# NATIONAL PSO
## POST-SCHOOL OUTCOMES CENTER

# Post-School Outcomes Data Collection and Use:

# Teachers as Partners

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**IDEAs that Work**
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Follow-up studies documenting the post-school outcomes for youth in special education have been conducted for more than twenty years and have had a significant impact on evaluating and designing policy at the federal and state level (Affleck, Edgar, Levine, & Kortering, 1990; Blackorby, Edgar, & Kortering, 1991; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Frank, Sitlington, & Carson, 1995; Hasazi, Gordon & Roe, 1985; Wagner, Newman, D'Amico, Jay, Butler-Nalin, Marder, & Cox, 1991). There is a national requirement for all states to collect specific post-school outcomes data to be reported at state and local levels. As part of the State Performance Plans (SPP) and Annual Performance Reports (APR) states must collect information from youth with disabilities after exiting high school to determine "the percentage of youth who had Individual Education Programs (IEPs), are no longer in secondary school and who have been competitively employed, enrolled in some type of postsecondary school, or both, within one year of leaving high school" (Part B, State Performance Plan, Indicator 14, 2004). This requirement strengthens one of the purposes of IDEA, "that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living" (IDEA 2004, 34 CFR §300.1(a)).

The State of Washington has gathered post-school outcomes data for over twenty years and has developed a process that may be of use to states interested in streamlining strategies to gather this information in a way that is meaningful to state agencies, school districts, and other stakeholders. A significant component of Washington State's process is the use of teachers to collect the data from students' final IEPs and conduct telephone interviews with former students or family members. In addition, teachers participate in the analysis and reporting of post-school outcomes to assist in local program improvement. This approach not only reduces overall cost in data collection but provides a means of connecting teachers to outcomes data for their own students that is meaningful to their work in schools.

This paper provides information to assist other states in including teachers as partners in post-school data collection and examination. Suggestions are also included for teacher participation in this research with the goal of increasing the positive post-school status of youth with disabilities. Discussion will include: 1) a brief history of post-school data collection in Washington State; 2) teacher training to support and enhance data collection strategies; 3) information from focus groups and case studies that informed training; and 4) summary suggestions for state level implementation.

*"I feel connected to these numbers because I made the phone calls" (Teacher)*

# History of Post-School Data Collection in Washington State

Information collected from follow-up studies in Washington State provides other states and local educational agencies a basis on which to build their own data collection system and include teachers in this process. Washington State began collecting information on the post-school status of youth in special education over two decades ago (Edgar, 1985; Edgar, Levine, & Maddox, 1988; Edgar, Levine, Levine, & Duby, 1988; Neel, Meadows, Levine, & Edgar, 1998). With the continued support of the State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI), the Department of Special Education, and the commitment of local education districts, special education staff, families and youth with disabilities, this effort has grown to include every district in Washington State. District participation from 1983 to 1998 included 10% to 15% of the school districts in Washington State. District participation has increased steadily to 96% of the districts participating in the most recent study of the 2005 cohort (Table 1).

