

## 4. Youth With Disabilities' Views of Secondary School

Research has demonstrated that the way youth feel about school can be related to their behavior and performance at school, outside of school, and in the years after leaving school. For example, studies have established linkages between students' participation in school, enjoyment of school, and academic achievement (Fredricks and Eccles 2006; Herman and Tucker 2000; Hudley et al. 2002; Newmann 1992; Singh, Granville, and Dika 2002; Sirin and Jackson 2001). Further, a recent "snapshot of America's teens" (Albert et al. 2005) reports research that suggests that teens who feel connected to their schools and are highly involved at school are less likely to have sex at an early age, and girls are less likely to get pregnant (Manlove 1998; Resnick et al. 1997). Pursuit of postsecondary education also has been statistically related to youth's engagement in their schooling during their high school years (Finn 2006; Fredricks and Eccles 2006; Mahoney, Cairns, and Farmer 2003). However, little research has addressed the perceptions youth with disabilities have of their experiences in secondary school.

This chapter addresses this gap in the knowledge base by documenting the self-reported perceptions of youth with disabilities<sup>1</sup> regarding the following aspects of their school experiences:

- academic challenges;
- interpersonal challenges;
- school safety;
- services and supports received at school;
- affiliation with school; and
- enjoyment of school.

### Challenges at School

Several aspects of schooling present challenges to some youth with disabilities, including those associated with meeting academic expectations and getting along with others.

#### *Academic Challenges*

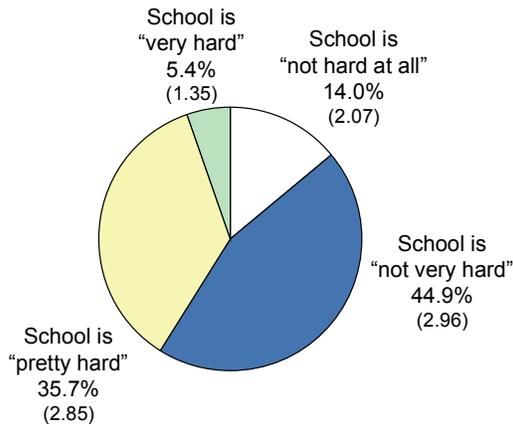
Eligibility for special education requires that a student's disability present a challenge to his or her ability to learn without specially designed instruction, modifications, accommodations, or other supports.<sup>2</sup> These learning challenges were documented by NLTS2 in a direct assessment of students' achievement, which found substantially lower academic achievement among youth with disabilities relative to general education peers. For example, the average standard score of 16- through 18-year-old youth with disabilities on a standardized measure of reading

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<sup>1</sup> Readers are reminded that findings are national estimates for the subsample of youth with disabilities who could report their own perceptions and expectations, not a sample of all youth with disabilities in the NLTS2 age range. See chapter 1 for further details on the group that is the focus of this report.

<sup>2</sup> See appendix A for the definitions of disabilities that make students eligible for special education service in each of the 12 federal special education disability categories.

Figure 9. Youth with disabilities' reported perceptions of school being "hard"



NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

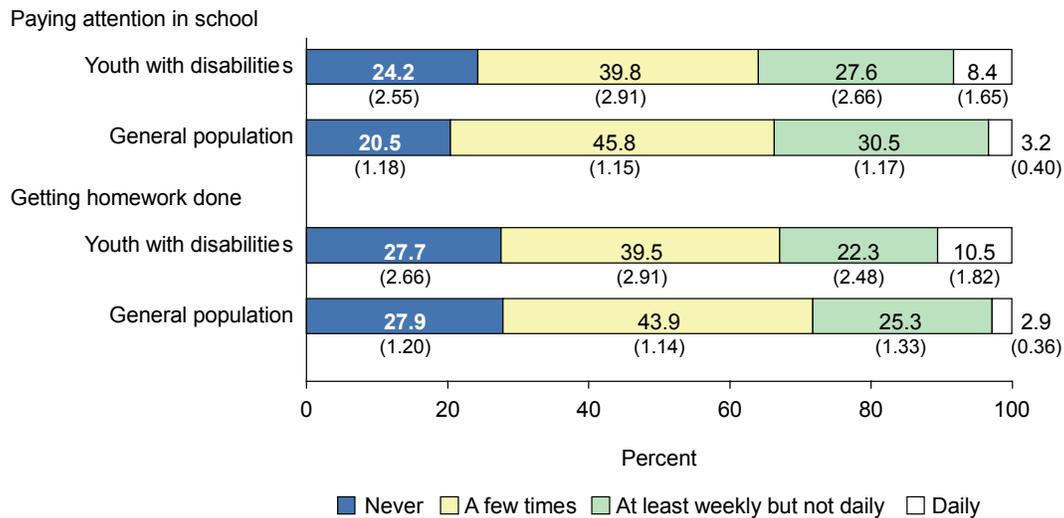
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

comprehension<sup>3</sup> is 79, and the average for math calculation skills is 84; both scores are more than one standard deviation below the average score of 100 among same-age youth in the general population (Wagner et al. 2006). Despite their learning challenges, 14 percent of youth with disabilities report on a 4-point scale that secondary school is academically "not hard at all" (figure 9), and 45 percent report it to be "not very hard." In contrast, 36 percent report finding school "pretty hard," and 5 percent say it is "very hard."

