

Parents' In-School Values and Post-School Expectations for Transition-Aged Youth with Disabilities

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Abstract. A survey was conducted with 234 parents of secondary-level students with high- and low-incidence disabilities in two urban school systems about the importance of secondary instructional domains and transition planning and their post-school expectations for their son or daughter. Significant differences were found between parents of students with high- and low-incidence disabilities in the values they placed on instructional domains and transition planning areas, their desired independent living situations, and their post-school expectations for education and employment for their son or daughter. Implications for practice and research are discussed.

Over the past three decades, including parents in the assessment and educational planning processes for their son or daughter with a disability has been a hallmark of special education (Smith, Polloway, Patton, & Dowdy, 1998; Turnbull & Turnbull, 1997). Parental involvement has also been recognized as a key component of transition planning as students with disabilities move through the secondary years (deFur, Todd-Allen, & Getzel, 2001; Kohler, 1998; Morningstar, Turnbull, & Turnbull, 1995; Salembier & Furney, 1997; Sitlington, Clark, & Kolstoe, 2000). Stakeholders also recognize parental support and family involvement as critical factors in the development of self-determination for students with disabilities (Field & Hoffman, 1994; Martin & Marshall, 1998; Mithaug, Wehmeyer, Agran, Martin, & Palmer, 1998; Wehmeyer, 1996).

While policymakers, researchers, and educators have increasingly recognized the key role parents play during the secondary years, we know little about how parents view the importance of secondary instructional domains, transition planning needs, or post-school goals since the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997. This legislation calls for students with disabilities to participate in the general education curriculum to a greater extent and for a statement of transition needs to be included in the IEP addressing a student's course of study by age

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14 and needed interagency linkages by age 16 (IDEA Amendments of 1997). Further, the importance of self-determination skills is implied by requiring that statements of transition service needs be based on students' needs, interests, and preferences, and that students be invited to their IEP meetings when transition services are discussed (Wehmeyer, 2002).

Recently, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education (U.S. Department of Education, 2002) recommended that transition services be defined as a results-oriented process that focuses on in-school and post-school outcomes. Previous research on the perspectives of parents of students with disabilities has also addressed these two dimensions: the *in-school aspects*, such as the value parents place on various instructional domains, and the *post-school aspects*, such as parents' expectations for their son or daughter with disabilities. Given the changes in policy and practice in recent years, it is important to examine parents' current values regarding secondary instructional needs and post-school expectations. Determining if parental views and values have changed from research conducted in the 1980s and early 1990s can provide future direction for practitioners and policymakers.

While the IDEA Amendments of 1997 mandate that students have access to the general education curricula, in reality, the curricula for students with disabilities in high school may look different than those for students without disabilities (Eisenman & Wilson, 2000; Moon & Inge, 2000). For example, a student's focus of study may be on academic preparation for postsecondary education, attainment of vocational and academic skills in career and technology programs, or participation in community-based or life skill instruction. For some students with disabilities, the focus of study may ultimately impact the type of diploma they will receive when they exit school. For example, if a student's focus of study is on community-based life skills, he or she may not meet the requirements to earn a standard high school diploma, and may exit school with an IEP diploma or a high school certificate. Determining what parents value in terms of their son or daughter's secondary instruction is important because the instructional domains valued by parents are likely to be valued by their child, as parental support is often a key factor in maintaining a student's motivation and achievement (Mercer & Mercer, 2001).

Research into the value parents place on specific instructional domains has often focused on students within a specific disability category, such as parents of students with moderate or severe disabilities. Parents' values have been found to differ depending upon the age of the child (Epps & Myers, 1989) and the severity of the child's disability (Hamre-Nietupski, Nietupski, & Strathe, 1992). Epps and Myers (1989) surveyed 153 parents of students with severe disabilities whose ages varied (5-21) to rank their priority for instruction in four curricular areas: domestic, community, vocational, and leisure. Overall, parents ranked skills that fell under the domestic domain first and vocational skills

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second, followed by community skills, then leisure skills. However, when rankings were grouped by age, some of these rankings changed, especially for females ages 12-18, whose parents ranked community second, followed by vocational. Parents in this study did not seem to connect the type of instruction their child received with the outcomes that they anticipated their child achieving.

Surveying a group of parents of students with moderate and severe disabilities (ages 6-21), Hamre-Nietupski et al. (1992) found that parents' values of instructional domains differed based upon the child's disability. Thus, parents of students with moderate disabilities indicated that they most valued functional life skill instruction, followed by academic skills, and social relationship development. Parents of students with severe disabilities, on the other hand, indicated that they valued friendship and social relationship development first, followed by functional life skills, then academics.

