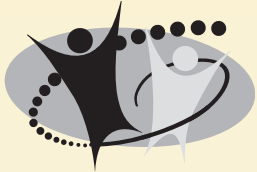


# NLTS2 Data Brief

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National Center on Secondary  
Education and Transition  
Creating Opportunities for Youth With  
Disabilities to Achieve Successful Futures



NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL  
TRANSITION STUDY 2



NLTS2 is being  
conducted by SRI International

## The Transition Planning Process

By Renée Cameto

The transition from school to young adulthood can present challenges for youth served by special education, but the transition period also entails opportunities for educators and practitioners to provide young people with experiences that lead to success. In the two decades since *transition planning* entered the special education lexicon, changes in service delivery have helped shape the implementation of the transition planning process in schools for students with disabilities (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004). One outcome of the transition requirements included in IDEA '97 has been to focus attention on how students' educational programs can be planned to help them achieve their goals for life after secondary school and how postschool services can be identified that will promote students' successful movement from school to young adulthood. This NLTS2 Data Brief provides a national view of the transition planning process undertaken during high school with and for youth with disabilities as they prepare for life after school. Information reported here comes from a mail survey of school personnel who knew the 2001-02 school programs of study members well. Findings from NLTS2<sup>1</sup> generalize to youth with disabilities nationally who were 13 to 16 years old in December 2000, to each of 12 federal disability categories, and to each age group within the age range.

School staff report that planning for the transition to adult life occurs for almost 90% of students with disabilities. The percentages of students for whom this planning has taken place increases steadily across the age range, from 75% of 14-year-olds to 96% of 17- and 18-year-olds. Among students with disabilities who have transition planning in place, about two-thirds begin the process by age 14<sup>2</sup>, whereas 20% do so when they are 15 years old and 14% when they are 16 or older.

### Students' Transition Goals

Students with disabilities have postschool goals that are similar to those of other young adults, including continuing education and training, attaining employment, enhancing social competencies, and increasing independence. Accord-

<sup>1</sup> NLTS2 has a nationally representative sample of more than 11,000 youth who on December 1, 2000, were ages 13 through 16, receiving special education, and in at least seventh grade. Information from NLTS2 is weighted to represent youth with disabilities nationally as a group, as well as youth in each of the 12 federal special education disability categories used in NLTS2.

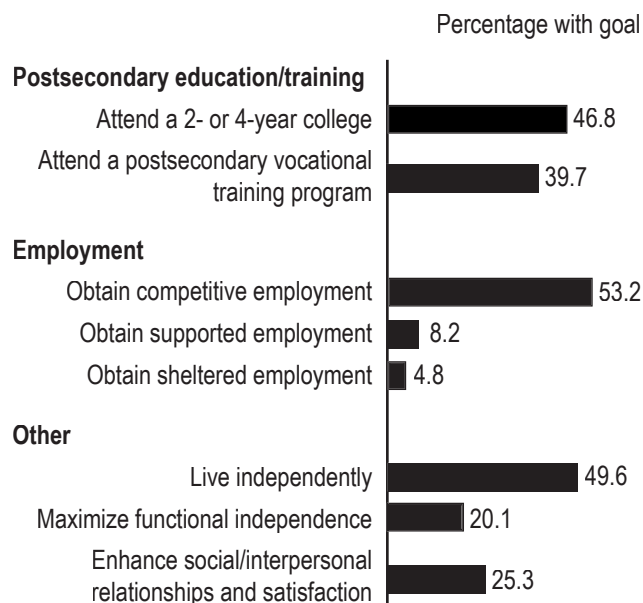
<sup>2</sup> Some students with disabilities represented in NLTS2 may not have begun receiving special education services, and therefore were not subject to transition planning, until age 15 or later.

ing to school staff, more than 45% look forward to attending 2- or 4-year college, and 40% plan on postsecondary vocational training (Exhibit 1). About half of students with disabilities have competitive employment as a primary transition goal; small proportions of students are working toward supported (8%) or sheltered employment (5%). The school programs of many students with disabilities reflect their goals; school staff report that about three-fourths of students with disabilities have IEPs or transition plans that specify a course of study or kinds of classes that will help them meet their postschool goals. In addition to academic or vocational aspirations, living independently is a transition goal for half of students with disabilities, with about one in five students working toward maximizing their functional independence and one in four working on enhancing their social or interpersonal relationships.

