

POST-SCHOOL OUTCOMES STUDY- 2005

A Project of:

**The NORTHEAST REGIONAL EDUCATION COOPERATIVE #4,
(NEREC)**



Developed with the Assistance of:

**THE NEW MEXICO PUBLIC EDUCATION DEPARTMENT,
SPECIAL EDUCATION BUREAU**

Submitted by:

**Mary Schutz, NEREC Director,
Glenn Damian, Project Research Analyst**

SEPTEMBER 30, 2005

Executive Summary

The NEREC Post School Outcomes Study is a product of the joint efforts of the New Mexico Public Education Department-Special Education Bureau, the Northeast Regional Education Cooperative #4 and seven member school districts including Santa Rosa Consolidated Schools, Pecos Independent Schools, Mora Independent School, Jemez Valley Public Schools, Wagon Mound Public Schools, West Las Vegas Schools and the Las Vegas City Schools. This pilot project was initiated to meet the needs of the schools and the PED for student outcome information, and has two primary objectives:

1. To collect and analyze student outcome data for use in program planning resulting in improved services to students who receive special education services;
2. To determine if outcomes data including information on employment, post-secondary education and supportive services can be effectively collected by schools.

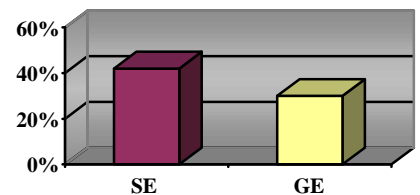
The outcome data, collected on students one year after exiting high school, demonstrated that students who received special education services were doing remarkably well compared to students who received regular education services in the area of employment. Employment outcomes included rate of employment, average hourly wage and average hours worked per week. The outcomes of former special education students were significantly lower than those of former regular education students in the area of post-secondary education.

Summary of Requested Data for the PED

Percentage of Returned Surveys

Special Education	General Education
42%	30%

Returned Survey Percentage

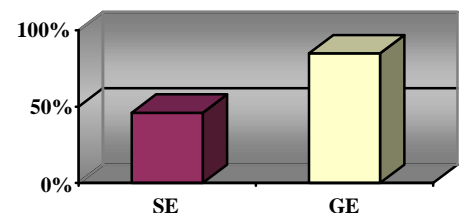


Percentages/ Post-secondary Education

(detail included in College/ Vocational Training Descriptive section)

	Special Education	General Education
Enrolled	46%	85%

Post secondary Education Percentages

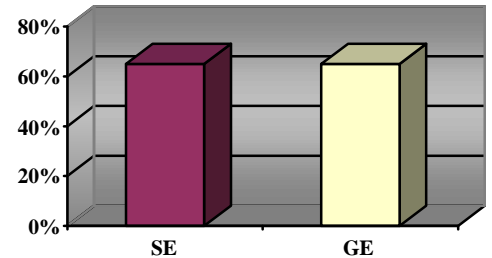


Percentages/ Employment

(detail included in Employment Descriptive section)

	<u>Special Education</u>	<u>General Education</u>
Working	65%	65%

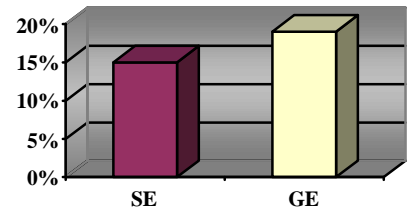
Employment Percentages



Percentage Receiving Income Assistance

	<u>Special Education</u>	<u>General Education</u>
	15%	19%

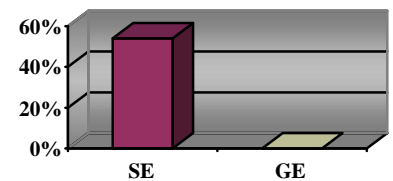
Percentage Receiving Income Assistance



Percentage Receiving DVR Services

	<u>Special Education</u>	<u>General Education</u>
	54%	0%

Percentage Receiving DVR Services



Methodology

The survey questions were assembled through a synthesis of questions asked in previous outcomes studies sponsored by the PED, with input from Sue Gronewold of the PED-SEB, Dr. Ginger Blalock of UNM, Dr. Jim Alarid of NMHU and the University of New Mexico Institute of Public Policy. NEREC contracted with the schools to do the mailings and to provide Interview assistance to students who needed this service. Mailing lists including

previous year 12th grade exiters were compiled by NEREC utilizing ADS files from the districts. All students were surveyed approximately one year after exiting high school. Surveys were mailed in May and June of 2005, and were sent or hand delivered to all students who graduated in 2004, or exited in that school year, and for whom valid addresses were available. Assistance in completing the surveys was available at each school site to former special education students and interview assistants were paid a stipend of \$100 for this service. A total of 13 students who received special education services requested assistance in completing the surveys. A stipend of \$100 was also paid to one individual at each district to assemble and mail out the surveys.

NEREC created a database and entered survey information matching entries with ADS data, and the survey data was analyzed by NEREC. It should be noted that NEREC expanded the survey at the request of the member schools, to include all students who exited as 12th graders in the 2004-2005 school year. This expansion in the scope of the survey was paid with NEREC operating funds contributed in addition to PED grant funds. The additional information collected on general education students will be summarized in an addendum report to participating schools, and is not included in this report.

