A Comparison of the Transition of Special Needs Students to Regular Education Students

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A Comparison of the Transition of Special Needs Students to Regular Education Students

A Thesis
Presented to
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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of Educational Specialist

by
Anita Burnette

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A Comparison of the Transition of Special Needs Students to Regular Education Students
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This study investigated the success of transition from school to community life of special needs students in comparison to a similar population served in regular education. Graduates of a western Kentucky high school over a three year period composed the population for the study. Variables observed were KIRIS test results, economic status, and successful transition as measured by the KIRIS Adult Report to Life. Results indicated special needs students were as successful in the transition process as the population to which they were compared. Results have implications that transition plans and teams are necessary for some regular education students as well as special needs students.
Introduction

For some of our Kentucky students the transition from high school to adult life is a natural passage. It is a smooth graduation through a cycle of life. However, this transition from school to community life is a difficult challenge for other young adults. Low achieving and low income students seem to have more barriers in their way of success.

In this specific population one group has more assistance than the other. Special needs students receive services through an individual education plan (IEP). They also benefit from the advantage of having an individual transition plan (ITP) and team to assist them with the challenges of progressing from school to the adult world.

Low achieving and low income students with no special education services receive assistance like other Kentucky high school youth. They work with high school guidance counselors or faculty advisors. In some high schools there are written graduation plans to assist students, but not all educational institutions require such specifications.

Transition plans for special needs students became a requirement with the passage of federal law PL-476, or what the public recognizes as Individuals with Disabilities
Education Act (IDEA). IDEA specifies that each Individual Education Program (IEP) includes the following:

A statement of the needed transition services for students beginning no later than age 16 and annually thereafter (and, when determined appropriate for the individual, beginning at age 14 or younger), including when appropriate a statement of the interagency responsibilities or linkages or both before the student leaves the school setting. (IDEA, 1990)

In addition, PL 101-476 (IDEA) provides the following definition of Transition Services:

A coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from school to post-school activities, including post-secondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supportive employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be the student's preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post-school adult living objectives, and when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation. (IDEA, 1990)
At the state level, as an integral part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act of 1990 (KERA), transition is considered a critical outcome for all students, including those with disabilities. Section 3 of KERA states: "Schools shall be measured on the proportion of students who make a successful transition to work, post-secondary education and the military" (Kentucky Executive Transition Task Force, 1991, p. 4).

Four year plans for high school students are called many different things in many different states. In Kentucky, Individual Graduation Plans (IGP) became a requirement for many high school students when the High School Restructuring Task Force recommended required IGPs as a core component for graduation to the Kentucky State Board for Elementary and Secondary Education. The State Board has not yet adopted the recommendations made by the task force in June of 1992. However, many schools have adopted graduation plans as best practice, and those schools receiving Carl Perkins funding in Kentucky are required to begin IGPs in the eighth grade. The school involved in this present study required graduation plans. In the final report from the High School Restructuring Task Force, the Graduation Plan is defined as "an academic program of study for achieving the six KERA Learning Goals and demonstration of the 75 Learner Outcomes" (Task Force on High School Restructuring, 1993, p. 12). It also recommends that "every school council/district will adopt policies for ensuring
that academic programs of study based upon the six KERA Learning Goals and 75 Learner Outcomes will be available to each student to accomplish his or her Individual Graduation Plan" (p. 12). The 75 Learner Goals have now been reduced to 57.

An individual transition plan (ITP), basically, is a working document that assesses student interests and strengths while requiring interagency planning and assistance to ensure student success in transition from school to community life. The transition plan offers the special needs student an individual plan that bridges the gap between schools and community by using a team recruiter and other necessary agencies.

The individual graduation plan is developed between appropriate school personnel and the student. Depending on the policies of individual school districts, appropriate school personnel is usually a guidance counselor or a student faculty advisor. The individual graduation plan maps a student's school career from the eighth grade through graduation. As part of the plan, students shall indicate a specific program of study that enables them to complete high school. This program of studies should facilitate a transition from high school to one of the following: college, vocational/technical school, the workforce, the military, or community service.
The main differences between the transition plan and the graduation plan are the individual time and connections to outside agencies. Guidance counselors and faculty advisors serve many students and carry many responsibilities separate from individual graduation plans. Teachers responsible for transition plans teach fewer students as required by law because special education students need more individual time. The graduation plan does not ensure connections with outside agencies. Most times these connections must be attended to by students and their families. There are no laws to protect students if the graduation plan is not successful. If the transition plan is not successful within the first year after graduation, the transition team is required by law to reconvene and make necessary changes to assist the special needs learner in a successful transition.

Special needs students face many challenges and limitations, but have a wealth of required support to assist them in the transition process. Do special needs students have a higher success rate on the transition component of the KIRIS assessment than regular education students with similar economic backgrounds and low achievement on state testing? Will the results of this study indicate a need for low achievement students who are not special education identified to have more individual planning and assistance in the transition process? Frequently these students and
families have similar difficulties in making the step from school to community life.

The purpose for this study is to investigate whether special needs students, when compared to regular education students of similar economic backgrounds with low achievement scores on academic tests, will be as successful on the transition component of the KIRIS assessment as their regular education peers.
Review of the Literature

To respond to the questions posed in this study the literature was reviewed in search of information on past and current practices in transition from high school to the adult world for special needs students and low achieving regular education students. The review produced articles relative to special needs students transitioning in the area of a common practice as supported employment. Evidence was also found documenting the importance of the roles, responsibilities, knowledge, and support of all transition team members as well as interagency collaboration. Information was also located on specific and correct usage of the individual transition plan (ITP) as regards to the individual education plan (IEP).

