

**Outcomes of Approved Special Education  
Programs in the Private Sector**

**Plans for Exiting Students: 2013-2014**

**Report Number 13  
NAPSEC Outcomes Project**

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## Executive Summary

For over a decade, NAPSEC, a national association of approved private special education centers, has examined the discharge plans for the students with disabilities enrolled in members' intensely therapeutic special education programs. The organization has supported this task because few studies, including the National Longitudinal Transition Studies (1993, 2004, 2010), ask:

**What happens to the students with the most unique/intensive service needs who are not able to be successfully educated in classrooms within the local public school district?**

The series of exit studies sponsored by NAPSEC have consistently reported the plans made by students at the time they were discharged from a NAPSEC-member's facility due to transferring, graduating, and/or reaching the legal age limit for receiving educational services. Below are the highlights of the current study, which examined the plans of students who were discharged during the 2013-2014 academic year.

### Transfer Students

During the 2013-14 school year, NAPSEC-member schools provided sufficient educational remediation and support within a reasonable time-frame to the students who transferred from their programs to enable these students, upon discharge, to enter or re-enter educational programs within their local public school districts:

- 55% of the transfer students planned to enter or re-enter an educational program within their local public school district.
- 19% of the transfer students planned to enter or re-enter regular education settings, including inclusive classrooms, in their home districts.
- 94% of the transfer students were enrolled in the NAPSEC-member program for 5 years or less.

### Graduates/Aged-Out Students

During the 2013-14 school year, NAPSEC-member schools provided sufficient instruction, support, and guidance to students making the transition to adulthood to enable these graduate and/or "aged-out" students to make plans, upon discharge, to productively engage, in accordance with their individual capabilities and capacities, in their communities:

- 88% of the graduates/aged-out students left a NAPSEC-member program with plans to enter productive and/or engaged adult roles.

- 45% of the graduates/aged-out students planned to enter a mainstream activity. This included 31% with plans to enroll in post-secondary 4-year/2-year college or trade/technical school; and 14% with plans to join the competitive employment workforce or military.
- Almost 22% had plans to enter vocational rehabilitation, including vocational rehabilitation training, supported employment or sheltered employment.
- More than 21% made plans to enter an appropriate adult program in the community, including adult partial care or nonvocational day programs.
- Graduates/aged-out students from Learning Disorders programs (97%) were the most likely group to make plans 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 group to plan to participate in vocational rehabilitation (33%) as well as community-based programs (42%).
- 57% 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**

The National Association of Private Special Education Centers (NAPSEC), a national organization of 250 approved private special education centers, has, for more than a decade, sponsored an exit study to highlight the discharge plans of the preschool, elementary, middle, and high school students with disabilities who attend the nonpublic special education programs operated by their members. The organization has supported this task because few studies, including the National Longitudinal Transition Studies (1993, 2004, 2010), ask:

**What happens to the students with the most unique/intensive service needs who are not able to be successfully educated in classrooms within the local public school district?**

From 2000-2004, and again from 2007 to the present, NAPSEC has examined the discharge plans of the students who exited from its members' educational programs. Past inquiries revealed that approximately 50% of the transfer students who leave a NAPSEC-member program return to the local public school and, when they do, nearly 20% of these students have plans to enter regular education and inclusive classrooms. These previous studies have also shown that about 90% of the graduate/aged-out students were discharged with plans to enter appropriate productive and engaged adult roles in their communities with approximately 50% making plans to enter mainstream adult roles, including a high proportion of students with emotional and behavioral disorders, who are often characterized by poor adult outcomes.

The present report continues to focus on identifying the educational settings to which the younger students planned to transfer and the adult settings to which the graduates/aged-out

students planned to enter when they left a NAPSEC-member program during the 2013-2014 school year.<sup>1</sup>

## 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 previous academic year, 2013-2014. 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

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<sup>1</sup>When reading this report, it is important to keep in mind that each student in this study has an Individual Education Program (IEP) which was developed by the public school district that sent the student to the out-of-district NAPSEC-member school to receive the intensive, therapeutic services and curriculum modifications outlined in the IEP. In other words, the nonpublic NAPSEC-member school is the partner of the local school district in educating the student who has extensive special needs.

