

8. MOVING ON

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As noted in Chapter 1, the recent reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) affirms that the primary purpose of the free appropriate public education guaranteed to children and youth with disabilities is to “prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living” [Sec. 602(d)(1)(A)]. This report addresses the question “How do young people with disabilities fare in these domains in their early years after high school?”

In response to that question, the report documents the experiences of youth with disabilities who have been out of secondary school up to 2 years, focusing on the changes in their experiences that have occurred between 2001 and 2003, a period in which the large majority of these youth left high school. Experiences with postsecondary education, employment, social involvement, and aspects of emerging independence, summarized in Exhibit 8-1, are described, as well as aspects of youth’s individual and household characteristics and prior experiences that are related to differences in their experiences in the early post-high-school years. This chapter summarizes the key themes that emerge.¹

Youth Are Engaged in School, Work, and Preparation for Work

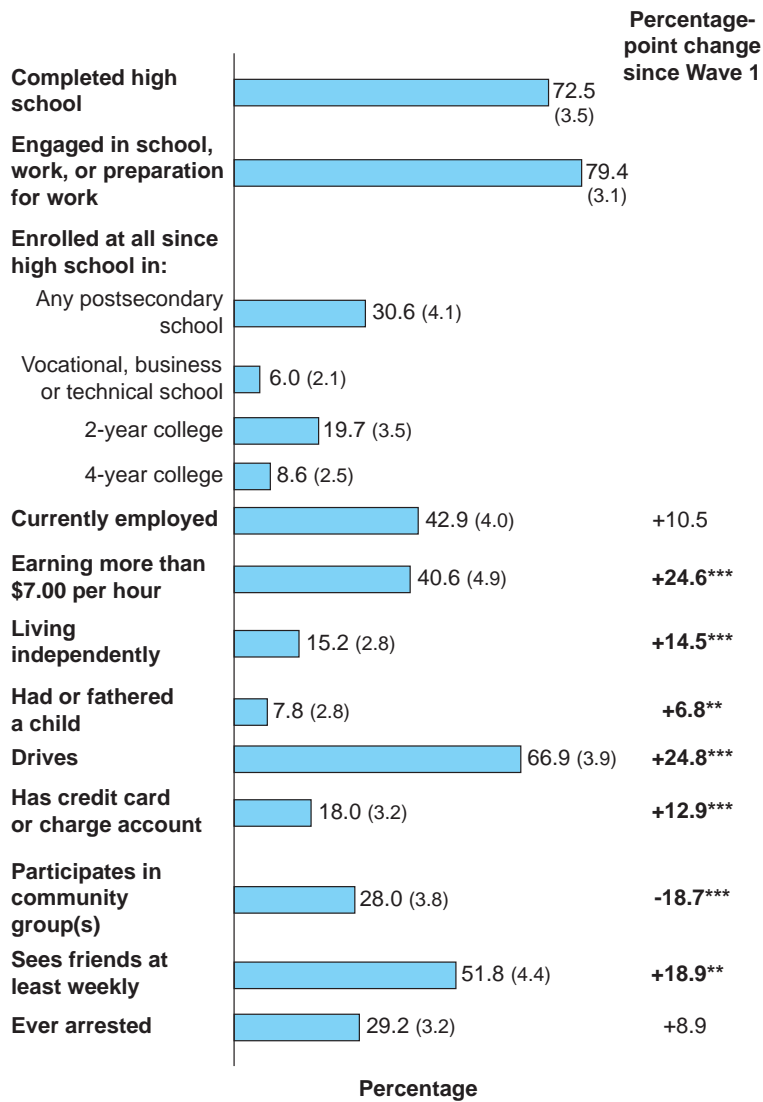
The early postschool activities of the large majority of out-of-school youth with disabilities affirm that their secondary school years have, indeed, prepared them for further education and employment. Since leaving high school, almost 8 in 10 out-of-school youth with disabilities have been engaged in postsecondary education, paid employment, or training to prepare them for employment. Employment is the most common activity among out-of-school youth with disabilities; about 7 in 10 have been employed since leaving high school, including about half of youth with disabilities for whom employment is the sole mode of engagement in the community. About 3 in 10 out-of-school youth with disabilities have attended a postsecondary school since leaving high school, with about one-fifth both going to school and working. Most of the 21% of youth with disabilities who have not been engaged in school, work, or job training reported spending most of their time looking for work.