## Percentage of Districts Participating in the Post-School Study: 1998-2005

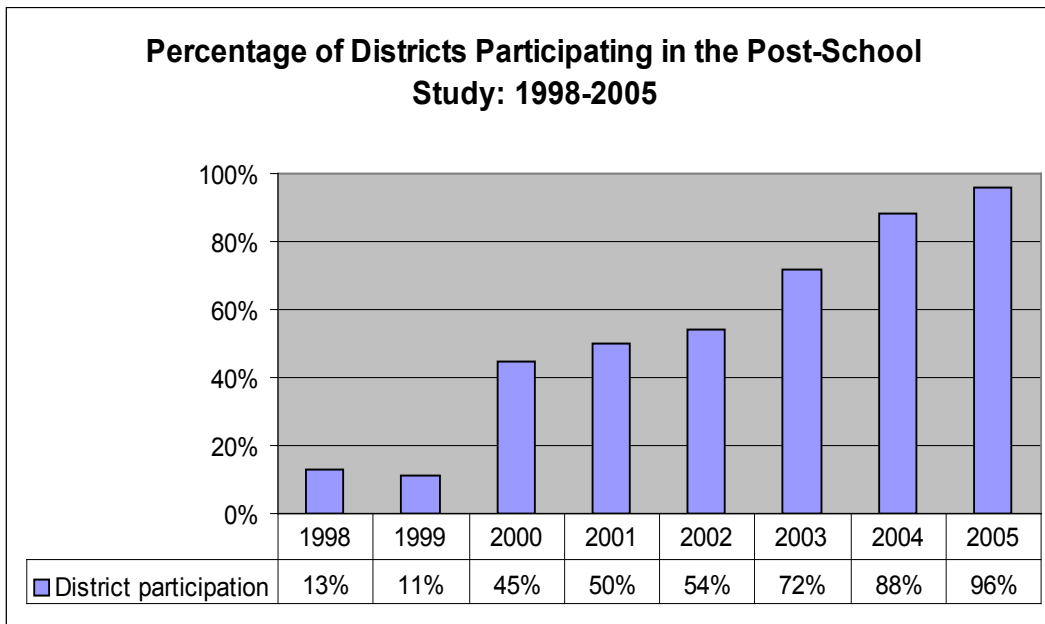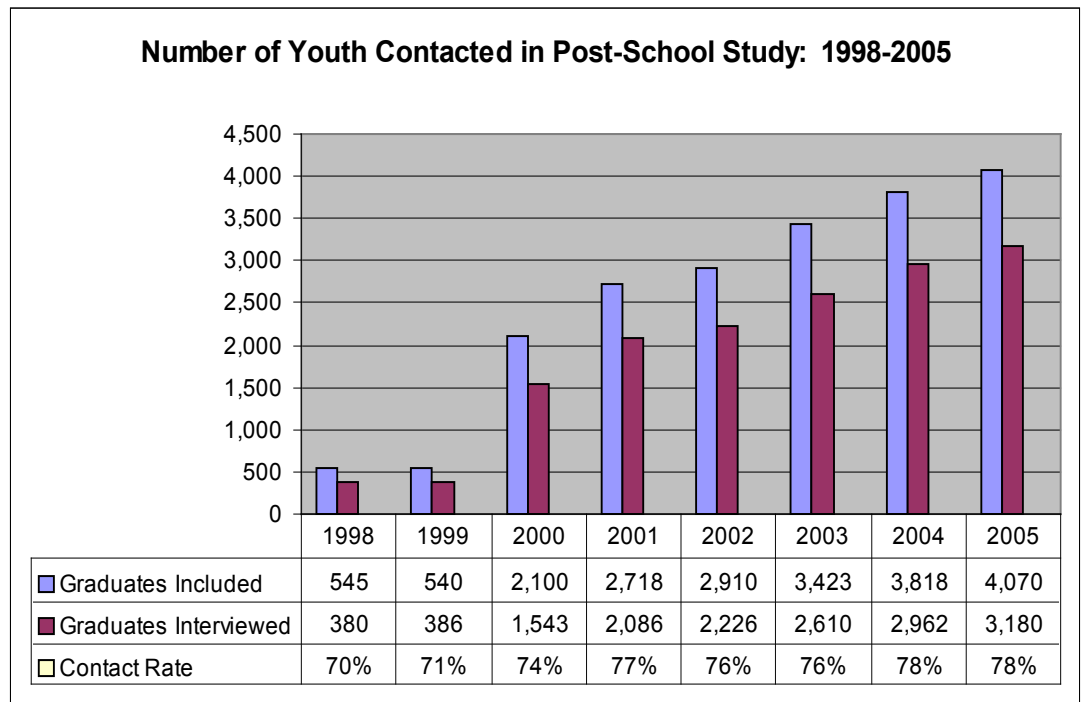| | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| District participation | 13% | 11% | 45% | 50% | 54% | 72% | 88% | 96% |

Table 1: Percentage of Districts Participating in Post-School Study, Washington State

The 2006 study includes 100% of the districts in the state. Contact rate with former students after leaving high school has continued to rise over the years even as the number of youth in the study has increased from 540 youth in the 1998 study with a 70% contact rate to 4,070 youth in the 2005 study with a 78% contact rate (Table 2).

Table 2: Number and Percent of Youth Contacted in Post-School Study, Washington State

**Number of Youth Contacted in Post-School Study: 1998-2005**

| | 1998 | 1999 | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ☐ Graduates Included | 545 | 540 | 2,100 | 2,718 | 2,910 | 3,423 | 3,818 | 4,070 |
| ■ Graduates Interviewed | 380 | 386 | 1,543 | 2,086 | 2,226 | 2,610 | 2,962 | 3,180 |
| ☐ Contact Rate | 70% | 71% | 74% | 77% | 76% | 76% | 78% | 78% |

The increase in district participation and number of youth contacted is connected to statewide initiatives in transition services. Building on the prior work of Edgar and his colleagues, Washington State was awarded a Transition Systems Change Grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in 1990 to fund the newly formed Center for Change in Transition Services (CCTS). CCTS was housed at the University of Washington until it moved to Seattle University in 2004. CCTS, in partnership with OSPI, has provided consistent leadership to the state in the provision of transition services and the collection and use of post-school outcomes data.

