about positive results.

From birth to age 18, children spend 87% of their time under the control of the home environment (Bevivino, as cited in Dettmer, Dyck, & Thurston, 1996). Given this fact and the positive effect of family involvement in educational outcomes, practitioners have to find ways to enhance family-school collaboration. Collaboration, working together, and establishing a mutually respectful relationship is preferable to simply involving families in the educational process (Dettmer et al., 1996). Clearly, individualization is the key to implementing best practices for family-school collaboration. The type and extent of collaborative relationships should be individualized according to family preference.

Interagency Collaboration

Interagency collaboration is a key ingredient in the success of transition programs; hence, successful transition programs establish interagency agreements between the school and community agencies that clearly describe what roles those agencies will assume in the transition process. This group of individuals represents multiple and diverse agencies and organizations who come together and commit themselves to teaching, learning, and working with each other across traditional agency and organizational boundaries to better serve individuals with disabilities. Their activities may include planning, service implementation, and assessments at both the school and community level. An effective team may accomplish improved transition services, student outcomes and other system-change results.

Larson and LaFasto (1989) studied interagency collaborative teams over a 3-year period to determine what effective characteristics are. Eight characteristics were identified as distinguishing effective teams from ineffective teams: *(1) a clear, elevating goal; (2) a result-driven structure; (3) competent members; (4) unified commitment; (5) a collaborative climate; (6) standards of excellence; (7) external supports and recognition;* and *(8) principles of leadership* (p. 90). The results of this investigation provided more support for the importance of interagency collaboration.

Legislation (e.g., IDEA, School-to-Work Opportunities Act, and Rehabilitation Act) requires collaboration on both the individual planning level and the community level. Interagency collaboration practices focus on programs, systems, and service delivery. Research indicates that effective transition programs include a strong collaboration and cooperation component, whereas lack of collaboration and cooperation can serve as a barrier to program implementation and effectiveness (Kohler, 1993; Kohler et al., 1994; Rusch, Kohler, & Hughes, 1992). With respect to transition planning at the community level, collaboration focuses on eliminating disconnect, duplication, and efficient use of services. It also reduces professional territoriality and increases holistic planning and service delivery (Everson & Moon, 1990). An interagency coordinating body that includes students, parents, service providers, and employers to facilitate these collaborative outcomes is necessary for a successful transition. The focus on a common goal (e.g., to improve postschool options and adult outcomes of youth with disabilities) decreases the focus on individual differences. Thus, collaboration emerges as a process as well as an outcome that is valued by those who engaged in collaboration and that results in trust among the collaborators. Further, a coordinating body and established methods of

communication were identified by transition state systems change project directors as necessary for systems change to occur (Wallace, Kohler, & Wiltrout, 1996).

On-the-Job-Training via Paid Work Experiences

During some point in their lives, the vast majority of our nation's youth will enter the working world and seek to develop careers with opportunities for advancement. However, the paths that youth with disabilities take to the workforce vary depending on their career goals, support needs, and the extent to which they participated in work-based learning and employment experiences while in school (Flexer, Simmons, Luft, & Baer, 2001). Some student's pathways after exiting public school programs lead to competitive employment, while others pursue postsecondary education and training prior to beginning their careers and some do neither. Regardless of the path to the labor force, competitive employment, defined as compensation at or above minimum wage for work performed on a full or part time basis, should be a transition-related employment goal for the majority of individuals with disabilities (Gajar, 1998; Stodden, & Dorwick, 2000).

A major strategy for ensuring that youth with disabilities are employed upon graduation is providing employment training and experiences during high school. Numerous research studies show that students with disabilities who have been involved in community-based work experiences or were employed competitively while in school were more likely to be employed after exiting school (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Morningstar, 1997; Rabren, Dunn, & Chambers, 2002; Wagner et al., 1993a; Wagner et al., 1992b; Wehman, 2001). Opportunities for work-based learning and the transition to employment is a vital component of any effective transition program for students with disabilities.

Successful programs place an emphasis on providing students with staff-supervised on-the-job-training. Additionally, successful programs place students in jobs prior to graduation from school. Students are often offered paid work experience while participating in transition programs. Successful programs attempt to integrate individuals with disabilities with individuals without disabilities. A central purpose of work experience is to provide students an opportunity to gather first hand experiences and information about the world of work that may be useful in career decision-making. The information gained from early work experiences may serve primarily as an exposure to the world of work or an exploration of a particular field. Later and more intensive experiences may be for specific preparation and skill development in a chosen career area. In addition, experiences for completion of an individual project to enhance the chance of admission to a selected university may occur. Thompson (1995) emphasized that work experiences must be individualized to each student's interests. In the context of special education transition services, Halpern (1993) echoed this view, cautioning that work experiences without connections to career development, have little value.

Career development theorists, emphasizing the importance of accurate knowledge of the world of work for sound career decision making, note that the most direct and powerful information about the world of work is drawn from actual work experience (Isaacson & Brown, 1993; Rosenthal, 1989). Thus, work experiences have value for students as a vehicle for exploring careers and job types, as much as for direct preparation and skill development. Students find that even the knowledge that a particular career does not suit them is invaluable in steering them past costly mistakes later on (Reidy & Schottmueller, 1993).

Social/Interpersonal Skills Training

Social interpersonal skills are critical to success in a variety of settings. From the vocational perspective, they influence the degree to which one is capable of maintaining a job. From a leisure perspective, they influence social acceptance and friendships. Wehman et al., (1985) argued that social competence can be conceptualized as those verbal and nonverbal behaviors that are emitted in an interpersonal context, which are perceived as appropriate by one's peers and significant others. An emphasis is on the need to (a) coordinate the delivery of verbal and nonverbal responses; (b) respond to unique aspects of a particular interpersonal situation; and (c) evaluate the effectiveness of specific interpersonal responses. Examples of verbal responses that may need to be taught include greetings, praise, requests and demands. Qualitative aspects associated with the delivery of such verbal communications such as tone and loudness of voice, and smoothness of delivery may need to be taught, as well as nonverbal skills such as eye contact, facial expressions, posture, interpersonal distance, and physical contact.

Students also need activities that build a sense of self. They need practice and conceptual knowledge for living with sensitivity to others, and they need to develop values and value systems for which they take full ownership. As this learning accumulates, students develop a positive identity that moves them forward to a full and rich adult life. Self-esteem is essential to students with disabilities so that they can effectively develop and properly use the skills associated with their immunity to abuse and violence, and their ability to commit to a career for themselves and the welfare of others. Field and Hoffman (1994) viewed this process as self-determination: "the ability

to define and achieve goals based on a foundation of knowing and valuing oneself" (p. 164).

In summary, all of these practices are important for students with disabilities as they transition to life beyond high school. It is imperative that the entire transition portion of the IEP is designed around the individual's strengths, needs, and interests (Flexer et al., 2001; Kohler, 1993, 1996, 1998; Kohler & Rusch, 1996). Once the IEP is in place it should allow for some flexibility as the student may have more life experiences. There should be a system-wide transition program that will promote the organization of local and state interagency teams to continuously improve coordination and address barriers to implementation. With this there is an elimination of each agency preparing a separate program with a separate set of objectives. Agencies sharing opportunities reduce duplication and everyone will learn more about each other, including the families and student. Finally, when team planning is facilitated the acquisition of the necessary development of a transition program becomes a reality of all parties involved (McMahahan & Baer, 2001).

The Postschool Outcomes of Individuals with Disabilities

Individuals with disabilities constitute a substantial minority among adolescents transitioning to adulthood. The number of adolescents with disabilities depends solely on which definition of disability is used (Altman 2001; Fujiura & Rutkowski-Kmitta, 2001). For example, LaPlante and Carlson (1996) estimated that approximately one-fifth of the non-institutionalized people of the U.S. have some form of physical or developmental disability. Another recent estimate indicates that approximately 12%–15% of American

children have some type of disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). A little more than 6 million children are participating in educational programs supported by federal funds for those with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). Even with the varying definitions and estimates the number of students with disabilities in the U.S. is large enough that these children are and should be a key public policy issue.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) initiated the requirement that public schools implement transition planning for students with disabilities at the age of 16 or younger if appropriate [20 U.S.C. §1414 (d) (1) (A) (vii) (III)]. This mandate largely stemmed from research in the 1980s that showed that young adults with disabilities were experiencing poor postschool integration, high dropout and unemployment rates, low rates of post secondary education, and inferior independent living and community participation outcomes (Scuccimarra & Speece, 1990; Weber, 1988; Wehman, Kregel, & Barcus, 1985).

Follow-up and Follow-along Studies

In the 1980s, it had been 10 years of educational services for much of the first group of students who were exiting public schools under the provisions of PL 94-142. With it being such a critical time for PL 94-142, Congress approved funds to assess the long-term effectiveness of these services (Benz & Halpern, 1986, 1987; Cobb & Hasazi, 1987; deBettencourt, Zigmond & Thornton, 1989). The effectiveness of services can be evaluated through follow-up and follow-along studies. These studies of students who have exited school offer information on the difficulties that students encounter after graduation and on the effectiveness of the transition services they received before graduation (Baer et al., 2003). Follow-along studies follow a cohort of students over time,

while follow-up studies collect information on outcomes at a single point in time (Halpern, 1990). These studies may be conducted for all students or for a random sample of students. Typically, follow-up and follow-along studies look at student outcomes 1, 3, and 5 years after leaving school (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996).

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education funded studies that investigated and documented the varying experiences since the mid-1980s of former students with disabilities as they transitioned to the early stages of adulthood. The first of two nationally representative studies was the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS). NLTS included a database that was developed to document the changes of secondary students with disabilities' experiences since the mid-1980s. In order to document the transition of students in the early 21st century OSEP commissioned the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2). NLTS reports data on youth in 1987 and NLTS-2 is conducted on youth in 2003 (Wagner et al., 2005).

Blackorby and Wagner (1996) reported that the initial NLTS study showed that 10 years after the implementation of the EHA, postsecondary education attendance, wages, employment, and independence for students with disabilities was still far behind their peers without disabilities. Initial reports from NLTS-2 have shown some increases in work-study jobs and employment outcomes (Wagner, Cameto, & Newman, 2003). However, the results of NLTS and NLTS-2, as well as other outcome-based research from the late 1980s up through the early 2000s, have suggested that the needs of secondary special education students from their schools continue to move from a focus on the special education process to one on the postschool outcomes (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Wagner et al., 2003).

When comparing data from NLTS and NLTS2 significant changes in post school outcomes during the early stages of transition of former students with disabilities up to two years after exiting high school in the following areas are noted:

1. Secondary school completion status and timing (i.e., high school diploma, dropout, age-out; one year, three years or fives after leaving high school).
2. Living arrangements and social involvement (i.e., participating in organized groups outside of work or school, taking part in volunteer or community service activities, experiencing negative consequences for behavior).
3. Education after high school, including enrollment in high school degree-completion programs by dropouts and participation in 2-year or 4-year colleges or postsecondary vocational, business, or technical schools.
4. Employment rates and job characteristics.
5. Engagement in the community through participation in school, work, or preparation for work. (Wagner, et al., 2005)

The results of the first NLTS allow for a baseline for comparison of the future outcomes of students with disabilities. These comparisons also bring into focus the many factors that affect the successful transition of youth with disabilities. By identifying these factors one can begin to address them as they relate to students with disabilities in varying geographical communities.

Many other sources of data are available on the post school employment of youth with disabilities. For example, The Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities, which has performed the most extensive public policy review ever,

would like to increase the employment outcome of individuals with disabilities through the post secondary education, transition skills, work, social and personal wellbeing treatment and autonomous living issues affecting former students with disabilities. This task force has the responsibility of analyzing youth-related programs administered at the U.S. Department of Labor, Department of Education and the Social Security Administration. In doing so, they must also include a review of results of studies funded by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) that review school-to-work, transition, vocational education, and work incentives programs as they relate to findings on the outcomes of youth with disabilities.

Another data source is the National Council on Disability, whose purpose is to endorse policy, curriculum, and systems that provide assurance of equal access to all persons with disabilities without regard to the severity of the disability. An additional purpose is to encourage and promote the achievement of self-sufficiency through living independently and integration into all aspects of adult life offered by society. The council is responsible for gathering information pertaining to persons with disabilities that have been assisted by Federal departments and agencies. The evaluations provide an opportunity for review on a continuing basis on the policy, programs, practices, and procedures employed in these various servicing agencies. The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act contain the statutes and regulations pertaining to these Federal programs that are designed to assist individuals with disabilities through assessing the effectiveness of such policies, practices, and procedures. Some of the most important findings of these and other sources on employment status, job characteristics, and outcomes of youth with disabilities are presented next.

Postschool Employment

During the 1980s and 1990s the employment opportunities created were largely minimum wage service jobs. This makes it invaluable to have information not only on the number of former students with disabilities that are employed but also the types and financial compensation for employment they have obtained. As indicated by Freeman and Wise (1982) the employment experiences that students with disabilities can have during the early stages of transition can have a life-long influence in work-related behaviors as well as benefits to their ultimate achievement or lack thereof in the labor market.

Financial independence and self reliance are achieved through financial independence for the vast majority of adults. Youth with disabilities also want financial impendence as they move toward independent living. In fact, having a job is a goal for the majority of former students with disabilities as they leave high school (Cameto, Levine, & Wagner, 2004). Even though students have this goal of being employed it is also very critical that they have a job that provides benefits, a livable wage, and opportunities for advancement.

One of the major areas of concern during the transition movement has been the employment status of former students with disabilities. Employment status is found in practically every research study investigating postschool follow-up involving young people with disabilities. A major factor in former students with disabilities' opportunity to obtain financial and residential independence is employment. However, it does not automatically guarantee success in other facets of life (Halpern, 1985; Kohler, 1996). As such, employment status is one of the most important and frequently studied outcome

variables for people with disabilities. Unfortunately the employment status of adults with disabilities has been exceptionally poor.

Fabian, Lent and Wills (1998) reported that 3 to 5 years after high school completion slightly more than half of young people with disabilities were employed, compared with 69% of their peers in the general population. Results from these and other follow-up studies of youth with disabilities who exited secondary special education programs provide evidence of the importance of transition planning and programming related to employment. The NLTS and the NLTS-2 described previously provide the best source of information on former students with disabilities after leaving high school. Results from the extensive NLTS participants with disabilities revealed that employment rates for youth with disabilities lagged significantly behind their peers without disabilities (Wagner et al., 1992). However, during the NLTS-2 investigation students with disabilities show some improvements in their employment outcomes two years after leaving secondary school.

Rate. Although the employment rate of recent school leavers with disabilities is lower than their peers without disabilities, the results from the NLTS-2 show, however, that rates increase over time as these students have been out of school longer. Higher percentages of students with disabilities in NLTS-2 worked for pay soon after high school completion than their peers in NLTS (70% vs. 55%, $p < .05$), respectively. The interval between the rate of current employment for out-of-school youth with disabilities in NLTS-2 (41%) was significantly behind the rate of peers with the same characteristics in the general population (63%). Full-time employment was more likely for youth in NLTS than their peers in NLTS-2 (Wagner et al., 2003). Students indicated that they

worked fewer full-time hours, 35 hours or more (57% for NLTS vs. 39% for NLTS, $p < .01$). However, the number of part-time hours worked, 10 to 19 hours, increased (5% vs. 17%, $p < .01$, NLTS and NLTS-2). Other reports also noted changes in the employment rate for individuals with disabilities.