Research on students with mild or learning disabilities (LD) has focused on parents' perceptions of students' skills and abilities in areas such as oral language, reading, written language, math, and study skills (Addison, 1997) or their perceptions of their child's friendships (Wiener & Sunohara, 1998). For this group of students, rarely have the values parents place on particular instructional domains been assessed with the exception of Michaels (1994). He asked parents, teachers, and vocational rehabilitation counselors to rate the importance of various components of the curriculum for promoting successful transition for students with LD and the level of each area provided in special education. All groups rated skills on the vocational subscale highest, followed by the living subscale, with skills on the academic subscale receiving the lowest rating of importance. However, in assessing the level of provision of each curricular area, Michaels found that academics received the highest overall rating with vocational and living skills being provided to a lesser degree. Furthermore, all groups indicated that the special education curriculum was not appropriate for meeting the transitional needs of secondary-level students with LD.

While these studies provide some insight into how parents' values of instructional domains may be influenced by their child's disability type, with the exception of Michaels (1994), they do not specifically address the perspectives of parents of transition-aged students. Further, it is difficult to make comparisons between the groups of parents, as the samples were somewhat homogeneous. Instead, the use of broader categories of disability, such as high- and low-incidence disabilities, as used by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (U.S. Department of Education, 2001), would engender a wider perspective, and thus, more generalizable results.

Research conducted with families regarding transition planning has also included post-school perspectives, identifying the outcomes that parents of

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students with disabilities expect or hope their children will achieve in the areas of education, employment, independent living, and social outcomes. Some studies have targeted parents of students in a specific disability group such as students with severe disabilities (Epps & Myers, 1989; Kraemer & Blacher, 2001) or students with mild or learning disabilities (Thompson, Fulk, & Piercy, 2000; Tilson & Neubert 1988). Others have made comparisons between disability groups (deFur et al., 2001; Hanley-Maxwell, Whitney-Thomas, & Pogoloff, 1995; McDonnell, Wilcox, Boles, & Bellamy, 1985), or between parents of students with and without disabilities (Lehmann & Baker, 1995; Masino & Hodapp, 1996; Whitney-Thomas & Hanley-Maxwell, 1996).

This body of research has revealed a number of trends. Few parents of students with severe disabilities expected their son or daughter to have part-time or full-time employment following their school program (Epps & Myers, 1989; Kraemer & Blacher, 2001). Often, parents realistically envisioned their child as being employed in a day activity or sheltered workshop. Parents of students with mild disabilities have expressed greater hopes for their child to work competitively, however, often in entry-level and low-paying jobs in the clerical or food service fields (Tilson & Neubert, 1989).

In terms of independent living, some researchers have found that parents of students with mild and severe disabilities hope for greater independence and social connections for their children (deFur et al., 2001; Hanley-Maxwell et al., 1995). Lehmann and Baker (1995) found that both parents of students with severe disabilities and parents of students without labels expected their child to leave home after graduation, though the parents of the students with disabilities believed that their child would require assistance from paid professionals in order to do so. Epps and Myers (1989) found that parents of students with severe disabilities anticipated their child would live at home, in a group home, or in an institution as an adult.

The expectations of parents of students with disabilities for their son or daughter's postsecondary education have also been sought by some researchers. For example, Tilson and Neubert (1989) asked parents of students with mild disabilities to choose their most desired post-school option for their child. Only 13% chose post-secondary education. Using data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, Masino and Hodapp (1996) found that parents of eighth-grade students with disabilities (visual, hearing, orthopedic disabilities, and deafness) had higher expectations for their child's postsecondary education than those without disabilities. Student disability status was not found to contribute significantly to the ability to predict parental expectations. However, it may be relevant that none of the parents involved had a child with cognitive disabilities.

While this research provides some information about the expectations parents of students with various disabilities had in the past, especially before the

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IDEA Amendments of 1997, it does not provide a clear understanding of current post-school expectations of parents of students with disabilities. In addition, previous research regarding parents' values related to instructional domains in school addressed specific disability groups, and the disparity within the samples and within the research questions does not provide a holistic perspective on parents' values or expectations.

The purpose of the current study was to provide that perspective by eliciting the in-school values related to instructional domains and post-school expectations of parents of students with disabilities in secondary education. The current study expands on previous work by focusing on parents of students in high school from ethnically diverse urban areas, allowing for comparisons between parents of students with high- and low-incidence disabilities, and soliciting views from parents after the IDEA Amendments of 1997. In addition, we expanded the options on the survey used to include instructional areas such as self-determination and career/technology education; post-school expectations were expanded to include integrated employment, the military, and post-secondary experiences that were absent in some of the earlier studies. Finally, we asked parents to rate the importance of transition planning areas in the son or daughter's transition plans during the secondary-school years.