A review of the literature produced past and current practices used to assist regular education students in the transitioning process as well. According to the literature, career education was the focus in the 1970s and again in the 1990s as a strategy to assist in the passage from school to adult life. Vocational education and work experience programs were developed and implemented to promote regular education students success in the work world.
Current Practices

The first practice reviewed was supported employment. Supported employment involves a job coach actually going to a job site and doing one-on-one job training with a special needs youth. Supported employment is a method practiced with many special education students to ensure a successful employment transition. "Supported Employment: Transition from School to Work" by Lagomarcino and Rusch (1987) investigated the role of supported employment in the transition of disabled youth. They cited the following as components needed for a successful transition: functional vocational training, student placement in jobs, school collaboration with adult service agencies, development of a community transition team, staff development, collaborative planning, parental involvement, individualized transition planning, and evaluation.

Weham (1985) supported the philosophy of Lagomarcino and Rusch (1987). In their article, "Unemployment Among the Handicapped Youth: What is the Role of Public Schools?", Weham and Barcus (1985) suggested a similar approach. They advocated a supported work approach for disabled youth that features four components: job placement, job site training and advocacy, on-going assessment, and follow-along and transition.

Rubin (1993) discussed supported employment as one aspect of the transitional linkage between school and work but stressed the importance of job matching and the
variables involved. These variables included items such as detailed job analysis, worker productivity, assessment of social skills, and employer/supervisor support. Other factors considered related to successful employment outcomes were availability of transportation and support services. When studying the employment patterns of mildly disabled individuals, Neubert (1989) also found that participants benefited from on-going support in maintaining employment and suggested the need for continued but minimal support to negotiate job changes.

Even at the state level a need for supportive employment was recognized. Supported employment programs were encouraged in Montana (Offner, 1987) and Texas (Morgan & Karr-Kidwell, 1994). In a pilot study in Texas, benefits of supported employment participation were found to include motivation of at-risk students to remain in school, increased collaboration with service agencies, and the receipt of student wages for comparable work. Most of the literature related to supported employment is positive; however, Siegel & Sleeter (1991) argued that the trend toward supported employment and transition services still rested on the dependency model of disability, which meant persons with disabilities must depend on nondisabled persons to be successful.

In addition to the supported employment practice, various articles were found in the literature review suggesting the importance of the transition team. The
literature specified that youth with disabilities required a
complete team whose members understood their roles and
responsibilities.

Rusch (1986) completed a study on school to work
research needs. He found the most highly rated item
recommended investigation of the most appropriate roles and
responsibilities for families, teachers, rehabilitation
counselors, and vocational educators in the transition
process. Everson (1987) described optimal involvement of
parents as well as professionals if young adults with severe
disabilities were to be successful. Putnam (1987) expressed
the need for cooperative relationships among home, school,
and community to make the transition from school to working
in the community.

Overall, the role of parents is crucial for success and
achievement during the high school years and in the
transition from high school to the adult world. Parents
must have accurate information to be effective transition
team members. Many guides and workbooks have been developed
to assist parents in the transition process. An index of
these resources is located in the Appendix.

Transition issues for parents with disabled children
are many. Goodall and Bruder (1986) stressed the importance
of parents gathering information and participating in the
development of individual transition plans. For those
students with disabilities, parent participation seemed to
ease the transition from school to the adult community.
Lankard (1993) indicated that the unique and complicated needs of students with disabilities require the involvement of other actors, primarily parents.

Arnold (1984) in his article "The Role of the Parents in Transition Planning and in Adults Services" went even further. He suggested parents should be trained to be effective transition team members. He explained training could come in a variety of ways such as university courses, workshops, mini-courses, self-help groups, and parent information networks.

Justice (1988) analyzed ways that existing educational service systems could modify their roles in order to improve school-to-adult-life transition services for students with disabilities. His strategies included new positions to coordinate vocational and special education such as case manager, job coach, and job developer. He also suggested changing teacher roles to emphasize community based instruction.

**Teacher Training**

Coombe (1994) developed a collaborative program between two universities to better prepare preservice and inservice school counselors and vocational rehabilitation counselors to cooperate in facilitating the transition of disabled individuals. Severson (1994) also developed an integrated model for preservice and inservice teacher training in helping students with disabilities. Her training consisted of three phases. These three phases were transition
preconditions and planning, transition phase, and transition outcomes. She stressed the importance of interagency collaboration and parent/student input for effective transition.

Teacher and vocational rehabilitation counselor training in facilitating successful transitions has been a research topic as well. Guides have been developed for these professionals as well as for parents. Examples of them can be found in the Appendix.

Interagency Collaboration

The literature revealed that not only should the transition team be emphasized but also that interagency collaboration was one of the most important components of the transition process. This importance was articulated in the 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 1990). This act specified that not only would a student with disabilities have a statement of transition services in the IEP but also a statement of interagency responsibilities for linkages. The committee from the federal government in this area documented the seriousness of interagency involvement to ensure successful transition for students with disabilities.

Several cooperative interagency models have been developed by states to meet transition needs of students (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1988). Not only have models been developed to meet transition needs of students they have also been developed through the
interagency approach to assess effectiveness of transition programs and services (Stodden & Boone, 1987).

Springfield (1991) called for the development of Individual Transition Teams to assist the student in obtaining the most satisfactory transition possible into meaningful work and living environments upon completing high school. The article summarized that the challenge at hand is to synchronize education and human service systems.