According to the Second Report of the Presidential Task Force on Employment of Adults with Disabilities (1999), for example, 75% of the 30 million working age adults with significant disabilities are unemployed. The National Council on Disability (2001) reported that the unemployment rate of people with disabilities has been at a stand still at 70% for more than 12 years, while the unemployment rate for those individuals without disabilities has been below 10%. Similarly, employment rates found in a recent national poll indicated that 32% of persons with disabilities versus 81% of those without disabilities were employed (National Organization on Disabilities, 2001). There is an improvement for those who have recently graduated 74% vs. 48% non-graduated suggesting that transition is having a positive impact on those students that are graduating since the mandating of transition (Dunn & Schumaker, 1997; Fardig, Algozzine, Schwartz, Henzel, & Westling, 1985). In addition, these mandates have impacted community participation as well.

It is a well documented finding that students with disabilities who participated in community based work experiences or were employed competitively while in school would be employed after exiting secondary school (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Morningstar, 1997; Wagner et al., 1993; Wagner, et al., 1992; Wehman, 2001). Opportunities for work-based learning coupled with being employed after transitioning is a vital element of any successful transition program (Levinson & Ohler, 1998).

The severity of one's disability is linked to higher rates of unemployment, as well. For instance, in a survey of 398 high school graduates with severe disabilities 48% were not employed or pursuing postsecondary education. Of those employed, slightly more than one-third (34%) held competitive jobs (Johnson, McGrew, Bloomberg, Bruininks, & Lin, 1997). In fact, relatively few individuals with severe disabilities work competitively in the community. The community-based employment rates reported in several studies varied from 0% to 20% across studies (Haring, Lovett, & Smith, 1990; Haszai et al., 1985; Wehman, Kregel, & Seyfarth, 1985).

Underemployment, or chronic unemployment, remains a serious problem for many Americans with disabilities. The most recent National Organization on Disability (NOD) survey of Americans with Disabilities (2004) indicated that two out of three persons with disabilities are not working. Despite the implementation of school-to-work transition programs, progressive laws designed to remove barriers to employment, and advancement in rehabilitation technology for people with disabilities the underemployment and underemployment of persons with disabilities have changed very little since the 1980s. Increasingly, educators, rehabilitation professionals, students with disabilities, and their families are collaborating to promote awareness of and access to, comprehensive employment supports in order to facilitate community employment. The following results compare student with disabilities from NLTS and NLTS-2.

Hourly wages. In the NLTS, the wages of both students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities in the general population were well below poverty level. This was quite common during the first 2 years after leaving high school and for their peers without disabilities who were not enrolled in college.

Youth with disabilities in NLTS-2 had improved pay on average (Wagner, et al., 2003). Eighty-five percent of former students with disabilities in NLTS-2 earned significantly more than the federal minimum wage. However, there was no increase over time from 1987 when wages were adjusted for inflation.

Race/ethnicity. Race/ethnicity is associated with the likelihood of employment for both youth in the general population and youth with disabilities (Shaver, 1991). According to the NLTS both African American and Hispanic youth are significantly less likely to have paid jobs when compared to their White peers. African American youth with disabilities in the same NLTS cohort in 1990 were nearly twice as likely to be employed as they were in 1987. The results indicated an increase over time in employment after leaving secondary school between White youth in school (62% vs. 74%, $p < .05$) and African American (36% vs. 62%, $p < .01$) and three to five years after leaving school, respectively. With the substantial gain in the percentage of African American youth being employed, the wide disparity between the two groups was eliminated. Also the disproportion of currently employed African American youth and white youth was no longer significant as well.

With regard to racial/ethical backgrounds, there were no significant decreases in working full-time over time. However, for White youth with disabilities earning more than minimum wage there were substantial changes (71% vs. 90%, $p < .01$). Even though in NLTS-2 high-wage earners, percentages increased substantially for both Whites and Hispanics, from 9% to 46% and 1% to 25%, respectively. The increase was not the same for African American youth.

Gender. NLTS examined gender as another youth characteristic that relates to variations in employment experiences. For example, among youth who had been out of school less than 2 years, males were more likely to be competitively employed than females. Further, the same males found increased success in employment over the 3 years, from 52% to 64%; the increase for females in the same cohort was only 9%. These relative increases for males and females with disabilities are almost opposite of those observed in the general population, in which young men showed a 9% gain in employment, compared with 12% for young women.

However, in NLTS changes in employment status over time were dramatic for girls with disabilities but not for their male counterparts. In NLTS 64% of the males were working for pay and in NLTS-2, 72% were working for pay since leaving high school. From NLTS to NLTS-2 females had a significant increase in the percentage of them working for pay since leaving high school, (NLTS) 35% vs. (NLTS-2) 67%, $p < .001$. The increase in the percentage of girls working eliminated the large gap in employment rate that was apparent in NLTS, 64% vs. 35%, males and females, respectively. In the NLTS boys were twice as likely as girls to be employed (57% vs. 30%, $p < .001$), but this was not the case in NLTS-2 (72% vs. 67%, $p < .001$). There were no significant differences in the rate of full-time work from NLTS or NLTS-2 by gender.

Job type. The NLTS reported that maintenance jobs were the most common type of job (30%); however, in NLTS-2 there was a significant decrease in the percentage of out-of-school students who worked in these types of jobs (13%) $p < .01$. There was an increase in the number of students with disabilities who worked in retail 4% vs. 20% ($p < .001$), NLTS and NLTS-2, respectively. There was also a significant decrease in the

percentage of students who worked in clerical positions as well, 16% vs. 6%, $p < .01$. The percentage of out-of-school youth working full-time did not significantly decrease. In NLTS boys were more likely to be employed in maintenance than in NLTS-2, (32% vs. 14% $p < .01$). However, in NLTS-2 there was a significant increase in the percentage of boys working in retail jobs (3% vs. 17%, $p < .01$).

Disability differences in employment. Employment rates vary considerably across disability categories. The results of the NLTS study indicate that youth with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, other health impairments, or speech impairments are the most likely to be employed within 1-year from school exit. Their employment rates ranged from 50% to 60%, with the rates equaling or exceeding that of the general population of youth (50%).

In contrast, 15% of youth with autism; approximately one-fourth of youth with multiple disabilities, deaf-blindness, or orthopedic impairments; and about one-third of youth with mental retardation or visual impairments were employed in that same 1-year period. Increases in overall employment rates from 1987 to 2001 ranged from 4 to 17 percentage points across disability groups, including significant increases for youth with learning disabilities or with speech, orthopedic, or other health impairments (10 to 17 points). The severity of one's disability has also been linked to higher rates of unemployment. For instance, a survey of 398 high school graduates with severe disabilities showed that 48% were not employed or pursuing postsecondary education (Johnson et al., 1997)**.** In fact**,** relatively few individuals with severe disabilities work competitively in the community (Affleck et al., 1990).

Within the varying disability categories there were some noteworthy changes between the first and second investigation in the employment status. The increase for competitive employment were significant in two disability categories, learning disabilities, 62% vs. 79%, $p < .01$, and visual impairments, 37% vs. 62%, $p < .001$. Former students with learning disabilities and speech and hearing impairments were most likely to be employed since completing high school as well as at the time of interview. Significantly more former students with learning disabilities reported being competitively employed than peers with mental retardation, orthopedic impairments, or multiple disabilities.

School exit option. Completing secondary school appears to have paid off for high school graduates with disabilities. Youth with disabilities participated in NLTS and completed school experienced a significant increase in employment rates 3 years after school from 53% in 1987 to 75% in 1990. As well, after completing secondary school, 3 to 5 years later graduates in comparison to their peers who dropped out (65% vs. 47%) or aged out (65% vs. 37%) were significantly more likely to be employed. Former students with and without disabilities who graduated experienced an advantage in employment over their peers who dropped out. However, for former graduates without disabilities there was a decrease in the gap over time. The percentages of former students with disabilities who indicated they were employed for pay since leaving high school increased only among dropouts, 51% vs. 68%, $p < .05$, NLTS and NLTS-2, respectively. In NLTS those who finished high school were employed at a higher rate than their peers who dropped out, 1987 (64% vs. 51%, $p < .05$) and at time of interview, 1990 (57% vs.

41%, $p < .05$), but in NLTS-2, these differences were moderated and were not statistically significant.

There were notable differences in employment characteristics of those who completed school based on the length of time that has passed from the time students left high school. A decrease occurred in the number of out-of-school youth who had completed school and worked full-time since the first wave, 55% vs. 34%, NLTS and NLTS-2, respectively. Also for a significant number of these same students, rate of pay was more than the federal minimum wage, 68% vs. 85%, $p < .001$. Furthermore, those students who completed high school were less likely to be employed in maintenance jobs, 26% vs. 12%, and more likely to be employed in retail, 6% vs. 23%, NLTS and NLTS-2, respectively. In NLTS or NLTS-2 no significant differences noted in employment characteristics between those who completed high school and their peers who did not.

Former students with disabilities have experienced a significant increase in the combining of part-time employment and postsecondary education, which is consistent with findings reported in the next section. Graduates, who are mostly likely to be enrolled in postsecondary education, provide a potential explanation and reinforce the fact that there is a decrease on full-time current and employment. In addition, only high school graduates experienced changes in types of jobs as well as increases in earnings relative to the federal minimum wage.

Research for individuals with disabilities has indicated that there is a relationship between the increases in employability skills and having part-time employment and participation in vocational classes while in school (Hasazi et al., 1985; Hasazi, Johnson, Hasazi, Gordon, & Hull, 1989), and secondary school completion (Zigmond & Thornton,

1985). As well, the completion of postsecondary education can greatly enhance employment. Postsecondary education has been a rapidly growing outcome of transition programs for youth with disabilities. Students with disabilities have been attending postsecondary educational programs and their numbers have steadily grown through the 1990s up to the early 2000s.

Postschool Education

High schools in the United States emphasize preparing students for college. Indeed, even some middle schools offer high school credit classes. In high school, students take college entrance exams and guidance counselors advise students in taking those courses that will help them gain admittance to college. In the United States more young adults access postsecondary education than in any other developed country. Many youth with disabilities, particularly students with high incidence disabilities, anticipate attending a college program. Wagner et al. (1992b) found that 4% of special education graduates were enrolled in four-year colleges and 16% were enrolled in two-year colleges three to five years after graduation. In 1998, federal statistics indicated that 11% of all postsecondary students had disabilities, which represents a significant increase from 1988 (Gajar, 1998). However, many students with disabilities do not succeed in their post secondary educational experience (Wagner et al., 1992).

In the U.S., high school graduates and nearly half of all youth are expected to either enroll or graduate with an undergraduate degree (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996). In recent years it has become more advantageous to have an education beyond high school. For example, Mincer (1989) noted that college graduates were twice as likely to be employed as high school graduates, who were, in turn, twice as likely to be employed as

those who dropped out. For those persons who are employed, the difference in salary among the varying levels of education has increased and will continue (Murphy & Welch, 1989).

Former students with disabilities often leave school ill-prepared for competitive employment. They can benefit from being enrolled in postsecondary education, including vocational training. In the next 10 years the largest increase in career choices will be in occupations that require college educations (Braddock, 1999). In 1959 only 20% of employees needed some post secondary education; however, in 2000 56% need some college education to obtain employment (Carnevale & Fry, 2000). Over the past 25 years the gap in earnings and educational attainment has widened (Day & Newburger, 2002)

Parents hold different expectations for their adolescent children once they have completed secondary school, indicating a change over time in what they previously felt were obtainable goals for their children. In 2001 youth across all disability categories, genders, for African American or White, and all income levels were more likely to graduate from a two-year school than in 1987 (Wagner, et al., 2003). Next the NLTS and NLTS-2 differences in enrollment in college for youth will disabilities will be examined from 1987 and 2003.

There were significant increases in attendance at a two-year community college (4% to 21%, $p < .001$), as well as attendance at a four-year college (1% vs. 10%, $p < .01$) from NLTS to NLTS-2. As for former students without disabilities, they experienced a higher increase in enrollment in four-year colleges than two-year college since the 1980s (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). However, for former students with

disabilities, it is the opposite. They were more likely to attend a two-year rather than a four-year institution in NLTS-2 (21% vs. 10%, $p < .05$).

Disability differences in post secondary education. There was a wide range of increased enrollment in college by disability, with the smallest being 3 percentage points for former students with mental retardation to 33 percentage points for former students with visual impairments as the time elapsed from high school completion. Significant increases in enrollment in post secondary education were experienced by former students in four disability categories since high school completion. Students identified as having a learning disability and visual impairment both had changes in participation in any postsecondary education (15% vs. 35%, $p < .01$; 33% vs. 66%, $p < .01$) from NLTS to NLTS-2, respectively. The same group of individuals also had changes in participation in two-year colleges (3% vs. 23%, $p < .001$; 6% vs. 10%, $p < .01$), and four-year colleges (1% vs. 11%, $p < .05$; 17% vs. 41%, $p < .05$) from NLTS to NLTS-2, respectively.

Students identified as having a hearing impairment experienced a significant increase in their attendance at two-year colleges (13% vs. 37%, $p < .05$) and four-year colleges (6% vs. 36%, $p < .001$) from NLTS to NLTS-2. There was, however, only a significant increase in the attendance of students identified as having emotional disturbance in two-year college attendance, 3% vs. 13%, $p < .05$, NLTS and NLTS-2, respectively.

School exit status. A significantly greater increase in post secondary enrollment between NLTS and NLTS-2 time was experienced for former students with disabilities who graduated from high school in comparisons to their peers who dropped out (24% vs. 41%, $p < .01$; 6% vs. 9%). High school completers had significant increases in two areas

addressed in postsecondary education participation. Their attendance at two-year college increased from 5%, NLTS, to 28%, NLTS-2, $p<.001$, and at four-year colleges 3% vs. 13%, $p < .01$, NLTS and NLTS-2, respectively. Even though there was an increase in overall and two- year and four-year college attendance, there was a significant decrease in enrollment in vocational, technical and business schools 16% vs. 5%, $p < .01$.

Gender. In both the general and disability population, girls demonstrated larger gains than boys in enrollment in postsecondary school (Peter & Horn, 2005). However, there was only a significant increase in enrollment for girls in two-year colleges from NLTS (14%) to NLTS-2 (35%, $p < .01$). On the other hand, boys experienced a significant increase in both two-year colleges (4% vs. 19%, $p < .01$) and four-year colleges (1% vs. 11%, $p < .01$). In addition, there was a significant decrease in the enrollment of males in postsecondary vocational, technical, or business schools (12% vs. 5%, $p < .05$). This overall increase in enrollment implies that almost as many former students with disabilities postponed enrollment into college for several years, as did those without disabilities in the general population who began their enrollment in college immediately after high school.

Race/ethnicity. In NLTS the only racial/ethnic group to experience a significant increase in enrollment in post secondary enrollment was White youth with disabilities 14% vs. 36%, $p < .001$. However, in NLTS-2 there were no significant differences in the enrollment in post secondary education of youth with disabilities by ethnicity, 24% of White youth with disabilities, 28% of African American youth with disabilities, and 21% of Hispanic youth with disabilities.

The enrollment in post secondary education programs of students in the general population differed over time compared to youth with disabilities. It is interesting to note that former students with disabilities who were Hispanic experienced the smallest increase and White youth experienced the largest in their enrollment in post secondary education. However, in the general population, Hispanic youth had the largest increase, 18 percentage points, which were three times the 6% increase by White youth and nine times the 2% increase experienced by African American youth (Snyder & Hoffman, 2003).

