A study on employment of vocational school graduates with disabilities: how is their transition from school to adulthood?

Herbert H. Stevenson Jr.
Rowan University

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A STUDY ON EMPLOYMENT OF VOCATIONAL SCHOOL GRADUATES
WITH DISABILITIES: HOW IS THEIR TRANSITION
FROM SCHOOL TO ADULTHOOD?

by
Herbert H. Stevenson, Jr.

A Research Study
Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 11, 2006

Approved by ___________________________
Professor
Date Approved 5/8/06
The purpose of this study was to examine the employment and independent living status of students with learning disabilities (LD) upon graduation from a vocational school, the Institute of Technology. A telephone survey of 56 graduates was developed based on the Post High School Plans Survey (PHSPS) to investigate their employment, living, and opinion of transition services. A total of 46 graduates responded to the survey questions. The results showed that 39% of the graduates were employed in the career major they had studied at the institute, 17% employed out of their major and 22% unemployed. Fifty four percent of the students remain dependent on parents or siblings two years after their graduation. Sixty three percent of graduates expressed that they had unsuccessful transition and 85% indicated that they did not utilize transition services after their graduation. The transition from school to adulthood remains a critical issue to students with disabilities.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

The Institute of Technology is a public school district serving the county residents in a northeastern state of U.S.A. This institute is designed to offer vocational technical training as well as academic preparation. Over the past 42 years, the district expanded to include two campuses in order to include more students and provide more services. Students in the institute are required to pass the state high school competency exam, the High School Proficiency Assessment, as the regular students in comprehensive high schools must do. A state high school diploma and a certificate of training competency in the student’s choice of over 20 vocational-technical programs will be issued at the graduation. The mission of this institute is to provide competency-based occupational, technical, and vocational education programs for the emerging and current workforce. The curriculum focuses on preparing students for successful employment and continued education. Occupational, technical, and vocational education programs that are offered include technical, and essential work attitude skills necessary for employment and/or further education. The institute works with employers, the labor market, and other institutions to provide current, cost-effective programs and services to students with disabilities.
Statement of the Problem

Success in life is a goal for all students. Throughout their young lives, students are guided to meet this goal by parents, teachers, social workers and other support staff they encounter in school. Beginning at age 14, as mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1997, a transition plan should be included in the Individual Education Program (IEP) of each student with disabilities. This plan is called Individual Transition Plan (ITP). ITP establishes the guideline for transition as a long range educational plan for a student’s future. The plan must be reviewed annually by the student’s Child Study Team (CST), which includes a case manager, student, parent, regular education and special education teachers and related personnel.

The goals of post school employment for students with disabilities are developed with the support of a career major teacher and other CST members. It is found that a special education student’s desired post secondary outcomes include the following: Four year college, continuing and adult education, two year community college, specialized training, trade school, or other employment, such as Military Service or other private sector employment (Jahnikainen, 1998).

Other post high school issues include community participation, but not limited to recreation and leisure activities, and participation in community organizations. The techniques and skills that the student must learn to experience the desired post school outcomes must be considered and the responsibilities should be to support the student
shared among participants (student, parent, school staff, outside agencies, employers, etc.). The involvements of the outside agencies are also considered as an important issue, because these agencies will provide resources and assistance to students. These outside agencies refer to such agencies as the Commission for the Blind, Deaf Services or Social Security, Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, and other organizations.

Transition for students with disabilities is difficult (Wagner & Burnette 2000). First, it is assumed that at the age of 14, they begin to go from a state of dependence and gradually by the age of 18, to a state of independence in every aspect of daily living, whether at home creating meals, or taking responsibilities previously assumed by caregivers (e.g., parent, sibling, or other helpers). The reality is that people with learning disabilities (LD) don’t match achievement with their abilities. Whether in academic areas, functional behaviors, or employment outcomes, there seems to be a significant gap between what would be expected, given the individual’s ability, and what is actually accomplished (Reiff, Gerber, & Ginsberg, 1993).