Specifically, parents were asked to (a) rank their choices of types of instruction and types of transition planning areas for their son or daughter in secondary settings; (b) rank their choices of future living arrangements and post-school outcomes for their son or daughter; and (c) choose a post-school outcome for their son or daughter related to employment, college, military, or adult service programs. Comparisons were made to determine if differences existed between the parents of students with high- versus low-incidence disabilities. These findings are part of a larger study in which parents and teachers of students in secondary special education were surveyed about transition and self-determination (Grigal, 2001; Grigal, Neubert, Moon, & Graham, 2003).

METHOD

Instrument

A review of research focused on parent in-school values and post-school expectations revealed a number of areas about which parents had been questioned in the past (Epps & Myers, 1989; Hamre-Nietupski et al., 1992; Kraemer & Blacher, 2001; Lehmann & Baker, 1995; McDonnell et al., 1985; Michaels, 1994). Parents' in-school values were sought about instructional areas such as functional or community-based life skills, academic skills, vocational skills, and social development. Their post-school expectations for their son or

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daughter were focused on employment, independent living, and recreational or social experiences. Using these areas as a basis, a survey was developed to assess parents' current values and post-school expectations.

Feedback on initial drafts of the survey was solicited from a panel of experts in secondary special education and transition services and from a group of parents of students in secondary special education at a transition conference sponsored by a state parent resource organization. The final survey asked for demographic information from parents, including their relationship to the student, their child's incidence of disability (high or low), chronological age, gender, ethnicity, course of study (college preparation, career and technology education, or community-based/life skills), and type of graduation document (diploma or certificate). Another section of the survey included items designed to elicit the relative importance parents placed on secondary-school instructional areas, transition planning areas, and post-school outcomes (see Table 1 for the survey items).

Selection of Participants

Personnel from two school systems in a mid-Atlantic state agreed to participate in the study. The directors of each school system's research department randomly selected the names and addresses of 984 parents who

Table 1
Parent Survey Items

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1. Please rank the importance (1 is most important and 6 is least important) of the following types of instruction in your son or daughter's education program:
 Functional Life Skills Instruction Academic Instruction
 Community-Based Instruction Social Skills Instruction
 Career & Technology Instruction Self-Determination Instruction
 2. Please rank the importance (1 is most important and 6 is least important) of the following transition planning areas for your son or daughter's transition plan:
 Recreation/Leisure Residential Employment
 Education Relationships Financial
 3. Please rank your ideal-choice living arrangements for your son/daughter when he or she reaches adulthood (1 is most important and 4 is least important):
 At home with parents/family/guardian In an apartment with a friend/spouse
 In a supervised apartment or group home In a home that he/she owns
 4. Please rank the importance (1 is most important and 5 is least important) of the following potential outcomes for your son or daughter when he or she reaches adulthood:
 Live independently Manage own finances Make and keep friends
 Attend college Gain employment in the community
 5. Please circle one response that best fits your answer. After graduation, I want my son/daughter to participate in:
 A community college A four-year college The military
 Part-time work Supported employment situation Full-time work
 Segregated workshop for people with disabilities
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had a son or daughter with disability in high school between the ages of 16 to 21 years. Both school systems were located in urban areas, each bordering a major metropolitan city. One of the school systems served a total of 106,465 students. Twelve percent of the 1,620 students who received special education services were between the ages of 16-21. The other school system served a total of 131,059 students with 10% of this population receiving special education services. Of students receiving special education services, 2,196 were between the ages of 16-21.

Parents or caregivers (referred to as parents) of high school students with high- and low-incidence disabilities, ages 16 years or older, were surveyed to determine their in-school values and post-school expectations related to their child's transition from school to adult life. Students with high-incidence (HI) disabilities included students with a specific learning disability, mild/moderate mental retardation, emotional disability, or a speech/language disability. Students with low-incidence (LI) disabilities included students with autism, multiple/severe disabilities, severe orthopedic disabilities, significant mental retardation, visual or hearing impairment, or traumatic brain injury.

Procedures

Introductory letters were mailed to the randomly selected 984 parents to provide background information about the study and survey. One week later, surveys were mailed to each of these parents, along with a cover letter and a postage-paid reply envelope. Subsequent mailings included a postcard reminder to complete the survey and an additional copy of the survey sent to non-respondents (Salant & Dillman, 1994). To encourage responses, parents were told they would be entered into a random drawing for three prizes.

