

4. PARTICIPATION IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

By Tom W. Cadwallader, Mary Wagner, and Nicolle Garza

The lives of many youth are substantially enriched by their participation in organized extracurricular activities, which are defined broadly to include adult-sanctioned organized activities that youth do outside of the classroom, whether or not they are school-sponsored.¹ Youth can engage in such activities individually, such as taking private music lessons, or in groups, such as taking part in scouting or a school club. Youth participate in extracurricular activities to be with peers, to learn new skills, to stay fit, or simply to have fun. In recognition of the importance of such activities, the federal legislation guiding American elementary and secondary education, *The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001* (P.L. 107-110) poses the following challenge for all schools: To give families—children and their parents—more out-of-school learning opportunities so they are better prepared for academic success (U.S. Department of Education, 2002). It also provides for the establishment or expansion of community learning centers as a mechanism for meeting the challenge. Reflecting the importance of extracurricular activities for students with disabilities, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 require Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) to address student participation in extracurricular and nonacademic activities, as well as the general education curriculum (P.L. 105-17, § 614, 111 Stat. 84). Consistent with the legislation, presence and participation in the community, including extracurricular activities, is one of the primary outcome domains for assessing the well-being of youth with disabilities posited by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 1994).

The social, psychological, and educational benefits of extracurricular activities are well known. Extracurricular participation has been shown to have a beneficial effect on academic performance (e.g., Marsh, 1992; Camp, 1990) and to diminish the likelihood of students' dropping out of school (Mahoney & Cairns, 1997). A correlation also has been found between extracurricular involvement and academics, results that are "consistent with the argument that participation [in extracurricular activities] promotes greater academic achievement" (Gerber, 1996, p. 48). Research also has suggested positive relationships between structured nonacademic activities and both ethnic identification (Davalos, Chavez, & Guardiola, 1999) and self-esteem (Coladarci & Cobb, 1996). Extracurricular participation also is associated with prosocial peer relations and lower rates of drug use (Borden, Donnermeyer, & Scheer, 2001; Shilts, 1991). Research has shown that spending 1 to 4 hours in extracurricular activities per week is associated with a 49% lower likelihood of using drugs and a 37% lower likelihood of becoming a teen parent (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1996).

Despite these potential benefits of extracurricular activities, questions remain. For example, it is not clear whether participation in extracurricular activities produces benefits or whether already successful youth are more inclined to participate in them, or both (O'Brien & Rollefson, 1995). The specific kind of activity also may influence outcomes (Eccles & Barber, 1999). In addition, not all youth may benefit; the impacts of extracurricular programs vary for youth of different ages, socioeconomic levels, racial/ethnic groups, and genders (Berk & Goebel, 1987;