Second, it is assumed by graduation the student is ready and able to tackle daily living and to become a productive part of society. The term Specific Learning Disability (SLD) indicates that the student has had a impediment to learn the skills needed, thus preventing the student from reaching the goals set forth in his/her IEP.

Social and emotional characteristics are most notable with adults with LD. An overall feeling of lack of self worth, low self-esteem, and a poor self-concept can be
pervasive (Barton & Fuhrmann, 1994). Many adults with LD have had particularly painful experiences during their school years, both in and out of the classroom. Consequently, these adults continue to have episodes of feeling dumb, stupid, or incompetent (Gerber, Ginsber, & Reiff, 1992). In addition, students with disabilities encounter problems associated with employment that may not be addressed in the educational setting during their high school years. Many have carried self-attribution into adulthood, stemming from the notion “I am a person who cannot,” as opposed to “I am a person who can,” and they often take on the attributes and behaviors of learned helplessness (Groteluschen, Barkowski, & Hale, 1990). As a result, many adults with LD see themselves as incapable or as losers. They feel if they get something right, they are lucky, and if they get it wrong, then, they are dumb (Clance, 1985).

Adults with LD often experience a sense of frustration and exasperation. The cost is a set of “emotional baggage” that is carried into most social and learning experiences and daily living tasks (Barton & Fuhrmann, 1994). Confronted with myriad challenging tasks every day combined with a history of being self-doubted lays the seeds of emotional liability (Gerber & Reiff, 1991). Stress and anxiety become part of the mix, often leading to an uncontrollable feeling of being overwhelmed by what is to be accomplished. In some cases more intense emotional reactions occur, which can lead to a wide array of mental health problems including depression.

According to Gerber (1994), some adults with LD are resilient despite past failure.
In many cases, the lives of individuals with LD are punctuated with successes and failures. Those who have been able to move forward undeterred by failure (and sometimes strengthened by it) have a greater sense of inner strength and self confidence. In essence, in tough times, they know that there are good times ahead, if they are able to challenge it (Gerber, 1994).

Another positive characteristic is the unconventional way some adults with LD devise learning strategies as adoptive methods to master a task or learn a new routine. They have unique ways in which they approach tasks, and when given the time and opportunity, they are able to solve problems in their own style. This process is termed "learned creativity" and is credited with adaptive techniques used in employment, daily living tasks, and social situations (Gerber, 1994).

Significance of the Study

There are many studies to investigate the transition of special education graduates. However, follow-up studies are needed to determine if special education students seek employment in areas they trained while in high school, whether they gain an employment position related to their high school training. The finding of such study could provide school’s accurate information about their graduates and obtain feedback for the high school curriculum and career training.

Purpose of the Study

Students spend four years at the Institute of Technology learning skills in the
career major of their choice. It is hoped that they may transition smoothly from vocational high school to their employment following their graduation. The purpose of this study was to first determine what special education graduates do upon graduation, in particular, whether graduates transition to employment would be successful in their chosen field. Second, to determine the level of which graduates with disabilities are experiencing success in the social and emotional domains. Finally, to determine if the graduates utilized the services available to make their transition from high school to adulthood as smooth as possible.

It is assumed that this study would provide findings to allow Board of Education members, administrators, teachers and counselors to determine the employment patterns of special education graduates of the institute. Thus, school officials can monitor student placement rates and other indicators, in order to determine if training is meeting student and employers’ needs. Also, it may be possible for the school to provide guidance to students with disabilities and direct them to the service agencies, so that these students can be helped to have a successful transition into an active and productive adult life.

Research Questions

1. What are the employment patterns of graduates with learning disabilities who graduated from the Institute of Technology in one or two years?

2. Are these graduates experiencing successful transition from school to adulthood?
3. Do these graduates utilize the services available for the successful transition from school to adult communities?
CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Students with disabilities need support services throughout their school years. These support mechanisms come from their parents, grandparents, siblings at home, teachers, child study team members, guidance counselors, and numerous support staff in school.