Initial grant activities provided training to school districts and developed and strengthened collaboration with local districts and OSPI to state agencies including Division of Developmental Disabilities and Division of Vocational Rehabilitation. Transition institutes were offered during the first five years of the grant. Districts participating in the institutes were asked to work with CCTS staff to collect data from their special education graduates. Information was collected from the final Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) and follow-up telephone surveys were conducted by district personnel with former students or family members. This information was given to CCTS for data entry and analysis. Data were analyzed and reported back to the districts and CCTS to develop training and technical assistance in areas of need across the state.

In 1996, as the Federal Systems Change Grant ended, OSPI continued funding for CCTS. In addition to training and technical assistance to districts throughout the state, efforts continued in collecting post-school data annually and increasing

participation of all districts in the State of Washington. The information was shared with districts at the local level, with administrators at the regional level, OSPI, and the state's divisions of Developmental Disabilities and Vocational Rehabilitation.

The survey protocol was finalized in 1996 by a state team composed of special education directors, school psychologists, vocational directors, parents and CCTS staff. The Washington State survey protocol has remained consistent since 1996 with a few additional questions. In 2001 a question was added to gather information on medical insurance and in 2005 the survey was aligned with a survey protocol developed by the National Post-School Outcomes Center with the addition of two questions concerning previous employment and postsecondary attendance or training.

All districts across the state use the same survey protocol. The protocol is used to gather data from district records and the final IEP, recording demographic information (e.g., disability, age, gender, and ethnicity), information on the post-school goals of employment, postsecondary education and training, and agency linkages. Approximately eight months after the students leave school; district personnel use the protocol to conduct the telephone survey with the former students or their families. Information is gathered to determine if the former student is employed, attending postsecondary education or training, and if contact has been made with an appropriate adult service agency. Data are collected concerning wages and hours worked, types of employment, types of postsecondary education or training, names and types of adult agencies contacted and if the young person has medical insurance.

Prior to the 2006 study, school staff gathered data from the final IEP, conducted telephone interviews with the former students and their families and returned the surveys to the CCTS. Since 2006, districts have continued to gather information from the final IEP, conduct the telephone surveys with their former students, and enter the data via a secure website.

CCTS analyzed and reported the data consistent with previous reports. Data are aggregated and analyzed at the local, regional, and state levels and reported to districts and the OSPI. Reports include post-school outcomes in the number and percentage of youth that are employed, in training and post-secondary education and how those outcomes relate to the measurable postsecondary goals on the final IEP. CCTS coordinates and manages this statewide process with OSPI.

The continuing support of the OSPI Special Education Program for this initiative is critical to the increase in district and teacher participation, the use of the data for program improvement and the connection between post-school data, transition services training, and technical assistance.

**Teacher Training**

This section describes training offered to teachers and discusses the information gathered from focus groups and case studies to inform the development of a meaningful system for data collection. As training to districts increased over the years, teacher participation in the post-school data research has also steadily increased and teachers began suggesting strategies to increase teacher participation.

One example used by teachers to encourage participation is to identify the cohort of student leavers and divide that number by the number of teachers and para-professionals that would conduct the telephone surveys to estimate the number of calls per person. Teachers said that once they knew the number of calls they would make it seemed much more manageable to them. Therefore, it was not as daunting as volunteering to conduct telephone surveys without knowing how much time it would take. A large district may have twenty teachers, para-professionals, and special education coordinators willing to participate and 100 surveys to conduct. Given this information (that they would conduct five surveys each) when asked to volunteer, teachers said that this appeared very reasonable.

Teachers also suggested that the first page of the survey (the demographics and information from the IEP) could be completed prior to conducting the telephone surveys. Teachers advised that their time was much more efficient and essential if spent calling their former students rather than gathering demographic data.

These suggestions and first-hand experiences of teachers provided valuable insight and informed our training. In addition to training teachers and staff, it is extremely important to include special education administrators in both the initial training and in technical assistance and follow-up support. A statewide system is also necessary to assure that training and post-school data research are a coordinated effort with the goal of increasing district participation and the contact rate with youth.

Training is provided on-site, both locally and regionally, and through video and telephone conferencing throughout the year. Training includes information in: 1) developing a team and designing a process to collect data at the local level; 2) identifying and developing a list of special education students who graduate, age out, and drop-out; 3) gathering contact information for students who graduate, age out, and drop-out prior to their leaving school; 4) gathering information from the final IEP and completing the first portion of the follow-up survey; 5) conducting the telephone surveys with the former students or their families; 6) returning the data to CCTS and assisting in finding missing data and correcting errors (cleaning the data); 7) examining and analyzing the district and state report; and 8) developing goals from this information for the following school year in program improvement.