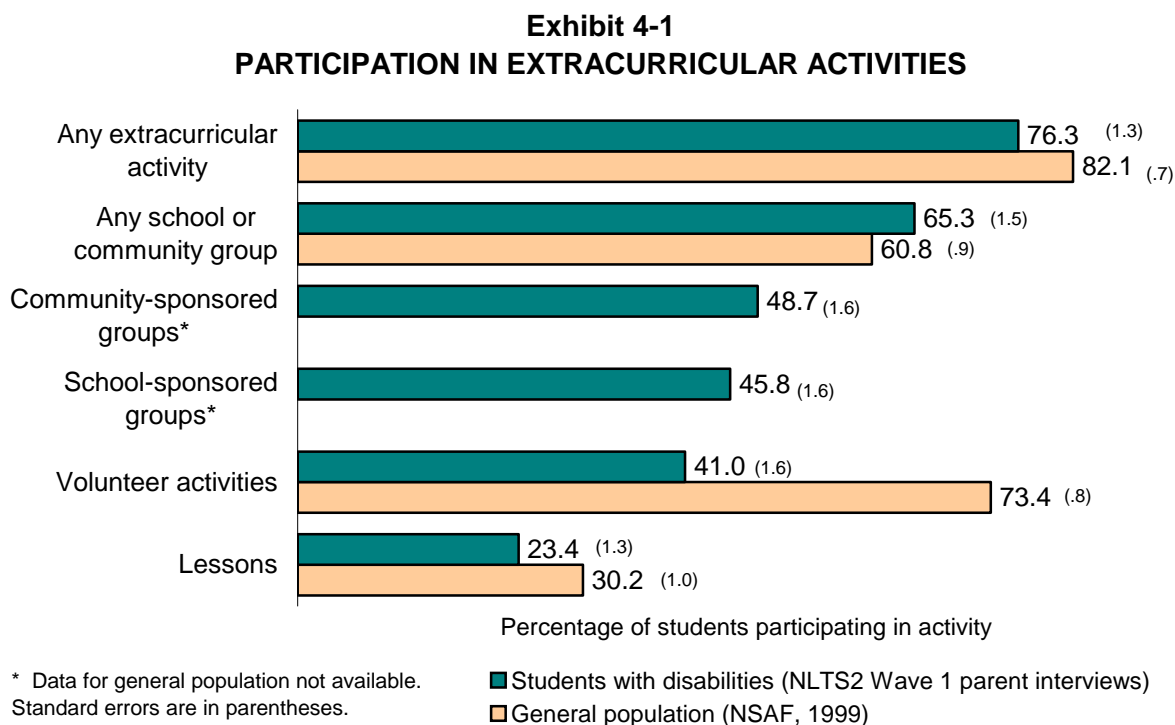
¹ Analyses similar to these were conducted as part of the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) and are reported in Garza, Cadwallader, & Wagner (2002).

Eder & Parker, 1987; McNeal, 1995; Lisella & Serwatka, 1996). Further, little is known about the levels of participation in such activities by youth with disabilities or the extent to which they benefit from that participation.

This chapter describes the involvement of middle- and high-school-age youth with disabilities in extracurricular activities, including the frequency of their involvement and the extent to which those activities are sponsored by schools or community organizations. The kinds of activity in which youth participate are identified, as well as variations in participation for youth who differ in their primary disability classification, age, gender, household income, and race/ethnicity. These analyses rely on reports by parents of youth with disabilities regarding whether in the past year youth have taken lessons or classes outside of school,² participated in organized group activities at school³ or in the community,⁴ or volunteered or did other forms of community service. If youth had participated in school or community groups, parents were asked to describe the kinds of group or groups in which youth participated

Types of Extracurricular Activity

Overall, 76% of youth with disabilities ages 13 through 17 are reported by parents to have participated during the past year in at least one of the kinds of extracurricular activity explored in NLTS2 (Exhibit 4-1). Almost two-thirds (65%) have taken part in an organized group at school



² Parents were asked whether youth participated during the past year in any “lessons or classes outside of school in things like art, music, dance, foreign language, religion, or computer skills.”

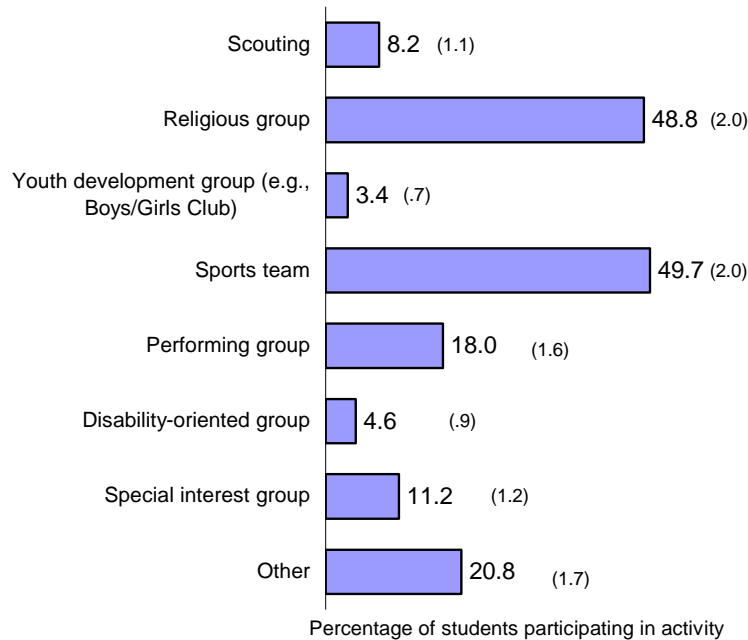
³ Parents were asked whether youth participated during the past year in “any school activity outside of class, such as sports teams, band or chorus, school clubs, or student government.”