As a student enters high school, the expectation is that he/she will accept more responsibilities, becoming an individual, and by the time of graduation, he/she will be transitioning into a productive member of the society. The student is expected to be an active participant in their high school transitioning planning process. This transitioning planning begins at the age of 14 with the expectation of determining post secondary opportunities and employment options. Transition may include connecting with the adult services together with schools to provide the students guidance and services once they graduate (Fischer, 1995). This chapter reviews research articles on transition of students with disabilities, their employment status after their graduation, and support they needed for successful transition from school to adulthood.

The Status of Students with Disabilities after their Graduation

The Texas Effectiveness Study, conducted over a ten year period and concluding in 2002, was a post school survey of former students who received special education services while in high school. The study was intended to examine the effects of
individualized instruction, adequacy of support mechanisms, and planning opportunities provided by schools, with an initial focus on transition activities at the high school level. Basically, the question: “How well did high school prepare each student to meet the challenges of adult life?” was asked. Tracing the former special education students over a ten years, more than 12,000 surveys were distributed to request their extensive and personal information. The survey focused on three areas, a) Post-secondary Education/Training Focus, b) Personal/Social/Independent Living, and c) Work Focus.

When asked who completed the survey, of 1,054 returned surveys, 681 respondents noted self, 112 indicated self with help, 201 were completed by parents, 22 were completed by caseworkers and 18 by others. Fifty percent of the respondents who received unsolicited mail survey agreed to be available for a follow-up contact. Students with Learning Disabled (LD) accounted for the largest percentage of returned surveys with 53.8%, compared to 69.1% of the LD student population.

For the school year of 2001, 75.4% of special education students chose their classes by themselves more than the years before 2001. Likewise, a higher percentage of students participated in transition planning in 2001 than 1999, representing a 10% of increase.

When asked to rate how well school prepared students for experiences after high school, about 51% of respondents indicated success. In terms of continuing education following graduation, about 35% of respondents reported attending a two year college,
24% for a four year college, 12% for a vocational trade school, 3% for adult education (non-credit), 1% for formal apprenticeship programs, and 4% attending a GED program. Students with learning disabilities accounted for 49% of reporting respondents.

Regarding their employment, 35% of the 907 respondents reported that they were employed full time, 28% were part time, and 38% were unemployed. Of those, 30% reported they were satisfied with their job. When asked about workplace accommodations, nearly 75% reported there was no accommodation at their working environment. When asked about job satisfaction, 30% indicated they were satisfied, and 34% were unsatisfied with their employment. When asked about their employment maintenance, (i.e. how long they held their current job), 34% responded less than six months, and about 20% keeping a job for more than two years.

When asked who helped them find a job, the responses varied. Respondents stated either they found the job themselves, or had a help from family, friends, adult service agencies, a high school teacher or counselor. Of the unemployed respondents, about 75% indicated that they want a job. They also indicated the reasons for not finding a job, because:

- there are no new or few jobs in their community;
- they are not trained;
- they have medical or health problems;
- there is no transportation available;
• there is no on-the-job training provided;
• no one helps them find a job;
• they will lose Social Security benefits;
• they have to take care of their families;
• they do not want to work;
• they have problems getting along at work;
• or there is no personal attendant care.

Regarding social/recreational activities, independent living, and personal information the most frequent response was to be living with family or relatives. Seventy percent of the respondents reported living in the same place where their high school is located. About 76% of recent graduates reported living on their own, but declined to less than 60% for older students. The percentage of recent graduates living on their own with a spouse was 10 percent, verses 25% for older students. However, within one year, the majority of respondents (50%) expect to be living independently with or without some support.

When reporting to leisure time, watching television and participating in activities with friends accounted for the most likely responses. A small number of graduates participated in special sports events. More than half of them had access to the internet, while a slightly higher number of graduates read books and magazines for recreation. However, a majority of graduates (68 percent) indicated that they did not regularly
participate in leisure activities in the community.

