



Highlights of [GAO-03-773](#), a report to the Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

States receive federal funds under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to help students with disabilities reach their postsecondary goals, and various federal programs offer services that can assist these youth. However, research has documented that youth with disabilities are less likely to transition into postsecondary education and employment. Congress requested that GAO provide information on (1) the proportion of IDEA students completing high school with a diploma or alternative credentials, and their postsecondary status; (2) the transition problems being reported and state and local actions to address them; and (3) the types of transition services provided by the vocational rehabilitation, the Workforce Investment Act youth, and the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency programs, and the factors affecting participation of IDEA youth.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Department of Education (1) gather and provide states with information on sound strategies to collect and use postsecondary data, (2) develop a plan to provide states with timely feedback and consistent quality of technical assistance, and (3) coordinate with other federal agencies to provide IDEA students and their families with information on federally funded transition services.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-773](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-773).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David Bellis at (415) 904-2272 or [bellisd@gao.gov](mailto:bellisd@gao.gov).

## SPECIAL EDUCATION

# Federal Actions Can Assist States in Improving Postsecondary Outcomes for Youth

## What GAO Found

Of all IDEA youth who left high school during the 2000-01 school year, 57 percent received a standard diploma and an additional 11 percent received an alternative credential. High school completion patterns of IDEA youth have remained stable over recent years despite concerns that states' increasing use of exit examinations would result in higher dropout rates. Students with some types of disabilities were much less likely, however, to complete high school with a standard diploma, receiving an alternative credential or dropping out instead. IDEA youth without a diploma have some options for entering employment or postsecondary education, but national data on their post-school status are over a decade old. Twenty-one states routinely track students' post-school status, but these data have some limitations. While most states used post-school data for program improvement purposes such as monitoring service delivery, some officials indicated that guidance was needed on how to best collect and use these data.

A variety of transition problems, such as lack of vocational training and poor linkages between schools and service providers, have been consistently reported by students, parents, and others. While state and local educational agencies have taken actions to address some of the problems, other problems such as lack of transportation are less likely to be addressed at the state level. While state Directors of Special Education reported being generally satisfied with assistance provided to them by the Department of Education in addressing transition issues, some expressed concerns about the timeliness of the federal feedback on their state improvement plans and inconsistency in the quality of technical assistance provided by the six federal Regional Resource Centers.

The vocational rehabilitation (VR) program, the Workforce Investment Act youth program (WIA), and the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency (Ticket) program all offer an array of employment and education-related services that can aid some IDEA youth. However, several factors may impede participation by the IDEA populations that are eligible for services. The lack of participation may be explained in part by the insufficient capacity of the VR and WIA programs to serve eligible populations requesting services, and potential concerns of Ticket participants about losing public assistance because of employment income. A general lack of awareness by youth and families of these programs may also limit participation.