⁴ Parents were asked whether youth participated during the past year in “any out-of-school group activities, such as scouting, church or temple youth group, or nonschool team sports like soccer, softball, or baseball.”

or in the community. Youth are about as likely to have participated in a community-sponsored group activity as one sponsored by their school. Almost a quarter of youth with disabilities are reported to have taken lessons of some kind, and volunteer activities have been undertaken by 41% of youth with disabilities.

These rates of activity are somewhat lower than those of the general population of youth, 82% of whom have participated in one or more of these kinds of extracurricular activity ($p < .001$, National Survey of America's Families, 1999). This overall lower rate of participation by youth with disabilities results from lower rates for lessons and volunteer activities ($p < .001$). In contrast, youth with disabilities are somewhat more likely than youth in the general population to have participated in an organized group activity (65% vs. 61%, $p < .05$).

Exhibit 4-2
TYPES OF GROUPS IN WHICH STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES PARTICIPATE



Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.
Standard errors are in parentheses.

The types of group in which youth with disabilities participate vary widely, reflecting the wide-ranging interests that would be expected in a nationally representative group of youth (Exhibit 4-2). Sports teams are the most common group, with half of youth with disabilities playing on a sports team, compared with 54% of youth in the general population ($p < .05$; National Survey of America's Families, 1999).

Community-sponsored activities are popular with many youth; 49% have participated in religious youth groups, and 8% have taken part in scouting. Almost one in five youth have participated in a performing group, such as a band or choir, at school or in the community, and 11% have participated in other kinds of club

or other hobby clubs). Few youth (5%) have participated in a disability-oriented group.

Not surprisingly, youth who participate in extracurricular activities also have more active friendships (Exhibit 4-3). One reason may be that extracurricular participants are exposed to a wider range of social interactions and opportunities to make friends, or perhaps functional limitations that make extracurricular participation difficult for some youth similarly limit their ability to interact with friends (e.g., youth who are unable to participate in after-school programs also may not be able to visit with friends or attend other kinds of social events). Involvement with friends in every form is more common among those who have participated in extracurricular activities. For example, those who have participated in some kind of extracurricular activity are significantly more likely than nonparticipants to be reported to receive telephone calls several times a week, be invited to social activities, and communicate by

**Exhibit 4-3
FRIENDSHIP INTERACTIONS AND
PARTICIPATION IN EXTRACURRICULAR
ACTIVITIES**

	Youth Have Participated in Any Activity	
	No	Yes
Percentage who:		
Visit with friends:		
Never	16.2 (2.3)	7.4 (1.0)
Frequently	30.4 (2.9)	30.6 (1.7)
Receive telephone calls from friends:		
Rarely or never	23.8 (2.7)	14.5 (1.3)
Frequently	56.5 (3.2)	67.8 (1.7)
Have been invited to other youth's social activities	78.0 (2.6)	87.4 (1.2)
Use e-mail or chat rooms at least weekly	30.3 (3.2)	42.4 (2.0)
Do none of these activities	5.1 (1.4)	1.7 (.5)

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.
Standard errors are in parentheses.

computer ($p < .01$ for all comparisons). Because of these relationships between active friendships and participation in extracurricular activities, the disability and demographic differences in extracurricular participation are expected to be similar to those demonstrated for friendship interactions in Chapter 3.

Disability Differences in Extracurricular Activities

Participation in extracurricular activities varies much less across disability categories than does involvement of youth with individual friendships, as reported in Chapter 3. A majority of youth in each disability category have participated in some kind of extracurricular activity during the past year, with a 16-percentage-point difference between categories in the percentage of youth thus engaged (68% to 84%, $p < .001$; Exhibit 4-4). This contrasts with the 37-percentage-point-difference between categories in youth having at least some involvement with friends.