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 2013-2014 school year, 35% of NAPSEC's membership (87 schools) agreed to participate in this study. These schools offered 203 highly specialized education programs to accommodate the needs of day and residential students with a range of disabilities. Of these programs, 148 (73%) were available for day students, 5 (2%) for residential students, and 51 (25%) for both day and residential students. Fifty-eight (29%) of these specialized programs focused on the needs of students with Development Disorders, 52 (26%) on students with Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders, 39 (19%) on students with Medical Disorders, 33 (16%) on students with Learning Disorders, and 21 (10%) on meeting students with Preschool Disorders. Taken together, the participating schools reported an enrollment of 11,465 students comprised of 8,211 (72%) males and 3,254 (28%) females.

Participating schools were located in 16 states and 6 of the 10 federal education regions. As Table 1 demonstrates, about 63% of the schools were located in the Mid-Atlantic region (Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania) with 55 schools participating; close to 15% came from the Northeast region (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Rhode Island) with 13 schools represented; 2 regions, each represented about 8% of the distribution (the Appalachia region with 7 schools in Tennessee and Virginia; the North Central region with 7 schools in Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin); the WestEd region with 3 schools in Arizona and California accounted for over 3%; and, finally, the Southwest region with 2 schools in Texas, complete the participation with over 2%.

Table 1. Participating Schools by Federal Educational Regions

N=87

Federal Regions/Participating States	#	%
<u>Northeast:</u> <sup>1</sup> Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island	13	14.9
<u>MidAtlantic:</u> <sup>2</sup> Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania	55	63.2
<u>Appalachia:</u> <sup>3</sup> Tennessee, Virginia	7	8.1
<u>North Central:</u> <sup>4,5</sup> Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin	7	8.1
<u>Southwest:</u> <sup>6</sup> Texas	2	2.3
<u>WestEd:</u> <sup>7,8,9,10</sup> Arizona, California	3	3.4
Total	87	100.0

1 In Northeast Region, no participants from Maine, 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 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

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 WestEd Region, no participants from 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, 3,067 students exited from a participating school. Outcome information was available for 2,794 (91%) of the exiting students, 1,974 transfer students (64%) and 998 graduates/aged-out students (32.5%). Overall, discharge planning information was not available for 273 students (9%), those who identified themselves as dropouts (95 students<sup>2</sup>) and those who left school without making their plans known to the school (178 students). Nonetheless, in some instances the schools did report some demographic characteristics of the exiting students with unknown plans and such instances are included in Table 2. In other words, example, the student's age, gender, type of program was reported, but not the plan.

The sample of all exiting students, those with known and unknown discharge plans, was comprised of White (54%), male (69%), high school students (67.5%), aged 12 to 17 years (42%), who attended day programs (63%) with a focus on Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (50%) from 1-5 years (60%), but did not participate in the federally-sponsored subsidized lunch program (58%). Transfer students made up 64% of the sample, while graduates/aged-out students made up 32.5%.

About 78% of the students who left a NAPSEC-member school were involved in exits that were "planned" as an integral part of the transition from the NAPSEC-member educational program. Moreover, 81% of the exits were viewed as "positive," indicating that the staff at the NAPSEC-member program concluded that the exiting students were "ready" to move on to the next setting.

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<sup>2</sup> Of the 95 dropouts, 69 (73%) were male and 26 (27%) were female. When their race/ethnicity were examined, 52 (55%) were White, 25 (26%) were Black, 15 (16%) were Hispanic, and 3 (3%) were Asian. Finally, when the disability was considered, 8 (8%) came from programs for Developmental Disorders, 61 (64%) from programs for Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, 21 (22%) from programs for Medical Disorders, and 5 (5%) from programs for Learning Disorders.