NLTS2 youth were asked to report on a 4-point scale how frequently they face challenges presented by two specific aspects of their academic experience during the current school year—paying attention in class and finishing their homework (figure 10).

Figure 10. Youth with disabilities' reported academic challenges

In 2002-03 school year, how often youth had trouble:



NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Wave II youth interviews, 1996.

<sup>3</sup> The NLTS2 direct assessment of academic achievement used research versions of subtests of the Woodcock-Johnson III related to passage comprehension, synonyms and antonyms, mathematics calculation, applied mathematics problem-solving, and content knowledge in science and social studies (Woodcock, McGrew, and

About one-fourth of youth with disabilities report “never” having trouble with these academic expectations (24 percent and 28 percent, respectively), and 40 percent report having trouble with each of them “a few times.” More frequent difficulties are reported by about one-third of youth with disabilities, including 8 percent who report daily difficulties with paying attention and 11 percent who report daily challenges to completing homework. These percentages of youth with disabilities having daily difficulties with paying attention and completing homework are significantly higher than rates among youth in the general population (3 percent for both challenges,  $p < .01$  and  $p < .001$ , respectively).<sup>4</sup>

Correlations of scale scores of the frequency of having difficulty paying attention and completing homework show they are related to each other in that youth who face one of these challenges tend also to face the other ( $r = .48$ ,  $p < .001$ ). Further, both of these academic challenges have statistically significant correlations with youth’s perceptions of school being hard for them ( $r = .15$  and  $.18$  for difficulty paying attention and completing homework, respectively;  $p < .001$  for both correlations).

Although both of these academic challenges have a statistically significant correlation with youth’s perceptions of school being hard for them, the correlations of  $.15$  and  $.18$  are modest.

### ***Interpersonal Challenges***

Students’ school experiences can be shaped by the relationships they form with peers and adults at school. Forming positive relationships may be particularly challenging for youth with disabilities because, on average, their social skills are not as strong as those of youth in the general population (Cameto et al. 2003). Nonetheless, the large majority of youth with disabilities report they have little trouble getting along with teachers or other students (figure 11). Forty-three percent and 39 percent of youth with disabilities say they “never” have trouble getting along with teachers and students, respectively, and 36 percent say they do only “a few times” in the school year. In addition, half of youth with disabilities report they agree “a lot” with the statement “There is an adult at school who you feel close to and who cares about you,” and 35 percent indicate “a little” agreement with the statement.

In contrast, 6 percent of students with disabilities report daily problems getting along with teachers, and 11 percent report daily problems getting along with other students. These rates of daily problems getting along with other teachers and students are more than four times the rates of such frequent problems reported by students in the general population (1 percent and 3 percent, respectively,  $p < .001$ ).<sup>5</sup> Further, 15 percent of students with disabilities report “a little” or “a lot” of disagreement with the statement that they feel close to an adult at school who cares about them.

Correlational analyses of youth’s scale scores regarding the frequency of having interpersonal challenges with teachers and peers show they are related among youth with

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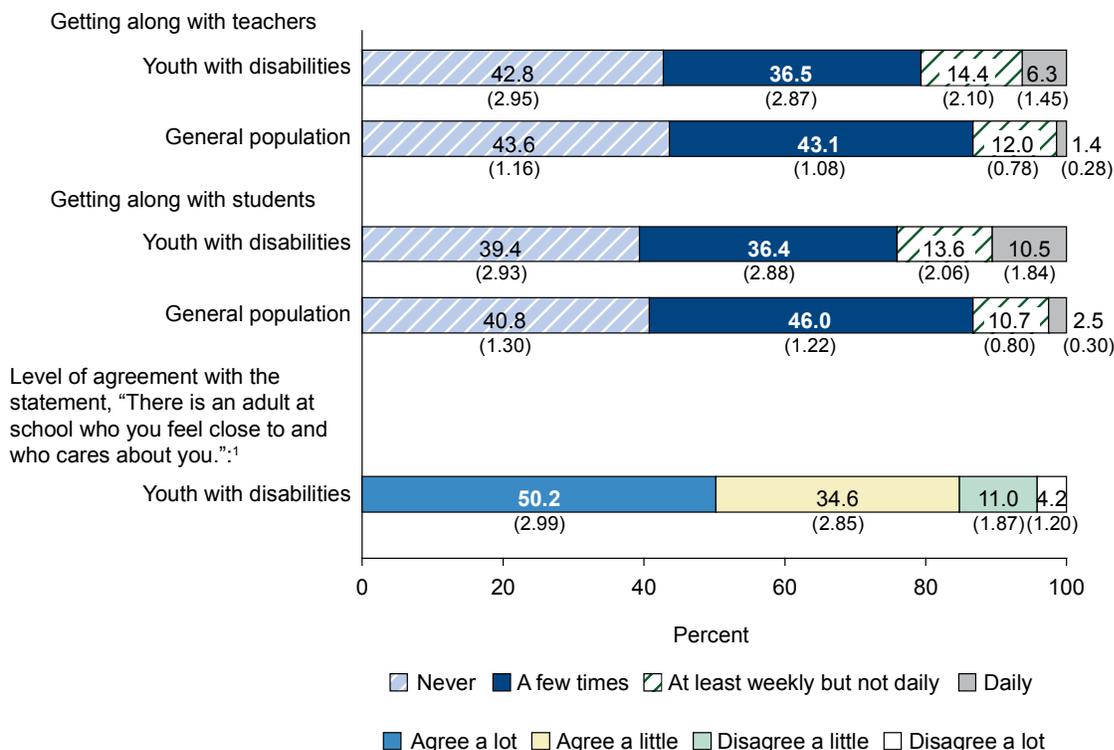
Mather 2001). See Wagner et al. (2006) for additional details of the assessment methods and instruments and of the findings.