Youth with hearing impairments are the most likely to have participated in an extracurricular activity; 84% have done so, as have 82% of youth with other health impairments and 80% of those with speech language impairments. Youth with mental retardation, emotional disturbances, autism, or multiple disabilities, including deaf-blindness, are the least active in extracurricular activities; about 30% or more of these youth had not participated in any extracurricular endeavor in the past year.

Sports teams or religious groups are the most common groups for youth in every disability category. However, participation in religious groups is more uniform across disability categories than participation on sports teams. From 44% of youth with deaf-blindness to 54% of youth with orthopedic impairments take part in religious groups. In contrast, participation on sports teams varies more widely, from 29% of youth with autism to 62% of those with hearing impairments. Performing groups are particularly popular among youth with visual impairments, among whom 37% have participated in a performing group ($p < .01$ compared with youth with learning disabilities). Although participation in disability-oriented groups is not common overall, from 18% to 27% of youth with mental retardation, orthopedic impairments, autism, multiple disabilities, or deaf-blindness have belonged to such groups in the past year ($p < .001$ compared with youth with learning disabilities).

Exhibit 4-4
PARTICIPATION IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES, BY DISABILITY CATEGORY

	Learning Disability	Speech/Language Impairment	Mental Retardation	Emotional Disturbance	Hearing Impairment	Visual Impairment	Orthopedic Impairment	Other Health Impairment	Autism	Traumatic Brain Injury	Multiple Disabilities	Deaf-Blindness
Percentage who had participated in:												
Any extracurricular activity	78.3 (2.0)	80.5 (1.9)	69.7 (2.3)	70.1 (2.3)	83.5 (2.1)	78.2 (2.9)	74.2 (2.4)	81.9 (1.8)	70.2 (2.4)	73.4 (4.1)	67.9 (2.5)	70.9 (4.5)
Lessons or classes outside of school	23.6 (2.1)	28.5 (2.2)	19.5 (2.0)	19.6 (2.0)	30.0 (2.6)	35.3 (3.4)	28.5 (2.5)	31.3 (2.2)	30.3 (2.4)	28.6 (4.2)	18.8 (2.1)	29.5 (4.5)
Organized group	68.2 (2.3)	71.5 (2.2)	55.6 (2.5)	57.0 (2.5)	74.6 (2.5)	63.5 (3.4)	63.0 (2.6)	71.3 (2.1)	55.8 (2.6)	61.6 (4.5)	57.7 (2.6)	59.6 (4.9)
Volunteer activity	42.8 (2.4)	46.3 (2.5)	33.2 (2.4)	36.9 (2.5)	43.9 (2.9)	43.0 (3.5)	39.9 (2.7)	47.0 (2.4)	34.7 (2.5)	41.4 (4.5)	32.5 (2.5)	34.0 (4.7)
Percentage of group members who had belonged to:												
Sports team	52.7 (3.0)	57.0 (3.0)	39.3 (3.4)	42.2 (3.4)	61.8 (3.3)	38.4 (4.4)	29.9 (3.3)	49.6 (2.9)	29.0 (3.4)	43.1 (5.7)	35.9 (3.7)	45.9 (6.7)
Religious group	48.6 (3.0)	48.5 (3.0)	49.2 (3.5)	49.8 (3.4)	45.5 (3.4)	45.5 (4.5)	53.6 (3.6)	50.7 (2.9)	48.7 (3.8)	50.7 (5.7)	45.2 (3.8)	44.3 (6.7)
Scouting	8.0 (1.6)	8.1 (1.6)	8.2 (1.9)	7.5 (1.8)	10.6 (2.1)	6.9 (2.3)	8.8 (2.0)	11.8 (1.8)	9.2 (2.2)	9.3 (3.3)	7.0 (1.9)	10.9 (4.2)
Performing group	18.0 (2.3)	28.3 (2.7)	12.7 (2.3)	14.3 (2.4)	14.9 (2.4)	36.9 (4.3)	25.4 (3.1)	23.7 (2.4)	17.1 (2.9)	25.5 (5.0)	13.9 (2.6)	17.2 (5.1)
Special-interest group	11.2 (1.9)	12.3 (2.0)	10.1 (2.1)	10.4 (2.1)	12.2 (2.3)	17.9 (3.5)	12.0 (2.3)	13.0 (2.0)	7.3 (2.0)	12.5 (3.8)	10.9 (2.4)	8.0 (3.6)
Youth development group	2.2 (.9)	3.2 (1.1)	8.0 (1.9)	6.6 (1.7)	3.0 (1.2)	2.7 (1.5)	3.8 (1.4)	3.1 (1.0)	4.1 (1.5)	2.1 (1.6)	4.4 (1.6)	4.2 (2.7)
Disability-oriented group	1.8 (.8)	2.4 (.9)	18.1 (2.7)	3.9 (1.3)	7.0 (1.8)	11.4 (2.9)	17.8 (2.8)	5.1 (1.3)	27.3 (3.4)	9.7 (3.4)	18.6 (3.0)	21.0 (5.5)
Other group	20.6 (2.5)	20.1 (2.5)	27.0 (3.1)	13.5 (2.3)	22.5 (3.0)	37.6 (4.4)	26.5 (3.1)	19.7 (2.1)	30.0 (3.5)	28.8 (5.8)	29.0 (3.4)	28.0 (6.0)

