

## **7. A National Picture of the Post-High School Experiences of Youth With Disabilities out of High School up to 4 Years**

NLTS2 provides a unique source of information to help in developing an understanding of the experiences of secondary school students with disabilities nationally in their early adult years. This report documents the postsecondary education, employment, independence, and social experiences of youth with disabilities who had been out of secondary school up to 4 years. The major findings that have emerged from these analyses are highlighted below.

### **Engagement in School, Work, and Preparation for Work**

By the time youth with disabilities had been out of high school up to 4 years, almost 9 in 10 (85 percent) were reported to have been productively engaged in postsecondary education, employment, or job training activities. Employment was the most common of these activities among out-of-high school youth with disabilities; close to three-quarters (72 percent) had been employed at some time since leaving high school. For more than one-third of youth (36 percent), employment was their only mode of engagement.

Youth in the general population were more likely to be employed at the time they were interviewed than were similar-age youth with disabilities (66 percent vs. 57 percent). On average, youth with disabilities who had been out of high school from 1 to 4 years had held two to three jobs during that time, and they had stayed at a job for a shorter period, on average, than those in the general population (10 months vs. 15 months). More than half (58 percent) of youth with disabilities worked full time, earning an hourly wage of \$8.20, on average. Thirty-three percent received paid vacation or sick leave benefits, 28 percent received health insurance, and 26 percent received retirement benefits from their employer. Wages and receipt of benefits did not differ significantly between youth with disabilities and their general population peers.

Almost one in five youth with disabilities (18 percent) were reported to be involved in both employment and postsecondary education concurrently—juggling the demands of going to school while working. Approximately two in five youth with disabilities (45 percent) had continued on to postsecondary education within 4 years of leaving high school, a rate exceeded by the 53 percent of their peers in the general population who had done so. Of those with disabilities who continued their education, 7 in 10 attended postsecondary school full time.

Postsecondary students with disabilities were more likely to enroll in 2-year or community colleges (32 percent) than in vocational, business, or technical schools (23 percent) or 4-year colleges (14 percent). Youth with disabilities were about as likely as those in the general population to be going to a 2-year or community college. However, youth in the general population were almost four times as likely as youth with disabilities to be enrolled in a 4-year college or university (29 percent vs. 8 percent). Students with disabilities who attended the various types of postsecondary institutions focused on a broad range of majors, with those at 2-year colleges being more likely to concentrate on an academic than a vocational course of study (57 percent vs. 29 percent).

Most students (89 percent) who were enrolled in postsecondary school at the time of the interview reported that they were working toward a diploma or certificate. Fewer students with

disabilities who left postsecondary school had graduated than initially anticipated doing so when they were in high school; 29 percent of postsecondary school leavers had graduated or completed their program.

## **Accommodations and Supports From Postsecondary Schools and Employers**

When students with disabilities leave high school and enter postsecondary schools, the responsibility for arranging for accommodations and supports shifts from a school to the student. To receive accommodations or supports for a disability from postsecondary schools, students first must disclose a disability to the schools. However, disclosure of a disability is voluntary. More than half (55 percent) of postsecondary students who were identified by their secondary schools as having a disability did not consider themselves to have a disability by the time they had transitioned to postsecondary schools. An additional 8 percent considered themselves to have a disability but chose not to disclose it to their postsecondary schools. Thirty-seven percent of postsecondary students with disabilities identified themselves as having a disability and had informed their postsecondary schools of their disability.

Less than one-quarter (24 percent) of postsecondary students who were identified as having a disability by their secondary schools were reported to receive any accommodations or supports from their postsecondary schools because of their disability. In contrast, when these postsecondary students were in high school, more than three times as many (84 percent) received some type of accommodation or support because of their disability.

Postsecondary students who were given assistance because of their disability received a range of accommodations and supports from their schools. Additional time to complete tests was the most frequently received type of assistance, received by 68 percent of those who received accommodations or supports.

