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STUDENT OUTCOMES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION:

A Review and Study Options

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with
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In addition to this report, ***Special Education Fiscal Study: Final Report*** is available from the Institute.

Four additional working papers on this project are also available:

- ***Outcomes in Special Education: What We Know and How We Could Know More***
- ***A Review of Federal and State Laws Addressing The Education of Children with Disabilities: An Executive Summary***
- ***A Review of Current State Law Governing the Education of Children with Disabilities***
- ***A Review of Federal Law Addressing the Education of Children with Disabilities***

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Student Outcomes in Special Education:
A Review and Study Options

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background: The Washington Legislature directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to determine the feasibility of doing a longitudinal study of educational outcomes for students in special education. **A longitudinal study allows the tracking of a population over some period of time in order to document changes in that population.**

This report summarizes what is already known about student outcomes for special education and suggests possible ways to learn more about special education programs.

The University of Washington's Role: Staff at the College of Education/Experimental Education Unit of the University of Washington have done research over the past decade on outcomes for those special education students who graduate from high school. They summarized their research on high school graduates from three school districts in Washington and national research on educational outcomes for such graduates. Their work is available as a separate report.

Highlights of their work in three school districts in Washington State:

- Students with learning and behavior disabilities **graduate** from high school at rates lower than those for non-disabled students: 60 % and 50 % respectively, compared to 81 % for non-disabled students.

- **Employment** rates, 5 years after high-school graduation, are comparable for learning disabled and non-disabled graduates (79 % and 78 %), but lower for those with behavior disabilities (43 %).

- **Independent living** rates, 5 years after high school graduation, are 66 % for non-disabled, 64 % for those with learning disabilities and 71 % for those with behavior disabilities.

- **Postsecondary education** attendance rates, 5 years after high school graduation, are 92 % for non-disabled, 71 % for those with behavior disabilities, and 63 % for those with learning disabilities.

- **Postsecondary attendance** rates are relatively high, but postsecondary graduation rates are substantially lower. Special education graduates are more likely to be enrolled in vocational and community college programs; their non-disabled peers are more likely to be enrolled in four-year institutions.

Their recommendations regarding a longitudinal system for collecting information on special education outcomes are:

- Any system for assessing outcomes in special education should be part of an educational data system for the entire K-12 system.

- Any such system should:

  - collect data at the school district level.
  - summarize data at regional and state levels.
  - follow cohorts of students *over time* (longitudinal).
  - collect basic demographic student data.
  - collect data on types of educational services provided.
  - measure and assess student achievement regularly.
  - monitor school completion rates.
  - track post-school outcomes for 5 years.

Future Directions for Special Education Outcomes Study: A major, comprehensive longitudinal study of special education outcomes is **not** a feasible option at present. In Washington State, we have had only limited experience with this approach in the field of K-12 education. Conducting such a study would be complicated and costly.

Four options for follow-up studies on special education outcomes, however, could shed light on issues that surfaced in the 1994 legislative studies of special education:

- Develop a tracking system for children served in the ***Preschool Developmentally Delayed*** program. What happens as students move from preschool into elementary school? What kinds of educational programs do they receive? What types of special education services, if any, do they receive? Is it possible to measure and track outcomes for preschool students as they progress through the K-12 system?

- Describe the educational services provided to children in the ***Behavior Disabilities*** funding category in a sample of Washington's school districts. Assess the feasibility of defining and tracking educational outcomes for such students. How are they accommodated in regular classes? What are the educational attainments for students with behavior disabilities?

- Develop a pilot project with interested school districts for a ***different approach in special education***, which would foster a more dynamic interaction of student assessment, instruction, curriculum content, student learning and measurements of student progress.

- Develop a link between defining and tracking outcomes in special education and the assessment activities of the ***Commission on Student Learning***. Students with special needs will be included in any future data tracking system that will document student educational attainment in Washington State. Any longitudinal approach for special education will have to link up with the Commission's overall directions for Washington's K-12 system.

STUDENT OUTCOMES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION: A Review and Study Options

I. Background

The Washington Legislature, in its 1994 Supplemental Appropriations Act, directed the Washington State Institute for Public Policy to determine the feasibility of doing a longitudinal study of educational outcomes for students in special education. This preliminary report assesses the field of educational outcomes as they might apply to special education, as well as suggests ways to learn more about specific aspects of Washington's special education programs—for example, programs for preschoolers and students with behavioral disabilities.

