

4. Productive Engagement in the Community

According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004), one of the primary purposes of special education is to prepare students “for further education, employment, and independent living” [20 U.S.C. § 1400(33)(c)(1)]. At the time they were in high school, the majority of young adults with disabilities included in this report had employment and postsecondary education as primary transition goals (Newman et al. 2009; Wagner et al. 2007). Research and policies related to transition from high school to early adulthood have primarily focused on employment and postsecondary school attendance (e.g., Johnson et al. 2002; Savage 2005; Wehman and Evans Getzel 2005); improving high school transition planning, services, and strategies (Carter et al. 2009; Guy et al. 2009); and promoting the career awareness of young adults with disabilities (Carter et al. 2010b). Other transition-related topics have included research into outcomes for young adults who differ in their primary disability category (Carter et al. 2010a; Neece, Kraemer, and Blacher 2009), gender (Powers et al. 2008), and cultural or linguistic background (Fabian 2007; Povenmire et al. 2010).

Chapters 2 and 3 of this report describe separately involvement in two important post-high school outcomes—employment and postsecondary education. However, some young adults engage in one of these activities but not in the other. For example, some might spend their early post-high school years attending postsecondary school but are not employed. To provide a broader understanding of the extent to which young adults are productively engaged in their communities, this chapter focuses on a broader measure of successful transition—the combination and the overlap of these two types of engagement—employment and 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 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, young adults 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.⁷⁸
- Education—attended a vocational, business, or technical school; a 2-year, junior, or community college; or a 4-year college or university.
- 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 Employment and Postsecondary Education or Training for Employment at the Time of the Interview and Since Leaving High School

At the time of the Wave 5 interview, 65 percent of young adults with disabilities reported having been productively engaged in postsecondary education, training for employment, and/or employment (figure 33). Forty-eight percent of young adults with disabilities reported having paid employment as their only mode of engagement at the time of the interview. Nine percent of post-high school young adults with disabilities reported being involved in both employment and education concurrently at the time of the interview—juggling the demands of going to school while working. Postsecondary education was the only mode of engagement at the time of the interview for 5 percent of young adults with disabilities. Two percent were involved in employment and job training concurrently, and 1 percent of young adults with disabilities reported “other” modes of engagement. Other modes included involvement in job training only, involvement in postsecondary education and job training, and involvement in employment, job training and postsecondary education.

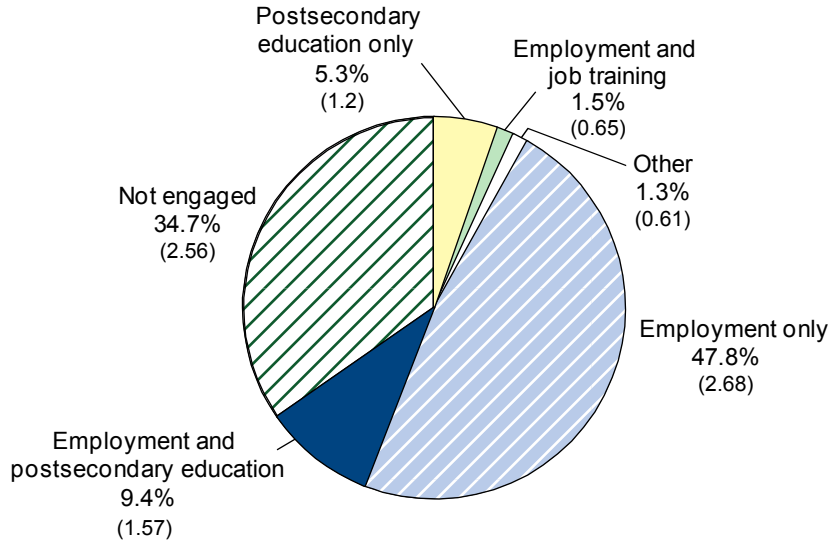
A larger proportion of young adults with disabilities (94 percent) reported having been productively engaged in postsecondary education or training for employment and employment at some time since leaving high school (figure 34). Thirty percent of young adults with disabilities reported having paid employment as their only mode of engagement. Others had been employed since leaving high school and had concurrently been involved in other activities, including

- postsecondary education (42 percent);
- postsecondary education and job training (14 percent); or
- job training (5 percent).