The overall enrollment in postsecondary education rate increased over time from 15%, NLTS, to 32%, NLTS-2, $p < .001$. In the NLTS-2 sample, the gap still remains between former students with disabilities and their peers without, even with the greater increase in postsecondary education enrollment for youth with disabilities.

Summary

For the purposes of this chapter, the term transition was used to describe the process of facilitating the postschool adjustment of secondary students, particularly students with disabilities. Postschool adjustment was broadly defined to include adjustment to work, leisure, and independent functioning in the community. Transition planning, although legally within the scope of educators as a result of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), must include professionals from the fields of education, mental health, social services and vocational rehabilitation if it is to be successful.

Given the high unemployment and underemployment of youth with disabilities, and the elevated dropout rate that exists among students with disabilities, there is little doubt efforts in the area of special education have not resulted in the successful integration of many of these individuals into society (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Halpern, 1990). The history of the unsuccessful integration of persons with disabilities has lead to the enactment of legislation that now makes transition a national priority for students with disabilities. The federal legislation summarized in this paper has attempted to address the above-mentioned problems by requiring schools to address the issue of transition for all students with disabilities. Finally, it is hoped that the initiation of such services several years prior to the student being eligible to leave school will increase the likelihood that the student will be able to secure and maintain employment, function independently in the community, and ultimately become a satisfied and productive member of society.

Rural Communities and Transition

There are no easy answers to the range of complex problems rural America faces. The strong economy in many nonrural and suburban areas, in many cases, has contributed to people in rural areas being left behind. The gap between the "haves" and the "have-nots" is increasing; young people in rural areas continue to leave and not return. While they make contributions elsewhere, they represent yet another extraction of resources from rural areas.

In spite of these and other issues and problems, rural places and their people are an essential part of the fabric of American life. They contribute resources, and they hold

promises of keeping civic action alive. They exemplify the diversity that has made the nation strong and creative. Although they need more financial resources and friendlier federal policies, they are not deprived of competence and power (Helge, 1991).

This section begins with an overview of rural communities through a review of the characteristics of these communities and schools, as well as the current trends they are experiencing in education. Next, the factors affecting special education service delivery in rural areas are discussed. This is followed by a review of early research on outcomes of students with disabilities in rural areas and the limitations that exist with these early studies. A discussion on rural transition variables that have been identified and addressed since transition was included in IDEA will conclude this section.

Rural Communities

One-fourth of Americans reside in rural areas (Monsey, Owen, Zierman, Lambert, & Hyman, 1995). While rural communities vary in architecture, agriculture, climate, and geographical features, there are some distinguishing characteristics of rural communities as a whole (U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement [OERI] 1994). Bender (1985) identified rural communities based on their financial base, resident characteristics, and the existence of federally-owned land. "These communities include those primarily dependent on farming, manufacturing, or mining; those specializing in government functions; those in persistent poverty; those composed mainly of Federal land; and those whose population includes large numbers of retirees" (p. 23). Because of the numerous subcultures those with similar characteristics can vary in rural communities.

Characteristics of Rural Communities

Historically, rural communities have been portrayed as those with two-parent families who sit down together to a home cooked meal after parents complete their work in fields and the children return from a trouble-free day at school. The church is a focal point in this picture-a place providing families spiritual comfort and opportunities for social support. A 1994 OERI report (1994) noted the heart of the rural community since the beginning of the development of the United States was the family, place of worship and the educational setting. These three entities have established the foundation of the rural community by providing the standards of behavior, a circle of personal communication, and a range of collective actions that jointly shape the people, customs and characteristics.

There are many characteristics that distinguish rural communities from nonrual communities. Rural areas in America are sparsely populated, averaging fewer than 40 residents per square mile and located outside simple commuting range of a metropolitan area. They rate higher than nonrural areas in poverty, a rate that is rapidly increasing. The jobless rate in rural areas is also higher than metropolitan counties. As well, the job income growth rate lags behind the rest of the nation. The rate of families headed by women, also, is rising. Additionally, rural communities are no longer supported by the farming industry. Finally, these communities lag behind in opportunities for higher education and/or well-paying occupations (Greene & Kochhar-Bryant, 2003).

These characteristics of rural communities result in social and academic advantages and disadvantages. Advantages include a (a) close-knit community and desire to help one's own; (b) community involvement in school activities; (c) opportunities to

participate in multiple school activities at one time (i.e., school government, performing arts, sports, and academic extracurricular activities); and (4) opportunities for teachers, students, and businesses to form academic and/or vocational relationships that promote individualized attention towards learning and personal goals (Helge, 1984; Ryan & Cooper, 1992; White, 1990). Disadvantages include a limited variety of classes and extracurricular offerings, and limited vocational opportunities. As well, youth experience unique needs such as transportation, housing, and employment opportunities due to the geographical, sociological, cultural, economical, political and ethnic differences in their communities (Clark & McDonnell, 1994; Greenwood, 1992; West & Penkowsky, 1994).

Rural communities are experiencing a decreasing sense of community, which has an impact on rural schools. One factor contributing to the decline in community cohesiveness is the increasing number of parents who commute to nonrural centers for work. Schools are beginning to take responsibility for the custodial care of children whose parents are absent most of the day. Before and after-school programs provided by the teaching staff or community members afford these students structured and monitored activities. Funding for such programs presently comes from dwindling district resources as well as sliding fee arrangements with parents.

Another change relates to the economy. The rural economy is now more directly connected to national and international markets, with rural schools, health care, and other services more a part of national systems than they have ever been. One consequence of this is greater rural community dependency on resources and funding outside of the community and less autonomy. Hobbs (1994) noted, “It is increasingly difficult for rural

residents to maintain a sense of community when so many things they depend on are located somewhere else" (p. 14).

Geographic isolation may also impact living and employment opportunities. For example, employment training and experience sites may be limited because industries or businesses are not located in the vicinity. And employment opportunities may be limited due to the types of jobs available and a lack of alternatives (Sarkees &Vier, 1988). Inadequate transportation to and from living and employment sites outside of the community also poses a problem for youth in rural communities. According to Hobbs (1994), this lack of opportunity "… is both cause and effect for the continuing migration of the most highly educated youth from rural communities" (p. 18).

Another characteristic of rural subcultures is that they vary tremendously. They range geographically from remote islands and deserts to clustered communities. Economically the range includes stable, classic, farm communities; depressed lower socioeconomic settings; and high-growth "boom or bust" communities. The array of rural schools ranges from isolated schools serving as few as 1 to 10 children in a location 350 miles from the next closest school district to schools located in rural clustered towns or surrounded by other school districts. More than 300 rural community structures were catalogued from 1978 to 1982 (Helge, 1984). While these characteristics by Helge portray rural life as less than attractive, nonrural families are moving to rural communities in growing numbers. Those who migrate to rural communities do so for several reasons. Rural schools are one of the attractions.

Rural Schools

Two thirds of America's school districts and 17.6% of the nation's children reside in rural areas (NCES, 2000). Rural schools have a distinct educational environment and unique strengths and weaknesses. For example, rural schools serve a greater percentage of children with disabilities than do non-rural areas, due to parents having less prenatal and postnatal care, higher poverty rates, and fewer available social services (Helge, 1991).

Rural schools are undergoing changes previously encountered by nonrural and suburban schools. There is a greater diversity of the rural student population, in part, due to minority migration. For educators, this diverse student population brings new challenges. As noted in The Changing Face of Rural America (2000), "Many minority children in rural communities are at risk … [and] teachers across the country are facing the challenge of how to adapt to change and difficult conditions while meeting the needs of all of their students" (p. 1). There is also a migration of families from suburban communities. Suburban parents that move to rural communities are likely to expect that their children would receive an education similar to what they left behind, placing additional pressures on teachers and administration.

Current Trends in Rural Schools

While the number of school districts nationwide has declined slightly in the last decade, the number of school buildings in use is on the rise. More non-traditional buildings are being used to house students (e.g., charter schools) and new schools are being built. Yet, in some parts of the nation, particularly rural areas, schools are being shut down because of the lack of enrollment or because of forced consolidation.

Rural schools were traditionally linked to the specific needs of their communities. In earlier years, the process of schooling reflected local values, morals, and ways of being in the world. This link between school and community was broken in the late 1970s, when many small rural schools were consolidated on the assumption that schools needed to be big to better serve the needs of big cities and big industries. The call for consolidation has been the most controversial and most frequently suggested for rural areas (Helge, 1984).

OERI (1994) reported 46% of the school districts in America are rural; these districts are most likely to be in the North Central, Southern, and Western parts of the United States. Schools in these rural districts generally have enrollments of fewer than 400 students, and one in five of these schools have fewer than 100 students. Student achievement levels of youth in rural areas are generally higher than those of youth in nonrural disadvantaged groups, but lower than those of youth in nonrural advantaged groups. Low school enrollment is one of the attractions nonrural families find in rural settings. Another is that rural schools provide a forum for more positive attitudes about schools and closer connections between students and teachers than do nonrural schools (Rural Policy Matters, 1999).

However, the influx of nonrural families has little impact on rural school funding. Roessler and Forshee (1996) pointed out that rural schools have budgets with few government resources funneled their way. While often the school is the largest employer/ financial institution in a rural community, few governmental resources are sent to rural schools. These funding inequities seem to relate to inequities in the quality of education for rural and nonrural children. Some might argue that operating small/rural schools is

less expensive than running large, nonrural schools, but a study of small, rural schools in Vermont showed that the per pupil cost of operations ran about 18% higher than the state average (Rural Policy Matters, 1999). Also, some funding inequities are attributed to a commonly held myth that rural schools do not have problems of racism, violence, and general decay that are found in some metropolitan schools (Peterson, Beekely, Speaker, & Pietrzak, 1998).

Social, psychological, recreational, medical and other services in rural areas tend to be inadequate for addressing increasing social problems such as increased drug and alcohol abuse, sexually transmitted diseases, homelessness, and crime. Many rural areas also lack adequate vocational and career education opportunities, prenatal care, special education, and staff development opportunities (Helge, 1991). These and other factors will be addressed in the next section, along with model programs that have helped combat these critical factors affecting service delivery in rural schools.

Factors Affecting Special Education Service Delivery in Rural Areas

The one area in which there is no dispute about need is the education of children with disabilities. Children with disabilities who live in small, rural communities are entitled to the same free appropriate public education (FAPE) as any other child in the Unites States as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Providing a free and appropriate public education to children can be a severe financial burden to local rural districts. For example, the cost for a child with a severe disability can exceed $100, 000 annually. Federal funding has not yet met the level established by

Congress when IDEA became law in 1975 or in subsequent reauthorizations (Office of Special Education Programs, 2001).

The increasing number of students identified with disabilities in rural areas has created the need to provide expanded special education services. Regardless of the service delivery method used (e.g., inclusion, part day, self-contained, special school), special education and related services have triggered extra expenditures for school systems and these costs continue to rise (Williams & Katsiyannis, 1998). Since 1990, special education costs have risen by 10% while general education costs have risen by only 4% (Quigney, 1996). More than $19 billion in local, state and federal funds were spent for special education services during the 1987-1988 school year. Expenditures for special education, according to best estimates, range from approximately 30.9 billion to 34.8 billion (Smith, & Colon, 1998).

Regrettably, legislative mandates such as IDEA, coupled with the growing number of students receiving special education services, have not been met with corresponding increases in funding (Krug, 1993). Due to the entitlement nature of IDEA and the relative under funding at the federal level, the brunt of the fiscal responsibility for the delivery of special education services has fallen on state and local education agencies. Thus, the cost of delivering special education services is assumed at approximately 8% by the federal government, 56% by the individual state, and 36% from local sources (Sage & Burrello, 1994). Rural schools have a particularly difficult time in complying with under funded legislative mandates such as IDEA (Krug, 1993).

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) conducted an investigation that asked the opinions of eight rural state directors of special

education. They identified four areas that impede their ability to provide efficient services and programs to their students with disabilities: not being able to competitively compete in the teacher job market; the inability to provide in-service or pre-service training for the needs of rural special educators; crime, violence, and drug abuse; and inadequate program offerings due to district size. Recommendations for improving these four issues encountered by special education service providers in rural areas were centered on finances. They indicated that increasing salaries, funds for technology and additional essential materials as well as grants that are federally funded specifically for rural areas would help with improving services in rural schools (Hicks, 1994).

Five of the eight rural state directors of special education believed that the recruitment and retention of faculty was the most critical issue for improving special education programs in their state. In addition, finances, identifying and assessing students, and having the capabilities to provide services in the least restrictive environment (LRE) will be discussed in more detail next.

Financing Special Education in Rural Schools

In meeting the needs of all students, rural school districts face many challenges. According to a research study conducted by Parker and Day (1990) undersized school districts, those with 200-300 students, will pay more for each student to be educated than a larger school district. This is true because all aspects of the district, central, and local administration as well as equipment are still necessary to have a functioning district (Parker & Day, 1990). It is also important to note that these undersized districts are not heavily populated, which causes additional charges in transporting students from sparsely populated areas (Freitas, 1992). With the majority of funding going for basic and

necessary aspects of the school district, there is decreased funding available for specialized curricula and programs for students with disabilities.

Business mangers and superintendents from small rural schools identified the following as negative effects of rural location and small size on the finances of schools:

(1) Isolation imposed by terrain and distance, which increases transportation costs;

(2) Increased rates of poverty and unemployment;

(3) Under-funded or unfunded state and federal mandates;

(4) Decrease in value of an education earned through completing high school;

(5) Inadequate fiscal management practices. (Freitas, 1992)

The result is an extreme financial burden for small districts. While only a small percentage of children need extensive services, the majority of educational services for children enrolled in special education still cost more than the average daily expenditure for other children in school districts. Rural districts have small budgets and need greater federal and state assistance. Without additional support, there is a constant struggle between general and special education budgets for scarce resources. Although no one wishes to place one student's needs against another, it happens in many rural communities across the nation (Helge, 1991).

Identification and Assessment in Special Education in Rural Schools

Huebner et al (1986) conducted a study with school psychologists to identify the major challenges they face when providing services in rural schools in California, Iowa, Indiana and Georgia. Three major challenges were the inability to locate adequate assessment measures for adaptive behavior, large number of students on caseloads, and

extensive travel demands. The amount of time that was needed to provide adequate comprehensive assessments required by IDEA was not available due to the large caseloads and amount of time spent traveling from school to school (Huebner et al., 1986).

Testing, evaluation and assessment materials used in each state to place students into special education programs are required by IDEA to be non-discriminatory. However, this does not always occur due to the limited capability to evaluate the abilities of children from diverse backgrounds, including students from rural areas. Results from a study by Hilton (1991) indicated that low test performance can be common for children with mostly rural life experiences as well as those from rural cultures due to the culturally-biased nature of many standardized assessments used to assess students.

For example, Hilton's (1991) study of 214 children from rural middle-class farm homes and 214 matched children from middle-class suburban metropolitan homes indicated significantly different performance profiles on the Preschool Language Survey. Significantly more rural children failed a broad age range of oral ability and acoustic knowledge items. The rural students were not at ease in the unfamiliar testing setting, less talkative, less likely to offer a guess on questions and did not openly interact with the unfamiliar adult examiners according to the anecdotal data from the study. When conducting assessments with children in rural areas, it is imperative that those conducting the assessments are familiar to and with the communities and the children they serve.

