

**OUTCOMES OF PRIVATE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS  
SERVING PUBLICLY PLACED STUDENTS THROUGH IDEA**

**PLANS FOR EXITING STUDENTS: 2014-2015**

**NAPSEC OUTCOMES PROJECT**

**REPORT NUMBER 14 - MAY, 2016**



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## **Executive Summary**

For over a decade, NAPSEC, a national association of private special education centers, has examined the discharge plans of the students with disabilities enrolled in the intensive therapeutic special education programs offered by its members. Other inquiries of the outcomes of special education focus on students in local, public school programs and do not fully explore the results for the students with perhaps the most severe and complex disabilities who are served by the highly specialized NAPSEC-member programs.

Students who attend NAPSEC-member programs in the private sector do not attend local public schools because their complex needs cannot be met by programs in the local public school district. In partnership with the local school district, which develops an IEP (Individualized Education Program) to prescribe the intensive therapeutic services and curriculum modifications required for each special education student to succeed, NAPSEC-member programs operationalize the IEP. In so doing, these nonpublic special education facilities play a vital role on the continuum of special education service delivery.

The current study focuses on reporting the plans made by exiting students at the time they were discharged from a NAPSEC-member's program. Students who left were either transfer students, graduates, or those who reached the legal age limit for receiving educational services.

Below are the highlights of the findings of the current study for the plans of students who were discharged during the 2014-2015 academic year.

### **Transfer Students**

During the 2014-15 school year, the study findings indicate that NAPSEC-member schools provided the necessary educational remediation and support to the students who transferred from their programs to enable these students, upon discharge, to plan to enter or re-enter educational programs within their local public school districts:

- 61% of the transfer students planned to enter or re-enter an educational program within their local public school district.
- 29% of the transfer students planned to enter or re-enter regular, not special, education settings in their local public school district. While 16 % planned to do so with appropriate supports, supports were not needed for the remaining 13%.
- 96% of the transfer students were enrolled in the NAPSEC-member program for 5 years or less.

### **Graduates/Aged-Out Students**

During the 2014-15 school year, the study results show that NAPSEC-member schools provided prescribed instruction, support, and guidance to graduate/ "aged-out" students making the transition to adulthood so that these students were able to plan, upon discharge, to pursue productive and engaged adult roles in their communities, in accordance with their individual capabilities and capacities:

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- 90% of the graduates/aged-out students left a NAPSEC-member program with plans to enter productive and/or engaged adult roles.
- 47% of the graduates/aged-out students planned to enter a mainstream activity. This included 32% with plans to enroll in post-secondary 4-year/2-year college or trade/technical school; and 15% with plans to join the competitive employment workforce or military.
- Almost 25% had plans to enter vocational rehabilitation, including vocational rehabilitation training, supported employment or sheltered employment.
- More than 18% made plans to enter an appropriate adult program in the community, including adult partial care or non-vocational day programs.
- Graduates/aged-out students from Learning Disorders programs (87%) and Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs (75%) were the most likely to plan to enroll in postsecondary education, obtain a competitive job, or enlist in the military.
- Graduates/aged-out students from Developmental Disorders programs were the most likely to plan to participate in vocational rehabilitation (41%) as well as community-based adult programs (32%).
- 75% of graduates/aged-out students from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, a population often associated with poor outcomes, had plans to enroll in a 4-year college/2-year college (30%), trade/technical school (7%), or to enter the job market or the military (20%).

By offering individualized, intensive, therapeutic services, NAPSEC-member schools educate and support students with severe disabilities and continue to fulfill a critical role along the continuum of special education. Because of the programs found in the facilities of NAPSEC members, children with serious disabilities can not only gain access to the benefits of education, but can also look forward to finding meaningful and productive roles in their communities as adults.

### **Introduction**

For more than a decade, the National Association of Private Special Education Centers (NAPSEC), an organization of 235 private special education centers, has sponsored an outcomes study to focus on the discharge plans of the school-aged students with severe disabilities who are enrolled in the nonpublic special education programs operated by its members. NAPSEC has supported this inquiry because related efforts, such as the National Longitudinal Transition Studies (1993, 2004, 2010), have failed to examine the outcomes for students with the most severe disabilities whose needs cannot be met within the local public school district.

The students enrolled in NAPSEC-member programs do not attend special education programs within the local public school district because the intensive, specialized services they require are not available in the public sector. Because of their unique educational needs, each student in this study has an Individual Education Program (IEP) which was developed by the public school district to comprehensively describe the intensive therapeutic services and curriculum modifications the student needs to succeed. The NAPSEC-member's specialized setting is a partner to the local public school district in assuring that the IEP is carried out.