This report covers these topics:

- **Outcomes in Public Education:** Washington is one of many states looking at the performance of their public education systems. These reviews can direct the way we look at outcomes in special education.

- **Outcomes in Special Education:** Very little is known about the benefits of special education for its students, either nationally or in Washington State.

- **Longitudinal Research in Education:** Looking at the educational performance of students over time is one way to assess student outcomes. This section summarizes what is known from longitudinal research in education, and what might be applicable to such research in special education.

- **Future Directions:** A review of the research on education outcomes suggests **four** options for further work in special education.

II. Outcomes: New Directions in K-12 Education

A. Overview

Washington State is one of many states in the midst of reforming and restructuring its K-12 system. The overall goal is to change the system of public education from one of inputs (dollars per student, staff mix, FTEs, calendar days, class size, and so forth) to one of results, or outcomes (student performance, indicators of school performance, postgraduation outcomes, and so forth). These new directions are embodied in Washington's education reform legislation [Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1209], passed in 1993. Additionally, they are reflected in the work of Washington's Commission on Student Learning (CSL) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction's (OSPI) Center for the Improvement of Student Learning, as well as in a wide range of activities in nearly every building and school district within Washington State. Under the "Educate America Act" and the Goals 2000 efforts taking place in most states, the U.S. Department of Education will supplement these directions in education reform. The extent to which these broad-based education reforms will influence special education, however, is not yet known.

B. Washington's Current Direction

Washington's Commission on Student Learning is defining and making operational the Essential Academic Learning Requirements that are at the core of our state's educational reform legislation. Through the next 18 months, the Commission will develop an assessment and accountability system that will measure student achievement in the first four subject areas: reading, writing, communication, and mathematics. This system of assessments for these four subject areas will be ready for voluntary implementation by school districts in time for the 1996-97 school year.

Representatives from various parts of the special education community are part of an advisory committee to the Commission, as this assessment system is being developed. While the exact ways that students with special needs will be included in this assessment system have not been worked out, special education students will **not** be excluded from this new assessment system. Full implementation of all subject areas in all Essential Academic Learning Requirements is scheduled for 1999.

C. Tracking Outcomes Over Time

Washington's assessment system will eventually have two major components. One part will be linked to individual students and determine the presence or absence of a connection between the curriculum and what students learn. It will be the equivalent of a "report card" for individual students. The second part will be a kind of accountability index that will allow policymakers to compare student performance among schools and across school districts within our state. These comparisons could be the equivalent of Washington's current system of using average scores for groups of students to obtain some assessment of the "health" of our state's education system.

It is unclear whether a data tracking system will be developed to allow, on a systematic basis, a measurement of educational outcomes over time for groups of students. For example, whatever individual measures are decided upon, what is the progress of students as they move from fourth to sixth to eighth grades? A limited number of outcome measures could be tracked through the K-12 system, giving some meaning to a notion of "return", or "benefit" for the educational resources expended. Such a general system could also incorporate student and program outcomes for special education.

III. Outcomes: Recent Research in Special Education

A. The National Perspective

Despite over twenty years of considerable federal, state, local and private resources expended on the education of students with special needs, no state or national data address the effectiveness of special education in the public schools. What exists are a series of annual surveys carried out by the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education, a recent review of outcomes for students in special education, and recommendations from the National Center on Educational Outcomes on the directions for developing special education outcomes. From these sources we know the following:

Who is served in special education? Nationally, during 1991-92, nearly 5 million students from birth to age 21 received special education services in the United States. This reflected about **10** percent of the school-age population (ages 6 to 21). The population receiving special education services differs from the general education population in several ways:

Table 1

Characteristics of Special & General Education Populations in the United States: 1992-93

Special Education Population		General Education Population	
Male	69%	Male	50%
Black	24%	Black	14%
Low Income	68%	Low Income	39%
Parent has less than high school diploma	41%	Parent has less than high school diploma	26%

Source: Edgar and Associates, Outcomes in Special Education, 1994.

Where do students receive their special education? Reflecting a trend since federal legislation of the mid-1970s, most students receive their education *in regular schools*, and 69 percent of special education students are in regular classrooms at least 40 percent of the time. Apart from information on "placement", very little systematic information exists on the type of instruction, the content of the curriculum, or the levels and kinds of educational and related support services that special education students receive.