Research Questions

The NEREC post-school outcomes study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data to answer the following questions:

1. What are the characteristics of students receiving special education services in the seven participating school districts?
2. How do the post-school outcomes of students who received special education services compare to the outcomes of those who received regular education services?
3. How effective are special education services in promoting positive outcomes for students who received special education services?
4. What additional barriers to positive post-school outcomes exist for students with disabilities who received special education services?
5. What are the net effects of special education services on earnings and employment?
6. What are the net effects of special education services on entry into academic and post-secondary education and training?
7. What are the barriers that schools may encounter in collecting post-school outcomes data at the local level, and what are the possible solutions to these barriers?

In this report all evaluation questions are addressed. It is anticipated that the answers to these questions will form a basis for evaluating and planning special education services for the participating schools, and that the implementation of a practical, LEA based survey effort will establish a sustainable process for collecting post-school outcomes data annually.

The Comparison Made in the Evaluation

In the evaluation, 26 special education participants were compared directly with 26 non-participants who received general education services using a nonequivalent comparison group design. The participants differ from non-participants in that the participants received the normal scope of special education services provided through IDEA funds and regulations.

Research Population and Selection of Comparison Group

The survey was sent to 458 students who exited high school as 12th grade students in the 2003-2004 school year. This number represents the total of those in the seven participating school districts who exited as 12th grade students in that school year with the exception of 9 students at Valmora High School. Valmora is a treatment center that accepts students from other regions, and forwarding addresses for these students were not available. A stipend of \$10 was paid for each returned survey. A total of 142 surveys, (35%) were returned. Of the returned surveys, 26 were from students who received special education services, comprising (43%) of those sent, and 116 were returned by students who received general education services, comprising (30%) of those sent. A comparison group of general education students was randomly selected using an Excel random number generator, and a research population of 52 was identified.

Descriptive Statistics

(Special Education exiters are coded **SE**, General Education exiters are coded **GE**)

- Total Research Population:
N= 52

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
26	26

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- Average Age

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
19.0	18.7

-
- Gender

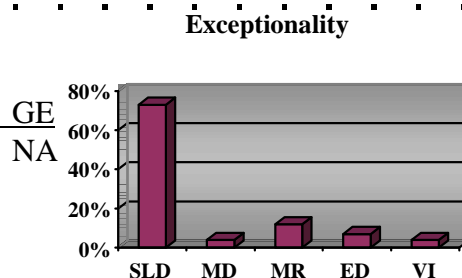
	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Female	10/ (38%)	12/ (46%)
Male	16/ (62%)	14/ (54%)

- Race/Ethnicity

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
White not Hispanic	1/ (4%)	5/ (19%)
Hispanic	25/ (96%)	19/ (73%)
Black not Hispanic	0/ (0%)	0/ (0%)
Native American	0/ (0%)	2/ (8%)
Asian	0/ (0%)	0/ (0%)

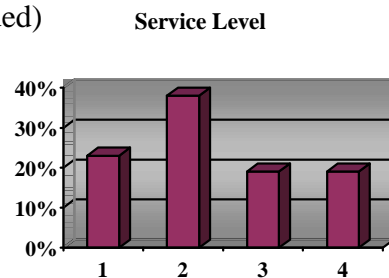
- Exceptionality

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
SLD (Specific Learning Disabled)	19/ (73%)
MD (Multi-Disabled)	1/ (4%)
MR (Mentally Retarded)	3/ (12%)
ED (Emotionally Disturbed)	2/ (7%)
VI (Visually Impaired)	1/ (4%)



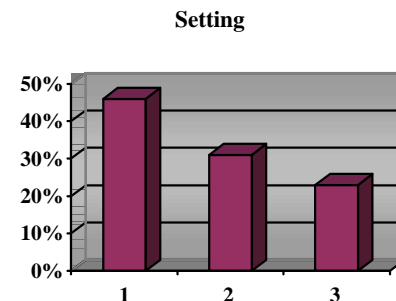
- Service Level (amount of special education services provided)

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
01 (less than 10% of day)	6/ (23%)
02 (11-49% of day)	10/ (38%)
03 (50% or more of day but less than full day)	5/ (19%)
04 (up to full day)	5/ (19%)



- Setting (location where learning takes place)

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
01 (regular class 80% or more)	12/ (46%)
02 (resource room 21-60%)	8/ (31%)
03 (separate class 61% or more)	6/ (23%)



- Surveys Returned by District

	<u>SE (sent) (returned) (rate)</u>			<u>GE (sent) (returned) (rate)</u>		
Las Vegas City	19	10	(53%)	136	38	(28%)
West Las Vegas	14	6	(43%)	88	26	(30%)
Pecos	10	5	(50%)	48	12	(25%)
Mora	3	1	(33%)	38	11	(29%)
Wagon Mound	3	1	(33%)	8	2	(25%)
Santa Rosa	9	3	(33%)	49	17	(35%)
Jemez	3	0	(0%)	30	10	(33%)

