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Postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities related to employment and higher education

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POSTSECONDARY OUTCOMES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES
RELATED TO EMPLOYMENT AND HIGHER EDUCATION

By

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A thesis

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

Students with disabilities are leaving high school and are not prepared. What is happening to students with disabilities after high school? Why? What can educators do to ensure that students with disabilities are successfully transitioning into the real world, which includes higher education institutions, long-term employment, and living independently? Oftentimes students with disabilities are not equipped to meet the challenges after high school. In some cases students with disabilities lack knowledge as well as confidence, which they internalize, and it in results failure in post-secondary settings and in other aspects of their lives. Students with disabilities are one of the fastest growing populations in America's schools today. Are they prepared to secure employment and attend higher education institutions? All school districts in the state of Wisconsin are required to provide transition services as a part of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Indicator 13 is a state and federal mandate that requires all special education teachers to work collaboratively with students, parents, and when necessary outside agencies to document post-secondary goals. The number of students who successfully transition into adulthood after high school varies.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine existing data and determine what happened to students once they exited high school. The information provided insight for interested stakeholders on whether the outcomes of students with disabilities need to be improved. Examining the Wisconsin Statewide School District Post High School Outcomes Survey results will give special-education service providers a better understanding of the outcomes of the

participants. The survey responses may help educators encourage students to make more informed choices on how to successfully accomplish their post-secondary goals. The survey results were analyzed in an effort to determine how many students were engaged in postsecondary activities in what specific areas

Are students with disabilities securing employment or attending higher education institutions after they leave high school? The state of Wisconsin requires that all students with disabilities to have documented plans before the students reach age fourteen. The transition plans are designed to help students begin to explore and pursue goals that are age appropriate and based upon their interest and abilities. Thousands of transition plans are written annually but are the majority of students accomplishing their post- secondary goals? Students were surveyed and answered a series forty-three interview questionnaire. The survey asked open-ended question that provided surveyors with a data on the students' activities after they left high school.

Significance of the Study

Transition has been and continues to be a significant area of focus for educators and researchers. There is a continuum of students exiting secondary settings on an annual basis. Thousands of students will be in need of an employment or training. The impact of the large number of students entering post-secondary settings indicates that professors and counselors will need to be equipped to provide accommodations.

Definitions

Indicator 13- a law in place to ensure that all students IEP's include transition plan with clear and concise language and has a plan of action for transition services related to student post secondary goals. All plans must have appropriate measureable post-secondary goals that address the students' education/training, employment, and independent living needs for life after high

school. It is important that each goal is measurable so it can be determined whether the students' goals are met in the future. 920 U.S.C.1416 (a)(3)(B))

Indicator 14- a measurement of student participation in post-secondary education and employment that is unduplicated. The target areas include higher education, competitive employment, other post-secondary employment or training, and whether a student is not engaged in any post-secondary activities. It is required by the federal government that states monitor students' progress once they exit high school. The post-secondary outcomes are measured to determine student engagement level in the various areas.

Transition- According to IDEA: (34) The term "transition services" means a coordinated set of activities for a child with a disability that—(A) is designed to be a results-orientated process, that is focused on improving the academic and functional achievement of the child with a disability to facilitate the child's movement from school to post school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing an adult education services, independent living, or community participation.

Assumptions

The first assumption I made was that individuals with disabilities were not equipped to successfully transition into the various post-secondary settings. In fact some students did possess the skills and knowledge to gain access to higher education institutions and employment opportunities. The second assumption I made was that all students wanted to work or attend college after high school. However, some students were not interested in working or attending college based on my analysis of survey question responses. My final assumption was that students who were surveyed were willing to honestly answer questions or answered the questions in a way that was positive. In fact the results indicated that some students responded negatively.

Limitations

The study was limited in regards to the actual number of state respondents who left high school who were surveyed compare to the state sample. The state respondents represented less than 40% of the population of students with disabilities who exited in 2011.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Historical Framework

Preparing students with disabilities by providing post-secondary transition plans, training, information, and education while students are in high school will better prepare them for higher education institutions, and competitive employment. The purpose of the research study was to learn how students in Wisconsin benefited from setting post-secondary goals prior to exiting. Students with disabilities' transition outcomes have been an area of concern for more than three decades. There are many points of view, assumptions or biases related to transition. The research articles and studies in this literature review were significant because they contributed to various perspectives regarding students in transition from secondary to post-secondary settings. The debate continues on whether or not students are receiving the necessary preparation and support before they leave high school. Currently, the technological world demands that all students be knowledgeable and motivated. Job expectations are that individuals with disabilities enter the workforce or higher education institution with skills and knowledge to compete and excel in their work. However, in the past post-secondary education after high school was optional before entering a job. Historically, the jobs were manual labor and the students were not expected to live independently and work. More special education students worked jobs that required repetition. The jobs required minimal training and they did well. Currently, job requirements are different from thirty years ago. Everyone is expected to function in a fast paced environment including students with disabilities.

