



THE STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT / THE UNIVERSITY OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK / ALBANY, NY 12234

TO: The Honorable the Members of the Board of Regents
FROM: Lawrence C. Gloeckler *Lawrence C. Gloeckler*
COMMITTEE: Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities
TITLE OF ITEM: Transition Planning and Services for NYS Students
DATE OF SUBMISSION: August 22, 2001
PROPOSED HANDLING: Discussion
RATIONALE FOR ITEM: Policy Implementation Update
STRATEGIC GOAL: Goals 3 and 4
AUTHORIZATION(S): *Thomas P. Hulse*

SUMMARY:

The New York State Board of Regents last discussed transition planning and services in February 1999, when post-school outcomes were reported for former special and general education students from the Big Five Cities when they were one year out of school. Helpful transition planning was strongly related to completion of diplomas, a higher number of transitions to postsecondary education and employment and more frequent connections to community agencies for needed services. The major challenge identified was disparity in the quality and availability of transition planning and services in different locations. Recommendations were made to enhance quality assurance and technical assistance and increase special education and vocational rehabilitation collaboration.

This report summarizes activities to date and new data, identifies current issues and recommends next steps for implementation.

Executive Summary

Since 1990, federal and State laws and regulations require that school districts provide transition planning and services to secondary students with disabilities. The purpose is to prepare these students for productive and fulfilling adult lives by working, continuing to learn, living independently and participating fully in their communities once they leave school. Services may include classroom instruction, career exploration and guidance for students to help them verbalize their aspirations. During the past decade, the Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) has provided technical assistance, training, information and quality assurance to assist school districts, participating agencies, postsecondary and other community service programs, families and students with implementing effective transition practices. Information about transition planning and services was reported at the February 1999 meeting of the Board of Regents. Since then, the following activities have been undertaken:

- More extensive data are being collected about the transition process. A Longitudinal Post-School Indicators (PSI) survey is gathering data from seniors of the classes of 2000 and 2001, beginning with their graduation from high school and following up at one, three and five years out of school.
- Two Key Performance Indicators on transition were added to VESID's strategic plan.
- A Transition Web Page was established to increase access by schools and families to transition planning and service information.
- A Transition Quality Indicator (TQI) checklist was developed based on national research about effective transition practices. The TQI is now used to identify school district needs for technical assistance.
- The Special Education Quality Assurance monitoring protocols were revised to include transition compliance questions. Transition Coordination Sites are being invited to assist Special Education Quality Assurance Offices in addressing transition compliance with targeted schools.
- A specialized Transition Case Review was conducted in November 1999 with vocational rehabilitation District Offices to determine the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation case services to youth.
- Career Link Projects were funded in each vocational rehabilitation District Office to improve career preparation provided by targeted school districts, increase appropriate referrals to vocational rehabilitation services and improve vocational rehabilitation services to youth from the targeted schools.

This report shares the latest data regarding transition planning and services, activities that are being taken to improve the transition process and further actions needed to continue improving the quality and availability of transition planning and services statewide.

Report to the NYS Board of Regents Transition Planning and Services for NYS Students

Introduction

Since 1990, federal and State laws and regulations require that school districts provide transition planning and services to New York State's secondary students with disabilities. The purpose is to prepare these students for productive and fulfilling adult lives, working, continuing to learn, living independently and participating fully in their communities once they leave school. The students affected by these requirements are all secondary special education students between the ages of 14 and 21. At any given time, approximately 140,000 students are entitled to the benefits of these requirements. During the past decade, the New York State Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities (VESID) has provided technical assistance, training, information and quality assurance to assist school districts, participating agencies, postsecondary and other community service programs, families and students with implementing effective transition practices.

Transition planning and services begin at age 14. Transition planning is an integral part of developing secondary level students' Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Student needs, preferences, interests and aspirations are reviewed. Educational and community services are then designed to develop each student's capacity to function independently in post-school life. The student and family are actively engaged in partnerships with the school regarding future careers, postsecondary education and independent living possibilities. Transition planning is the formalized way to assure that these conversations occur and that effective steps are taken to prepare students appropriately for the future.

VESID last reported information about transition planning and services at the February 1999 Board of Regents meeting. At that time, post-school outcomes were reported for students with disabilities who had been out of school for one year. Needs were identified for statewide improvements including increasing special education and vocational rehabilitation collaboration, enhancing quality assurance activities, redirecting technical assistance to districts in need and learning more about the long-term process of transition. Activities that subsequently were implemented are discussed in more detail in this report. However, some of the major activities undertaken since February 1999 include:

- More extensive data are being collected about the transition process. A Longitudinal Post-School Indicators (PSI) survey is gathering data from seniors of the classes of 2000 and 2001, beginning with their graduation from high school and following up at one, three and five years out of school.
- Two Key Performance Indicators on transition were added to VESID's strategic plan. These are that: (1) students with disabilities will transition to postsecondary education and employment at the same rate as their general education peers and

(2) all schools will report the post-school plans of all special education students exiting school annually.

- A Transition Web Page was established to increase access by schools and families to transition planning and service information.
- A Transition Quality Indicator (TQI) checklist was developed based on national research about effective transition practices. The TQI is now used to identify school district needs for technical assistance with the assistance of the regional technical assistance centers, called "Transition Coordination Sites."
- The Special Education Quality Assurance monitoring protocols were revised to include transition compliance questions. Transition Coordination Sites are being invited to assist Special Education Quality Assurance Offices in addressing transition compliance with targeted schools.
- A specialized Transition Case Review was conducted in November 1999 with vocational rehabilitation District Offices to determine the effectiveness of vocational rehabilitation case services to youth. Plans were developed with each office to identify improvement strategies.
- Two brochures were developed for parents and students to answer their typical questions about the vocational rehabilitation process. Two hundred thousand of each were printed and disseminated in April and May 2001 to schools, community agencies and family groups to assure that all 14 to 21-year olds and their parents would receive the information.
- Discretionary grants are being provided to establish Career Link Projects in each vocational rehabilitation District Office. The purposes are to improve career preparation provided by targeted school districts, increase appropriate referrals to vocational rehabilitation services and improve vocational rehabilitation services to youth from the targeted schools.