From 2000-2004, and again from 2007 to the present, NAPSEC examined the discharge plans of the students who left its members' educational programs. These efforts demonstrated that approximately 50% of the exiting transfer students return to the local public school and, when they do, nearly 20% have plans to enter regular education. These previous undertakings also revealed that about 90% of the graduate/aged-out students left a NAPSEC-member school with plans to engage in productive adult roles in their communities. In fact, about 50% planned to enter mainstream adult roles, including students with emotional and behavioral disorders, a group often characterized by poor outcomes as adults.

The current report continues efforts to explore the plans made by students exiting a NAPSEC-member special education program during the 2014-2015 school year by identifying the educational settings to which the younger students planned to transfer as well as the adult settings to which the graduates/aged-out students planned to enter.

### **Method**

Each NAPSEC-member school that volunteered for this study was asked to submit discharge information on every student who left a program over the course of the 2014-2015 academic year. Exiting students were defined as transfer students, students who left the NAPSEC-member program to move on to another educational program, and graduates/aged-out students, those who left a NAPSEC-member school because he/she received a high school diploma, a certificate of completion, and/or aged out. In addition, demographic and programmatic information was collected on the number of students who dropped out of school during the course of the study.

Each participating school was given a definition of 5 specific types of special educational programs offered by NAPSEC member schools and was asked to place each exiting student into 1 of these 5 specific types. Instructions stated that only one category was to be used for each student. The programs were defined as follows: 1) Preschool Disorders Programs – for students with any disorder identified at the preschool stage; 2) Developmental Disorders Programs for students with speech/language impairments, intellectual disability, autism, developmental delays; 3) Emotional/Behavioral Disorders Programs for students with emotional and behavioral disturbances; 4) Medical Disorders Programs – for students with other health impairments, hearing impairments, visual impairments, orthopedic impairments, deaf-blindness and traumatic brain injury; and 5) Learning Disorders Programs for students with specific learning disabilities. This data was collected from each participating school and entered in a database for analysis.

### **The Participating Programs and Student Demographics**

During the 2014-2015 school year, 39% of NAPSEC's membership (92 schools) volunteered to be participants in the study. **Not all of NAPSEC's members serve publicly placed students and many serve adults only - not all members are eligible to participate in the study.** These schools are comprised of 213 specialized education programs for day and residential students with a wide range of disabilities. Of these programs, 162 (76%) were for day students, 8 (4%) for residential students, and 43 (20%) offered services to both day and residential students. Of these specialized programs, 64 (30%) focused on the needs of students with Development Disorders, 58 (27%) on students with Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders, 37 (17%) on students with Medical Disorders, 31 (15%) on students with Learning Disorders, and 23 (11%) on students with Preschool Disorders. Taken together, the participating schools reported an enrollment of 13,205 students comprised of 9,526 (72%) males and 3,679 (28%) females.

Participating schools were located in 12 states and 6 of the 10 federal education regions. As Table 1 demonstrates, almost 72% of the schools were located in the Mid-Atlantic region (Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania) with 66 schools participating; about 15% came from the Northeast region (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island) with 14 schools represented; 2 regions, the Appalachia region with 4 schools (Tennessee and Virginia) and the North Central region with 5 schools (Illinois) accounted for about 10% of the distribution; the Southwest region with 1 school (Texas) accounted for over 2%; and, finally, the WestEd region with 1 school (Arizona) completed the participation with about 1%.

**Table 1. Participating Schools by Federal Educational Regions**

Federal Regions/Participating States	#	%
<b>Northeast:</b> <sup>1</sup> Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island	14	15.2
<b>Mid Atlantic:</b> <sup>2</sup> Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania	66	71.7
<b>Appalachia:</b> <sup>3</sup> Tennessee, Virginia	4	4.4
<b>North Central:</b> <sup>4,5</sup> Illinois	5	5.4
<b>Southwest:</b> <sup>6</sup> Texas	2	2.2
<b>West:</b> <sup>7,8,9,10</sup> Arizona	1	1.1
<b>Total</b>	92	100.0

1 In Northeast Region, no participants from Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Puerto Rico, Virgin Islands.

2 In Mid Atlantic Region, no participants from Delaware, Washington, D.C...

3 In Appalachia Region, no participants from Kentucky, West Virginia.

4 No participants from Southeast Region (Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina).

5 In North Central Region, no participants from Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin

6 In Southwest Region, no participants from Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma.

7 No participants from Mid-Continent Region (Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming).

8 In West Region, no participants from California, Nevada, Utah.

9 No participants from Northwest Region (Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington).

10 No participants from Pacific Region (American Samoa, Commonwealth of Northern Mariana Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Hawaii, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Republic of Palau.

## Exiting Students

As Table 2 demonstrates, during the study period, 3,596 students exited from a participating school. Outcome information was available for 3,204 (89%) of the exiting students, 2,202 transfer students (61%) and 1,002 graduates/aged-out students (28%). Discharge planning information was not available for 392 exiting students (11%), those who identified themselves as dropouts (148 students<sup>1</sup>) and those who left school without making their plans known to the school (244 students).