Preparing Students for Postsecondary Education

The purpose of the study (Canto, Proctor, & Prevatt, 2005) was to determine how individuals with learning disabilities who received academic support progressed in college. The participants were separated into three groups, which included students with learning disabilities, students without learning disabilities and students who were not diagnosed with learning disabilities. The difference between the second and third group were that one group was diagnosed with LD; the other group was evaluated but was not diagnosed. The students' academic and demographic records were used to conclude whether they benefited from support after one calendar year. Students registered to participate and were evaluated related to academic concerns. Some participants received academic accommodations and other did not. Results indicated the students without learning disabilities had a lower GPA than students with learning disabilities. Students with disabilities who received academic support benefited and did well compared to the other two groups. The students without a disability did not take advantage of the supports and didn't make as much progress. "It is equally important to determine whether students with LD perform differently from students without LD, whether students ZLD take advantage of special services, and whether these services have a positive effect on academic progress."(p.10). Students were successful when they received academic support and were encouraged and motivated to do well despite any obstacles.

This study (Hennessey, Roessler, Cook, Unger, & Rumrill, 2006) examined how individuals with disabilities accessed employment. It also focused on strategies that could be used to improve employment outcomes after graduation. "Several developmental and environmental barriers continue to impede the career success of students, and information is needed pertaining to students' current employment concerns and career service needs."(p.40)

Students were surveyed and responses were tallied using a Likert scale. The individuals' teachers also provided information by completing a questionnaire. The results indicated that career related interventions and career-related programs help improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

This study focused on the attributes and components of self-empowerment and it affects students leaving high school unprepared. The numbers of students with disabilities entering higher education institutions are increasing. According to Hong, Ivy, Gonzalez, and Ehrensberger, (2007) "Students with disabilities are increasingly enrolled in postsecondary education, yet many of them are not prepared to cope with the rigor of education." (p.32) Researchers determined that skills necessary were lacking which included self-advocacy, confidence, and determination. The results indicated what students with disabilities lack related to self-determination and must be taught that expectations are higher in post-secondary settings.

This study focused on how to improve strategies when working with students to increase their success rate in post-secondary settings. All of the participants volunteered and received some level of special education service at one time. The disability category for each participant varied. There were three main factors believed to increase the success rate of students with disabilities in post-secondary settings. The focus areas included self-determination, planning efforts, and post-secondary supports. These are believed to have had a major impact on how well students achieved after leaving high school. "The attitudes and characterizations secondary teachers, postsecondary instructors, and families held concerning these students were important because they influenced these students' perceptions about their capabilities."(Garrison-Wade, 2012, p.117). The data was collected using surveys. One was a focus group survey and the other was an interview questionnaire. Results indicated that students were not equipped to advocate for

themselves, and their knowledge base and skill level were an obstacle to seeking out answers from teachers. The results of this study indicated that there was a direct connection between students who are determined, plan ahead, and who received support and positive outcomes and in secondary and post-secondary settings.

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) focused on students with disabilities and their outcomes in the following areas which included: Post-Secondary Education, Employment, Independent Living, Social or Community Activities. The study looked at how students were engaged in these activities six years after leaving their secondary settings. Furthermore, the study explored whether the adults with disabilities engagement and post-secondary activities were based upon their gender, race, and socioeconomic status. It also compared the adults with varying disabilities regarding how well they did in the five areas. The study showed how outcomes varied depending upon the individuals' disability, social economic status, gender, and ethnicity. Individual with disabilities wages did not differ but the number of people securing employment differed based upon their parents' economic status. The largest population was adults with learning disabilities. The study concluded that young adults with disabilities earned less, had lower enrollment and attendance in post-secondary settings, engagement, and social and community involvement. "As young adults with disabilities continue on their path through emerging adulthood, opportunities for employment increase."(Sanford, Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knonkey & Shaver, 2011 p. 23) The data for this study was collected in four waves. The first wave was parent interviews, second wave were interviews with the parent and a youth mail survey, for youth that were in high school who were 16 to 18 years old. Wave three repeated the parent telephone interview, and mail survey. Wave four included phone interviews, mail survey for both parents, and high school transcripts were requested for

review. The total duration of the National Longitudinal Transition Study was 10 years. The results of the study were significant and indicated that young adults whose parents earned substantial income did secure employment and attend higher education institutions. Furthermore, they were more involved in social or community activities, which included independent living.