With a large percentage of students still living at home, a parent or guardian is the most likely provider of financial support. The next largest contributor is Social Security, with a scattering of other sources. Sixty-two percent of all respondents reported having a checking account, with the same percentage reporting that they supported themselves. Less than four percent have been in the military, less than seven percent reported being in trouble with the law. In order to facilitate successful transition, it is suggested to: a.) ensure measures are in place so that all students could have an appropriate transition plan; b.) create relationships between districts and adult service agencies to promote students access to services; and c) prepare students with disabilities with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to find and retain employment after leaving high school. This includes academic preparation as well as acquiring inter-and intra-personal skills needed for employment. Schools should create opportunities to support student responsibility and ownership of their educational plan during the IEP and ITP meetings. Further more, provide students with disabilities the opportunity to participate in integrated social/recreational/leisure activities in the school community, which may lead to greater participation in those activities in the community at large after leaving high school (Norris, 2002).

Social Competence for a Successful Transition

Social competence is an integral part in how well a youngster transitions into
adulthood. Without adequate skills a person may experience difficulty in the areas of employment, daily activities, independent living and participating in the community. Employers often claim that social competency is more important than actual experience in the workplace (Mellard & Hazel, 1992). Being able to organize thoughts and questions, having a sense of humor, dealing with finance and successfully communicating with co-workers have been recommended to be critical for job maintenance (Doren, 1996; Mellard & Hazel, 1992). Poor peer relationships and social skills have been linked to dropouts, juvenile delinquency, job termination, suicide, police contacts and dishonorable discharges from the military (Bryan, 1997).

According to Haager and Vaughn (1995), it is estimated 35% to 75% of students with learning disabilities have social skill deficits. Furthermore, children with learning disabilities are likely to have emotional problems, low self-esteem, and conduct deficiencies (Pavri, 2001). Because the label “disabled” often carries a mild stigma, these children are frequently expected to move into adulthood with less transition planning than those with more severe disabilities (Cronin, 1996; Sitlington, 1996). It is found that adults with learning disabilities have difficulty in performing daily living skills, such as finance and time management (Mellard & Hazel, 1992). Adolescents with disabilities often feel alone and their peers feel that they are out of control, irresponsible and alienated (Hazel & Schumaker, 1988; Sitlington, 1996). These problems may need to be addressed, and remediation should be indicated during the IEP/ITP process. While school districts are
pushing to create better programs to address post-secondary education, the military, competitive/supported employment, living arrangements, and adult services, social competency is rarely on the list of transition services.

Kohler (2002) organized transition into five areas: student-focused outcomes, student development, interagency collaboration, family involvement and program structures and attributes. Each area covers the components necessary to create a well-rounded transition plan for a student moving into adulthood. Social competency, however, is only addressed under student development, but is not incorporated throughout the plan. According to Saur (2002), appropriate behaviors are learned through experience and interactions. A child with a learning disability may have less opportunity for such interactions. Therefore, social skills must be taught and considered as an important part of a child’s development. Social skills should be addressed in IEP/ITP’s and incorporated into the curriculum in schools (Saur, 2002).

Research and experience has demonstrated that students diagnosed with LD during childhood will live with these problems for their entire life span (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003). To achieve success in any postsecondary setting, the individual learn many strategies that are appropriate for that environment. For example, the graduates who would like to attend college must know about their disability and how it affects their learning, and be armed with specific operational strategies that can help compensate for their weaknesses. Second, they must learn to be a self-advocate. They must develop a
support network and consider joining a support group for students with LD. Third, students must know their rights and responsibilities, and understand related laws and regulations. In high school, they must obtain a comprehensive psychoeducational evaluation that focuses on specific processing problems they may have, and pursue a written document for their learning accommodations needed in college. Finally, they must participate in a formal postsecondary transition program (Skinner & Lindstrom, 2003).

Parents should become familiar with federal and state regulations dealing with the education of children with disabilities, make sure local schools include career counseling as part of the curriculum, find out what school and community programs are available, and search for part-time job opportunities for their children (Beale, 1999). The goal of parental involvement is to make sure that children have access to the competitive labor market.