Table 2. Demographic and Other Relevant Information of Exiting NAPSEC Students  
n=3,067

<u>Program Classification</u>	#	%
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders	1,531	49.9
Developmental Disorders	784	25.6
Preschool Disorders	332	10.8
Medical Disorders	266	8.7
Learning Disorders	154	5.0
<u>Program Type</u>		
Day	1,926	62.8
Residential	68	2.2
Day & Residential	1073	35.0
<u>Reason for Exit</u>		
Transfer	1,974	64.4
Graduate/Aged-Out	998	32.5
Dropouts	95	3.1
<u>Grade Level</u>		
Preschool	334	10.9
Elementary School	251	8.2
Middle School	412	13.4
High School	2,070	67.5
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
White	1,662	54.2
Black	922	30.1
Hispanic	399	13.0
Asian	71	2.3
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific and American Indian/Alaskan Native Islander	13	.4

<u>Table 2 (continued)</u>		
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	2,116	69.0
Female	951	31.0
<u>Ages at Exit</u>		
3-5 years	334	10.9
6-11 years	251	8.2
12-17 years	1,293	42.1
18-21+ years	1,189	38.8
<u>Length of Stay</u>		
< 1 year	521	17.0
1-5 years	1,832	59.7
6-10 years	276	9.0
11+ years	165	5.4
Not Available	273	8.9
<u>Subsidized Lunch</u>		
Yes	1,277	41.6
No	1,790	58.4
<u>Status of Planning Information</u>		
Available in Records	2,794	91.1
Not Available	273	8.9
<u>Staff Assessment of Exit</u>		
Planned		
Yes	2,392	78.0
No	675	22.0
Positive		
Yes	2,484	81.0
No	583	19.0

## The Transfer Students

### Demographics

Taken together, 1,817 students transferred from a NAPSEC-member school with a known education plan. Of these, 1,306 students (72%) were male, while 511 (28%) were female. When race/ethnicity was assessed, 934 students (51.4%) were White, 589 (32.4%) were Black, 248 (13.6%) were Hispanic, 41 (2.3%) were Asian, and the remaining students (.3%) were American Indian/Alaskan Native (3 students) and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (2 students).

### Grade Level

As Table 3 shows, 301 (16.6%) of the exiting transfer students attended Preschool, 227 (12.5%) Elementary School, 365 (20.1%) Middle School, and 924 (50.8%) attended High School programs.

Table 3. Transfer Students by Grade Level

n=1,817

	#	%
Preschool	301	16.6
Elementary School	227	12.5
Middle School	365	20.1
High School	924	50.8
Total	1,817	100.0

### Length of Stay

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

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

n=1,817

	#	%
< 1 year	475	26.1
1-5 years	1229	67.6
6-10 years	109	6.0
11+ years	4	.2
Total	1,817	100.0

As Table 4 indicates, while 26% (475 students) attended their special education program for less than 1 year, nearly 68% (1,229 students) attended for 1 to 5 years and 109 students (6%) were in placement for 6 to 10 years. Finally, less than 1% (4 students) were enrolled for 11 years or more. When the “less than 1 year” and “1-5 years” categories are taken together, it is evident that about 94% of these students were in a NAPSEC-member program for 5 years or less before planning to transfer to another educational program.

#### **The Educational Plans by Specialized Program**

The plans of the 1,817 students who transferred from a NAPSEC-member program to another educational program during the 2013-14 academic year were examined by the specialized program in which they were enrolled before they exited. About 53.1% (965 students) attended Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs; 20.4% (371 students) went to Developmental Disorders programs; 16.5% (300 students) were enrolled in Preschool Disorders programs; 7.5% (136 students) attended Medical Disorders programs; and another 2.5% (45 students) attended Learning Disorders programs. Table 5 displays the distribution of these student plans.