⁷⁸ 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 young adults with disabilities reported having been competitively employed and/or enrolled in postsecondary school within up to 8 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.

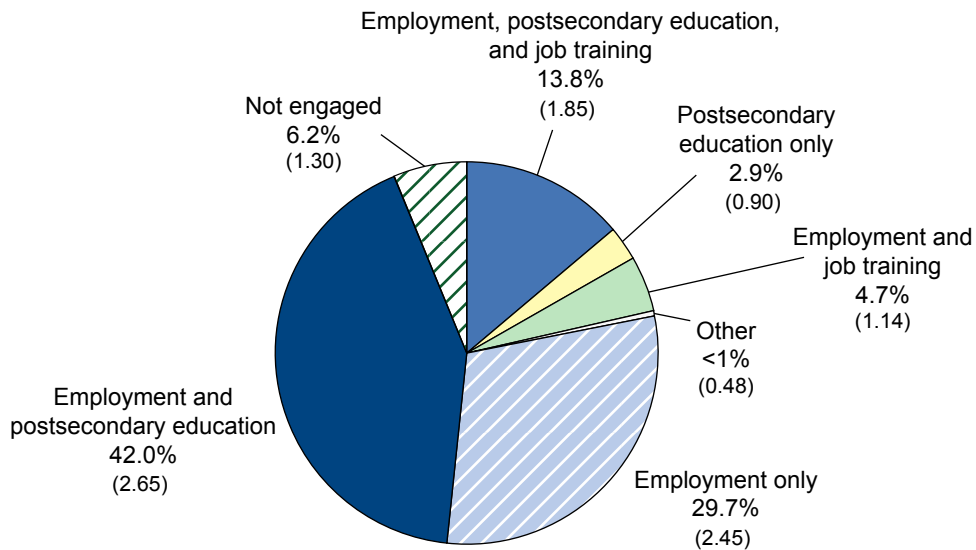
Postsecondary education was the only mode of engagement since high school for 3 percent of young adults with disabilities. Less than 1 percent of young adults with disabilities reported “other” modes of engagement. Other modes included job training only, and postsecondary education and job training.

Figure 33. Modes of engagement of young adults with disabilities at the time of the interview



NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 8 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 4,800 young adults with disabilities. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 5 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2009.

Figure 34. Modes of engagement of young adults with disabilities since leaving high school



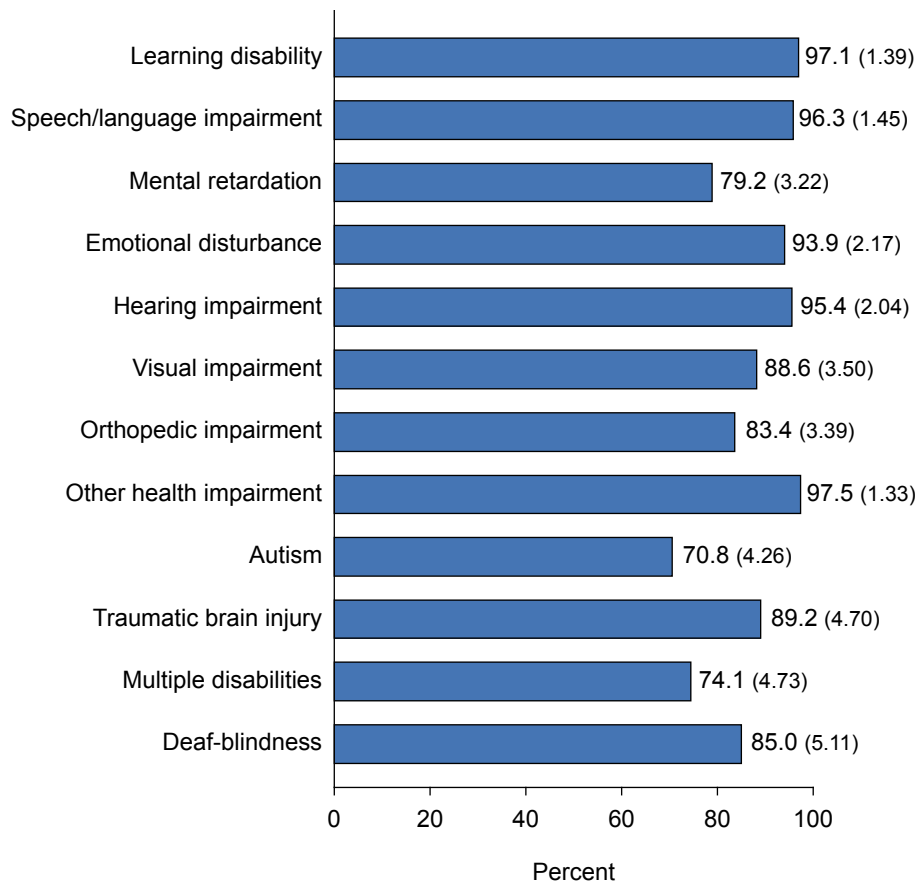
NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults out of high school up to 8 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 4,800 young adults with disabilities. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 5 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2009.

