

National Association of Private Special Education Centers

Outcomes of Private Specialized Education Programs

Plans for Exiting Students 2015-2016

Report Number 15

NAPSEC Outcomes Project

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Executive Summary

From 2000-2004, and again from 2007 to the present, the National Association of Private Special Education Centers (NAPSEC), an organization of 220 approved private special education centers, has sponsored an outcomes study to report the discharge plans of the students with severe disabilities who were enrolled in the nonpublic special education programs operated by its members. NAPSEC has undertaken this task because other investigations into the outcomes of students from special education have not focused on the students with the most severe disabilities, those who are enrolled in NAPSEC-member programs because the highly individualized and intensive specialized services they require are not available in the public sector.

Each student in this study has an Individual Education Program (IEP) which, as legally mandated, was developed by the public-school district. The IEP comprehensively describes the intensive therapeutic services and curriculum modifications each student needs to succeed. By offering the specialized programs prescribed in the IEP to students with severe disabilities, NAPSEC-member facilities partner with the local public school district by implementing the IEP. In doing so, NAPSEC-members play a critical role along the continuum of special education. Because of the programs offered by NAPSEC-member facilities, children with severe disabilities gain access to the benefits of education and can also look forward to leading meaningful and productive lives in their communities as adults.

Below are the highlights of the report for the 2015-16 academic year which focuses on the discharge plans made by students who exited from NAPSEC-member programs. These exiting students were either transfer students (those of school-age who moved to another educational setting) or graduates (those who received a secondary school diploma or certificate of completion) and aged-out students (those who reached the legal age-limit for receiving educational services).

Transfer Students

Study findings for the 2,570 students who transferred during the 2015-16 school year indicate that the educational remediation and support provided by NAPSEC-member programs enabled the majority of these students to plan to enter or return to educational programs within their local public school districts:

- 62% (1,585 students) planned to enter or return to an educational program within the local public school district.
- 24% (601 students) planned to enter or re-enter regular education settings in their local public school district. Of these, 10 % (244 students) planned to do so without supports, while the remaining 14% (357 students) planned to access the regular education setting with IEP-prescribed supports.
- 38% (984 students) planned to enter other educational settings within the local district, such as an alternate school program or a self-contained classroom.
- Another 38% (985 students) planned to move to settings outside the local district. These included plans for 17% (648 students) to enroll in an out-of-district special education day school

programs; 3% (162 students) to enter a residential school; 4% (70 students) to receive home instruction; and 6% (105 students) to make other plans, such as entering the juvenile justice system or facilities for drug, medical, or psychiatric treatment.

- 95% (2,439 students) were enrolled in the NAPSEC-member program for 5 years or less.

Graduates/Aged-Out Students

Study findings for 1,033 students who graduated or aged-out during the 2015-16 school year indicate that NAPSEC-member programs provided prescribed instruction, support, and guidance as these older adolescents and young adults made the transition to adulthood with plans to pursue productive and engaged adult roles in their communities, in accordance with their individual capabilities and capacities:

- 90% (931 graduates/aged-out students) left a NAPSEC-member program with plans to enter productive and/or engaged adult roles.
- 49% (504 graduates/aged-out students) planned to enter a mainstream activity. This included 33% with plans to enroll in post-secondary 4-year/2-year college or trade/technical school; and 16% with plans to join the competitive employment workforce or the military.
- 25% (261 graduates/aged-out students) had plans to enter vocational rehabilitation, including vocational rehabilitation training, supported employment or sheltered employment.
- 16% (166 graduates/aged-out students) made plans to enter an appropriate adult program in the community, including adult partial care or nonvocational day programs.
- 80% (65 graduates/aged-out students) from Learning Disorders programs and 70% (290 graduates/aged-out students) from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs (70%) were the most likely to make plans to enroll in postsecondary education, obtain a competitive job, or enlist in the military.
- It is important to highlight that 70% 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%).

Introduction

From 2000-2004, and again from 2007 to the present, the National Association of Private Special Education Centers (NAPSEC), an organization of 220 approved private special education centers, has sponsored an outcomes study to report the discharge plans of the students with severe disabilities who were enrolled in the nonpublic special education programs operated by its members. The association has undertaken this task because other investigations into the outcomes of students from special education, such as the National Longitudinal Transition studies (1993, 2004, 2010, 2011), have not focused on the outcomes for students with the most severe disabilities, the students

who are enrolled in NAPSEC-member programs, whose needs cannot be met within the local public school district. These students do not attend special education programs within their local public school district because the highly individualized and intensive specialized services they require are not available in the public sector. Due to their highly individualized educational needs, each student in this study has an Individual Education Program (IEP) which was developed by the public school district and which comprehensively describes the intensive therapeutic services and curriculum modifications the student needs to succeed. By offering the IEP-prescribed individualized specialized program to each student with severe disabilities, NAPSEC-member programs function as partners to the local public school district in implementing the IEP.