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.

Standard errors are in parentheses.

Demographic Differences in Extracurricular Activities

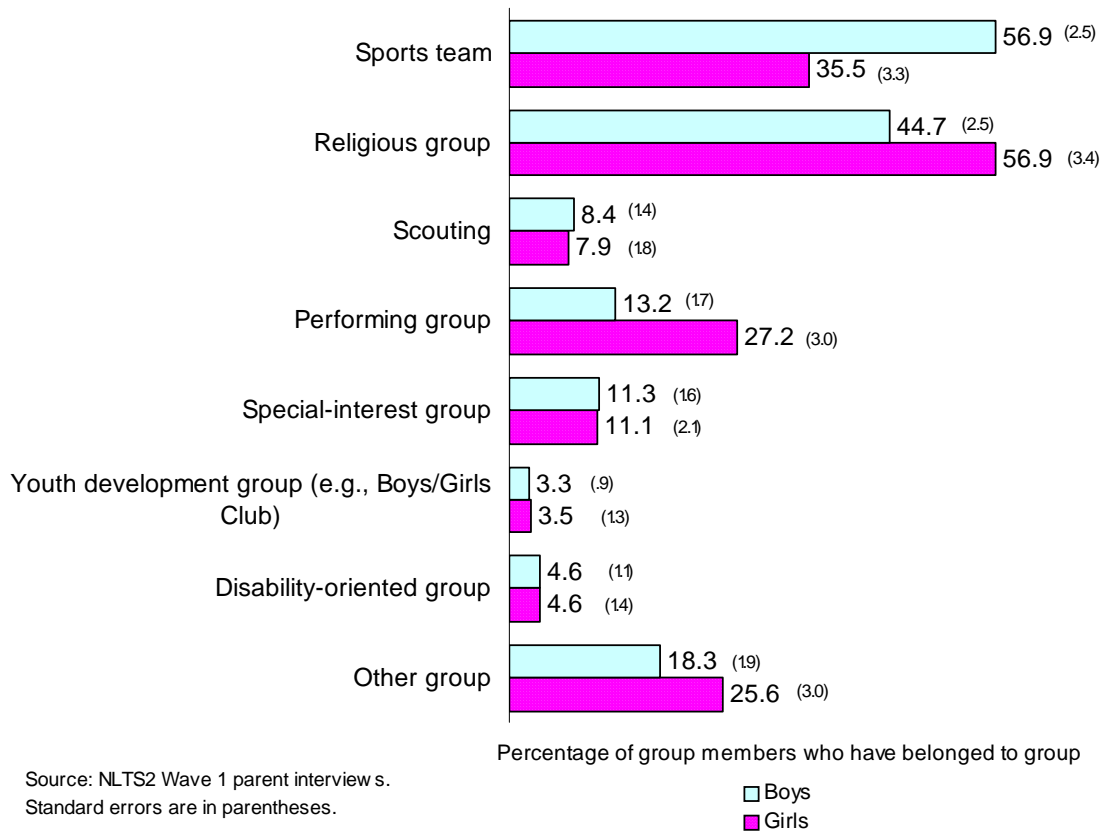
Age. The overall level of participation in extracurricular activities does not differ significantly between age groups, ranging from 79% at ages 13 and 14 to 76% at age 17. The level of activity for middle- and high-school-age youth also does not differ markedly from that of elementary school students (73%; Garza, Cadwallader, & Wagner, 2002). Similarly, the rate at which teens have participated in each of the individual activities does not differ between 13- and 17-year-olds.