Work: A Fact of Life for Most Youth with Disabilities

As noted above, most out-of-school youth with disabilities have been engaged in paid employment at some time since leaving high school, and more than 4 in 10 were employed at the time of the Wave 2 interview. This rate is substantially below the 63% employment rate of same-age out-of-school youth in the general population. Further, leaving high school has not resulted in a statistically significant increase in the rate of current employment for out-of-school youth with disabilities.

¹ Outcomes of youth with disabilities represented in NLTS2 are not compared with those reported for NLTS because differences in the age groups included in the two studies make straightforward comparisons misleading. A subsequent report will present findings of analyses using the adjustments necessary for accurate comparisons between NLTS and NLTS2.

Exhibit 8-1
SUMMARY OF KEY EARLY POSTSCHOOL OUTCOMES OF
OUT-OF-SCHOOL YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES



Sources: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews and Wave 2 parent/youth interviews.

Statistical significance: **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Standard errors are in parentheses.

However, other aspects of their employment experiences have changed. Out-of-school youth with disabilities work more and earn more than they did 2 years earlier. There has been a substantial increase in youth with disabilities working full-time, so that in Wave 2, 40% are doing so. Wage increases have resulted in fewer than 1 in 10 out-of-school youth with disabilities earning less than the minimum wage and 4 in 10 earning more than \$7.00 per hour. In fact, the average wage earned by working out-of-school youth with disabilities is \$7.30, \$1.30 more than they earned 2 years earlier. Much of this increase may reflect a shift in the kinds of jobs youth hold. There has been a dramatic decline in young women with disabilities working in personal care jobs, including babysitting, and an increase in young men with disabilities working in trades (e.g., carpentry, plumbing), both of which would put upward pressure on wages. Overall, three-fourths of working youth reported believing they are well paid.

Despite wage increases, however, receiving benefits as part of a total compensation package is not common; about one-third of out-of-school youth with disabilities receive any benefits (i.e., paid vacation or sick leave, health insurance, or retirement benefits). Receiving accommodations for their disabilities on the job is even less common; only 4% of working youth with disabilities receive accommodations for their disabilities, largely because almost seven out of eight youth have employers who are unaware of their disabilities. Thus, among those whose employers are aware of their disabilities, 25% are receiving workplace accommodations for them.

These characteristics of the jobs of working out-of-school youth with disabilities add up to an employment experience that most youth find satisfying. More than 8 in 10 working out-of-school youth with disabilities reported liking their job; half of those reported liking it “very much.” Almost all youth reported being treated well at work, and almost two-thirds reported that they have opportunities to advance there; almost 60% have received a wage increase or promotion already. These early work experiences are just the first step toward regular paid employment, which more than 90% of out-of-school youth with disabilities were expected by their parents to achieve eventually.

A Slow Start toward Postsecondary Education

When out-of-school youth with disabilities were still in high school, about three-fourths had postsecondary education as a goal for their early postschool years, and 60% had parents who expected that they would pursue their educations after high school. Up to 2 years after high school, however, only one in three have been enrolled in any kind of postsecondary school or program since high school; one in five are enrolled in Wave 2. This rate of current postsecondary school enrollment is half the rate of same-age youth in the general population. Although the coming years may well see an increase in out-of-school youth with disabilities achieving their intended pursuit of postsecondary education, the early years after high school suggest they are not rushing to continue with school.