Transfer students made up 67% of the sample, graduates/aged-out students made up 29%, and students who dropped out of school made up 4%. When all exiting students are examined, those with and without plans, the following emerges. This sample is made up of White (51%), male (72%), high school students (64%), in the age categories of 12 to 17 years (36%) and 18-21+ years (34%), who tended to be enrolled in day programs (67%) for students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (44%) from 1-5 years (61%); in general these students did not participate in the federally-sponsored subsidized lunch program (67%). Moreover, 74% of the exiting students had a “planned” discharge and, in 81% of the exits, staff at the NAPSEC-member program viewed the discharge as “positive,” concluding that the exiting students were prepared for the move on to the next setting.

**Table 2. Demographic and Other Relevant Information of Exiting NAPSEC Students**  
n=3,596

<b>Program Classification</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>%</b>
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders	1,570	43.7
Developmental Disorders	850	23.6
Preschool Disorders	702	19.5
Medical Disorders	318	8.8
Learning Disorders	156	4.4
<b>Program Type</b>		
Day	2,413	67.1
Residential	200	5.6
Day & Residential	983	27.3
<b>Reason for Exit</b>		
Transfer Students	2,406	66.9
Graduates/Aged-Out Students	1,042	29.0
Dropouts	148	4.1
<b>Grade Level</b>		
Preschool	728	20.2
Elementary School	225	6.3
Middle School	333	9.3
High School	2,310	64.2
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>		

<sup>1</sup> Of the 148 dropouts, 112 (76%) were male and 36 (24%) were female. When race/ethnicity was examined, 59 (40%) were White, 55 (37%) were Black, 23 (16%) were Hispanic, and 11(7%) were Asian. When the disability category was considered, 44 (30%) came from programs for Developmental Disorders, 90 (61%) from programs for Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, 13 (close to 9%) from programs for Medical Disorders, and 1 (less than 1%) from programs for Learning Disorders.

White	1,844	51.3
Black	1,055	29.3
Hispanic	576	16.0
Asian	100	2.8
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander- American Indian/Alaskan Native	21	.6
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	2,574	71.6
Female	1,022	28.4
<b>Ages at Exit</b>		
3-5 years	707	19.7
6-11 years	376	10.5
12-17 years	1,296	36.0
18-21+ years	1,217	33.8
<b>Length of Stay</b>		
< 1 year	568	15.8
1-5 years	2,187	60.6
6-10 years	333	9.3
11+ years	116	3.3
Not Available	392	10.9
<b>Subsidized Lunch</b>		
Yes	1,183	32.9
No	2,413	67.1
<b>Status of Planning Information</b>		
Available in Records	3,204	89.1
Not Available	392	10.9
<b>Staff Assessment of Exit</b>		
Planned		
Yes	2,666	74.1
No	930	25.9
Positive		
Yes	2,834	78.8
No	762	21.2

## The Transfer Students

### Demographics

Taken together, 2,202 students transferred from a NAPSEC-member school with a discharge plan. Of these, 1,619 (74%) were male, while 583 (26%) were female. When race/ethnicity was examined, 1,130 students (51%) were White, 648 (29.4%) were Black, 370 (16.8%) were Hispanic, 50 (2.3%) were Asian, and the remaining 4 students (.2%) were American Indian/Alaskan Native (2 students) and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (2 students). While 1,488 (67%) of these students attended day programs, 589 students (27%) attended programs that served both day and residential

students, and 125 students (6%) attended programs that were exclusively residential. About 43% (952 students) came from Emotional /Behavioral Disorders programs, 30% (666 students) Preschool Disorders programs, 16% (352 students) from Developmental Disorders programs, 8% (166 students) from Medical Disorders programs, and 3% (66 students) from Learning Disorders programs.

### Grade Level

As Table 3 shows, 692 (31.4%) of the exiting transfer students attended Preschool, 203 (9.2%) Elementary School, 303 (13.81%) Middle School, and 1,004 (45.6%) attended High School programs.

**Table 3. Transfer Students by Grade Level**

n=2,202

	#	%
Preschool	692	31.4
Elementary School	203	9.2
Middle School	303	13.8
High School	1,004	45.6
Total	2,202	100

### Length of Stay

Table 4 shows how long the transfer students were enrolled in a NAPSEC-member program.

**Table 4. Length of Stay for Transfer Students**

n=2,202

	#	%
< 1 year	495	22.5
1-5 years	1,608	73.0
6-10 years	99	4.5
11+ years	0	0
Total	2,202	100

As Table 4 indicates, while 22.5% (495 students) were enrolled in a NAPSEC-member special education program for less than 1 year, 73% (1,608 students) attended for 1 to 5 years and 99 students (4.5%) were enrolled for 6 to 10 years. No transfer student was enrolled for 11 years or more. When the categories of “less than 1 year” and “1-5 years” are combined, close to 96% of these students were enrolled in a NAPSEC member program for 5 years or less before making plans to transfer to another educational program.