However, the rates of participation in several individual activities are markedly different for teens than for much younger students. For example, 46% of 13- to 17-year-olds have participated in a school-sponsored group during the past year, compared with 29% of 6- to 13-year-olds ($p < .001$; Garza, Cadwallader, & Wagner, 2002). This increased involvement in school-sponsored extracurricular activities among teens may reflect the greater number of such

groups sponsored in middle and high schools relative to elementary schools. In addition, volunteer activities and community service are more common among teens (41%) than among younger students (30%, $p < .001$; Garza, Cadwallader, & Wagner, 2002). Volunteerism is encouraged by many youth development organizations across the United States, through the U.S. Department of Education, the Corporation for National Service, and The National and Community Service Trust Act of 1993. Volunteerism also has become part of some service learning curricula at the high school level, and some high schools now specify a certain number of hours of community service as a graduation requirement. These developments may play a part in the higher rates of volunteerism among high school students.

Gender. There are no significant differences between boys and girls in the extent to which they participate at all in extracurricular activities or in school or community groups or volunteer activities. However, girls are significantly more likely to have taken lessons than boys (30% vs. 20%, $p < .001$). There also are significant differences in the kinds of group in which boys and girls participate (Exhibit 4-5). Boys are significantly more likely to have played on sports teams (57% vs. 36%, $p < .001$). In contrast, girls are more likely than boys to have been in religious (57% vs. 45%, $p < .01$) or performing groups (27% vs. 13%, $p < .001$). These choices of activity

Exhibit 4-5
GROUP MEMBERSHIP OF BOYS AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES



are consistent with parents' reports of their adolescent children's strengths or aptitudes (Cameto, Cadwallader, & Wagner, 2003).

Household Income. Household income is related to the participation of youth with disabilities in extracurricular activities of several kinds (Exhibit 4-6). Youth from wealthier households are significantly more likely to have taken part in an extracurricular activity than youth from lower-income households (83% for the highest-income group, compared with 70% of those in the lowest-income group, $p < .001$) and to have taken part in lessons or classes, organized groups, or volunteer activities ($p < .001$), with the greatest difference being in involvement in volunteer or community service activities. These findings suggest that there may be financial barriers to access or entry into these activities for lower-income youth. However, there are no significant differences in the specific kinds of group to which youth of different household income levels have belonged.

Exhibit 4-6
PARTICIPATION IN EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES,
BY INCOME AND RACE/ETHNICITY