This report will share the latest data regarding transition planning and services, activities that are being undertaken to improve the transition process and further actions needed to continue improving the quality and availability of transition planning and services statewide.

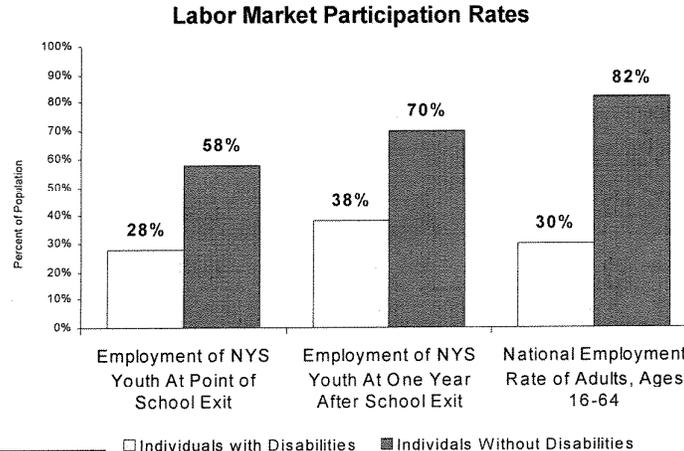
What do the data tell us?

Benchmarking data are reviewed continually from the existing sources of the United States Census, national research publications, annual data reported by New York State school districts about special education and vocational rehabilitation case service data. Since 1996, VESID has also conducted several specialized studies about the transition process. This report contains data from these several sources.

POST-SCHOOL OUTCOMES

The statewide 1996 and Big Five Cities 1997 Post School Indicators surveys¹ asked former special and general education students about their transitions at a point one-year out of school. These surveys found that 62 percent of special education students successfully transitioned to post-school outcomes of employment or postsecondary education. General education students transitioned to postsecondary education or employment at a rate 26 percent more than students with disabilities. Eighteen percent of students with disabilities were still looking for work.

Comparing the results obtained from the 1997 sample of New York State youth at the time of school exit and one year later with national census data regarding the rate of adults participating in the labor market² it is evident that there are lifetime consequences to transition planning.



¹ *Transitions to the Adult World – Living, Learning and Earning: A Report of the 1996 Post School Indicators Survey Results for New York State Youth with Disabilities.* Albany, N.Y.: New York State Education Department Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities, 1996.

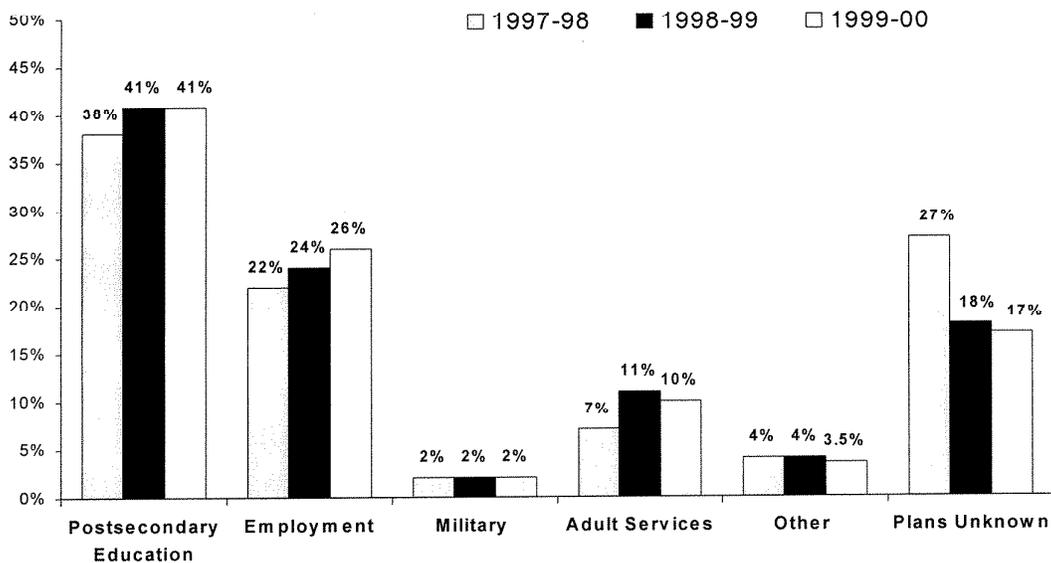
Report to the New York State Board of Regents on the Post School Status of Former Special Education Students in the Big Five Cities. Albany, N.Y.: New York State Education Department Office of Vocational and Educational Services for Individuals with Disabilities, 1999. (Note: data were collected in late 1997.)

² *March Current Population Report, Table 2 – Labor Force Status.* Washington, D.C.: United States Bureau of Census, 2000. (Note: data are for working age adults, ages 16-64.)

POST-SCHOOL PLANS

Schools annually report the post-school plans of students with disabilities as part of their reporting requirements. Increasing percentages of special education graduates are planning postsecondary education and employment. All schools should be able to report the post-school plans of all special education students. Since transition planning and service activities are required to occur within an outcome oriented process, it is expected that schools could readily report on student post-school plans. However, plans are unknown for approximately one out of every five exiting students with disabilities who leave with a diploma or when they reach the maximum age of 21.