Disability Differences in Engagement in Employment and Postsecondary Education or Training for Employment Since Leaving High School

Engagement in employment and postsecondary education or training since leaving high school varied by disability category, ranging from 71 percent to 98 percent (figure 35). Young adults in several disability categories were more likely to report ever having been engaged than were those with autism. Ninety-eight percent of those with other health impairments, 97 percent of those with learning disabilities, 96 percent of those with speech and language impairments, 95 percent of those with hearing impairments, and 94 percent of those with emotional disabilities had ever been engaged, compared with 71 percent of young adults with autism ($p < .001$ for all comparisons)

Young adults with other health impairments also were more likely ever to have been engaged in productive activities (98 percent) than were those with multiple disabilities (74 percent), mental retardation (79 percent), and orthopedic impairments (83 percent, $p < .001$ for all comparisons).

Figure 35. Engagement in education, employment, or training for employment of young adults, by disability category since leaving high school



NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults out of high school up to 8 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 4,800 young adults with disabilities. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 5 parent interview and youth interview/survey, 2009.

Modes of engagement also varied by disability category (table 59). Thirty-nine percent of young adults with mental retardation and 38 percent of those with emotional disturbances were more likely than those in several other categories to have paid employment as their only mode of engagement: 13 percent of those with orthopedic impairments ($p < .001$ for both comparisons), 15 percent of those with visual impairments ($p < .001$ for both comparisons), 16 percent of young adults with autism ($p < .001$ for both comparisons), and 17 percent of those with hearing impairments ($p < .001$ for both comparisons).

Young adults with learning disabilities were more likely to have employment as their only mode of engagement (28 percent) than were those with orthopedic impairments (14 percent, $p < .01$).

Table 59. Modes of engagement of young adults, by disability category since leaving high 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											
Employment only	27.8 (3.70)	25.5 (3.36)	39.2 (3.88)	37.6 (4.40)	16.7 (3.64)	14.9 (4.02)	12.9 (3.06)	27.5 (3.80)	16.3 (3.46)	25.3 (6.58)	28.9 (4.89)	19.2 (5.64)
Postsecondary education only	2.9 (1.39)	2.7 (1.25)	1.9 (1.08)	2.4 (1.39)	3.3 (1.74)	8.5 (3.07)	12.8 (3.05)	1.9 (1.16)	2.8 (1.55)	7.1 (3.89)	6.0 (2.56)	8.0 (3.88)
Employment and postsecondary education	47.7 (4.13)	53.3 (3.84)	15.5 (2.87)	37.1 (4.38)	45.7 (4.86)	39.0 (5.37)	33.2 (4.29)	46.8 (4.25)	20.6 (3.79)	35.9 (7.26)	13.3 (3.67)	27.2 (6.37)
Employment, postsecondary education, and job training	14.3 (2.89)	11.0 (2.41)	11.8 (2.56)	12.4 (2.99)	24.4 (4.19)	20.5 (4.45)	13.0 (3.07)	16.3 (3.14)	16.7 (3.50)	16.2 (5.58)	9.8 (3.21)	14.3 (5.01)
Employment and job training	4.0 (1.62)	3.7 (1.45)	9.3 (2.31)	3.4 (1.64)	3.9 (1.89)	2.8 (1.82)	8.2 (2.50)	4.8 (1.82)	8.4 (2.66)	3.3 (2.70)	10.4 (3.30)	9.1 (4.12)
Other combination of activities	0.4 (0.52)	0.1 (0.24)	1.6 (1.00)	1.1 (0.95)	1.4 (1.15)	3.0 (1.88)	3.3 (1.63)	0.3 (0.47)	6.0 (2.23)	1.3 (1.71)	5.8 (2.52)	7.3 (3.73)
No engagement	2.9 (2.41)	3.7 (1.94)	20.8 (3.72)	6.1 (2.28)	4.6 (2.66)	11.4 (3.9)	16.6 (3.71)	2.5 (2.13)	29.2 (4.4)	10.8 (5.39)	25.9 (5.07)	15.0 (6.23)