	Income			Race/Ethnicity		
	\$25,000 or Less	\$25,001 to \$50,000	More than \$50,000	White	African American	Hispanic
Percentage who have participated in:						
Any extracurricular activity	69.6 (2.4)	76.5 (2.5)	83.4 (2.2)	80.2 (1.6)	73.6 (3.0)	63.0 (4.3)
Lessons or classes outside of school	18.3 (2.0)	21.6 (2.4)	30.1 (2.7)	23.8 (1.7)	23.8 (2.9)	19.1 (3.5)
Organized group	57.0 (2.5)	66.4 (2.8)	73.3 (2.6)	68.7 (1.9)	64.9 (3.2)	49.6 (4.4)
Volunteer activity	32.1 (2.4)	40.1 (2.9)	52.2 (3.0)	47.3 (2.0)	30.3 (3.1)	27.7 (4.0)
Percentage of group members who have belonged to:						
Sports team	44.3 (3.6)	47.4 (3.9)	52.6 (3.5)	49.3 (2.5)	51.3 (4.6)	50.1 (6.4)
Religious group	48.9 (3.6)	46.9 (3.9)	51.1 (3.5)	50.8 (2.5)	49.5 (4.6)	37.4 (6.2)
Scouting	6.0 (1.7)	10.6 (2.4)	8.6 (1.9)	9.6 (1.5)	6.5 (2.2)	4.9 (2.8)
Performing group	15.4 (2.6)	16.6 (2.9)	17.9 (2.7)	18.6 (2.0)	17.9 (3.5)	15.3 (4.6)
Special-interest group	9.0 (2.1)	10.8 (2.4)	13.1 (2.3)	11.9 (1.6)	6.8 (2.3)	13.7 (4.4)
Youth development group	3.3 (1.3)	3.7 (1.5)	3.6 (1.3)	2.4 (.8)	5.1 (2.0)	6.6 (3.2)
Disability-oriented group	4.5 (1.5)	5.3 (1.8)	4.6 (1.5)	5.2 (1.1)	4.1 (1.8)	2.8 (2.1)
Other group	21.5 (2.9)	20.2 (3.2)	21.0 (2.7)	20.8 (2.0)	21.5 (3.7)	18.9 (5.1)

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.
Standard errors are in parentheses.

Race/Ethnicity. Differences in participation in extracurricular activities are apparent for youth who differ in their race/ethnicity (Exhibit 4-6). Most notably, Hispanic youth are the least likely to have participated in each of the kinds of activity investigated in NLTS2; 63% of Hispanic youth have participated in some kind of extracurricular activity, compared with 80% of white ($p<.001$) and 74% of African American youth ($p<.05$). Significant differences also are noted for their participation in organized groups and volunteer or community service activities ($p<.001$ for white youth and $p<.01$ for African American youth). Volunteerism also is lower for African American than white youth (30% vs. 47%, $p<.001$). However, there are no significant differences in the specific kinds of group joined by group members, with the exception that Hispanic youth are less likely than white youth to have participated in religious groups (37% vs. 51%, $p<.05$).

Summary

The majority of both youth with disabilities and youth in the general population groups are active in organized extracurricular activities during their middle and high school years. More than three-fourths of youth with disabilities participate in extracurricular activities and programs through which they can explore interests, learn skills, develop friendships, and participate actively as members of their schools and communities. However, rates of participation are significantly lower than those of youth in the general population, primarily because of lower rates of participation of youth with disabilities in lessons and volunteer activities. However, participation in school- or community-sponsored group activities is somewhat more common among youth with disabilities than among youth in the general population. Youth with disabilities who participate in activities tend to be youth who also have more frequent interactions with individual friends.

Participation in extracurricular activities is not equally common for youth across disability groups. Youth with disabilities such as mental retardation, multiple disabilities, or deaf-blindness are much less likely to have participated in extracurricular activities, whereas youth with speech, hearing, or other health impairments are the most active overall.

Choices of activity and participation level among youth with disabilities are related to a variety of demographic factors and generally mirror those of youth in the general population. Boys and girls with disabilities engage in extracurricular activities in about the same proportions, although differences in their choices of the kinds of group to which they belong reflect traditional gender roles. Financial barriers, however, may hinder participation in some kinds of extracurricular activities; youth from lower-income households participate in extracurricular activities at a lower rate overall, as do minority youth.

Analyses of subsequent waves of NLTS2 data will explore the shifts in patterns of extracurricular activity as the developmental changes associated with increasing age and maturity take effect and as the context for such activities changes for many youth from high school to work or postsecondary education.