

**Follow-Up Survey of Year 2002
Graduate/Exiters of Connecticut High Schools**

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2002, 3935 students with disabilities exited special education in the State of Connecticut. Two years after exit, each individual was mailed a survey by the Connecticut State Department of Education to obtain follow-up information on post-school outcomes. The survey included items in three main areas: *Independent Living/Community Participation/Self-Advocacy*; 2). *Primary Employment: Current Status*; and 3). *Postsecondary Education and Training: Current Status*. Two waves of mailings were conducted, and responses were received from 695 exiters. When the total sample size was adjusted for surveys that were not deliverable due to incorrect or outdated addresses, the response rate was 22%.

Of the 468 exiters who responded to the questions about employment (67% of the total sample), the majority (47%) was employed full-time; Seventy-nine percent indicated that they were earning more than minimum wage (\$7.10 hour). The largest percentage of respondents (50%) reported that they are generally happy with their jobs. Females were less likely than males to be employed full-time (40% to 51%), and they reported earning less money and receiving fewer job benefits than males. Respondents with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Learning Disabilities (LD) reported the highest levels of full-time employment, while respondents with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) reported holding full-time employment at rates much lower than respondents from any other category (17%). Respondents with ID also reported earning less money and receiving fewer benefits than respondents from the other disability categories. Black respondents were more likely than white or Hispanic respondents to be employed less than 21 hours per week, and they more

frequently reported earning the minimum wage than other respondents. Male respondents, and respondents with ADHD and Emotional Disorders (ED), were more likely to report having trouble with the law and with drugs or alcohol.

Nearly 60% of the sample reported being enrolled in a postsecondary education or training program. The most common type of program was a four-year college or university followed by community, technical or two-year colleges. It was more likely for white respondents, and for respondents with cognitive disabilities (e.g., LD, ADHD) to be enrolled in these postsecondary education programs.

Methodology

Survey Development

The instrument used in this investigation was based upon the survey used by Bruder and Gaynor (2002) in the report “*Follow-Up Survey of Year 2000 Graduates/Exiters of High School.*” The data from that study was used as a baseline upon which to facilitate comparisons to subsequent cohorts of exiters, including those in the current sample.

The instrument was revised by a panel of four content experts with expertise in Special Education and/or in survey methodology. The most significant change was the entire instrument being shortened from 34-items to 24-items. Additional directions were added to assist respondents in skipping non-pertinent items and moving directly to relevant items (e.g., for respondents who were employed versus those in postsecondary education).

A panel of 6 young adults with disabilities reviewed the revised instrument. Information was elicited related to the clarity and readability of each item and of the instructions. The survey was subsequently revised based upon this feedback. The final instrument can be found in Appendix A.

The instrument consisted of 22-items across three main categories: 1). *Independent Living/Community Participation/Self-Advocacy*; 2). *Primary Employment: Current Status*; and 3). *Postsecondary Education and Training: Current Status*. Most items contained a stem and then a list of options from which the respondent could check either the single most appropriate response, or all responses that applied. The final item on the survey was open-ended and offered the respondent an opportunity to provide additional information about life after high school.

A letter explaining the purpose of the survey and inviting participation was created. The letter explained that the completed survey would be sent to the Project Principal Investigator (PI), Dr. Joseph Madaus at the University of Connecticut, for analysis. A consent form that outlined the respondent's rights and protections as a participant in this research was also created. Both the cover letter and the consent form indicated that completion and return of the survey was an expression of consent to participate (Appendix B). The completed instrument, letter of participation, and consent form was submitted to the University of Connecticut Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was approved on February 5, 2004.

Subjects

The subjects for this investigation consisted of 3,935 individuals who had exited special education during the year 2002 from one of the 169 Local Education Agencies (LEA) in the State of Connecticut. This data is reported in December of each year to the State Department of Education, Office of Research, Evaluation and Accountability, and in turn, the data is compiled and sent to the United States Department of Education. The LEA's assigned each exiter with a unique composite identification code (COMPID) that was based upon the last five letters of the student last name, the first initial, two digit year of birth, and "1" or "2" for gender (1= male, 2 = female). Data was also provided for the student's exceptionality, ethnicity, and reason for exit.

The data was sorted by the State Department of Education by LEA by all students who graduated during the period of January 1 to June 30, 2002 for any of the following reasons:

- Graduated with a regular education diploma;

- Graduated with an IEP diploma;
- Reached maximum age; or
- Dropped out of school

In December, 2003, each of the 169 LEA's in the State of Connecticut was mailed both a letter (Appendix C) and an electronic computer disk that contained the COMPID for each student in the district, and requested relevant contact information (e.g., name, address, telephone number).

The computer discs were returned to the Bureau of Special Education, and a complete database was established. There was a 100% response rate from the LEA's for this request. Mailing labels were generated from this database, and additionally, each survey was coded to identify the LEA and the student's code.