Post-School Plans of Special Education Completers as Reported by Their Schools



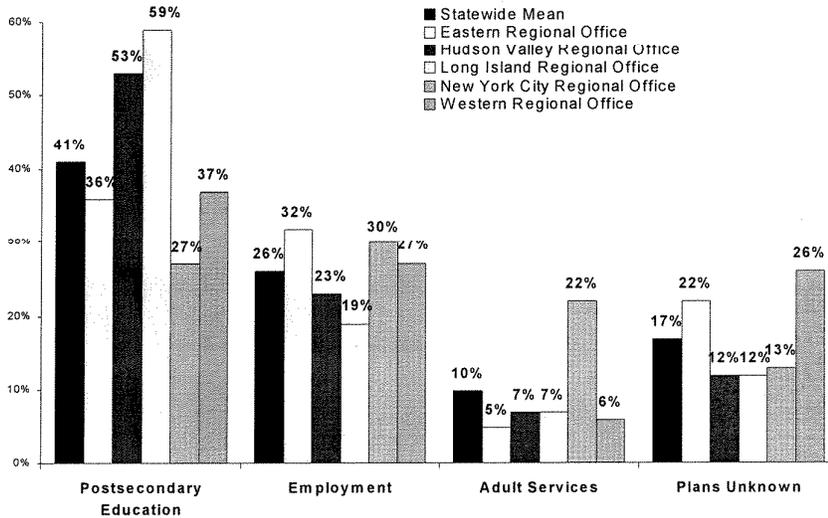
NYSID VESID PD-5 Data, 1999-00

REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Data regarding secondary transitions consistently reveal regional differences in the availability or quality of transition planning and services. The post-school plans reported by schools vary by region. Within regions there are extreme examples. In the counties surrounding Buffalo, schools report that 41 percent of students plan postsecondary education, 31 percent of students plan employment, 8 percent plan adult services and 15 percent have unknown plans. In contrast, in the counties surrounding

Rochester, 33 percent of students plan postsecondary education, only 23 percent plan post-school employment, 4 percent plan to access adult services and 37 percent have unknown plans.

Post-School Plans Reported by Schools for 1999-00 Special Education Completers by Special Education Quality Assurance Regional Offices



Note: Omitted from display are the low incidence plans of Military Service and Other.

NYSID VESID PD-5 Data, 1999-00

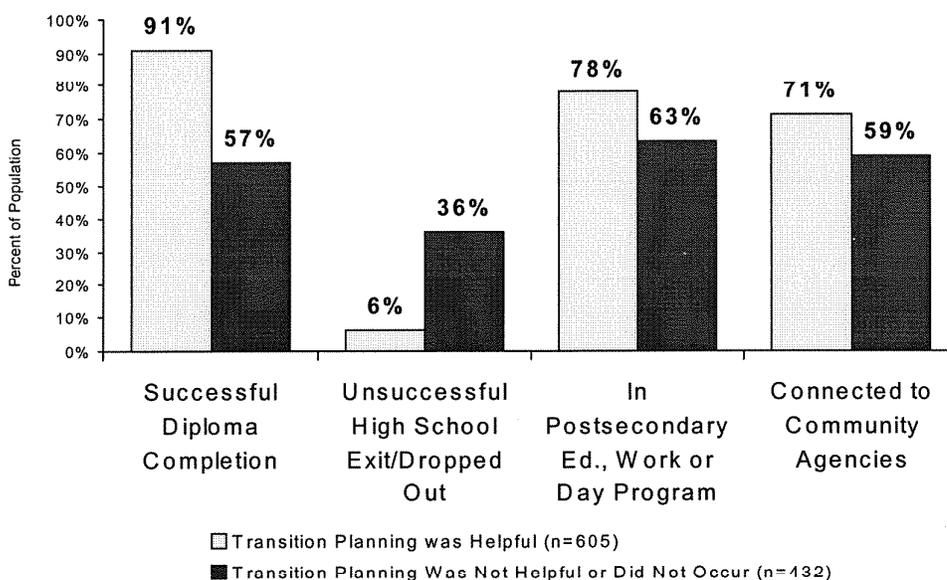
POST-SCHOOL INDICATORS STUDIES

With the help of more than 100 schools and more than 3,500 former special and general education students and their families over the past five years, VESID is learning more about the process of preparing students for life after school and the kinds of transition planning and service activities that make a difference. Where New York State schools provide transition planning, they are making a difference in the lives of their students in terms of school completion as well as in the kinds of post-school transitions that students with disabilities achieve.

Based on the Post-School Indicators research in New York State and national research in effective transition practices, VESID redesigned the technical assistance approach being used by its network of seven Transition Coordination Sites. Technical assistance activities shifted from training conferences to individualized strategic planning with teams from individual schools.

In the past, 25,000 people annually were being trained. Currently, technical assistance is offered to an average of 10-15 school districts per Transition Coordination region. A standard Transition Quality Indicators (TQI) checklist assesses the availability of transition planning and services based on five areas of effective practices: (1) district procedures, (2) internal and external collaboration, (3) family involvement, (4) student planning activities and (5) services to develop student skills. Based on the results of this analysis, a strategic plan for improvement is developed and resources are offered to help schools offset costs of staff development and/or materials.