Two-year or junior colleges are the most common postsecondary schools attended by youth with disabilities; 20% have attended one at some time since leaving high school, and 10% are attending one currently. In fact, youth with disabilities are about as likely to be going to a 2-year or junior college as youth in the general population. Rates of attendance at 4-year colleges or universities tell a different story, however. Fewer than 1 in 10 youth with disabilities have attended such a school, and 6% are doing so in Wave 2, compared with 28% of same-age youth in the general population. About 5% of youth with disabilities attend postsecondary vocational, business, or technical schools.

When youth with disabilities do attend postsecondary school, almost three-fourths go full-time and about 8 in 10 are enrolled consistently, rather than a semester or quarter here and there. Further, about two-thirds of postsecondary students with disabilities pursue their studies without benefit of accommodations from their schools. As with accommodations from employers, by far the greatest reason for students’ not receiving accommodations is that their postsecondary schools are unaware of their disabilities. In fact, about half of postsecondary students with disabilities reported that they do not consider themselves to have a disability, and another 7% acknowledged a disability but have not informed their schools regarding it. Only 40% of postsecondary students with disabilities have informed their schools of their disabilities. Thus, the 35% who receive accommodations are 88% of those whose schools are aware of their disabilities.

Independence Emerging on Several Dimensions

In their first few years out of high school, youth with disabilities demonstrate growing independence on many fronts. They are about as likely as youth in the general population to be living away from their parents’ home; almost one-fourth do so, a significant increase from 2 years earlier. The ability of youth with disabilities to live independently is enhanced by the

sizable increase over time in the proportion of age-eligible youth with disabilities who have driving privileges; two-thirds can drive, whereas fewer than half could do so 2 years earlier. Personal financial management tools also are being used by more youth with disabilities; about one-third have personal checking accounts, and almost one in five have a credit card or charge account in their own name, significantly more youth than 2 years previously.

Despite these gains in some kinds of independence, in other areas there may be cause for concern. For example, 7% of 15- through 19-year-old out-of-school youth with disabilities reported being married or in a marriage-like relationship, and 8% reported having had or fathered a child; more than half of these very young parents are single. Although these rates of marriage and parenting are similar to those for the general population, they connote a kind of responsibility that may be difficult for young people to handle well. These challenges may be exacerbated by the fact that two-thirds of out-of-school youth with disabilities who have independent households earn less than \$5,000 per year.

Leisure Activities and Social Interactions Are Changing

Leaving high school is associated with a reduction among youth with disabilities in pursuing a variety of passive activities with most of their leisure time, including watching TV or videos and using a computer. Sizable reductions in participation in organized groups and volunteer activities also are evident. In Wave 2, about one-fourth of out-of-school youth with disabilities belong to organized community groups, and a similar share take part in volunteer activities, down from 45% pursuing each activity in Wave 1. It appears that some of the time freed up by these reductions in leisure and organized activities is being invested in more frequent contacts with friends. Just over half of youth with disabilities reported seeing friends at least weekly outside of organized groups and any school they may attend, an increase from about one-third of youth seeing friends at least weekly 2 years earlier.

This shift away from the prosocial activities often associated with organized, community-focused groups and volunteerism toward a greater time investment in informal get-togethers with friends that is evident among out-of-school youth with disabilities may be worrisome. Earlier analyses from NLTS demonstrated that belonging to organized groups was strongly associated with more positive outcomes for youth with disabilities in their early postschool years, including greater postsecondary education enrollment and independent living (Wagner, Blackorby, Cameto, & Newman, 1993). Seeing friends often had quite the opposite relationships; those who saw friends more than 5 days a week were less likely to enroll in postsecondary education, independent of differences in their academic achievement or school completion status (Wagner, Blackorby, et al., 1993). Further tracking of the experience of out-of-school youth with disabilities represented in NLTS2 will reveal whether these changes in their social activities are sustained and whether they relate to postschool outcomes in the same ways identified in NLTS.

Citizenship: Indicators Are Mixed

NLTS2 has investigated both a positive indicator of citizenship—youth's being registered to vote—and a negative aspect—involvement with the criminal justice system. Findings suggest that youth with disabilities are as likely to be registered to vote as youth in the general population. Overall, 64% of 18- and 19-year-old out-of-school youth with disabilities were reported to have accepted the responsibility of citizenship that is inherent in registering to vote.