Providing Special Education Services in the Least Restrictive Environment in Rural Schools

When rural districts are faced with providing services for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE) rural school districts have utilized a variety of approaches. However, because of limited options, students tend to be either (a) included in general education settings more than their nonrural or suburban peers or (b) placed in more restrictive environments. Non- rural districts (37%) serve a smaller number of students with disabilities in the general education classroom than do rural districts (50%). Twenty-five percent of students with disabilities in nonrural schools are provided services in self-contained special education in comparison to only 15% in rural districts (U.S. Department of Education, 1990).

Due to the limited number of special education resources and teachers in rural districts some students must receive specialized instruction and or related services in residential facilities far from their home district, which may not be their LRE, but due to the lack of options, this is where they must be placed. While other school districts may require students to travel for long hours to regional programs or intermediate education units.

Recruiting and Retaining Qualified Special Education Personnel in Rural Schools

For schools in rural areas attracting and hiring personnel to teach students with disabilities is quite challenging. Some of the most prominent factors include low salaries, social and professional isolation from metropolitan areas and universities, constant time spent traveling to serve students throughout the district. In addition, in rural systems there can be a lack of staff to do recruiting (Helge, 1991). In rural areas, staff must be dually or

cross-categorically certified to serve a variety of disabilities due to there not being enough students for separate programs. However, with the districts' inability to hire certified staff in rural districts numerous teachers are hired and given emergency certificates which in turn increases shortage of "highly qualified" teachers.

In rural districts, attrition can be as high as 20% nationally. For specialized service areas like speech and physical therapy attrition has been estimated as high as 30 to 60% annually. According to McIntosh (1986) for those who must travel long distance to provide special education services the turnover rate is also especially heightened.

Another study conducted in Kansas reported that 20.9% of teachers resigned and for the majority it was due to the personal and cultural isolation. For those in the study that did return to the profession 70.7% accepted positions in larger school districts (Anshutz, 1988).

The severity of this problem is evident in several programs and initiatives specifically designed to recruit and retain rural special educators. For example, in Maine there is the Support Network for Rural Special Educators. This is the state's effort to decrease professional seclusion and reduce the high turnover among its rural special educators. Meetings occur three times a month, with various activities to provide support throughout the year. For example, there is a summer academy and state wide retreat during the winter every year. As indicated by the National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education (1990) 90% of all school districts and 75% of special education personnel in the State were involved in some aspect of the Support Network for Rural Special Educators.

In summary, the financial burden, sufficient personnel, and isolation that are common to rural districts impede all parts of the special education process -- classification and evaluation and service delivery. These factors certainly influence the transition outcomes of students in rural schools. Research on the transition outcomes of youth with disabilities has been accumulating since the 1980s. Unfortunately, very little of this research has focused specifically on the outcomes of youth with disabilities in rural areas. The next section will identify the most common transition outcomes examined and address the need to consider others that are important but for which little has been reported.

Transition Outcomes of Young Adults in Rural Schools

For the first 140 years of our nation's existence most Americans lived in open country and rural towns. Not until the 1920 Census were there more Americans living in nonrural than in rural areas. Now, at the turn of the century, not only do most Americans continue to live in nonrural areas but they live in nonrural areas with populations over 1 million (U.S Department of Agriculture, 1997). Nevertheless, nearly 60% of the nation's public school districts are located in rural districts, with three-quarters of their students residing in towns with populations of less than 2,500 (Spicker, 1992). In 1998-99, 17.6% of all students in the United States were educated in rural schools (NCES, 2000).

Some students, whether educated in rural or nonrural schools, require the supports of individualized instruction provided by special education. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2000) stated that approximately 12% of public school children participate in special education programs each year and the percentage of students

participating in special education in rural districts is higher than in metropolitan districts (Schneider, Leland, & Ferritor, 1986). Some research has indicated that the efficacy of education for all students is measured by whether they attend an nonrural or rural school.

Educational outcomes in both general and special education have become key concerns in educational reform (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997; Ysseldyke et al., 1992). Outcomes measured for all students include literacy, independence, citizenship, behavior, mental health, basic academic skills, and critical thinking (Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997). Outcomes for general education students may also include readiness for postsecondary education as determined by scores on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) and American College Testing Program (ACT) (Ysseldyke, et al.,1992). On the other hand, many of the key outcomes examined for special education students typically include employment or enrollment in employment preparation programs.

Early Research

Although there have been a number of studies investigating the postschool adjustment of students with disabilities, the majority were conducted in the 1960s and 1970s, before students with moderate to severe disabilities were included in school-based programs and the expansion and refinement of secondary and vocational educational programs to accommodate students with disabilities. In addition, most of these studies (a) focused only on students with the label of mental retardation (b) were confined to single communities or cities, and (c) collected information on former students at a single point in time (Brolin, 1972; Dinger, 1961; Mahoney, 1976). Also, early studies comparing students identified as “educable mentally retarded” (EMR) and “trainable mentally retarded” (TMR) with students without disabilities reported either little difference on

employment dimensions or 30% less gainful employment for those who were identified with mental retardation (Baller, 1936; Fairbanks, 1933). Unfortunately, none of these studies specifically reported any results on students in rural areas.

In an effort to obtain information on the employment status of former special education students from rural areas, Hasazi et al. (1985) conducted a statewide study of students with disabilities who received special education services in resource room and special education class programs in rural and nonrural schools in Vermont. Employment outcomes were examined in relation to demographic, educational, and vocational variables; and social service utilization. The researchers reported that the employment rate varied significantly with the location of the program, with employment rates of 44% for rural, 64% for nonrural and 47% for metropolitan. Of those from the overall sample employed, 55% were employed in nonsubsidized positions (37% were employed full-time and 17% were employed part-time or at seasonal work).

There was a significant relationship between current employment status and manner of school exit. When comparing the school experiences of those who graduated, dropped out or left after turning 18, 60% of graduates were employed, while only 51% of those who dropped out before 18 years of age were employed, and only 30% of those who left after turning 18 had jobs. There was also a significant association between current employment status and vocational education. Sixty-five percent of former students who had participated in vocational education were currently employed, whereas only 45% of former student who had not participated in vocational education were employed. When examining help received from service agencies, 65% to 96% of the youth reported no contact at all. The results of this study suggested that having a job prior

to leaving high school is more likely to predict successful employment outcomes than not having a job prior to leaving school.

In another study, deBettencourt et al. (1989) examined the dropout rates and employment status of students with and without learning disabilities (NLD) in a semi-rural district. In comparison, the dropout rate in the NLD sample (16%) was significantly lower than the LD sample (36%). Repeating a grade was an indicator of students becoming dropouts. For the majority of the students (LD and NLD) if they failed ninth grade, they were more than likely going to leave school prior to graduation. There were no differences in employment outcomes for students who graduated or dropped out and were identified as LD. The employment rate of LD graduates (80%) was not significantly different from the employment rate for NLD graduates (74.1%). This study revealed that there are indeed high numbers of students with LD dropping out of school. However, it failed to substantiate the harmful relationship between leaving school prior to graduation and successive adjustment and employment.

Although there have been numerous follow-up studies on the status of graduates of special education programs over the past 20 years, several limitations of the studies' scope and focus prevent a comprehensive analysis and description of the status of graduates in general. As reported by Mithaug et al. (1985), 90% of follow-up studies of special education graduates focused primarily upon students with mental retardation, most frequently those classified as having educable mental retardation. A second major difficulty with past studies is that they typically included graduates of only a small sample of school systems within a given state. Another concern is the type of information

on the graduate's employment status and the variation in the type of additional data collected.

Another limitation of earlier research is that these studies failed to collect data on the graduates' opinions regarding what school experiences were most and least useful in preparing them for the future. Also, with the changes occurring in the laws and legislation that require transition planning, one should expect improved outcomes. Additionally, those findings that have been reported must be viewed with caution due to the various ways of collecting and reporting findings and the limited number of times data is collected on the same cohort of students at various times in the students' life. Finally, all of this is magnified by the fact that there are limited numbers of studies that cover students with disabilities transitioning from rural areas.

Current Research

As mentioned previously, in 1983, Congress authorized the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) to perform a national longitudinal study on former students with disabilities to determine the status several years after exiting high school of those students who had gone entirely through school under the provision of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (PL. 94-142). SRI International was contracted by the U.S. DOE to gather follow-up data on more than 8,000 special education students to create a nationally representative sample.

These studies, The National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students (NLTS) and National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, both generated numerous reports and documents concerning the outcomes of these students in various areas such as postsecondary schooling, employment, housing independence, and

participation in society (Valdes, Williamson, & Wagner, 1990). However, none of these studies reported results that differentiated between the outcomes of students from nonrural and rural settings.

Difficult challenges are occurring in rural schools when they are required by IDEA to provide programs and services to students with disabilities that ensure that students are receiving a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). Special education personnel and administrators must identify ways to positively address these challenges so that students can increasingly experience positive in-school and post-school outcomes as they transition to adult life. The development of programs that are specifically tailored to meet the individual district needs may better serve rural areas rather than generalized programs because of the varied geographical, social, cultural and financial differences in rural districts. Employment is the most identified and studied outcome for students with disabilities in general and it is important to discuss why this outcome is studied so often and how the school program students participate in can help with facilitating successful transitions of students with disabilities from school to work.

A number of students with disabilities decide to pursue employment immediately after high school. For a student to have a good experience in the world of work, the amount and type of preparation that leads to employment can make the difference between success and failure. The changing nature of the job market is making employment more difficult to obtain without specific skills. Preparing for entry into the job market is a developmental process and well thought out transition planning can ensure that the student is ready to take on the challenge.

High schools can provide appropriate preparatory programs for students planning to enter the job market. Vocational education programs at the high school level provide a real opportunity to explore occupations and to gain at least basic knowledge within the various fields. For this reason the vocational educator will be seen as an integral member of the team. Because preparing for life after graduation is a step-by-step process, it is important to determine work-oriented goals as soon as possible. The development of a comprehensive, objective-driven IEP can provide the overall guidance that will allow the student to gain skills, knowledge, and self-confidence over the four-year transition planning period. This is even more of an important issue for those in rural areas with there being such a lack of information concerning the outcomes of these students beyond high school.

As discussed previously the information on outcomes surrounding students with disabilities from rural settings is limited. In fact a recent research synthesis concerning outcomes of young adults who had transitioned from secondary school to adult life in rural areas conducted by Sheehey and Black (2003) highlights this. The purpose of their study was to answer the question: How effective have transition services been in rural areas as measured by employment and independent living since the passage of IDEA? The researchers examined studies between 1990 and 1998 because 1990 was the first year that transition was federally mandated. They noted that many articles were found to include “rural” or “transition” in the title. However, only 20 addressed rural transition and were included in the initial review.

The inclusion criteria for their synthesis was (a) that the article report empirical results and (b) the authors were able to identify the school district as rural either through

a definition in the article or a statement indicating that the district was considered rural. Of the 20 initially identified, only five met the above criteria to be included in the analysis. An internet and journal search on studies since 1998 yielded no additional studies. All of the five studies focused on the transition outcome of employment. Several addressed independent living. Because of the limited information on independent living, only findings on employment from these five studies will be reported. Table 3 provides a summary of the methodology used in all of these studies and employment outcomes. Key findings and results are discussed.

Table 2

Summary of Methodology and Outcomes

Author/Year	Method of Collection	Dependant variables	Independent Variables	Outcomes
Dunn & Schumaker (1997)	**Telephone interview:** adaptation of Vermont's Post-School Indicators Follow-Up Questionnaire (Hasazi, Hock, & Cravedi-Cheng, 1992)	Employment outcomes	**Student characteristics**- gender, ethnicity, disability classification; **Community size**- rural vs. urban; **School variables**- High school exit status, and paid employment while in high school	The employment rate for students from the rural school system was 72%, while the employment rate for students from the urban school system was 81.4%.

Author/Year	Method of Collection	Dependant variables	Independent Variables	Outcomes
Schalock et al (1992)	**Telephone interview:** protocol designed for the study	Current employment status (employment outcomes (number of weeks employed during last year and hours a week, per week, and wages); work related benefits, primary source of income, job type, job patterns	**Student characteristics-** disability classification, IQ, gender, family involvement; **School variables-** enrolled in school, time in resource room, hours in vocational programs	**Current employment status**: FT-60.4% and PT-16.8%; Unemployed 12.3% and school 4.9%; 3%Other; CBMR 2.6%. **Current Job Type:** Services 35.1%; Agricultural/Farm 31.1%; Construction/Manufacturing 16.4%; Military 8%; Trade 6%; Government 2%; Transportation 1.6%. **Job Patterns:** Never changed jobs 72.7%; Voluntary Change 15.6%;Quit 6%; Laid off 5.6%.
Sitlington & Frank (1994)	**Survey Interview:** instrument designed for the study	Employment status, wages, benefits,; postsecondary education; living outcomes, financial independence	**Student characteristics** disability classification,; **Community size-** rural vs. urban; time out of school – 1 year and 3 year	**One year** 72% of students with LD were employed in rural areas and 74% in Urban. Students with BD in rural areas were employed at 75% and 43% in urban areas. For those with MR in rural areas 69% were employed and 60% were employed in urban areas. Overall employment rate for students with disabilities in rural and urban was 65% **Three years:** LD students in rural areas were employed at rate of 84% and in Urban 82%. Students with BD in Rural areas were employed at a rate of 79% and 62% in Urban areas. For those with MR in rural areas they were employed at a rate of 77% and in Urban areas 67%. Overall employment rate for students with disabilities in rural and urban was 75%.

Author/Year	Method of Collection	Dependant variables	Independent Variables	Outcomes
Spruill & Cohen (1990)	**Telephone interview:** modified of Vermont out come survey tool (Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985)	Employment outcomes	Demographics to describe sample, not used to make statistical comparisons	65% of all students in the sample were employed. Of those 73% were employed full-time and 27% were employed part-time and >1% were employed in seasonal jobs.
Spruill & Kallio (1994)	**Telephone interview:** modified of Vermont out come survey tool (Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985)	Vocational preparation, work experience, employment status, and employment history	Demographics to describe sample, not used to make statistical comparisons	**Vocational Preparation**: 86% found information helpful. 84% took vocational education classes**; Employment status:** Competitive jobs 91%; Subsidized jobs 2%; sheltered 7%. Full-time 69%, Part-time31%; **Employment History:** 88% had some form of work experience; 56% had Summer job; 22% had jobs during the school year

These five studies analyzed two core outcomes: employment and independent living. However, the focus of this paper is only employment, so only employment outcomes will be addressed. All studies included employment outcomes (employed part-time and/or full-time) as the primary dependent variable. Four studies provided employment outcome data by disability category. None of the studies included social or community involvement outcomes as dependent variables. However, one study (Sitlington & Frank, 1994) defined successful adjustment as a combination of independent living, full time employment, and involvement in leisure activities. The following measures were used to summarize and compare employment outcomes for participants: (a) overall employment including part-time and full-time combined, (b) full-

time employment only, (c) job type, and (d) wages. Four of the studies presented this data by disability category. Across the studies the average rate of employment was 75%, with a full-time employment rate of 59%.