What are the outcomes for students in special education? No consistent national data document outcomes for these students. For all students in the K-12 system, *performance on standardized tests* is our only consistent, comparable measure. Although patterns may differ greatly by state, and indeed by school district, the National Center on Educational Outcomes determined that between 40 and 50 percent of special education students are left out of standardized testing programs. Nonetheless, in recent years there seems to be a pattern to include more and more students in these national tests, with provisions to accommodate the testing needs of a broader range of students. Even with their limitations, national standardized tests could give some minimal indication of student outcomes.

Who completes school? Dropout rates are higher and graduation rates are lower for special education students. These patterns hold for students with mild impairments, such as learning and behavior disabilities. Estimated graduation rates for the general education population are 83 percent. For students with learning disabilities, it is 66 percent; for those with behavior disabilities it is only 48 percent.

What happens when students leave school? Three dimensions of activity after students graduate have been tracked:

- Employment
- Independent Living
- Postsecondary Education

Looking at employment rates and rates of independent living, youth with learning disabilities and behavior disabilities appear to be making a relatively satisfactory adjustment to adult life, when compared to their nondisabled peers. Major discrepancies occur in attendance at, and graduation from, postsecondary education programs. This latter difference is important, however, because every year of postsecondary education ensures, other things being equal, a higher level of earnings. When combined with the higher dropout rate, the potential earnings disadvantage for the special education population increases.

B. The Washington State Perspective

Information on outcomes for students in special education is quite limited. Aside from annual program information from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, only studies and data from the First Decade Project at the University of Washington Experimental Education Unit can inform us of the general patterns for Washington's special education population. Moreover, the Washington outcome data draws on information from three school districts: Highline, Bellevue, and Seattle.

Who is served in special education? As reported elsewhere, in 1993-94 101,108 students received special education services through our state's public schools. This represents **11.1** percent of the K-12 enrollment for the state. While the percent breakdown is known by disability category, little else is known about the state special education population in terms of gender, ethnicity, family income or parents' education. The largest category (41 percent) of Washington's special education students are those with learning disabilities.

Where do students receive their special education services? Special education students in Washington receive their education in a variety of settings: regular classroom (49 %), resource room (29 %), separate classroom (19 %), or other settings such as a special residential setting (3 %). No other systematic information is available on the types of educational programs they receive.

What are the outcomes for students in special education? Very little information exists on the overall academic achievement of students in special education in Washington State. Although there is a general requirement that all students be tested in the 4th, 8th and 11th grade standardized testing programs, the inclusion of students with special needs in this testing program varies enormously by district.

Who completes school? No consistent information is available, by district, on the percent of special education students, by disability category, who graduate from high school. In the First Decade Project at the University of Washington, school completion rates were 60 percent for learning disabled students, and 50 percent for students with behavior disabilities. These rates compare to 81 percent for all students.

What happens when students leave school? The most complete information on special education graduates comes from the First Decade Project, which tracked post-school outcomes for 1985 and 1990 graduates from three school districts in Washington. Compared to their nondisabled peers, high school graduates with learning and behavior disabilities are making a reasonable accommodation to adult life on the measures of employment and independent living. Moreover, this holds for both men and women, although the special education population, as previously noted, is largely male.

However, differences do occur in attendance and graduation rates in postsecondary education. Since earnings are largely a function of educational levels, these differences in postsecondary education, combined with lower high school graduation rates, may imply less successful transitions to adult life in terms of economic potential—even for individuals with milder forms of disabilities.

C. Summary

Little systematic information exists on outcomes for students in special education. Also, very little information exists on the characteristics of students, or on the features of their educational programs.

What is available is largely confined to knowledge about "end stage" outcomes—that is, the high school graduation rates for special education students and various kinds of post-graduation outcomes in terms of employment, independent living and postsecondary education. This limited picture contains positive, as well as negative, news.

When looking at school completion, whether secondary or postsecondary, however, the rates are significantly different for disabled students. Since education is always correlated strongly with present and future earnings in any population, the future economic success of special education students, whether in Washington State or the nation, may be problematic.