Technology is a critical strategy in the transition process. This should be used to assist in written language, reading and spelling. Issues related to technology include the purpose of use as either a cognitive prosthesis to correct a specific impairment, or as a cognitive partner to support the student with a learning disability on a specific task. Students must be properly trained in the use of devices prior to transitioning to the postsecondary environment. Students should use devices approximately to avoid an over dependance on the instruments, otherwise they will be unable to function independently (Mull & Sitlington, 2003).
Self-determination or a person’s freedom to make decisions independently, about such activities as work, education, or independent living is measured by postsecondary residential and financial independence. Parents of students with LD reported that those who had a high level of self-determination expressed a desire to live on their own more frequently than students with low levels of self-determination. Independence and self-reliance are key issues used to determine whether transition is successful. Special education philosophy reflects the results of this research on self-determination as a goal for the transition process (Trainor, 2002).

Transition Support

Students with disabilities receive a wide range of private and informal support provided by family, friends and community or advocacy organizations. For example, families and friends might pay for or provide personal care services, transportation, housing and private health insurance, serving as important emotional support to motivate individuals. Community and advocacy groups might provide benefit planning, assistance and outreach services, and other services for advocacy, protection, case management, transportation, housing, and funding for medical and assistive devices (Stapleton, Nowak, & Livermore, 2001).

There are numerous advocacy organizations for students with disabilities. One example is the Resources for Independent Living (RIL) which is an organization formed by people with a variety of disabilities dedicated to the principles of consumer-driven
independent living (United Way, 1996). In addition, the individual can call CONTACT, which is a 24 hour telephone hotline serving people in need of help, or links people with the appropriate human services agency.

Through networking, people gain an awareness of available resources and discover how to access or refer individuals to those services. An example might be a transition coordinator talking with local business owners to identify possible job training sites for students.

Coordination refers to arranging for a student with disabilities to receive specific services from different agencies. For example, telephone calls from one agency to another to determine their respective roles and to schedule activities for the student.

Cooperation of different agencies, schools and communities is important to the transition of students with LD. For example, an adult service agency may accept a student’s recent test results from his or her school to determine the student’s eligibility for services. This would prevent the student from being tested twice, and save time and expense.

A collaboration begins with networking, coordination and cooperation, and, then, requires team members to share decisions, responsibilities, and trust. Working together collaboratively invites participation of multiple service providers and the use of multiple resources. Many community resources are available to support youth with disabilities. Coordinating these services across the country is difficult to achieve. First, there are
complications in agency eligibility criteria, difficulty in convening meetings, lack of agreement between agencies, and lack of commitment addressing specific needs of the community and student. Often resources are underutilized by schools and organizations to serve youth with disabilities. Thus, many youth with disabilities do not benefit from services available. Resource mapping is one tool that could be used to build relationships among community agencies, organizations, businesses, and people at the local, state and federal levels. It also would help foster relationships between schools and community service agencies by focusing on the strengths rather than the deficits of the community, thus, building its capacity. If state agencies and local communities could align services available, support for young people with disabilities would be accessible to many more individuals in need.

Summary

Students need support throughout their lives. This support comes from parents, guardians, siblings, and school personnel. As a young person climbs up the educational ladder during the school years, he/she is dependent on adults making key decisions that influences his/her future. Once students enter high school, at the age of 14, transition plans should be developed as ITP’s to provide services to these students.

Students with disabilities need various support from family, friends, agencies and the community. Community and advocacy groups need to be aware of their needs and understand the procedures to ensure the individual is living a full and productive life as
possible. It is found that those students have difficulty in transition from school to adulthood, especially after their high school graduation.