Table 5. Educational Plans for Transfer Students by Specialized Program

n=1,817

Education Setting	Preschool n=300		E/BD n=965		DD n=371		Medical n=136		Learning n=45		Total n=1,817	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Regular Education, Not Special Education	41	13.7	38	3.9	15	4.0.1	9	6.6	2	4.4	105	5.8
Regular Education, Supported Inclusion	62	20.6	129	13.4	27	7.3	11	8.1	9	20.0	238	13.1
<b>Subtotal: Returns to Regular Education</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>34.3</b>	<b>167</b>	<b>17.3</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>24.4</b>	<b>343</b>	<b>18.9</b>
Alternate School	0	0	89	9.2	8	2.1	0	0	6	13.3	103	5.7
Special Education, Self -Contained LEA	173	57.7	143	14.8	188	50.7	38	27.9	8	17.8	550	30.3
<b>Subtotal: Returns to Other In-District Education</b>	<b>173</b>	<b>57.7</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>24.0</b>	<b>196</b>	<b>52.8</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>27.9</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>653</b>	<b>35.9</b>
Out- of- DistrictSpecial Education Day School	21	7.0	285	29.5	91	24.5	41	30.2	7	15.6	445	24.5
Residential School	0	0	137	14.2	23	6.2	6	4.4	2	4.4	168	9.2
Home Instruction	0	0	47	4.9	7	2.0	13	9.6	3	6.7	70	3.8
Other	3	1.0	97	10.1	12	3.2	18	13.2	8	17.8	138	7.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>965</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>136</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>1,817</b>	<b>100</b>

### **Results for Transfer Student Educational Plans**

As Table 5 indicates, nearly 55% of the transfer students (996 students) left school with plans to return to an educational program within the local district. While nearly 19% (343 students) had plans to return to regular education classes (almost 6% to regular education classrooms and more than 13% to classrooms offering supported inclusion), nearly 36% (653 students) planned to return to other programs within the public school district (about 6% to alternate school and over 30% to self-contained classrooms).

Students from Preschool Disorders (34%) were the most likely to return to regular education programs. Students from the other disability categories made plans to return to regular educational programs as follows: about 24% from Learning Disorders programs; 17% Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs; nearly 15% from Medical Disorders programs; and approximately 11% from Development Disorders programs. Finally, when plans to enter other educational programs within the local school district, alternate schools and self-contained classrooms, were examined by disability, the following emerged. Close to 58% of the students who from Preschool Disorders programs, nearly 53% from Developmental Disorders programs, 31% from Learning Disorders programs, close to 28% from Medical Disorders programs, and 24% from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs returned to educational programs within their local district with plans to enter either an alternate school or a self-contained classroom.

When all returns to in-district programs are examined by program type, 92 % of the transfer students from Preschool Disorders programs, 64% from Developmental Disorders programs, 55% from Learning Disorders programs, and 43% from Medical Disorders programs, and 41% from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs were discharged with plans to return to an in-district program.

### **Return to In-District Education: School Years 2012-13 and 2013-14**

Table 6 summarizes the degree to which the plans of the transfer students reflect a return to an in-district program, including a regular education setting, for the 2012-13 and 2013-14 school years.

Table 6 Transfer Student Return to In-District Education: School Years 2012-13 and 2013-14

	In-District		Other		Total		Outside	
	Regular		In-District		In-District		District	
	Education <sup>a</sup>		Education <sup>b</sup>		Education		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

<sup>a</sup> Regular education, including supported inclusion

<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 2013-14 school year are compared to those for the previous school year, it appears that about 2% more of the transfer students left a NAPSEC-member program to return to in-district programming. Moreover, the reported 2% increase of in-district returns were made to regular education classrooms, including those offering supported inclusion.