- Surveys Used in Research by District

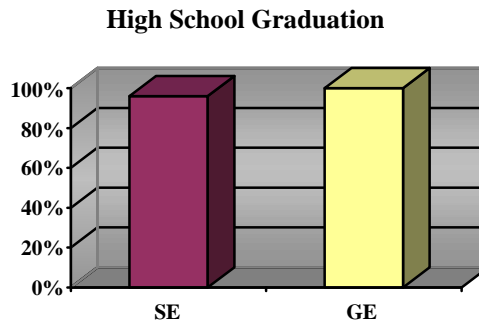
	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Las Vegas City	10	10
West Las Vegas	6	6
Pecos	5	4
Mora	1	2
Wagon Mound	1	1
Santa Rosa	3	3
Jemez	0	4

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Graduation

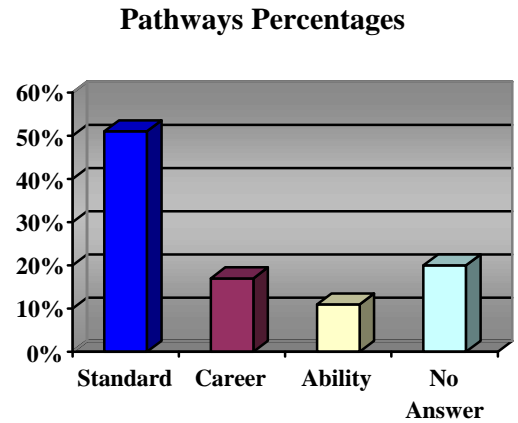
- High School Graduation

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
25/ (96%)	26/ (100%)



- Pathway to Diploma

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Standard	13/ (52%)	NA
Career	5/ (17%)	
Ability	3/ (11%)	
No Answer	5/ (20%)	



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- Grade Completed

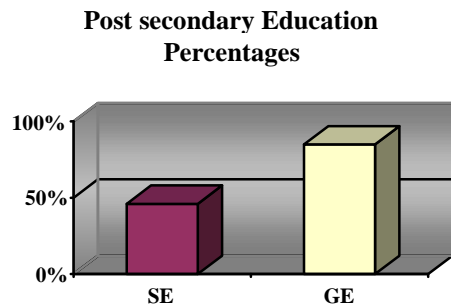
	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
11 th	1	0
12 th	25	26

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College/ Vocational Training

- Enrolled in Academic or Vocational Program after HS graduation?

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
12/ (46%)	22/ (85%)

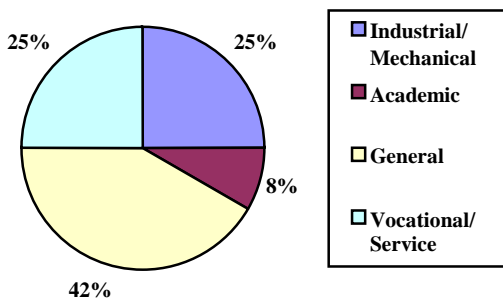


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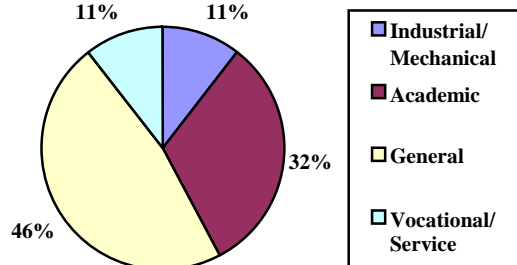
- If attended college or vocational program, what area of study?

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
General or Developmental	5	9
Culinary Arts	1	
Mechanical	2	1
Computer Science	1	1
Cosmetology	2	
Welding	1	
Medical		2
Business		1
Criminal Justice		1
Civil Engineer		1
Political Science		1
Education		1
No answer		4

Program of Study, SE



Program of Study, GE



- If attended college or vocational training, received degree or certificate?

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
1	0

- If attended college or vocational training, supports or accommodations requested?

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Tutoring	2	4
Special Needs Accommodations	1	

- If did not attend college or vocational training, why not?

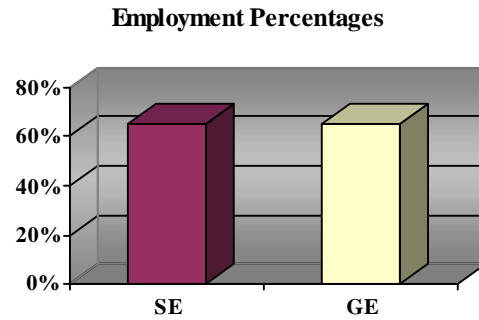
	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Got a job	7	2
Not well prepared	3	
Financial Reasons	1	
Severity of disability	1	
Don't want to work		1
Not ready yet		1
No answer	2	

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Employment

- Are you currently working?

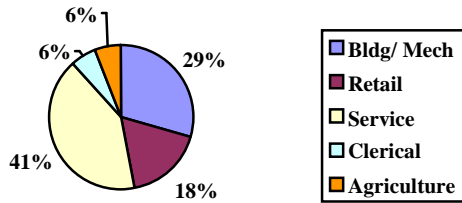
<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
17/ (65%)	17/ (65%)



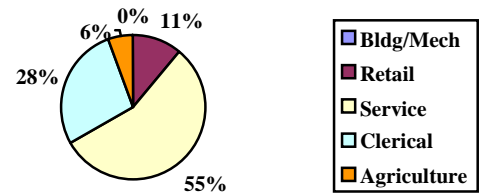
- What best describes your most recent job?