### The Educational Plans by Specialized Program

The plans of the 2,2002 students who transferred from a NAPSEC member program to another educational program during the 2014-15 school year were examined according to the category of the specialized program in which they were enrolled before they exited. About 43% (952 students) attended Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs; 30% (666 students) were enrolled in Preschool Disorders programs; 16 % (352 students) were enrolled in Developmental Disorders programs; 8% (166 students) attended Medical Disorders programs; and another 3% (66 students) attended Learning Disorders programs. Table 5 displays the distribution of these student plans.

**Table 5. Educational Plans for Transfer Students by Specialized Program**

Education Setting	Preschool n=666		E/BD n=952		DD n=352		Medical n=166		Learning n=66		Total n=2,202	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Regular Education, Not Special Education	162	24.3	8	9.0	27	7.7	4	2.4	8	12.1	287	13.0
Regular Education with Supports	185	27.8	66	7.0	42	11.9	26	15.7	37	56.1	356	16.2
<b>Subtotal: Returns to Regular Education</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>52.1</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>16.0</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>19.6</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>18.1</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>68.2</b>	<b>643</b>	<b>29.2</b>
Alternate School	0	0	97	10.2	5	1.4	29	17.5	2	3.0	133	6.0
Special Education, Self -Contained LEA	243	36.5	208	21.8	83	23.6	31	18.7	6	9.1	571	25.9
<b>Subtotal: Returns to Other In-District Education</b>	<b>243</b>	<b>36.5</b>	<b>305</b>	<b>32.0</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>25.0</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>36.2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>12.1</b>	<b>704</b>	<b>31.9</b>
Out- of- District Special Education Day School	72	10.8	283	29.7	128	36.4	45	27.1	11	16.7	539	24.5
Residential School	0	0	87	9.1	32	9.1	8	4.8	2	3.0	129	5.9
Home Instruction	0	0	37	3.9	16	4.5	7	4.2	0	0	60	2.7
Other	4	.6	88	9.3	19	5.4	16	9.6	0	0	127	5.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>666</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>952</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>2,202</b>	<b>100</b>

### Results for Transfer Student Educational Plans

As Table 5 indicates, more than 61% of the transfer students (1,347 students) left a NAPSEC-member specialized school with plans to return to an educational program within the local public school district. Of these, about 29% (643 students) had plans to return to regular education programs (13%

to regular education without special education services; 16% to regular education with supports), while nearly 32% (704 students) planned to return to other available programs within the public school district (about 6% to alternate school and 26% to self-contained classrooms).

Exiters from member facilities serving students with Learning Disorders ( 68%) and Preschool Disorders ( 52%) were the most likely to plan returns to regular education programs. Exiting students from programs offering services to those from other disability categories planned to return to regular educational programs as follows: almost 20% for Developmental Disorders programs; 18% from Medical Disorders programs; and 16% from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs. When plans to enter other educational programs offered within the local school district were examined by disability category, the following emerged. Over 36% of the students from Medical Disorders and Preschool Disorders programs, 32% from Emotional/Behavioral programs, 25% from Developmental Programs, and 12% from Learning Disorders programs left with plans to return to educational programs within the local public school district that were not in regular education classrooms.

When all plans to return to in-district programs are examined, 88 % of the transfer students from Preschool Disorders programs, 80% from Learning Disorders programs, 54% from Medical Disorders programs, 48% from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, and 45% from Developmental Disorders programs made discharge plans to return to a program in the local public school district.

#### **Return to In-District Education: School Years 2012-13 to 2014-15**

Table 6 provides an overview of the plans of transfer students to return to an in-district program for the schools years of 2012-13 to 2014-15.

**Table 6 Transfer Student Return to In-District Education: School Years 2012-13 to 2014-15**

	In-District		Other		Total		Outside	
	Regular Education <sup>a</sup>		In-District Education <sup>b</sup>		In-District Education		District Education <sup>c</sup>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2012-13 n=1,725 (35% participation)	297	17	614	36	911	53	814	47
2013-14 n=1,817 (35% participation)	343	19	653	36	996	55	821	45
2014-15 n=2,202 (39% participation)	643	29	704	32	1,347	61	855	39

<sup>a</sup> Regular education, including with supports

<sup>b</sup> Resource room, alternate school, self-contained LEA

<sup>c</sup> Out-of-district special education day school, residential school, home instruction, other placement (e.g., correctional, psychiatric, medical, or developmental facility)

When results for the 2014-15 school year are compared to those for the previous 2 school years, it is clear that there has been an increase in the number of students who left a NAPSEC member program with plans to return to in-district programs. For planned returns to regular education programs, an increase of 12% from 2012-13 and of 10% from 2013-14 is noted. For return to other in-district programming, an increase of 8% from 2012-13 and of 6% from 2013-14 is evident.