Former Students from the Big Five Cities, One Year Out of School in 1997



NYSED PSI Data, 1997

A typical intervention plan may address school district infrastructure and management of the transition planning process, strength based assessment, use of community resources, development of community-based employment services and models to develop student self-advocacy skills. The objective is to move the availability of transition practices from impact on only a few students in each district to impact on all students in the district. Data are currently kept in paper form. An on-line version of the TQI is being developed with Cornell University and will soon be available for all schools to use.

LONGITUDINAL STUDY

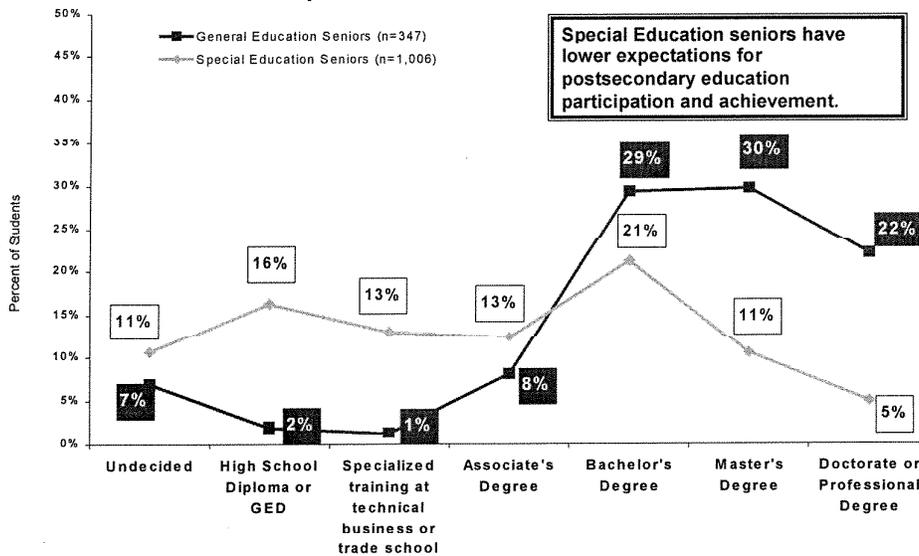
Beginning with the seniors of the class of 2000, VESID initiated a longitudinal version of the PSI. Seniors of the classes of 2000 and 2001 are being asked about the transition process as they experience it, at the point of school graduation and then at

one, three and five years beyond school exit. Through this process, we hope to learn how transition planning and activities experienced in school and similar activities in the world beyond school influence student success. At this time, this is the only longitudinal study being conducted nationally. Later this year, a national study will begin.

The first step in the PSI project was to survey the seniors of the class of 2000. The group of seniors from 74 schools includes 1,006 special education and 347 general education students. We looked at how four major outcomes are affected by presence or absence of disability, gender, family employment or education, school environment, type of diploma, and such school program components as helpful transition planning or availability of career preparation activities. The outcomes examined included preparedness for postsecondary education, employment, community participation and combined preparedness for employment or postsecondary education. Analysis identified that certain ingredients in the transition process are statistically significant predictors for each outcome. The factors that make a difference in students reporting they are prepared for post-school life include achieving a Regents diploma (for postsecondary education transitions), receiving support for post-school plans from school and family, school environment, transition planning, career preparation opportunities and early receipt of postsecondary and career planning information.

One theme reflected repeatedly in the findings is that there are differences in the expectations held by and for students with disabilities. General and special education students have different expectations regarding the level of education to which they aspire.

What is the highest level of education you plan to achieve?

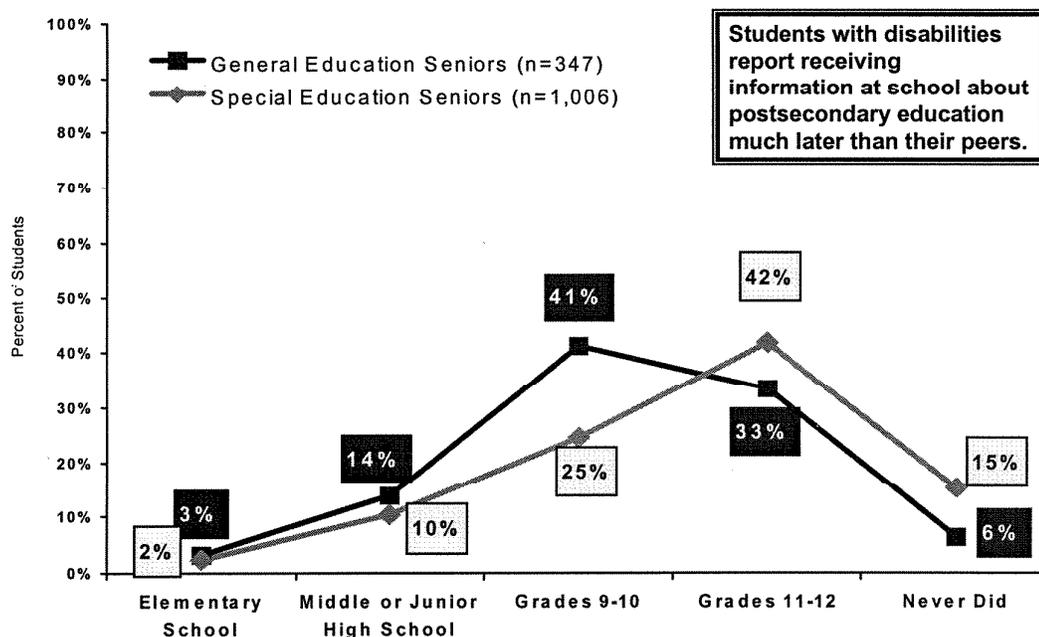


NYSED PSI Data, Senior 2000 Exit Survey, 7/20/01

Analysis of the survey data from the seniors of the class of 2000 found that the receipt of a Regents diploma is a predictor for students reporting that they were prepared with academic and study skills to succeed in college. Findings also indicate that even with the attainment of a Regents or local diploma, fewer seniors with disabilities made plans to continue their education beyond high school.