Postsecondary students were reported to receive help with their schoolwork other than support received from their schools because of their disability. Approximately two in five (45 percent) received some type of help, including tutoring or help from a study center, irrespective of their disability. Forty-four percent sought help on their own outside of what their postsecondary schools provided. Forty-nine percent of students who received help with their schoolwork from these various sources reported that these supports were very useful, and 42 percent reported that they definitely were getting enough assistance.

For youth who were employed, 19 percent had employers who were reported to be aware of the youth's disability. Three percent of employed youth received accommodations from their employers because of a disability. For these youth, job accommodations included a variety of individual adaptations, ranging from specialized materials or technology, such as large-print materials or use of a TTY, to supports, such as interpreters and job coaches, to modifications to assignments and scheduling and supervision accommodations.

## **The Period of Early Adulthood**

Some youth with disabilities who had been out of high school up to 4 years had begun to pass several markers on the path to adulthood. However, others had yet to make these transitions in terms of residential independence, sexual relationships, formation of partnerships, parenthood, and financial independence.

With approximately one-quarter having lived independently at some point since leaving high school, youth with disabilities were about as likely as youth in the general population to have lived away from their parents' home. Those who lived at home tended to be less satisfied with their residential arrangement and were more than twice as likely as those who lived independently or semi-independently<sup>1</sup> to report that they would prefer living somewhere other than their current living arrangement (45 percent vs. 17 percent).

Many youth with disabilities were sexually active. By the time youth with disabilities had left high school and were 18 or older, 73 percent reported having had sexual intercourse. Eighty-seven percent of sexually active youth reported having used contraception the last time they had intercourse. Eleven percent of youth with disabilities had had or had fathered a child by the time they had been out of high school up to 4 years, and a similar percentage were married or living in a marriage-like relationship. An additional 7 percent were engaged to be married. Although 56 percent had savings accounts and 28 percent had a credit card in their own name, few had the resources to live independently or provide for a family. Eighty-nine percent had annual incomes of \$25,000 or less, and more than half (54 percent) earned less than \$5,000 per year.

### **Social and Interpersonal Networks**

Many youth with disabilities reported active friendships. Eighty-seven percent saw friends outside of school or organized activities at least weekly, and about one-quarter (28 percent) were reported to interact with friends almost daily. More than one in five (24 percent) used electronic means of communication (i.e., e-mail, chat rooms, instant messaging) once a day or more, and almost half (48 percent) did so at least weekly. Almost half (49 percent) of youth with disabilities who had been out of secondary school from 1 to 4 years had engaged in some kind of extracurricular activity in the preceding year, including taking lessons or classes outside of formal school enrollment, participating in a volunteer or community service activity, or belonging to an organized community or extracurricular group.

### **Negative Community Involvement**

Involvement in violence-related activities and with the criminal justice system are two negative aspects of community involvement. Approximately one-fifth (21 percent) of youth with disabilities who had been out of secondary school 1 to 4 years reported having been in a physical fight in the preceding 12 months. Additionally, 11 percent of youth 18 years or older reported having carried a weapon in the past 30 days. Two percent of young adults with disabilities reported belonging to a gang.

Criminal justice system involvement was more prevalent among youth with disabilities than among youth in the general population. Almost 3 in 10 out-of-high school youth with disabilities (28 percent) reportedly had been arrested at some point, more than twice the rate for youth in the general population (12 percent). Fifteen percent of youth with disabilities had spent a night in jail, and 17 percent had been on probation or parole. More than half (53 percent) had been stopped by police for other than a traffic violation.

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<sup>1</sup> Youth were considered to live independently if they lived alone, with a spouse, or with a roommate. Youth were considered to live semi-independently if they were living in a college dormitory, military housing, or group home.

## Variations by Disability Category

Youth varied widely by disability category in their post-high school experiences, as noted below.