### Living Arrangements

When the plans for living arrangements were examined, 78% of the students (1,724) reported that they planned to continue to live with their parents or legal guardians. About 1.5% (33 students) planned to live independently (13 students) or semi-independently (20 students). Nearly 7% (144 students) made plans to live in a skill development/ foster home (35 students) or group home (109 students). Another 3% (74 students) planned to enter residential treatment. About 2.5% (57 students) made plans to go to a developmental (1 student), psychiatric (30 students), or medical (26 students) center. The plans of nearly 4% (75 students) called for entry into the juvenile justice system. Finally, 4% (95 students) planned to live in another situation, such as a drug treatment facility.

### The Graduates/Aged-Out Students

#### Demographics

There were 1,002 graduates/aged-out students with discharge plans. Of these, 676 students (67%) were male, while 326 students (33%) were female. When race/ethnicity was examined, 532 students (53%) were White, 265 (26.5%) were Black, 151 (15%) were Hispanic, and 40 (4%) were Asian. The remaining 1.5% (14 students) were American Indian/Alaskan Native (8 students) and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (6 students). About 42% (423 students) were enrolled in Developmental Disorders programs, 39% (386 students) Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, 11% (116 students) in Medical Disorders programs, and 8% (77 students) in Learning Disorders programs. While 719 (72%) of these students attended day programs, 54 students (5%) attended programs that served both day and residential students, and 229 students (23%) attended programs that were exclusively residential.

#### Length of Stay

Table 7 shows the length of stay in a NAPSEC-member program for the students who graduated or aged out.

**Table 7. Length of Stay for Graduates/Aged-Out Students**

n= 1,002

	#	%
< 1 year	73	7.3
1-5 years	579	57.8
6-10 years	234	23.3

11+ years	116	11.6
Total	1,002	100

As Table 7 indicates, more than 7% (73 graduates/aged-out students) were enrolled in their NAPSEC member special education program for less than 1 year; 58% (579 graduates/aged-out students) for 1-5 years; 23% (234 graduates/aged-out students) for 6-10 years; and over 11% (116 graduates/aged-out students) for 11 or more years. When the categories of “less than 1 year” and “1-5 years” are combined, what emerges is that 65% (652 graduates/aged-out students) were enrolled in these programs for 5 years or less.

### The Post School Plans by Specialized Program

Table 8 presents an analysis of the post school plans of the graduates/aged-out students according to the specialized educational programs from which they were discharged.

**Table 8. Post School Plans of Graduates/Aged-Out Students by Specialized Program**  
n=1,002

Post School Setting	DD n=423		E/BD n=386		Medical n=116		Learning n=77		Total n=1,002	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Four Year College	1	.2	50	13.0	16	13.8	36	46.7	103	10.3
Two Year College	19	4.5	127	32.9	19	16.4	16	20.8	181	18.1
Trade/Technical School	4	.9	26	6.7	5	4.3	4	5.2	39	3.9
Competitive Employment	49	11.6	82	21.2	7	6.0	8	10.4	146	14.5
Military	0	0	3	.8	1	.9	3	3.9	7	.7
<b>Mainstream Activity<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>73</b>	<b>17.2</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>74.6</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>41.4</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>87.0</b>	<b>476</b>	<b>47.5</b>
Vocational Rehabilitation Training Program	69	16.3	21	5.4	14	12.1	5	6.5	109	10.8
Supported Employment	53	12.6	16	4.1	13	11.2	1	1.3	83	8.3
Sheltered Employment	50	11.8	6	1.6	3	2.6	0	0	59	5.9
<b>Vocational Rehabilitation Activity<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>172</b>	<b>40.7</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>25.9</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7.8</b>	<b>251</b>	<b>25.0</b>
Adult Partial Care	32	7.6	6	1.6	9	7.7	0	0	47	4.7
Nonvocational Day Program	104	24.6	8	2.1	19	16.4	0	0	131	13.1
<b>Community-Based Program Activity<sup>c</sup></b>	<b>136</b>	<b>32.2</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>178</b>	<b>17.8</b>
Other	1	.2	2	.5	0	0	1	1.3	4	.4
No Education/Training, Job or Program	41	9.7	39	10.2	10	8.6	3	3.9	93	9.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>423</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,002</b>	<b>100</b>

<sup>a</sup> Mainstream Activity – 4-Yr. /2-Yr. College, Trade/Technical School, Competitive Employment or Military

<sup>b</sup> Vocational Rehabilitation Activity – Vocational Rehabilitation Training Programs, Supported or Sheltered Employment

<sup>c</sup> Community-Based Programs Activity – Partial Care and Non vocational Day Programs

### Results for Graduate/Aged-Out Student Post School Plans

As Table 8 shows, more than 32% (323 graduates/aged-out students) planned to go on to a 4-year/2-year College or a Trade/Technical School. More than 15% (153 graduates/aged-out students) were discharged with plans to enter Competitive Employment or the Military. Taken together, more than 47% of the graduates/aged-out students (476) planned to enter a Mainstream Activity by participating in post school education or technical training, seeking competitive employment, or enlisting in the military.