To synchronize education and human service systems as Springfield (1991) suggested there must be an outline ensuring that transition needs are addressed in the IEP as well as the ITP. Goodman and Iseman (1992) produced a framework for analyzing needs of students with disabilities in dealing with transition services in their Individual Education Plan. This framework outlined procedures that should be followed to ensure adequate delivery of services. This framework and procedures are intended to result in Individual Education Plans that not only will survive legal challenges but also will assist students in making successful transitions to life beyond school. Kupper (1993) explored the definitions of transition services within federal law and also the legal implications for the Individual Education Plan. Her article discussed types of transition services, when services must be provided, who determined what services were needed, and how eligibility was determined. Stowitschek and Kelso (1989) articulated their fear of making the same mistakes with the Individual
Transition Plan as we have with the Individual Education Plan. They considered such issues as accountability, relevance, quality, feasibility, and preparedness.

**Best Procedures**

There are many articles in the literature explaining the best procedures and the components that must exist for successful transitions for disabled youth. The elements on which authors seem to agree include the following:

1. Individual transition planning with individual student choice is crucial for success (Hasazi, 1985; Kohler, 1993; Vandergoot, 1988; Weham, 1990).

2. Comprehension program planning with functional and vocational objectives incorporated into the IEP is necessary (Getzel, 1990; Hasazi, 1985; Weham, 1990).

3. Community-based instruction which includes vocational training is another important element (Kohler, 1993; McManus, 1987; Vandergoot, 1988; Weham, 1990; Wisniewski, 1991). Social skills and employment related skills need to be included (Halloran & Ward, 1988; Kohler, 1993).


5. School business linkages which would lead to work experience and job placement is important (Hasazi, 1985;

6. Assessment of individual needs, strengths, and weaknesses is also very important (Reiff & deFur, 1992; Okolo & Sitlington, 1986). Some rely on vocational assessment only (Dick, 1987), while others feel the assessment should be much more in-depth (DeStefano, 1987).

7. Family involvement for all children must not go underestimated. For youth with special needs parental and family support in the transition process is crucial for success (Kohler, 1993; Vandergoot, 1988; Weham, 1990).

Concerns and Issues

As educators and parents prepare transition plans for their students and children, they find such barriers as duplication of services, conflicting policies, confusion about eligibility criteria, and shifting funding patterns. The need for consistent policy development, clear eligibility requirements and stable funding for transition services is needed (Hoffman, 1988; Johnson, 1987).

As discussed earlier in the literature review, many programs and projects have been developed and implemented since the passage of the IDEA to facilitate the successful transition of students with disabilities (IDEA, 1990). Universities have also implemented pilot projects to research and evaluate best practice in the area of transition.
Not only has great focus been placed on the success of disabled students in the work force but also recent years have brought great criticism from employers about all high school graduates and their lack of ability (Carlson, 1990). This criticism has caused school systems to struggle to develop programs to better prepare all of our students for the work world. Career education, career plans, vocational education, at-risk youth, work experience programs and, most recently, school-to-work are programs created to develop a better product for the employer.

**Career Education**

Career education became important in the early 1970s when the United States Office of Education supported the development of career education models. An Office of Career Education was created. Career education led to Individual Career Plans (ICP), practical written action plans of career development activities designed to direct a student's formal and informal learning experiences toward identifying and achieving a career goal (Piland, 1986). Individual Career Plan manuals, guides, and models were developed to assist educators in completing and implementing the Individual Career Plan (Batsche, 1982; Bhaerman, 1988; Colorado State Community College and Occupation Education System, 1987; Frederick County Board of Education, Maryland, 1983; Ohio State University, 1994; Research for Better Schools, 1984; Tennessee State Department of Employment Security, 1992; Virginia State Department of Education, 1984). However, in
the 1980s the focus was placed elsewhere and career education went to the back burner. In the 1990s the focus again has been placed on career education and school-business partnerships (Terry & Hargis, 1992).

A review of the literature revealed the issue of a career education curriculum for kindergarten through grade twelve. Decision making about careers should begin in elementary school and continue through one's working life (Rosenthal & Pilot, 1988). Career education in Colorado focused on a K through 12 guidance and counseling program and a business-education community council (Johnson, 1982). Farmington Public Schools in Michigan have a developmental career program designed to reach every student at every grade level (Parrot, 1989).

Specific States Implementation

The statement and purpose of the Carl D. Perkins Act of 1984 set forth an ambitious and important agenda for education to meet the challenges facing it. This 1984 Act set the stage for the 1990s (Drier & Gysbers, 1988). Specific states developed programs to help meet the career education challenge.

Wisconsin brought together students, parents, guidance counselors, and administrators regarding implementation of new approaches to career guidance. Participants voiced strong support for fundamentally changing their school systems. The Wisconsin Guidance Implementation Panel recommended that students ought to develop an Individual
Career Plan. Participants also wanted direct business participation and learning experiences delivered through hands-on activities (Jobs for the Future, 1993; Wisconsin State Department of Public Instruction, 1992).

A New York State task force determined that the education system in their state must be changed to prepare youth for the high performance workplaces of the future. Students at secondary level must work toward earning a Career Pathways Certificate (CPC) that would certify mastery of rigorous academic fundamentals and entry-level workplace skills at a world class level. The Career Pathways Certificate would be followed by attainment of a high school diploma and then a Professional and Technical Certificate (PTC) according to standards set by employers and labor (New York Training Partnership Council, 1992).

In Michigan, the Livonia Public Schools Whitman Center Comprehension Career Development Program was designed to meet individual needs for those age sixteen and over. The program involved a three step agenda to include assessment, information diffusion, and job placement. Expected outcomes were that students would assess their own interests, become cognizant about careers, learn a decision making process, develop a career plan, develop employability and job-seeking skills (Livonia Public Schools, 1987).