Overall employment rates. Additional information related to employment, such as exit status and school programs were also presented in some of the studies. Overall employment rates (including both full-and part-time) varied considerably across studies. All studies examined employment outcomes one year after school completion. Spruill & Cohen (1990) and Sitlington & Frank (1994) reported the lowest rate, which was 65%. Dunn & Schumaker's (1997) results were next with the employment rate reported at 73%. The highest rate was 77.2% (Schalock et al. 1992). Sitlington & Frank (1994) also examined the employment rate of students with disabilities three years after school completion. In their study they found an increase in overall employment rate from 65% (one year after school exit) to 75% (three years after school exit) which could indicate that there is an increase in the likelihood that students will be employed the longer they are out of school. Earlier research studies conducted in the 80s reported much lower employment rates (i.e. Hasazi et al., 1985)

Full-time employment rate. The full-time employment rate also varied considerably across studies. The number of participants employed full-time in rural areas ranged from 35% to 87%, with a mean of 64%. Consistent with overall employment outcomes, individuals with LD demonstrated higher rates of employment than individuals with BD or MR. For example, in the Dunn & Shumaker (1997) study; the combined (rural and urban) rates were 73.5%, 71% and 67% in the disability categories LD, MR and BD, respectively. However, this was not so with findings from Sitlington and Frank

(1994); their findings were lower for the combined full-time employment rates. Students with LD were employed full-time at a combined rate of 68%, 60% for those with BD and 38% for those with MR, which is more consistent with national studies than the findings in the Dunn and Shumaker study.

*Job type***.** The types of jobs held by participants were included in all but one study (i.e., Spruill & Cohen, 1990). Job types presented in the other four studies included predominantly blue-collar type jobs (e.g., trade and industry, laborer, construction, and service). Service and agriculture were included as job types in three studies, with more participants working in service jobs than agriculture (29% and 6% respectively). One study (Sitlington & Frank, 1994) included job type by disability category, showing young adults with MR having the highest employment rates in service and rural laborer. Jobs in agriculture comprised the lowest employment rate across all disability categories.

School programs. Spruill and Kallio (1994) reported some interesting correlations between the employment status of students and their secondary experiences. Students who had summer jobs, even subsidized ones, were more likely to have found competitive employment. Also, all but one of the part-time workers described their jobs as semi-skilled or unskilled. Those making the highest wages tended to credit their vocational program with helping them secure their current jobs. Thus, the increased focus placed on preparing students for adulthood could be related to the increase in employment rates.

Exit status. Students who graduated had skilled jobs; whereas unskilled workers were students who left school under the age of 18. Also, semi-skilled workers included students who graduated and those who left school after turning 18 years old. Spruill &

Kallio's (1994) study produced support for prior job experience, vocational training and high school graduation.

All five empirical studies addressed employment outcomes, and two of the five studies also included living outcomes. Compared to research from previous follow-up studies of rural students, this review indicates that employment rates have increased during the past 15 years. Previous studies reported full-time employment rates of 44% (Hasazi et al., 1985) and 48% (Fardig, et al., 1985) for students with mild disabilities in rural areas after leaving school. The results of the current synthesis indicated an overall employment rate of 75% and a full-time employment rate of 59%. The findings indicate a 30% increase for overall employment and an increase of 10% for full-time employment for young adults with mild/moderate disabilities in rural areas. However, caution should be exercised in analyzing the increase in employment due to the limited number of studies involving transition outcomes in rural areas as well as the limited geographic regions of the studies, populations, and time.

In summary, after 25 years of mandated special education, it appears that employment rates for many young adults with mild/moderate disabilities in rural areas have improved. The outcomes reported show positive results. Nevertheless, due to the limited number of empirical studies focusing on transition for young adults with disabilities living in rural areas, these results must be reviewed with caution. The key thing missing in most studies is identifying factors and/or components of the high school programs that contribute to successful outcomes as measured by employment, post secondary education and training, independent living, and social adjustment in the community for students with disabilities in rural areas.

Rural school districts continue to comprise a good proportion of the school districts in the country (i.e., 60%, Spicker, 1992). More empirical research in rural areas detailing the outcomes of specific transition program components and follow-up results are called for in order to develop effective transition planning programs. In addition, there is little research focusing on independent living, postsecondary education or training and social integration into the rural community.

These are key areas essential to the well-being of any adult, but especially to those with disabilities. The efficacy of special education includes all aspects of adjustment or outcomes of the young adult to adult life including employment, independence, and social well-being. The adult lives of many young adults with disabilities needs to improve. Hopefully, researchers will conduct more extensive research on those students with disabilities in rural areas who have transitioned or are transitioning and increase the identification of factors that positively influence their employment, postsecondary education, independence and social-well-being.

Summary

When considering the challenges of serving students with disabilities in rural communities, it is imperative that one keeps in mind the differences that exist within rural America. Rural areas may differ in land, residents, dialect, financial structure, and traditions. All of these must be in the forefront of the minds of those who provide services to students with disabilities in rural areas. Rural districts service approximately 475,000 students with disabilities. A larger percentage of students with disabilities are served in rural districts than in non rural areas. In addition, the low performance of these

students according to some is due to a larger proportion of students living in poverty within in rural districts (U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

Factors that present challenges for staff in rural areas include but are not limited to accessibility of suitable evaluation materials, availability of certified personnel so that students can be placed in their least restrictive environment, and actively involving parents throughout the entire educational process of their children. Data suggest that fewer children with disabilities are served in the self-contained special education classes than their peers in non-rural districts (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Even though, immense amounts of data are reported through the National Longitudinal Transition Study and the National Longitudinal Study-2 for students with disabilities in varying school districts, these studies do not provide data on the comparison of outcomes by school size and/or locations.

As service providers, administrators, and policy makers develop and implement programs for students with disabilities it would be beneficial to them if future research would investigate the parallels and differences between rural and non-rural districts. This will ensure that the distinctive needs of rural schools and school districts are not neglected (U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

III. METHODOLOGY

The outcomes of individuals with high incidence disabilities in rural school systems in Alabama in comparison to their peers with high incidence disabilities in nonrural schools systems as reported through the Alabama Student Tracking System were investigated. Rural was defined as all territory population and housing units located outside urbanized areas or urbanized clusters (Census, 2000). It is also important to note that former students included in the sample were all under IDEA 1997 due to their being exited in 2003, a year prior to the most recent reauthorization. This chapter contains details about the methods that were used to conduct this research study. Descriptions of participants, instrumentation and procedures, variables, and data analyses are included in this chapter. Finally, the statistical procedures employed for testing each null hypothesis are described.

Research Methodology and Design

Previously obtained information from the Alabama Student Tracking System was used as the data base for the current study. The Alabama Student Tacking System is an ongoing data collection process aimed at tracking the post-secondary outcomes of former special education students in Alabama (Browning, Rabren, Whetstone, & Dunn, 2001).

Specifically, the study examined the outcomes of individuals with high incidence disabilities in Alabama one year after exiting high school. Former students with high incidence disabilities in rural school systems were compared with their peers from nonrural school systems. While the Post School Transition Survey provides an array of performance data on student outcomes, only select employment, post secondary education and training, satisfaction, and the perception of preparedness variables were used in the current study.

Participants

The participants in this study were former students with high incidence disabilities from 29 of the 130 school systems in Alabama. These individuals completed the Post-School Transition Survey one year after exiting school during the 2003-2004 school year. Each school system was randomly selected based on criteria set by the Alabama State Department of Education (ALSDE). Annually, the State Director of Special Education Services sends a letter of invitation and participation information to Special Education Coordinators representing 40 of the 130 school systems in the state. These 40 school systems are randomly selected based on a set of 9 criteria as approved by ALSDE. The ALSDE is the only state department that uses nine criteria all others use the federal guidelines which only require three. These criteria serve to identify a sample of school systems that are representative of all the State's public school systems. A total of 119 former students with learning disabilities (LD) or mental retardation (MR) provided high school exit status data on the Alabama Post- School survey. A description of the procedures employed for selecting and identifying the school systems is presented, as

well as, a description is provided of the former special education students that represent the sample for this study.

School system sample. The sample for this study was comprised of former students with high incidence disabilities from 29 public school systems in Alabama. These systems represented one-third of the school systems in Alabama. Of the 29 school systems, 11 and 18 represented nonrural and rural school systems, respectively, based on state population.

Of the 119 former students from the 29 school systems, 71 (60%) were males and 48 (40%) were females. Fifty-five (46%) were Caucasian, 62 (52%) were African American, and 2 (2%) were Hispanic. The former students with high incidence disabilities included in the sample represented the largest disability groups in the state, 78 (66%) students were labeled as having learning disabilities and 41 (34%) as having mental retardation. In terms of type of high school exit option, 25 (21%) were graduated with a high school diploma, 52 (44%) were graduated with the Alabama Occupational Diploma, and 42 (35%) graduated with a Graduation Certificate (see Table 3.) In this study there was one student who graduated with an Advanced High School Diploma; this student's information was coded and included with the results of the students who left high school with a High School Diploma.

Table 3

Student Sample

Variable		N (percentage)
Gender	Male	71 (60%)
	Female	48 (40%)
Race	Caucasian	55 (46%)
	African American	62 (52%)
	Hispanic	2 (2%)
Primary Disability	Specific Learning Disability	78 (66%)
	Mental Retardation	41 (34%)
Exit Option	Alabama High School Diploma	25 (21%)
	Alabama Occupational Diploma	52 (44%)
	Graduation Certificate	42 (35%)
School Type	Nonrural	76 (64%)
	Rural	43 (36%)

Instrumentation and Procedures

The Alabama Student Tracking System obtains both in-school and post-school information annually on a sample of youth and young adults with disabilities in Alabama (Browning et al., 2001). This study was based only on the results derived from the Post School Transition Survey tracking system of former students for the 2003-2004 school year. The Post-School Transition Survey instrument is modeled after the Post-School Indicators Follow-up Questionnaire used in Vermont (Hasazi, Hock & Cravedi-Cheg, 1992). Minor modifications to the Vermont questionnaire were made based on

recommendations from an Alabama Transition Task Force. The instrument, which has been used on an annual basis since 1996, was pilot tested during the early stages of development and has been used since as an instrument of study in Alabama (Dunn & Shumaker, 1997). These annual investigations involve an ongoing data collection process. Select post-school findings from former special education students who exited from one of the participating Alabama public school systems during the 2003-2004 school year are reported.

The Post-School Transition Survey was designed to fulfill two purposes. First, the survey is used to acquire post-school outcome information as well as allow former students with disabilities an opportunity to reflect upon their past high school transition program. Second, it provides information on how successfully or unsuccessfully former students have transitioned into young adulthood. For each participating high school, the Post-School Survey was to be administered to all former students with disabilities who exited high school during the previous school year. However, for this investigation only students with high incidence disabilities who exited during the 2003-2004 school year were investigated because these students were the greatest number of students receiving special education services in Alabama. Each school system was responsible for compiling a list of names and phone numbers of former students with disabilities. The designated personnel from each of the systems were required to make three attempts to contact former students. To assure confidentiality, all surveys were entered into a password-protected data base and results were reported without any identifying information.

The Alabama Post-School Transition Survey includes 13 student demographic information items and 20 survey questions that pertain to one of three general categories:

(a) high school education program and experiences, (b) postschool outcomes, and (c) current quality of life indicators. Former students completing the Post-School Transition Survey were interviewed via a telephone survey by their former teachers or other designated personnel from the high schools within the participating school systems.

These special education teachers, as well as other designated personnel, received training from state department personnel with respect to the nature and importance of standardization procedures of the student tracking system as written in the *Alabama Student Tracking System Administration Manual*. The interviewer was responsible for gathering all demographic and program information about the former student. Then the interviewer and interviewee were given three hours to complete each survey, even though it usually took approximately 30 minutes to complete. The survey had to be completed once the interviewer had begun or the system would automatically close out the session. If for some reason the student was unable to complete the survey in its entirety, the partial information had to be reentered by the interviewer after logging in again to the survey.

The survey developers provided three different sources to support the content validity of the Alabama Student Tracking System Post School Transition Survey. A feasibility task force was formed with professionals within the field of special education that had experience in the transition process. Task force members agreed unanimously on the number and types of items after several meetings. Second, when comparing the content domains of the Alabama Post-School Transition Survey with the National Transition Survey-2 (NLTS-2), six of the eight domains in NLTS-2 were included in the Post School Transition Survey. Third, in a comparison to a study of more than 14 states

that collect data on post school outcomes, the Post School Transition Survey contained all eight of the domains examined (Dunn, Chambers, & Rabren, 2004).

To test for internal reliability, correlational analyses were applied to the 1999-2001 responses from two pairs of same content questions (i. e., employment questions and independence questions). For example, one question used for the employment status pair asked "How do you pay for the things you need?" ("I work" responses were coded as 1, and responses from participants who did not mark "I work" were coded as 0). A second employment status question asked "Do you currently have a job?" (with responses coded as yes=1 and no=0). The other pair examined independence and the same analyses were applied. When examining the correlation coefficients for employment (r =.83) and independence (r =.23) both areas were significant at the .01 level. Because independence is subjective, one could expect the coefficient to be low, but was still statistically significant.

Variables and Data Analysis

This section identifies the variables and data analysis procedures for each research question. Data analysis for the Post-School Survey of former students with high incidence disabilities (learning disabilities or mental retardation) one year after school completion was conducted using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 13 computer software program (SPSS, Inc., 2005).

Research Question One: Postschool Engagement

Research question one asked: "To what extent is there a difference in engagement (employment and post secondary school or training) of high school completers based on

their (a) disability (learning disability or mental retardation), (b) exit option (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate) and (c) school type (nonrural or rural)?

Engagement refers to the student being involved in employment, postsecondary school, vocational training or any combination of these (e.g., part-time employment and postsecondary education). For *disability,* former students who participated in the study were classified as either being labeled as having a learning disability or mental retardation, based on Alabama State Department of Education criteria. *Exit Option* was defined by the type of exit document (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate) with which the student completed high school. The student's primary disability and exit option information were obtained from the demographics portion of the survey. The *school type* was categorized as either nonrural or rural as indicated by the requirements used by the National Center for Education Statistics. Two items from the survey were used for the first research question. The questions were:

a. Since you left high school, have you had additional training in… technical school…?, 2-year college…?, 4-year college…?
b. Do you have a job?

If a student did not respond "yes" to any of the engagement questions, he or she was considered "not engaged". Chi-square statistical procedures were used. Chi-square is calculated by comparing the actual, or observed, frequencies in each cell in the table to the frequencies one would expect if there were no relationship at all between the two variables in the populations from which the sample was drawn. In other words, Chi-

square compares what actually happened to what hypothetically would have happened if "all other things were equal" (the null hypothesis of the differences). If the actual results are statistically different from the predicted results, one can reject the null hypothesis and claim that a statistically significant difference exists between the variables (Spatz, 1993).

Research Question Two: Satisfaction with Life Now

Research question two was "To what extent is there a difference in the satisfaction with life now of high school programs and experiences of high school completers based on their (a) disability (learning disability or mental retardation), (b) exit option (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate) and (c) school type (nonrural or rural)?" Satisfaction with post school life now was determined by the former student indicating "much", "some", or "not at all" to the following survey items:

a. How satisfied are you with… your education/training…?,where you live…?, your friends…?,your family life…?, your community life…?, your free time…?, your transportation…?,your decision making…?