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Retail sales	3	2
Building trades	4	
Secretarial/clerical	1	5
Food service	4	5
Mechanical	1	
Medical	1	
Agricultural	1	1
Housekeeper	1	
Janitorial	1	
Delivery		2
Teaching//tutor		2
Human services		1

Most Recent Job, SE



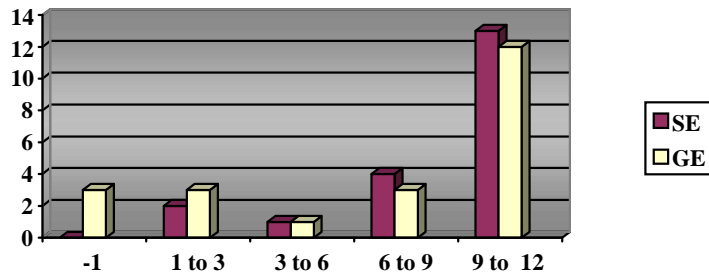
Most Recent Job, GE



- How many months of the past year were you employed?

	<u>Less than 1 month</u>	<u>1-3 months</u>	<u>3-6 months</u>	<u>6-9 months</u>	<u>9-12 months</u>
SE	0	2	1	4	13
GE	3	3	1	3	12

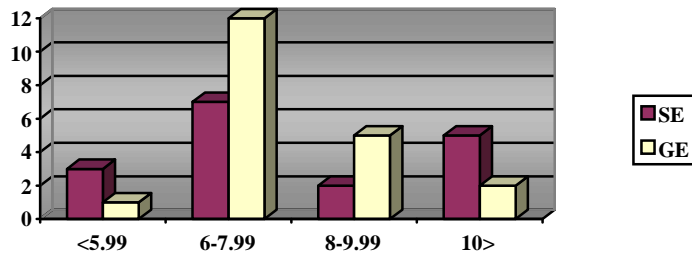
Months of Past Year Employed



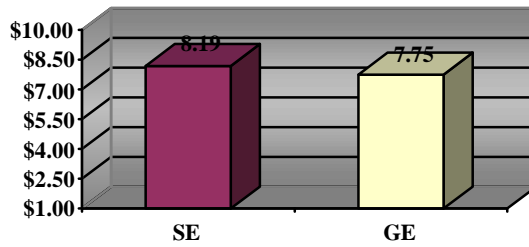
- Most recent hourly wage?

	Less \$5.99	\$6.00-7.99	\$8.00-9.99	Over \$10.00
SE	3	7	2	5
GE	1	12	5	2

Most Recent Hourly Wage



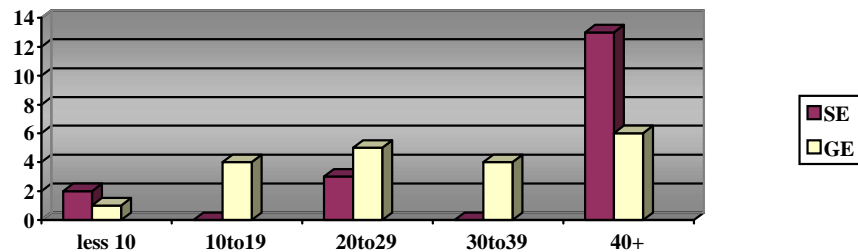
Average Wage of Those Currently Working



- Average hours worked per week?

	Less 10	10-19	20-29	30-39	Over 40
SE	2	0	3	0	13
GE	1	4	5	4	6

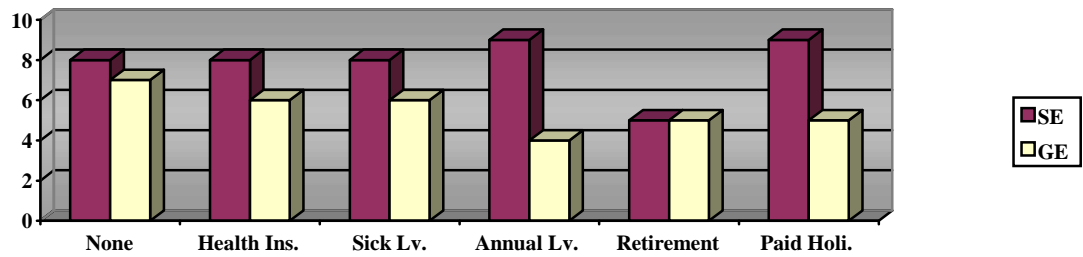
Average Hours Worked per Week



- Receive any of the following job benefits?

	<u>None</u>	<u>Health Ins.</u>	<u>Sick Leave</u>	<u>Annual Leave</u>	<u>Retirement</u>	<u>Paid Holidays</u>
SE	8	8	8	9	5	9
GE	7	6	6	4	5	5

Job Benefits



- If not working, why not?

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Can't find job	2	4
Fired	1	
Laid off		1
No Transportation	1	
Going to school	1	
Don't want a job		1
Child care problems		1
Other (severity of disability)	3	

High School Programs

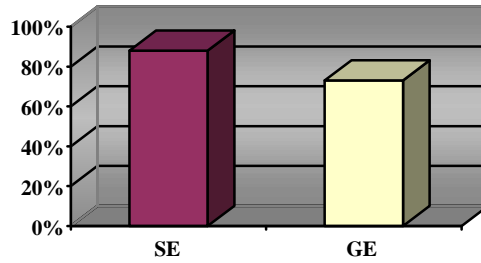
- How many class periods do you have in a school day?