## Participants in Transition Planning

Effective transition planning is characterized by the consistent involvement and participation of appropriate individuals, including parents and

*Exhibit 1: Students' Post-High-School Goals*



Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 student's school program survey.  
Note: Includes only students with transition planning.

students, together with regular and special education personnel and others from agencies outside the school (Hasazi, Furney, & DeStefano, 1999; Johnson & Sharpe, 2000; National Council on Disability, 2000, NICHCY, 2000).

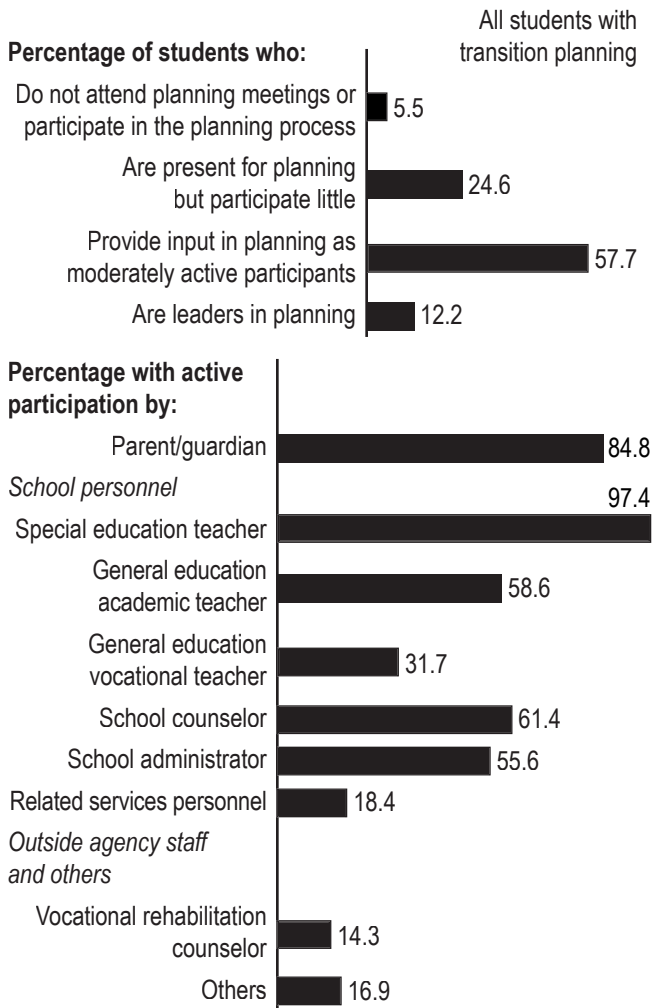
Virtually all students with disabilities with transition planning (97%) have a special educator actively involved in that process, and 85% have parents who participate (Exhibit 2). All but about 6% of these students participate in the process in some way, although only about 70% do so actively by providing input (58%) or by taking a leadership role (12%).

A variety of other individuals participate in the transition planning process, including general education academic and vocational teachers, other school staff, and representatives from outside organizations. About 60% of students have a general education academic teacher who is actively involved in transition planning, even though about 70% take general education classes in a given semester. General education teachers are significantly more likely to participate actively in transition planning for students who have 2- or 4-year college as a postschool goal than for students who do not have a college goal (67% vs. 49%). Fewer general education vocational teachers are actively involved (32%), although 43% of students with disabilities take general education vocational classes in a given semester (Cameto & Wagner, 2003).

General education vocational teachers are significantly more likely to participate actively in transition planning when students plan to attend a postsecondary vocational training program than when they do not (40% vs. 27%). They also are actively involved in transition planning for significantly larger proportions of 17- and 18-year-old students than for younger students (40% vs. 20% for 14-year-olds); this finding is not surprising, given that vocational education course-taking increases significantly across the grade levels (from 55% of middle school students to 68% of high school juniors and seniors [Cameto & Wagner, 2003]).