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These components are described in the next section.

1. **Developing teams to design a process for data collection at the district level.** We encourage one team for smaller districts and multiple building-level teams for larger districts. The team typically includes the special education director or secondary director, special education teachers and department chairs, para-professionals, and occasionally, guidance counselors and principals or vice-principals. The team is responsible for developing a data collection system, participating in the data collection, examining and disseminating the data and developing goals for the following school year based on this information.

   The facilitator of the team is the contact person to CCTS. Training, materials, resources, and information are coordinated with the facilitator.

2. **Identifying and developing a list of special education students who graduated, aged out and dropped-out during the previous school year.** The team is crucial to coordinating the identification of special education students who graduate, age out and drop-out. Principals, guidance counselors, and the district data manager are essential to this process. The team is provided a **timeline** for identifying youth who drop out, information about state and district coordination, and ideas to assist in this process.

3. **Gathering contact information for special education students who graduate, age out and drop-out prior to leaving school.** The team coordinates the plan to gather contact information for the school leavers' cohort that will be surveyed the following year. Team members assure that all special education teachers in the district receive instructions and forms to collect contact information from their students prior to leaving school. Contact information includes student name, home and cell phone number, email, emergency contact information, and contact information for other family members or friends who would know where the student is living the year after leaving high school. Contact information is gathered using the **Demographic Form**. In many districts this information is gathered during an exit interview.

4. **Gathering information from the final IEP and completing the first portion of the follow-up survey.** The Demographic Form is attached to the post-school protocol. The first page of the survey includes demographic information for the student and can be completed prior to the student leaving school. Teams are encouraged to divide the list of special education leavers among the teachers and others who will conduct the telephone surveys the following school year. In most districts, teachers contact their former students. The teachers gather information from the final IEP regarding the measurable postsecondary goals, education and training, employment, independent living as appropriate and agency linkages. Completing the first portion of the IEP in the spring makes it unnecessary for teachers to collect IEPs from archives the following year. The form is filed until the following year when the follow-up telephone surveys are conducted.

5. **Conducting the telephone surveys with the former students or their families**. Teachers are trained in conducting the telephone surveys by the district level team members who participated in the CCTS training. Training includes provisions for confidentiality, introduction to the survey protocol, background about the research, information on each item on the survey, and role playing using the survey.

6. **Returning the data to CCTS and assisting in finding missing data and correcting errors (cleaning the data).** After completing the surveys, the district is often contacted by CCTS staff to "clean the data." Teachers assist in finding missing information and in clarifying or correcting errors. In districts where training for data collection is not rigorous, there are more errors and therefore more time spent tracking down missing information. It is our experience that when this occurs, more detailed training needs to be provided the following year.

7. **Examining and analyzing the district and state report.** After all the post-school outcomes data are entered and state and district reports are finalized and disseminated, district teams are encouraged to examine the data with colleagues. Over the years there has been increased emphasis on assisting school district personnel examine the post-school data for program improvement. In those districts that included teachers in examining and discussing the post-school data, teacher involvement in data collection increased. Errors and missing data decreased as the district became more aware of and invested in the research.

In districts where teachers conducted the telephone interview there was increased awareness and understanding of the connection between the outcomes data and teachers' activities in the classroom. One teacher said, "It is valid feedback we get about programs from the students and families. We get information we don't typically hear. We can tie this to the programs or lack of programs."

Examination of the data provides suggestions to teachers for improving IEPs, as well as strategies for improved assessment, transition services and agency linkages. In one of the team discussions a teacher said, "It bothered me so much that there were few linkages on the IEP (to adult agencies). When I would make the call, the parent would ask me, 'What is DVR (Division of Vocational Rehabilitation)?' That really bothered me. Every teacher should know this and provide this information to students with IEPs (focus group, 2002)." This district then developed a manual for teachers with agency information including contact names and numbers. The teachers were provided training with the manual to increase appropriate agency linkages on the IEP. In 2002 the agency linkages on all IEPs was 51%. In 2003, 78 of the IEPs had agency linkages and in 2004, 88% of the IEPs had agency linkages.

In contrast to districts in which teachers conducted the telephone surveys, there were districts where administrative assistants collected the data. In these districts, most teachers were unaware of the post-school data research and often did not know that their own districts were involved in this study. Involving teachers in the study became a primary goal of CCTS as a statewide data collection system developed. A process was created to assist districts in understanding the data and to facilitate conversation about the outcomes. This **"Examining the Data"** process is used with local teams, at district level meetings and is provided to districts across the state through email and the CCTS website.