The outcome-oriented process for transition planning and instructional activities to prepare for transition are required to begin at age 14, which equates to ninth grade. This implies that the discussion of transition needs would be based on information about the student in relation to possible post-school adult life objectives. Students with disabilities in the sample of the seniors from the class of 2000 consistently reported receiving information about post-school opportunities later than their general education peers and later than transition planning requirements would suggest.

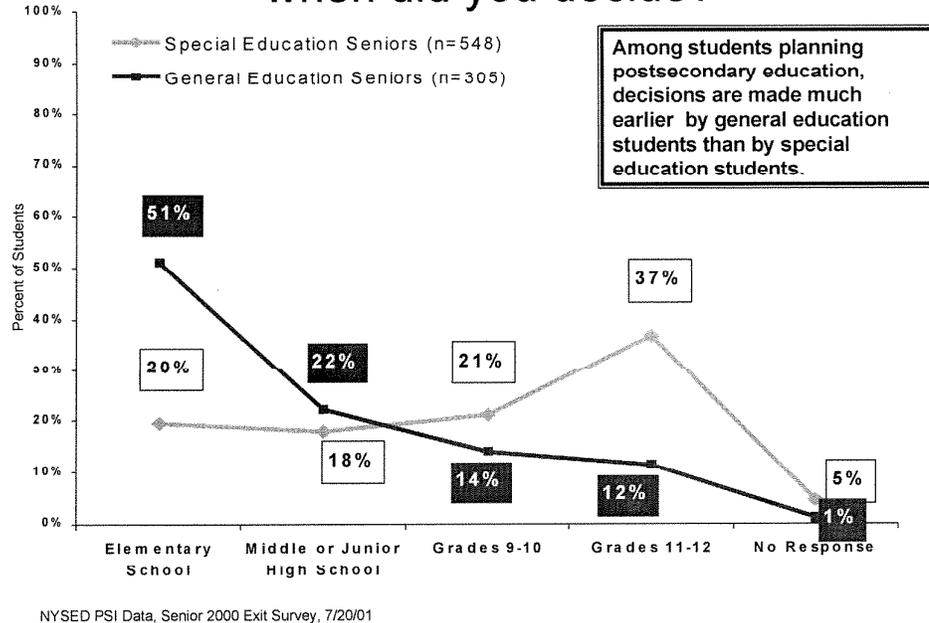
When did you first receive information at school about postsecondary education?



NYSED PSI Data, Senior 2000 Exit Survey, //20/01

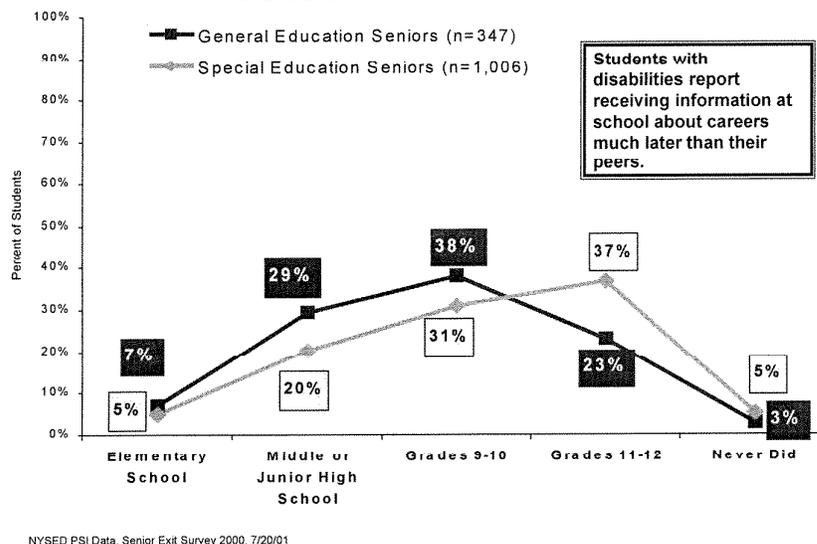
The data suggest that students with disabilities planning postsecondary education do not have much time to prepare their academic, study and self-advocacy skills for campus life. Thirty-seven percent of students with disabilities do not decide to pursue postsecondary education until grades 11 to 12, as compared with 12 percent of general education students. The survey team will make periodic post-school contacts with students to determine the long-term consequences related to the differences in timeframes for information received and decisions made.

Students planning postsecondary education, when did you decide?