	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>
SE	0	5	0	10	9
GE	0	10	1	6	8

- Work while in High School?

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
23/ (88%)	19/ (73%)

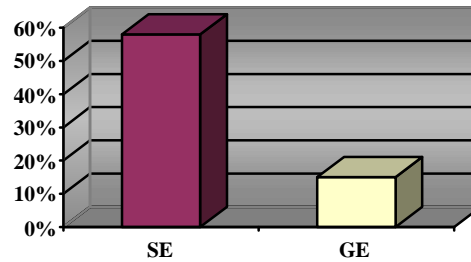
Worked While in High School



- Was your work in High School part of a work-study program?

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
15/ (58%)	4/ (15%)

Work Study Program



- Where was your worksite located?

	<u>On campus</u>	<u>Somewhere else</u>
SE	8	14
GE	1	18

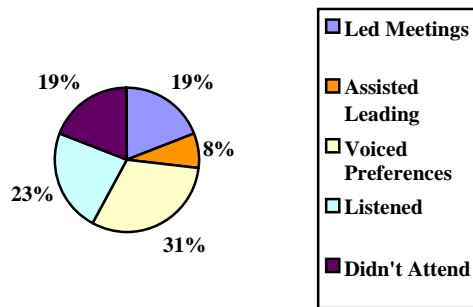
- Did counselors/ teachers assist you with career planning?

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
22/ 85%	14/ 54%

- If received special education services, how did you participate in the IEP meeting?

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
I led the meetings	5/ (19%)	NA
I assisted leading the meetings	2/ (8%)	
I told the team what I wanted to do	8/ (31%)	
I just listened	6/ (23%)	
I didn't attend	5/ (19%)	

Participation in IEP Meetings, SE

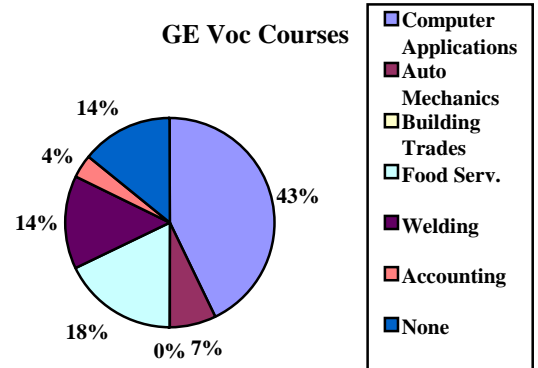
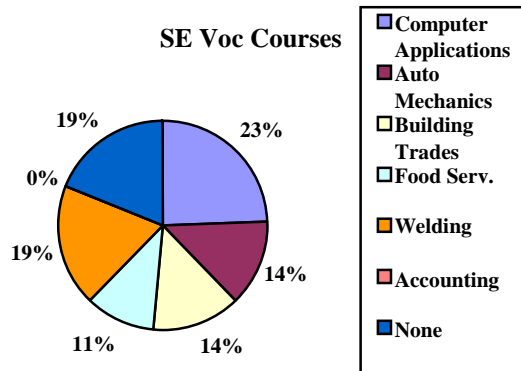


- If received special education services, how many classes per day in regular ed classroom?

	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>7</u>	<u>no answer</u>
SE	2	6	3	4	2	2	1	6
GE	NA							

- Did you take any of the following vocational courses while in High School?

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
None	7	4
Computer applications	9	12
Auto mechanics	5	2
Building trades	5	0
Food service	4	5
Welding	7	4
Horticulture/landscaping	0	0
Other (accounting)	0	1



- If you took vocational courses, were they helpful?

	Very helpful	Somewhat helpful	Not helpful	NA
SE	7	5	3	11
GE	5	9	2	10

- What courses or assistance that wasn't available would have been helpful?

SE

Life skills
 Independent living skills
 Computer courses

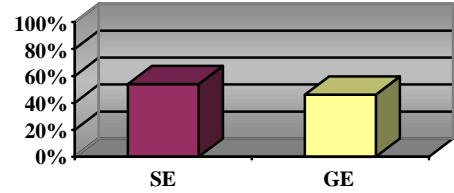
GE

Personal financial management/ tax returns
 Study skills
 More structure in classrooms
 More college prep courses
 More vocational courses
 Job preparation/ search skills

- Did you receive vocational and/or career interest assessment in High School?

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
14/ (54%)	12/ (46%)

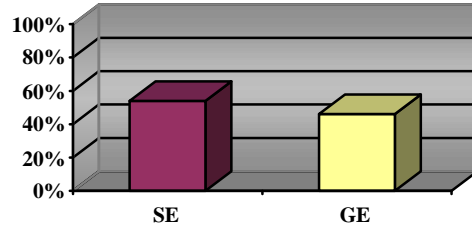
**Receive Vocational Assessment/
Career Interest Assessment While in
High School**



- Opportunities to explore different careers through courses or counseling in High School?