School counselors and school administrators are actively involved in transition planning for 61% and 56% of students with disabilities, respectively. The active involvement of school administrators is more likely for older students (63% among 17- and 18-year-olds vs. 44% among 15-year-olds).

**Exhibit 2: Active Participants in Transition Planning for Students with Transition Planning**



Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 student's school program survey.  
 Note: The category "Others" includes staff of the Social Security Administration or other outside agencies, employers, representatives of postsecondary education institutions, and advocates or consultants.

Related service personnel are less likely than other school personnel to be actively involved in transition planning. Eighteen percent of students have related services personnel participate in their transition planning, although parents of 59% of students with disabilities report the receipt of related services from their schools (Levine, Marder, & Wagner, 2004). However, when students' postschool goals include obtaining supported or sheltered employment, maximizing functional independence, or improving social and interpersonal skills, related service personnel are more likely to participate ac-

tively in transition planning than when students do not have these goals. For example, 43% of students with a postschool goal of obtaining supported employment have related services personnel actively participate in their transition planning, whereas those personnel participate in planning for only 16% of students who do not have this goal.

According to school staff, the frequency of participation in transition planning of personnel from organizations outside the school is much lower than that of school staff; but, among the organizations that could be involved in transition planning, students are more likely to have the involvement of a vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselor (14%) than personnel from any other single type of outside organization. Students with goals of obtaining sheltered employment or maximizing functional independence are twice as likely as students who do not have these goals to have a VR counselor or participate actively in their transition planning (28% vs. 14%). Students with goals of obtaining supported or sheltered employment, maximizing functional independence, or enhancing social and interpersonal relationships also are more likely to have the active participation of personnel from an outside organization (e.g., a social service agency or advocate) than students who do not have these transition goals. The likelihood of participation by staff from outside organizations increases for older students as they approach the time of transition to adult life. Fewer than 1 in 10 students up to age 16 are reported to have a VR counselor actively involved in transition planning, compared with 1 in 4 students who are 17 or 18 years old.

### Transition Preparation and Supports

Transition planning involves identifying measurable postsecondary goals, transition services, and a course of study that will help students achieve those transition goals. Students with disabilities can receive further assistance through instruction that focuses on transition planning skills; such instruction can help students understand their interests and abilities and make informed decisions about their future.

**Course of study and instruction in transition planning.** According to school staff, about three-fourths of students with disabilities have IEPs or transition plans that specify the course of study or kinds of classes they should pursue to meet their postschool transition goals (Exhibit 3). Almost two-thirds of students are reported to have received instruction in transition planning skills. However, older students are more likely than younger students to have participated in this type of instruction, despite the fact that most students begin transition planning by age 14. About half of 14- and 15-year-old students (48% and 54%, respectively) have received instruction in transition planning, compared with 76% of 17- and 18-year-olds.

**Postschool service needs.** About three-fourths of students with disabilities have needs for postschool services identified as part of their transition planning (Exhibit 3). Two types of services predominate: accommodations to help in the pursuit of postsecondary education and vocational services to help in securing employment. Almost half of students have a need for postsecondary education accommodations specified in their transition plans, whereas the transition plans of 38% of students with disabilities specify vocational training, job placement, or support services as postschool needs. Other types of services are reported for about 5% of students; those services include mental health, social, and transportation services; behavioral interventions; and supported living arrangements. More specialized services, such as occupational or physical therapy, are reported for even fewer stu-

dents. Older students (i.e., 17- and 18-year-olds) are more likely to have post-high-school service needs identified in their transition plans (81%) than their 14-year-old peers (63%).