Generally, NAPSEC's outcome studies have demonstrated that 50% or more of the exiting transfer students plan to enter or return to the local public school and, when they do, 20% or more have plans to enter or return to regular education programs. These previous studies have also revealed that about 90% of the graduate/aged-out students leave a NAPSEC-member school with plans to engage in productive adult roles in their communities. In fact, about 50%, including a high proportion of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, a group who are often characterized by poor outcomes as adults, exit with plans to enter mainstream adult roles.

The current report continues efforts to explore the plans made by students exiting a NAPSEC-member special education program during the 2015-2016 school year. The outcomes for transfer students are categorized by disability group as well as by identifying the educational settings in which these younger students planned to transfer after leaving the NAPSEC-member program. The outcomes for the graduates/aged-out students are categorized by disability group as well as by the adult settings which they planned to enter after leaving the NAPSEC-member secondary school program.

Method

Each NAPSEC-member school that volunteered for this study was asked to submit discharge information about each student who exited a program over the course of the 2015-2016 academic year. Exiting students were defined as transfer students, students of school age 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 due to reaching the legal age limit for receiving public educational services. In addition, demographic and programmatic information was collected on the number of students who dropped out of school during the course of the study as well as students who left without making a plan or revealing plans to school staff.

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. The responses were collected from each participating school and entered in a database for analysis.

The Participating Programs and Student Demographics

During the school year of 2015-2016, 108 schools, 49% of NAPSEC’s membership, volunteered to participate in the study. These schools offered 247 specialized education programs; 201 (81%) of these programs offered services to day students, 9 (4%) to residential students, and 37 (15%) to both day and residential students. Moreover, 76 (31%) programs focused on addressing the needs of students with Development Disorders, 58 (23%) on students with Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders, 44 (18%) on students with Medical Disorders, 40 (16%) on students with Learning Disorders, and 29 (12%) on students with Preschool Disorders. Taken together, 14,493 students were enrolled in the participating member schools during the 2015-16 academic year. Of these, 10,278 (71%) were male and 4,215 (29%) were female.

The participating schools were located in 13 states and 7 of the 10 federal education regions. As Table 1 shows, 75% of the schools were located in the Mid-Atlantic region (Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania) which contained 81 participating schools. About 12% came from the Northeast region (Connecticut, Massachusetts, and New York) with 13 schools represented. The North Central region (Illinois) with 5 schools accounted for over 4%, the Appalachia region (Tennessee and Virginia) with 4 schools represented nearly 4%, and the WestEd region (Arizona, California, and Utah) with 3 schools made up almost 3% of the distribution. Finally, the Southeast region (Florida) with 1 school at nearly 1% and the Mid-Continent region (Kansas) with 1 school at almost 1% completed the participation.

Table 1. Participating Schools by Federal Educational Regions

N=108

Federal Regions/Participating States	#	%
<u>Northeast:</u> ¹ Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York	13	12.1
<u>MidAtlantic:</u> ² Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania	81	75.0
<u>Appalachia:</u> ³ Tennessee, Virginia	4	3.7
<u>Southeast:</u> ⁴ Florida	1	.9
<u>North Central:</u> ^{5,6} Illinois	5	4.6
<u>Mid-Continent:</u> ⁷ Kansas	1	.9

<u>WestEd:</u> ^{8, 9, 10}	3	2.8
Arizona, California, Utah		
<u>Total</u>	108	100.0

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

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

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

4 In Southeast Region, no participants from Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina.

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

6 No participants In Southwest Region (Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Texas).

7 In Mid-Continent Region, no participants from Colorado, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming.

8 In WestEd Region, no participants from Nevada.

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, 4,076 students exited from a participating school. Outcome information was available for 3,603 (88%) of the exiting students, 2,570 transfer students (63%) and 1,033 graduates/aged-out students (25%). Discharge planning information was not available for 473 exiting students (12%), those students who left school without making their plans known (342 students)¹ and those who dropped out of school (131 students).²

When all exiting students are examined, those with and without discharge plans, it is clear that these students tend to be White (50%), male (71%), high school students (59%), in the age categories of

¹ Of the 342 students whose plans were not available, 306 (89%) were transfer students and 36 (11%) were graduate/aged-out students; 231 (68%) were male, 111 (32%) were female; 53% (180) came from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, 17% (59) from Developmental Disorders programs, 16% (54) from Preschool Disorders programs, 8% (29) from Medical Disorders programs, and 6% (20) from Learning Disorders programs. When race/ethnicity was examined, 174 (51%) were White, 99 (29%) were Black, 54 (16%) were Hispanic, and 15(4%) were Asian.

² Of the 131 students who dropped out, 88 (67%) were male and 43 (33%) were female; 80% (105) came from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, 14% (18) from Medical Disorders programs, 5% (6) from Developmental Disorders programs, and 1% (2) from Learning Disorders programs. When race/ethnicity was examined, 56 (43%) were White, 42 (32%) were Black, 31 (24%) were Hispanic, and 2(1%) were Asian.