**Youth with visual or hearing impairments.** Youth in these disability categories experienced patterns of post-high school outcomes quite different from those experienced by youth in many other categories. For example, youth with visual or hearing impairments were more likely to attend postsecondary school (78 percent and 72 percent, respectively) than were those with speech/language or other health impairments (55 percent), orthopedic impairments (54 percent), learning disabilities (47 percent), multiple disabilities (35 percent), emotional disturbances (34 percent), or mental retardation (27 percent).

Youth with visual or hearing impairments also were more likely to consider themselves to have a disability (83 percent and 71 percent, respectively) than were youth in the categories of orthopedic, other health, or speech/language impairment (69 percent, 43 percent, and 27 percent, respectively); mental retardation (60 percent); traumatic brain injury (57 percent); learning disability (43 percent); or emotional disturbance (37 percent). Postsecondary students with visual or hearing impairments were more likely to have disclosed that disability to their postsecondary schools (79 percent and 65 percent, respectively) than were youth with orthopedic, other health, or speech/language impairments (63 percent, 38 percent, and 18 percent, respectively); mental retardation (56 percent); traumatic brain injuries (52 percent); learning disabilities (36 percent); or emotional disturbances (21 percent). Youth with visual or hearing impairments also were more likely to have received accommodations and supports from their schools (58 percent and 56 percent, respectively) than were youth in the categories of traumatic brain injury; orthopedic impairment, other health, or speech/language impairment; mental retardation; learning disability; and emotional disturbance (ranging from 13 percent to 46 percent). Employed youth with visual or hearing impairments also were more likely to have disclosed a disability to employers (65 percent and 60 percent, respectively) compared with youth with other health impairments (29 percent), mental retardation (25 percent), emotional disturbances (18 percent), learning disabilities (16 percent), and speech/language impairments (15 percent).

More postsecondary students with visual or hearing impairments attended school full time (84 percent and 79 percent) than youth in the categories of autism (60 percent), multiple disabilities (51 percent), or traumatic brain injury (49 percent), leaving less time to work full time. Consistent with their higher postsecondary school attendance rate, youth with visual or hearing impairments were more likely to have lived in a semi-independent setting (e.g., a college dormitory; 18 percent and 13 percent, respectively) than were youth with emotional disturbances (5 percent), other health impairments (4 percent), multiple disabilities (3 percent), or mental retardation (less than 1 percent).

Youth with visual or hearing impairments also were more likely to use computers at least daily to e-mail, instant message, or participate in chat rooms (39 percent and 45 percent, respectively) compared with youth with emotional disturbances (19 percent) or mental retardation (12 percent). Youth with visual impairments also were more likely than these two categories of youth to have taken lessons or classes outside of formal school enrollment (52 percent vs. 19 percent and 9 percent, respectively). Youth with visual impairments also had a significantly higher rate of participation in volunteer or community service activities (67 percent) than did youth in seven disability categories: learning disability (25 percent); mental retardation

(20 percent); emotional disturbance (24 percent); hearing, orthopedic, and other health impairment (26 percent, 28 percent, and 24 percent, respectively); and autism (16 percent). Youth with visual impairments also were more likely to have belonged to an organized community or extracurricular group than youth with mental retardation (46 percent vs. 12 percent).

**Youth with emotional disturbances.** In contrast to the experiences of youth with sensory impairments, youth in several categories were more likely than those with emotional disturbances to have enrolled in postsecondary programs, including youth with visual or hearing impairments, autism, and other health, speech/language, or orthopedic impairments (34 percent vs. 78 percent, 72 percent, 58 percent, 55 percent, 54 percent, respectively). Youth with emotional disturbances who were enrolled in postsecondary programs were more likely than youth in several other disability categories to report that they did not consider themselves to have a disability; 63 percent of youth with emotional disturbances reported having that perception, compared with 31 percent of youth with autism; 29 percent and 17 percent, respectively, of youth with hearing or visual impairments; and 19 percent of youth with multiple disabilities. Thus, youth in several other categories were more likely than those with emotional disturbances to have informed their schools of a disability, including youth with visual, hearing, or orthopedic impairments; multiple disabilities, mental retardation, or autism (21 percent vs. 79 percent, 65 percent, 63 percent, 79 percent, 56 percent, and 55 percent, respectively). Youth with multiple disabilities or visual, hearing, or orthopedic impairments also were more likely than those with emotional disturbances to have received accommodations or supports because of disability (67 percent, 58 percent, 56 percent, and 40 percent, respectively vs. 13 percent).