8. **Developing goals from the post-school outcomes data for the following school year for program improvement.**
   Examining the  post-school data with colleagues provides opportunities to identify areas of both success and concern. Areas of concern and subsequent goals include increasing the percent of youth contacted within one year of leaving, increasing the percent of appropriate adult agencies identified on the IEP, and decreasing the discrepancy between the percent

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of youth that identified postsecondary education as a goal and those who achieved that goal within one year of leaving high school.

The training and technical assistance to districts has increased in both quantity and complexity over the years of this study as teachers become more sophisticated in their support of and involvement in the post-school outcomes research and as the CCTS staff learn from teachers in the field. An example of collaboration with teachers in the field is the Demographic Form. A teacher shared with CCTS staff that he presented the post-school data from the previous year's cohort to his current students at the end of the school year. He invited former students to talk to his class about their post-school experiences. The current students analyzed the post-school data and reviewed their own IEPs. The teacher developed a form for the students to use in reviewing their IEP. This activity provided the teacher with contact information for the telephone survey to be conducted the following year and provided information to the students about the study. CCTS developed a **demographic form** based on this activity to assist districts in identifying youth during their last year in high school and to gather and update current contact information. Teachers are encouraged to complete the form with their students to assure that contact information is current and that the students are aware of the follow-up telephone survey occurring the following year. This form was introduced in 2002 to districts across the state and teachers were encouraged and reminded to use it for their 2003 study. Four districts that consistently used the form increased their average contact rate from 63% in 2003, to 74% in 2004, and to 78% in 2005.

## Focus Groups and Case Studies

While providing training to districts in Washington State, CCTS conducted focus groups to further understand data collection and to inform the training process. Focus groups and case studies were used to gather information from districts in a systematic way with the purpose of increasing understanding of teacher involvement in data collection and to inform teacher training. Information was collected from the districts through questionnaires, focus group discussion, individual interviews, review and analysis of the audiotapes of those discussions and interviews, document reviews, notes and second source verification. The analysis of multiple data sources provided rich information and details to support the emerging themes (Johnson, C. 2000).

The initial focus groups were from fifteen districts in 1998 and 1999. Findings

from these focus groups provided the basis for case studies in fifty-seven districts over the next five years (2000-2005). Case studies included ten districts in 2000, five districts in 2001, five districts in 2002, twenty districts in 2004, and seventeen districts in 2005. These case studies provided opportunities to work closely with school district personnel, the majority of whom were teachers, and to investigate the participation of teachers in the post-school data research. The focus groups and subsequent case studies provided valuable information from the teachers that directly informed our work with the goal of including more teachers in the process and enhancing opportunities for teachers to use post-school data for program improvement.

Five themes emerged from the focus group discussions and the case studies over the seven years of study. The themes included three that directly affect teacher training and participation in the post-school data study and two additional findings that address the educational system. The themes include:
1. Participants prefer examining follow-up data with colleagues.
2. "Stories" about real students need to be added to the data reports.
3. The low number of special education graduates is disturbing and an indication of high rates of students dropping out.
4. Connections to adult agencies should be addressed earlier and more systematically.
5. Traditional high school programs are viewed as college-preparatory programs, with increasingly high standards and limited classes or opportunities for transition services particularly vocational classes and community based work experiences.

Noticeable differences in how districts collect post-school data, the contact rates by districts, and the understanding and use of the post-school data by the teachers and administrators are represented in the case studies. Responses from district personnel were both positive and negative regarding their participation in the post-school study.

The majority of responses was positive and included the following:

*"This is the best thing I do all year long, providing me with the information I need to develop my program."*

*"I love this part of my job. I really, really like to follow up with my students and see what they are up to. It helps me figure out what to do with my current students that might help them get a better start."*

Although fewer in number, there were also negative responses from the teachers:

*"I don't think I should ever have to do this (collect data). It is not my fault what happens to these students after they leave us."*

*"So, am I going to be held responsible for the post-school outcomes of my students? It doesn't mean I am responsible for what happens to them after they leave me."*

The disparity between teacher perception and district level involvement in post-school data collection provided additional questions for our work. The outcomes data suggested that teacher involvement is important to increased contact rate. The story of a large, inner city urban district provides us with rich information. This district reported 112 special education youth in the 2002 cohort. The contact rate was 21% (23 youth). The work of gathering demographic information, data from the last IEP, and conducting the surveys fell to the secondary special education director and at the last minute. The following year (2003) the district did not participate and reported that they had "run out of time."

The next year we offered training to a district team with the intention of developing a plan to collect post-school data in a timely and meaningful manner. Teachers attended the three meetings with varying degrees of interest. All teachers attending the team meeting were asked to conduct the telephone surveys. For the 2004 post-school data survey, 38 of the 73 youth (52%) were contacted.