The purpose of the study (Shaw, 2009) was to examine how students with disabilities were being prepared and whether they were given enough options before they left high school. The study took a close look at the responsibilities of the post-secondary setting and the school districts of the students when they were at the secondary level. “Effective transition includes school-wide supports, family supports, Universal Design, counseling programs, and joint programs between high schools and colleges” (p. 11) The results indicated that students with disabilities should be involved in the transition planning stages and step-by-step process. Accommodations and support systems after transitioning into a post-secondary setting should also be appropriately aligned with the setting that best fits their skills and ability levels.

This study (Williams-Diehm & Benz, 2008) compared students with disabilities to students without disabilities to determine the differences in their post-secondary outcomes. There were four areas of focus, which included employment, post-secondary education, independent living, and recreation and leisure. “Districts must be prepared to collect both reliable and valid data as well as know how to use this data in comparison to other groups.” (p. 6) The study focused on students from one school district. There was an exit survey and a post school survey. The control factor was that all surveys were administered in the same educational setting. The results indicated that students with and without disabilities both responded to the surveys. Students or exiters with disabilities had a difficult time finding employment, or attending higher education institutions. The similarities between students with and without disabilities were that

both groups graduated or earned a regular graduation diploma, but students with disabilities had significant difficulties reaching post- secondary outcomes.

The primary focus of this study (Williams, Robertson, & Casey, 2010) examined successful transition from school to work and to living independently as an adult after completing post-secondary education requirements. The data were collected based on a subsystem of four characteristics which included timing, behavior, personal care, and independent living. Students' characteristics were examined based upon classroom performance, cooperation, and self-help skills. Timing was directly correlated with handing in assignments on time, arriving to class on time, and starting working a timely manner. It was related to employment. Arriving to work on time and completing tasks in a timely manner, increased success in both environments. The study results indicated there was a connection between behavior, independence, and being responsible for personal needs. According to Williams, Robertson, and Casey "Transition from school to adulthood for students with disabilities further complicates any typical changes experienced by their non-disabled counter parts and brings about its own set of obstacles." (p. 101) The characteristics measured in work or employment in a post-secondary setting was based upon psychological assessments, and a prevocational skills checklist.

Summary

The purpose of the present study was to determine the level of engagement for students with disabilities in the areas of employment and higher education. Previous research suggested that students were not prepared and needed to improve their personal characteristics that included self-advocacy, effective communication, problem solving, personal responsibility, and self-determination. Transition planning, which include hands-on opportunities, planning, support

programs in both secondary and post-secondary settings are needed for students with disabilities so they are able to transition successfully into adulthood. The review of the literature suggested transition improvements, college preparedness, and career development; and a continued need for changes to ensure an increase in the population of students with disabilities who transition successfully.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This research was undertaken to study students with disabilities and post-secondary outcomes. Special education teachers, administrators, parents, and students would like to know whether improvements need to be made to ensure a higher rate of success for students who exit high school and enter into post-secondary settings. The Wisconsin Post High School Outcomes Survey (WPHSOS) included open-ended questions that generated responses that were specific to the experiences of the students who participated in the interviews. Analyzing the data included in the various survey reports provided the researcher with insight on the views of the people who participated. Using the archival data from the Wisconsin Post High School Outcomes Survey of 2009-2010 exiters I examined the responses to the survey questions and analyzed the results

Participants

The target sample of the WPHSOS was students with disabilities who exited high school in 2009-2010 who earned a certificate of completion, a diploma, aged out, or dropped out. The participants were both male and female, ages 18-22 years old, from varying ethnic groups. Students from varying disability categories were included. Cognitive, emotional behavioral, learning, and low incidence categories were represented in the data sample. All participants voluntarily completed the survey. The number of state respondents was 460 compared to the states sample of 1466 exiters.