12 to 17 years (31%) and 18-21+ years (29%) , who were enrolled in day programs (75%) for students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (45%) from 1-5 years (59%). almost 38% of the exiting students participated in the federally-sponsored subsidized lunch program. Moreover, 88% of the exiting students had made plans at discharge and staff at the NAPSEC-member program viewed the planned discharge as “positive” for 75% of the students. In other words, in the judgment of staff, 75% of the exiting students were prepared to move to the settings indicated in the plans.

Table 2. Demographic and Other Relevant Information of All Exiting NAPSEC Students, Those with and without Plans at Discharge n=4,076

<u>Program Classification</u>	#	%
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders	1,837	45.1
Developmental Disorders	991	24.3
Preschool Disorders	766	18.8
Medical Disorders	301	7.4
Learning Disorders	181	4.4
<u>Program Type</u>		
Day	3,056	75.0
Residential	152	3.7
Day & Residential	868	21.3
<u>Reason for Exit</u>		
Transfer Students	2,570	63.1
Graduates/Aged-Out Students	1,033	25.3
Not Available ^a	473	11.6
<u>Grade Level</u>		
Preschool	783	19.2
Elementary School	358	8.8
Middle School	513	12.6
High School	2,422	59.4
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
White	2,038	50.0
Black	1,207	29.6
Hispanic	674	16.5
Asian	132	3.3
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander-	25	.6

American Indian/Alaskan Native		
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	2,872	70.5
Female	1,204	29.5
<u>Age at Exit</u>		
3-5 years	728	17.9
6-11 years	431	10.6
12-17 years	1,252	30.7
18-21+ years	1,192	29.2
Not Available	473	11.6
<u>Length of Stay</u>		
< 1 year	676	16.6
1-5 years	2,416	59.3
6-10 years	371	9.1
11+ years	140	3.4
Not Available	473	11.6
<u>Subsidized Lunch</u>		
Yes	1,545	37.9
No	2,531	62.1
<u>Status of Planning Information</u>		
Available in Records	3,603	88.4
Not Available	473	11.6
<u>Staff Assessment of Exit</u>		
Planned		
Yes	3,603	88.4
No	473	11.6
Positive		
Yes	3,053	74.9
No	1,023	25.1

The Transfer Students with Plans at Discharge
Demographic and Other Relevant Information

During the 2015-2016 school year, 2,570 students transferred from a NAPSEC-member school with a discharge plan. Table 3 sets forth the demographic and other relevant data about this group of students.

**Table 3. Demographic and Other Relevant Information of
 Transfer Students with Plans at Discharge
 n=2,570**

<u>Program Classification</u>	#	%
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders	1,134	44.1
Developmental Disorders	483	18.8
Preschool Disorders	712	27.7
Medical Disorders	164	6.4
Learning Disorders	77	3.0
<u>Program Type</u>		
Day	1,920	74.7
Residential	102	4.0
Day & Residential	548	21.3
<u>Grade Level</u>		
Preschool	727	28.3
Elementary School	318	12.4
Middle School	407	15.8
High School	1,118	43.5
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
White	1,332	51.8
Black	750	29.2
Hispanic	405	15.7
Asian	61	2.4
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander- American Indian/Alaskan Native	22	.9
<u>Table 3 (continued)</u>		
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	1,840	71.6

Female	730	28.4
<u>Age at Exit</u>		
3-5 years	727	28.3
6-11 years	318	12.4
12-17 years	707	27.5
18-21+ years	818	31.8
<u>Length of Stay</u>		
< 1 year	608	23.7
1-5 years	1,831	71.2
6-10 years	131	5.1

As Table 3 indicates, of the 2,570 transfer students who exited with a plan, about 44% (1,134 students) came from Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders programs; 28% (712 students) from Preschool Disorders programs; 19% (483 students) from Developmental Disorders programs; 6% (164 students) from Medical Disorders programs; and 3% (77 students) from Learning Disorders programs. While 1,920 (75%) of these students were enrolled in day programs, 548 students (21%) attended programs for both day and residential students, and 102 students (4%) attended residential programs. When grade level was examined, 727 students (28%) attended Preschool; 318 (12%) were Elementary School students; 407 (16%) were in Middle School; and 1,118 (44%) were High School students. When race/ethnicity was examined, 1,332 students (52%) were White, 750 (29%) were Black, 405 (16%) were Hispanic, 61 (2%) were Asian, and the remaining 22 students (1%) were American Indian/Alaskan Native (12 students) and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (10 students).