<sup>4</sup> Calculated for 15- through 19-year-olds using data from Wave II youth interviews of The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), 1996 (Udry 1998); item wording is identical to that of NLTS2.

<sup>5</sup> Calculated for 15- through 19-year-olds using data from Wave II youth interviews of The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), 1996 (Udry 1998); item wording is identical to that of NLTS2.

Figure 11. Youth with disabilities' reported interpersonal challenges at school

In 2002-03 school year, how often youth had trouble:



<sup>1</sup> Comparison data are not available for general population.

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), Wave II youth interviews, 1996.

disabilities ( $r = .36, p < .001$ ). In contrast, correlations between these two scales and the extent to which youth perceive there to be a caring adult at school are not statistically significant.

### School Safety

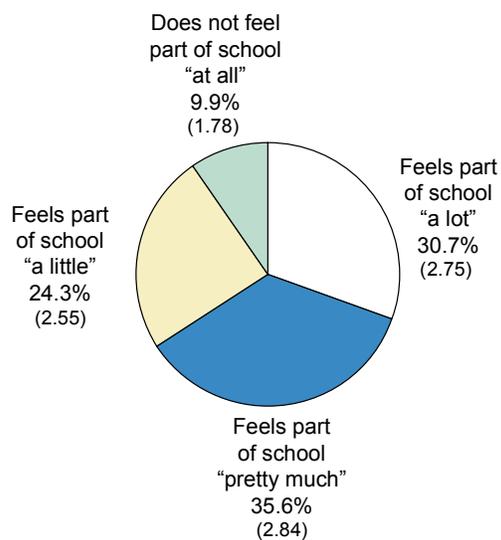
Recent research associates a number of negative factors with students not feeling safe at school. For example, students with such feelings have been found to be more likely than those who feel safe to skip school, carry a weapon to school, have difficulty paying attention at school, and demonstrate poor academic achievement (Bluestein 2001). Overall, 38 percent of youth with disabilities report feeling “very safe” at school, and 55 percent report being “pretty safe”; in contrast, 8 percent report feeling “not very safe” or “not safe at all” at school. These reports are quite similar to the 31 percent of youth in the general population who “strongly agree” that they

feel safe in their school, the 57 percent who “agree,” and the 12 percent who “disagree” or “strongly disagree” with a sense of safety at school.<sup>6</sup>

## Services and Supports Received From School

Students with disabilities receive a variety of services and supports to help them learn (Levine, Marder, and Wagner 2004), and a comparison of services and supports provided to students in 2003 with those provided in the mid-1980s shows significant increases in the likelihood of students with disabilities receiving several kinds of related services (Wagner, Newman, and Cameto 2004). When youth were asked to indicate the degree to which they are (if still in school) or were (if no longer in school) “getting the support and services from the school that you need/needed to do well,” almost half of youth with disabilities (47 percent) report agreeing “a lot,” and more than one-third (37 percent) report agreeing “a little”; 10 percent and 6 percent reported disagreeing “a little” and “a lot,” respectively. Youth who perceive they are getting the services and support they need at school are no more or less likely than those who do not to indicate that school is hard for them.

Figure 12. Youth with disabilities’ reported feelings of being part of their school



NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

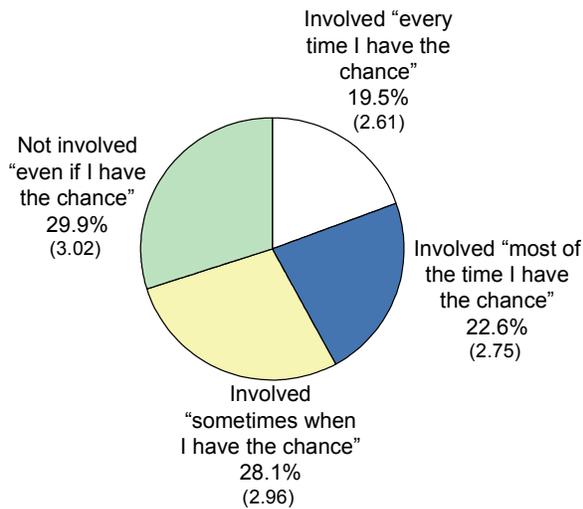
## Affiliation With School

Attachment to one’s school has been called one of the “three A’s necessary for school success” (National Center for School Engagement n.d.). Almost one-third of secondary school youth with disabilities (31 percent) report on a 4-point scale feeling part of school “a lot” (figure 12), a rate quite similar to the 32 percent of students in the general population who “strongly agree” with the statement “you feel part of your school.”<sup>7</sup> Another 35 percent of students with disabilities say they feel “pretty much” part of their school. “Little” sense of affiliation with school is reported by 24 percent of youth with disabilities, and 10 percent say they do not feel part of their school “at all.” Students with disabilities are significantly more likely to report a sense of being part of their school “a little” and “not at all” (24 percent and