Respondents

A total of 234 parents responded to the survey, for a return rate of 24%. The majority of parents who completed the survey were mothers (82.5%), followed by fathers (9.8%), grandparents (5.6%), or legal guardians (1.7%), with .4% giving no response. One hundred sixty-two (69%) of the parents reported that their child had a HI disability; 72 parents (31%) reported that their child had a LI disability. Parents' reports of their son or daughter's gender, ethnicity, course of study, and graduation documentation are presented in Table 2.

RESULTS

Mean ranks were determined for each parent response on the scale items in which responses were rated. Further, chi-square analyses were conducted comparing the responses of parents of students with HI disabilities to the

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Table 2
Parent Reports of Son or Daughter's Gender, Ethnicity, Course of Study, and Type of Graduation Document

Variable	<i>N</i>	%
Gender		
Male	163	69.7
Female	70	29.9
No response	1	.4
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	4	1.7
African American	116	49.6
Asian	3	1.3
Caucasian	99	42.3
Multiracial	5	2.1
No response	7	3
Course of study		
College prep	63	26.9
Career technology	52	22.2
Community-based/life skills	76	32.5
Other	13	5.6
No response	30	12.8
Type of graduation documentation		
Diploma	159	67.9
Certificate	49	20.9
Unsure	22	9.4
No response	4	1.7

responses of parents of students with LI disabilities. Chi-square analyses were also conducted between the parent groups on the scale item that asked for a categorical response (see Item 5 on Table 1). Parents' ranking of types of instruction and transition planning areas during the secondary years are presented first, followed by their ranking of living arrangements and post-school outcomes, and their choice of post-school employment of education activity.

Instructional Domains In-School

Parents were asked to rank the importance of six areas of instruction (academic, career, life skills, community-based, social skills, and self-determination) in their son or daughter's education program. The percentages of parents' ranking of instructional domains by incidence of child's disability is presented in Table 3.

As illustrated, parents of students with LI disabilities (31.3%) were

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Table 3
Percentage of Parents' Ranking of Instructional Domains by Incidence of Child's Disability

RK	High Incidence Disabilities						Low Incidence Disabilities					
	A	C	LS	CB	SS	SD	A	C	LS	CB	SS	SD
1	40.0	24.1	15.2	1.4	3.4	15.9	25.4	19.4	31.3	0.0	7.5	16.4
2	23.6	35.7	12.9	2.9	8.6	16.4	18.0	23.0	14.8	6.6	18.0	19.7
3	10.9	16.8	21.9	3.6	20.4	26.3	6.7	10.0	13.3	20.0	25.0	25.0
4	11.9	14.1	20.0	12.6	21.5	20.0	8.6	17.2	27.6	20.7	15.5	10.3
5	4.4	6.7	18.5	27.4	29.6	13.3	10.5	17.5	10.5	26.3	21.1	14.0
6	11.1	3.7	9.6	51.9	16.3	7.4	31.6	10.5	3.5	26.3	14.0	14.0

Note. RK= rank, A = academic, C = career, LS= life skills, CB = community-based, SS = social skills, SD = self-determination.

significantly more likely to rank life skill instruction as number one than parents of students with HI disabilities (15.2%) ($\chi^2 = 11.63, df=5, p < .05$). Parents of students with LI disabilities (20%) were significantly more likely than parents of students with HI disabilities (3.6%) to rank community-based instruction as their third choice ($\chi^2 = 17.04, df=5, p < .05$).

Other significant differences included the following. Parents of students with LI disabilities (31.6%) ranked academic instruction sixth almost three times more often than parents of students with HI disabilities (11.1%) Finally, parents of students with HI disabilities ranked community-based instruction sixth almost twice as often than did parents of students with LI disabilities ($\chi^2 = 22.86, df=5, p < .05$).

Transition Planning Areas

Parents were asked to rank the importance of six transition planning areas for their son or daughter (i.e., recreation, education, relationships, employment, residential, financial). The percentages of parents' ranking of transition planning areas by incidence of child's disability is presented in Table 4.

While the majority of both parent groups ranked the education first, a significant difference was found by disability group in the residential area: 20% of parents of students with HI disabilities residential first versus 12% of parents of students with LI disabilities ($\chi^2 = 14.91, df=5, p < .05$). Parents of students with HI disabilities (2.8%) were significantly less likely to rank the area of residential as their second choice than parents of students with LI disabilities (13.1%). Additionally, parents of students with HI disabilities (49.6%) ranked employment second significantly more than did parents of students with LI disabilities (31.1%) ($\chi^2 = 15.57, df=5, p < .05$).