Colorado has developed a program called Colorado's Guaranteed Graduate Program. It is a process that assures that high school graduates have the knowledge and skills
considered essential for entry into employment and postsecondary education. A Transition Skills Portfolio and a Performance Portfolio are required (Colorado State Department of Education, 1991).

The Kentucky Education Reform Act has required many changes in Kentucky schools. The High School Restructuring Task Force has recommended an Individual Graduation Plan (IGP) for each student beginning in the eighth grade and following him or her through graduation. At this time the State Board of Education has not voted on high school reform, but many schools feel it will be a requirement and have already begun the IGP with their students.

**Practices - Vocational Education**

Hoyt (1993) discussed "transition" for the non-college bound student not in the context of special education, but for the regular education student. He saw a new concept of transition from schooling to employment, and this new concept recognized (a) the reality and importance of both paid and unpaid work, (b) the classroom as a workplace, (c) the student as a worker, and (d) the teacher as a worker. Hoyt (1993) cited workbase learning such as technical preparation, cooperative education, and youth apprenticeship as helpful but not sufficient alone. According to Hoyt, transition components should be developed early in life and must include basic academic skills, productive work habits, personally meaningful work values, general employability skills, career decision making skills, and a set of job-seeking/finding/getting/holding skills.
Vocational education is an important piece of successful transition for the non-college bound youth. The vocational education system in the United States was started by a collaborative effort of employers, educators, and unions to produce workers with skills needed by industry (Barton, 1983). Reubens (1983) saw vocational education as necessary for immigrant and minority youth to make the school to work transition successfully. Some feel vocational education has lowered dropout rates (Bishop, 1988). Groff (1986) agreed by saying that the mission of vocational education has always been to provide a skilled work force for society. Campbell and Basinger's 1985 study indicated that high school vocational education is associated with a clear wage advantage for vocational graduates in jobs related to their area of training (Campbell & Basinger, 1985).

In more recent literature Petrina (1993) felt for vocational education to become economically and socially vital, it must focus on subject matter integration, private sector collaboration, and preparation for highly skilled or technical careers. Hamby and Monaco (1993) made similar recommendations. They suggested (a) eliminating the general education track, (b) improving the connection between school and work, (c) integrating academic and vocational curriculum to enhance the relevance of course content to work, and (d) making school more relevant, caring, responsive, and student
centered for non-college bound students (Hamby & Monaco, 1993).

The National Assessment of Vocational Education's Final Report to Congress in 1994 described the education reform movements and its effect on vocational education. The report also discussed current reforms that states were undertaking to improve preparation of students for the work force. This report to Congress also recommended the following possible changes to ensure successful school to work transition: (a) developing and implementing a system of performance measure and standards, (b) developing national skill standards and industry skill standards, (c) developing and implementing school to work transition reforms at state and local levels, (d) integration of academic and vocational curricula, and (e) developing work experience programs (Boesel, 1994).

Practices - Apprenticeships and Cooperative Education

Other avenues schools have attempted in their endeavor to produce students who are prepared and capable of adapting for the work force are work experience programs. This discussion will focus on two of those avenues: apprenticeships and cooperative education. Youth apprenticeships have been defined as learning programs for young people that integrate on the job training with school based instruction. These programs bridge high school and postsecondary schooling and result in both academic
credentials and certification of mastery of work skills (Imel, 1993).

Clinton has been supportive of youth apprenticeships and has suggested they may assist the non-college bound youth transition from school to work. Cheek (1991) explained the key to successful programs was having the private sector become a partner in the occupational training of youth. According to Pfeiffer (1985), employing senior high school students part-time as registered apprentices by local employers and continuing as full-time apprentices, once they have graduated, was an appropriate approach to education. In 1992 the United States Department of Labor and Council of Chief State School Officers awarded grants for the development of statewide systems to enhance school to work transition through youth apprenticeships in eight states (California, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Oregon, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Wisconsin). Employers also perceived youth apprenticeship programs as sources of good employees and ways to promote positive images for themselves (Florida State Council on Vocational Education, 1994).

While some authors viewed youth apprenticeships as positive, others were skeptical. The Florida Council on Vocational Education (1994) found barriers for success such as student workers' immaturity or poor attitudes, lack of retention, and lack of guarantees after training resources have been expended. Other difficulties noted were time required for paperwork, program development, program
implementation, and insurance coverage for underage workers. Bailey and Merritt (1993) studied the feasibility of youth apprenticeships in the United States and found these problems: (a) lack of coordination between workplaces and classrooms, (b) lack of employer involvement, (c) lack of programs providing a broad educational foundation had difficulty meeting occupation specific credential standards, (d) lack of existing models often perpetuated divisions between types of students, and (e) lack of existing models that included academically oriented college bound students.

Imel (1993) cited the following as potential problems as well: (a) conflicts with labor unions, (b) the need for schools to make significant changes in instructional methods, (c) scheduling, (d) the need for increased financial support from business, and (e) the danger of tracking students at an early age. Along the same lines, Roditi (1991) questions what secondary school programs cost and who will pay. The suggestion was made that youth apprenticeship programs cost more than regular high school programs. Kantor (1994) criticized youth apprenticeships for non-college bound youth because he felt it reproduced inequities for the economic poor and minority students.