IV. Longitudinal Research in Education

A. What is a Longitudinal Study?

A longitudinal study allows researchers to follow a population over some period of time in order to document changes in that population. Because information about the same people is collected over time, changes in their behavior can be observed and analyzed. A longitudinal study is like a continuous video, and goes beyond the "snapshot in time" that is characteristic of most research studies of large populations.
Longitudinal studies can help address major questions in the broad field of public education. Accountability concerns are shifting from a singular focus on "inputs" (student-teacher funding ratios, sizes of classes, days per year in the school calendar, services for students with special needs, and so forth) to a more complex concern for ***"outcomes"*** (measures of student achievement and progress, test scores, certificates of mastery, post-secondary attendance and completion, post-graduation employment and earnings, and so forth).

Outcomes in public education in Washington State are not consistently tracked. In special education, a main concern is the provision of educational services to children with special needs. Of secondary concern has been the impact of specialized services on their educational performance.

Several major national longitudinal studies in the field of education, however, have been completed or are in progress. A summary of them can guide potential directions for assessing outcomes in special education.

B. National Longitudinal Surveys (of Youth)

The National Longitudinal Surveys (NLS) project is based at Ohio State University and has been conducted since 1966. Sponsored by the Bureau of Labor Statistics of the U.S. Department of Labor, the NLS is a set of surveys of the labor market experiences of six groups of American men and women—men 45 to 59 years old; women 30 to 44 years old; young women 14 to 24; young men 14 to 24; young men and women 14 to 21 years old; and children of the women in the latter group.

Together, these surveys offer a comprehensive and contemporary historical view of the national population. They provide tools for those engaged in understanding the dynamics of labor supply, earnings and income distribution, job search and unemployment patterns, labor market inequities (especially race and gender discrimination), and the impact of "human capital investments." These investments refer to both education and training as they impact those who are working or who will work in the future.

Education topics make up a substantial portion of all research carried out since 1968 on the NLS. Much of what is known of the economic impacts of education and training (such as: the critical importance of high school graduation, the diminishing value of the GED, the additional importance of post-secondary education, and so forth) have come from work on these data.

The focus is somewhat limited. Little or nothing is available from these surveys on outcome measures of interest to educators, such as the progress, or lack of it, made by students in the course of 13 years in the public schools. As a background resource, the findings from NLS are useful when considering labor market behavior and success as **one** of the outcome measures for education. Defining individuals from these surveys who were special education students during their school years is, however, **not** possible. Thus, using information from these extensive studies for a perspective on outcomes for those who received special education, whether or not they graduated from high school, is not possible.

C. National Educational Longitudinal Studies

Since the early 1970s, the National Center for Educational Statistics, at the U.S. Department of Education, has conducted a series of longitudinal studies of representative national samples of American elementary and secondary students. The overall goal of this research is to produce an accurate picture of the educational, vocational and personal development of students in American schools. These studies also allow an examination of personal, family, social, and cultural influences on these developmental patterns.

Because of the longitudinal nature of these studies, one can gain a portrait of different American student populations in the 1970s, 1980s and, now, the 1990s. The third of these studies, the National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (**NELS-88**), sampled students who were in the 8th grade in that year, reinterviewing them in 1990, 1992 and 1994. By the 1994 interview, most students are in postsecondary education or the labor market. Because this study draws upon a student population that would have been exposed to the changes in American education characteristic of the late 1980s, results from it can help understand the impacts of these changes on experiences of young adults.

These studies are very complex, requiring years of complicated research and data analysis experience. To date, no researchers in Washington State have worked with these data sets. Relevant experience with this information, then, is not readily at hand.

Information about educational outcomes for special education students from these studies, while limited, could be an important starting point for a systematic view of what might be occurring on a national level. As a guide to potential future work in Washington State that might look at defining outcomes and tracking these over some period of time, **NELS-88** is a useful resource. As a means of referencing current information regarding outcomes for special education students, this study is still incomplete.

D. Longitudinal Studies in Education: Washington State

Apart from the work on special education graduates in three Washington school districts, little has been done that systematically tracks outcomes for students in our state's educational programs. One exception is the evaluation of Washington's Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program (ECEAP), which is our state's version of an educational and developmental enrichment program for preschoolers. Since 1991, the evaluation of ECEAP has followed educational outcomes each year for their preschool students as they move on to elementary school. A comparison group of children, who did not receive ECEAP services, has also been tracked. *When tested in kindergarten, ECEAP participants show small gains over the comparison group on a series of educational and developmental measures.*

The significance of this evaluation lies in its longitudinal design, where educational and other outcomes for ECEAP participants will be tracked each year of elementary school through the 4th grade. This design will allow researchers to understand the differences, if any, in these outcomes for these students when compared with those who did not participate in a similar enrichment activity in their preschool years. The ECEAP evaluation is currently Washington State's only example of an assessment of the educational impact of a state-funded program. Any option for tracking educational outcomes of special education services, especially those for preschool developmentally delayed, should build on this example of tracking outcomes over time.