Moreover, 25% (251 graduates/aged-out students) planned to enter a Vocational Rehabilitation Activity by participating in a vocational rehabilitation training program (11%) or in supported (8%) or sheltered employment (6%).

Another 18% (178 graduates/ aged-out students) planned to enter a Community-Based Program Activity by enrolling in adult partial care (about 5%) or non-vocational day programs (13%).

Only .4% (4 graduates/aged-out students) had plans to enter “Other” adult settings, such as psychiatric, drug rehabilitation, or correctional facilities.

Finally, more than 9% (93 graduates/aged-out students) were discharged without plans to enter a specific educational, vocational, rehabilitative, or supportive program or to obtain a job after completing their secondary program.

At discharge, graduates/aged-out students from Learning Disorders programs (87%) followed by students from Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders programs (75%) were the most likely to make plans to enter Mainstream Activity by enrolling postsecondary education, the competitive workforce or the military. Graduates/aged-out students from Developmental Disorders programs (41%) followed by those from Medical Disorders programs (26%) were the most likely to enter Vocational Rehabilitation Activity. Graduates/aged-out students from Developmental Disorders programs (32%) and Medical Disorders programs (24%) were the most likely to plan to participate in Community-based Program Activity.

Finally, graduates/aged-out students from Developmental Disorders programs (10%), Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders programs (10%), and Medical Disorders programs (9%) were the most likely to leave school without a plan to enter postsecondary education, employment, or an appropriate adult vocational training or community-based program

### Post School Plans: School Years 2012-13 to 2014-15

Table 9 shows the post school plans for graduates/aged-out students from school years 2012-2013 school year to 2014-15.

**Table 9. Post School Plans of Graduates/Aged-Out Students by Activity:  
School Years 2012-13 and 2013-14**

School Year		Vocational	Community-	Total	Other
% Members	Mainstream	Rehabilitation	Based Program	Engagement	Engagement/
All Exiters	Activity <sup>a</sup>	Activity <sup>b</sup>	Activity <sup>c</sup>		Not Engaged <sup>d</sup>

	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2012-13 35% participation n=782	239	51	175	22	123	16	693	89	89	11
2013-14 35% participation n=977	439	45	210	22	208	21	857	88	120	12
2014-15 39% participation n=1,002	476	47	251	25	178	18	905	90	97	10

<sup>a</sup> Mainstream Activity – 4-Yr./2-Yr. College, Trade/Technical School, Competitive Employment or Military

<sup>b</sup> Vocational Rehabilitation Activity – Vocational Rehabilitation Training Programs, Supported or Sheltered Employment

<sup>c</sup> Community-Based Programs Activity – Partial Care and Non-vocational Day Programs

<sup>d</sup> Engaged in other activities or not engaged in any activities

For the 2014-2015 school year, an increase is noted in the total engagement of the graduates/aged-out students from the previous 2 school years. This appears to derive from increased plans to enter both Mainstream Activity as well as Vocational Rehabilitation Activity. Although plans to enter Mainstream Activity in 2014-15 remain lower than the plans for the 2012-13 school year, they represent a 2 percentage point increase over the planning report for the 2013-14 school year. Moreover, graduates/aged-out students reportedly made plans to enter Vocational Rehabilitation Activity at the higher rate of 3 percentage points than they had done in the previous 2 school years. Plans in the “Other/No Engagement” category also decreased, in this case by 1 percentage point from 2012-13 and 2 percentage points from 2013-14. This is mostly accounted for by a decrease in “Other” plans for the current year when compared to the previous years (only 4 graduates/aged-out students currently as compared to 35 graduates/aged-out students in 2013-14 and 37 graduates/aged-out students in 2012-13).<sup>2</sup>

### Living Arrangements

About 75% of the graduates/aged-out students (750) planned to live with a parent, other relative, or guardian. About 7% (70 graduates/aged-out students) made plans to live independently (47 graduates/aged-out students; 5%) or semi-independently (23 graduates/aged-out students; 2%). Nearly 15 % (148 graduates/aged-out students) had plans to live in a group home (85), skill development or foster home (31), residential treatment center (21), or developmental center (11). Finally, about 3% (34 graduates/aged-out students) had plans to enter another living arrangement, namely a medical (15 graduates/aged-out students), psychiatric (10 graduates/aged-out students) or correctional facility (9 graduates/aged-out students).

<sup>2</sup> Please see “Plans for Exiting Students, 2012-2013, Report No.12 of the NAPSEC Outcomes Project,” published by NAPSEC, Washington, D.C., in 2014 and “Plans for Exiting Students, 2013-2014. Report No.13 of the NAPSEC Outcomes Project,” published by NAPSEC, Washington, D.C., in 2015 – [www.napsec.org](http://www.napsec.org).