However, the 2-year period during which most of these out-of-school youth with disabilities left high school also has seen an increase in some kinds of involvement with the criminal justice system. About half of youth have been stopped by police for other than a traffic violation, and 16% have spent a night in jail, both significant increases in this 2-year period. Further, 29% of out-of-school youth with disabilities have been arrested, and one in five have been on probation or parole. Although these experiences are cause for concern for any youth, rates of arrest and being on probation or parole have not increased markedly in the 2 years during which most youth with disabilities left high school, and the arrest rate is not significantly different from that of same-age out-of-school youth in the general population.

Results Associated with Dropping Out of School

Almost three-fourths of youth with disabilities who have been out of secondary school up to 2 years finished high school; of those youth, 94% graduated with a regular diploma, according to parents, and the rest received a certificate of completion. However, 28% of out-of-school youth left high school without finishing. This has not been an irrevocable decision for the 2% of youth with disabilities who earned a GED within 2 years of leaving high school.

The difference in the high-school-leaving status of youth with disabilities is associated with marked differences in their experiences in their early postschool years. Those who dropped out are significantly less likely to be engaged in school, work, or preparation for work shortly after high school than are school completers; two-thirds of dropouts have been engaged in these activities, compared with almost seven out of eight school completers.

Not surprisingly, the forms of engagement among dropouts are much less likely to include postsecondary education than among school completers. In fact, controlling for other differences between dropouts and completers with disabilities, including their functional cognitive abilities and previous academic achievement, dropouts are 18 percentage points less likely to have enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college shortly after high school than are school completers. Because the absence of a high school diploma precludes them from attending a 4-year college, their postsecondary education largely is limited to vocational, business, or technical schools; 8% of dropouts have attended such schools, and 1% have attended a 2-year college.

The limitations in their education do not appear to have immediate negative impacts on the ability of dropouts with disabilities to find jobs. For example, the rate of holding a paid job since high school among both dropouts and school completers is about 85%; however, dropouts are much more likely to have work be their only form of engagement in the community, whereas completers are more likely to combine work with postsecondary education. Without postsecondary education and employment competing for time, dropouts with disabilities tend to work more hours per week (an average of 34 vs. 27 for school completers). Because dropouts and school completers earn quite similar hourly wages, the longer hours worked by dropouts result, in the short run, in higher total earnings, on average, than those of completers.

The higher earnings of dropouts are being used to support independent households and children to a greater degree than is evident among school completers. More than one-fourth of dropouts with disabilities are living independently with a spouse or partner, and 19% are parenting. These rates of independent living and parenting are more than four times those of youth with disabilities who completed high school. Yet dropouts are less likely than school completers to have such supports for independence as a driver's license or a checking account.

The social lives of youth with disabilities who did and did not finish high school are quite similar; their involvement in organized groups and volunteer activities and the frequency with which youth with disabilities see friends up to 2 years after leaving high school are not different. However, both the positive and negative aspects of citizenship differ significantly between the two groups. Dropouts with disabilities are much less likely than those who completed high school to be registered to vote (fewer than half are, compared with more than two-thirds of school completers). Of particular cause for concern is the much higher rate of criminal justice system involvement among dropouts with disabilities; more than half have been arrested, and nearly one-third have spent a night in jail, three times the rates of these experiences among youth with disabilities who finished high school. It is clear that not all of this large difference between the two groups in criminal justice system involvement results from the difference in their school-leaving status; they also differ in the prevalence of particular disabilities in the two groups, their academic histories, and some dimensions of their functioning. Nonetheless, controlling for other differences between them, dropouts are 10 percentage points more likely to have been arrested than youth with disabilities who finished high school.

In sum, dropouts with disabilities are finding some success in the employment arena shortly after high school; however, examination of other aspects of their lives reveals cause for concern. In the long run, the absence of a high school diploma and further postsecondary education is likely to have serious negative implications for the ability of youth who dropped out to find and keep jobs that pay a living wage. A criminal record also may limit the employability of many dropouts with disabilities. In addition to the stresses that are inherent in raising children, early parenting will put further economic pressure on working youth with disabilities who did not finish high school.