Parents of students with HI disabilities ranked finances third (42.3%)

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Table 4
Percentage of Parents' Ranking of Transition Planning Areas by Incidence of Child's Disability

	High Incidence Disabilities					Low Incidence Disabilities							
	RC	ED	RL	EM	RS	F	RC	ED	RL	EM	RS	F	
RK													
1	0.7	62.2	4.7	24.3	20.0	6.1	1.6	57.8	7.8	20.3	12.5	0.0	
2	2.1	18.4	7.1	49.6	2.8	19.9	4.9	13.1	14.8	31.1	13.1	23.0	
3	2.1	9.9	8.5	22.5	14.8	42.3	16.7	5.0	10.0	23.3	5.0	4.0	
4	10.6	5.6	19.0	2.1	45.1	17.6	15.3	13.6	15.3	11.9	37.3	6.8	
5	27.0	2.1	43.0	1.4	19.1	7.1	27.1	5.1	25.4	6.8	23.7	11.9	
6	57.0	1.4	18.3	1.4	15.5	6.3	38.3	3.3	28.3	5.0	8.3	16.7	

Note. RK = Rank, RC = recreation, ED = education, RL = relationships, EM = employment, RS = residential, F= financial.

significantly more often than did parents of students with LI disabilities (4%) ($\chi^2 = 18.64, df=5, p < .05$). Parents of students with LI disabilities were more likely to rank education (13.6%) and employment (11.9%) as their fourth choice ($\chi^2 = 16.33, df=5, p < .05$) than parents of student with HI disabilities, who ranked these categories fourth 5.6% and 2.1%, respectively. Finally, while recreation was ranked sixth most often by both parent groups, a significantly larger percentage of parents of students with HI disabilities (57%) ranked this least important than parents of students with LI disabilities (38.3%; $\chi^2 = 14.25, df=5, p < .05$).

Future Living Arrangements

Parents were asked to rank their choice of four future living arrangements for their son or daughter (i.e., home with family, group home, apartment with friend, own home). A percentage of parents' ranking of post-school living arrangements by incidence of child's disability is presented in Table 5.

Table 5
Percentage of Parents' Ranking of Post-School Living Arrangements by Incidence of Child's Disability

Rank	High Incidence Disabilities				Low Incidence Disabilities			
	HF	GH	A	OH	HF	GH	A	OH
1	20.1	4.5	14.3	61.0	43.5	14.5	8.7	33.3
2	14.1	8.1	60.7	17.0	16.7	21.7	40.0	21.7
3	50.4	15.3	21.4	13.0	32.8	12.1	43.1	12.1
4	16.4	70.9	3.0	9.7	12.1	53.4	6.9	27.6

Note. HF= home with family, GH= group home, A= apartment with friend or spouse, OH= own home.

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As illustrated, parents of students with LI disabilities (43.5 %) ranked home with family as their first choice significantly more often than parents of students with HI disabilities (20.1%). Further, parents of students with HI disabilities (61%) ranked own home as their number one option significantly more often than parents of students with LI disabilities (33%) ($\chi^2 = 23.84$, $df=3$, $p < .001$).

Parents of students with LI disabilities (21.7%) were significantly more likely than parents of students with HI disabilities (8.1%) to rank group home as their second choice. In addition, parents of students with HI disabilities (60.7%) were significantly more likely to rank apartment with friend or spouse as their number two response than parents of students with LI disabilities (40%) ($\chi^2 = 10.13$, $df=3$, $p < .05$).

Twice as many parents of students with LI disabilities (43.1%) ranked the option of apartment with friend or spouse as their third choice than parents of students with HI disabilities (21.4%) ($\chi^2 = 9.86$, $df=3$, $p < .05$). Finally, parents of students with LI disabilities were three times more likely to rank the option of own home as fourth (27.6 %) than parents of students with HI disabilities (9.7%) ($\chi^2 = 12.44$, $df=3$, $p < .05$).

Potential Outcomes after Exiting the School System

Parents were asked to rank the importance of five different outcomes for their son or daughter (i.e., live independently, manage own finances, employment in the community, make friends, attend college). No significant differences were found between the parents of students with HI or LI disabilities.

Post-School Employment and Postsecondary Education Outcomes

Parents were asked to indicate the post-school employment or postsecondary education outcome they desired for their child given seven possibilities (i.e., community college, four-year college, military, full-time work, part-time work, supported employment, and segregated workshop). Percentages for each outcome can be found in Table 6. A significant relationship was found between the incidence of the child's disability and the parents' desired post-school activity ($\chi^2 = 23.77$, $df=6$, $p < .001$). The majority of parents of students with LI disabilities (36.2%) desired a four-year college, whereas the majority of parents of students with HI disabilities desired a community college (34.9%). However, a little more than a quarter of parents of students with HI disabilities (28.3%) chose a 4-year college. Thirteen (18.8%) of the parents of students with LI disabilities chose segregated workshop as the desired outcome compared to only 5 (3.3%) parents of students with HI disabilities.