When gender was analyzed, 1,840 (72%) of the transfer students were male, while 730 (28%) were female. About 28% (727 students) were between the ages of 3-5 years; 12% (318 students) were between the ages of 6-11 years; more than 27% (707 students) were between the ages of 12-17 years; and 32% (818 students) were between the ages of 18-21 years. About 24% (608 students) were enrolled in a NAPSEC-member program for less than 1 year; about 71% (1,831 students) for 1 to 5 years; and 131 students (5%) were enrolled for 6 to 10 years. When the categories of “less than 1 year” and “1-5 years” are combined, it is clear that 95% 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 Discharge Plans of Transfer Students: Educational Plans by Specialized Program

Table 4 exhibits the discharge plans of the 2,570 transfer students by the category of the program in which the students were enrolled before they exited the NAPSEC-member facility.

Table 4. Educational Plans for Transfer Students by Specialized Program N= 2,570

Education Setting	Preschool n=712		E/BD n=1,134		DD n=483		Medical n=164		Learning n=77		Total n=2,570	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Regular Education, Not Special Education	109	15.3	97	8.6	9	1.9	14	8.5	15	19.5	244	9.5
Regular Education with Supports	163	22.9	115	10.1	31	6.4	33	20.1	15	19.5	357	13.9
Subtotal: Returns to Regular Education	272	38.2	212	18.7	40	8.3	47	28.6	30	39.0	601	23.4
Alternate School	7	1.0	119	10.5	7	1.5	16	9.8	5	6.5	154	6.0
Special Education, Self-Contained LEA	350	49.1	239	21.1	190	39.3	32	19.5	19	24.7	830	32.3
Subtotal: Returns to Other In-District Education	357	50.1	358	31.6	197	40.8	48	29.3	24	31.2	984	38.3
Out- of- District Special Education Day Program	82	11.5	329	29.0	190	39.3	34	20.7	13	16.9	648	25.2
Residential School	0	0	132	11.6	23	4.8	5	3.1	2	2.6	162	6.3
Home Instruction	0	0	33	2.9	15	3.1	19	11.6	3	3.8	70	2.7
Other	1	.2	70	6.2	18	3.7	11	6.7	5	6.5	105	4.1
Total	712	100	1,134	100	483	100	164	100	77	100	2,570	100

Results for Transfer Student Educational Plans

As Table 4 indicates, more than 62% of the transfer students (1,585 students) left a NAPSEC-member facility with plans to enter an educational program within the local public school district. Of these, nearly 24% (601 students) had plans to return to regular education programs (about 10% to regular education without special education services; 14% to regular education with IEP-prescribed supports); while more than 38% (984 students) planned to return to other programs available within the public-school district (about 6% to alternate school and 32% to self-contained classrooms).

Transfer students who were enrolled in facilities serving students with Learning Disorders (39%), Preschool Disorders (38%), and Medical Disorders (27%) were the most likely to plan to enter regular education programs. About 8% of exiting students from programs for students with Developmental Disorders and 18% from those for students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs made plans to enroll in regular education programs. When plans to enter other in-district educational programs were examined by disability category, the following emerged. About 50% of the students from Preschool Disorders programs, 41% from Developmental Disorder programs, 32% from Emotional/Behavioral programs, 31% from Learning Disorders programs, and 29% from Learning Disorders programs exited from a NAPSEC-member facility with plans to enter an educational program within the local public school district that could not be described as one that offers regular education services.

When all plans to return to in-district programs are examined, 62% (1,586 students) of the transfer students planned to enter programs within the local school district. Of these, 88% (629 students) from Preschool Disorders programs, 71% (54 students) from Learning Disorders programs, 60% (95 students) from Medical Disorders programs, 50% (570) from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, and 49% (237 students) from Developmental Disorders programs reported plans to enter an educational program in the local public school district. The plans of the remaining 38% (985 students) of the transfer students involved moving to settings outside the local district. These included plans for 17% (648 students) to enroll in an out-of-district special education day school; about 3% (162 students) to enter a residential school; 4% (70 students) to receive home instruction; and more than 6% (105 students) to make other plans, including entering the juvenile justice system, drug treatment, and medical and psychiatric facilities.

Return to In-District Education: School Years 2012-13 to 2015-16

Table 5 provides an overview of the plans of transfer students to return to an in-district program for the school years of 2012-13 to 2015-16.

Table 5 Transfer Student Return to In-District Education: School Years 2012-13 to 2014-15

	In-District		Other		Total		Outside	
	Regular Education ^a		In-District Education ^b		In-District Education		District Education ^c	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
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
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2015-16 n=2,570 (49% participation)	601	24	984	38	1,585	62	985	38
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^a Regular education, including with supports

^b Resource room, alternate school, self-contained LEA

^c 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 2015-16 school year are compared to the 3 previous academic years (i.e., 2012-13, 2013-14, and 2014-15), it is clear that in 2015-16 more students left a NAPSEC-member program with plans to return to in-district programs than in the three previous school years. Although fewer students made plans to enter regular education programs in 2015-16 than in 2014-15, the overall number of students with plans to enroll in programs within their the local district increased when compared to 2014-15 as well as 2013-14 and 2012-13.