Disability Has Differential Effects across Outcome Domains

As with all aspects of the lives of youth with disabilities that are being investigated in NLTS2, differences across disability categories are dramatic. However, the categories of youth who stand out differ with the domain of experience being examined, resulting in markedly different patterns of experience for youth in particular disability categories, as noted below.

Youth with Learning Disabilities or Other Health Impairments

These two categories of youth have similar experiences in the early years after high school, and because those with learning disabilities are the largest disability category, this group of youth has a pattern of experience most like that of youth with disabilities as a whole, with a few exceptions. About three-fourths of out-of-school youth with learning disabilities or other health impairments have completed high school, almost all of those with a regular diploma. The large majority are engaged in school, work, or preparation for work, and they are among the most likely to be engaged in employment only. About one-third were expected by their parents “definitely” to go on to postsecondary education after high school, and about that many have done so within 2 years of leaving high school. Junior college is their typical pursuit. Youth with learning disabilities or other health impairments have experienced among the broadest changes in their leisure-time and friendship pursuits, with large reductions in passive leisure activities (e.g., watching television or using a computer) and large increases in the frequency of seeing friends. However, other aspects of their community and social activities are potentially troublesome.

Although these youth are among the most likely to be registered to vote, they also have experienced the largest declines in participation in prosocial organized groups and volunteer activities. Most troubling is that youth with other health impairments have experienced the only significant increase in arrest rates and, together with youth with learning disabilities, are surpassed only by youth with emotional disturbances in the likelihood of being involved with the criminal justice system. This uneven record of experiences across outcome domains testifies to the “floundering” many youth experience before finding solid footing in the adult world.

Youth with Emotional Disturbances

More than a decade ago, when NLTS reported on the early postschool experiences of youth with disabilities nationally, it noted that for youth with emotional disturbances, “their difficulties in transition are particularly troubling” (Wagner, 1991a, p. 11-3). A similar conclusion can be reached from NLTS2 findings. Youth with emotional disturbances are the most likely already to be out of secondary school, with 44% of those leaving school without finishing, the highest dropout rate of any category of youth with disabilities. Along with youth with mental retardation, school completers with emotional disturbances are the least likely to have graduated with a regular diploma. The challenges of being out of school without a high school diploma are compounded for many youth with emotional disturbances by the fact they are “on their own” in many other respects. Thirty-five percent no longer live with parents, the largest proportion of any category of youth, and they are the only group to have experienced a significant increase in the likelihood of living in “other” arrangements, including in criminal justice or mental health facilities, under legal guardianship, in foster care, or on the street. They also have experienced the largest increase in their rate of parenting, 10 percentage points, bringing to 11% the proportion of youth with emotional disturbances reported to have had or fathered a child.

One-third of these youth have not found a way to become engaged in their community since leaving high school; for those who have, employment is the usual mode of engagement. Although more than 6 in 10 youth with emotional disturbances have been employed at some time since leaving high school, only about half as many are working currently, attesting to the difficulty many of these youth have in keeping a job. Only about one in five have been enrolled in any kind of postsecondary education since leaving high school, indicating that few youth in this category are getting the education that might help them find and hold better and more stable jobs. Although youth with emotional disturbances are by far the most likely to be rated by parents as having low social skills, they also are among the most likely to see friends often, with the potentially negative consequences noted earlier. They also are among the least likely to take part in prosocial organized community groups or volunteer activities or to be registered to vote. Most troublesome, however, is that they far surpass any other group of youth in their involvement with the criminal justice system. More than three-fourths have been stopped by police other than for a traffic violation, 58% have been arrested at least once, and 43% have been on probation or parole, although these rates are not significantly higher than for these youth 2 years earlier. A pattern of early school leaving, low levels of social integration in the community, and criminal justice system involvement does not bode well for youth with emotional disturbances as they move further into their adult lives.