Zemsky (1994) explored employer attitudes toward youth, the youth labor market, and prospects for a national system of youth apprenticeships. The study found employers wary of a policy initiative designed to encourage the hiring and training of new workers. They were also reluctant to
initiate youth apprenticeship programs given the present labor surplus and job shortages. The employers generally felt that youths lack discipline, good work attitudes, and communication skills. They felt schools did not prepare youth for employment.

According to Humbert and Woloszyk (1983), cooperative education aided students in making the transition from school to work, as well as enhancing employability and earning power. These authors also concluded that employers benefit through the ability of cooperative education programs to adapt to labor market needs through reduced recruitment and training problems and through the satisfaction gained from helping to educate students. Humbert and Woloszyk also described the essential elements of cooperative education programs as follows: (a) alternate or parallel periods of instruction in school, (b) supervised employment, (c) written training agreements, (d) vocational instruction related to the job, (e) student's academic study or career goals, (f) carefully planned alternation of study and work; and (g) students' employment and compensation.

Concerns and Issues

As early as 1980 concerns were raised about the transition of non-college bound youth from high school to work (William T. Grant Foundation, 1988). A report done by the Maryland State Department of Education (1989) reported students were not equipped to make a successful transition, and the students themselves expressed concern about the
extent to which high schools helped facilitate student transitions. In June of 1990 written and oral testimony was given at a Congressional hearing on problems in the education of non-college bound youth in the United States (Joint Economic Committee, 1990). Problems that were discussed included lack of academic skills, lack of bridges between schools and the business world, and lack of government leadership.

Carlson (1990) and Barton (1990) published reports that focused on school to workbound youth. Both reports expressed concern for the lack of transitioning from the high school setting to the workforce. Carlson (1990) discussed the problem of inadequate assistance for the work bound youth. Barton (1990) explained that half of all high school graduates move into the workforce, but the attention given this group is almost always in terms of whether they are academically and vocationally equipped before they leave school. Transition into the world of work is usually left to chance.

Passmore (1991) found the United States spends less for the transition from school to work of non-college bound students when compared to other countries and suggested our work bound students were a forgotten group. Mansfield's (1991) focus on high school students found that they lack business experience and that they need to develop the emotional skills necessary when dealing with the world of work. She believed it was the teacher's responsibility to
make students aware of the realities of the work world. Pautler (1991) also held the school accountable for providing a smooth transition from high school to work.

To aid in this transition from school to work, the School To Work Opportunities Act was passed through federal legislation in 1994 (School To Work Opportunities Act, 1994). It was a comprehensive approach to work-based learning through integrating academic and vocational education, integrating school and work-based learning, and linking secondary and postsecondary education (Grittleman, 1994). Imel (1995) cited school to work transition programs as plans to prepare young people for high-skill and high-wage careers. The basic skills needed to pursue postsecondary education and lifelong learning should also have been taught.

There were some concerns over the lack of strong federal leadership because of current Congressional efforts to streamline government (Imel, 1995). Also an issue of uncertainty remained as to whether the federal government would maintain spending in this area with constant discussion of budget cuts.

There were other issues that concerned interested professionals as well. A critical challenge would have been finding enough employers to provide workplace experience for students (Grittleman, 1994). Some felt programs forced
youth to make career choices too early and placed too much emphasis on preparing youth for occupations (Imel, 1995).

Another issue was the equity with which school to work experiences were distributed among different student groups (Mithaug, 1994). A school to work opportunities system could not be restricted to those vocations meeting the definition of high wage. Three possible workplace learning opportunities were included: the high-skill, high-wage workplace; the community-building workplace; and the capacity-building workplace. Each offered the potential for work-based learning where young people would be able to develop skills that are needed to work in high performance workplaces (Stone, 1994).

There are many articles and programs presented in the literature that could have assisted a targeted group called at-risk students in their transition from school to work (Reisner & Balasubramaniam, 1989; Dougherty, 1989; Feichtner, 1989). Many at-risk students leave school without graduating, and the dropout rate is higher for minorities and students from families of lower socioeconomic status. Peng (1985) felt the dropout problem was closely related to broad social issues affecting the competitiveness of American industries. The undereducation of at-risk youth made us "a nation at risk," according to Smith and Lincoln (1988). They contended workers' lack of basic skills was creating an inadequate labor force in our country.
The National Commission for Employment Policy (1979) suggested a commitment for improving employment prospects for disadvantaged youth. The Commission found most young people were able to make the transition from school to work without undue difficulty. However, it also found minorities, high school dropouts, and low-income persons faced serious difficulties. The Commission held that these groups needed intensive motivational programs to obtain successful outcomes.

Over the years, many programs have been developed and funded to help this at-risk population. Some programs presented in the literature are Jobs for America's Graduates (du Pont, 1985); High School Academics (Archer & Montesano, 1990); Career Beginnings (Bloomfield, 1989); Impact Programs Project (Nemko & Feichtner, 1990); Job Training Partnership Act Programs (Cook, 1985; Izzo & Drier, 1987; New York State Education Department, 1986; Meissner, 1988); Yzaguirre, 1987); Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (Hahn & Lerman, 1983; Tapper, 1983); Co-op/Disadvantaged Job Success Project (Welch & Erwin, 1986); and Youthwork, Inc. (Rist, 1980).

Although many programs have been developed and implemented, there are still many disadvantaged students who drop out and remain unemployed. The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act (1984, reauthorized 1990) contained provisions for vocational services for special populations.
The following improvements were recommended to provide more effective services to disadvantaged learners:

1. The transition into vocational education can be improved by effective management of relevant information, effective recruitment practices, appropriate counseling and assessment practices.

2. Individual planning should be expanded with counseling to ensure student interests are genuine with a match made between student characteristics and performance variables.