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
14/ (54%)	12/ (46%)

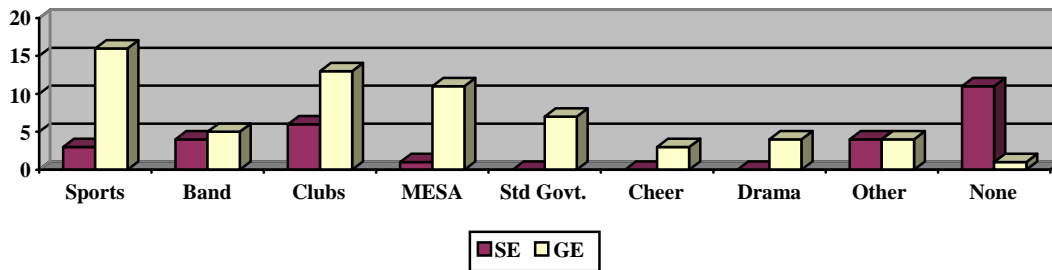
**Opportunities to Explore Careers
While in High School**



- Participate in any of the following activities while in High School?

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
None	11	1
Sports	3	16
Band	4	5
Clubs	6	13
Cheerleading/ Dance Team	0	3
Student Govt.	0	7
Drama	0	4
MESA	1	11
Mecha	1	1
Choir	1	1
Community service		1
Yearbook		1
Guitar	1	
Peer education	1	

Activities in High School



Quality of Life

- Involved in any recreational activities now?

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
None	13	15
Sports	4	7
Music	0	4
Acting	0	2
Clubs	1	3
Swimming	1	
Hunting	1	
Fishing	1	
Car club	1	
Roping	1	

- Rate your satisfaction with the quality of your life in the following areas that apply.

Job

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Great	5	6
Pretty good	10	8
OK	3	5
Not Good	2	2
No response	6	5

College

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Great	2	6
Pretty good	5	6
OK	3	6
Not Good	2	1
No response	14	7

Vocational Training

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Great	2	1
Pretty good	7	1
OK	4	5
Not Good	2	1
No response	11	18

Living Situation

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Great	7	9
Pretty good	13	12
OK	4	4
Not Good	1	1
No response	1	0

Recreation Opportunities

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Great	4	9
Pretty good	9	5
OK	7	6
Not Good	1	0
No response	5	1

Prospects for Future

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Great	6	12
Pretty good	11	6
OK	7	7
Not Good	1	0
No response	1	1

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- Do you have a driver's license?

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
19/ (73%)	26/ (100%)

.....

- Do you own a car?

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
15/ (58%)	23/ (88%)

.....

- Do you have access to a car?

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
20/ (77%)	26/ (100%)

.....

- Which of the following best describes your living situation?

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Alone/ on my own	4	2
Parents/ relatives	11	14
Roommate	5	7
Spouse	0	0
With boyfriend/ girlfriend	2	1
No response	8	4

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- What would you change to make your life better?

	<u>P</u>	<u>NP</u>
Nothing	1	4
More choices	5	6
Solutions to personal problems	2	5
More to do	2	10
More friends	2	3
A job	4	4
A different job	2	3
A car	2	1
More money	12	10
<u>Other</u>		
Help with college/ education	3	3
Help with medical problems	1	
More time		1
Better decision making skills		1
Help with childcare	1	

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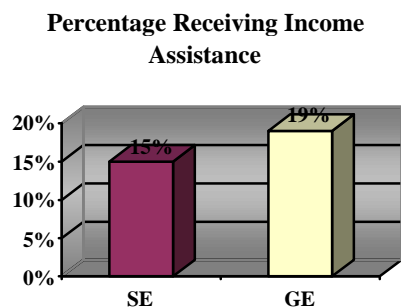
- How do you spend your free time?

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
Work	9	7
Studying	2	9
With friends	8	11
Watch TV	7	6
Video games/ listen to music	8	6
Sports	1	6
Church activities	0	1
Mall	0	0
Movies	2	5
Camp/ fish/ hunt	6	6
Partying	2	2
<u>Other</u>		
With my baby	1	3
On computer	1	
Sleeping	1	
Walking	1	
With grandparents	1	
Crafts		1
Aerobics		1
With girlfriend		1

.....

- Do you receive income assistance from any of the following sources?

	<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
TANF	0	2
SSI/ SSDI	3	0
<u>Other</u>		
DD Waiver	1	
Assistance for Heart Surgery		1
VA		1
Food stamps		1

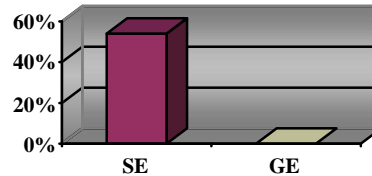


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- Received services from Division of Vocational Rehabilitation since leaving High School?

<u>SE</u>	<u>GE</u>
14/ (54%)	0/ (0%)

Percentage Receiving DVR Services



Analysis

What are the characteristics of students receiving special education services in the seven participating school districts?

Although special education and general education students were not matched in the research design, the characteristics of students receiving special education services and general education services were similar. It should be noted that no surveys were returned by students who received special education services at Jemez Valley, while four were returned by students from that district who received regular education services.

How do the post-school outcomes of students who received special education services compare to the outcomes of those who received regular education services?

