



Highlights of [GAO-06-759SP](#) a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Convened This Conference

The federal government plays a significant role in supporting youths with disabilities, many of whom research has shown are less likely than other students to successfully transition from high school to postsecondary education or employment. Federal programs make considerable investments in providing transition services for youths with disabilities, often through state and local agencies. GAO has previously reported problems in how these programs support transition, such as difficulties youths with disabilities may experience in accessing services.

To better understand how federal programs interact at the state and local levels to support transitioning youths with disabilities, on November 15, 2005, GAO convened a conference of professionals and state and local program experts who are directly involved with transitioning youths with disabilities in California. While the perspectives offered were limited to one state's experience, California has wide variation in population, industry, disability rates, and employment rates among its counties, and thus may offer lessons to other states about the challenges and successes in serving transitioning youths. This report summarizes the views of panelists on challenges they experienced serving this population during critical transition years, and identifies several practices that they believe are helping to address those challenges in California.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-759SP.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Robert E. Robertson, Director, (202) 512-7215, robertsonr@gao.gov.

SUMMARY OF A GAO CONFERENCE

Helping California Youths with Disabilities Transition to Work or Postsecondary Education

What Panelists Said

Panelists offered a variety of perspectives on the challenges they faced serving youths with disabilities making the transition from high school to postsecondary education or employment. Participants reached general agreement in two broad areas.

- Panelists generally agreed youths with disabilities in California do not receive sufficient training in vocational preparation, life skills, and transition planning. While acknowledging the recent emphasis on learning academic skills and its importance for all youths with disabilities, panelists noted that for those who will not pursue postsecondary education, there are too few vocational programs in high school and inadequate time during school to study vocational and life skills. They suggested many ways to address these challenges, including beginning transition planning at a younger age, creating internship programs during high school, and bringing in mentors from the working world.
- Panelists generally agreed that limited coordination among programs and differences in program structure prevented the seamless provision of services. For example, several panelists noted that students are generally not able to retain school-provided assistive technology equipment that could help them with postsecondary school or employment, and often need to reacquire such technology through the support of another service provider after they graduate. Panelists also cited specific differences in the structure of programs—such as the use of different definitions of learning disabilities between high schools and community colleges—that they thought hindered the seamless provision of services. Panelists suggested ideas for improving coordination among programs, including designating days outside of the classroom for teachers to coordinate with other programs and adopting common assessment materials and, where feasible, common definitions of disability.

Panelists also shared examples of programs currently available to a limited number of youths in California that had the potential to address some of the challenges they identified. For example, some programs provide work experience and career counseling. Other programs provide a case manager to work with students throughout their transition and help coordinate their services. Panelists suggested that expanding and replicating these practices could improve the transition outcomes of youths with disabilities.