<sup>6</sup> Calculated for 15- through 19-year-olds using data from Wave II youth interviews of The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), 1996 (Udry 1998). Note that the NLTS2 and Add Health items differ in that NLTS2 asked youth to report the degree of their feeling of safety (e.g., “very safe”) whereas Add Health asked youth their degree of agreement with the statement “you feel safe in your school” (e.g., “strongly agree”).

<sup>7</sup> Calculated for 15- through 19-year-olds using data from Wave II youth interviews of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health), 1996 (Udry 1998). Note that the NLTS2 and Add Health items differ in that NLTS2 asked youth to report the degree of their feeling part of their school (e.g., “a lot”) whereas Add Health asked youth their degree of agreement with the statement “you feel part of your school” (e.g., “strongly agree”).

Figure 13. Youth with disabilities' reported level of involvement at school



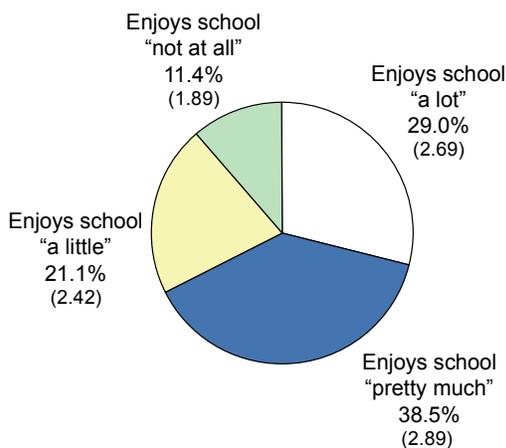
NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

SOURCES: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), youth in-person interviews, 2002 and 2004.

10 percent) than students in the general population are to "disagree" or "strongly disagree" that they feel part of their school (9 percent and 3 percent, respectively,  $p < .001$  for both comparisons).

One way students can express their sense of affiliation with school is through their involvement in school activities. In fact, correlational analyses between responses regarding the level of involvement in activities at school and the strength of their feeling of affiliation at school show they are related ( $r = .27, p < .001$ ). Almost one in five youth with disabilities (19 percent) report being involved at school "every time I have the chance" (figure 13), in contrast to the 30 percent who choose not to be involved "even when I have the chance." Almost one-fourth of youth with disabilities (23 percent) say they are involved "most of the time," and 28 percent are involved "sometimes" when they have the chance. More than 4 in 10 youth with disabilities (43 percent) who were still in high school in the year preceding the interview report having participated in one or more organized group activities outside of class during that time.

Figure 14. Youth with disabilities' reported enjoyment of school



NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

### Enjoyment of School

As a general summary of their attitude toward school, youth with disabilities were asked to report on a 4-point scale how much they enjoy school. Almost 3 of 10 youth with disabilities (29 percent) report enjoying school "a lot" (4 points; figure 14), in contrast with the 11 percent who say they don't enjoy school "at all" (1 point). These reports of strongly liking and disliking school are both more common than the rates at which youth in the general population "strongly agree" or "strongly disagree" that they enjoy school (15 percent and 4 percent, respectively,  $p < .001$  for both

comparisons).<sup>8</sup> Thirty-eight percent of youth with disabilities report they enjoy school “pretty much,” and 21 percent indicate “a little” enjoyment of school.

Correlational analyses of the scale scores of youth with disabilities regarding their overall sense of enjoyment of school and those related to their other feelings about school show some statistically significant relationships. Feeling a part of school was correlated ( $r = .46, p < .001$ ) with school enjoyment. Also statistically significantly related to school enjoyment are being involved in school-based activities ( $r = .28, p < .001$ ), the ability to identify a caring adult at school ( $r = .24, p < .001$ ), the acknowledgment that adults at school provide the services and supports youth need ( $r = .26, p < .001$ ), feelings of safety at school ( $r = .19, p < .001$ ), and feeling that school is academically difficult ( $r = .11, p < .001$ ).

## **Disability Differences in School Experiences and Perceptions**

### ***Challenges at School***

**Academic challenges.** Across disability categories, most youth do not differ significantly in the extent to which they perceive school to be “not hard at all” (table 8). The exception is that 10 percent of youth with learning disabilities, the largest category of secondary school students receiving special education services, report having no academic problems at school, whereas almost three times as many youth with emotional disturbances (27 percent) report finding school to be without academic difficulty ( $p < .01$ ).