Living Arrangements

When the plans for living arrangements were examined, 83% of the students (2,144) reported that they planned to continue to live with their parents or legal guardians. Less than 1% (16 students) planned to live independently (9 students) or semi-independently (7 students). More than 5% (137 students) made plans to live in a skill development/ foster home (62 students) or group home (75 students). Another 6% (162 students) planned to enter residential treatment. About 2% (45 students) made plans to go to a developmental (3 students), psychiatric (29 students), or medical (13 students) center. The plans of nearly 2% (51 students) indicated entry into the juvenile justice system. Finally, about 1% (15 students) planned to enter another situation, such as a drug treatment facility.

The Graduates/Aged-Out Students

Demographic and Other Relevant Information

During the 2015-2016 school year, 1,033 graduates/aged-out students exited from a NAPSEC-member program with discharge a plan. Table 6 sets forth the demographic and other relevant data about this group of students.

Table 6. Demographic and Other Relevant Information of Graduates/Aged-Out Students with Plans at Discharge

n=1,033

<u>Program Classification</u>	#	%
Developmental Disorders	443	42.9
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders	418	40.5
Medical Disorders	90	8.7
Learning Disorders	82	7.9
<u>Program Type</u>		
Day	811	78.5
Residential	26	2.5
Day & Residential	196	19.0
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
White	602	58.3
Black	261	25.3
Hispanic	142	13.7
Asian	25	2.4
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander- American Indian/Alaskan Native	3	.3
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	707	68.4
Female	326	31.6
<u>Age at Exit</u>		
12-17 years	812	78.6
18-21+ years	221	21.4
<u>Length of Stay</u>		
< 1 year	68	6.6
1-5 years	585	56.6
6-10 years	240	23.2
11+ years	140	13.6

As Table 6 indicates, of the 1,033 graduates/aged-out students who exited with a plan, about 43% (423 graduates/aged-out students) came from Developmental Disorders programs; close to 41%

(418 graduates/aged-out students) from Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders programs; 9% (90 graduates/aged-out students) from Medical Disorders programs; and 8% (82 graduates/aged-out students) from Learning Disorders programs. While 811 (79%) of these students were enrolled in day programs, 196 graduates/aged-out students (19%) attended programs for both day and residential students, and 26 graduates/aged-out students (more than 2%) attended programs that were exclusively residential. When race/ethnicity was examined, 602 graduates/aged-out students (58%) were White, 261 (25%) were Black, 142 (14%) were Hispanic, 25 (2%) were Asian, and the remaining 3 students (less than 1%) were American Indian/Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander. When gender was analyzed, 707 (68%) of the graduates/aged-out students were male, while 326 (32%) were female. About 79% (812 graduates/aged-out students) were between the ages of 12-17 years, while 21% (221 graduates/aged-out students) were between the ages of 18-21 years. About 7% (68 graduates/aged-out students) were enrolled in a NAPSEC-member program for less than 1 year; about 57% (586 graduates/aged-out students) for 1 to 5 years; 23% (240 graduates/aged-out students) 6 to 10 years; and nearly 14% (140 graduates/aged-out students) for more than 11 years. When the categories of “less than 1 year” and “1-5 years” are combined, it is clear that 63% (653 graduates/aged-out students) were enrolled in a NAPSEC-member program for 5 years or less, while 37% (380 graduates/aged-out students) attended these programs for 6 years or more .

The Postschool Plans by Specialized Program

Table 7 presents an analysis of the postschool plans of the graduates/aged-out students according to the specialized educational programs from which they were discharged.

Table 7. Postschool Plans of Graduates/Aged-Out Students by Specialized Program

n=1,033

	DD n=443		E/BD n=418		Medical n=90		Learning n=82		Total n=1,033	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Postschool Setting										
Four Year College	7	1.6	41	9.8	9	10.0	31	37.8	88	8.5
Two Year College	55	12.4	107	25.6	20	22.2	19	23.2	201	19.5
Trade/Technical School	7	1.6	31	7.4	5	5.6	9	11.0	62	5.0
Competitive Employment	32	7.2	100	24.0	13	14.4	6	7.3	161	14.6
Military	1	.2	11	2.6	0	0	0	0	12	1.2
Mainstream Activity^a	102	23.0	290	69.4	47	52.2	65	79.3	504	48.8
Vocational Rehabilitation Training Program	53	12.0	37	8.8	3	3.3	4	4.9	97	9.4
Supported Employment	65	14.6	23	5.5	5	5.6	6	7.3	99	9.6
Sheltered Employment	62	14.0	2	.5	1	1.1	0	0	65	6.3