Mailings

Multiple names ($n = 65$) were removed from the initial database for one of the following reasons: 1). Student address unknown/student moved ($n = 49$); 2). Deceased ($n = 7$); 3). Did not graduate in January to June, 2002 ($n = 2$); 4). Incarcerated ($n = 2$); and, 5). Duplicate Names ($n = 5$).

The initial mailing was conducted by the State Department of Education and consisted of 3,870 surveys. The surveys were mailed in batches of approximately 800 during the first week of May, 2004. The PI received a total of 454 completed surveys from the first wave. A second wave mailing was conducted by the PI and a graduate assistant in July 2004, and yielded an additional 241 responses for a total of 695 responses.

Across the two waves of mailings, a total of 733 surveys were returned as undeliverable because of incorrect or unknown addresses, and 12 names were

deleted from the database because the data duplicated an existing name or was incomplete. Five individuals, or their parents or guardians, contacted either the State Department of Education or the PI and requested that they be removed from the project database. Thus, the final sample for the present analysis is based upon 3,120 individuals ($n = 3,120$), and a response rate of 22%.

Data Analysis

Frequency analyses were conducted on each item for all respondents collectively. Responses were also analyzed according to Gender, Disability, Ethnicity, and Reason for Exit. Appendices D through H contain the specific results for all frequency analyses. Care must be taken in interpreting the observed differences between some of the categories; several of the cell sizes for the respondents are extremely small (e.g., on reason for exit, on disability type) and thus differences may appear that are in fact a result of the small and unequal sizes. Because all collected data was dichotomous (i.e., Yes/No), selected variables that appeared to be of note were analyzed using chi-square analyses. It should be noted that although several of the analyses yielded significant results many had small effect sizes or expected frequencies within cells that are so low as to raise concerns about the validity of the results. Thus, only analyses that displayed effect sizes approaching a medium level and that had sufficient cell sizes are presented in the following results.

Results

Descriptive Information

The group was overwhelmingly “White” (87%), followed by “Black” (6%), “Hispanic” (6%), and “Other” (1%). Although the respondents ranged in age from 18 ($n = 4$, 1%) to 24 ($n = 20$, 3%), 81% of the group was in the range of 20 to 21

years. Appendix D contains the frequencies of the total sample on all of the survey questions. There were nearly twice as many males ($n = 430$, 62%) as there were females ($n = 265$, 38%). Appendix E contains frequency data on all survey items by Gender.

The most common exceptionality was “Learning Disability” (LD; 49%), followed by “Emotional Disturbance” (ED; 13%), “Other Health Impaired” (OHI; 10%), “Intellectual Disability” (ID; 8%), “Speech” (5%) and “Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder” (ADHD; 5%). Because of the low incidence of other disabilities, the categories were collapsed from 14 to 7. As such, the following categories are reported on for the remainder of this report: ADHD, ED, ID, LD, OHI, Speech, and All Other Disabilities. While white respondents constituted the majority of respondents in all disability categories, this was especially pronounced in the categories of ADHD (97%), OHI (97%), LD (88%), and ED (86%). The lowest incidence within the categories for white students was ID (70%). Black respondents constituted 16% of respondents with ID, 7% of respondents with LD, and 7% of respondents with ED. Hispanic respondents represented 11% of those with ID, and 6% of those with ED. Appendix F contains data related to each survey item by disability type, and Appendix G contains data related to ethnicity for all survey items.

Nearly 90% of the respondents (89.4%) graduated with a diploma, while 4% dropped out, and 3% both graduated with an IEP diploma or aged out. While graduation with a standard diploma was the most common outcome across all disability categories, it was notable that 14% of the sample with ED dropped out. This rate was more than twice that of the next closest disability category who dropped out (Speech; 6%). Sixteen percent of the respondents in the category of

ID reached the maximum age, in comparison to 12% of students in the “All Other Disability Category” and to 1% in the category of ED. Appendix H contains specific data on Reason for Exit on all survey items.

Sixty-two percent of the graduate/exiters completed the survey themselves, while an additional 34% of the surveys were completed by a parent or guardian. In examining the pattern of who completed the survey by exceptionality type, it was notable that in the Intellectual Disability category, a parent or guardian completed 78% of the returned surveys. A Chi-square analysis revealed a significant difference in this area ($\chi^2(6, N = 644) = 77.433$, $p < .001$, Cramer's $V = .35$).

Comparison of the Sample to the Population

As noted, responses were received from 695 individuals who were part of a larger population of 3,935 individuals who exited special education in Connecticut during 2002. Descriptive data was run on the total population ($n = 3,395$) and this was compared to the actual responding sample ($n = 695$). Investigation of this data reveals that the gender distribution was fairly similar (68% male in the population versus 62% of the respondents) and was nearly identical in terms of disability type (Table 2).