Youth with Mental Retardation or Multiple Disabilities

These are the categories of youth mostly likely to be reported to have low functional cognitive skills and to have difficulty communicating, functional limitations that can affect all aspects of life and set them apart from other youth with disabilities. For example, these categories of youth are among the least likely to be out of school as of summer 2003, consistent with their tendency to remain in high school until they reach age 21 (Wagner, 1991b). Along with youth with emotional disturbances, out-of-school youth with mental retardation or multiple disabilities are the least likely to have completed high school. Among completers, they are among the least likely to have graduated with a regular diploma. Their rates of engagement in school, work, or preparation for work shortly after high school are the lowest of all disability categories, yet youth with mental retardation are among the most likely to be living on their own and to be parenting. Few have tools to support that independence, including driving privileges or checking accounts.

The social lives of youth with mental retardation or multiple disabilities also are affected by their disabilities. They are among the least likely to see friends frequently outside of groups or school activities. In fact, independent of other differences in functioning between them, youth with multiple disabilities are 17 percentage points less likely to see friends often than are youth with learning disabilities, and when more functional domains are affected by their disabilities, the likelihood of frequent friendship interactions falls even lower. Youth with mental retardation and those with multiple disabilities also are among the least likely to take part in organized community groups or volunteer activities up to 2 years after leaving high school, and they are among the most likely to watch more than 6 hours of TV or videos per week.

Despite this pattern of having generally poorer outcomes than other categories of youth with disabilities, some youth with mental retardation or multiple disabilities are transitioning more effectively than others. For example, almost 6 in 10 youth in these categories have been engaged in the community since high school, including about one-third of youth with mental retardation and half of those with multiple disabilities who have worked for pay at some time since high school. About 15% of youth in each category have pursued their education beyond high school, although virtually none have enrolled in a 4-year college. And despite the pattern of limited social activity for youth in these categories as a whole, about one-fourth do belong to groups and/or volunteer; about 4 in 10 are registered to vote. Later NLTS2 analyses will investigate the extent to which youth in these and other disability categories access adult services to help improve their odds of a successful transition to adult roles and responsibilities.

Youth with Hearing or Visual Impairments

Youth with these sensory impairments are the most likely of all categories to experience academic success. Ninety percent or more finish high school, virtually all with a regular high school diploma. This high graduation rate prepares them to take advantage of postsecondary education opportunities more than youth in many other categories. They are among the most likely youth to be engaged in school, work, or preparation for work, and they are more likely than most to have postsecondary education participation be their mode of engagement. In fact, youth with hearing or visual impairments are more than twice as likely as youth with disabilities as a whole to have enrolled in a postsecondary school; about two-thirds have done so up to 2 years after high school. Further, they are the most likely to attend a 4-year college or

university; about 4 in 10 have enrolled in such schools, a rate four times that of youth with disabilities as a whole.

Youth with hearing or visual impairments also stand out with regard to their involvement in prosocial activities. Unlike youth with disabilities as a whole, youth with these sensory impairments show no significant decline in participation in organized community groups or volunteer activities; almost twice as many of them volunteer, for example, as youth with disabilities as a whole. They are as likely to be registered to vote as any other category of youth, and their rates of criminal justice system involvement are low. For example, the arrest rate of youth with hearing impairments is less than half and the rate for youth with visual impairments is one-fourth the rate for youth with learning disabilities. Their parenting rates are low; about 1% of out-of-school youth with hearing or visual impairments report having had or fathered a child.

