

## 4. Productive Engagement in the Community

At the time they had been in high school, employment and postsecondary education were primary transition goals for the majority of students with disabilities included in this report (Cameto, Levine, and Wagner 2004). Research and policies related to transition from high school to early adulthood primarily have focused on employment and postsecondary school attendance (e.g., Benz, Doren, and Yovanoff 1998; Johnson et al. 2002; Rusch et al. 1992; Savage 2005; Sitlington, Clark, and Kolstoe 2000; Stodden 2001).

Chapters 2 and 3 of this report describe involvement in these two post-high school outcomes—employment and postsecondary education—separately. This chapter focuses on the overlap of these two types of productive engagement in the community—engagement in **either** employment or postsecondary education. Addressing this broader concept of engagement, rather than considering individual outcomes separately, was encouraged by the advisory panel during the design of the initial NLTS; as a result, NLTS was one of the first studies to present a broader perspective on how youth and young adults with disabilities could be productively engaged in their communities. The advisory panel for the current study continued to endorse that view of engagement. The importance of this broader view of what constitutes a successful transition is now incorporated in the current federal policy that requires states to collect data on “Indicator 14”—i.e., “the percent of youth who had IEPs, are no longer in secondary school, and who have been competitively employed, enrolled in some type of postsecondary school, or both, within one year of leaving high school” [20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B)]. The NLTS2 operationalization of this concept, as endorsed by the NLTS2 design advisory panel, is somewhat broader than Indicator 14, in that NLTS2 includes all forms of employment, not just competitive employment, and includes job training as a productive form of preparation for work, in addition to enrollment in postsecondary education.

In this chapter, youth with disabilities are considered productively engaged in the community if they had participated in one or more of the following activities since leaving secondary school:

- Employment—worked for pay, other than work around the house, including supported or sheltered employment.
- Education—attended a vocational, business, or technical school; a 2-year, junior, or community college; or a 4-year college or university.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The focus of this chapter is on involvement in any type of paid employment (other than work around the house), mirroring much of what is presented in this report’s employment chapter. Current federal policy requires states to measure transition from high school to post-high school years in terms of competitive employment. The State Performance Plan (SPP) and Annual Performance Report (APR) to the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) for the reporting of Indicator 14 require the “Percent of youth who had IEPs, are no longer in secondary school and who have been competitively employed, enrolled in some type of postsecondary school, or both, within one year of leaving high school” [20 U.S.C. 1416(a)(3)(B)]. In NLTS2, *when restricting the definition of employment to competitive employment*, 88 percent of youth with disabilities reported having been competitively employed and/or enrolled in postsecondary school within up to 4 years after leaving high school and 85 percent reported having been competitively employed and/or enrolled in postsecondary education within the 1 year post-high school period specified in the regulations.

- Job training—received training in specific job skills (e.g., car repair, web page design, food service) from someone other than an employer or a family member, such as an agency or a government training program.

### Engagement in Education, Employment, or Training for Employment

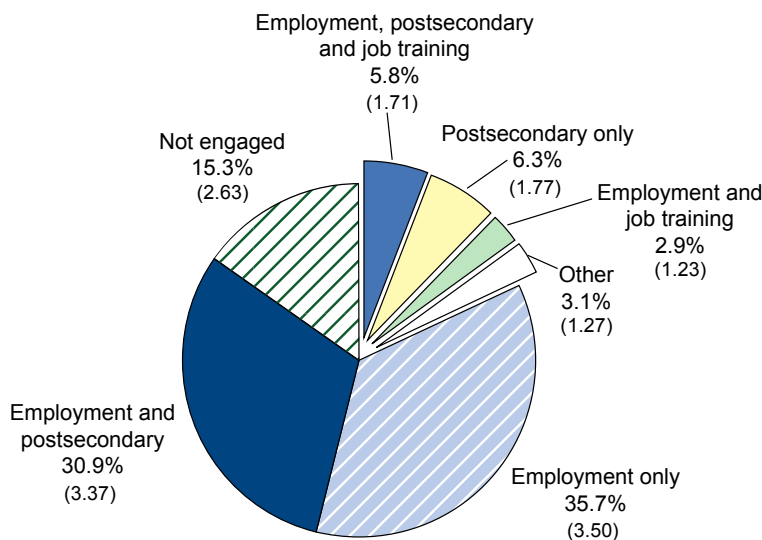
Almost one in five (18 percent) of post-high school youth with disabilities reported being involved in both employment and education concurrently at the time of the interview<sup>2</sup>—juggling the demands of going to school while working.