Employment was more likely to have been their only mode of productive engagement in the community (35 percent) than was the case for youth with autism (15 percent); deaf/blindness (14 percent); hearing, visual, or orthopedic impairments (13 percent, 10 percent, and 9 percent, respectively); or traumatic brain injuries (11 percent). Youth with emotional disturbances who were employed were more likely to work full time (56 percent) than youth with orthopedic impairments (38 percent), autism (22 percent), or visual impairments (23 percent).

Youth with emotional disturbances also were more likely to report ever having had sexual intercourse (78 percent) compared with youth in the categories of autism (21 percent); orthopedic, visual, hearing, orthopedic, or other health impairments (26 percent, 41 percent, 45 percent, 56 percent, and 61 percent, respectively); multiple disabilities (39 percent); or mental retardation (58 percent). They also had a pattern of greater involvement in violence-related activities. They were more likely to report having been involved in physical fights (31 percent) than youth with speech/language impairments (8 percent), mental retardation (4 percent), or autism (5 percent) and to report having carried a weapon than youth with orthopedic impairments or autism (20 percent vs. 3 percent and 2 percent, respectively).

Involvement with the criminal justice system also was more common for youth with emotional disturbances than those in many other categories. They were more likely to have been stopped by police other than for a traffic violation (82 percent) than youth in all other categories except traumatic brain injury (17 percent to 54 percent) and to have spent a night in jail (39 percent) than youth in all other categories (2 percent to 18 percent). Youth with emotional disturbances were more likely to have been arrested (60 percent) than youth in all of the other categories, whose arrest rates ranged from 3 percent to 27 percent. They also were more likely to

have been on probation or parole (39 percent) than youth in all other categories (1 percent to 20 percent).

**Youth with mental retardation or multiple disabilities.** These youth experienced yet another pattern of post-high school outcomes. For example, youth with other health impairments were more likely than either youth with mental retardation or multiple disabilities to report ever having been engaged in school, work, or preparation for work since leaving high school (92 percent vs. 66 percent and 65 percent). Youth with learning disabilities or visual or hearing impairments also significantly exceeded youth with mental retardation in their rates of engagement (89 percent, 88 percent, and 86 percent, respectively). Additionally, youth with multiple disabilities who were employed were more likely than youth with speech/language impairments, learning disabilities, or emotional disturbances to report that employers were aware of their disabilities (54 percent vs. 15 percent, 16 percent, and 18 percent, respectively), and their employers were more likely to have provided them with disability-related accommodations (31 percent) than youth with learning disabilities (1 percent) or speech/language impairments or emotional disturbances (2 percent).

Similarly, in the postsecondary education domain, students with multiple disabilities were more likely to have reported considering themselves as having a disability than those with speech/language impairments or emotional disturbances (81 percent vs. 27 percent and 37 percent, respectively). Students with multiple disabilities also were more likely to receive accommodations or supports because of a disability than were those with speech/language impairments, emotional disturbances, or other health impairments (67 percent vs. 10 percent, 13 percent, and 19 percent, respectively).