It is found that the majority of high school graduates were not as well prepared to sustain a productive life in society as was expected when attending high school. This lack of readiness for adulthood transition was not addressed during the IEP/ITP process. Social competent skills for successful transition should be emphasized and issues such as post-secondary education, military, employment, living arrangements, adult services should also be included in high school curriculum to better support these students.
CHAPTER THREE
Methodology

Participants

A total of 56 students with learning disabilities graduated from the County Institute of Technology in 2003, were participants in the study. Of these, 38 were male and 18 were female. Fifty of these graduates were 18 years old and six were 19 years old at the time of graduation. They were diagnosed as having severe learning disabilities according to the state criteria and assessment of their child study teams. Each student had an IEP in needed academic areas, i.e. English, health and physical education, mathematics, history, science, and world languages. All graduates were residents of 20 townships and municipal cities of the southern area of New Jersey. They spend 4 years of studies in the Institute.

Setting

The Institute of Technology is located in Southern New Jersey. It is a four year vocational high school for students from grades 9 through 12. The programs of studies are accredited by the State Department of Education. The curricular include English I-IV, various levels of math courses, science, history, health and physical education and the career majors or workshops for students to study in order to prepare them for a particular occupation such as cosmetology, health occupations, auto mechanics, diesel mechanics, or culinary. Each day, students spend two hours and 20 minutes in learning academic
subjects and two hours and 20 minutes of vocational training in selected workshops based on their career interests.

Survey

The Post High School Plans Survey (PHSPS) was developed by the school to investigate graduates from the Institute each year. This survey is a self-reported questionnaire with ten questions ranging from student’s name to their employment status and their desire of work. Based on this survey, I developed a telephone survey to obtain recent graduates’ information after they graduated from the Institute. This telephone survey includes 10 questions as follows:

1. What is your name?
2. What was your age at the graduation?
3. What was your career major?
4. What is your gender? _Female _Male
5. Who is your current employer?
6. If unemployed, what is your desired work?
7. Do you attend a college or a trade school? _Full _Part time
8. Did you serve in the Military? Which Branch?
9. How has transition from your high school been?
   _very successful _successful _some what successful _unsuccessful
10. Have you used any transition services?
    _very frequently _Frequently _sometimes _don’t use services
Procedure

To begin my research, I went to the Child Study Team Coordinator at the Institute, to get a complete list of students who graduated in 2003. This list contained information about the graduates including their entrance and exit date, exit reasons, name and address, and home phone number at the time of graduation.

I called each student on the list by introducing myself as a special education teacher from the school they graduated, explaining the survey and requested for permission to interview him/her individually.

Subsequently, I informed the former student all the information would be strictly confidential, and their privacy would be protected. Once the graduate permitted, I proceeded to ask the 10 questions in order. At any time requested, I paused and answered any questions if the respondent asked to explain more detailed information, in order to obtain complete responses.

Finally, I told the student I would be taking notes in references to their responses so that I could clarify answers once the survey ended. At the conclusion of the telephone interview, I thanked the respondent for his/her cooperation and wished him/her well with future endeavors.

Data Analysis

The survey results were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Percentages were calculated to present the employment status of our recent graduates after their graduation.
CHAPTER FOUR

Results

Students from the senior class of 2003 at the Institute of Technology participated in the study. A total of 56 graduates with learning disabilities were interviewed individually, of those, 10 graduates did not respond or wished not to participate. This chapter presents the interview results of the 46 participating graduates.

Employment Status

Table 4.1 displays the employment pattern of graduates following high school. Thirty nine percent of the students were employed in the career major studied at the institute, 17% were employed out of their career major, 6% were enrolled in post secondary training, 15% were enrolled in various military services, and 22% were unemployed. Students who were not successful in their career major chose either postsecondary education, a job unrelated to their career major, or entered the military. Thirty nine percent of the graduates did secure jobs in the field they studied while attending the Institute of Technology.
Table 4.1 Employment Status of Graduates of 2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment/Post-graduation Training</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Postsecondary</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed in Career Major</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed out of Career Major</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Independent Living

Table 4.2 displays students' living situation. Twenty five students stated they still are dependent on parents or siblings at the time of the survey, indicating 54% of graduates from 2003 were not living independently two years after their graduation.