Reports of “never” having trouble paying attention at school range from 14 percent of youth with other health impairments, the disability category that generally contains students whose primary disability is attention deficit or attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, to 39 percent of youth with deaf-blindness. The only differences that reach the  $p < .01$  level of statistical significance are between youth with other health impairments (14 percent) and those with visual impairments or mental retardation (34 percent and 35 percent, respectively;  $p < .01$  for both comparisons). The percentage of youth reporting “never” having trouble finishing homework ranges from 25 percent of youth with learning disabilities to 44 percent of those with visual impairments; this is the only statistically significant difference in reports of this perception ( $p < .01$ ).

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<sup>8</sup> Calculated for 15- through 19-year-olds using data from the 1999 National Household Education Survey (Nolin et al. 2001). Note that the NLTS2 and NHES items differ in that NLTS2 asked youth to report the degree of their enjoyment of school (e.g., “a lot”) whereas NHES asked youth their degree of agreement with the statement “I enjoy school” (e.g., “strongly agree”).

Table 8. Youth’s reported perceptions of academic challenges, by disability category

Academic challenges	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
	Percent / standard error											
Percentage reporting school is:												
Not hard at all	9.6 (2.67)	16.0 (3.45)	22.4 (4.96)	26.8 (4.64)	16.7 (4.83)	12.9 (4.20)	12.8 (4.04)	14.3 (3.61)	14.0 (5.33)	14.4 (6.62)	23.6 (6.54)	11.2 (5.95)
Not very hard	49.4 (4.54)	42.5 (4.65)	34.1 (5.64)	34.7 (4.99)	40.1 (6.48)	40.4 (6.27)	43.0 (5.99)	41.8 (5.09)	39.4 (7.50)	43.3 (9.35)	37.5 (7.45)	34.1 (8.94)
Pretty hard	36.3 (4.36)	37.5 (4.56)	36.6 (5.73)	31.7 (4.88)	27.9 (5.81)	31.2 (5.81)	35.0 (5.77)	37.6 (5.00)	39.4 (7.50)	35.5 (9.03)	30.9 (7.11)	48.0 (9.42)
Very hard	4.7 (1.92)	3.9 (1.82)	6.9 (3.02)	6.9 (2.66)	4.3 (2.90)	4.5 (2.86)	9.2 (3.50)	6.3 (2.51)	7.2 (3.97)	6.7 (4.72)	8.0 (4.18)	6.7 (4.71)
Percentage reporting having trouble:												
Paying attention at school												
Never	23.5 (3.84)	18.0 (3.61)	34.9 (5.72)	20.1 (4.20)	31.0 (6.03)	33.5 (5.90)	30.5 (5.44)	14.2 (3.59)	20.7 (6.23)	14.6 (6.55)	30.0 (7.04)	38.8 (9.19)
Just a few times	40.3 (4.44)	53.4 (4.69)	33.8 (5.67)	36.9 (5.05)	33.3 (6.14)	42.5 (6.18)	43.4 (5.86)	44.9 (5.12)	28.5 (6.94)	54.1 (9.24)	37.6 (7.44)	38.4 (9.17)
At least weekly but not daily	29.5 (4.13)	19.7 (3.74)	15.9 (4.39)	32.0 (4.89)	24.5 (5.60)	19.2 (4.92)	19.3 (4.66)	36.1 (4.94)	42.5 (7.60)	23.5 (7.86)	18.3 (5.94)	20.6 (7.62)
Daily	6.7 (2.26)	8.9 (2.68)	15.5 (4.34)	11.0 (3.28)	11.2 (4.11)	4.8 (2.67)	6.8 (2.97)	4.8 (2.20)	8.3 (4.24)	7.8 (4.97)	14.1 (5.35)	2.2 (2.77)
Finishing homework												
Never	24.7 (3.95)	25.7 (4.12)	37.9 (5.83)	27.1 (4.77)	30.4 (6.01)	44.3 (6.31)	36.5 (5.78)	30.7 (4.84)	26.4 (6.83)	38.4 (9.01)	42.1 (7.81)	41.0 (9.27)
Just a few times	44.0 (4.54)	44.9 (4.69)	29.6 (5.49)	31.4 (4.98)	35.0 (6.23)	32.5 (5.95)	37.6 (5.81)	30.3 (4.82)	34.7 (7.37)	29.8 (8.47)	29.8 (7.23)	29.3 (8.58)
At least weekly but not daily	23.4 (3.87)	18.6 (3.67)	15.1 (4.30)	25.7 (4.69)	17.6 (4.97)	18.0 (4.88)	17.5 (4.56)	30.6 (4.84)	27.8 (6.94)	23.2 (7.82)	10.7 (4.89)	18.2 (7.27)
Daily	8.0 (2.48)	10.8 (2.93)	17.4 (4.56)	15.8 (3.91)	17.0 (4.90)	4.2 (2.82)	8.5 (3.35)	8.4 (2.91)	11.0 (4.85)	8.6 (5.19)	17.4 (6.00)	11.5 (6.01)

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

**Interpersonal challenges.** There is wider variation across disability categories in the views of youth with disabilities regarding getting along with others at school (table 9) than is evident with regard to facing academic challenges. For example, youth with emotional disturbances are about half as likely as those with orthopedic impairments to report they “never” have trouble getting along with teachers (30 percent vs. 59 percent,  $p < .001$ ). Similarly, youth with emotional disturbances are significantly less likely than those with visual or orthopedic impairments to report “never” having trouble getting along with other students (29 percent vs. 56 percent and 54 percent, respectively;  $p < .001$  for both comparisons). No other group differences in these perceptions reach the  $p < .01$  level of statistical significance.