## Discussion

Considerations of the outcomes of special education tend to focus on how well students with special education backgrounds have transitioned into adulthood. Since little is known about movement in the careers of special education students with severe disabilities, including those who receive special education services in settings outside of the local school district, our efforts to examine outcomes in special education have also included tracking the discharge plans of the students who were neither graduates nor aged-out students, but who transferred out of specialized private approved facilities to enroll in another education facility. In doing so, we want to identify the type of settings to which students planned to move when they left a NAPSEC-member program and contribute to the knowledge base. Since IDEA supports the notion of offering special education services in the least restrictive environment along a continuum, we were interested in learning the point upon the continuum to which the transfer students planned to move upon discharge.

We were particularly interested in discovering how many transfer students were able to make plans to return to the general education setting. Following the national trend (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs, 2015; McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012) , the number of students with plans to return to regular education classrooms, with and without supports, increased to 29% percent for the present study. In comparison, for the 2012-13 school year the percentage of students leaving NAPSEC member schools with such plans was 17%, while for 2013-14, it was 19%. Another 32% of the transfer students had plans to return to other programs within the local school district, such as self-contained classrooms and alternate schools. Taken together, 61% of the transfer students had plans to return to programs within their local school district. In comparison, for the 2012-13 school year the percentage of students discharged from NAPSEC member programs with plans to return to the local district was 53%, while for 2013-14, it was 55%. It appears, therefore, that a high proportion of the transfer students in this study who were enrolled in NAPSEC-member schools received the intensive and highly specialized services and supports needed to develop, remediate, and/or strengthen their skills, which enabled them to plan to return to their local district. In fact, 74% of the staff at the NAPSEC member programs agreed that these students were prepared for this return and 79% viewed the planned return as positive. Moreover, when we consider that students with disabilities who attend NAPSEC member programs have severe, complex, and often multiple disabilities and require highly specialized and intensive programs to assure academic success, it would appear that the returns were done in a timely fashion, since more than 95% of these students were in the NAPSEC member programs for 5 years or less. Future research should follow these students to ascertain to the degree to which they were able to experience success in programs available at the local district.

As the conversation continues regarding best methods for educating students with disabilities, some authors have recently suggested that evidence of adequate learning, rather than the setting in which the learning takes place, should guide concepts of what constitutes success in special education (Fuchs, Fuchs, Compton, Wehby, Schumacher, Gersten, & Jordan, 2015). Since students with disabilities are made up of a broad range of subgroups, the field of special education is challenged to find effective methods to meet the individualized learning needs of all students with disabilities. To meet the goals of the IEP, some students with disabilities may benefit from the programs available within a public school district, while others may require out-of-district programs, such as the programs available in the approved private sector, to meet their learning needs. Again, IDEA makes clear that special education takes place upon a continuum that is sensitive to each student's individual needs.

The remaining 39% of the transfer students, those whose plans did not include returning to local district programs, were seen as needing further intensive, specialized programming outside of their local districts in order to succeed. About 25% of these students left the NAPSEC member program with plans to enter another out-of-district day program. About 6 % had plans to enter a residential treatment program, while 3% planned to receive home instruction until further educational arrangements could be developed. Finally, about 6% of the transfer students made other plans at discharge, which included entering a medical, psychiatric, drug treatment or correctional facility. Further research should attempt to track the educational paths of these students to learn more about the pattern of their careers as special education students, including whether they are able to successfully return to their local districts.

Although IDEA is forty years old, researchers continue to struggle to understand the specific elements that lead to successful outcomes for youth with disabilities as they transition from school to adulthood. Concerns remain that few studies about the transition process have been of sufficient quality to provide credible guidance in closing the gap between general and special education students in regard to outcomes (Cobb, Lipscomb, Wolgemuth, Schulte, Veliquette, Alwell, Batchelder, Bernard, Hernandez, Holmquist-Johnson, Orsi, McMeeking, Wang, & Weinberg, 2013). We may add that often such discussions do not adequately account for the wide range of disabilities represented by the singular term “special education” nor the degree of disability faced by one student as opposed to another. The variability in the discharge plans of the graduates/aged-out students with severe disabilities who left a NAPSEC-member school during the 2014-15 school year demonstrate a range of planned outcomes for the exiting students. On the whole, taking individual abilities, challenges, and needs into account, 90% of the graduates/aged-out students had plans to lead engaged adult lives in their communities. About 47% planned to be involved in the mainstream, 25% in vocational rehabilitation, and 18% in community-based adult day programs in which vocational and/or non-vocational needs (such as, medical, psychiatric, social) could be addressed.<sup>3</sup>

Overall, more than 47% of the graduate/aged-out students had plans to enter mainstream activities (10% to 4-year college, 18% to 2-year college, 4% to trade/technical school, and 15% to competitive employment, including military service), an increase of 2% from the findings for 2013-14.