E. Summary and Lessons Learned From Longitudinal Research

These efforts at tracking results, or outcomes, for students who have completed some stage in their education (high school or eighth grade) offer suggestions as one thinks about embarking on any systematic study of special education students. Any longitudinal study that would track students over time while they are in school or, like the First Decade Project at the University of Washington, after they leave school, will be complex and costly to undertake. Before a "longitudinal study" is thought to be able to answer questions about the effectiveness, or ineffectiveness, of Washington's services to students with special needs, several lessons can be drawn from the very extensive—and expensive—national studies summarized here:

- **Longitudinal studies are not conclusive and alone will not tell us "what works" in special education.** All of these national longitudinal studies in education tell us the characteristics of students in our educational systems and something about their educational progress. Much less is known about the quality of the educational programs that they received and the link between those programs and these student characteristics. While Washington's ECEAP evaluation strives to make this link, the relationship between what took place in the preschool program and educational progress in later elementary school years will always be difficult to establish.

  However, a different stage is developing in the interest in educational outcomes. School reform efforts will move toward determining "what works", so that ineffective educational methods and programs can be replaced by those that produce more desirable outcomes. Any design for a comprehensive longitudinal study, then, could be joined with a pilot project that would test a different system of special education, so that impacts from this new system could be tracked over time.

- **Be attentive to the various audiences for outcomes.** Educational outcomes have different meanings for different audiences. ***Teachers*** and ***parents*** may be especially concerned about the educational progress of their students, and will be particularly attentive to all the qualitative dimensions of what these students learn and those areas in which they have difficulty. The details of the individual students' grades, the contents of their educational portfolios, and many other dimensions of their day-to-day achievement will all be important and relevant outcomes for this audience.

  Policymakers, while concerned about the progress, or lack of it, of individual students, are also concerned with the "accountability outcomes" that reflect on the performance of the educational system. What kind of educational progress, in general terms, is occurring in the schools? Do students perform well on standardized tests? What happens once students leave school? These "system outcomes", related to issues of public accountability, would be part of any outcome study of special education.

- **Be attentive to the complexity of longitudinal studies.** All of these major national studies have been carried out by large federal agencies (Departments of Labor and Education) with ample resources for extensive survey questionnaires with large samples of students, parents, teachers and administrators (NELS surveys) and general respondents (NLS surveys). Survey research has been the preferred method for extensive longitudinal studies in the United States.

  However, a study focusing on a more limited range of student characteristics and educational outcomes <u>during</u> the school years could rely more on administrative records already maintained in the schools. Any longitudinal study needs the ability to define relevant samples of students, track educational outcomes for them over some period of time, and maintain continuity with the sample of students as they change schools. While this work would be complex, an appropriate study in Washington State could be of more limited scope than any of these major national studies.

- **Reach agreement on the kinds of outcomes that are of concern.** Which educational outcomes are of greatest interest? Are they the educational benefits of special education services while students are in school, progressing through the school year, from one grade to the next? Or is the major concern with what happens when students leave school?

  National studies have examined student performance, sometimes from the 8th grade on, and have linked these educational benefits to outcomes once students have left school for postsecondary education or the world of work. The research already completed in Washington State for special education high school graduates is similar in focus to these national studies.

  Very little has been done to track outcomes as special education students move through the public school system. Studies of small groups of students, focusing on the results of particular kinds of treatments or instructional techniques, make up some of the research in special education. These studies, however, have intended to affect, if not improve, the quality of instruction and the educational experience for students with special needs.

General outcomes for accountability purposes might illustrate something about the performance of special education as a system of services. Reaching agreement on which outcomes to track, both during the school years and once students leave school, will be an important part of any longitudinal tracking of educational outcomes within Washington State.

- **Ensure the effective collaboration of all elements of the educational system.** Thinking about lower cost options for any study, including a longitudinal study, of outcomes in special education will require reliance upon data maintained in school districts, in Educational Service Districts and in the central Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Coordinating the collection of and access to such data will have to be part of any system for assessing student outcomes in special education.