3. Additional transition assistance should be provided beyond the point at which students have completed their vocational programs (Brown & Johnson, 1986).

Even though Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act provided support for at-risk youths, other barriers exist. Other authors discussed the following as the issues that create additional barriers for at-risk youth:


2. Too few role models in good jobs (Reisner & Balasubramaniam, 1989).


4. Inadequate access to vocational education programs (Reisner and Balasubramaniam, 1989).

5. Employer negative perceptions and attitudes (Reisner and Balasubramaniam, 1989).
6. Poor labor market (Reisner and Balasubramaniam, 1989).


10. World of work experiences (Dougherty, 1989).


12. Positive learning climate (Wircenski, 1990); and


Others such as Mangum (1987) stated that the family is the single most important contributor or deterrent to the career success of youth. Surveys of exemplary programs for dropouts showed the four most important program descriptors to be self-concept development, work attitudes and habits, interpersonal and life skills, and motivation. The four program descriptors that were ranked as least necessary were interagency collaboration, job development, staff upgrading, and community service (Batsche, 1984).

**Similar Studies**

In the review of the literature similar studies comparable to this current study were reviewed.
Lichtenstein (1987) published a study focusing on employment patterns of two groups: those were self-identified as handicapped and nonhandicapped graduates and those identified as dropouts. He examined aspects of transition from school to work and the incidence of handicapped individual dropouts. Findings on dropout rates among the handicapped students far exceeded the rate of their nonhandicapped peers. Results also supported findings that limited education and unemployment are likely outcomes for mildly handicapped students.

In 1989, Fisher and Harnisch published data that examined the educational, employment, and independent living outcomes attained by youth with handicaps as they exit school and enter the work force. The data obtained for this research were from the High School and Beyond second follow-up data files (Office of Educational Research and Improvement, 1986), part of the Center of Statistics National Longitudinal Studies program on the educational and occupational experiences of high school aged youth. The study found that students identified as handicapped had significantly higher dropout rates compared to the nonhandicapped sample. Nonhandicapped students were more likely to be in subprofessional positions as opposed to nonsubprofessional positions and less likely to be in part-time employment than their peers with handicaps. Based on the results of this study, it is apparent that certain patterns exist in selected combinations of employment
measures that suggest lower levels of achievement and performance among individuals with handicaps in comparison to individuals with no handicaps.

In 1989 a study was conducted in Vermont to examine employment of youth with and without handicaps following high school. Factors associated with the employment status of students with and without handicaps were investigated. One hundred thirty-three youths from nine Vermont school districts participated in the study. Handicapped students who exited high school in 1984-1985 and who had been receiving special education services were identified and compared to non-college bound, vocationally oriented students without handicaps. The findings suggested that the employment outcomes for youth with handicaps are substantially different and less favorable than those of nonhandicapped youth. The results of the study also suggested that substantial numbers of students without handicaps also experienced difficulty obtaining employment in the immediate post-high-school years (Hasazi, Johnson, Hasazi, Gordon, & Hull, 1989).

In 1990 Dowdy, Carter, and Smith investigated the post-high-school vocational status of individuals with disabilities to determine their transition needs. The study surveyed 80 high school students with learning disabilities (LD) and 80 nondisabled peers (NLD). Results indicated (a) more LD students than NLD students were involved in transition programs, (b) career goals were established by
the majority of both groups, (c) parents provided most of the assistance in making career decisions, (d) twice as many NLD students as LD students wanted to go to college, and (e) twice as many LD students wanted to enter the job market.

A national longitudinal study by Fisher and Harnisch (1992) examined the reasons behind the exclusion of students with disabilities from higher paying occupations. Data were analyzed for 14,830 subjects, members of the 1980 sophomore cohort from the High School and Beyond. The results illustrated that young people with disabilities have much lower estimates of their chances of obtaining jobs that could lead to higher pay, better conditions, and higher status in the community than do their nondisabled peers.

Using data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth and the National Longitudinal Transition Survey, Marder and D'Amico (1992) focused on youth in the last years of secondary school and the first two years after leaving secondary school. The study looked at how many young people dropped out of secondary school, the grade levels at which dropouts left, how many of those who dropped out completed GED programs, and how many of those who graduated attended postsecondary schools. Findings indicated that compared to nondisabled individuals (a) almost twice as many students with disabilities dropped out of secondary school, (b) four percent of dropouts with disabilities completed GEDs as compared to ten percent; (c) twenty-three percent of graduates with disabilities attended postsecondary schools
as compared to fifty-six percent, (d) forty-nine percent of youths with disabilities had paying jobs compared to sixty-three percent, and (e) thirty-eight percent youths with disabilities worked part-time and in low status jobs as compared to twenty-eight percent.

Rangasamy (1993) reported on the data he analyzed concerning the employment situation of 106 Apache youths, of whom 52 had been special education students. All students in the study exited school between 1987 and 1992. He found 65% of the regular education students and 73% of special education students were employed. He also found 50% of working special education students were receiving below minimum wage.

Careful review of the literature examined current and past practices used in assisting special needs and regular education students to successful transition from high school to the adult world. The findings of research led to the purpose of this study: special needs students, when compared to regular education students of similar economic backgrounds with low achievement scores on academic tests, will be as successful on the transition component of the KIRIS assessment as their regular education peers.
Methodology

Participants

Participants involved in the study were low achieving and low income graduates of a western Kentucky high school. To qualify for the study group a student would have scored novice on math and reading on the KIRIS assessment. Scoring novice on the KIRIS assessment indicated low achievement. Another requirement was being a recipient of free or reduced lunch, which determined low income. The study was done in a small midwestern city with a population of approximately 55,000 people.

