

Easing Transitions between School and Adult Life

When Congress reauthorized the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990, transition planning for special education students was mandated for the first time. The 1997 amendments to IDEA emphasized the preparation of students with disabilities for transitions from high school, and, of particular significance, recognized that transition planning was a process. The amendments required that a course of study be developed for students with disabilities at age 14 that would assist in planning for transition services, and that when the students reached age 16 their IEPs would expand to include services designed to facilitate the transition from school to adult life. Below we report on secondary transitions between the 1999-2000 and 2004-2005 school years, with a particular focus on the availability of secondary transition coordinators. Findings are from the 2004-2005 school year; unless otherwise noted, no significant changes were found from the 2002-2003 school year.

Most states and districts used transition coordinators, most often supported by IDEA funds, to help students with disabilities make effective transitions from secondary school to postsecondary life.

For instance, our study found that:

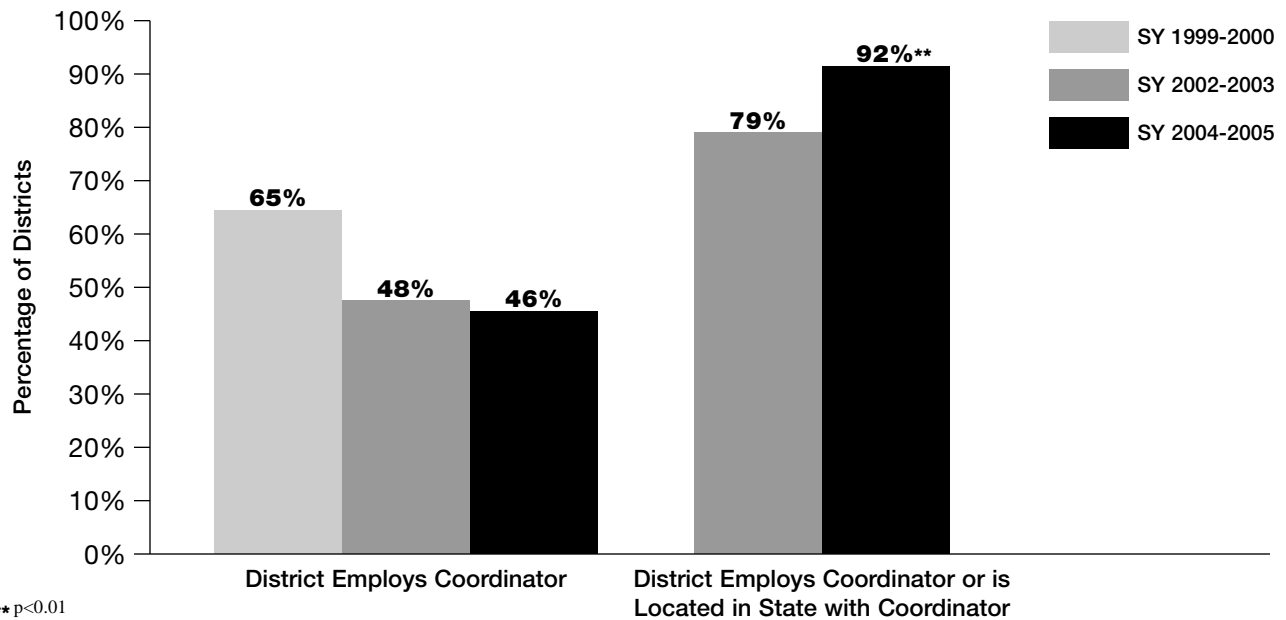
- Eighty-eight percent of states employed secondary transition coordinators in the 2004-2005 school year, an increase of 21 percentage points from the 2002-2003 school year.
- Eighty-six percent of states used IDEA funds to support the employment of secondary transition coordinators, an increase of 19 percentage points from the 2002-2003 school year. All other funding sources (e.g., general state, Title I, or vocational rehabilitation funds) were used by less than one-quarter of states.

Schools had access to a range of resources to support their secondary transitions efforts for students with disabilities.

For instance, our study found that:

- States provided a variety of supports to districts and schools to assist them with the transition of students with disabilities from school to adult life. All states provided resources to districts or schools for this purpose, almost all states (90 percent) provided written guidelines regarding secondary transitions, and 88 percent developed interagency agreements to assist with transition services.
- More than four in five schools (82 percent) had staff available with specific responsibility for secondary transitions.
- About two-thirds of principals (68 percent) consider most of their special education teachers well prepared to help students with disabilities transition from school to adult life. Teachers at 75 percent of schools attended professional development activities on this topic.

Figure 1
Percentage of Districts Employing Secondary Transition Coordinators



**p<0.01

Note A: This survey question changed over time. For the 1999-2000 survey: "How many transition coordinators did you have working in your district during the 1999-2000 school year? Transition coordinators are individuals whose primary responsibility is helping students transition from school to adult life." For the 2002-2003, 2003-2004 and 2004-2005 surveys: "Does your district employ any transition coordinators to support the following? Transition of students with IEPs from secondary school to postsecondary life? If yes, indicate the number of transition coordinators employed."

Note B: Analyses of district survey responses were limited to the subset of districts that serve 12th grade students.

Districts may depend on state transition coordinators rather than hiring their own.

(See Figure 1)

For instance, our study found that:

- A large majority of districts (92 percent) either employed a coordinator or were located in a state employing at least one coordinator, a significant increase from the previous school year (79 percent). This change is consistent with the increase in the percentage of states employing transition coordinators.

The results summarized in this fact sheet are based on the six year *Study of State and Local Implementation and Impact of IDEA (SLIIDEA)* supported by the Office of Special Education Programs, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, U.S. Department of Education, as part of Contract ED-00-C0-0026, conducted by Abt Associates Inc. Any points of view expressed in this fact sheet are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education.

Surveys were mailed to key personnel responsible for or familiar with special education issues in all 50 states and the District of Columbia - a total of 959 districts and 4,434 schools. For state, district, and school surveys, response rates were 100 percent, 89 percent, and 80 percent, respectively in the 2004-2005 school year. Similar response rates were obtained for the 2002-2003 school year.

From Abt Associates Inc (2006 April). *Marking the Progress of IDEA Implementation and Volume I: The SLIIDEA Sourcebook Report (1999-2000, 2002-2003, 2003-2004, and 2004-2005 School Years)*. Study reports, data tables and technical documentation are available at <http://abt.sliidea.org>.