Procedure

I compared results of students with disabilities who exited high school in 2009-2010. I compared students' engagement in the Indicator 14 outcomes categories that included higher education, competitive employment, other education, and other employment. Additionally, I compared these outcomes to those of 2008-2009 exiters in the same categories to determine if there was an upward trend. Furthermore, I compared the 2010, 2011, and 2012 Indicator 14 outcomes categories results.

The purpose of my examination of the post-secondary outcomes data of students with disabilities was to learn what happened to students related to securing employment and attending higher education institutions. Therefore, I compared and contrasted the various Indicator 14 categories. Specifically, I also analyzed the Part B State Annual Performance Report for 2011. The outcome categories analyzed were Higher Education, Competitive Employment, Other Employment, and Other Education. Furthermore, I compared the number of statewide respondents to the state population in the FFY 2010, 2011, and 2012 in the same Indicator 14 outcome categories. However, my primary focus was on the 2011 results of the students who exited 2009-2010. The 2011 WPHSOS of 2009-2010 Exiters with Disabilities compared the participants' gender, ethnicity, and age to determine the level of engagement in relationship to the demographics. I analyzed the state population, sample and respondents by gender, ethnicity/race, and disability of 2009-2010 exiters. My analysis of the state population, state sample, and state respondents gave me information on how many students were included in the state sample and how many actually responded to the survey. I also analyzed the Wisconsin Post High School Outcome Survey Interview Questions & Interviewer Script. All the archival data form Wisconsin Post High School Outcomes Survey website www.posthighschoolsurvey.org

which were directly accessible through the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction website. The state samples were collected as a result of school districts (LEAs) providing information to interviewers who contacted former students that exited in 2009-2010. The primary method used to collect the data was phone interviews that asked students open-ended questions. The names and contact information of the students were not used in reporting the survey results.

Data Analysis

After analyzing the data I developed a table and figures to show the various levels of engagement and the indicator 14 categories, which included higher education, employment, other employment, and other education. I examined the level of engagement in those activities based on gender, ethnicity, and disability. Another, area I examined was how the students with the disabilities exited; which earned a regular diploma, certificate of completion, reached the maximum age, or dropped out of high school.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

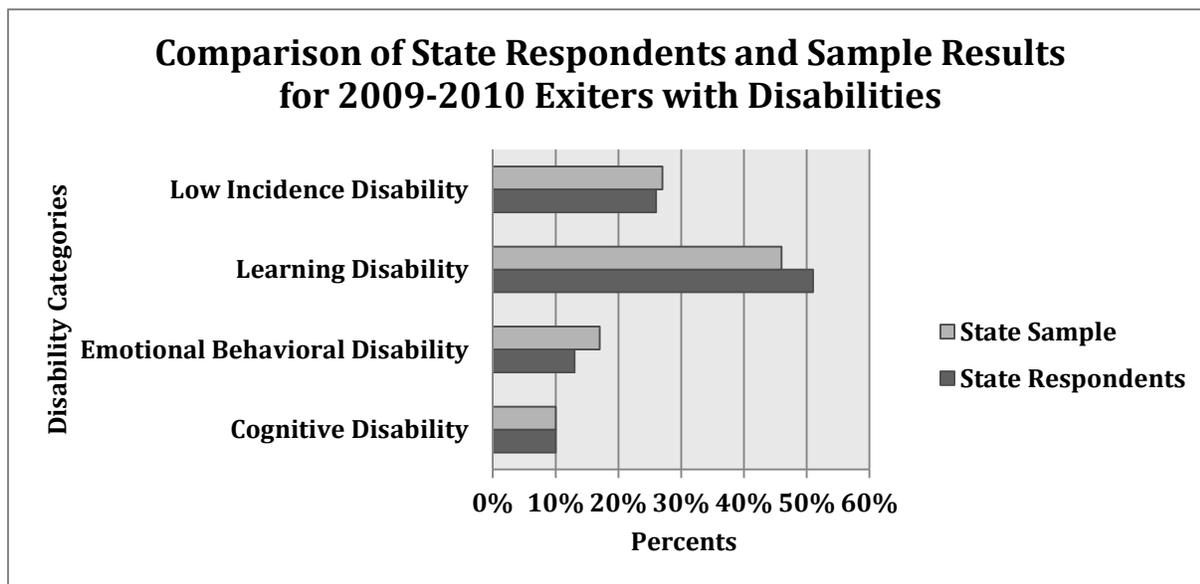


Figure 1

Figure 1 is a comparison of the state sample and those who exited high school and responded to a survey in 2011. State respondents and state sample numbers were equal at 10 % of exiters with cognitive disabilities. Data indicated exiters with emotional behavioral disabilities were 5% lower in the state sample compared to the state respondents. The state sample data indicated 46% of exiters had learning disabilities compared 51% of state respondents, which indicated a difference of 5%. The data for exiters in the low incidence disability category indicated state respondents were 26% and the state sample was 27%, which indicated the difference of 1%. The state sample mean was (M= 366.5) and the state respondents mean was (M= 115).