Eighty-five percent reported having been productively engaged in postsecondary education, employment, and/or job training since leaving high school. The combinations of ways youth had been engaged (i.e., modes of engagement) differed. Some primarily had been employed, with 36 percent reported having paid employment as their only mode of engagement (figure 30). Others had been employed since leaving high school and also had been involved in other activities, including

- postsecondary education (31 percent);
- postsecondary education and job training (6 percent); or
- job training (3 percent).

Postsecondary education was the only mode of engagement since high school for 6 percent of those with disabilities. Three percent of youth had been involved in other activity combinations, such as postsecondary education and job training only.

Figure 30. Modes of engagement within 4 years of leaving high school



NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 2,280 youth.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 3 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2005.

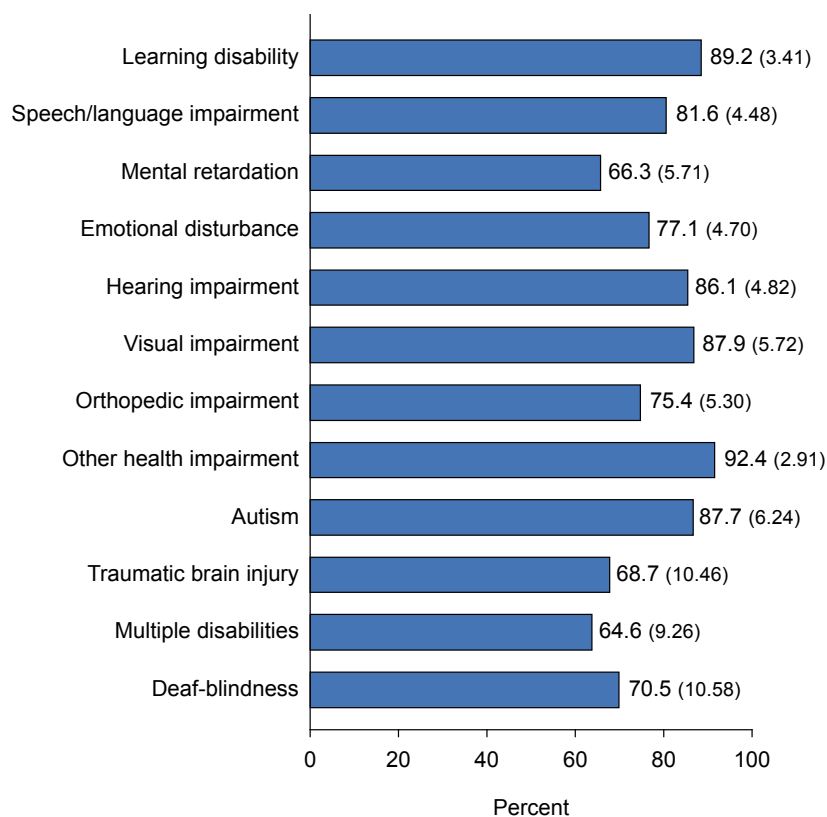
<sup>2</sup> The time frame for the postsecondary and employment items in the 2005 NLTS2 parent and youth interview/survey required that analyses of concurrent employment and school enrollment focus on the experiences of out-of-high school youth who were participating in either activity “currently” (at the time of the interview).