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Table 6
Parents' Post-Graduation Plans by Incidence of Child's Disability

Post Graduation Plan	High-Incidence Disabilities		Low-Incidence Disabilities	
	<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Community college	53	34.9	15	21.7
Four-year college	43	28.3	25	36.2
Military	8	5.3	0	0.0
Full-time work	18	11.8	4	5.8
Part-time work	2	1.3	2	2.9
Supported employment	23	15.1	10	14.5
Segregated workshop	5	3.3	13	18.8

DISCUSSION

It is widely agreed that parental input and support are vital to transition planning activities during the secondary years. Over the years, there have been significant changes to legislation that impact how secondary teachers and transition specialists provide information to parents regarding options for post-school outcomes and for participating in general education. It is important to examine if this legislation and the move to (a) include self-determination instruction in secondary education, (b) expand choices for independent living, and (c) expand employment options for individuals with disabilities is valued by parents.

The current study adds to the literature by detailing how parents view the importance of secondary-school instructional domains, transition planning areas, and post-school outcomes since the IDEA Amendments of 1997. Given the number of significant differences found between parents of students with HI disabilities and LI disabilities, the discussion will highlight these findings along with the limitations of the study and implications for practitioners and future research.

Parent In-School Values

Secondary-school instructional domains. Similar to previous studies, parents of students with LI disabilities ranked life skills instruction as their number-one instructional domain. Parents of students with HI disabilities ranked academic instruction as most important whereas parents of students with LI disabilities ranked this last. While not surprising, this finding is disturbing given the mandate of the IDEA Amendments of 1997 to include students with disabilities in general education. These rankings could reflect the type of educational program these students were receiving in high school, given the distinction in the state regarding assessment and instructional requirements for a diploma or a certificate as an exit document. For example, students with LI disabilities

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pursuing a certificate rather than a diploma generally participated in community-based, functional skill programs. The distinction between various diploma options has raised concern about when and how often students with LI disabilities should participate in community-based instruction (Fisher & Sax, 1999). Some have advocated that such instruction should be postponed until after the student is 18 or conducted during evenings and weekends, so that the student may focus on participating in general education course work. Finally, it is important to note that 13% of the parents did not indicate which type of high school program their son or daughter participated in, and 11% were unsure of what type of document their son or daughter would receive upon exiting the school system. Parents must understand the options available in high school and the adult world so that the focus of study statement (e.g., college preparation, vocational-technical education) is appropriate and included in students' IEPs by age 14 (IDEA Amendments of 1997).

Though significant differences were not noted for self-determination, the findings in this area warrant some discussion. As the topic of self-determination has only recently been included in the legislation and practice of special education, it had not previously been included as an instructional area in parent surveys. Therefore, the current data provide a good baseline for the value parents attribute to self-determination as part of their son or daughter's instruction. Self-determination was ranked first, second, or third by 61% of parents of students with LI disabilities and by 58.6% of parents of students with HI disabilities. This finding is encouraging as it reflects that parents value self-determination and are familiar with the concept as an instructional domain that can impact transition planning. As secondary special education teachers cope with the ever-increasing educational assessment requirements and general education standards, it will be important to investigate how self-determination can be incorporated into daily instruction and be targeted as an outcome in transition planning.

Transition planning areas. The majority of both parent groups ranked education as their first choice among transition planning areas, which did not reflect the differences found in the instructional domain responses. Since the term *education* was not defined on the survey, it is unclear why parents made this distinction. It could be that educational planning is always included at IEP meetings and that parents assumed that term *education* would encompass appropriate transition goals for their son or daughter.

Parents indicated that they do not value recreation or social activities in transition planning as much as they value education and vocation. Thus, recreation was ranked last by both parent groups, but by a larger percentage of parents of students with HI disabilities (57%) than by parents of students with LI disabilities (38.3%). These results fail to support those of earlier studies such as Hanley-Maxwell et al. (1995), who found that the transition issues most vital

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to parents were those related to residential and social outcomes. Though it is possible that parents have changed their views on the importance of social and recreational goals, it is more likely that these views are a reflection of what educators have stressed as important. Often recreation and social goals are not emphasized in transition planning or evident on students' IEPs (Collet-Klingenberg; 1998; Everson, Zhang, & Guillory, 2001), which may indicate to parents that these areas are of little to no importance. Further exploration is needed on the value parents place on recreational and social goals and outcomes for their adolescents with disabilities.