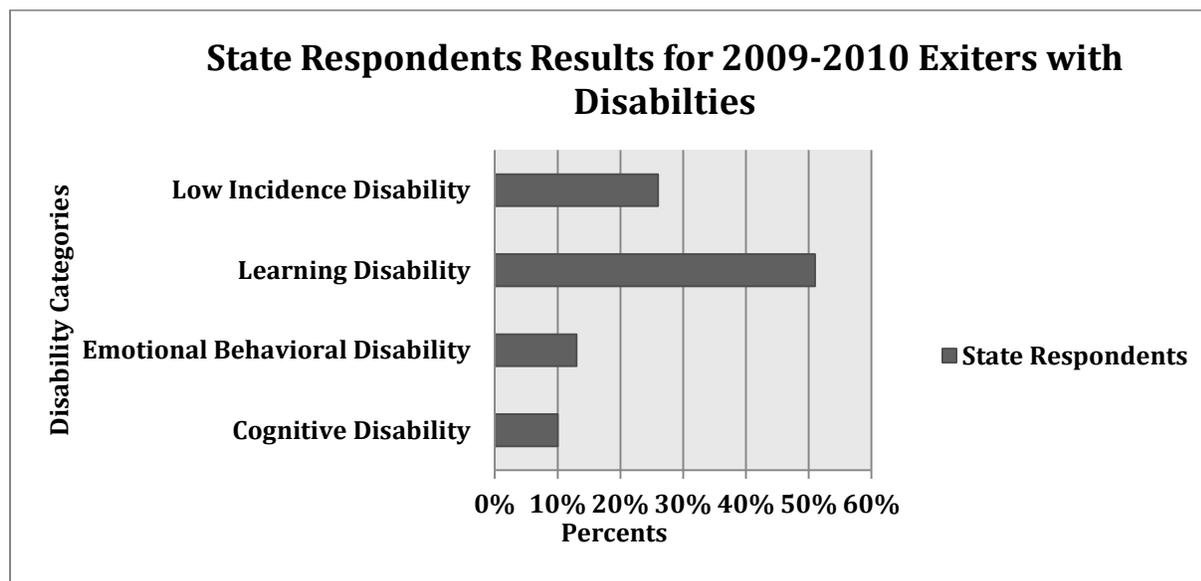


Figure 2

Figure 2 shows students that exited high school in the year 2009-2010 with learning disabilities were at 51% the largest group who responded to the survey. Exiters in the low incidence category at 26% were the second largest group to respond. The low incidence category included former students with autism; who had hearing, other health, orthopedic, visually, and speech/language impairment, and those with traumatic brain injury. Thirteen percent of the exiters had an emotional behavioral disability. Data indicated that respondents with cognitive disabilities were at 10%. The total number of exiters to respond was 460. The state respondent data indicated that a total of 31% of exiters responded to the survey.