However, Whites are over represented in the present sample (75% of the population versus 87% of the respondents), while Black and Hispanic respondents are underrepresented (12% for blacks and 11% for Hispanics in the total population versus 6% for both groups in the present sample). Likewise, those individuals who graduated with a diploma are over represented in the sample (80% of the population versus 90% of the sample), while those who dropped out are under represented (14% of the population versus 4% of the

sample). Therefore, the results related to ethnicity and reason for exit should be considered with some caution.

Table 1
Comparison of Respondents in Sample versus Total Exiters: Gender

Gender	Respondents		Total Exiters	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Female	265	38.1	1269	32.2
Male	430	61.9	2666	67.8
Total	695	100.0	3935	100.0

Independent Living/Community Participation/Self-Advocacy

Living arrangements. The respondents were asked to indicate where they lived during a majority of the year. The overwhelming majority responded that they live in a “Parent’s or Relative’s Home” (65%), followed by “On-School Campus Housing” (18%), and a “Rented Apartment” (11%). Correspondingly, most respondents indicated that they live with a “Parent/Guardian” for a majority of the year (64%), followed by “Roommate(s) – Not Related” (21%), and “Alone” (6%).

Regardless of disability type, most respondents lived in their parent’s home, with their parents. This is especially true of respondents with Intellectual Disabilities, who live at home in a higher percentage than any other disability type (81% compared to 65% of respondents with ED and 63% of respondents with LD). This trend was also found across all categories of ethnicity. The only significant difference between the ethnic categories was that white respondents

were more likely to live in “On Campus School Housing” than respondents in any other category (20% compared to 7% of respondents in the “Other” ethnicity category and 2% of black respondents).

Table 2
Comparison of Respondents in Sample versus Total Exiters: Disability Type

Disability Type	Respondents		Total Exiters	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
ADHD	33	4.7	169	4.3
Autism	9	1.3	28	.7
Deaf/Blind	2	0.3	6	.2
ED	90	12.9	670	17.0
Hearing Impairment	14	2.0	46	1.2
Intellectual Disability	57	8.2	267	6.8
Learning Disability	337	48.5	1981	50.3
Multiple Disability	25	3.6	83	2.1
Neurological Impairment	15	2.2	52	1.3
Orthopedic	1	0.1	5	.1
Other Health Impaired	68	9.8	373	9.5
Speech	33	4.7	204	5.2
TBI	3	0.4	9	.2
Visual Impairment	8	1.2	31	.8
Other	0	0.0	11	.3
Total	695	100.0	3935	100.0

Table 3
Comparison of Respondents in Sample versus Total Exiters: Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Respondents		Total Exiters	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Asian/Pacific Islander	4	0.6	37	.9
Black	44	6.3	471	12.0
Hispanic	31	4.5	443	11.3
Native American	3	0.4	21	.5
Other	8	1.2	17	.4
White	605	87.1	2946	74.9
Total	695	100.0	3935	100.0

Table 4
Comparison of Respondents in Sample versus Total Exiters: Exit Reason

Exit Reason	Respondents		Total Exiters	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
Graduated with Diploma	621	89.4	3157	80.2
Graduated with Certificate	23	3.3	156	4.0
Dropped Out	30	4.3	557	14.2
Maximum Age	21	3.0	65	1.7
Total	695	100.0	3935	100.0

Independent living. The respondents were provided with a list of ten items related to independent living (e.g., driver's license, car, checking account, credit card, computer, internet access) and were asked to select all choices which they had access to. Most respondents reported having, or having access to a telephone or cell phone (90%), a computer (78%), internet access (77%), a driver's license (74%), a savings account (72%), a car (68%), and a checking account (67%). Analysis of these responses across disability type revealed that young adults with ID generally had less access to each of the items than respondents from any other disability category. White respondents reported higher levels of access to each of the items than respondents from any of the other ethnicity categories.

Community participation. The respondents were provided with a list of seven items related to Community Participation (e.g., voting, membership in clubs or churches) and were asked to select all items in which they participate. It was most likely for respondents to report having hobbies and regular fun activities (70% each), to have access to transportation (68%), and to attend sporting or cultural outings (59%). Only 48% of the respondents reported voting, and 42% reported belonging to clubs, churches, and other organizations.

Socialization. The respondents were asked to select with whom they spend a majority of their free time. There was a good deal of variability in this response, with 25% indicating "Family Members", 24% indicating with a "Girlfriend, Boyfriend, or Fiancée," 22% reporting with "New Friends Since High School" and 17% with "Old Friends from High School." When this item is analyzed by ethnicity, most responses are fairly evenly distributed, with one exception. The most common response for Black respondents was "With Family