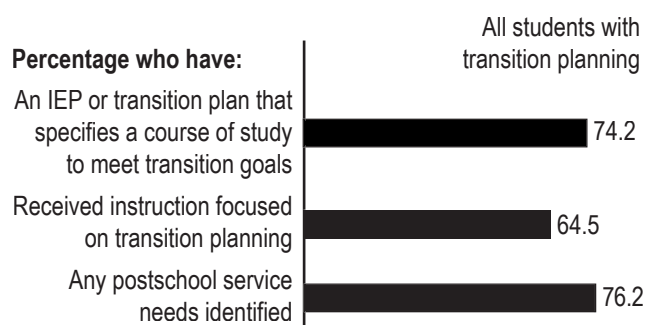
The types of postschool service needs identified during transition planning reflect students' postschool goals. Two-thirds of students planning to attend college have postsecondary education accommodations specified as a needed service, compared with fewer than one-third of students who do not have college as a transition goal. Similarly, the need for these accommodations is more commonly specified for students who plan to attend vocational school than for students who do not (56% vs. 42%). Students with an independent living goal are more likely than students who do not have this goal to have vocational service needs identified (44% vs. 32%).

Students with postschool goals that include supported or sheltered employment, maximized functional independence, or enhanced social and interpersonal relationships have multiple needed postschool services identified as part of their transition plans. These students are more likely than students who do not have these goals to have transition plans that specify postschool needs for vocational training, job placement, or support; supported living arrangements; behavioral interventions; or mental health, social, speech/communication, and transportation services.

## School Contacts with Service Providers and Organizations on Behalf of Transitioning Students with Disabilities

Educational best practice suggests that “effective transition planning and service depend upon functional linkages among schools, rehabilitation services, and other human service and community agencies” (National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, 2004). Coordination and collaboration between schools and service agencies that may provide services to youth with disabilities as they transition into the adult world can be a critical element in helping youth access those services and making their entry into adult life a more positive experience.

**Exhibit 3: Supports and Services Specified in Transition Planning**



Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 student's school program survey.



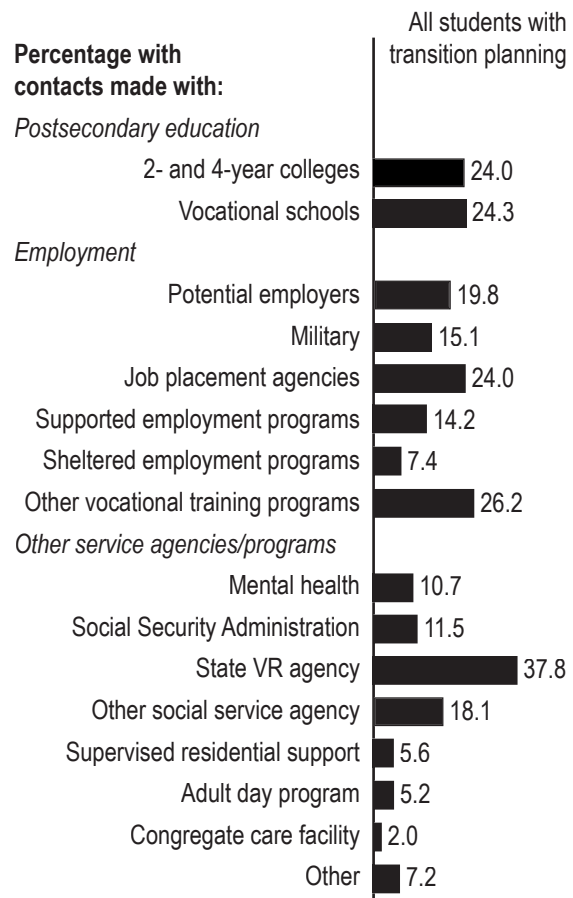
The percentages of students for whom schools make contacts with organizations or service providers regarding programs or employment for students with disabilities when they leave high school range from fewer than 5% to almost 40%, depending on the type of agency/program (Exhibit 4).

The state VR agency is the organization contacted for the most students (38%). Contacts with colleges and vocational schools are equally likely; 24% of students with disabilities have contacts made on their behalf with each kind of institution. Schools contact a variety of employment organizations, including sheltered employment programs (for 7% of students), supported employment programs (14%), other vocational training programs (26%), and job placement agencies (24%). Employers and the military are contacted for 20% and 15% of students, respectively. With the exception of VR agencies, school staff initiate contacts with individual adult service agencies for fewer than one in five students.