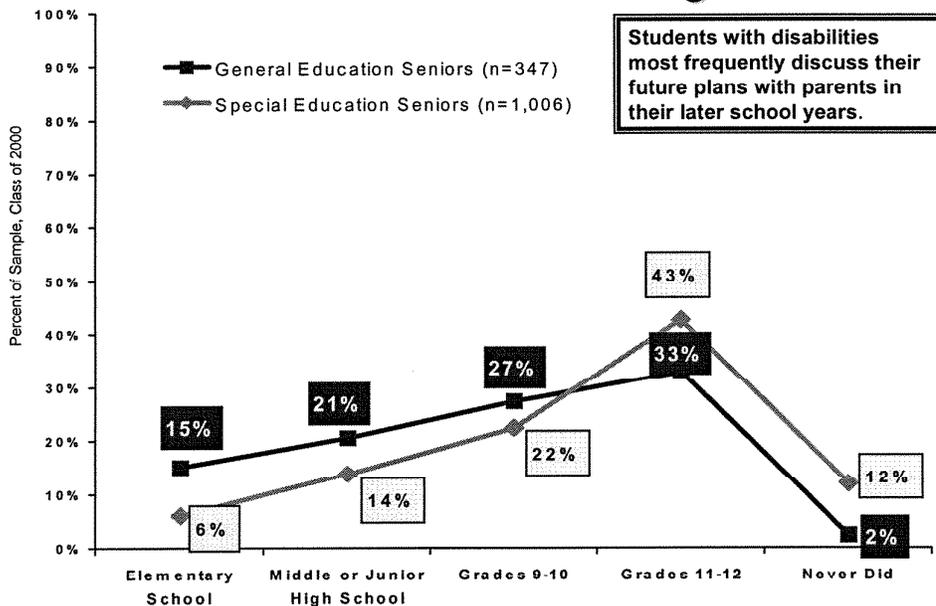
Similarly, seniors with disabilities from the class of 2000 report receiving information about career opportunities later than their general education peers and later than the timeframe suggested by transition requirements.

When did you first receive information at school about careers?



The class of 2000 seniors reported that their conversation with parents occurred later than would have been expected if parents and students had participated in transition discussions with their schools beginning at age 14. The chart shows that conversations about student aspirations for the future occurred within the families of general education students much sooner than for students with disabilities and their families.

When did you first talk with your parents about what to do after leaving school?



NYSED PSI Data, Senior 2000 Exit Survey, 7/20/01

SUMMARY OF SCHOOL AND STUDENT DATA

The data suggest that transition compliance issues remain a concern. During the past two years, the Special Education Quality Assurance protocols were revised to add questions regarding transition. The regional Transition Coordination Site personnel participated on review teams. During 2000-01, 11 of the reviews addressed transition. The Quality Assurance Information System, which tracks district compliance and progress on key performance indicators, will eventually allow for data to be analyzed statewide on the topic of transition compliance. VESID regional special education staff indicate that enhanced inclusion of transition in the Quality Assurance process is alerting more schools to the need for improving their transition activities.

Data also suggest that expectations for students with disabilities need to be raised by the students themselves, their schools and families. Students with disabilities and their families need information about possible choices for adults with disabilities in postsecondary education, careers and community participation. Educators and pupil

personnel professionals need to increase their awareness of possibilities so that appropriate information and programs can be made available to students. Parents, students and districts then can be partners in transition planning.

What do we know about postsecondary education and vocational rehabilitation?

The transition process needs to address a wide array of student skills for learning, working, community living and self-determination. Schools cannot address all needs in isolation of community services and programs. In addition to what the student can learn in school, there needs to be planning for what types of services students will need once they graduate from their programs. Other agency systems, especially vocational rehabilitation and postsecondary education, must participate with schools, students and families. The longitudinal PSI survey will be a major tool to improve understanding of how schools and community services interact.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION TASK FORCE

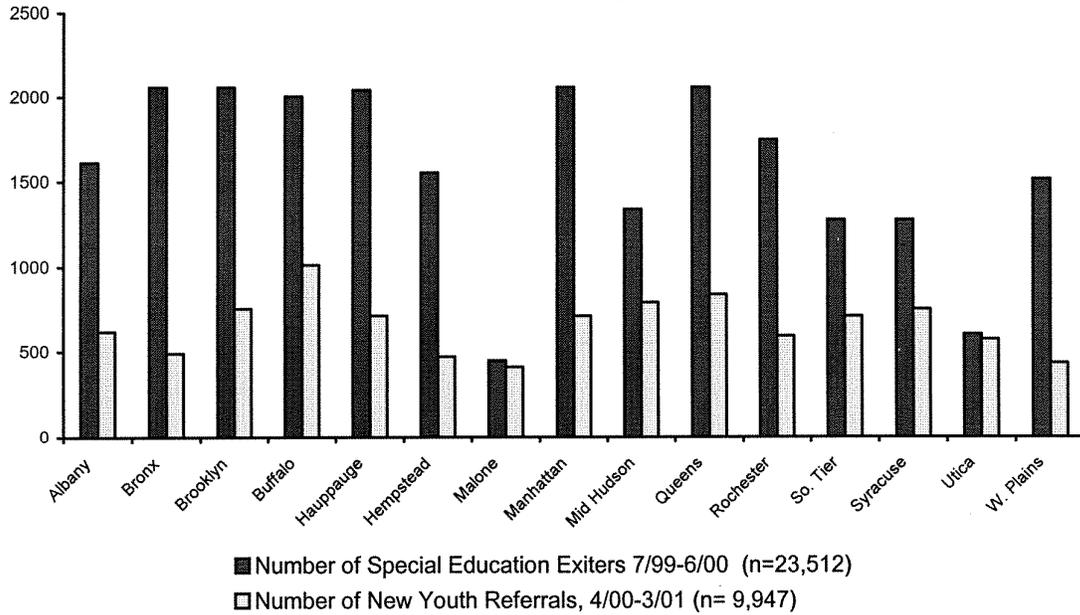
Annual data reported to the New York State Education Department by school districts indicates that graduates with disabilities plan to transition to college half as often as do all seniors. In March 2000, the New York State Task Force on Postsecondary Education and Disabilities reported its findings regarding preparation and readiness of students with disabilities for postsecondary education.³ Results revealed that students with disabilities are less likely to consider the possibility of college and are less likely to be prepared to handle college-level study. Other findings indicate that transition planning is not occurring early enough for students to make informed decisions about postsecondary options. The Task Force report includes, among its recommendations, that transition planning begin as early as middle school for students with disabilities.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION DATA

Vocational rehabilitation has a major role in assisting youth with disabilities to enter the labor market when they graduate from school. There are major differences across vocational rehabilitation District Offices in the data reported annually by school districts regarding student exits and the data reported by vocational rehabilitation offices regarding the entry of youth into caseloads. Because not all students with disabilities may necessarily require vocational rehabilitation services, we do not expect there to be an exact match between exits from school and entry into the vocational rehabilitation system. However, we would not expect the gaps to be so great, nor to see such variations across office locations.