Design

The design of the study was causal comparative, or ex post facto, since the assignment of students to groups was not random but instead based on whether they had an ITP with IEP services or an IGP. Frequencies of successful and not successful students on the KIRIS Transition to Adult Life Report were the two dependent variables compared. Students with an individual transition plan were students who had individual education plans and received special education services. Students with individual graduation plans were those in the general curriculum receiving no special services.
Procedures

If students met the criteria for the study then their transition success was reviewed in the KIRIS Transition to Adult Life Report to see if they were reported successful or nonsuccessful according to the specifications of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. Those specifications are: students are considered successful if they are full-time postsecondary education students; part-time employee and part-time postsecondary education student; entered in the military; or full-time employees (working at least 30 hours per week). Students who did not fit in the above categories are considered unsuccessful.

As students were found they were divided into two groups. One group consisted of students who had an ITP and received services through special education as documented by their IEP. The other group had an IGP. This division was done for the school years 1991-1992, 1992-1993, and 1993-1994.
Results


Table 1
Number of Students Included in the Study Results for 1991-1992 School Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>IGP</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>ITP</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlocated</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrolled</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the 1991-1992 school year, there were 28 students with IGPs. While 11 of the 28 were found to be successful, 9 of the 28 were identified as unsuccessful. The findings showed 39% were successful while 32% were unsuccessful (see Table 1). However, 8 students, or 29% were unaccounted for in this group. They either dropped out before graduation or were not located for the data survey used in the KIRIS Transition to Adult Life Report.
The study found 10 students with ITPs. The KIRIS Transition to Adult Life Report identified 5 or 50% successful with 5 or 50% unsuccessful. All students were located.

Table 2
Number of Students Included in the Study Results for 1992-1993 School Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>IGP</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>ITP</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlocated</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrolled</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the 1992-1993 school year, 17 students with IGPs qualified for the study. Of these IGP students, 10 or 59% were found successful while 2 or 12% were identified as unsuccessful and 5 or 29% were not located (see Table 2).

The students with ITPs for 1992-1993 consisted of 6 students. Of these 6 students 4 or 67% were found to be successful and all were located.
Table 3
Number of Students Included in the Study Results for the 1993-1994 School Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>IGP</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>ITP</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlocated</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrolled</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 1993-1994 school year results identified 14 students with IGPs that qualified for the study. Of these students 8 or 57% were found to be successful, 2 or 14% were identified as unsuccessful, and 4 students or 29% as unlocated (see Table 3).

The students with ITPs for 1993-1994 consisted of 8 students. The KIRIS Transition Adult to Life Report found 4 students or 50% to be successful, 3 or 37% unsuccessful, and one or 12% unaccounted.
Table 4


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>IGP</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>ITP</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Successful</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsuccessful</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlocated</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Enrolled</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The study identified 59 students with IGPs and 24 students with ITPs. On the KIRIS Transition to Adult Life Report 29 or 49% of the students with IGPs were identified as successful in comparison to 13 or 54% of those students with transition plans (see Table 4). The study showed 13 or 22% of the students with IGPs were classified as unsuccessful, whereas 10 or 42% of the students with ITPs were found to be unsuccessful. Of those who were not located or unaccounted for transition data, 17 or 29% were students with IGPs, while one or 4% was an ITP student.

The Chi Square test was chosen to compare obtained frequencies of success for the two conditions to check if there was a significant difference between the two population's success ratios.
Table 5 shows the Chi Square test for the entire sample of successful, unsuccessful, and missing students in both groups. In reference to Table 5 the Chi Square method shows a Chi Square value of 7.23 at 2 degrees of freedom. When compared to the Chi Square cumulative distribution function the significance is .0268. The Chi Square value of 7.23 indicates there was a difference in the 2 groups. These data tend to suggest we need to more closely observe the two groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADPLAN</th>
<th>ORIGSUC</th>
<th>Count</th>
<th>Exp Val</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>Not success</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Not success</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Success</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Column Total | 23 | 42 | 18 | 83 |
| Total | 27.7% | 50.6% | 21.7% | 100.0% |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chi-Square Value</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>7.23653</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 6 shows the results of a Chi Square test showing only the comparing frequencies of students who were located. The Chi Square test showed a Pearson value of 1.019 at degree of freedom. When compared to the Chi Square cumulative distribution function the significance was .3125. The indication is that at the .05 level, the two conditions (IGP and ITP) were not different in frequencies of successful or nonsuccessful students.

Table 6 - Chi Square Test for Frequencies of Successful and Unsuccessful Students in ITP and IGP Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADPLAN</th>
<th>SUCCESS</th>
<th>Not success</th>
<th>Success</th>
<th>Row Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>27.1</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Column Total</th>
<th>23</th>
<th>42</th>
<th>65</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Row Total</td>
<td>35.4%</td>
<td>64.6%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chi-Square</th>
<th>Value</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>1.01983</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.31256</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7 is a Chi Square test comparing the number of students located, or not located, in each group. The Chi Square value was 6.102 with 1 degree of freedom. When compared to the Chi Square cumulative distribution function, the significance was .0135, indicating that such a difference between ITP and IGP groups would not have happened by chance. At the .05 significance level the two conditions compared were different.