Table 4.2 Independent Living

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dependent on parents/siblings</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Living</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Experiencing Successful Transition

Table 4.3 displays students' transition experience following high school.

Seventeen graduates were independent living out of their parents' home and maintaining employment representing 37%, while 63% (29 students) reported unsuccessful transition. Of the 29 students who reported unsuccessful transition, 10 are unemployed and must remain dependant on parents or siblings for financial support.

Table 4.3  Successful Transition

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent Living</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining Employment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful Transition</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Services Utilization

Table 4.4 displays the number of students who reported utilizing services (e.g. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation) available for successful transition from high school to the adult community. Seven students (15%) reported utilizing such services since graduating from school, while 39 (85%) did not utilize any services. Those who didn't utilize services reported that they didn't know how to get services, or didn't know services were available following graduation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Utilization Status</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Utilized services</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not utilize any services</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>46</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this investigation was to determine the employment patterns of graduates with disabilities who graduated from the Institute in one or two years, and to determine if their transition into adulthood was successful. The findings are limited by several factors. First, researcher bias may exist due to the fact that the researcher is an employee of the institute. The respondents might anticipate researcher expectancy when answering the survey questions. Many of the graduates had the researcher as a teacher, or know the researcher from attending the institute. The participating students may want to present a response for the researcher because of the relationships developed during their years at the institute. Second, the participating students are from only one school. This small sample size may limit the findings. Third, the research per se was designed to obtain information based on a self-reported survey. It is not possible to verify validity of respondent answers without extensive field research to further examine their employment status.

The research question focused on the employment status of students with learning disabilities following graduation. It is found that 39% of the graduates were employed in the career major they learned while attending the institute. The rest of students chose a job that is not related to their studies, or attended postsecondary education, entered the military, becoming unemployed, and remaining dependent on parent(s) or siblings for...
support. Twenty-six percent of the graduates were employed, either in their career major related jobs, or non related career major jobs. Twenty two percent of the graduates were unemployed following graduation. Learning a trade at the institute affords a higher percentage of students with LD a greater chance of being self sufficient and productive members of society than a regular high school does. Technology Institutes, such as the one in the study, provides students the opportunity to graduate from high school and go directly into a profession such as plumbing, culinary arts, auto mechanics, or numerous other professions where a college degree is not necessary for a successful adult life. The data showed that only 37% of graduates are able to maintain their employment and live independently. Over 50% of graduates depend on their parents and siblings for financial support. This means that the school needs to ensure the students are being taught the working skills, self help skills and social skills that are essential for employment. These skills must be practiced in school and reinforced by parents after school so that students can learn to become independent.

Transition appears to be difficult for students with LD. These students are often sent to vocational schools that may separate them from their general education peers. Parents, CST managers, or teachers often assist these individuals, creating a situation for their dependency on others. Thus, self advocacy is difficult for these individuals to learn in daily lives. This can be a problem once the student has left the school setting. Frequently, they don’t know how to search for services they are entitled to, and they are
not aware such services exist. This is especially true if the services are not available or necessary during the high school transition period. In the study, 80% of the students indicated that they had unsuccessful transition, because they were not informed about adult agencies or graduated prior to receiving knowledge about those available services.

For a successful transition from school to adulthood, following suggestions must be considered. First, school personnel must teach students how to become self advocates during the years in high school. When the Individual Transition Plan (ITP) is developed, school personnel must try to determine the individual needs and related services for the student. Both parent and student must be involved to ensure that the student will be able to access agencies and services, as well as becoming familiar with receiving entitlements from such agencies and services. In school, students must learn academic and social skills that are required for future employment. At home, parents must provide support to their children. Second, students must learn what services are available, and how to access these services while attending high school. Third, students must learn daily living activities, as well as community living environments, such as public transportation systems, grocery stores, banks, and other community facilities. Fourth, students must learn appropriate social skills in different settings. Whether in the classroom, in an employment setting or a social occasion, they must demonstrate appropriate social skills to adjust themselves to the environment.