A strong affinity with an adult at school is reported by more than 60 percent of youth with hearing, visual, or orthopedic impairments; multiple disabilities; or deaf-blindness, and the rate

of strong affiliation with an adult among youth in other categories ranges from 48 percent to 58 percent, with no significant group differences. The exception is youth with mental retardation, who are significantly less likely than youth in any other category to agree “a lot” that they feel close to an adult at school who cares about them (12 percent,  $p < .001$  for all comparisons).

Table 9. Youth’s perceptions of interpersonal challenges at school, by disability category

Interpersonal challenges	Learning disability	Speech/ language impairment	Mental retardation	Emo- tional distur- bance	Hearing impair- ment	Visual impair- ment	Ortho- pedic impair- ment	Other health impair- ment	Autism	Trauma- tic brain injury	Multiple disabili- ties	Deaf- blind- ness
	Percent / standard error											
Percentage reporting having trouble:												
Getting along with teachers												
Never	44.6 (4.51)	41.6 (4.63)	41.8 (5.87)	30.4 (4.83)	47.1 (6.51)	42.1 (6.20)	59.1 (5.93)	43.4 (5.10)	50.4 (7.77)	52.5 (9.25)	45.3 (7.67)	54.5 (9.39)
Just a few times	36.9 (4.38)	39.0 (4.58)	31.0 (5.50)	44.1 (5.22)	32.0 (6.08)	46.2 (6.26)	28.9 (5.47)	34.1 (4.87)	25.0 (6.73)	27.8 (8.30)	29.6 (7.04)	29.5 (8.60)
At least weekly but not daily	14.2 (3.39)	12.2 (3.05)	14.9 (4.35)	16.1 (3.99)	10.1 (4.03)	7.3 (3.40)	6.9 (2.79)	17.3 (4.22)	19.5 (6.04)	15.3 (7.36)	13.8 (5.12)	13.6 (7.41)
Daily	4.4 (1.86)	7.3 (2.44)	12.3 (3.91)	9.3 (3.05)	10.8 (4.04)	4.4 (2.57)	5.1 (2.65)	5.2 (2.28)	5.2 (3.45)	4.4 (3.80)	11.4 (4.90)	2.4 (2.89)
Getting along with other students												
Never	40.4 (4.47)	43.2 (4.68)	38.8 (5.84)	29.0 (4.76)	46.9 (6.49)	56.0 (6.23)	53.9 (6.09)	40.6 (5.08)	29.8 (7.02)	49.1 (9.41)	43.2 (7.71)	36.2 (9.06)
Just a few times	38.6 (4.44)	35.6 (4.53)	31.2 (5.55)	36.2 (5.05)	19.7 (5.17)	26.2 (5.52)	27.0 (5.42)	34.9 (4.93)	37.8 (7.44)	28.5 (8.49)	22.9 (6.54)	34.1 (8.94)
At least weekly but not daily	12.6 (2.99)	12.7 (3.05)	13.6 (4.28)	19.6 (4.04)	20.5 (5.26)	12.7 (4.12)	11.6 (3.66)	15.2 (3.89)	19.5 (6.14)	14.1 (6.78)	10.8 (4.89)	22.8 (7.89)
Daily	8.4 (2.53)	8.6 (2.65)	16.4 (4.44)	15.2 (3.77)	12.9 (4.36)	5.1 (2.76)	7.4 (3.20)	9.3 (3.00)	12.9 (5.14)	8.3 (5.19)	23.1 (6.56)	6.9 (4.78)
Agreement that “there is an adult at school who you feel close to and who cares about you”												
Agree a lot	54.6 (4.54)	48.2 (4.75)	12.3 (3.94)	57.4 (5.20)	60.5 (6.37)	63.5 (6.03)	65.5 (5.66)	58.1 (5.10)	58.2 (7.63)	49.7 (9.36)	66.6 (7.32)	66.2 (8.92)
Agree a little	30.4 (4.19)	30.2 (4.37)	71.9 (5.40)	26.8 (4.66)	25.5 (5.68)	23.8 (5.33)	26.5 (5.25)	29.2 (4.70)	29.1 (7.02)	36.3 (9.01)	19.0 (6.08)	29.3 (8.58)
Disagree a little	11.0 (2.85)	12.7 (3.17)	15.4 (4.33)	8.5 (2.93)	7.5 (3.43)	7.7 (3.34)	5.1 (2.62)	8.0 (2.81)	8.5 (4.31)	9.3 (5.44)	8.1 (4.23)	4.5 (3.91)
Disagree a lot	3.9 (1.76)	8.9 (2.71)	0.4 (0.76)	7.4 (2.75)	6.6 (3.24)	5.0 (2.73)	2.9 (2.00)	4.7 (2.19)	4.3 (3.14)	4.7 (3.96)	6.3 (3.77)	#

# Rounds to zero.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

## School Safety

Youth with disabilities share similar views across disability categories in reported feelings of being “very safe” at school (table 10), ranging from more than half of youth with visual impairments or autism to 36 percent of youth with learning disabilities. However, at the other end of the spectrum of feelings of school safety, youth with emotional disturbances are significantly more likely to report feeling “not very safe” or “not safe at all” at school than youth with visual impairments (13 percent vs. 2 percent,  $p < .01$ ).