Table 7 - Chi Square Test for Frequencies of Located or Not Located Students in ITP and IGP Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GRADPLAN</th>
<th>Graduation 1</th>
<th>Individual 2</th>
<th>Row Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>Exp Val</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MISSING</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not missing</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>78.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Column Total | 59 | 24 | 100.0% |
| Total        | 71.1% | 28.9% |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chi-Square Value</th>
<th>DF</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pearson</td>
<td>6.10211</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis of Results

In investigating the number of successful and unsuccessful transitions of the IGP and ITP students, the percentages show the ITP students had a slightly higher transition success. However, when using the Chi Square test statistically there was no significant difference between the two populations.

The observed test statistic value of 7.23 in Table 5 had a very low significance indicator. These data indicate that there was more variance between the two groups than would be expected to happen by pure chance. Further investigation was done because of the large number of missing students.

A statistical comparison was done using data from only the students who were found. This was done to eliminate the variability that may have been observed from not having the data of missing students. The Chi Square test method showed in Table 6 there was no significant difference.

Initial observations would seem to indicate there was a difference in the number of students missing from each group. The Chi Square test method in Table 7 revealed there was a significant difference. The observed test statistic value in Table 7 did show there was more variation between
the two groups than would be expected to happen by pure chance.

The key piece of data in the three Chi Square comparisons was the missing students variable. The inclusion or exclusion of these data changed the strength of the significance indicators.
Conclusions

The statistical method used in this study indicated there was a significant difference between the two populations that were analyzed when all students were included. Therefore, special needs students, when compared to regular education students of similar economic backgrounds with low achievement scores on academic tests, were more successful on the transition component of the KIRIS assessment as their regular education peers. However, when comparing the two conditions using only information from all students found there is no significant difference in the two populations. This indication is that special needs students transitioned as well as their regular education peers.

As indicated in the analysis the key piece of missing statistical data was the unlocated students. There were seventeen students with IGPs who were not located during data collection. There was only one ITP student not found. The statistical method used showed there was a significant difference between the two populations when comparing the variable of unlocated students.

The ITP students transition teams actually track students after graduation to ensure success. IGP students do not have this type of transition support. The ITP
students utilized special services and transition team support before and after graduation while IGP students are not provided these services. This extra support facilitates a higher success rate of locating students in the ITP group.

Special education students have educational advantages that are written into their IEPs and implemented as the law demands, while students with similar problems do not receive such advantages because they do not have a label. The same holds true for transition. The law requires that special needs students have an ITP. If this plan is not successful after graduation, then the transition team must reconvene to develop a new plan to ensure success. The students that have an IGP and no special education services do not have this support. Once they graduate their high school is finished. This similar population of students needs the same kind of transition team and support as the special education students.
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Kallembach, S. C. (1992). Selected resources to facilitate the transition of learners with special needs from school to work or postsecondary education. Berkeley, CA: National Center for Research in Vocational Education.


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Appendix

A Better Way

Achieving Outcomes: A Guide
Interagency Training in
Transition and Supported
Employment

A Consumers Guide to Transition
Planning for Students, Parents, and
Advocates

A Curriculum Planning Guide for
Students with Mild Disabilities

A Curriculum Planning Guide for
Students with Mild Disabilities

A Guide to Resources on The
School to Work Transition

A Vocational/Special Education
Individualized Transitional Planner

Building on Today for Tomorrow
Designing and Implementing a
Community Based, Family Centered
Transition Planning Project

Learning Disabled Students Make
the Transition

Life After School for Children with
Disabilities: Answers to Questions
Parents Ask About Employment and
Financial Assistance

Parents and Transition: A Self-
Teaching Workbook

Rick Feller
Colorado State University
School of Occupational and
Educational Studies, 1986

Jane Everson
Virginia Commonwealth University
Rehabilitation Research and
Training Center, 1987

William T. Allen
Area IV Developmental Disabilities
Board
Napa, California, 1987

Lee Andersen
Merced County Schools,
California, 1988

Jeanne Jackson
University of Southern California
Department of Occupational Therapy
1988

Kelli Garing
Indiana Youth Institute
Indianapolis, 1992

Joseph Youshock
Nancy Gilgannon
Bloomsburg University,
Pennsylvania, 1987

Kathryn Moery
Family Resource Center on
Disabilities, Chicago, Illinois,
1993

Debra Neubert
Jennifer Foster
Teaching Exceptional Children
Spring 1988

Eileen Lavine
Joan Romeo
National Association of State
Directors of Special Education
Washington, D.C., 1987

Katharin Keller
Michael Hagen
Montana Center for Handicapped
Children, 1986
<table>
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<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Institution/Location</th>
<th>Year</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Planning for the Transition from High School to Adult Life</td>
<td>Trish Matuszak</td>
<td>PACER Center, Inc., Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1992</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning for Transition</td>
<td>Katharin Keller</td>
<td>Montana Center for the Handicapped Children, 1986</td>
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<tr>
<td>Selected Resources to Facilitate the Transition of Learners with Special Needs from School to Work on Postsecondary Education</td>
<td>Sherri Kallembach</td>
<td>National Center for Research in Vocational Education, 1992</td>
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<td>STEPS Handbook</td>
<td>Darlene Cain</td>
<td>Gwinnett County Schools, Georgia, 1985</td>
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<td>Successful Transitioning of Secondary Special Needs Students: from High School to the Community</td>
<td>David Berg</td>
<td>ERIC Document</td>
<td>1985</td>
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<td>The Transition from School to Postsecondary Education and Training</td>
<td>Alan Gartner, Dorothy Kerzner Lipsky</td>
<td>City University of New York New York Center for Advanced Study in Education, 1987</td>
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<td>Transition from School to Work</td>
<td>Patricia Patton</td>
<td>San Diego State University, California, Department of Special Education, 1984</td>
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