V. Future Directions for Special Education Outcomes Study

Washington is in the midst of significant change in the way public education is provided in the state. Assessing outcomes in special education, by tracking samples of current students over time, would consume substantial and scarce resources. Moreover, initiating an extensive longitudinal study of outcomes in special education now would miss the impact of the changes that general education reform might bring for students with special needs. Also, mistaken conclusions might be reached about the impact, or results, of a system that is on the way out. Thus, a major, comprehensive longitudinal study of special education outcomes is **not** a feasible option at present.

A better alternative would be to include students with special needs in a long-term, data tracking system to document educational attainment in Washington State. Building in a longitudinal dimension to such a system could help answer questions about the progress of groups of students over various stages of their education. Something more systematic could then be known about student outcomes for our state's special education programs.

Four options for follow-up studies to this review could shed light on issues that surfaced in the fiscal study of special education. Two of these options could begin immediately, at modest additional cost for the remainder of the current biennium. The final two could be part of additional directions for the 1995-97 biennium.

A. Outcomes in Special Education: The Preschool Program

The Preschool Developmentally Delayed Program is one of the fastest growing categories in special education in Washington State. Over the past ten years, it has grown at an average annual rate of **14** percent. Washington, like many other states, has an active "childfind" process to identify preschoolers who may need and can benefit from special education services. Also, many school districts have expanded their preschool programs to cover very young children in the birth to age three group. However, very little is known about the educational progress of these children once they move on to the public schools.

Eugene Edgar and his colleagues at the University of Washington tracked students in the preschool special education program from 10 school districts in Washington in the mid-1980s. His study occurred ***before*** the growth in the preschool program of recent years. His analysis indicated that, once preschool children entered the K-12 system, **36** percent of these children were placed in regular education settings, while **64** percent were in special education settings. The preschool program has grown dramatically in the past 10 years, and those placement patterns that prevail once students enter elementary school would be worth investigating.

Proposal: *Develop a tracking system for children served in the* ***Preschool Developmentally Delayed*** *program, on a pilot basis, to determine its feasibility.*

Questions to be asked:

- What is the profile of children in preschool special education? What is the nature of their disabilities, and the types of services they receive? Do these reflect similar or different patterns in the K-12 special education programs?

- Does Washington's preschool special education program provide an early intervention for young children with special needs, in order to address these needs before children enter school?

- Does the preschool program identify continuing special education needs, requiring special education services as children progress through elementary school?

- Once these preschoolers enter first grade, what percent are in special education? What types of disabilities do they have?

- Are children who have received services through the preschool program enrolled in regular education in the first grade, but later enrolled in special education programs in the second, third or fourth grades?

- Are there differences in educational performance, or outcomes, for elementary special education students who have been in the preschool program, compared to those who have not? If so, what are these differences?

Approach:

- Develop a pilot project, beginning in January 1995 and running through June 1995, to create a longitudinal system, based upon **existing** student records and **existing** school data systems. Define a base year, such as 1989. Determine the feasibility of selecting students from the preschool program from that year and tracking placement outcomes once they have moved on to elementary school, in the first through fourth grades. The following are "guideposts" to this proposed study:

    1. Select sample school districts within Washington, possibly some of the 16 districts visited as part of the Special Education Fiscal Study.

    2. Determine the feasibility of defining their preschool special education populations. Pick a base year for tracking this population through their preschool program and into elementary school. This could be a "retrospective" study focusing on students, now in elementary school, who were once enrolled in the preschool program.

    3. If a retrospective study is not feasible, then begin a tracking system, within some of the 16 districts. Follow the progress of students currently in the preschool program as they enter elementary school. If this were the only option, a profile of preschool students, based upon their Individual Educational Programs (IEPs), could be available by June 1995.

4. Begin to address the research questions listed above.

5. Provide an initial progress report on ***SPECIAL EDUCATION PRESCHOOL OUTCOMES*** to the Legislature on June 30, 1995.

B. Outcomes in Special Education: Serious Behavioral Disabilities

The special education category of Serious Behavioral Disabilities is **not** among the fastest growing categories in Washington, but this category has been growing at an annual rate of **5** percent over the past 10 years. This growth rate is **twice** that of the K-12 population. Children placed into this category raise classroom management, appropriate education, and cost issues for school districts. Districts' high cost students, those costing more than $14,000 a year in extra resources to serve, were disproportionately students with severe behavioral disabilities.