The following year the team was primarily comprised of teachers who volunteered because they were interested in the process and had participated in the 2004 study. The contact rate was 71%, with teachers (and the secondary special education director) reaching 76 of the 107 youth. Equally important to the development of a team and teacher training was that the secondary special education director has been in this position since 2002 and has taken a leadership position in this research at the district level.

**Administrative Leadership and Support**
We found that leadership from the district special education director is crucial for teacher involvement in the post-school data research. Even in districts where teachers wanted to participate in the post-school data research, without the support of the special education director, this seldom happened. For example, in four of the five case studies conducted in 2001 and with major involvement by the special education director, teachers decided to collect the information needed for the post-school survey. The director provided teachers with prior notice, invitations, and agendas to all meetings and ensured that teachers received ongoing training, technical assistance, and support. These four districts continue

to participate in the post-school study while increasing both the number of youth contacted and the level of understanding of the process on the part of the district, the students, and their families. In all four of these districts, post-school outcomes data are presented to the school board, parent groups, and students. In addition, principals and other administrators are knowledgeable about the outcomes data.

In contrast, the fifth district met as a focus group but there was minimal leadership from within the district. The special education director was not at the initial meeting, teachers came to the meeting not sure of the purpose and the follow-up meeting was not scheduled to meet teachers' time schedules. Subsequently, this district did not follow through with the data collection and telephone surveys. Graduate students working with the CCTS conducted the telephone surveys with former students at the request of the special education director. The data were collected by the graduate students to ensure that the district would continue with the focus group study.

After the data were collected and analyzed, this information was shared with school teams at each district. Follow-up meetings took place throughout the next year to determine any changes the focus group attributed to their understanding of the post-school data. Compared to the other districts, this district demonstrated little change to practices, programs, or policies.

The second year of the study, this district hired a new secondary special education coordinator who worked with the teachers to collect the data and conduct the interviews. The contact rate for this district increased from 49% to 85%.

A great deal was learned from the districts participating in the case studies. Contact rates with the former students and their families were much higher in the four districts where the teachers made the telephone calls. The average contact rate for the four districts in which the teachers made the calls was 80% while the fifth district in which the teachers did not make the calls was 49%.

**Examining the Data for Program Change**
Teachers who conducted the surveys with their former students wanted opportunities to examine the outcomes data with their colleagues. They asked for a facilitator to help them make sense of the data.

*"I need this group. I need to discuss this information. I don't internalize it well. I am thinking more clearly about transition services just because of this group."*

In the four districts where teachers made the calls, participants discussed the importance of "personalizing the data."

> *"Personalizing the data" was important to all the participants and was defined by the teachers as wanting to "know their own students' stories behind the numbers."*
>
> *"I can't connect to the outcomes numbers and percentages without the stories. Only by making the calls do I hear the stories."*
>
> *"Data doesn't reflect human life. We need data that reflects the stories of our students' lives after high school. I need to hear those stories."*

Programs, services, and practices changed in those districts where teachers participated in the post-school outcomes research and conducted the telephone surveys with their former students. One such change included developing a better system to identify students who were graduating, leaving, and/or dropping out of high school. The low number of special education graduates surprised each district's focus group. Larger districts had difficulty identifying the youth that were leaving. These districts worked to develop a system to track special education youth through high school and beyond.

An example of this process is from a large urban district with 17 high schools (including alternative schools). In 2002, the district-level team initiated a plan in which the special education department head at each high school would be responsible to identify all special education youth in each cohort. That year the district reported 118 youth in the cohort; 137 in the 2003 cohort; 130 in the 2004 cohort; 201 in the 2005 cohort; and 235 in the most recent 2006 cohort. This process relies not only on the building level practices but also the administrative leadership to oversee this process.

Other examples of program change in these districts included a more systematic approach and timeline connecting students to appropriate adult agencies, including career guidance counselors in transition planning for students with IEPs; providing opportunities for students with IEPs to share their postsecondary goals with general and career technical teachers; and advocating for access and accommodations in career technical courses in which it had previously been difficult for special education students to gain admission.

To add to the understanding of how teachers collect and use the post-school data, twenty districts were selected from the 210 districts participating in the 2004 study. The selection included ten districts with the highest contact rates in the state as well as ten districts with the lowest contact rates. The ten districts with the highest contact rates averaged 87% for the 2004 study (state average was 79%) and all

had contact rates above the state average for the previous three years (Group A). The districts with the lowest contact rates had an average contact rate of 46% and had contact rates well below the state average for the previous three years (Group B).

