

April 6, 2009

Texas Senate
Senate Education Committee

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to share and support SB 2083. SB 2083 sets forth a national precedent to measure and, most importantly, to improve outcomes for students with disabilities in the State of Texas. The expression “you measure what you treasure” rings true in many aspects of education today. We spend extraordinary time, effort, and resources measuring student academic outcomes in public school. SB 2083 takes this to the next level of measuring educational inputs and associating them with postschool outcomes. That is, SB 2083 is designed to help answer the ongoing question, “What public school educational efforts best contribute to making a lifelong difference for students with disabilities?” The question is complex. Not surprisingly the methodology to help answer the question is extensive.

Much can be learned from studying data collected from the efforts supported by SB 2083. Educators in Texas, and indeed the country, would gain from the outcomes of this effort. However, the true beneficiaries would be the legions of students with disabilities that will come through the Texas education system in the years to come. These students will benefit directly from the application of this knowledge. Their Individual Education Plans and their Transition Plans will incorporate what is found through this work.

The Texas citizenry also stands to gain. By providing students with disabilities a more effective education—one designed based on their strengths and tomorrow’s outcomes—this population will achieve at a higher level. Increased achievement levels translate to reduced dependency on government subsidized services. Maximizing productivity of individuals for the overall betterment of society is the ultimate goal of education.

In 25 years of special education data work, including follow-up and follow-along studies of students with disabilities, SB 2083 is the most comprehensive State initiative I have seen to measure and effectively improve the postschool status of students with disabilities. The work is significant, the effort significant, the opportunities significant. I wish you great success.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me if I can be of assistance.

Bruce Bull
President

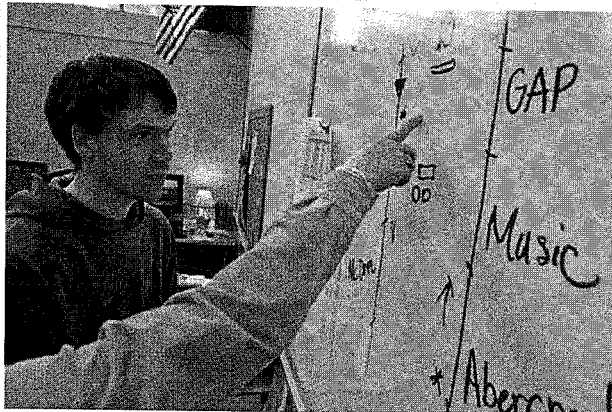
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SPECIAL EDUCATION DATA SERVICES AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Oregon tracks special ed students after high school

by Betsy Hammond, The Oregonian
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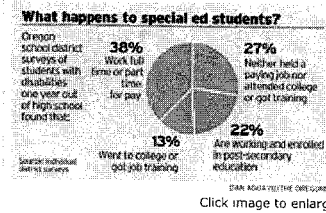
Benjamin Brink/The Oregonian

Erik Caldwell takes part in a class exercise about navigating a large shopping mall as part of a job- and life-skills program for students with disabilities. Caldwell, who has autism, and his mother, Kim Yeager, are thrilled with how Lake Oswego High is helping him and other young adults learn job skills and get experience in the workplace. "He's taking a more active interest in his future," she says.

During their first year out of high school, more than one in four special education students in Oregon never held a paying job or enrolled even part time in college or job training, a new state report shows.

It marks the first time that Oregon has tried to determine what happens after high school to students who received special education services.

Telephone surveys of former students in every school district found that about 1,150 of the 4,200 special education students who finished their high school education in 2006-07 spent the next year without getting a job that paid minimum wage or any post-secondary education.



This year, nearly 73,000 students are enrolled in special education programs, or about one in eight students in Oregon public schools. Most have learning disabilities, speech disorders or attention deficits.

The survey shows that results vary widely across communities. The West Linn-Wilsonville school district, for instance, reported only 44 percent of its former special education students found paying work or enrolled in post-secondary education, while Hillsboro found 84 percent of its former special education students succeeded in getting a job or enrolling in college or job training.

State and national officials called the results a big success, simply because schools are finally tracking what happens to students with disabilities once they leave school, information that will help them better prepare future students.

A panel of Oregon parents, educators and advocates for those with disabilities had set a goal of getting 74 percent of recent special education students employed or enrolled in college or job training. The state got within 1 percentage point of that goal.

"It is absolutely our responsibility as educators, under the law, to prepare all students to succeed in that next step in life, whether that be employment, post-secondary school or community living," said Jackie Burr, who coordinated the post-school outcome survey for the Oregon Department of Education.

Kim Yeager of Clackamas County was afraid her son, Erik Caldwell, would become one of the many students with disabilities who end up unemployed after high school.

The 23-year-old has autism and was awarded a special education diploma but lacked the

Special education in Oregon

How many

basic job know-how -- skills such as showing up on time and asking questions of his manager when he was unsure what to do. His high school gave him no real work experience, she said.

But Yeager and her son are overjoyed these days, thanks to a transitional program at Lake Oswego High that is helping Caldwell and other young adults with disabilities gain skills and experience to get and hold a job. Caldwell worked for six months as a restaurant dishwasher, tried his hand at landscaping and is thinking he might like to work in a grocery.

"He is learning things he really needs to know -- budgeting, shopping, social skills, learning to speak up and ask questions when he doesn't understand," Yeager said.

Jane Falls, coordinator of the federally funded National Post-School Outcomes Center at the University of Oregon, said educators haven't tracked how many non-disabled students get jobs or attend college the year after high school.

Nationally, states reported that 40 to 93 percent of their former special education students found jobs or enrolled in post-secondary education, she said. The differences largely stem from variations from state to state in their definition of what constitutes paid work or legitimate post-secondary education.

Many states, for example, count former special education students as employed only if they worked at least 20 hours a week. Oregon counts former students as employed no matter how many hours or weeks they work, as long as they earn minimum wage and work with non-disabled co-workers.

A uniform federal definition, including a 20-hour-a-week minimum standard, will kick in in 2011, Falls said.

State officials say they don't track what former special education students who aren't working or attending college are doing. Some get help from federally funded programs that help adults with disabilities. Others volunteer or work at below-minimum-wage jobs designed for those with disabilities, they said.

But Bette Koski, whose twentysomething son with developmental disabilities is happily employed, says fellow parents and disabilities workers she talks to tell her the same thing: "Most of them are just sitting home, bored."

She has found that parents nearly always have to scramble and push to find the extra services that their disabled children need to become independent.

And parents of older teens with moderate to severe disabilities in Portland are worried that even less help will be available after budget cuts, says Laurie Goss, whose daughter Chloe, 18, has Down syndrome and autism.

Students with disabilities are eligible to continue their high school education through age 21 and are supposed to get transitional services to help prepare them for work and independent living. But Portland school officials said at a recent meeting that they plan to give those students, including Chloe, just six to 15 hours a week of education next year, down from 24 hours in the current program.

-- Betsy Hammond; betsyhammond@news.oregonian.com

students: 72,800 in 2008-09. Of those, 28,000 have learning disabilities.

How educated: 69 percent spend at least 80 percent of their day in regular classrooms; 11 percent are in separate classes more than half the day; 2 percent are in separate schools or special settings.

How much: Tax money varies widely depending on disability. On average, Oregon gives schools about twice as much money to educate a special education student as the roughly \$6,000 spent on students without disabilities.

Source: Oregon Department of Education