For this question, to measure satisfaction with life now the "much" response was coded as "2", "some" coded as "1" and "not at all" coded as "0". The Mann-Whitney *U* statistical procedure was performed to examine satisfaction with life now and disability (2A) and satisfaction of life now and school type (2C). The Mann-Whitney *U* procedure is a non-parametric statistical significance test used with ordinal data. It is used to determine whether two sets of data based on two independent samples come from the same population (i.e., primary disability and school type). The Kruskal-Wallis *H* test was preformed when evaluating exit option because the independent variable had three levels.

This is the nonparametric equivalent of the one-way ANOVA. It tests whether or not several independent samples come from the same population (i.e., Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate) (Cronk, 2006).

Research Question Three: Perception of Preparedness

Research question three asked: "To what extent is there a difference in perception of preparedness of school programs and services of high school completers based on their (a) disability (learning disability or mental retardation), (b) exit option (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate) and (c) school type (nonrural or rural)?" The following items from the survey were used to measure perception of preparedness of school programs and services:

a. Did your high school prepare you for what you are doing now?
b. How much did your high school prepare you to…get a job…?, be a good worker…?, get along with others…?, make friends…?, mange your money…?, cook and clean…?, be a part of your community…?

For this question, to measure the perception of preparedness of school programs and services the "much" response was coded as "2", "some" coded as "1" and "not at all" coded as "0". The Mann-Whitney *U* statistic was calculated for primary disability and school type. The Kruskal-Wallis *H* was used to measure exit option because it was the appropriate analysis to use when examining an independent variable with three levels (i.e., Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate).

Summary

This investigation was based on preexisting data obtained from the Alabama Student Tracking System. The participants in this survey were former special education students from 29 public school systems in Alabama. Data from the 2004-2005 (i.e., students who exited school during the 2003-2004 school year) collections were used in the current investigation. The variables that were used were *primary disability, school type*, *post school engagement, exit option, satisfaction of life now* and *perception of preparedness of school programs and services*. Three research questions were identified along with the statistical analyses that were used for measurement.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to identify factors associated with the engagement of former students with high incidence disabilities in Alabama from nonrural or rural school systems who exited from high school during the 2003-2004 school year. This study investigated whether there would be significant differences in the type of engagement of individuals with high incidence disabilities by primary disability, exit option and school type. Second, this study examined whether a significant difference existed in student satisfaction of life now by primary disability, exit option and school type. This study also examined the differences between student perception of preparedness of school programs and services by primary disability, exit option and school type.

Preexisting data from the Alabama Post-School Transition Survey of former students with disabilities who exited high school in Alabama during the 2003-2004 school year were analyzed. The dependent variables were *postschool engagement, satisfaction with life now* and *perception of preparedness of school programs and services.* Independent variables were *primary disability, exit option* and *school type*. Chi-Square, Mann –Whitney *U* and Kruskal-Wallis *H* statistical procedures were used to test the null hypotheses. Null hypotheses were formulated for each research question, and the results are presented for each null hypothesis. The remainder of this chapter is a

discussion of the results of the analysis. Analyses were performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 13 computer software program (SPSS Inc., 2003).

Data Analysis Results

Research Question One: Postschool Engagement

To what extent is there a difference in engagement (employment and enrollment in postsecondary education or training) of high school completers based on their (a) disability (learning disability or mental retardation), (b) exit option (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate) and (c) school type (nonrural or rural)? The following null hypothesis was formulated to respond to the first research question:

> $H_{01(a,b,c)}$: There are no statistically significant differences in postschool engagement of high school completers based on their (a) disability (learning disability or mental retardation), (b) exit option (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate) and (c) school type (nonrural or rural).

The chi-square statistic was calculated to assess whether or not differences existed in the observed and expected frequencies for engaged or not engaged former students based on (a) primary disability, (b) exit option and (c) school type. The alpha level was set at .05.

Table 4

Frequency and Percent of Engaged and Not Engaged by Primary Disability, Exit Option and School Type

Variable	Employed n = 98 (82)	Technical n= 11 (9)	2-year n= 10 (8)	4-year n= 5 (4)	Not Engaged n= 17 (14)
Primary Disability					
LD (n = 78)	72 (92)	9 (12)	10 (13)	5 (6)	2 (3)
MR (n = 41)	26 (63)	2 (5)	0 (0)	0 (0)	15 (37)
Exit Option					
High School Diploma (n =25)	23 (92)	3 (12)	8 (32)	4 (16)	0 (0)
AO D (n = 52)	48 (92)	5 (10)	1 (2)	0 (0)	3 (6)
Graduation Certificate (n= 42)	27(64)	3 (7)	1 (2)	1 (2)	14 (33)
School Type					
Nonrural (n = 76)	62 (81)	8 (10)	7 (9)	2 (2)	11 (14)
Rural (n = 43)	36 (83)	3 (6)	3 (6)	3 (6)	6 (13)

Numbers in parentheses indicate percentages.

Percentages for engagement could be greater than 100 because participants selected all that apply.

$H_{01(a)}$ examined differences in the observed and expected frequency of postschool engagement (employment or school enrollment) of high school completers based on their primary disability (learning disability or mental retardation). A Chi-Square goodness of fit test was calculated comparing the frequency of postschool engagement of each former student by primary disability. It was hypothesized that each option would occur an equal number of times. A statistically significant deviation from the hypothesized value was

found for employment (χ^2 (1) = 15.223, p< .05) and enrollment in 2-year college (χ^2 (1) = 5.795, p < .05) for individuals with learning disability and mental retardation (see Table 5). Specifically, individuals with LD were employed and enrolled in 2-year college at a statistically significant greater rate than those with MR (see Table 6). There were no statistically significant differences for the expected and observed frequencies in enrollment in technical school (χ^2 (1) = 1.459, p < .05) and 4-year college (χ^2 (1) = 2.773, p < .05) for this sample.

Table 5

Pearson Chi Square Results of Postschool Engagement by Primary Disability

	χ^2	*Df*	P
Employment	15.223	1	.0001*
Technical school	1.459	1	.227
2 year college	5.795	1	.016**
4 year college	2.773	1	.096

*p < .001

**p < .05

Table 6

Frequency and Percentage of Postschool Engagement by Primary Disability

Variable	Employed n = 98 (82)	Technical n = 11 (9)	2-year n = 10 (8)	4-year n = 5 (4)
LD (n = 78)	72 (92)	9 (12)	10 (13)	5 (6)
MR (n = 41)	26 (63)	2 (5)	0 (0)	0 (0)

Numbers in parentheses indicate percentages.

Percentages for engagement could be greater than 100 because participants selected all that apply.

$H_{01(b)}$ examined differences in the observed and expected frequencies of postschool engagement (employment or school enrollment) of high school completers based on their Exit option (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate). A chi-square goodness of fit test was calculated comparing the frequency of postschool engagement of each former student by exit option. It was hypothesized that each option would occur an equal number of times. A significant deviation from the hypothesized value was found for employment (χ^2 (2) = 22.472, p < .001), technical school (χ^2 (2) = 10.427, p < .05), 2-year college (χ^2 (2) = 29.787, p < .001) and 4-year college (χ^2 (2) = 12.214, p < .05) (see Table 7).

Table 7

Pearson Chi-Square Results of Postschool Engagement by Exit Option

	χ^2	*Df*	P (2-sided)
Employment	22.472	2	.001*
Technical School	10.427	2	.034**
2 year college	29.787	2	.001*
4 year college	12.214	2	.016**

*p < .001

**p < .05

Former students who left school with a High School Diploma (92%) and an Occupational Diploma (92%) were employed more frequently than those who left with a Graduation Certificate (64%). Also, individuals who left school with a High School Diploma were enrolled in 2-year (32%) or 4-year (16%) college more frequently than those with an Occupational Diploma (2-year = 2% or 4-year = 2%) or those who exited with a Graduation Certificate, (2-year = 2% or 4-year = 0%) as reported in Table 8. An additional interesting finding is that there was very little difference in the frequency of attendance at a technical school by exit option, (High School Diploma = 12%, Occupational Diploma = 10% and Graduation Certificate = 7%) even though there was a statistically significant difference in technical school and exit option.

Table 8

Frequency and Percent of Postschool Engagement by Exit Option

Variable	Employment n = 98 (82)	Technical School n = 11(9)	2-year College n = 10(8)	4-year College n = 5(4)
High School Diploma N = 25	23 (92)	3 (12)	8 (32)	4 (16)
Occupational Diploma N = 52	48 (92)	5 (10)	1 (2)	0 (0)
Graduation Certificate N = 42	27 (64)	3 (7)	1 (2)	1 (2)

Numbers in parentheses indicate percentages

$H_{01(c)}$ examined differences in the expected and observed frequencies of postschool engagement (employment or post secondary school enrollment) of high school completers based on their school type (nonrural or rural). A chi-square goodness of fit test was calculated comparing the differences in expected and observed frequencies of postschool engagement by school type. It was hypothesized that there would be no difference. No significant deviations from the hypothesized values were found for employment (χ^2 (2) = .046, p > .05), technical school (χ^2 (2) = .509, p > .05), 2-year college (χ^2 (2) = .241, p > .05) or 4-year college (χ^2 (2) = 1.162, p > .05) (see Table 9).

Table 9

Pearson Chi-Square Results of Postschool Engagement by School Type

	χ^2	*Df*	P(2-sided)
Employment	.046	1	.831
Technical School	.509	1	.475
2 year college	.241	1	.623
4 year college	1.162	1	.281

The frequencies of the postschool engagement of former students in employment were very similar, nonrural (81%) vs. rural (83%). Percentages for enrollment in technical school (11% vs. 7%), 2-year (9% vs. 7%), 4-year college (3% vs. 7%) were very comparable for former students who had attended nonrural or rural schools, respectively (see Table 10).

Table 10

Frequency and Percent of Postschool Engagement of Students by School Type

	Employment n = 98(82)	Technical School n = 11(9)	2-year College n = 10(8)	4-year College n = 5(4)
Nonrural (N = 76)	62 (81)	8 (10)	7 (9)	2 (2)
Rural (N = 43)	36 (83)	3 (6)	3 (6)	3 (6)

Numbers in parentheses indicate percentages

Research Question Two: Satisfaction with Life Now

To what extent is there a difference in satisfaction with life now of high school completers based on their (a) disability (learning disability or mental retardation), (b) exit option (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate) and (c) school type (nonrural or rural)? The second null hypothesis was stated as follows:

$H_{02(a,b,c)}$: There are no statistically significant differences in the satisfaction with life now of high school completers based on their: (a) disability (learning disability or mental retardation), (b) exit option (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate) and (c) school type (nonrural or rural). A Mann-Whitney *U* statistical procedure was performed to ascertain differences in satisfaction with life now based on (a) primary disability and (c) school type. The alpha level was set at .05. A Kruskal-Wallis *H* statistical procedure was performed to examine differences in satisfaction of life now based on exit option. These analyses are the appropriate nonparametric statistical procedures for data that do not meet the assumptions of the *t* test, such as interval data (Cronk, 2006).

$H_{02(a)}$ examined differences in the satisfaction with life now of high school completers based on their primary disability (learning disability or mental retardation). Results of the analysis revealed no statistically significant differences in satisfaction with life now for individuals with mental retardation and learning disability (See Table 11).

Table 11

Results of Mann-Whitney U for Satisfaction with Life Now by Primary Disability

Variable	*U*	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Satisfied with your education/ training	1469.000	.381
Satisfied with where you live	1528.000	.624
Satisfied with your friends	1461.000	.310
Satisfied with your family life	1465.000	.308
Satisfied with your community life	1559.00	.783
Satisfied with your free time	1498.000	.499
Satisfied with your transportation	1377.000	.160
Satisfied with your decisions	1493.500	.490

Mean ranks information for satisfaction based on primary disability are presented in Table 12.

Table 12

Mean Rank of Satisfaction with Life Now by Primary Disability

Variable	Primary Disability	N	Mean Rank
Satisfied with your education/ training	LD	78	58.33
	MR	41	63.17
Satisfied with where you live	LD	78	59.09
	MR	41	61.73
Satisfied with your friends	LD	78	61.77
	MR	41	56.63
Satisfied with your family life	LD	78	61.72
	MR	41	56.73
Satisfied with your community life	LD	78	60.51
	MR	41	59.02
Satisfied with your free time	LD	78	58.71
	MR	41	62.45
Satisfied with your transportation	LD	78	62.85
	MR	41	54.59
Satisfied with your decisions	LD	78	61.35
	MR	41	57.35

$H_{02(b)}$ examined differences in satisfaction of life now of high school completers based on their exit option (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate). Table 13 reports the results of the analysis. There was a statistically significant difference in satisfaction of life now by exit option for one aspect of post-school life, transportation (H (2) = 7.636, $p < .05$). Those high school completers who exited school with a High School Diploma reported the highest level of satisfaction with life now was with their transportation. Students who graduated with an

Alabama Occupational Diploma (AOD) reported the lowest levels of satisfaction. Significant results of the Kruskal-Wallis *H* test indicates that at least one of the groups is different from at least one other group.

Table 13

Results of Kruskal-Wallis H for Satisfaction with Life Now by Exit Option

Variable	χ^2	*df*	P (2-tailed)
Satisfied with your education/ training	.071	2	.965
Satisfied with where you live	2.380	2	.304
Satisfied with your friends	4.589	2	.101
Satisfied with your family life	1.995	2	.369
Satisfied with your community life	1.649	2	.438
Satisfied with your free time	1.590	2	.452
Satisfied with your transportation	7.636	2	.022*
Satisfied with your decisions	1.395	2	.498

Note. *p < .05.

The mean ranks for satisfaction with life now by exit option are reported in Table 14.

Table 14

Mean Ranks of Satisfaction with Life Now by Exit Option

Variable	Exit Option	N	Mean Rank
Satisfied with your education/ training	HSD	42	58.98
	AOD	52	59.81
	Graduation Certificate	25	60.85
Satisfied with where you live	HSD	25	54.64
	AOD	52	58.58
	Graduation Certificate	42	64.95
Satisfied with your friends	HSD	25	68.36
	AOD	52	60.63
	Graduation Certificate	42	54.25
Satisfied with your family life	HSD	25	66.36
	AOD	52	58.12
	Graduation Certificate	42	58.55
Satisfied with your community life	HSD	25	65.78
	AOD	52	59.88
	Graduation Certificate	42	56.71
Satisfied with your free time	HSD	25	53.58
	AOD	52	61.88
	Graduation Certificate	42	61.50
Satisfied with your transportation	HSD	25	74.82
	AOD	52	55.01
	Graduation Certificate	42	57.36
Satisfied with your decisions	HSD	25	65.96
	AOD	52	57.54
	Graduation Certificate	42	59.50

Table 15 reports the results of the Mann-Whitney *U* statistical procedures that were used to test hypothesis $H_{02(c).}$ This hypothesis tests differences in satisfaction with life now of high school completers based on their school type (nonrural or rural). Results of the analysis reported no statistically significant differences in satisfaction with life now for individuals with high incidence disabilities based on type of school.

Table 15

Results of Mann-Whitney U Test for Satisfaction with Life Now by School Type

Variable	*U*	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Satisfied with your education/ training	1405.50	.128
Satisfied with where you live	1448.00	.203
Satisfied with your friends	1562.50	.603
Satisfied with your family life	1528.00	.425
Satisfied with your community life	1519.00	.433
Satisfied with your free time	1433.00	.181
Satisfied with your transportation	1548.50	.592
Satisfied with your decisions	1511.00	.426

Mean ranks of students' satisfaction with life now by school type are presented in Table 16.