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 8 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 4,800 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 5 parent interview and young adult interview/survey, 2009.

Postsecondary school enrollment as the only form of engagement was more likely for young adults with orthopedic impairments (13 percent) than for those in five of the other disability categories: young adults with learning disabilities (3 percent, $p < .01$), speech/language impairments (3 percent, $p < .01$), hearing impairments (3 percent, $p < .01$), emotional disturbances (2 percent, $p < .01$), mental retardation (2 percent, $p < .001$), and other health impairments (2 percent, $p < .001$).

Young adults with speech/language impairments (53 percent) or learning disabilities (48 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 autism (21 percent), mental retardation (16 percent), or multiple disabilities (13 percent), ($p < .001$ for all

comparisons). Young adults with other health impairments (47 percent) or hearing impairments (46 percent) were more likely than those with autism (21 percent, $p < .001$) mental retardation (16 percent, $p < .001$ for both comparisons) or multiple disabilities (13 percent, $p < .001$ for both comparisons) to have been employed and to have attended postsecondary school since leaving high school.

Engagement since high school in employment and postsecondary education and job training did not differ significantly by disability category, nor did engagement since high school in employment and training in job skills or other combinations of modes of engagement.

Differences in Engagement in Employment and Postsecondary Education or Training for Employment by Years Since Leaving High School

Both the overall engagement rate in employment, postsecondary education, and/or training and engagement in the various combinations of modes of engagement did not vary significantly by years since leaving high school (table 60).

Table 60. Modes of engagement in education, employment, or training for employment of young adults with disabilities, by years since leaving high school

	Less than 3 years	3 up to 5 years	5 up to 8 years
	Percent		
Engaged in at least one of the three modes of engagement	85.3 (4.41)	93.8 (2.28)	95.8 (1.49)
Employment only	27.7 (5.57)	30.2 (4.33)	29.7 (3.40)
Postsecondary education only	4.4 (2.55)	1.9 (1.29)	3.3 (1.33)
Employment and postsecondary education	38.5 (6.05)	42.2 (4.66)	42.4 (3.68)
Employment, postsecondary education, and job training	9.5 (3.65)	12.8 (3.15)	15.5 (2.69)
Employment and job training	4.1 (2.47)	6.2 (2.28)	3.9 (1.44)
Other combination of activities	1.0 (1.24)	0.3 (0.67)	1.0 (0.74)
No engagement	14.7 (4.41)	6.2 (2.28)	4.2 (1.49)

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 8 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on based on a sample of approximately 4,800 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 5 parent interview and young adult interview/survey, 2009.

Differences in Engagement in Employment and Postsecondary Education or Training for Employment by Highest Level of Educational Attainment

As would be expected by the definition of the engagement variable, all young adults with disabilities who had completed postsecondary education or had attended some postsecondary school reported engagement in employment, postsecondary education, or training for employment (table 61). Young adults who had attended and/or completed postsecondary school were more likely to have been productively engaged than were those who had not completed high school (77 percent, $p < .001$ for both comparisons) or who had finished their high school programs (90 percent, $p < .001$ for both comparisons).