### **Disability Differences in Engagement in Education, Employment, or Training for Employment**

Engagement in work, school, or training since leaving high school varied by disability category, ranging from 66 percent to 92 percent (figure 31). Youth in several disability categories were more likely to report ever having been engaged than were those with mental retardation. Sixty-six percent of youth with mental retardation had ever been engaged, compared with 92 percent of those with other health impairments ( $p < .001$ ), 89 percent of those with learning disabilities ( $p < .001$ ), 88 percent of those with visual impairments ( $p < .01$ ), and 86 percent of those with hearing impairments ( $p < .01$ ).

Youth with other health impairments also were more likely to ever have been engaged in productive activities than were those with multiple disabilities (92 percent vs. 65 percent,  $p < .01$ ), orthopedic impairments (75 percent,  $p < .01$ ), or emotional disturbances (77 percent,  $p < .01$ ).

Figure 31. Engagement in education, employment, or training for employment since leaving high school, by disability category



NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 2,380 youth.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 3 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2005.

Mode of engagement also varied by disability category (table 49). Youth with learning disabilities or emotional disturbances were more likely than those in several other categories to have paid employment as their only mode of engagement—40 percent of youth with learning disabilities and 35 percent of those with emotional disturbances, compared with 9 percent of those with orthopedic impairments ( $p < .001$  for both comparisons); 10 percent of those with visual impairments ( $p < .001$  for both comparisons); 11 percent of those with traumatic brain injuries ( $p < .001$  for comparison with learning disabilities and  $p < .01$  for emotional disturbances comparison); 13 percent of those with hearing impairments ( $p < .01$  for comparison with learning disabilities and  $p < .01$  for emotional disturbances comparison); 14 percent for deaf-blindness ( $p < .01$  for comparison with learning disabilities only); and 15 percent of youth with autism ( $p < .01$  for comparison with learning disabilities only).

Youth with other health impairments were more likely to have employment as their only mode of engagement (30 percent) than were those with orthopedic (9 percent,  $p < .001$ ) or visual impairments (10 percent,  $p < .01$ ).

Table 49. Modes of engagement within 4 years of leaving high school, 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
	Percent											
Employment only	40.3 (5.38)	21.8 (4.78)	25.9 (5.30)	34.8 (5.33)	13.1 (4.70)	9.6 (5.17)	9.0 (3.52)	29.7 (5.03)	15.4 (6.86)	11.0 (7.06)	25.2 (8.40)	14.1 (8.07)
Postsecondary education only	5.3 (2.46)	5.8 (2.70)	6.6 (3.00)	6.9 (2.84)	13.1 (4.70)	12.4 (5.78)	25.4 (5.36)	8.2 (3.02)	15.5 (6.88)	8.9 (6.42)	7.1 (4.97)	15.5 (8.39)
Employment and postsecondary education	34.2 (5.21)	40.7 (5.68)	10.6 (3.72)	25.7 (4.89)	36.2 (6.69)	33.1 (8.25)	23.3 (5.20)	42.1 (5.43)	21.5 (7.81)	32.6 (10.57)	15.8 (7.06)	29.3 (10.56)
Employment, postsecondary education, and job training	5.6 (2.52)	7.6 (3.07)	6.4 (2.96)	4.4 (2.30)	17.4 (5.28)	18.0 (6.74)	3.5 (2.26)	5.0 (2.40)	14.6 (6.71)	10.0 (6.77)	4.0 (3.79)	6.4 (5.68)
Employment and job training	2.2 (1.61)	3.2 (2.04)	7.7 (3.22)	1.5 (1.36)	1.3 (1.58)	0.8 (1.56)	4.1 (2.44)	3.5 (2.02)	13.8 (6.56)	5.3 (5.05)	5.5 (4.41)	2.6 (3.69)
Other combination of activities	1.6 (1.38)	2.5 (1.81)	9.1 (3.48)	3.7 (2.11)	5.0 (3.03)	14.0 (6.08)	10.2 (3.72)	3.8 (2.10)	7.0 (4.85)	0.9 (2.13)	7.0 (4.94)	2.6 (3.69)
No engagement	10.8 (3.41)	18.4 (4.48)	33.7 (5.71)	22.9 (4.70)	13.9 (4.82)	12.1 (5.72)	24.6 (5.30)	7.6 (2.91)	12.3 (6.24)	31.3 (10.46)	35.4 (9.26)	29.5 (10.58)

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for youth out of high school up to 4 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 2,280 youth.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 3 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2005.