Table 16

Mean Ranks for Satisfaction with Life Now by School Type

Variable	Exit Option	N	Mean Rank
Satisfied with your education/ training	Nonrural	76	56.99
	Rural	43	65.31
Satisfied with where you live	Nonrural	76	62.45
	Rural	43	55.67
Satisfied with your friends	Nonrural	76	59.06
	Rural	43	61.66
Satisfied with your family life	Nonrural	76	61.39
	Rural	43	57.53
Satisfied with your community life	Nonrural	76	58.49
	Rural	43	62.67
Satisfied with your free time	Nonrural	76	57.36
	Rural	43	64.67
Satisfied with your transportation	Nonrural	76	61.13
	Rural	43	58.01
Satisfied with your decisions	Nonrural	76	58.38
	Rural	43	62.86

Research Question Three: Perception of Preparedness of School Programs and Services

Research question three was: "To what extent is there a difference in perception of preparedness of school programs and services of high school completers based on their (a) disability (learning disability or mental retardation), (b) exit option (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate and (c) school type (nonrural or rural)?" The third null hypothesis was stated as follows:

$H_{03(a,b,c)}$: There are no statistically significant differences in the perception of preparedness of school programs and services of high school completers based on their (a) disability (learning disability or mental retardation), (b) exit option (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate) and (c) school type (nonrural or rural).

For this hypothesis a Mann-Whitney *U* statistical analysis was performed to investigate differences in perception of preparedness of school programs and services by high school programs, by primary disability, and by school type. A Kruskal-Wallis *H* statistical procedure was performed to examine differences in perception of preparedness of school programs and services based on exit option. The alpha level set at .05.

H_{03} (a) examined differences in the perception of preparedness of school programs and services of high school completers based on their primary disability (learning disability or mental retardation). Results of the analysis revealed statistically significant differences in perceptions of preparedness of school programs and services for individuals with mental retardation and learning disability only in the area of cooking and cleaning ($U = 1041.50$, $p<.001$). Individuals with mental retardation perceived that they were more prepared to cook and clean than their peers with learning disabilities (see Table 17).

Table 17

Results of Mann-Whitney U for Perception of Preparedness of School Programs and Services by Primary Disability

Variable	*U*	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Prepared for what doing now	1590.50	.937
Prepared to get a job	1455.00	.346
Prepared to be a good worker	1477.50	.403
Prepared to make friends	1413.00	.176
Prepared to make decisions	1381.50	.135
Prepared to mange money	1404.00	.217
Prepared to cook and clean	1041.50	.001*
Prepared to be a part of community	1424.50	.268

* $p < .05$

Table 18 reports the mean ranks of the perception of preparedness of school programs and services by primary disability.

Table 18

Mean Ranks of the Perception of Preparedness of School Programs and Services by Primary Disability

Variable	Primary Disability	N	Mean Rank
Prepared for what doing now	LD	78	60.11
	MR	41	59.79
Prepared to get a job	LD	78	61.85
	MR	41	56.49
Prepared to be a good worker	LD	78	61.56
	MR	41	57.04
Prepared to make friends	LD	78	62.38
	MR	41	55.46
Prepared to make decisions	LD	78	62.79
	MR	41	54.70
Prepared to mange money	LD	78	62.50
	MR	41	55.24
Prepared to cook and clean	LD	78	52.85
	MR	41	73.60
Prepared to be a part of community	LD	78	57.76
	MR	41	64.26

$H_{03(b)}$ examined differences in perception of preparedness of school programs and services of high school completers based on their exit option (Alabama High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate). Individuals with high incidence disabilities who completed school with an Occupational Diploma had the highest ratings for preparation for what they are doing now (H (2) = 6.199, p < . 05), getting a job (H (2) = 12.995, p < .005), being a good worker (H (2) = 13.973, p < .001), making friends (H (2) = 11.098, p < .005), managing money (H (2) = 12.567, p < .005), and being a part of their community (H (2) = 14.259, p < .001). In addition, former

students who left high school with a Graduation Certificate had the highest ratings for being prepared to cook and clean (H (2) = 15.123, p < .001) as reported in Table 19.

Table 19

Results of Kruskal-Wallis H for Perception of Preparedness of School Programs and Services by Exit Option

Variable	χ^2	*df*	P. (2-tailed)
Prepared for what doing now	6.199	2	.045*
Prepared to get a job	12.995	2	.002**
Prepared to be a good worker	13.973	2	.001***
Prepared to make friends	11.098	2	.004**
Prepared to make decisions	7.645	2	.022*
Prepared to mange money	12.567	2	.002**
Prepared to cook and clean	15.123	2	.001***
Prepared to be a part of community	14.259	2	.001***

*p < .05

**p < .005

***p < .001

Mean ranks information for perception of preparedness of school programs and services based on exit option is presented in Table 20.

Table 20

Mean Ranks of Perception of Preparedness of School Programs and Services by Exit Option

Variable	Exit Option	N	Mean Rank
Prepared for what doing now	HSD	25	58.98
	AOD	52	65.07
	Graduation Certificate	42	54.33
Prepared to get a job	HSD	25	47.82
	AOD	52	70.76
	Graduation Certificate	42	53.93
Prepared to be a good worker	HSD	25	46.04
	AOD	52	70.15
	Graduation Certificate	42	55.74
Prepared to be make friends	HSD	25	52.40
	AOD	52	69.19
	Graduation Certificate	42	53.14
Prepared to make decisions	HSD	25	56.02
	AOD	52	67.94
	Graduation Certificate	42	52.54
Prepared to mange money	HSD	25	50.80
	AOD	52	71.23
	Graduation Certificate	42	51.57
Prepared to cook and clean	HSD	25	37.56
	AOD	52	65.35
	Graduation Certificate	42	66.74
Prepared to be a part of community	HSD	25	42.30
	AOD	52	69.98
	Graduation Certificate	42	58.18

$H_{03(c)}$ examined differences in the perception of preparedness of school programs and services of high school completers based on their school type (nonrural or rural). Results of the analysis indicated statistically significant differences in the perception of preparedness of school programs and services of individuals with high incidence disabilities based on school type for five of the eight areas (see Table 21). Individuals with high incidence disabilities who had attended a rural school perceived themselves as

more prepared to be a good worker (U = 1277.00, p < .05), make decisions (U = 1277.00, p < .05), manage money (U = 1275.00, p < .05), cook and clean (U = 1195.00, p < .01), and be a part of their community (U = 1269.00, p < .05) than their peers who had attended a nonrural school.

Table 21

Mann-Whitney U Results for Perception of Preparedness of School Programs and Services by School Type

Variable	*U*	Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)
Prepared for what doing now	1566.00	.535
Prepared to get a job	1332.50	.051
Prepared to be a good worker	1277.00	.015*
Prepared to make friends	1493.00	.311
Prepared to make decisions	1277.00	.015*
Prepared to mange money	1275.50	.025*
Prepared to cook and clean	1195.00	.010**
Prepared to be a part of community	1269.00	.022*

*p < .05

**p < .01

Table 22 reports the mean ranks of perception of preparedness of school programs and services of former students with high incidence disabilities by school type. Former students with high incidence disabilities from rural schools perceived themselves to be more prepared than their peers who had attended nonrural schools in all areas of

functional, social and community skills. All but three areas were significant [prepared for what doing now (U = .535, p > .05), prepared to get a job (U = .051, p > .05), and prepared to make friends (U = .311, p > .05].

Table 22

Mean Ranks of Perception of Preparedness of School Programs and Services by School Type

Variable	School Type	N	Mean Rank
Prepared for what doing now	Nonrural	76	59.11
	Rural	43	61.58
Prepared to get a job	Nonrural	76	56.03
	Rural	43	67.01
Prepared to be a good worker	Nonrural	76	55.30
	Rural	43	68.30
Prepared to be make friends	Nonrural	76	58.14
	Rural	43	63.28
Prepared to make decisions	Nonrural	76	55.30
	Rural	43	68.30
Prepared to mange money	Nonrural	76	55.28
	Rural	43	68.34
Prepared to cook and clean	Nonrural	76	54.22
	Rural	43	70.21
Prepared to be a part of community	Nonrural	76	55.20
	Rural	43	68.49

Summary

Significant differences were noted between the postschool engagement (employment or enrollment in postsecondary education and or training) of high school completers and the primary disability (learning disability or mental retardation) and exit status (High School Diploma, Alabama Occupational Diploma, or Graduation Certificate). Satisfaction of life now was found to be statistically significant by exit option in one area, transportation. Finally, significant differences were also observed between the perception of preparedness of school programs and services (dependent variable) by primary disability, exit option and school type (independent variables).

V. DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study involved 119 former students with high incidence disabilities who were enrolled in special education programs in Alabama during the 2003-2004 school year. Results from the Alabama Post-School Transition Survey were used to measure *postschool engagement, satisfaction with life now and perception of preparedness of school programs and services*. The independent variables included in this study were *primary disability, exit option* and *school type*.

Discussion of Findings

In the previous chapter, results obtained by testing hypotheses were presented for this study. The hypotheses were examined with regard to whether there was a statistically significant difference between *postschool engagement, satisfaction with life now* and *perception of preparedness of school programs and services* of students with high incidence disabilities by *primary disability, exit option* and *school type.* In this chapter, discussion regarding the statistically significant results, conclusions, limitations and recommendations for further research are presented.

Postschool Engagement

Overall, the results of this study related to postschool engagement are encouraging. Eighty-six percent of the participants were engaged in employment and/or

post school education or training one year after completing high school. This percentage is high when compared to other studies (Dunn & Shumaker, 1997; Wagner & Blackorby, 2005) and significant differences were noted for some of the variables.

Postschool engagement and disability. In this study, 82% of the participants were employed. However, significant differences in employment rate by primary disability were noted (LD = 92%, MR = 63%). As well, the results of the analysis investigating postschool engagement by primary disability indicated that there were statistically significant differences in enrollment in 2-year colleges for individuals with learning disability and mental retardation (LD = 13%, MR = 0%). However, there were no statistically significant differences in enrollment in technical schools (LD = 12%, MR = 5%) and 4-year college (LD = 6%, MR = 0%). In addition, former students who were MR were more likely to be unengaged (37%) than their peers with LD (3%).

Previous studies (Cameto, Levine, & Wagner, 2004; Morningstar, 1997; Wagner et al., 1992, 1993; Wehman, 2001) have noted differences between individuals with LD and MR with regard to employment. For example, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 reported that significantly more out-of-school youth with learning disabilities (76%) were reported to work for pay since leaving high school than their peers with mental retardation (34%). A possible explanation for the difference in postschool engagement by primary disability may be due to the severity of the two types of disabilities and the differences in the disabilities.

As reported by Johnson et al. (1997) in their investigation of 398 high school graduates with severe disabilities, 48% were not employed or pursuing postsecondary education. The 2004 National Organization on Disability (NOD) survey found

substantially lower rates of employment for those with more significant disabilities. One could interpret this as an indication that the severity of one's disability can be linked to higher rates of being unengaged. The results of this study relating to differences in postschool engagement between students with LD and MR are not expected because students with more severe disabilities have been found to have lower enrollments in postsecondary education and training programs as well as lower rates of competitive employment.

Postschool engagement and exit option. Completing high school with a higher exit option (i.e., High School Diploma and Occupational Diploma) proved to be significant for former students. For example, the results indicated that individuals who left schools with a Graduation Certificate (33%) were more likely to be unengaged than their peers who left school with a High School Diploma (0%) or an Occupational Diploma (6%). Individuals who left school with a High School Diploma were enrolled in 2-year (32%) or 4-year College (16%) at a significantly higher rate than those who exited with an Occupational Diploma (2-year = 2% or 4-year = 0%) or a Graduation Certificate (2-year = 2%; 4-year = 2%).

Also results indicated that the majority of these former students who left high school with higher exit options were employed (82%). For example, those who left with a High School Diploma or an Occupational Diploma were employed at a significantly higher rate (92%) than those who left school with a Graduation Certificate (64%). This is can be unexpected given that the High School Diploma prepares students for postsecondary education and/or employment and the Occupational Diploma prepares students for more functional and employment skills. These findings are very similar to

the results of the NLTS-2. Individuals in NLTS-2 who completed school were employed at a rate of (75%). It is important to note that no matter the exit option, the majority of the former students were engaged (86% were employed and 21% were in post secondary education or training).

Postschool engagement and school type. The analysis did not yield a statistically significant difference in the postschool engagement of students by school type. Even though the results did not yield statistically significant differences there are some findings worth mentioning. Specifically, the employment rates are generally consistent with previous research in our state. For instance, in this study overall 86% of former students from nonrural schools and 87% of former students from rural schools were engaged. The results of Shumaker and Dunn's 1997 study comparing the outcomes of students from an urban and rural school system were slightly lower, indicating that 81% of former students in nonrural schools were employed and 72% from rural schools were employed.

Satisfaction with Life Now

Former students rated their level of satisfaction with their life now using a scale of 0-2 (0 = no satisfaction, 1 = some satisfaction and 2 = much satisfaction). An overall, high level of satisfaction (M = 1.84) with their life now was reported. This suggests that on average, the majority of former students with high incidence disabilities (Learning disability or Mental Retardation) were satisfied with the quality of their lives now. Although, research examining individuals with disabilities' satisfaction with life now is limited, these ratings are more positive than other research.

For example, the NOD/Harris Poll (2000) reported that 63% of individuals with disabilities were "satisfied with life in general". A possible explanation for lower ratings

in the NOD/Harris Survey is that the NOD/Harris survey sample includes persons from all disability categories, as well as all ages.

Satisfaction with life now and disability. The analysis yielded no statistically significance differences in the satisfaction with life now of former students with high incidence disabilities by primary disability. For students with LD the percentage of individuals who were either *some* or *much* satisfied with eight life areas ranged from 95%–100%. For students with MR, the range was 90%–100%.

Satisfaction with life now and exit option. There was not a statistically significant difference in satisfaction with life now by exit option. The percentage of those who left school with a High School Diploma who indicated that they were *some* or *much* satisfied in all of the eight categories of satisfaction with life now ranged from 96%–100%. For those individuals who left school with a Graduation Certificate, their range was 88%–100%. While the range for those who completed school with an Occupational Diploma was 96%–100%.

Satisfaction with life now and school type. The results of the analysis by school type did not yield any statistically significant differences. Specifically, the percentage of former students from both school types who were some or much satisfied ranged from 93% to 100%.

Perception of Preparedness of School Programs and Services

Former students rated their perception of preparedness of school programs and services based on a scale of 0-2 (0 = no preparation, 1 = some preparation and 2 = much preparation). An overall, high feeling of preparedness (M = 1.52) was reported. This would suggest that on average, the majority of former students with high incidence

disabilities perceived themselves to be somewhat or very prepared by their high school programs and services to handle postsecondary responsibilities. Although, little research has been conducted that examines student perception of preparedness for school programs and services, this is an important area of study. For example, in a study comparing students with high incidence disabilities who dropped out and those who remained in school, Dunn et al. (2004) found students who stayed in school were much more likely to say they felt high school prepared them for what they wanted to do after leaving school.

Perception of preparedness of school programs and services by primary disability. The results yielded statistically significant differences by primary disability for only one area. Specifically, significantly more students with MR indicated school prepared them to cook and clean. The area for which the rankings were lowest overall was "preparation for what doing now." Eighty-six percent of students with LD and 85% of students with MR indicated they felt some or much prepared for what they are doing now. In all other areas, the percentage of students by disability indicating they felt prepared was 90% or above.