Despite these similarities in the largely positive experiences of youth with hearing and visual impairments in the educational and citizenship domains, their experiences with friends and jobs differ. The communication challenges faced by youth with hearing impairments may help explain why they are significantly less likely than youth with disabilities as a whole to get together with friends frequently, a difference not observed for youth with visual impairments. However, in the employment domain, it is youth with hearing impairments who are more active. Although half or more of youth with hearing or visual impairments have worked since leaving high school, those with hearing impairments are as likely to be employed currently as youth with disabilities as a whole, whereas youth with visual impairments are among the least likely categories of youth to be employed currently. In fact, irrespective of other differences in disability, functioning, and demographics, youth with visual impairments are 21 percentage points less likely to be employed currently than youth with learning disabilities; there is no difference in the probability of being employed between youth with learning disabilities and those with hearing impairments. Some of the difference between employment rates of youth with hearing and visual impairments may be attributable to greater accessibility for youth with hearing impairments because they can drive; more than 80% of age-eligible youth with hearing impairments have driving privileges, compared with fewer than 20% of youth with visual impairments. As NLTS2 continues to assess the early adult experiences of out-of-school youth with disabilities, it will become clearer whether the postsecondary education acquired by youth with visual impairments helps them increase their participation in paid employment.

Demographic Differences Are Not Powerful

Youth with disabilities differ in many respects other than the nature of their disability, including such important characteristics as age, gender, household income, and race/ethnicity. However, these differences are not associated with strong or consistent differences across outcome domains, although there are some exceptions, as noted below.

Age

Most of the changes noted in the lives of youth with disabilities in a 2-year period have been experienced to similar degrees by the 88% of out-of-school youth with disabilities represented in this report who are 18 or 19 years old and by the smaller group of those who are 15 through 17. These three age groups (15- through 17-year-olds, 18-year-olds, and 19-year-olds) are equally likely to have been engaged since high school in school, work, or preparation for work.

However, interpreting this finding is not straightforward because age is intertwined with other differences between youth. For example, as a group, 19-year-olds have been out of school longer than younger peers, a potential advantage in terms of engagement in their communities. However, younger out-of-school youth have a different mix of disabilities, including more youth with speech impairments, for example, a group generally associated with more positive outcomes than youth with emotional disturbances, who are disproportionately represented among older youth.

Multivariate analyses of employment and postsecondary education rates disentangle these interrelationships and demonstrate that age does relate strongly to a higher likelihood of both employment and postsecondary education, independent of the influences of disability, functioning, and other demographic differences between youth. Nineteen-year-old youth with disabilities are 23 percentage points more likely than 17-year-olds to be employed at a given point in time, independent of other differences between them. In the postsecondary education domain, 19-year-olds with disabilities are 12 percentage points more likely than their 17-year-old peers to have been enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college, irrespective of the length of time they have been out of school or other differences between them. Age is unrelated to the likelihood of enrolling in a vocational, business, or technical school.

In the independence domain, 19-year-olds have experienced the largest drop over time in the proportion living with parents and the largest increase in having responsibility for personal financial management tools, including a checking account and a personal credit card or charge account. The only significant increases in earning driving privileges have occurred among 18- and 19-year-olds, who are more likely than younger peers to have earned those privileges, potentially giving them greater access to employment, educational, and other community opportunities. Somewhat surprisingly, age is not associated with the likelihood of parenting or of being involved with the criminal justice system; there are no differences in these risk factors across the three age groups of youth with disabilities. Although 19-year-olds show the greatest change in their leisure-time activities, age does not have an independent relationship with the likelihood that youth with disabilities see friends often. Neither are there age differences in the likelihood that youth participate in volunteer or organized community group activities. However, being registered to vote is more evident among 19- than 18-year-old youth with disabilities.

This pattern of findings suggests that more positive outcomes may continue to develop as youth with disabilities age and have a longer time out of high school in which to pursue their employment, education, or other goals.

Gender

Males predominate among out-of-school youth with disabilities (two-thirds are male), and their experiences differ from those of females with disabilities in many, although not all, respects. The genders do not differ in their school-leaving status, and they are equally likely to have been engaged in school, work, or preparation for work since leaving high school. However, the boys and girls are somewhat different in their engagement in the community. Although there is no relationship between gender and current employment, independent of disability and other differences between youth, girls with disabilities are 6 percentage points more likely to have

been enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college since high school than are boys, controlling for other differences between them.