Yet, little is known, apart from anecdotes from individual districts, about the characteristics of children who are placed in this category. From the work at the University of Washington, we know that high school graduation rates and post-school outcomes for students with behavioral disabilities are somewhat lower than for students with learning disabilities and for nondisabled students.

Proposal: *Develop a study of students who are placed in the special education category of* ***Serious Behavioral Disabilities****. In the process of describing this population, also research the literature on appropriate educational outcomes for students with behavioral disabilities.*

Questions to be asked:

- Develop a **demographic profile** of students who have serious behavioral disabilities. Are there patterns, across and within school districts, that suggest which students get included in this population?

- Develop a profile, by **educational level**, of students with behavioral disabilities. Is the profile different for elementary, middle school and high school students?

- Describe the **educational history** of students who have serious behavioral disabilities. Have they always been in special education? Are there patterns? Have students started out with learning disabilities and been later assessed as having behavioral disabilities? If such patterns exist, what characterizes this movement?

- Are there **patterns of concentration** for students with behavioral disabilities? Is there concentration in middle and high school years, or is the pattern dispersed, covering elementary school years as well?

- What are the unique **educational interventions** that students with behavioral disabilities receive? Apart from placement, what is the nature of their educational programs and services?

- What are the educational **outcomes** for students with behavioral disabilities? Are they enrolled in the same kinds of classes as are regular education students? What are the patterns of differences in their test scores? Are there differences in other standardized measures of educational performance? Do they make progress through the K-12 system in the same kinds of ways? If available, what is the drop-out rate for students with behavioral disabilities? Is this rate higher, lower, or the same as that for students with other disabilities and for regular education students?

Approach:

- Initiate a study of students with **serious behavioral disabilities**, beginning in January 1995 and running through June 1995. This study will focus on describing this population, but also will develop means to measure and, perhaps, track outcomes for these students. Data collection, for this phase of the study, will be based upon **existing** student records and **existing** school data systems. The following are "guideposts" to this proposed study:

    1. Select sample school districts within Washington, possibly selecting some of the 16 districts visited as part of the Special Education Fiscal Study, and adding some districts where innovations are taking place in the treatment of children with behavioral disabilities.

    2. Define their populations of seriously behaviorally disabled students as a portion of their special education populations. Determine whether it will be most useful to select all, or to select a representative sample, of such students.

    3. Focus first on descriptive profiles of the population of students with behavioral disabilities.

    4. Develop a feasibility plan for tracking educational outcomes for this population, through various stages of the K-12 system. Cohorts could be sampled from elementary, middle and high school populations with behavioral disabilities. The utility could be explored of doing a "retrospective" study of looking at what occurred, for example, for students now in middle school when they were in elementary school, those now in high school when they were middle school.

5. If a retrospective study is not feasible, then explore the feasibility of developing a tracking system, within the selected districts, for students currently enrolled who have serious behavioral disabilities.

6. Begin to answer the research questions listed above.

7. Provide an initial progress report on students with ***SERIOUS BEHAVIORAL DISABILITIES***, including a profile of their characteristics, to the Legislature on June 30, 1995.

C. Pilot Project for Change in Special Education: New Approach

During the course of the special education fiscal study, staff in several school districts expressed interest in developing, on a pilot basis, a different approach to operating special education programs. Pilot projects may be a means to encourage school districts to plan, develop and implement educational services for children with special needs very differently from the current model in Washington State.

The current special education system focuses on ensuring access of students with special needs to an appropriate education in the public schools. The emphasis is upon "entitlement" to services that can be provided with the extra special education resources—state, federal, and local—that each school district has. This current system places a high value on evaluating students and assigning them to the funding category that matches the disability determined in their assessment. Services, appropriate to the individual needs of each student, are outlined in each student's Individual Education Program (IEP). Although IEPs are monitored and reconfigured on an annual basis, they are rarely used to guide, on a daily basis, the instructional programs that students receive. Educational performance, benefits and **outcomes** are **not** measured on a regular or consistent basis.

Different approaches have been suggested, which would entail a more dynamic interaction of curriculum content, instructional practices, student learning and measurements of student progress. These different approaches could be tied to an Individual Educational Program that, in its content, is directed more to outcomes and less toward inputs and process.