³ *Postsecondary Education and Individuals with Disabilities: Recommendations to New York State for Strategies to Increase Access and Opportunity. Report of the Task Force on Postsecondary Education and Disability.* Albany, N.Y.: New York State Education Department, March 2000.

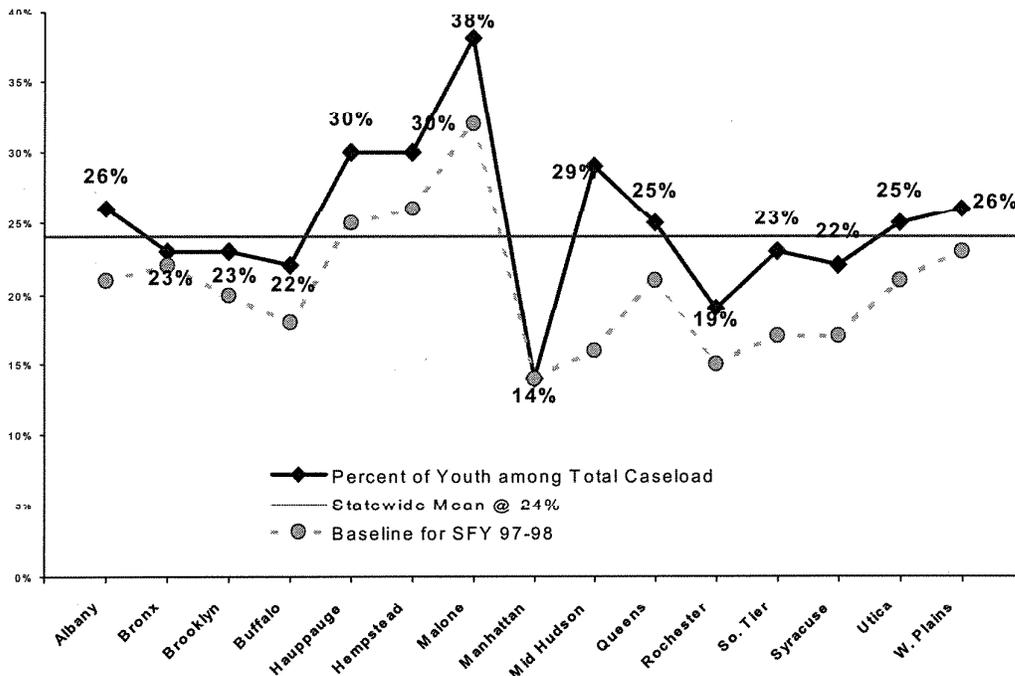
**New VR Referrals of Youth vs. Special Education Exiters,
SFY 00-01**



In spring 1999, VESID initiated a series of “Career Link Projects” to increase partnerships between specifically identified schools and vocational rehabilitation District Offices. The projects are led by representatives of VESID and either the New York City Board of Education or BOCES in each region. The data indicate that 82 percent of the increase in youth referrals during State Fiscal Year 2000-01 came from Career Link Project offices as a result of activities that increased outreach and recruitment with underserved schools.

While not all District Offices have yet started Career Link Projects, each office continues to pursue opportunities to reach out to serve youth. Statewide trend data indicate that youth are increasingly represented in the vocational rehabilitation caseload. More than 25,000 youth were served in State Fiscal Year 2000-01, with offices receiving 9,947 new referrals of youth and successfully employing 3,205 youth. VESID will be looking for ways to increase the availability of region-specific planning data to Regional Special Education Quality Assurance Offices, vocational rehabilitation District Offices and regional Transition Coordination Sites. This will enable these leaders to jointly identify specific schools to assist with improving transition planning and services.