Postsecondary enrollment as the only form of engagement was more likely for youth with orthopedic impairments (25 percent) than for those in five of the other disability categories: youth with learning disabilities (5 percent,  $p < .001$ ), speech/language impairments (6 percent,  $p < .01$ ), emotional disturbances (7 percent,  $p < .01$ ), mental retardation (7 percent,  $p < .01$ ), or other health impairments (8 percent,  $p < .01$ ).

Youth with speech/language (41 percent) or other health impairments (42 percent) were more likely to report having been employed and to have enrolled in postsecondary education at some point since high school than were those with mental retardation (11 percent,  $p < .001$  for both comparisons), or multiple disabilities (16 percent,  $p < .01$  for both comparisons). Youth with hearing impairments (36 percent) or learning disabilities (34 percent) were more likely than those with mental retardation (11 percent,  $p < .001$  for both comparisons) or multiple disabilities (16 percent,  $p < .01$  for both comparisons) to have been employed and to have attended postsecondary school since leaving high school.

Engagement since high school in employment, postsecondary education, and job training did not differ significantly by disability category.

Engagement since high school in employment and training in job skills and other combinations of modes of engagement did not differ significantly by disability category.

### ***Differences in Engagement in Education, Employment, or Training for Employment by High School-Leaving Characteristics***

Eighty-seven percent of high school completers and 75 percent of noncompleters report ever having been engaged in employment, job training, or postsecondary education since leaving high school (table 50; not significant differences). Engagement rates ranged from 75 percent of youth who were out of high school between 1 and 2 years, to 82 percent of those who had left within the year, to 95 percent of youth who were out between 2 and 4 years (not significant differences). Mode of engagement did not vary significantly by high school-leaving characteristics.

Table 50. Modes of engagement within 4 years of leaving high school, by secondary-school-leaving status and years since leaving high school

	Completers	Non-completers	Less than 1 year	1 up to 2 years	2 up to 4 years
	Percent				
Employment only	34.4 (3.95)	42.8 (8.74)	46.0 (5.97)	28.4 (5.81)	29.7 (5.95)
Postsecondary education only	6.8 (2.09)	3.5 (3.24)	6.0 (2.84)	9.6 (3.79)	3.9 (2.52)
Employment and postsecondary education	33.2 (3.92)	22.4 (7.36)	21.5 (4.92)	29.1 (5.85)	43.2 (6.45)
Employment, postsecondary education, and job training	7.2 (2.15)	0.4 (1.11)	1.5 (1.45)	2.8 (2.12)	13.2 (4.41)
Employment and job training	3.0 (1.42)	3.6 (3.29)	3.0 (2.04)	2.2 (1.89)	3.5 (2.39)
Other combination of activities	2.1 (1.19)	2.3 (2.65)	4.3 (2.43)	3.1 (2.23)	1.8 (1.73)
No engagement	13.5 (2.84)	25.0 (7.65)	17.7 (4.57)	24.9 (5.57)	4.8 (2.78)

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for youth out of high school up to 4 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 2,280 youth.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 3 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2005.

## Demographic Differences in Engagement in Education, Employment, or Training for Employment

Youth with disabilities from households with higher incomes (more than \$50,000) were more likely to report ever having been productively engaged in education, employment, or job training than were those from households with incomes of \$25,000 or less (93 percent vs. 75 percent,  $p < .01$ ; table 51). White youth were more likely to report higher rates of engagement than African American youth (89 percent vs. 67 percent,  $p < .001$ ). The percentage of having been productively engaged did not differ significantly by gender.

Mode of engagement varied by some demographic and high school-leaving characteristics. Youth from families with incomes of more than \$50,000 were almost twice as likely as those from families with incomes of \$25,000 or less (43 percent vs. 21 percent,  $p < .01$ ) to have been employed and to have attended postsecondary school. Paid employment as the only mode of engagement was more frequent for White youth than for African American youth (40 percent vs. 16 percent,  $p < .001$ ).

