

## **1. RELATED SERVICES, SUPPORTS, AND SPECIALIZED PROGRAMS FOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Students come to school with a wide range of personal characteristics, family dynamics, and functional, cognitive, and social abilities that contribute to how they learn, how much they benefit from their secondary school experiences, and how well they manage the transition to adulthood. Some youth, particularly those with disabilities, need supports and interventions besides the traditional classroom experiences to be successful at school. Recognizing this fact, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 (IDEA '97, P. L. 105-17) mandate that "...all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living" [IDEA '97 Final Regulations, Section 300.1(a)] (U.S. Department of Education, 1999).

IDEA '97 defines related services in this context as "transportation and such developmental, corrective, and other supportive services as are required to assist a child with a disability to benefit from special education" [IDEA '97 Final Regulations, Section 300.24(a)]. Related services, as highlighted in IDEA '97, include:

- Speech-language pathology and audiology services
- Psychological services
- Physical and occupational therapy
- Recreational, including therapeutic recreation
- Early identification and assessment of disabilities in children
- Counseling services, including rehabilitation counseling
- Orientation and mobility services
- Medical services for diagnostic or evaluation purposes
- School health services
- Social work services in schools
- Parent counseling and training
- Transportation. [IDEA '97 Final Regulations, Section 300.24(a)].

It is important to note that the list of related services is not exhaustive; related services may include a wide variety of disability-related services and supports, reflecting the fact that youth with disabilities are diverse in the types and amounts of related services they need.

The provision of related services and supports is established by the team responsible for developing a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), which includes teachers, other professionals, parents, and, where appropriate, students. Related services personnel may be included in the IEP team if a particular related service is discussed [IDEA '97 Final Regulations, Section 300.344(a)]. Details regarding the related services a student needs to benefit from special education and how often, where, and by whom those services will be provided are included in a student's IEP. Further, "if it is determined through [IDEA's] evaluation and IEP

requirements that a child with a disability requires a particular supportive service in order to receive FAPE..., that service can be considered a related service...and must be provided at no cost to the parents.”

In addition to related service needs, IDEA '97 requires that the IEP team, “in the case of a child whose behavior impedes his or her learning or that of others, consider, if appropriate, strategies, including positive behavioral interventions, strategies, and supports to address that behavior” [IDEA '97 Final Regulations, Section 300.346(a)(2)(i)]. For example, recent research demonstrates relationships between academic performance and nonacademic indicators of health and well-being, such as alcohol and substance use, exposure to violence, school safety, caring relationships, and high expectations at school (Hanson & Austin, 2003). Examples of what an IEP may call for in this regard are anger management or conflict resolution programs, substance abuse education or treatment, or behavioral interventions (Sprague, 1995; Sprague et al., 2001).

This report, one in a series from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), provides the first national picture of the services and supports provided to secondary school youth with disabilities in a single school year. Its findings will be augmented in the next few years of NLTS2 as youth develop transition plans, complete their high school careers, and navigate the multiple systems that provide postschool services and supports. These data will elucidate how the types and extent of services and supports students receive during their secondary school experiences affect long-term support needs and outcomes.

## **Background on NLTS2**

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education is working to provide the information needed to improve the education and outcomes of secondary school students with disabilities through NLTS2. NLTS2 is a 10-year study that is documenting the characteristics, experiences, and outcomes of a nationally representative sample of more than 11,000 youth who were ages 13 through 16 and were receiving special education services in grade 7 or above in the 2000-01 school year. NLTS2 findings generalize to youth with disabilities nationally and to youth in each of the 12 federal special education disability categories in use for students in the NLTS2 age range.<sup>1</sup>

## **Focus of This Report**

This report considers the following questions for secondary-school-age youth with disabilities:

- What related services and other supports are provided to students with disabilities during the secondary school years, and to what degree are they provided by or through the schools?
- What is involved in parents' acquiring services, including how they learn about services, the amount of effort they expend, and barriers they encounter?
- What is the unmet need for services, according to parents?

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<sup>1</sup> Additional information about the NLTS2 design, methods, and measurement, including definitions of disability categories, is contained in Appendix A. Further details, including other NLTS2 reports, are available at <http://www.nlts2.org>.