Perception of preparedness of school programs and services by exit option .The results of analysis by exit option indicated statistically significant differences in the perception of preparedness of school programs and services by exit option for all areas. Those who graduated with an AOD had the highest mean ranking for all areas, except one, cooking and cleaning, for which students who were graduated with a certificate had the highest mean rank. It is interesting to note that only 28% of students who were graduated with a High School Diploma felt school prepared them to cook and clean.

These results suggest that there is a difference in the curriculum requirements for students in the various exit options.

Perception of preparedness of school programs and services by school type. Students from rural schools had higher rankings for perception of preparedness for all areas. The differences were statistically significant for being prepared to be a good worker, make decisions, manage money, cook and clean and be a part of the community. Interestingly, 100% of students from rural areas felt that school prepared them to get a job, be a good worker and make decisions. The results indicated that there are some statistically significant differences in the perception of preparation of school programs and services of former students with high incidence disabilities by school type.

In summary, these results would indicate that the students who are involved in programs that focus on daily living and occupational skills believe they are better prepared to do functional, independent living and decision making skills after high school completion. It would also be fair to say that students who left high school with an Occupational Diploma and attended a rural school believe they are more prepared to participate in more aspects of functional and social life skills than their peers who left high school with a High School Diploma from a nonrural school. Finally, results from outcome-based research from the late 1980s up through the early 2000s have suggested that what secondary special education students need from their school programs is a continued focus on post school outcomes (i.e., employment, enrollment in postsecondary education or training).

Conclusions

The Alabama Post-School Transition Survey has adequate validity and reliability. The purpose of its inclusion in this research study was to increase the research effort on the issue of transition in Alabama. The Post-School Transition Survey was utilized to determine which factors (i.e., primary disability, exit option or school type) in the transition process were related to the significant differences among the postschool engagement of former students with high incidence disabilities, satisfaction with life now, and perception of preparedness of school programs and services. From the data obtained it would appear that significant differences do exist in the postschool engagement of students by primary disability and exit option, but not by school type. Students who were identified as having a LD were more likely than their peers with MR to exit school with more desired exit options, as well as be engaged in employment and/or postsecondary education or training.

In addition, data were utilized to determine if there were statistically significant differences in the satisfaction with life now of former students based on primary disability, exit option, and school type. As reported by responses from the Post-School Transition Survey, results indicated that statistically significant differences exist in the life satisfaction of life now of students by exit option in only one area, transportation. Former students who were identified as leaving school with a High School Diploma indicated they were more satisfied in more areas than their peers who left with any other exit option (i.e., Occupational Diploma or Graduation Certificate).

Former students with MR perceived themselves as more prepared to cook and clean than their peers with LD. Also those former students who exited high school with

an Occupational Diploma perceived that they were more prepared for more post school life in more categories than any of their peers who completed school with any other exit option. This result is also true for former students who had attended a rural school versus those who had attended a nonrural school. Rural school attendees perceived that they were more prepared than their peers in the majority of the categories as well.

Limitations

There were several limitations in this study that should be considered. The first is generalizability. The state of Alabama has been emphasizing the need for improved outcomes for students with disabilities since the mid 1980s. In Alabama, substantial efforts have been made to improve secondary programs and outcomes for students with disabilities prior to and since the implementation of a grant in 1996, and after to implement changes in the school systems in Alabama. The state of Alabama is recognized nationally for efforts and practices in the area of transition. The achievements due to this grant could account for the increasingly positive outcomes of former students with disabilities that have participated in the various programs in Alabama.

In addition, the subject selection process could potentially affect the representativeness of the sample due to the voluntary nature of participation. Former students could have declined participating in the study at any point throughout the data collection process. Perhaps those who participated in the study were students who had more positive school experiences, which would account for the overall positive results found in study.

Information that was obtained could have been reported inaccurately due to the fact that the person who interviewed the former students was a former teacher. For example, participants might have chosen to report more positive outcomes to someone who was influential or important to them during their high school years. Also, the self-report nature of the instrument could have influenced results.

This study investigated only those students with high incidence disabilities and not all of the thirteen disabilities recognized by the Alabama State Department of Education. The results can be used only by others who are investigating students in two (MR and LD) of the thirteen categories. Including all of the disability categories could have yielded some additional differences because research supports that there are differences in the engagement of students by disability category (Dunn & Schumaker, 1997; Sitlington & Frank, 1994; Wagner & Blackorby, 2005; Wagner et al., 2005).

Finally, due to the fact there are numerous definitions of the word "rural", the generalization of the interpretation of these results may be limited to those systems that meet the criteria for rural used in this investigation.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future research are presented in this section. The first recommendation is to further investigate the engagement of former students within the rural schools. The investigation would consider additional demographic variables (i.e. social economic status, race, gender, or least restrictive environment) and other external factors (i.e., lack of opportunities, parental involvement or resources) beyond the school curriculum that could increase or decrease the likelihood of students being engaged upon

completion of high school. The review of the literature suggested that the outcomes for students with disabilities from rural areas are less positive than their peers from nonrural areas. One of the criticisms of this previous research is that often only a single community is studied. Thus, the outcomes could be a function of the particular demographic, social, etc., characteristics of that community. In this study, the former students came from 18 different rural communities.

Future investigations could also include the influence of the changes in the law. For instance, the additional requirements of *No Child Left Behind* are forcing school systems to focus more on academic skills rather than skills that are more functional. Results have shown that over time, the functional skills that are being included in curricula, such as the Occupational Diploma, are related to the increasing numbers of former students with disabilities being engaged after leaving high school. The question may be whether or not functional skills will be included with more academically focused curriculum.

The impact of the change in the curriculum requirements of the Occupational Diploma going from functional and vocational skills to those that are focused on same academic skills as the general High School Diploma should be examined. It has been noted that individuals with disabilities require more training and instruction in areas of functional, social/ interpersonal, and vocational aspects of life, and changes in the Alabama Occupational Diploma curriculum could possibly lead to an increase or decrease in the types of engagement for former students.

When considering the outcomes of students, it is important to know which external factors influence the engagement of students (e.g. parental involvement,

community acceptance, educational and employment opportunities available). Variables that could have an effect on student engagement, satisfaction and perception of preparedness that were not examined in this study could be investigated. This investigation yielded few statistically significant differences between school type in engagement and exit option; therefore, it may be helpful to know how the communities are compensating for the apparent differences in the communities.

A final recommendation is investigating the extent to which there may be differences, in what former eleventh grade students predicted they would be engaged in one year after high school completion and what they were actually doing. Alabama routinely collects this information and this could provide additional information on factors that are related to the engagement of former students. In examining this, one could possibly identify some of the components of the transition program that are necessary for former students to be engaged one year after high school completion. The information that can be produced that identifies how students have changed their course of thought from one year prior to high school completion to what they are actually doing one year after high school completion may have important implications for program developers.

Summary

In conclusion, this study seems to support much of the previous research. Students in rural and nonrural school systems in Alabama appear to be equally engaged. Specifically, the majority of former students with LD and MR were engaged in employment, technical school, 2-year and 4-year colleges one year after high school completion. The differences that were noted occurred due to primary disability, an area

which historically has yielded differences in the type of engagement or lack thereof in students with high incidence disabilities.

Evidence from this study suggests that the connection between transition practices and student post school outcomes are worth exploring in greater depth. Further research could focus on how transition practices and services can be identified in such a way that they will yield consistent and distinct positive outcomes for all individuals with disabilities. Connections among the holistic experiences of individuals with disabilities through family, school, work, community, and friends are very complex. Research should seek ways to examine this integrated picture so that engagement after high school completion is obtainable for all.

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APPENDIX A

ALABAMA POST-SCHOOL TRANSITION SURVEY

Post-School Transition Survey *Template*

Directions

- Use your mouse button to click on each item below to enter a response.
- Enter a response for each applicable blank field and question on this form.
- After completing this form, click the "Submit" button at the bottom to send it.
- An error message will be displayed to indicate any incomplete item in need of a response.

If no interview was conducted
Click here to complete the No interview for Post-School Survey Form

Former Student Information

Student's Name		
Last	**First**	**MI**
Race (Select your race below)	**Disability** (Indicate primary disability below)	

Gender	Date of Birth (mm,dd,yyyy)	Telephone	Social Security Number
Male Female	Numbers only	Numbers only	Numbers only

School Information

Student's Educational Setting In hours per week outside the general classroom	Student's Exit Status *(Mark only one)*
(Mark only one) **0 hours** **Less than 6 hours** **6-21 hours** **Over 21 hours**	**Graduation Certificate** **Occupational Diploma** **High School Diploma** **High School Advanced Diploma** **Maximum Age** **Dropped Out** **Status Unknown** **Other**
LEA Code: #-#	**School Code: ####**

Interview Information

Type of Interview	Person Interviewed
☐ Telephone	☐ Former Student
☐ Personal Contact	☐ Parent/Guardian
☐ Other	☐ Adult Service Provider
	☐ Spouse, Sibling, Other Relative
	☐ Other

Teacher's Name: Last _____ **First** _____

Survey Questions

1a. Were any of your high school classes in …	YES	NO
...general education?	☐	☐
...special education?	☐	☐
...career/tech education?	☐	☐
...other areas?	☐	☐

1b. If YES, how much did this class prepare you to work and live in the community?	MUCH	SOME	NONE
...general education?	☐	☐	☐
...special education?	☐	☐	☐
...career/tech education?	☐	☐	☐
...other areas?	☐	☐	☐

2a. Did you have a high school...	YES	NO
...general ed teacher?	☐	☐
...special ed teacher?	☐	☐
...career/tech teacher?	☐	☐
...job coach?	☐	☐
...rehab counselor?	☐	☐

2b. If YES, how much did he or she prepare you to work and live in the community?	MUCH	SOME	NONE
...general ed teacher?	☐	☐	☐
...special ed teacher?	☐	☐	☐
...career/tech teacher?	☐	☐	☐
...job coach?	☐	☐	☐
...rehab counselor?	☐	☐	☐

3. Did your high school help prepare you for what you are doing now?	YES	NO
Yes or No	☐	☐

4. How much did your high school prepare you to…	MUCH	SOME	NONE
…get a job?	☐	☐	☐
…be a good worker	☐	☐	☐

5. If you DID NOT graduate from high Y

5. If you DID NOT graduate from high school, did you leave without graduating because…	YES	NO
…you lost interest?	☐	☐
…you couldn't meet the requirements?	☐	☐
…your school recommended it?	☐	☐
…you began work or joined the military?	☐	☐
…you had personal reasons?	☐	☐
…you had family reasons?	☐	☐
…some other reason?	☐	☐

?			
…get along with others, make friends?	☐	☐	☐
…make your own decisions?	☐	☐	☐
…manage your money?	☐	☐	☐
…cook and clean?	☐	☐	☐
…be part of your community?	☐	☐	☐

6a. Did you have a paying job when you left high school?	YES	NO
Yes or No	☐	☐

6b. If you DID have a job when you left high school, did you work...	Part Time	Full Time
...**Part**-time (less than 40 hrs /week)	☐	
or **Full**-time (40 or more hrs /week)		☐

7. Since you left high school, have you had additional training in...	YES	NO
...a technical school?	☐	☐
...a 2-year college?	☐	☐
...a 4-year college?	☐	☐
...a military program?	☐	☐
...another school?	☐	☐

8. Since you left high school, have you had any problems with...	YES	NO
…working?	☐	☐
…where you live?	☐	☐
…transportation?	☐	☐
…getting along with others, making friends?	☐	☐
…paying your bills?	☐	☐
…making decisions?	☐	☐
...becoming part of the community?	☐	☐
...your family?	☐	☐
...other areas?	☐	☐

9. Since you left high school, have you been living mainly with …	Click ONE
...only yourself?	☐
...your parents or family?	☐
...your friends?	☐
...your husband or wife?	☐

10. How much do others help you make major life decisions like where you work and live?	Click ONE
A lot	☐
Some	☐

...someone else?	☐
Some	☐
None	☐

11. Are you good at…	YES	NO
…working?	☐	☐
…getting along with others, making friends?	☐	☐
…making decisions?	☐	☐
…managing money?	☐	☐
…cooking and cleaning?	☐	☐
…being part of the community?	☐	☐

12. How much of your time do you spend...	MUCH	SOME	NONE
…working?	☐	☐	☐
…going to school or training?	☐	☐	☐
…hanging out with your family?	☐	☐	☐
…hanging out with your friends?	☐	☐	☐
…watching TV?	☐	☐	☐
…playing sports?	☐	☐	☐
…doing hobbies?	☐	☐	☐
…doing church activities?	☐	☐	☐
…going to the movies?	☐	☐	☐
…camping, hunting or fishing?	☐	☐	☐
…cooking and cleaning?	☐	☐	☐
…some other activity?	☐	☐	☐

13. How satisfied are you with...	MUCH	SOME	NONE
…your education or training?	☐	☐	☐
…where you live?	☐	☐	☐
…your friends?	☐	☐	☐
…your family life?	☐	☐	☐
…your community life?	☐	☐	☐
…your free time?	☐	☐	☐
…your transportation?	☐	☐	☐
…your decisions?	☐	☐	☐
…your work?	☐	☐	☐

Work-related questions

14a. Are you working for pay NOW?	YES	NO
Yes or No	☐	☐

14b. If you ARE working, do you work...	Part Time	Full Time
…**Part**-time (less than 40 hrs /week)	☐	
or **Full**-time (40 or more hrs /week)		☐

15. If you are working, is your current job in the area of... (*Click only one*)

Click Here			Click Here
☐	..... OR		☐
☐	...food services?	...janitorial services?	☐

16. Which of the following responses best describes your total income in the last calendar year? Click ONE

☐	...automotive services?	...childcare?	☐
☐	...computers/electronics?	...farming?	☐
☐	...construction/welding?	...cosmetology/ barbering?	☐
☐	...factory work?	...healthcare?	☐
☐	...cashier/sales?	...teaching/counseling?	☐
☐	...secretarial services?	...stocking/bagging?	☐
☐	...hotel services?	...other?	☐

Less than $10,000	☐
$10,000 to $15,000	☐
$15,000 to $25,000	☐
More than $25,000	☐
I don't know	☐

17. If you ARE working, were you helped in finding your current job by...	YES	NO
…your parents?	☐	☐
…your friends?	☐	☐
…school personnel?	☐	☐
…your rehab counselor?	☐	☐
…someone else?	☐	☐

18. If you ARE working, in addition to your work pay, does your job provide you with the benefits of...	MUCH	SOME	NONE
…health insurance?	☐	☐	☐
…sick leave?	☐	☐	☐
…vacation leave?	☐	☐	☐
…retirement?	☐	☐	☐
…some other benefit?	☐	☐	☐

19. If you are not working, have you had a job since leaving high school?	YES	NO
Yes or No	☐	☐

20. If you are not working, is it because you...	YES	NO
…are in school, training to prepare for work?	☐	☐
…are looking for a job, but can't find one?	☐	☐
…do not want to work?	☐	☐
…have some other reason?	☐	☐

Note: Remember to enter today's date below on the left
&
Press the "Submit" button.

Survey Completed (mm,dd,yyyy)
Month **Day** **Year**
---------- Numbers only ----------

Submit
Reset/Clear Form