Vocational Rehabilitation Activity^b	180	40.6	62	14.8	9	10.0	10	12.2	261	25.3
Adult Partial Care	25	5.6	7	1.7	4	4.4	2	2.4	38	3.7
Nonvocational Day Program	02	20.8	10	2.4	23	25.6	3	3.7	128	12.4
Community-Based Program Activity^c	117	26.4	17	4.1	27	30.0	5	6.1	166	16.1
Other	0	0	1	.2	4	4.4	2	2.4	7	.6
No Education/Training, Job or Program	44	10.0	48	11.5	3	3.3	0	0	95	9.2
Total	443	100	418	100	90	100	82	100	1,033	100

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

^b Vocational Rehabilitation Activity – Vocational Rehabilitation Training Programs, Supported or Sheltered Employment

^c Community-Based Programs Activity – Partial Care and Nonvocational Day Programs

Results for Graduate/Aged-Out Student Postschool Plans

As Table 7 shows, more than 33% (341 graduates/aged-out students) made plans to enroll in a 4-year/2-year College or a Trade/Technical School. About 16% (163 graduates/aged-out students) were discharged with plans to enter Competitive Employment or the Military. In short, 49% of the graduates/aged-out students (504) exited with plans to enter a Mainstream Activity to participate in postschool education, technical training, competitive employment, or military service.

Moreover, 25% (261 graduates/aged-out students) planned to enter a Vocational Rehabilitation Activity by participating in a vocational rehabilitation training program (9%; 97 graduates/aged-out students) or in supported (10%; 99 graduates/aged-out students) or sheltered employment (6%; 65 graduates/aged-out students).

Another 16% (166 graduates/aged-out students) planned to enter a Community-Based Program Activity by enrolling in adult partial care (4%; 38 graduates/aged-out students) or nonvocational day programs (12%; 128 graduates/aged-out students).

Only .6% (7 graduates/aged-out students) had plans to enter “Other” adult settings, such as psychiatric, drug rehabilitation, or correctional facilities.

Finally, about 9% (95 graduates/aged-out students) left the NAPSEC-member facility without specific plans to enter a postschool 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 (80%; 65 graduates/aged-out students) and those Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders programs (70%; 290 graduates/aged-out students) were the most likely to plan to enter Mainstream Activity by enrolling in postsecondary education, trade or technical school, or joining the competitive workforce or the military.

Exiters from Developmental Disorders programs (41%; 180 graduates/aged-out students) were the most likely to enter Vocational Rehabilitation Activity. While 12% (53 graduates/aged-out students) had plans to go to a vocational rehabilitation training program, about 15% (65 graduates/aged-out students) planned to enter supported employment, and another 14% (62 graduates/aged-out students) planned to go to sheltered employment.

Graduates/aged-out students from Medical Disorders programs (30%) and those from Developmental Disorders programs (26%) were the most likely to plan to participate in Community-based Program Activity. The plans for these exiters, regardless of the disability group, indicated entry into a nonvocational day program (27 graduates/aged-out students from Medical Disorders programs and 92 graduates/aged-out students from Developmental Disorders programs).

Finally, graduates/aged-out students from Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders programs (11.5%; 44 graduates/aged-out students) and Developmental Disorders programs (10%; 44 graduates/aged-out students) were the most likely to leave school without a specific discharge plan. Not one graduate/aged-out student from a Learning Disorders program was reported to leave a NAPSEC-member program without a plan.

Postschool Plans: School Years 2012-13 to 2015-16

Table 8 below shows the postschool plans for graduates/aged-out students from school years 2012-2013 to 2015-16.

**Table 8. Postschool Plans of Graduates/Aged-Out Students by Activity
School Years 2012-13 to 2015-16**

School Year % Members All Exiters	Mainstream Activity ^a		Vocational Rehabilitation Activity ^b		Community- Based Program Activity ^c		Total Engagement		Other Engagement/ Not Engaged ^d	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
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
2015-16	504	49	261	25	166	16	931	90	102	10

49%
participation
n=1,033

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

^b Vocational Rehabilitation Activity – Vocational Rehabilitation Training Programs, Supported or Sheltered Employment

^c Community-Based Programs Activity – Partial Care and Nonvocational Day Programs

^d Engaged in other activities or not engaged in any activities

For the 2015-2016 school year, the total engagement of the graduates/aged-out students is the same as it was in 2014-15 at 90%. The slight increase, when compared to 2012-13 (89%) and 2013-14 (88%), has been maintained. This increase in the current study appears to derive from an increase in those entering Mainstream Activity (49%). Plans for this category were 45% in 2013-14 and 47% in 2014-15, while in 2012-13, it was 51%. Moreover, graduates/aged-out students currently reported plans to enter Vocational Rehabilitation Activity at the same rate (25%) as in 2014-15. In 2012-13 and 2013-14 this rate was 22%. Current plans to enter Community-Based Program Activity (16%) were observed to decrease when compared to 2013-14 (21%) and 2014-15 (18%), although 16% was previously reported in 2012-13. Plans in the “Other/No Engagement” category in this investigation were maintained at the level reported in 2014-15 (10%), which was observed to decrease from 2012-13 (11%) and 2013-14 (12%).