According to the Texas Effectiveness Study (2002), it is recommended both
school personnel and parent(s) should provide opportunities for the student to make decisions, while monitoring progress until the student reaches a point where he/she can be comfortable and confident in the decisions that affect his/her lives both in and out of school. Self-determination and decision-making are important for these students in transition. The present study is only self-reported information gathering, thus, future research focusing on transition process for students with disabilities may emphasize on self-determination and decision making to support the students to develop their skills and confidence and to become independent and successful after their graduation.

In conclusion, this study provides information about employment, living status, and transition of high school graduates with disabilities. This information is important for educators and parents. Definitely, 20% of successful transition of graduates is not optimistic. Transition from school to adulthood remains a critical issue to students with disabilities. School personnel must teach students to become independent before graduation from high school, so that their needs can be addressed and problems can be eliminated to make the transition process successful. Becoming a productive society member is a goal of students with learning disabilities as well as a goal of schools to provide transition services.
REFERENCES


http://web10.epnet.com/citation.asp?tb=1&_ua=botS%5FDE+1st+Abstracts+db+ericdetfst...


successful adults with learning disabilities. Austin: Tx: Pro-Ed.


APPENDIX A

Institutional Review Board Disposition Form
INSTRUCTIONS: Check all appropriate boxes, answer all questions completely, include attachments, and obtain appropriate signatures. Submit an original and two copies of the completed application to the Office of the Associate Provost.

NOTE: Applications must be typed. Be sure to make a copy for your files.

FOR IRB USE ONLY:
Protocol Number: IRB- 2005-192
Received: Reviewed: Exemption: Yes No
Category(ies): Approved 1/24/06 (date)

Step 1: Is the proposed research subject to IRB review?
All research involving human participants conducted by Rowan University faculty and staff is subject to IRB review. Some, but not all, student-conducted studies that involve human participants are considered research and are subject to IRB review. Check the accompanying instructions for more information. Then check with your class instructor for guidance as to whether you must submit your research protocol for IRB review. If you determine that your research meets the above criteria and is not subject to IRB review, STOP. You do not need to apply. If you or your instructor have any doubts, apply for an IRB review.

Step 2: If you have determined that the proposed research is subject to IRB review, complete the identifying information below.

Project Title: The Employment Patterns of Graduates With a Specific Learning Disability For the Class of 2003

Researcher: Herbert Stevenson
Department: Special Education

Location: Robinson Hall

Mailing Address: 399 Tuckerton Road
Shamong, NJ 08088
609-268-6813

Co-Investigator/s:

Faculty Sponsor (if student)* Dr. Xin
Department Special Education
Location: Robinson

E-Mail: Xin@Rowan.edu Telephone: 856-256-4734

Approved For Use by Rowan IRB: 7/04
APPENDIX B

Institute of Technology Post High School Plans Survey
BURLINGTON COUNTY INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
POST HIGH SCHOOL PLANS

1. Name: ____________________________
   Address: ____________________________
   City/State/Zip: ______________________
   Telephone: __________________________

2. BCIT Shop: ________________________

3. The following information is required for State Dept. Follow-up reports.
   Please check the appropriate blocks.
   _____ Male   _____ White   _____ Hispanic
   _____ Female   _____ Black   _____ American Indian
   _____ Asian/Pacific Islander
   Please fill in one area which best describes you.

4. I am employed at: ______________________

5. I am unemployed and desire work at:
   ____________________________
   ____________________________
   ____________________________

6. I am enrolled at College/Trade School
   _____ Full time   _____ Part time
   School Name: __________________________
   Location: ____________________________

7. I enlisted in the Military
   _____ Yes   _____ No
   Branch: __________________________________

8. Please list any volunteer work or paid work experience you may have had.
   ______________________________________

9. Upon graduation I have a promise of employment at: __________________________
   ____________________________________

10. Where can we contact you in one to five years:
    Name: ____________________________
    Address: ____________________________
    City/State/Zip: ______________________
    Telephone: __________________________
    ____________________________________
    Thank you.