

# issue brief

## Students at Greatest Risk for Poor Post-School Employment Outcomes: What Can Schools Do?

Decades of research have consistently shown that students with disabilities as a group fare poorly after school exit, particularly in employment (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Hassazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; Mithaug, Horiuchi, and Fanning, 1985). While the transition planning mandates of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990 (IDEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEIA) have improved the postschool prospects for many students with disabilities, far too many transition from school not to employment or other productive activities, but to waiting lists for adult services, inactivity, and for some, illegal or self-destructive behaviors.

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### what we know

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A number of studies have identified factors that predict successful transition to employment following secondary school exit. For example, students who have higher levels of social skills and more independence in self-care skills have been found to be more likely to obtain postschool employment (Baer et al., Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2011). One explanation for this may be that the students' social and self-care skills make them more attractive to employers. A second factor to

predict postschool employment considers the degree of integration of the disabled student with non-disabled students in school-based activities, such as lunch, clubs, field trips, or athletics (White & Weiner, 2004). It is unclear, however, if this finding reflects the value of integrated settings or differences between students who are integrated and those who are not, such as more independence, fewer problem behaviors and the like, characteristics that would also make them more employable.



Perhaps most importantly, enrollment in vocational education, a work/study program, paid community-based job experience, or other employment-related programs in high school seems to improve postschool employment prospects for students with disabilities (Carter

et al., 2011; Flexer, Daviso, Baer, McMahan Queen, & Meindl, 2011; Shandra & Hogan, 2008). The evidence is strong that engaging students in vocational preparation as a component of their educational program has future value.

## advancing knowledge and practice

The Center on Transition to is conducting a study in which data from the second round of the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS-2) will be analyzed using data mining technique to identify risk factors for poor employment outcomes for students with disabilities. In addition to identifying those risk factors, the Risk Modeling Study will identify homogeneous subgroups of students who are at greatest risk for poor employment outcomes after school exit.

These will be students who are likely to fall into multiple risk categories (e.g., race and ethnicity, gender, disability type, family status, etc.). Yet even in the highest risk students, some will be successful in achieving employment post-school. Thus, we will conduct a follow-up study to the Risk Modeling Study using the NLTS-2 data that will focus exclusively on those students and investigate factors that may mitigate their risk for poor transition outcomes.

To conduct this study, we will first extract a dataset of all records for the highest risk students as identified by the Risk Modeling Study. Then, we will conduct a series of logistic regression analysis to identify predictors of successful transition to employment for different high risk groups. In particular, we will focus on those factors that are alterable at the school level. These would include items such as:

- the student's educational program (e.g., engagement in the general educational curriculum, vocational education, etc.);
- the student's level of integration with non-disabled students;
- employer mentors;
- student support services provided;
- engagement in prevention, for dropout, alcohol and drug use, and pregnancy;
- collaboration with adult services (including participation in planning); and
- the student's role or level of participation in transition planning.

## what we hope to find

From this study, we hope to accomplish two goals. First, we will identify the combination of risk factors that put students with disabilities at highest risk for poor postschool employment outcomes. Second, we will identify factors that are alterable at the school level, and are therefore amenable to developing school-

based interventions. Ultimately, we hope to impact school policy and practice by generating new knowledge that will lead to more effective interventions and strategies for improving postschool employment prospects for their highest risk students.

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