Table 51. Modes of engagement within 4 years of leaving high school, by household income, race/ethnicity, and gender

	\$25,000 or less	\$25,001 to \$50,000	More than \$50,000	Race/Ethnicity			Gender	
				White	African American	Hispanic	Male	Female
Percent								
Employment only	36.6 (5.97)	41.8 (7.44)	29.8 (5.33)	39.9 (4.46)	16.4 (5.58)	41.5 (11.23)	40.2 (4.53)	26.6 (5.18)
Postsecondary education only	8.6 (3.48)	4.0 (2.96)	6.6 (2.89)	4.2 (1.83)	11.3 (4.77)	9.5 (6.68)	5.3 (2.07)	8.3 (3.24)
Employment and postsecondary education	20.7 (5.02)	27.0 (6.70)	42.5 (5.76)	34.4 (4.32)	24.7 (6.49)	21.0 (9.28)	30.1 (4.24)	32.6 (5.50)
Employment, postsecondary education, and job training	2.3 (1.86)	6.0 (3.58)	8.3 (3.21)	5.5 (2.07)	6.6 (3.74)	7.7 (6.08)	5.9 (2.18)	5.5 (2.67)
Employment and job training	3.8 (2.37)	2.7 (2.44)	2.7 (1.89)	3.0 (1.55)	2.0 (2.11)	4.5 (4.73)	2.8 (1.53)	3.2 (2.06)
Other combination of activities	3.2 (2.18)	1.7 (1.95)	3.5 (2.14)	2.1 (1.30)	5.9 (3.55)	4.8 (4.87)	2.0 (1.29)	5.2 (2.60)
No engagement	24.7 (5.35)	16.8 (5.64)	6.7 (2.91)	10.8 (2.82)	33.0 (7.08)	11.0 (7.13)	13.7 (3.18)	18.5 (4.56)

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for youth out of high school up to 4 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 2,880 youth.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 3 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2005.

## Summary

This chapter describes engagement in employment, postsecondary education, and job training since leaving high school, for youth with disabilities. The majority of youth with disabilities (85 percent) reported involvement in at least one of these activities post-high school. Approximately one-third (36 percent) had paid employment as their only mode of engagement. Three in 10 (31 percent) had been employed since leaving high school and also had been enrolled in postsecondary education. Others had been involved in other combinations of activities.

Engagement in work, school, or training since leaving high school varied by disability category. Youth with other health impairments (92 percent), learning disabilities (89 percent), visual (88 percent) or hearing impairments (86 percent) were more likely to report ever having been engaged than were those with mental retardation (66 percent). In addition, youth with other health impairments were more likely to ever have been engaged in productive activities than were those with multiple disabilities (65 percent), orthopedic impairments (75 percent), or emotional disturbances (77 percent).

Mode of engagement also varied by disability category. For example, paid employment as the only mode of engagement was more likely for youth with learning disabilities (40 percent) or emotional disturbances (35 percent) than for those in several other categories, including: orthopedic impairments (9 percent), visual impairments (10 percent), traumatic brain injuries (11 percent), hearing impairments (13 percent), deaf-blindness (14 percent), and autism (15 percent). Postsecondary enrollment as the only form of engagement was more likely for youth with orthopedic impairments (25 percent) than for those in five of the other categories, including: youth with learning disabilities (5 percent), speech/language impairments (6 percent), emotional disturbances (7 percent), mental retardation (7 percent), or other health impairments (8 percent).

Youth from households with higher incomes were more likely to have been productively engaged in education, employment, or job training than were their peers from lower-income families (93 percent vs. 75 percent). White youth were more likely to report higher rates of engagement than African American youth (89 percent vs. 67 percent).

The beginning chapters of this report have focused on the postsecondary education and employment experiences of youth with disabilities. The following chapters shift the focus from these two post-high school outcomes to household circumstances and social and community involvement.