It is perhaps not surprising that 87% of the graduates/aged-out students from Learning Disorders programs had plans to enter the mainstream upon discharge. Special education has a long history of focusing on how to best teach students from this disability subgroup, a factor which might make this group of students with disabilities among the most prepared of all students with disabilities to successfully enter adult roles (McLeskey, & Waldron, 2011). In fact, this finding from our study appears to be consistent with the national trend of students with learning disabilities increasingly enrolling in postsecondary education (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005; Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009; Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010; Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagel, Shaver, & Wei, 2011; Hamblet, 2015). The NLTS2 also found that this group of students was the most likely of all students with disabilities to be employed 8 years after leaving high school (Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagel, Shaver, & Wei, 2011). A follow-up study to track the nonpublic school graduates/aged-out students with learning disabilities after exiting at several future points of time would make a valuable contribution to understanding the adult

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<sup>3</sup> More than 9% left with no plans and the plans of less than 1% placed them outside the pulse of the community in a hospital or correctional setting.

experiences of young adults with learning disabilities who entered the adult worlds of college or work after enrollment in out-of-district programs. It would be informative to learn whether students with more severe disabilities are as successful as adults as their public school peers.

Among students from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, 75% had plans to enter the mainstream, a finding that represents a nearly 20% increase for this subgroup of students with disabilities when compared to their peers in the 2013-14 cohort. In the current analysis, more than 52% of the distribution is derived from plans to enter 4-year college (13%), 2-year college (33%), or trade/technical school (7%). The literature has consistently reported the poor adult outcomes for this group of students due to their poor rates for graduation, employment, and relationship engagement as well as their antisocial behavior (SRI International, 1993; Wagner, 1995; Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Wagner & Blackorby, 1996; Malmgren, Edgar, & Neel, 1998; Mattison & Spitznagel, 1998; Sample, 1998; Tobin & Sugai, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 1999, 2000, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2000; Reddy, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2001; Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004; Wagner & Cameto, 2004; Newman, Wagner, Cameto and Knokey, 2009; Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, and Shaver, 2010; Chen, Symons, & Reynolds, 2011). That more than 52% of these students made plans to go on to postsecondary education is encouraging, since, as Lombardi, Gerdes, and Murray (2011) point out, students with disabilities face many challenges when, entering postsecondary education experiences, including a reduction in overall supports within the institution, faculty who may have unwelcoming attitudes, and new demands for self-disclosure and self-advocacy. The highly individualized and intensive services these students received in a NAPSEC member program, services that were specifically tailored to their unique educational, behavioral, social, and emotional needs, helped these students acquire the skills needed by individuals with disabilities to develop positive career trajectories (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Burchart, 2004; Lindstrom et al., 2013). After all, research has shown that schools that are small in size, that offer classes of small size, and have staff specifically trained to work and form relationships with students with Emotional/Behavioral disorders, such as those who belong to NAPSEC, appear best able to help students with emotional and behavioral issues develop prosocial behavior and adapt to new roles (Chen, Symons, & Reynolds, 2011; Carran et al., 2014). As Wagner et al. (2006) point out, students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders are often lost in large public schools where they are likely to interact with teachers who feel unprepared to work effectively with them.

Almost 42% of the graduate/aged-out students with Medical Disorders also reported they were entering the mainstream. While 34.5% planned to enter 2- or 4-year colleges or trade/technical schools, another almost 7% planned to enter competitive employment, both representing a slight decrease from the 2013-14 findings. Moreover, in 2014-15 about 26% of these students plans to enter vocational rehabilitation activities as compared to 17.5% from the previous year; in the present study 24% planned to enter adult partial care or non-vocational day programs as compared to 30% in the previous year. The difference in findings may be due to the range of severity in the disabilities of the students as they were discharged from a NAPSEC member program.

Finally, plans for graduates/aged-out students from Developmental Disorders programs to enter the mainstream remained relatively constant between 2014-15 (17.2%) and 2013-14 (17.9%). In the present study, about 5% made plans to enter 2- or 4-year college or trade/technical school as compared to 9% in 2013-14; presently more than 11% planned to enter competitive employment as compared to 9% in 2013-14. More studies are needed to better understand how to support this subgroup of students on paths to mainstream roles

The plans of 41% of the graduates/aged-out students with Developmental Disorders in the present study emphasized entering a vocational rehabilitation program to obtain employment skills as compared with 33% from 2013-14. About 32% had plans to be involved in a supportive adult program in the community as compared with 42% from 2013-14. Again, the difference in findings may relate to the range of severity in the disabilities of these students at the time of discharge planning.

### **Conclusion**

By offering individualized, intensive, therapeutic services, NAPSEC-member schools educate and support students with severe disabilities and continue to fulfill a critical role along the continuum of alternative placements and services required by IDEA. Because of the programs found in the facilities of NAPSEC members, children with serious disabilities can not only gain access to the benefits of education, but can also look forward to finding meaningful and productive roles in their communities as adults.

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