Finally, it was surprising that none of the parents of students with LI ranked finances as first in terms of transition planning, and only 6.1% of the parents of students with HI disabilities ranked this area first. Financial planning is crucial to the lives of all students once they leave public school, including students with disabilities. Contending with issues related to Supplemental Security Insurance (SSI), guardianship, and estate planning can be an ongoing struggle for adults with disabilities and their families (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2001; Thorpe, 2002; Varney, 1988). We need further research to determine if teachers are informed about these issues, if this information is being provided to families routinely at the IEP meetings, and why parents haven't perceived this as an area of transition planning while their son or daughter remains in the school system.

Parent Post-School Expectations

Independent living. Over half of the parents of students with HI disabilities ranked owning a home as their first choice for future living arrangements for their son or daughter. These results are consistent with those of Thompson et al. (2000) and provide the perspective of parents of students with HI disabilities who hope for independent adult living situations for their sons or daughters. This hope is supported by follow-up studies such as the National Longitudinal Transition Study, which found independent living was most common among youth with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, and sensory impairments (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996).

Similar to past studies (Epps & Myers, 1989; Kraemer & Blacher, 2001), parents of students with LI disabilities ranked "living at home with their family" as their first choice. This may be due to the reality of limited resources and supports for independent living opportunities for individuals with more significant support needs (Klein & Nelson, 2000). However, it is worth noting that more than a third of parents of students with LI disabilities expressed hope for a more independent living situation by ranking owning a home as their first choice, and 40% of parents ranked living in an apartment with a friend as their second choice. Compared to previous findings, these results demonstrate an increased level of expectation on the part of parents for their son or daughter

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with LI disabilities to live independently. These changes could be attributed to the influence of independent living initiatives such as the National Home of Your Own Alliance (Klein & Nelson, 2000) or increased use of flexibility in funding as provided by the home and community-based services waivers for Medicaid recipients. We are hopeful that parents of students with LI disabilities may also have been influenced by exposure to person-centered planning approaches (Holburn & Vietze, 2002) and self-determination initiatives (Human Services Research Institute, 1999), which promote opportunities for greater choice and independence for people with disabilities. Finally, it is possible that our survey included a range of independent living choices that had not been presented to parents of students with LI in earlier studies.

Post-school employment or postsecondary education outcomes. College was the most desired post-school outcome for the majority of parents, regardless of the student's disability (57.9% for LI disabilities and 63.2% for HI disabilities). Most surprising, more parents of students with LI disabilities chose a four-year college than parents of students with HI disabilities, who were more likely to choose community college. In the past, researchers have documented that students with HI disabilities attend college more often than students with LI disabilities (Peraino, 1992; Wagner, D'Amico, Marden, Neuman, & Blackorby, 1992). We know of no other studies that document parents of students with LI desire postsecondary education for their child. This may be due to the trend to provide students with LI opportunities to complete their final years of public school in post-secondary environments (Hall, Kleinert, & Kearns, 2000; Hart, Zafft, & Zimbrich, 2001; Neubert, Moon, & Grigal, 2002; Page & Chadsey-Rusch, 1995) or increased expectations for individuals with significant disabilities to be included in age-appropriate, community activities after exiting school (Doyle, 2003).

Nevertheless, this finding is perplexing in light of the fact that when parents were asked for demographic information, only 27% of students in both groups were reported to be a in high school program that focused on college preparation. For students with HI disabilities, we must make sure they are not participating in general education courses that contain "watered down" curricula (Ellis, 2002). Parents of students with LI disabilities ranked life skills instruction as the most important instructional domain in secondary education in this study, not academics. Hart et al. (2001) contended that lack of academic preparation is one of the most significant barriers for students with LI disabilities in college. If students with LI disabilities are to access the general education curricula, as required in the IDEA Amendments of 1997 (Wehmeyer, Lance, & Bashinski, 2002), it is important to examine how schools balance the opportunities for community-based instruction and college preparation coursework (Agran, Snow, & Swaner, 1999; Billingsley & Albertson, 1999; Fisher & Sax, 1999). We clearly need more information about what parents of students

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with LI disabilities envision in terms of postsecondary education for their son or daughter, and how these expectations impact the alignment of the secondary general education curriculum and community-based and life skill instruction.