Living Arrangements

About 83% of the graduates/aged-out students (856) planned to live with a parent, other relative, or guardian. About 9% (92 graduates/aged-out students) made plans to live independently (66 graduates/aged-out students; 6%) or semi-independently (26 graduates/aged-out students; 3%). More than 7 % (73 graduates/aged-out students) had plans to live in a group home (54), skill development or foster home (6), residential treatment center (11), or developmental center (27). Finally, about 1% (12 graduates/aged-out students) had plans to enter another living arrangement, e.g., a medical (8 graduates/aged-out students), psychiatric (2 graduates/aged-out students) or correctional facility (2 graduates/aged-out students).

Discussion

Transfer Students

Although studies of the outcomes of special education usually concentrate on results for the students who have graduated from or aged-out of eligibility for special education services, our efforts have additionally tracked the discharge plans for school-aged children and youth with IEP's who have been enrolled in approved nonpublic special education programs. Since there is a paucity of information about the trajectory for students who enter special education careers, findings from the NAPSEC-sponsored studies might contribute to the knowledge base of special education by shedding light on the patterns of movement taken by these students as they traverse the range of settings and programs available to them.

That 62% of the transfer students in this study made plans to move to programs within their local public school districts is encouraging and consistent with 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). Furthermore, that 24% of the transfer students had plans to move to regular education classrooms (10% without supports and 14% with supports), while 38% planned to enroll in other in-district programs indicates that the NAPSEC-member programs met the highly individualized needs of the students with disabilities as prescribed in each IEP. These transfer students were able to plan entry into programs within the public school district because their skills had been sufficiently developed, remediated, and/or strengthened while enrolled in the nonpublic special education program to enable them to now access appropriate educational services available within the public sector. Since 95% of these students attended the nonpublic special education programs for 5 years or less, evidence is provided that attending a NAPSEC-member program is not a barrier to returning to an in-district public school program in a timely fashion. Clearly these findings demonstrate that the NAPSEC-member programs succeeded in implementing the prescribed IEP and fulfilling their commitment as IEP partners with the local public school districts.

It would appear that the remaining 38% of the transfer students, those who did not plan to enter a local district program, needed intensive and individualized services that could not be provided by the local district. Consistent with our previous findings, about 25% of these students made plans to enter another out-of-district day program; about 6% planned to enter a residential school program; nearly 3% planned to receive home instruction; and about 4% had other plans at discharge (e.g., entering a medical, psychiatric, drug treatment or correctional facility). In the future, researchers should design studies which permit the students in special education to be tracked through all phases of their careers. More refined approaches to track movement could help to better determine the factors which contribute to and support learning success for these students.

Graduates/Aged-out Students

Since few investigations have been adequately designed to provide the critical guidance needed to help close the achievement gap between general and special education students, concerns continue to be expressed throughout the literature about understanding the main factors that lead to positive outcomes for students with disabilities as they transition from school to adulthood (Cobb, Lipscomb, Wolgemuth, Schulte, Veliquette, Alwell, Batchelder, Bernard, Hernandez, Holmquist-Johnson, Orsi, McMeeking, Wang, & Weinberg, 2013; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016; Wehman, Sima, Ketchum, West, Chan, & Luecking, 2014). Nor does the outcomes literature adequately address the differences between students from different disability groups. Although research designs that make use of well-defined, specific variables are sometimes successful in helping to reveal these distinctions, the list of distinguishing factors is complex and lengthy and remains a challenge (Shogren, Kennedy, Dowsett, & Little, 2014; Trainor et al., 2016). The current study has attempted to highlight differences in outcomes between disability groups. Taken together, 90% of the graduates/aged-out students made plans, based upon their individual needs, capacities, and strengths, to be engaged adults in their communities.

About 49% had discharge plans directed to involvement in mainstream activities. Those with Learning (79%) and Emotional/Behavioral disorders (69%) were the most likely to make such plans.

Graduates/Aged-out Students with Learning Disorders

As we have pointed out in previous studies, it is not surprising that a high proportion of the graduates/aged-out students from Learning Disorders programs planned to be involved in the mainstream. Educators have long focused on developing sound strategies to help this high-incidence group within special education achieve success with learning. Perhaps this success with learning in school has ultimately prepared this group for success in adulthood (McLeskey, & Waldron, 2011). That 72% of the students with Learning Disorders made plans to pursue postsecondary education is consistent with the national trend that students from this disability group increasingly enter 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). This tendency to seek postsecondary school may account for the NLTS2 findings which indicate that students with Learning Disorders are the most likely to be employed 8 years after leaving high school (Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagel, Shaver, & Wei, 2011). With a high proportion of these students planning to defer work to receive postsecondary education, only 7% planned to seek competitive employment after leaving school. Another 12% made plans to enter vocational rehabilitation programs, presumably to obtain assistance in preparing to enter the workforce in the future. Since work experience during high school and parental expectations have been found to have a positive impact on students with disabilities seeking employment as adults, future studies should ascertain how many exiting students held jobs during high school³ and what expectations parents had of their children working after leaving school (Trainor et al., 2016; Wehman et al., 2014). Exploring these factors may be particularly salient when exploring the outcomes of graduates/aged-out students who are presumably faced with more severe disabilities than their public school peers. Moreover, follow-up of graduates/aged-out students with learning disabilities at several future points of time would be invaluable in helping us better understand whether students with more severe learning disabilities than those who participated in NLTS2 experience similar success as adults as their public school peers.