Table 61. Modes of engagement in education, employment, or training for employment of young adults with disabilities, by highest level of educational attainment since leaving high school

	High school non-completer	High school completer	Some post-secondary school	Post-secondary school completion
	Percent			
Engaged in at least one of the three modes of engagement	76.5 (6.48)	89.7 (2.53)	100.0	100.0
Employment only	63.4 (7.36)	60.4 (4.06)	0.0	0.0
Postsecondary education only	2.2 (2.24)	0.7 (0.69)	6.5 (2.49)	2.4 (1.89)
Employment and postsecondary education	6.2 (3.69)	14.2 (2.9)	76.2 (4.30)	59.9 (6.06)
Employment, postsecondary education, and job training	0.5 (1.08)	2.9 (1.39)	15.6 (3.66)	37.2 (5.97)
Employment and job training	4.1 (1.86)	11.0 (1.51)	0.0 (1.64)	0.0 (2.33)
Other combination of activities	0.0	0.5 (0.59)	1.6 (0.95)	0.5 (0.87)
No engagement	23.5 (6.48)	10.3 (2.53)	0.0	0.0

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 8 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on a sample of approximately 4,800 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 5 parent interview and young adult interview/survey, 2009.

Demographic Differences in Engagement in Employment and Postsecondary Education or Training for Employment

Modes of engagement varied by income levels. Young adults with disabilities from families with incomes of more than \$50,000 were more likely than those from families with incomes of \$25,000 or less to have been employed and to have attended postsecondary school (50 percent vs. 32 percent, $p < .01$; table 62). The modes of engagement of young adults with disabilities did not vary significantly by parent's household income, race/ethnicity or gender.

Table 62. Modes of engagement of young adults with disabilities by parents' household income and young adults' race/ethnicity and gender

	\$25,000 or less	\$25,001 to \$50,000	More than \$50,000	Race/Ethnicity			Male	Female
				White	African American	Hispanic		
Percent								
Engaged in at least one of the three modes of engagement	90.0 (2.8)	94.4 (2.53)	96.9 (1.42)	95.3 (1.36)	90.0 (3.62)	92.2 (4.48)	94.1 (1.57)	93.4 (2.26)
Employment only	34.2 (4.42)	30.8 (5.07)	24.8 (3.53)	31.2 (2.97)	26.2 (5.30)	24.5 (7.19)	32.2 (3.11)	25.3 (3.96)
Postsecondary education only	4.5 (1.93)	1.6 (1.38)	2.3 (1.23)	2.3 (0.96)	2.2 (1.77)	7.3 (4.35)	2.5 (1.07)	3.7 (1.72)
Employment and postsecondary education	32.2 (4.35)	44.6 (5.46)	49.7 (4.09)	45.3 (3.19)	37.4 (5.84)	33.2 (7.87)	41.2 (3.27)	43.0 (4.51)
Employment, postsecondary education, and job training	12.0 (3.03)	10.7 (3.40)	16.6 (3.04)	11.2 (2.02)	16.3 (4.45)	23.5 (7.09)	13.5 (2.27)	14.4 (3.2)
Employment and job training	6.4 (2.28)	5.6 (2.53)	2.8 (1.35)	4.8 (1.37)	6.2 (2.91)	3.0 (2.85)	4.2 (1.33)	5.7 (2.11)
Other combination of activities	0.7 (0.78)	1.1 (1.15)	0.7 (0.68)	0.6 (0.50)	1.6 (1.51)	0.8 (1.49)	0.5 (0.47)	1.3 (1.03)
No engagement	10.0 (2.8)	5.6 (2.53)	3.1 (1.42)	4.7 (1.36)	10.0 (3.62)	7.8 (4.48)	5.9 (1.57)	6.6 (2.26)

NOTE: Standard errors are in parentheses. Findings are reported for young adults with disabilities out of high school up to 8 years. NLTS2 percentages are weighted population estimates based on samples that range from approximately 4,720 to 4,800 young adults with disabilities.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Special Education Research, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2), Wave 5 parent interview and young adult interview/survey, 2009.

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