The ten districts with the highest contact rate, Group A, all accepted our invitation to participate in this study. These ten districts had many commonalities. The teachers conducted the telephone surveys in all the districts and, in most districts, were assisted by para-professionals and special education program directors. It was a district-wide effort to follow up with former students and most, if not all, of the special education personnel in the district were aware of this work. Information gathered at team meetings established that teachers understood the definition of transition services and had few questions about the IEP. These teachers were engaged in providing transition services and curious about the post-school outcomes of their former students. In addition, the teachers provided suggestions regarding the use of post-school data for program improvement. These suggestions included increased coordination with adult service agencies, better identification of the postsecondary goals based on good assessment data, developing working relations with school to career programs in general education, and increased demand for access to vocational programs for their students.

The teachers wanted to conduct the interviews with their former students, and they examine the completed surveys and the data with their colleagues to develop goals from the information. The survey protocols for these districts were rich with comments, additional information, and suggestions written into the margins of the survey.

> *"I found it powerful to talk to the moms and dads and kids themselves. I wouldn't have missed looking at the results because I collected it."*
>
> *"I will examine the numbers carefully because I did many of the interviews and feel that it is my data, too."*
>
> *"I feel connected to these numbers because I made the phone calls. I would definitely read all of this (data tables), it means something to me now."*

An additional finding from Group A districts was the involvement of the special education administrators in this work. Special education directors attended the focus group meetings in all ten districts with high contact rates. The directors understood the requirements and best practices surrounding the collection and use of post-school data and clearly understood transition services.

The directors provided support to the teachers in planning time, early releases to make telephone calls, and, in one district, a celebration pizza party when the data were collected. In all ten districts the special education administrators conducted at least a few of the interviews.

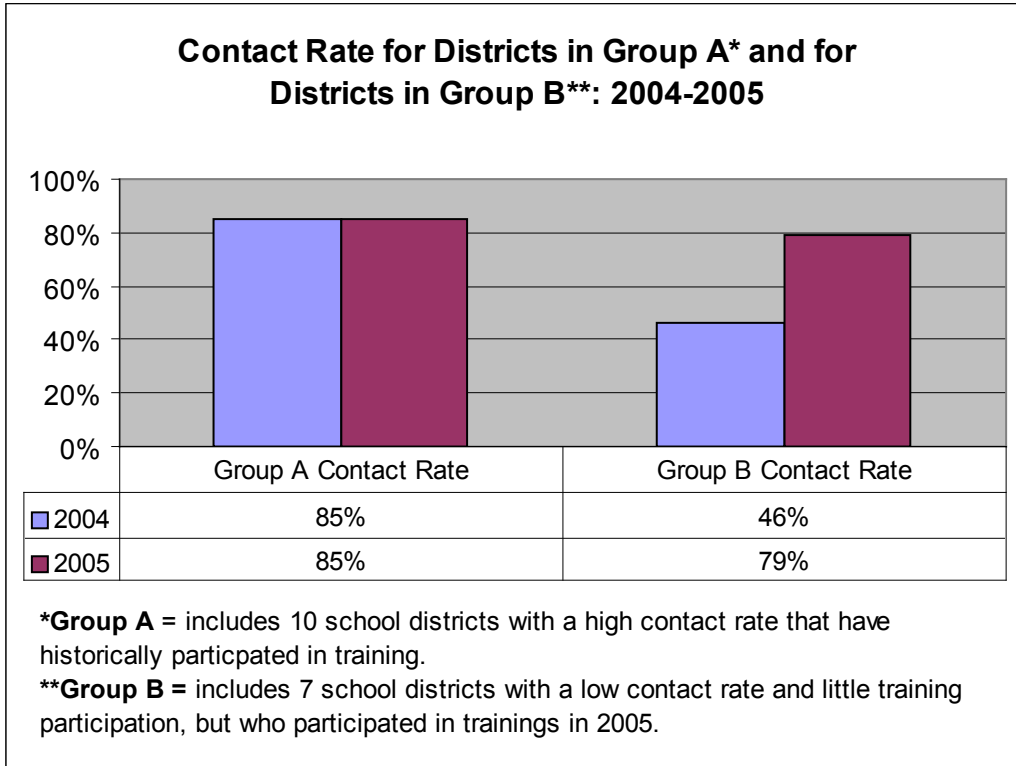Three strengths were apparent in the ten districts with the highest contact rate:
- strong administrative leadership and support;
- teachers participating in the study by gathering data from the final IEP, meeting with students to complete the demographic form, conducting the telephone interviews, and examining the post-school data with colleagues; and
- involving students in completing exit interviews and understanding the post-school data collection.