In the social domain, 33 percent of youth with multiple disabilities reported seeing friends informally at least weekly. This rate was exceeded by youth in the categories of learning disability and visual impairment (92 percent), emotional disturbance (84 percent), and speech/language, hearing, and other health impairment (88 percent, 82 percent, and 79 percent, respectively). At least daily electronic communication was more commonly reported for youth with speech/language, hearing, visual, orthopedic, or other health impairments (33 percent, 39 percent, 45 percent, 46 percent, 29 percent, respectively) than for youth with mental retardation (12 percent). Youth with visual, hearing, or other health impairments also were more likely than youth with mental retardation to have belonged to an organized community group, taken extracurricular lessons or classes, or taken part in volunteer service activities (82 percent, 59 percent, and 58 percent, respectively, vs. 28 percent). Approximately three-fourths or more of youth with learning disabilities (76 percent); speech/language, hearing, or other health impairments (80 percent, 79 percent, and 75 percent, respectively); or traumatic brain injury (82 percent) were reported to have driving privileges, as were 64 percent of youth with emotional disturbances, significantly higher rates than the 36 percent and 35 percent of youth with multiple disabilities or mental retardation, respectively, who had a driver's license or learner's permit.

Regarding financial independence, youth in most disability categories were more likely to have used several types of financial tools than were youth with mental retardation. Compared with youth with mental retardation, youth with hearing or other health impairments were more likely to have a savings account (65 percent and 66 percent, respectively, vs. 41 percent), a checking account (63 percent and 58 percent, respectively, vs. 26 percent), or credit card (37 percent and 36 percent, respectively, vs. 9 percent), and those with visual or speech/language

impairments or learning disabilities (71 percent, 57 percent, and 49 percent, respectively) were more likely to have a checking account (71 percent, 57 percent, and 49 percent, respectively) or credit card (51 percent, 34 percent, and 31 percent). Youth with orthopedic impairments also were more likely to have a checking account than those with mental retardation (57 percent vs. 26 percent). Also, youth in several categories were more likely than those with multiple disabilities to have lived independently; 29 percent of youth with learning disabilities, 22 percent of youth with emotional disturbances, and 24 percent of youth with speech/language impairments had done so, compared with 5 percent of those with multiple disabilities.

Despite these disability category differences, there were youth within each disability category who experienced positive transition outcomes. From 65 percent to 92 percent of those in every disability category had engaged in school, work, or training for work since leaving high school. With the exception of youth with multiple disabilities, more than half of youth in each category (59 percent to 92 percent) saw friends at least weekly, and from 59 percent to 81 percent were registered to vote.

In addition, there were some dimensions on which significant disability category differences were not apparent. For example, there were no significant differences across categories in the percentages of youth enrolled in vocational, business, or technical schools, and the average hourly wage did not differ by disability category.

### **Differences in Experiences by High School Completion Status**

High school completers (those who graduated, received a certificate of attendance or completion, or who passed a high school exit exam or completed a GED program) were more likely to experience several positive post-high school outcomes than were the approximately 20 percent of youth with disabilities who left high school without finishing. High school completers were three times as likely as noncompleters to have enrolled in a postsecondary school (51 percent vs. 17 percent). Although completers did not differ significantly from noncompleters in their rate of living independently, they were more likely to have lived in a semi-independent setting (e.g., a college dormitory, 6 percent vs. 0 percent), which is consistent with their having been more likely to continue their education at the postsecondary level. School completion status was not significantly related to rates of employment; however, school completers were more likely than those who had not finished high school to use financial tools, such as savings or checking accounts or credit cards. Youth who had completed high school were approximately three times as likely to have a checking account or credit card (53 percent vs. 13 percent and 32 percent vs. 8 percent), and 60 percent of youth who had completed high school had a savings account, compared with 35 percent of youth who had not completed school.

High school completers and noncompleters differed significantly from each other in some forms of social and community involvement, but not all. For example, they did not differ in their likelihood of seeing friends frequently, participating in volunteer or community service activities, or being involved in violence-related activities. However, high school completers were almost three times as likely as noncompleters to have had some form of community participation (55 percent vs. 20 percent), and they were more than six times as likely as noncompleters to take extracurricular lessons or classes (26 percent, vs. 4 percent). Seventy-five percent of high school completers had earned driving privileges, and 72 percent were reported to be registered to vote; 38 percent of noncompleters had each of these forms of community participation. Youth who left

school without finishing were more likely to have been involved with the criminal justice system, including being stopped by police other than for a traffic violation (73 percent vs. 48 percent), arrested (49 percent vs. 22 percent), and put in jail overnight (33 percent vs. 11 percent).