Full- or part-time work was not selected by a large percentage of either parent group as a most desired outcome. Of those who chose employment as an outcome, more parents of students with LI disabilities chose segregated workshops as the desired post-school activity for their child than supported employment. This is not consistent with the findings of Lehmann and Baker (1995) who noted that most parents preferred supported employment situations to sheltered workshops. In addition, nearly 20% of parents of students with HI disabilities in this study chose supported employment or segregated workshop as the desired post-school outcome for their son or daughter. Given that supported employment initiatives have been prominent since the mid-1980s, it is disturbing that some parents continue to choose a segregated workshop as a first choice. It is possible that parents are not being presented with all of the possible options at secondary IEP meetings that focus on transition service needs or that they do not understand the differences in terminology for employment options. These findings may also indicate that parents reported their realistic expectations. Kraemer and Blacher (2001) found that parents' ideal expectations for their children differed significantly from their realistic expectations; 71.2% ideally wanted their sons or daughters to work independently or in an individual supported work environment. Realistically, however, more parents imagined their adult sons or daughters being employed in a sheltered workshop or a day activity center.

Options for training and employment are becoming increasingly complex under mandates such as the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Act of 1999 (NISH, 2002) and the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 and one-stop centers (Hoff, 2000). It is important that educators inform students and their families about the full range of post-secondary options. Under these initiatives, students with disabilities and their families will be required to choose among community service providers and have greater control over how funds are spent for employment and training services.

Limitations of the Study

A number of methods were used to increase the rate of response to the surveys, including university sponsorship, pre-notification letter, stamped return envelope, postcard follow up, and a monetary incentive (raffle). However, the overall rate of return was only 24%. This is not surprising as the response rates for mail questionnaires tend to be 10-50% (Weisberg, Krosnick, & Bowen, 1996).

The results of this study were based upon a relatively large sample that was

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randomly selected from two racially diverse, large, urban school systems in one mid-Atlantic state. Fifty percent of the parent respondents were African-American. Generalization of the findings to parents in areas outside of these two school systems, especially in rural or less culturally diverse areas, should be done with caution.

The final limitation involves the nature of self-report data. Parents were asked to indicate their values about instructional domains, transition planning, and their post-school expectations. It is possible that the participants' responses did not accurately reflect their true values or that the terms and options presented in the survey were not adequately understood by all.

Implications

Three themes stem from the findings that have implications for both research and practice. First, parents' values related to transition planning and instructional domains may be a reflection of the type of high school courses or program their child participates in. Given the distinction between diploma and certificate requirements for students in participating school systems, their course of study was largely determined by this factor. The lack of emphasis given by parent to the transition areas of recreation, employment, and finances, lead us to believe that these areas are not being emphasized in high school for students receiving either exit document. Parents must rely upon education professionals to provide them with a full array of options to prepare their son or daughter for the transition from high school into adulthood. For students seeking a diploma and pursuing postsecondary education as an outcome, we must find ways to cultivate employment skills, explore recreation options, and build financial planning skills along with the academic demands of general education and requirements for state assessments. This is an issue that has received attention over the past 15 years (e.g., Billingsley & Albertson, 1999; Edgar, 1988; Sitlington & Frank, 1999), but few solutions have been implemented. For students with LI disabilities, we must balance community-based and life skill instruction with participation in general education so that they have the needed skills to access all adult environments.

A second theme relates to teacher preparation. Preservice and inservice training is necessary for teachers and transition specialists to become well versed in the ever-changing adult service systems. With the evolution of legislation, these systems have new names, new acronyms, and in some cases, new services. If teachers are unaware of these changes and how they may impact the future of their students, they will not be able to properly prepare families for these eventualities. The cadre of supports available such as SSI, Medicaid, Section 8 Housing, and Ticket to Work incentives are often generated by competing or even conflicting systems, requiring a great deal of time and attention to establish interagency linkages. Parents must also be made

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aware of the difference between various employment options, such as competitive employment, supported employment, and sheltered workshops. Teachers should facilitate familiarity with local community rehabilitation providers and provide students and their families with the means to determine who will provide the best quality of service. In doing so, teachers afford their students greater control and choice in their adult years.

The final theme was the overwhelming choice of college as the desired postsecondary outcome for students with LI and HI disabilities. Parents of students with disabilities who have been educated with their same-age peers without disabilities in general education may see college as a natural progression. Advances in assistive technology, access to computers, and universal design might also impact parents' beliefs about the possibility of higher education. If schools are increasingly encouraging students with disabilities to pursue postsecondary education, self-advocacy and an awareness of disability in terms of needs and preferences must be included as part of the secondary curriculum (Lukose, 2000). Further, we need research to document which strategies support the development of self-determination skills in general and special education and best support students with disabilities as they transition to postsecondary education.

In summary, research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s provided us with a knowledge base of what parents value for secondary instruction and post-school outcomes for students with disabilities. The findings of the present study offer further direction for tackling complex issues associated with transition planning and better preparing general educators, special educators, and transition specialists to work with students and their families to achieve successful outcomes.

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