- To what extent do secondary school students participate in specialized programs, including programs whose goal is to prevent or ameliorate risk behaviors, and what are school staffs' perspectives on students' unmet needs for these programs?
- How do these factors differ for students who differ in their primary disability classification and selected demographic characteristics?<sup>2</sup>

These questions are addressed by using data collected from parents and school staff who serve NLTS2 youth.<sup>3</sup> Parents or guardians<sup>4</sup> of NLTS2 study members provide a unique and valuable perspective on “how it’s going” with their adolescent children with disabilities, both in and out of school. In addition, parents relay information regarding special programs their students participate in, or related services and supports they receive. Telephone interviews conducted with parents in the spring and summer of 2001 addressed these important topics; mail questionnaires were administered to parents who could not be reached by phone. An 82% response rate resulted in interview/survey data for 9,230 students, who were ages 13 through 17 at the time.

Given this report’s focus on students’ participation in school-based programs and services, it also relies on information provided by staff in the schools attended by NLTS2 study members. Three mail surveys of school staff were conducted in the spring of the 2001-02 school year (students were ages 14 through 18 at the time), with each garnering about a 60% response rate. Data in this report are from the students’ school program survey, a multipurpose survey of staff members identified as the most knowledgeable people about the overall school programs of individual students; respondents often were special educators. One purpose was to obtain information on related and support services, as well as specialized programs provided to students, including those that focus on prevention of risk behaviors, such as reproductive health education, substance abuse prevention, and conflict resolution/anger management.

## Technical Notes

Readers should remember the following issues when interpreting the findings in this report:

- **Findings are weighted.** NLTS2 was designed to provide a national picture of the characteristics, experiences, and achievements of youth with disabilities nationally in the NLTS2 age range. Therefore, all the statistics presented in this report are weighted estimates of the national population of students receiving special education in the NLTS2 age group, as well as each disability category individually. Each response for each sample member is weighted to represent the number of youth nationally that are in his or her disability category in the kind of school district (defined by region, student enrollment, and proportion of students in poverty) or special school from which he or she was selected.
- **Standard errors.** For each mean and percentage in this report, a standard error is presented that indicates the precision of the estimate. For example, a variable with a weighted estimated value of 50% and a standard error of 2 means that the value for the

<sup>2</sup> Appendix B provides an overview of key disability and demographic characteristics of the youth represented in NLTS2.

<sup>3</sup> The specific interview and survey items that generated the data used in this report are included in Appendix C.

<sup>4</sup> For simplicity, parents and guardians are referred to here as parents.

total population, if it had been measured, would, with 95% confidence, lie between 48% and 52% (i.e., within plus or minus 2 percentage points of 50%). Thus, smaller standard errors allow for greater confidence to be placed in the estimate, whereas larger ones require caution.

- **Small samples.** Although NLTS2 data are weighted to represent the population, the size of standard errors is influenced heavily by the actual number of youth in a given group (e.g., a disability category). Groups with very small samples have comparatively large standard errors (in fact, findings are not reported separately for groups that do not include at least 35 sample members). For example, because there are relatively few youth with deaf-blindness, estimates for that group have relatively large standard errors. Therefore, readers should be cautious in interpreting results for this group and others with small sample sizes and large standard errors.
- **Significant differences.** In discussions of the descriptive statistics, only differences among groups that reach a level of statistical significance of at least .05 are mentioned in the text; significance levels usually are noted in the text.

## Organization of the Report

The chapters in this report generally correspond to the research questions posed. Chapter 2 provides information on disability-related services and supports provided to secondary school students with disabilities during the 12 months preceding the parent interview, including those provided both by the school and by sources other than the school. Chapter 3 describes students' participation in schoolwide programs that may be appropriate to students in the general population as well as those with disabilities, including the free or reduced-price lunch program, programs for English language learners (ELL or ESL), and summer school. Participation in services and programs that focus on risk behaviors typically associated with adolescence, such as substance abuse prevention, teen parenting education, reproductive health services, and conflict resolution, also is highlighted, as are school staffs' reports of students' unmet needs for these services. The final chapter reviews the key findings and their implications. Appendix A provides additional information on NLTS2 methodological issues, Appendix B includes a description of the individual and household characteristics of students represented in NLTS2, Appendix C contains the questions from the parent interview and the student's school program survey that generated data described in this report, and Appendix D provides the unweighted sample sizes for all data tables in the report.