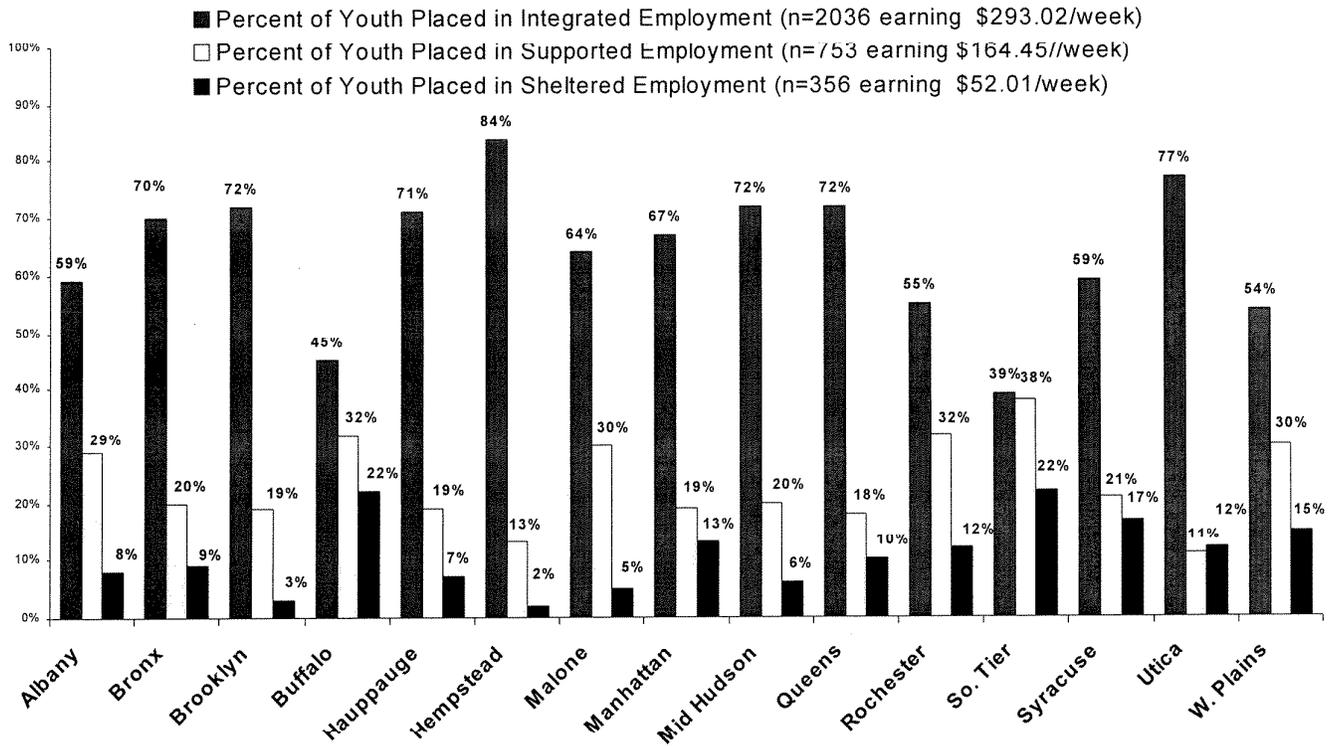
Proportion of District Office Caseloads Who Are Youth, SFY 00-01



Despite increased referrals, more youth are closed unsuccessfully (18 percent) after being found eligible than successfully complete their plans for service and become employed (13 percent). The predominant reason for unsuccessful closures of youth cases is loss of contact. Transition-specific case reviews held in fall 1999 indicated that counselors use school records in determining eligibility 93 percent of the time. However, only 57 percent of the time are vocational rehabilitation service plans written before school exit, as is now required by the federal regulations. Additional vocational rehabilitation counselors and rehabilitation counselor assistant positions are being established to improve services to youth.

As the number of youth served by vocational rehabilitation increases, there is a need for additional integrated and supported employment program capacity. While 3,205 youth comprised 20 percent of the 16,435 successful employment outcomes in State Fiscal Year 2000-01, youth represented 26 percent of all supported employment outcomes and 25 percent of all sheltered outcomes. Anticipated changes in supported and sheltered employment programs in New York State will impact a significant number of youth. There is a need for new supported employment capacity to handle the youth caseload and to find alternative options for youth who were previously placed in sheltered services. Consumers in Southern Tier, Buffalo, Syracuse, White Plains, Utica and Manhattan would be particularly affected by the loss of sheltered employment options.

Proportion of Successfully Employed Consumers Who Are Youth, SFY 00-01



Summary of Issues and Next Steps

Issue: Increase coordination and collaboration between high school career preparation and vocational rehabilitation.

Next Steps

- Increase the participation of students with disabilities in SED career preparation initiatives, including Career Planning, Career and Technical Education, Workforce Investment Act Youth Council activities and Ticket to Work programs and services.
- Seek funding to increase supported employment and integrated employment services to address increasing youth referrals to vocational rehabilitation.
- Increase access by Regional Special Education Quality Assurance and Vocational Rehabilitation managers to special education data regarding students with

disabilities in schools and exiting from schools with vocational rehabilitation data regarding services provided to students from specific schools.

Issue: Increase consistency of school district implementation of transition planning and services.

Next Steps

- Strengthen transition through Commissioner's Regulations. Require that Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) contain statements to ensure a relationship between a student's aspirations and transition planning activities. This will integrate transition need with other assessments of student learning needs and focus attention on the long-term implications of choices made about transition services offered to students.
- Work with institutions of higher education and teacher preparation programs to ensure that school administrators, pupil personnel professionals and special educators acquire the skills and knowledge they need to do effective transition planning and service implementation.

Issue: Increase technical assistance to school districts regarding transition implementation.

Next Steps

- Provide guidance to school districts to ensure that the transition process is assessed as part of the needs assessment to develop each district's Comprehensive System of Personnel Development plan. VESID, through its regional training initiative, will increase access to training resources for schools to improve their staff knowledge regarding transition and for families and students to have ongoing access to information they need to participate effectively in the transition process.
- Study the feasibility of various options available to establish the long-term accessibility of the expertise offered at the Transition Coordination Sites beyond June 30, 2004. This is a valued technical assistance resource. Given their unique knowledge and expertise, they are the primary source of information for schools, students, families and agencies regarding problem-solving and effective practices.
- Encourage all schools to use the on-line Transition Quality Indicators checklist to enhance district-level recognition of need for improvement and opportunities to do strategic planning. The database would provide SED with a way to identify cross-regional need for improvement.

Issue: Creating data resources to enable ongoing oversight of the transition process.

Next Steps

- Support the creation of a student based data system. This will obviate the necessity of additional survey projects and increase consistent measures of transition systems. It will also improve the capacity to assess the quality of transitions of students with disabilities from special education to vocational rehabilitation and enable interagency planning for appropriate services to address current and future needs of youth for various services.
- Include in reporting requirements of Career and Technical Education programs the collection of data about participation and successful completion by students with disabilities. This will enable ongoing reviews of the extent to which students with disabilities participate in career preparation programs.