## **Demographic Differences in Post-High School Experiences**

Youth with disabilities differed in many respects other than the nature of their disability or their school completion status, including differences in gender, race/ethnicity, and household income. Differences were apparent across youth demographic characteristics for some post-high school outcomes but not for others.

Postsecondary school enrollment; engagement in school, work, or training for work; and most aspects of independence, including residential arrangements, marital status, having driving privileges, and using personal financial management tools, were similar for young men and women with disabilities. However, some gender differences were apparent. Males were more likely than females to work full time (68 percent vs. 35 percent) and to work in skilled labor positions (16 percent vs. 0 percent) and gardening and grounds maintenance jobs (9 percent vs. 0 percent). Involvement in violence-related activities and with the criminal justice system also was more prevalent for males than females. Males were more likely than females to report carrying a weapon in the preceding 30 days (17 percent vs. 1 percent), to have been stopped by police other than for a traffic violation (59 percent vs. 38 percent), and to have been arrested (33 percent vs. 17 percent).

Youth with disabilities who came from households with different income levels were similar in several aspects of their post-high school experiences. For example, social and community involvement, residential independence, parenting status, and involvement in violence-related activities or with the criminal justice system did not differ significantly by household income. However, youth from wealthier families were more likely than their peers to experience several positive outcomes. Those from households with incomes of more than \$50,000 were almost twice as likely than their peers from the lowest income households (\$25,000 or less) to have enrolled in postsecondary school (57 percent vs. 30 percent), to have been employed since leaving high school (81 percent vs. 61 percent), and to have been productively engaged in education, employment, or job training since leaving high school (93 percent vs. 75 percent). They also were more likely to have a savings account (69 percent vs. 40 percent), a checking account (60 percent vs. 29 percent), or a credit card (44 percent vs. 11 percent). Additionally, youth with disabilities in the highest income group were more likely to be reported to have electronic communication at least daily than youth from households in the lowest income group (33 percent vs. 13 percent), and youth with disabilities from the middle and the upper income groups were significantly more likely to have driving privileges than youth from households with incomes of \$25,000 or less (75 percent and 83 percent, respectively, vs. 51 percent).

Similarities and differences also were apparent for youth with different racial/ethnic backgrounds. There were no significant differences across racial/ethnic groups in the likelihood of having been enrolled in postsecondary school, in social or community involvement, in parenting status, and in involvement in violence-related activities or with the criminal justice system. However, White youth were more likely to have been employed since high school and at

the time of the interview than their African American peers (80 percent and 63 percent vs. 47 percent and 35 percent) and to have a checking account and driver's license (55 percent and 79 percent vs. 24 percent and 49 percent). Employers of White youth were more likely to be reported to be aware of the youth's disability than were employers of African American or Hispanic youth (24 percent vs. 6 percent and 5 percent), and White youth were more likely than Hispanic youth to live independently (29 percent vs. 10 percent).

### **Cautions in Interpreting Findings**

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

- The analyses are descriptive; none of the findings should be interpreted as implying causal relationships. Nor should differences between disability categories be interpreted as reflecting disability differences alone because of the confounding of disability and other demographic factors.
- Although discussions in the report emphasize only differences that reach a level of statistical significance of at least  $p < .01$ , the large number of comparisons made in this report will result in some apparently significant differences, even at this level, being “false positives”—that is, type I errors. Readers also are cautioned that the meaningfulness of differences reported here cannot be derived from their statistical significance.

This report provides a national picture of the post-high school experiences of youth with disabilities who had been out of high school up to 4 years, how these experiences differed across disability categories and demographic groups, and, when data are available, how they compared with those of youth in the general population.