Graduates/Aged-out Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders

When students from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs are considered, the literature consistently reports concerns about their poor adult outcomes. Students from this disability group are often characterized by poor graduation rates, low employment rates, difficulty forming positive relationships, and 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; Wehman,

³Carran et al. (2014) in a study of students making the transition to adulthood from nonpublic special education facilities comment that these schools often provide their students opportunities to rehearse the skills needed for employment through learning experiences and internships in the community. In addition, the *NAPSEC Intensity of Services Study: 2006-2007* found that 63% of member programs offered career counseling; 59% offered help in finding a job; 67% offered training in job skills; and 51% offered vocational education.

Sima, Ketchum, West, Chan, & Luecking, 2014). About 43% of the graduates/aged-out students from this group made plans to enter postsecondary education, while another 26% planned to enter the competitive workforce. Another 25% students planned to enter vocational rehabilitation activities and strengthen the skills needed to work. These findings, which are consistent with previous NAPSEC-sponsored outcomes studies, are encouraging. The highly individualized and intensive services these students received in the smaller environment of a NAPSEC-member program, supported these students in acquiring the skills needed to develop positive career trajectories (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Burchart, 2004; Lindstrom et al., 2013). 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 (Wagner et al., 2006). The literature has consistently demonstrated that students with Emotional/Behavioral disorders can achieve success when they attend schools such as those offered by NAPSEC-member programs: they are small in size, offer classes that are also small in size, and employ staff with specialized training in teaching and forming relationships with students with emotional and behavioral issues. When such factors are aligned, students with Emotional/Behavioral disorders are able to develop prosocial behavior and successfully adapt to new roles (Chen, Symons, & Reynolds, 2011; Carran et al., 2014). Follow up is recommended to see to what degree these graduates/aged-out students implement their mainstream plans and how they fare over time as they move into the adult world. It would be helpful to know whether the success of these students as adults is related to work experiences they had in high school or parental expectations.

Graduates/Aged-out Students with Developmental Disorders

The plans of graduates/aged-out students from programs for Developmental Disorders (40%) were most likely to be directed to vocational rehabilitation activity or community-based programs (26%). That 23% of this group of graduate/aged-out students also had plans to enter mainstream activity appears to reflect a shift in attitudes as well as in disability policy. More and more young people with disabilities, including those with severe disabilities, are expecting to become fully functioning member of the community, including entering the competitive market place, and more and more laws are changing to support them in this goal. (Novak, 2015)

Graduates/Aged-out Students with Medical Disorders

About 52% of the graduates/aged-out students from Medical Disorders programs also made plans to enter the mainstream with 38% planning to enter postsecondary education and 14% competitive employment. Another 10% had plans to enter vocational rehabilitation activity. This group of students may also have benefitted from changes in attitudes and policy that support people with disabilities becoming integrated members of their communities.

Other Findings

About 9% of the graduates/aged-out students exited without making plans, while less than 1% left with “other” plans. Of these about 12% were from Emotional/Behavioral Disorder programs, 10% were from Developmental Disorder programs, and close to 8% were from Medical Disorders programs. Interestingly, not one student from a Learning Disorders program exited without a discharge plan. Future research should explore which variables were at play to lead students to leave without a plan. Did the graduates/aged-out students and/or their families have particular concerns about functioning in the larger the adult community? Did lack of appropriate resources interfere

with a plan being developed? Further exploration of these important issues is needed to better understand the complex interaction between family, school, and community as it relates to the transition of students with disabilities into adult roles (Shogren & Villarreal, 2013). Finally, given that this group of students has severe disabilities, it is perhaps not surprising that the graduates/aged-out students who left with “other” plans needed further medical or psychiatric treatment after leaving high school.

Conclusion

By offering individualized, intensive, therapeutic services as prescribed in each IEP, NAPSEC-member programs successfully educate and support students with severe disabilities from a wide range of disability groups. Because these intensive services assist school-aged students to develop, remediate, and/or strengthen skills, the majority of these students are able to plan to enroll in programs within their local public schools after leaving a NAPSEC-member program. Likewise, because of these IEP-prescribed services, a high proportion of graduates/aged-out students are able to make plans to enter productive and meaningful roles. The highly specialized services and supports for students with disabilities offered by NAPSEC-member programs continue to play a critical role on the continuum of special education.

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