Summary of the Issue:

Employment outcomes for youth with disabilities exiting public schools have not improved during the last decade (Benz & Lindstrom, 1997; Edgar, 1988; Wagner, 1993, Wehman, Kregel & Barcus, 1985). Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) indicated that only 46% of youth with disabilities were competitively employed one to two years following high school, compared to 50% of a demographically similar group from the general population (Wagner, 1991). The NLTS study indicated that many former students with disabilities were unemployed or underemployed. Of those who were competitively employed, only 38% earned more than minimum wage. Parents and students reported that 61% of these students needed vocational services one year after high school (Benz, Yovanoff & Doren, 1997).

This brief highlights a study that extended transition services beyond graduation and significantly increased employment earnings. Specific transition services delivered included vocational assessment, agency contacts, IEP/transition meetings, extended vocational training, employability counseling, job club, job interview preparation, job development, and job coaching.
Study Questions/Method:

A pretest- posttest control group design examined the effects of extending transition services beyond graduation on employment earnings of vocational graduates with disabilities. The study population were nominated by vocational special needs staff as at-risk for not maintaining employment following graduation. If graduates agreed to participate in the study, they were randomly assigned to the experimental or control group, controlling for race, gender, and previous work experience. Chi-square and t-tests analyses indicated that there were no significant differences between the two groups on gender, race, disability, and IQ variables. Young adults in the experimental group (n= 43) participated in a transition intervention program following graduation. Control participants (n=33) were paid an annual stipend to share their employment and independent living experiences.

A parent/student follow-up questionnaire was distributed five years after the delivery of extended transition services to determine the long-term effects of extending transition services on employment and independent living outcomes. Analyses were conducted to address the following research hypotheses:

1. Earnings of the experimental group will be significantly higher following the delivery of extended transition services than for participants in the control group.

2. Employment rates for participants in the experimental group will be significantly higher than those for the control group, 4 to 6 years following the termination of extended transition services.

3. The percentage of youth receiving job benefits will be significantly higher for participants in the experimental group than for those in the control group, 4 to 6 years following the termination of extended transition services.

Findings:

The results indicated that youth who received extended transition services had significantly higher earnings for two years following the termination of services than youth who did not receive extended transition services.

- The average earnings of the first four quarters (the first year after intervention) for the experimental group were $6,744, whereas the control group earned $3,502.

- During the second year after exiting their program, the experimental youth earned $7,336, whereas the control youth earned $4,534.

- On average, youth who received services earned approximately $3,000 more per year than their peers who did not receive these services.
Through a follow-up survey conducted five years after intervention services ended, we found that youth in the experimental group who received extended transition services were significantly more likely to be employed or in a training program than youth in the control group who did not receive extended transition services.

- Approximately 50% of participants in both groups were reported to receive health insurance and paid vacations.

- The experimental participants were significantly more likely to be active in social groups and to have savings accounts and credit cards, than youth in the control group.

- Parents reported that vocational training, counseling, and job placement services were helpful in assisting their son or daughter in gaining employment. Less than one-half of the parents who received IEP meeting coordination reported that these meetings helped their son or daughter gain employment.

Implications by Audience:

Educators, Transition Specialists and Rehabilitation Counselors

- Expand and individualize the delivery of transition services during high school. Services such as vocational assessment, vocational training, employability counseling, job development and job interview skills need to be a major component of the secondary school experience. Skills needed for job success need to be infused into the curriculum throughout the grades, as well as taught on an individualized basis.

- Add a thirteenth and fourteenth vocational training program as a postsecondary option. In contrast to their peers, many students with disabilities are not sufficiently mature or skilled to successfully enter the labor force full time after a four-year high school program. For many of these students, a preferred option might be to postpone graduation for two years in lieu of an extended vocational program. Students can focus on completing the high school requirements during the initial four years, and then enroll in a vocational program and work in a related field during a 13th and 14th year program.

- Provide employability counseling and job development transition services. Many youth need employability counseling and job development services to assist with the initial entry into the labor market. As part of this technical assistance, provide additional linkages to adult service agencies, as appropriate.
School and Adult Service Program Administrators

- Strengthen the coordination services across school and adult service agencies. Improve communication among service providers and the family so that a smooth continuum of services can be planned and implemented as the youth leaves school and enters community employment with the support of adult service providers.

- Coordinate outcome data collection efforts with adult programs. Provide on-going monitoring of the graduates’ work performance, earnings, and post-secondary outcomes.

- Expand adult service recruitment and service delivery efforts. Several participants in the control group were not employed because they were not connected to or aware of adult services as part of the secondary school’s transition program. Adult service agencies need to include these graduates in their service delivery programs.

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