

II. What Methodology is Used?

Target Population

The target population represents graduates from the senior classes of 2000 and 2001 from public secondary education. This includes students with and without disabilities receiving Regents, Local, Individualized Education Program, and General Education Development (aka High School Equivalency) Diplomas. The sample of students with disabilities primarily includes classified special education students plus some students with disabilities called "504" students because their schools provide them with access and reasonable accommodations under requirements of section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act. The class of 2000 serves as the beta-testing group for the class of 2001. Participation by general education graduates provides a reference group to determine which results are descriptive of the transition process unique to graduates with disabilities versus being typical for all graduates from the selected schools.

Sampling Procedures

Stratified cluster sampling was used to target 25 percent of students with disabilities who would be graduating from secondary education in June 2000. Computer analysis projected that a random sample of 166 schools from 10 geographic regions would yield a representative statewide sample of 4500 students with disabilities. Five of the regions are the Big Five Cities (New York City, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, and Yonkers). The other regions are Western New York, Central New York, Northern New York, Capital District\Upper Hudson Valley, and the Lower Hudson Valley/Long Island. From these participating schools, 1 of every 35 general education seniors, sampled by randomly drawn last name initial, would yield 1500 general education students. Targeting this sample size would allow for reductions in participation over time yet preserve sufficient participation to provide meaningful results.

For the beta group, recruitment with schools, their students and families initially yielded 89 schools willing to participate and identified 4300 possible seniors with disabilities and 1200 without disabilities. Following the process of obtaining parent and guardian consents for these minors to participate, the sample was formed from 74 school districts, 1,019 seniors with disabilities and 352 seniors without disabilities. Compared with the sample targets, the response rate is 44.6 percent for schools, 22.6 percent for students with disabilities and 23.5 percent for students without disabilities.

To form the sample for the class of 2001, recruitment of schools from the sampling list continued through the 2000-2001 school year. This added additional school districts to the sample. Students from 141 districts completed 2001 Senior Surveys, including 2,386 seniors with disabilities (2,234 special education; 152 with 504 plans) and 956 seniors without disabilities from general education.

Data Collection Points in Time

Former students are being asked directly for information. A small amount of demographic information is verified with school records. Seniors graduating in 2000 and 2001 were surveyed during their last month in high school. Interviews are being conducted at one, three and five years out of high school. Milestones to date include:

1. Class of 2000 seniors from 74 schools surveyed at school exit included 1,019 special education and 352 general education students.
2. Class of 2001 seniors from 141 surveyed when they graduated includes 2,234 special education students, 152 students with 504 Plans and 956 general education students.
3. Class of 2000 interviews one year after leaving high school included 920 students with disabilities and 234 general education students.¹
4. Class of 2001 interviews one year after leaving high school included 2267 students with disabilities and 1252 general education students.¹
5. Class of 2000 three-year out interviews will begin in May 2003.

Who collects the data?

The State University of New York at Potsdam (SUNY Potsdam) with co-located personnel from the local education agency, St. Lawrence Lewis Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), is contracted to coordinate all aspects of the project. This includes conducting the interviews through the on-campus calling center or regional coordination teams. Regional interviewers use laptop computers containing the survey protocols and enter data with each interview. Data is transmitted electronically to SUNY Potsdam. Regional PSI coordinators have an essential role giving local technical assistance to schools, former students and families and recruiting local interviewers. They also supply participating schools and their regions with analyzed data after the data collection cycle to assist with educating the community about transition. The contractor provides data analysis and technical supports throughout.

What are the costs of collecting, analyzing and reporting data?

The per person cost is approximately \$75 per student per cycle.

How are the data analyzed?

Report generation software was developed that tabulates and chart frequency of responses to all questions in a standardized report format. Filtering software allows reporting of subsets of data, based on demographic characteristics. In addition, data is processed through SPSS software to determine the significance of major apparent relationships among questions and to address specific issues of concern to the research team and NYS VESID.

¹ Seniors who did not complete the senior survey at school exit were offered the opportunity to join the follow-along portion of the survey.