Of the ten districts with the lowest contact rates, Group B, seven agreed to participate in our study. In contrast to the ten school districts with the highest contact rates, Group B, the districts with a contact rate of 46% or less, had little or no participation by the special education director in school team meetings. Meetings with these seven districts were difficult to coordinate, calls were not returned, and teachers often came to the team meetings with little understanding of the purpose. Teachers expressed a lack of knowledge about transition services, developing an IEP that reflected transition requirements, and basic understanding of services beyond the high school. Prior to this project, most of the teachers were not aware that post-school data existed for their district, even when their own district had participated for over ten years.

In districts with the lowest contact rates, teachers raised questions regarding how to identify appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based on assessment, how to develop the IEP, the difference between annual goals and measurable postsecondary goals, and the provision of transition services to reach these goals. These questions were indicative of the teachers' lack of understanding of transition services. All seven districts requested and received transition training for the entire staff in the coming year.

The meetings that were designed to elicit information from teachers in Group B about data collection became training sessions on transition services. In one year with two to three meetings in each of these seven districts, the technical assistance appears to have had positive influence on the post-school data collection. Teacher participation in the telephone surveys in Group B increased from 10% of the teachers making the calls to 80% of teachers making the calls. The contact for these districts increased from 46% in 2004 to 79% in 2005 as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3: Contact Rate for Group A and Group B, 2004-2005, Washington State

## Contact Rate for Districts in Group A* and for Districts in Group B**: 2004-2005

| | Group A Contact Rate | Group B Contact Rate |
|---|---|---|
| 2004 | 85% | 46% |
| 2005 | 85% | 79% |

**\*Group A** = includes 10 school districts with a high contact rate that have historically particpated in training.
**\*\*Group B =** includes 7 school districts with a low contact rate and little training participation, but who participated in trainings in 2005.

**Summary**
The continued post-school outcomes research in Washington State is informed not only by the ongoing study of the post-school status of thousands of youth with disabilities but also from the information gathered from the teachers in the field as they collect information from IEPs, and conduct telephone surveys with former students and their families. Policy and practices at the state and local level are informed by teachers examining and analyzing the post-school data for program improvement. Teachers are partners in this important research. Their work is closely connected to changes made in the classrooms, school buildings and districts. Ultimately, teachers' contributions have, impacted state level post-school outcomes data.

Suggestions for implementing post-school data collection processes emerge from these case studies. Teachers are critically important as front-line investigators in this research but it is very clear that for this to happen there must be strong administrative support and understanding of the requirements and strategies for collecting post-school data. Without this support it is very difficult for the teachers to participate in such a way as to make this information important at the classroom level. It is imperative for administrators to understand the use of these data for program improvement, transition services, and system change. Administrators can purposefully include teachers in this work and assist them in participating in the telephone surveys.

Teacher involvement is critical to assure that the information collected from former students affects classroom practices, transition services, programs, and community linkages. Teachers conducting the interviews with their former students represent an important strategy to enhance the use of these data. The studies in Washington State suggest that when teachers conduct the interview with youth contact rate increases and program changes occur. In addition to increasing contact rate this is an opportunity for a teacher to provide a final connection to their students and their families. Teachers shared stories of conversations with these young men and women in which information was offered regarding services from adult agencies, providing names, phone numbers and addresses for employment offices, and giving praise for positive outcomes.

It is not a simple process to identify special education graduates and drop-outs, contact and interview the former students within one year of leaving high school, and use this information for program improvement. However, with training and technical assistance to develop a process at the district and state level and with administrative support, this is a valuable use of teacher time.

In conclusion, training must be provided directly to teachers in collecting and examining the post-school data. Students and families need to be included in this process early and often and post-school outcomes data should be provided to them in a meaningful way. Special education administrators must provide teachers with leadership and time for this process while also ensuring that school boards, other administrators, stakeholders and communities are knowledgeable about

the post-school outcomes data and how this information is used for program improvement.

Post-school data should inform district level and state level training, policy and practices to provide transition services for youth in special education. State level coordination and support is necessary for this to occur in a systematic way. Washington State has been fortunate to have state level leadership and knowledge about post-school data collection and consistent funding over the many years of this work to develop a state-wide system of data collection that includes all districts. We are continually scrutinizing and improving our work, knowing that this is a process that does not occur in a few years. Rather, we have learned that this process works because we have participated closely with school districts and have learned from teachers, while staying current at a federal level and learning from other states conducting the same research and asking the same questions.

The teacher who presents the post-school data yearly to his current students said:

*"Collecting the follow-up data for my seniors has become an intentional focus of my curriculum. I want these data for my own use, but also to use to motivate students to plan for their future. These numbers represent boys and girls that the other students know. They will become those numbers in a year. I want them to know I am following them, so don't let me down."*

For further information about the Washington State Center for Change in Transition Services visit http://www.seattleu.edu/ccts/

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