Contacts with certain types of agencies or organizations are more likely to occur for students age 16 or older, consistent with the IDEA '97 requirement for identifying postschool service needs and related interagency involvement, if appropriate. Postsecondary education and training institutions are more likely to be contacted for high school students preparing to leave school than those beginning high school; 38% of 17- and 18-year-old students have had colleges contacted on their behalf, and 32% have had vocational schools contacted, compared with 6% and 4% of 14-year-old students, respectively. All types of employment or job training programs are contacted significantly more often for older than younger students. By the time students with disabilities are 17 or 18 years old, more than half (56%) are reported to have had the state VR agency contacted by their school on their behalf, compared with 16% of 15-year-olds. The likelihood of schools' contacting any other social services on students' behalf also increases, from 9% of 15-year-olds to 26% of 17- and 18-year-olds.

The type of agency or organization contacted on behalf of students relates to the postschool service needs identified in the transition planning process, which in turn reflect their goals. Students who will need postsecondary education accommodations are more likely to have teachers contact 2- or 4-year

**Exhibit 4: Contacts Made by Schools on Behalf of Students with Transition Planning**



Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 student's school program survey.

colleges or vocational schools than students who have not had such accommodations specified (35% vs. 10% for colleges and 31% vs. 17% for vocational schools). Students with postschool vocational service needs identified are more likely than students who do not have such needs to have a variety of agencies or organizations contacted on their behalf, including job placement agencies, the state VR agency, vocational training programs, employers, and supported or sheltered employment programs.

Students who need supported living arrangements after high school are more likely than those without this need to have their schools contact mental health services or sheltered employment providers, supervised residential programs, or adult day programs. The schools of students for whom postschool behavioral intervention and mental health service needs are specified are more likely to contact

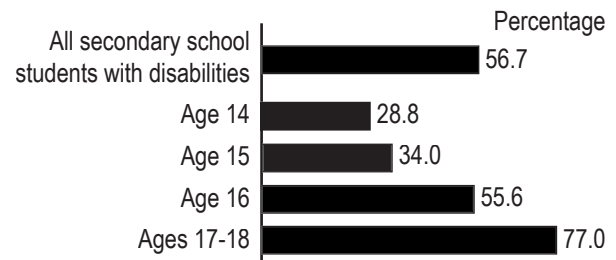
mental health agencies on the students' behalf than they are for students without these needs specified (45% vs. 8% and 75% vs. 6%, respectively). Interestingly, schools also are more likely to contact supported or sheltered employment programs or employers for students with behavioral intervention or mental health services identified than they are for students who do not have these needs identified.

## Informing Parents of Postschool Service Options

An important part of the school's role in assisting the transition of students with disabilities to adult life is informing parents about the services related to a student's disability that are available after high school. As students approach the transition years, parents more actively seek information on a variety of topics to support their adolescent and young adult children in transition, including postsecondary and employment options, financial planning, Medicaid, and VR (PACER, 2001).

According to school staff, schools provide increasing percentages of parents with information as students prepare to leave high school (Exhibit 5). For example, parents of about one-third of students who are 15 years old are provided information about postschool services and programs, compared with parents of about three-fourths of students who are 17 or 18 years old. However, school staff report that information about students' postschool services has not yet been provided to parents of about one in four students who are 17 or 18 years old.

### Exhibit 5: Parents Provided Information About Postschool Services, by Student's Age



Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 student's school program survey.  
Note: Includes only students with transition planning.

## Conclusion

NLTS2 provides a national picture of the transition planning process in schools today. There is variability in the extent to which the expectations for the transition planning process, which are embedded in law, regulation, and best practice, are being met for all secondary-school-age students with disabilities. Further, the transition planning process appears to develop over time and is more fully articulated for older students as they near their move from school to adult life. In the coming years, NLTS2 will address the question of whether differences in students' transition planning relate to their achievements in postsecondary education, employment, and independence during early adulthood.

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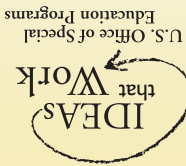


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