Proposal: *Explore the feasibility of a pilot project with several school districts in Washington State. Selected school districts or educational service districts could be part of this pilot effort, with comparison or control districts, or populations, used as part of a* ***rigorous outcome evaluation*** *of the impact of a combined assessment, curriculum and instructional change in special education that will focus on educational outcomes. A new direction in special education could tie into the interests of the U.S. Department of Education in fostering new approaches to special education. Such an effort might attract federal and/or foundation resources, as well as the provide a vehicle to secure waivers from federal and state regulations.*

Approach:

- Explore the development of a pilot model for special education that would include, but not be limited to, these features:

  √ Create funding, administrative, curricular, instructional and tracking systems for special education that will enable districts to assist students with services they need outside the special education system.

  √ Provide financial incentives that will reward, rather than penalize, school districts that exit students from special education.

  √ Work toward educational services for children with special needs that reduce the emphasis on labels and categories, and increases the focus on student performance, educational benefits, and measurable outcomes.

  √ Experiment with different options for curriculum content and instructional practices for students with special needs.

D. Future Option: Link Special Education to the Work of Washington's Commission on Student Learning

Developing a major longitudinal study of student outcomes in special education in Washington State now would be premature. Washington has embarked on a major reform, directed through legislative action and oversight, of its entire K-12 education system. Washington's Commission on Student Learning is developing student learning goals and will be working on a system for assessing student performance on these learning goals. Part of their work on student assessment includes a discussion of options for a tracking system to provide information on student performance, educational benefits, and outcomes, for accountability purposes, on a **longitudinal** basis.

For any future longitudinal data system, focusing on the educational performance of students in special education, Professor Eugene Edgar and his associates at the University of Washington have suggested the following approach:

- Any system for assessing outcomes in special education should be part of an educational data system for the entire K-12 system.

- Any such system should:

  √ Collect data at the school district level.
  √ Summarize data at regional and state levels.
  √ Follow cohorts of students *over time* (longitudinal).
  √ Collect basic demographic student data.
  √ Collect data on types of educational services provided.
  √ Measure and assess student achievement regularly.

√ Monitor school completion rates.
√ Track post-school outcomes for 5 years.

Approach:

- As learning goals are made operational, and assessment measures developed to assess the achievement of these goals by all students, schools and school districts in Washington, a complementary process should ensure that special education is an integral part of this evaluation process.

- Accompanying the development of this "assessment system" should also be the development of a data system that will monitor the progress of students over time. Such a reporting system could assess student outcomes and provide an analytical basis to report and interpret educational outcomes to the legislature, school boards, school administrators, teachers, parents and students.

- This reporting system will need to be part of a longitudinal data system that tracks student outcomes over time. Technical characteristics of a longitudinal data system should be consciously incorporated into such an outcome monitoring system.

Endnotes

1. This section draws from the recent work of Professor Eugene Edgar and his colleagues at the University of Washington, that summarizes highlights of research on special education. See, Eugene Edgar and others, Outcomes in Special Education: What We Know and How We Could Know More. Olympia: Washington State Institute for Public Policy, December 1994.

2. The National Longitudinal Transitional Study was carried out by SRI International and includes a national sample of more than 8,000 youth with disabilities, ages 13 to 21, who were in special education in the 1985-86 school year. Information on these students was collected in 1 987, 1989 and 1990. See M. Wagner and others, The Transition Experiences of Young People with Disabilities: A Summary of the Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students. Menlo Park, Calif.: SRI International, 1993.

3. See Edie Harding, Special Education Fiscal Study: Preliminary Report, Washington State Institute for Public Policy, December 1994.

4. The three school districts are from the core Puget Sound region: Seattle, Highline and Bellevue.

5. Center for Human Resource Research, The Ohio State University, NLS Handbook, 1994: The National Longitudinal Surveys. Columbus, Ohio, 1994, pp. 1-7.

6. There are three series of studies in this continuing project: National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS-72); High School and Beyond (1980); National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS-88)*.

7. See Washington State Department of Community Development, 1992 ECEAP Longitudinal Study and Annual Report, Olympia, April 1993.

8. See Eugene Edgar, et. al., “A Longitudinal Study of Graduates of Special Education Preschools: Educational Placement After Preschool,” Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 1 988 [vol. 8, no. 31, pp. 61-74.