Table 10. Youth’s reported perceptions of school safety, by disability category

School safety	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 / standard error											
Percentage reporting at school they feel:												
Very safe	35.5 (4.35)	37.1 (4.55)	43.9 (5.91)	45.3 (5.25)	46.8 (6.49)	52.0 (6.26)	39.4 (5.91)	37.7 (5.02)	52.6 (7.73)	47.3 (9.47)	45.7 (7.72)	48.3 (9.42)
Pretty safe	56.5 (4.51)	55.5 (4.68)	51.5 (5.96)	41.6 (5.20)	44.8 (6.47)	45.7 (6.24)	55.3 (6.01)	55.3 (5.15)	43.4 (7.67)	47.4 (9.47)	42.7 (7.66)	47.2 (9.41)
Not very or not at all safe	7.9 (2.45)	7.4 (2.46)	4.6 (2.50)	13.1 (3.56)	8.4 (3.61)	2.3 (1.88)	5.3 (2.71)	7.1 (2.66)	4.0 (3.03)	5.2 (4.21)	11.6 (4.96)	4.5 (3.91)

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

## Affiliation With School

Although the percentages of youth with disabilities who report feeling part of their school “a lot” cluster between 25 percent and 38 percent across most disability categories (table 11), almost half of youth with visual impairments (48 percent) report that feeling, in contrast with the 23 percent of youth with other health impairments who indicate that level of affiliation with their school ( $p < .001$ ). Feeling “not at all” affiliated with school is reported by 15 percent of youth with emotional disturbances, significantly more than the 2 percent of youth with hearing impairments or deaf-blindness who do so ( $p < .01$ ). Youth with hearing impairments also are less likely than those with other health impairments to report this low level of affiliation ( $p < .01$ ).

Youth with visual impairments join those with hearing impairments in having more than 60 percent of youth participating in organized extracurricular activities at schools. In contrast, 34 percent or fewer of youth with mental retardation, emotional disturbances, or autism report taking part in extracurricular activities at school ( $p < .01$  for comparisons with youth with autism;  $p < .001$  for other comparisons).

The frequency with which youth report being involved at school “every time I have the chance” ranges from 34 percent of youth with multiple disabilities to 13 percent of those with emotional disturbances. More than 40 percent of youth with emotional disturbances or autism say they never get involved at school “even when they have the chance” (42 percent and 46 percent, respectively). These rates are significantly higher than the 13 percent and 15 percent

of youth with hearing impairments or deaf-blindness, respectively, who also are unlikely to participate at school when they have a chance ( $p < .01$  compared with youth with deaf-blindness;  $p < .001$  compared with youth with hearing impairments).

Table 11. Youth's reported affiliation with school, by disability category

Affiliation with school	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
Percent / standard error												
Percentage reporting they feel part of school:												
A lot	29.8 (4.15)	29.8 (4.29)	37.9 (5.80)	29.1 (4.76)	36.3 (6.22)	48.2 (6.23)	37.7 (5.86)	23.2 (4.34)	25.1 (6.66)	24.7 (8.02)	36.8 (7.43)	36.5 (9.08)
Pretty much	38.1 (4.40)	43.4 (4.65)	25.5 (5.21)	26.7 (4.64)	30.4 (5.95)	28.7 (5.64)	28.8 (5.47)	36.0 (4.94)	35.5 (7.35)	49.9 (9.30)	28.4 (6.95)	36.5 (9.08)
A little	22.6 (3.79)	20.6 (3.79)	27.8 (5.35)	29.3 (4.77)	31.1 (5.99)	16.9 (4.67)	25.0 (5.23)	27.9 (4.61)	28.1 (6.91)	20.3 (7.48)	26.0 (6.76)	24.7 (8.13)
Not at all	9.6 (2.67)	6.2 (2.26)	8.9 (3.40)	14.8 (3.72)	2.3 (1.94)	6.2 (3.01)	8.6 (3.39)	12.9 (3.45)	11.4 (4.88)	5.1 (4.09)	8.9 (4.39)	2.2 (2.77)
Percentage participating in organized extracurricular group activities at school												
	45.8 (4.53)	47.0 (4.70)	29.7 (5.48)	32.2 (4.93)	61.8 (6.31)	65.0 (5.98)	44.1 (6.02)	41.8 (5.11)	34.0 (7.31)	39.7 (9.15)	51.0 (7.73)	58.2 (9.42)
Percentage reporting participating at school:												
Every time they have the chance	19.7 (3.96)	18.8 (3.93)	22.2 (5.93)	13.2 (3.96)	29.1 (6.14)	27.8 (6.76)	15.0 (4.86)	16.4 (4.13)	15.9 (6.03)	16.5 (7.20)	33.8 (8.41)	25.4 (8.61)
Most of the time when they have the chance	24.0 (4.25)	23.0 (4.23)	19.8 (5.69)	18.7 (4.57)	28.2 (6.08)	29.6 (6.89)	21.6 (5.59)	16.6 (4.16)	9.5 (4.84)	13.3 (6.58)	28.7 (8.04)	24.5 (8.51)
Sometimes when they have the chance	28.8 (4.51)	30.6 (4.64)	21.1 (5.82)	26.2 (5.15)	30.3 (6.21)	19.6 (5.99)	36.1 (6.53)	41.1 (5.49)	28.8 (7.47)	42.7 (9.59)	9.0 (5.08)	35.0 (9.43)
Not even when they have the chance	27.6 (4.44)	27.6 (4.50)	36.9 (6.88)	42.0 (5.78)	12.5 (4.47)	23.0 (6.35)	27.3 (6.06)	25.9 (4.89)	45.7 (8.21)	27.5 (8.66)	28.6 (8.03)	15.1 (7.07)