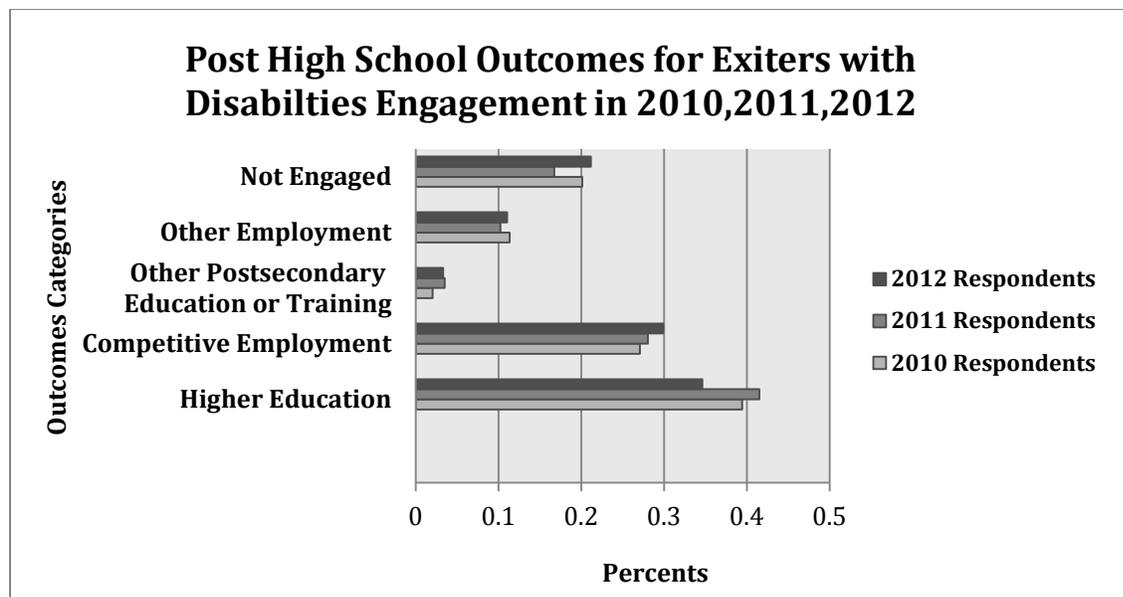


Figure 3

Figure 3 indicates that 14% of students with disabilities were not engaged in postsecondary education, training, competitive employment, or training. In 2011 9% of the students with disabilities were not engaged which a decrease was of approximately 5% compared to 2010. The outcomes for the state respondents in 2012 indicated that 13% of students were not engaged which was a 4% increase compared to 2012. Overall, 2011 had the lowest number of respondents and the highest response rate was in 2010. Former students in the outcomes category of other employment were 11% in 2010, 10% in 2011 and 11% in 2012. There was a 1% decrease in 2011 and the percentage of students who were employed was the same in both 2010 and 2012.

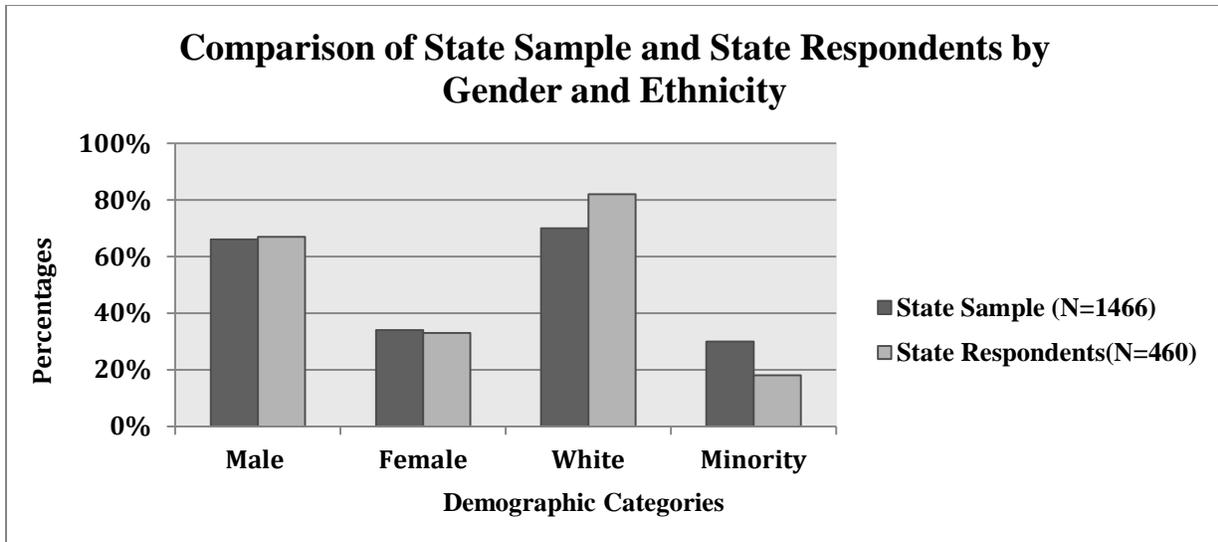


Figure 4

Figure 4 shows that males were 66% of the state sample and 67% of the respondents. The state sample female population was 34% compared to the state respondents was 33%. The state ethnicity was 70% white compared to 30% minority. The state respondent ethnicity data indicated 82% white and 18% minority.