The primary outcomes identified in the research included high school graduation, current employment status, average hourly wage, average hours worked per week, and enrollment in college or vocational training. Secondary outcomes included type of training, type of job, job benefits, drivers license, and public assistance.

The research found that former special education students were employed at the same rate as former regular education students, (65%). This parity contrasts sharply with their rate of enrollment in college/ vocational training, with (85%) of students who received regular education services reporting that they had enrolled in post-secondary training or academics, and only (46%) of former special education students who had enrolled.

The most recent average hourly wage of currently working students who received special education services was slightly higher, at \$8.19 per hour, compared to \$7.75 per hour for those who received regular education services. Former special education students worked 34 hours per week on average, compared to 27 for the regular education group.

Only one student, who was part of the special education group, reported that he did not graduate from high school.

Job benefits were similar for both groups, with a slightly higher number of former special education students reporting receiving benefits including health insurance, sick leave, annual leave, retirement and paid holidays.

The types of jobs held by both groups were similar, except in the areas of building trades, which were reported by (21%) of the special education group and (0%) of the regular education group, and secretarial/ clerical, which were reported by (56%) of the regular education group and (5%) of the special education group.

Former special education students appeared to have limited choices in academic and vocational post-secondary training. Almost half of those who enrolled, (42%), reported general or developmental studies as their area of study, with the balance distributed among culinary arts, mechanical, cosmetology, welding and computer science. About half, (41%) of former regular education students enrolled in college or vocational training also reported a focus on general or developmental studies, but the remaining (59%) reported a wide variety of programs of study including business, medical, mechanical, computer science, criminal justice, civil engineering, education and political science.

Among the special education group, (73%) reported holding a driver's license compared to (100%) of former regular education students. Although it would be anticipated that former special education students rely on programs of public assistance, this was not found to be the case. Similar numbers of both groups reported receiving public income assistance, with (15%) of the special education group who received specific benefits including SSI/ SSDI and/or Medicaid waiver, and (19%) of the regular education group who received specific benefits including TANF and/or food-stamps, veterans benefits and medical assistance.

How effective are special education services in promoting positive outcomes for students who received special education services?

Because of the complexity of contributing factors, it is difficult to attribute outcomes to services. There are, however, correlations which are suggestive in the research and which may indicate directions for further study.

It is clear that students who received special education services demonstrated positive outcomes in employment, one of the primary areas measured. While there are no unique services that stand out as explanatory factors, several influences probably contributed to the success. Previous studies have identified a correlation between working while in high school and future participation in employment. Over (87%) of students who received special education services reported that they worked while in high school compared to (73%) of the regular education group. Work-study programs contributed significantly to the high rate of employment

while in high school for the special education group, with (58%) of this group who participated in work-study placements. Students who received special education services also took advantage of vocational courses that were offered either on their campuses or through concurrent enrollment at local community colleges. Seventy-three percent, (73%) of the special education group took vocational courses while in high school compared to (85%) of the regular education group.

Previous research has suggested a correlation between participation in extra-curricular activities while in high school with future academic success. More than (42%) of the special education group reported that they did not participate in any extra-curricular activities while in high school, while only (4%) of the regular education group reported no extra-curricular activities during high school. It is clear, as previously stated, that students who receive special education services lag far behind in enrollment in college and post-secondary training as well. It is also notable that only 3 of the 12, (25%) former special education students who enrolled in college or post-secondary training programs requested accommodations or services from the institutions they attended. While universities and community colleges in New Mexico offer tutoring, academic modifications and a variety of supports for students with disabilities, it is apparent that most former recipients of special education services do not access these services.

What additional barriers to positive post-school outcomes exist for students with disabilities who received special education services?

Several questions were asked in the survey regarding the satisfaction of former students with services they received and prompting them to identify needs they believed were not addressed in their high school programs. It is notable that a high percentage of former special education students, (85%), reported that they had received career planning assistance from teachers and/ or counselors.

When asked, “what courses or assistance from high school teachers/ counselors would have better prepared you for college, vocational training or jobs”, students who received special education services identified more computer courses, and life skills including how to get and keep a job, personal financial management as needs. Slightly more than half, (54%) of students who received special education services reported that they received any type of vocational assessment while in high school, the same percentage that were provided with opportunities for career exploration and job preparation. As most former special education students go directly to work upon graduation, vocational assessment and career exploration would assist them in better assessing their options leading to better choices. Employment preparation activities including techniques for locating and applying for jobs, developing a resume and interviewing would serve their immediate needs in entering the competitive job market.

What are the net effects of special education services on earnings and employment?

To answer this question, and the following question regarding net effects on post-secondary outcomes, independent samples t-tests were run. Due to late arriving surveys, the effects test was run on 25 participants (the SE group), and 25 non-participants (the GE group). The subtraction of two from the research population does not significantly alter the power of the test.

The first t-test compared mean hourly wages of 25 participants, (students who received special education services), with the mean hourly wage of non-participants, (students who received regular education services). The mean hourly wage for participants was \$5.96 per hour with a standard deviation of \$3.94. The mean hourly wage for non-participants was \$6.32 per hour with a standard deviation of \$3.34. The mean difference was not statistically significant.