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

### Enjoyment of School

Half or more of youth with mental retardation or multiple disabilities report they enjoy school “a lot” (table 12). However, at 23 percent and 21 percent, youth with emotional disturbances or other health impairments are significantly less likely than these groups to enjoy school “a lot” ( $p < .01$  comparing youth with emotional disturbances and multiple disabilities;  $p < .001$  comparing youth with other health impairments and multiple disabilities and comparing both groups with youth with mental retardation). Between 25 percent and 37 percent of youth in most other categories report they enjoy school “a lot.”

Table 12. Youth’s reported enjoyment of school, by disability category

Enjoyment of school	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
	Percent / standard error											
Percentage reporting they enjoy school:												
A lot	25.3 (3.93)	27.0 (4.17)	52.3 (5.94)	22.8 (4.38)	29.3 (5.89)	37.2 (6.03)	34.0 (5.72)	20.9 (4.18)	31.4 (7.11)	25.7 (8.09)	50.4 (7.75)	43.4 (9.34)
Pretty much	43.2 (4.48)	46.0 (4.68)	21.4 (4.88)	29.5 (4.77)	37.6 (6.27)	38.5 (6.07)	42.6 (5.98)	41.0 (5.06)	40.2 (7.51)	42.2 (9.15)	21.9 (6.41)	40.8 (9.27)
A little	19.5 (3.58)	20.0 (3.75)	19.5 (4.71)	31.0 (4.83)	23.6 (5.50)	16.9 (4.67)	16.6 (4.50)	26.5 (4.54)	20.7 (6.20)	28.5 (8.36)	18.6 (6.03)	11.3 (5.97)
Not at all	12.0 (2.94)	7.0 (2.39)	6.8 (2.99)	16.6 (3.89)	9.5 (3.80)	7.4 (3.26)	6.9 (3.06)	11.7 (3.30)	7.7 (4.08)	3.5 (3.40)	9.2 (4.48)	4.5 (3.91)

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 2 youth telephone interview/mail survey, 2003.

## Demographic Differences in Perceptions of School Experiences

Youth with disabilities with various demographic characteristics do not differ significantly in their perceptions of school. No gender or racial/ethnic differences are apparent, nor do reported perceptions differ for youth from households with low, moderate, or higher incomes. However, one perception does differ across age cohorts. Specifically, the oldest cohort of youth, 19-year-olds, who were still in secondary school in the preceding year are significantly less likely than 15- and 16-year-olds to report participating in organized school activities outside of class (20 percent vs. 49 percent,  $p < .001$ ).

## Summary

This chapter has described a number of perceptions youth with disabilities report regarding their schooling, including views of their academic and interpersonal challenges, school safety, the services and supports they receive, and their affiliation with and enjoyment of school. On all measures, there are youth with disabilities who express the full range of views, from strongly positive to strongly negative. However, on virtually all measures, positive views predominate, and strongly negative views are held by a minority.

For example, the majority of youth with disabilities report not finding school particularly hard, and most say they do not have more than occasional problems completing homework, paying attention, or getting along with teachers or other students. Most indicate they find school at least “pretty safe,” and most report feeling at least “pretty much” a part of their school. Almost half agree “a lot” that they receive the services and supports they need to succeed at school, and the majority report liking school at least “pretty much.” The most negative views (e.g., having daily problems at school, finding school “very hard,” or not liking or feeling part of school “at all”) are held by 1 percent to 11 percent of youth with disabilities across measures, with one

exception—about one-third of youth with disabilities report they are not involved at school, even when they have the chance.

Other than perceptions of school safety, youth with disabilities are more likely to express negative views of certain school experiences than their peers in the general population. However, regarding their overall enjoyment of school, youth with disabilities are more likely to express both strongly liking and strongly disliking school.

Although there are few differences in perceptions of school associated with variations in demographic characteristics of youth, some differences are apparent across disability categories. In general, there is greater variation across categories in youth's reports of having interpersonal challenges at school than of academic challenges; the greatest variability is evident in youth liking school "a lot." In a few cases, one category of youth stands out from virtually all others, as in the low rate at which youth with mental retardation report having a familiar and caring adult at school and the low rate of affiliation with and involvement in school reported by youth with emotional disturbances.