Table 1. Comparison of State Respondents and State Sample for Exiters with Disabilities

	Regular Diploma	Certificate	Maximum Age	Drop Out
State Sample	83%	2%	1%	14%
State Respondents	93%	2%	2%	3%

Table 1 shows a comparison of the state sample to state respondents. Exiters who earned a regular diploma were 83% of the state sample and 93% of the state respondents, which indicated a difference of 10%. The number of students who earned a certificate was 2% for both the state respondents and the state sample. The number of students who reached the maximum age limit and exited in 2011 was 1% for the state sample and 2% for the state respondents, which was a difference of 1%. The number of students in the state sample who dropped out of high school in 2011 was 14% and the state respondents was 3% which was a difference of 11%.

Description of Findings

Comparing the male versus female respondents, white versus minority respondents and looking at the overall picture of the exiters there was an overrepresentation of males and whites. The numbers of exiters were exceptionally high in the category of learning disabilities compared to cognitive disability, emotional behavioral disability, and low incidence disabilities. More exiters earned a regular diploma in comparison to a certificate. Individuals with disabilities who dropped out of high school were included in the state respondent calculation.

Significance of Finding

The focus of the study was students with disabilities who exited Wisconsin high schools in the 2009-2010 fiscal year and their engagement in post-secondary activities. The outcomes were significant in regard to the comparison of male versus female minority versus white and the various categories of disabilities. The data indicated that a vast majority of males responded to the survey and were engaged in post-secondary activity compared to females. The outcomes also indicated more white respondents than minorities. Individuals with learning disabilities were the largest group engaged in higher education, employment, training or other employment. Indicator 14 benefits students who exit secondary settings educators responsible for transition planning, parents, and post-secondary settings that include higher education institutions, and employers. The study is different because it focused specifically on Wisconsin exiters and four specific outcome categories. After analyzing the data I conclude that the data represented only a small percentage of the population who exited high school in 2011. How many students were really successful in their post-secondary goals? **The Post High school Outcomes of Young Adults with Disabilities** results indicated there were a total of 1530 exiters who were counted as a part of the sample in 2011. Sixty-four students were not surveyed because they were unable to be contacted, which represented 4.2% of the 100% of students surveyed. Therefore, the actual number of students surveyed was 460. The data indicated that most students were engaged in either or both higher education and competitive employment and less than 4% completed other post-secondary education or training. Less than half of the students were surveyed. Therefore, the data were not an accurate reflection of the majority of students with disabilities who exited.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY

Results, Interpretation

The results of the survey indicated that the largest number of students who were enrolled in post-secondary education settings were white males with learning disabilities. The results of the (WPHSOS) indicated that 31% (n=460) of exiters were surveyed out of a sample of 1466 which was less than half of the sample. The small percentage indicated the data showed results for a small number of students who exited in the 2009-2010 fiscal year and their outcomes. It seems exiters are securing employment and attending higher learning institutions although, the rate is low and it was a certain group of people who accomplished their goals. Based upon the survey questions there was a correlation between the respondents in the survey questions. Exiters with a limited knowledge base would not have been able to fully understand the questions or may not have been interested in responding. All in all the data showed an upward trend of exiters with disabilities engaged in higher education, other post-secondary education, competitive employment, and other employment.

Implications

In theory transition plans are in place to prepare students with disabilities before they leave the secondary setting and transition into post-secondary settings. Special education teachers, supervisors, parents, and school administrators all work to improve the outcomes for students with disabilities. Individualized education programs (IEPs) are designed to meet the needs of all students with disabilities. The Wisconsin Post High School Outcomes Survey indicated that improvements are needed. The implications and contributions of this study will help us understand what we can do differently before the students leave secondary settings and

what we can do to help them be successful in post-secondary settings. Exiters could be required to participate in a work program or higher education transition program before leaving the secondary setting.

Recommendations

The first recommendation is to increase the number of students with disabilities that respond to the survey. Focus on students in other disability categories considering students with learning disabilities are the highest respondents. Provide detailed information, step-by-step, hands on processes to ensure students are prepared for employment and higher education completion. Students with disabilities should be required to participate in a work program or higher education transition program before exiting the secondary setting.

A pre-and post-survey would be more effective to determine how well students are doing towards their post-secondary goals. More work is necessary in the secondary setting to ensure students are prepared for post-secondary settings that include employment, higher education or training. School districts, educators, and post-secondary institutions provide information and services to students with disabilities, but efforts to increase the numbers of students securing employment and attending colleges continues to be a challenge.

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