The second t-test compared the mean number of hours worked per week of 25 participants with 24 non-participants. The mean number of hours worked per week for participants was 26.44 with a standard deviation of 23.52. The mean number of hours worked per week for non-participants was 22.17 with a standard deviation of 14.73. Again, the mean difference was not statistically significant.

It should be noted that the average wage for students who received special education services was higher than for students who received regular education services. The mean is considered to be a more accurate measurement of statistical significance. The t-test included those who were not working, and therefore the mean wage is lower than the average. The mean should not be used as an indicator of real hourly wage levels paid by employers.

The t-tests indicated that statistically there was no difference in the employment success of students who received special education services and that of their peers who received regular education services. It should be noted that this would be expected to change as those who enrolled in college and post-secondary training complete their programs of study and enter the work-force on a full-time basis.

What are the net effects of special education services on entry into academic and post-secondary education and training?

To answer this question, an independent samples t-test was run comparing the proportion of 25 participants enrolling in post-secondary education, (mean = .48, standard deviation, = .51), with the proportion of 25 non-participants enrolling in post-secondary education, (mean = .84, standard deviation = .37). This difference was statistically significant, (t = 2.846, 44 df, sig. = .007). A calculation of “d”, a measure of effect size resulted in a value of .96, which is considered a Cohen’s “d” effect. This represents a large effects size, being almost one whole standard deviation greater.

The t-test indicated that a significantly greater number of students who received regular education services enrolled in post-secondary education.

What are the barriers that schools may encounter in collecting post-school outcomes data at the local level, and what are the possible solutions to these barriers?

In addition to collecting and analyzing student outcomes data, it was the purpose of this research project to test the feasibility of collecting such data at the local level on a regular, systematic basis. The project utilized mailed surveys with a \$10 incentive for surveys fully completed and returned. The rate of return, (35%), demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach in establishing a sample size appropriate for useful statistical analysis. It should be noted that the special education group were offered assistance in completing the surveys upon request. The assistance generally consisted of interviewing former students in person or by phone. By this means, the rate of returned surveys for the special education group was raised from (30%) to (43%). The interview assistance was provided by a counselor or teacher at each site who was familiar with the former students.

Some of the problems encountered included a moderate number of invalid addresses in year-old school data. In several instances surveys were obtained by interviewers who took the initiative to make brief home visits to former students.

Recommendations

Outcomes

It is apparent that students who received special education services enter college and post-secondary training at significantly lower rates than those who received general education services. Although it cannot be determined from this survey, which only measures outcomes one year after high school graduation, post-secondary education data suggests that these students often encounter additional difficulties when enrolled in academic and training programs that may cause them to drop out. These factors indicate the need for more post-secondary education and training recruitment directed towards former special education students, better preparation for negotiating the likely barriers, and better supports for students who enroll in post-secondary institutions. In the high school setting, preparation in self-advocacy and supports in post-secondary education for students including efforts to make them aware of available assistance and how this assistance will enhance prospects for post-secondary success are indicated.

The survey results point to a need for more career exploration, vocational assessment, work preparation and vocational courses made available in high school to students receiving special education services, as they are likely to enter the workforce immediately after graduation. Former special education students also demonstrated success in entering vocational occupations including mechanical, medical and building trades. They take advantage of training opportunities in these career areas when they are available. As vocational training is limited in many schools especially in rural areas, a more opportunities for vocational training at

both the secondary and post-secondary levels for students would likely lead to career success for these students.

Research has demonstrated a strong correlation between participating in extra-curricular activities such as sports, clubs, and academic and service organizations while in high school and future academic success. While (96%) of general education students in this research indicated that they participated in extra-curricular activities, only about half of the special education group reported participation. Efforts to reach out and recruit students receiving special education services, involving them in available activities may lead to increased interest and confidence of success in post-secondary education.

Process

The incentive of \$10 for each returned survey resulted in a considerably higher rate of return than a standard mail-out survey would be expected to produce. The \$10 stipend is clearly a cost effective means to maximize the return rate of surveys. In addition, a final deadline should be set for returning surveys.

It was apparent that former special education students returned surveys less frequently than general education students, and that direct contact by a familiar person with offers of assistance if needed dramatically increased the rate of return. As the duties entailed in this survey effort were outside the scope of normal duties of school staff, small stipends were paid for their services outside of work hours. If the tasks involved in conducting the survey were part of regular assigned duties, this additional stipend cost would not be a factor.

A brief basic training for interviewers and persons who perform survey data entry is necessary to insure quality and consistency of survey data. The survey instrument was piloted extensively before implementation, and misunderstanding of survey questions by respondents was minimal.

At least two questions were not included in the survey and later presented an inconvenience in analyzing the data. The questions, “what school did you attend,” and “what school district is your school a member of” should be added to the survey.

To facilitate a survey for a larger population, it would be helpful for the PED to prepare mailing labels preprinted with the student’s name, school, district, and ADS ID number to be placed on a survey.

A significant portion of the funds for this project was utilized to analyze and standardize survey questions from previous outcomes studies, and to develop a database for use in analyzing the data. It is anticipated that these costs would not be replicated in future efforts, and would therefore not be a factor in sustaining the outcomes study as an annual activity.

The Post-School Outcomes Study is the product of the efforts and expertise of several individuals and agencies dedicated to the enhancement of educational opportunities for students. The NEREC would like to extend sincere thanks to the following:

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