In the social domain, differential changes over time are apparent across genders. For example, in Wave 1, girls were much less likely than boys to get together with friends frequently outside of class or organized group activities. However, a large increase over time for girls has resulted in the two genders being equally likely to spend time with friends frequently in Wave 2. In contrast, the significant increase in the likelihood of being stopped and questioned by police other than for a traffic violation and of spending a night in jail that is evident among youth with disabilities as a whole occurs solely among boys, resulting in boys being significantly more likely than girls to have stayed overnight in jail.

Most aspects of independence are similar across genders, including residential arrangements, having driving privileges, and using personal financial management tools. However, some gender differences are apparent. Girls with disabilities are significantly less likely than boys to be single; about one-fourth are engaged, married, or in a marriage-like relationship. Further, girls who are living independently are significantly more likely than boys to be supporting themselves on less than \$5,000 per year. About one in eight girls with disabilities also have had a child. Experiences of poverty and childbearing at an early age may stack the deck against some girls with disabilities in making a successful transition to self-sufficiency in early adulthood.

Household Income

Youth with disabilities who come from households with different income levels are similar in several aspects of their early postschool experiences. For example, the leisure-time use and social lives of out-of-school youth with disabilities have not changed differentially with household income, nor have many aspects of their independence, including their residential arrangements or parenting status. Income also has no independent relationship with arrest rates, irrespective of other differences between youth.

However, there are several indications that youth with disabilities who have more economic resources are having more positive experiences in their early postschool years than peers with fewer economic advantages. For example, wealthier youth with disabilities are more likely than low-income peers to have earned driving privileges (perhaps because they are more likely to have access to a car) and to have a personal checking or charge account or credit card. These aspects of independence may support more ready access to employment and other opportunities. In fact, wealthier youth with disabilities are more likely to be engaged in school, work, or preparation for work; whereas 93% of youth with disabilities from families with incomes of more than \$50,000 a year are engaged in such activities after high school, 70% of youth from families with household incomes of \$25,000 or less a year are thus engaged. This difference results largely from a difference in their mode of engagement; youth in the highest income group are more likely to have been engaged in postsecondary education and employment than youth from families in the lowest income group. However, this difference is not related to income alone. Multivariate analyses suggest that having a better-educated head of household, which tends to be more common among higher-income households, outweighs income itself in helping explain the variation in the likelihood that youth with disabilities will enroll in 2- or 4-year colleges up to 2 years after leaving high school.

Race/Ethnicity

The differences in early postschool outcomes of youth with disabilities who have different racial/ethnic backgrounds are similar in some respects to those noted for youth from different income groups. There are no differences across racial/ethnic groups in the likelihood of being engaged in school, work, or preparation for work shortly after high school; enrolling in college or a vocational, business, or technical school; living independently; having active friendships; having had or fathered a child; or ever having been arrested. However, white youth with disabilities are more likely than others to have driving privileges and a personal checking account. More importantly, a significant difference is apparent in the employment domain. Independent of other differences between them, African-American youth with disabilities are at a 16-percentage-point disadvantage relative to white youth in their rate of current employment. Further longitudinal analysis will be needed to determine whether the fairly equal rates of postsecondary education enrollment noted here among white and minority youth eventually will reduce or eliminate the differential likelihood of their employment.

The look at the postschool experiences of youth with disabilities provided in this report reaffirms the great diversity in the experiences of youth with disabilities. Most have finished high school, become engaged in their communities, see friends regularly, and show signs of emerging independence; but on every dimension, it is evident that some youth are struggling because of their disability, poverty, the absence of a high school education, or other factors. Yet it is important to be cautious in assuming either success or failure in the transition to adulthood from this very early period after high school. Much has changed for the youth with disabilities represented in this report in the 2-year period during which most left high school; much can change in the coming years as well. NLTS2 will continue to describe the experiences of youth with disabilities as they age and to investigate the programs and experiences during secondary school and the early transition years that are associated with positive outcomes in young adulthood. Additional reports also will document changes in the early postschool experiences of youth with disabilities that have occurred in the 15 years between NLTS and NLTS2.