### **Living Arrangements**

When the plans for living arrangements were examined, 78% of the students (1,424) reported that they planned to continue to live with their parents or legal guardians. About 1% (21 students) planned to live independently (6 students) or semi-independently (15 students). Nearly 7% (123 students) made plans to live in a skill development/ foster home (37 students) or group home (86 students). Close to 8% (144 students) planned to enter residential treatment. About 1.5% made plans to go to a developmental (1 student), psychiatric (21 students), or medical (5 students) center. The plans of more than 4% (59 students) called for entry into the juvenile justice system. Finally, 1% (19 students) planned to live in another situation, such as a drug treatment facility.



## The Graduates/Aged-Out Students

### Demographics

There were 977 graduates/aged-out students with known plans. Of these, 680 students (69.6%) were male, while 297 students (30.4%) were female. When race/ethnicity was examined, 572 students (58.5%) were White, 259 (26.5%) were Black, 109 (11.2%) were Hispanic, and 30 (3.1%) were Asian. The remaining .7% were American Indian/Alaskan Native (5 students) and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (2 students). About 40% (394 students) came from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, 39% (379 students) from Developmental Disorders programs, 11% (103 students) from Medical Disorders programs, and 10% (101 students) from Learning Disorders programs.

### 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=782

	#	%
< 1 year	58	5.9
1-5 years	570	58.3
6-10 years	196	20.1
11+ years	153	15.7
Total	977	100

As Table 7 demonstrates, about 6% (58 graduates/aged-out students) were enrolled in their special education program for less than 1 year; 58% (570 graduates/aged-out students) for 1-5 years; 20% (196 graduates/aged-out students) for 6-10 years; and about 16% (154 graduates/aged-out

students) for 11 or more years. When the categories of “less than 1 year” and “1-5 years” are combined, it is clear that 64% (628 graduates/aged-out students) were enrolled in these programs for 5 years or less.

### **The Postschool Plans by Specialized Program**

Table 8 presents an analysis of the postschool plans of the graduate/aged-out students according to the specialized educational programs from which they graduated or aged-out.

Table 8. Postschool Plans of Graduates/Aged-Out Students by Specialized Program

n=

<b>Postschool Setting</b>	<b>E/BD n=394</b>		<b>DD n=379</b>		<b>Medical n=103</b>		<b>Learning n=101</b>		<b>Total n=977</b>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Four Year College	26	6.6	3	.8	7	6.8	34	33.7	70	7.1
Two Year College	94	23.9	29	7.6	27	26.2	47	46.5	197	20.2
Trade/Technical School	27	6.9	2	.5	3	2.9	8	7.9	40	4.1
Competitive Employment	75	19.0	34	9.0	10	9.7	9	8.9	128	13.1
Military	4	1.0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	.4
<b>Mainstream Activity<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>226</b>	<b>57.4</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>17.9</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>98</b>	<b>97.0</b>	<b>439</b>	<b>44.9</b>
Vocational Rehabilitation Training Program	36	9.1	40	10.6	3	2.9	1	1.0	80	8.2
Supported Employment	22	5.6	47	12.4	13	12.6	0	0	82	8.4
Sheltered Employment	7	1.8	38	10.0	2	2.0	1	1.0	48	4.9
<b>Vocational Rehabilitation Activity<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>65</b>	<b>16.5</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>33.0</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2.0</b>	<b>210</b>	<b>21.5</b>
Adult Partial Care	6	1.5	13	3.4	5	4.9	0	0	24	2.5
Nonvocational Day Program	13	3.3	145	38.3	26	25.2	0	0	184	18.8
<b>Community-Based Program Activity<sup>c</sup></b>	<b>19</b>	<b>4.8</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>41.7</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>30.1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>208</b>	<b>21.3</b>
Other	28	7.1	4	1.1	3	2.9	0	0	35	3.6
No Education/Training, Job or Program	56	14.2	24	6.3	4	3.9	1	1.0	85	8.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>394</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>379</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>101</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>977</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 Nonvocational Day Programs

### **Results for Graduate/Aged-Out Student Postschool Plans**

As Table 8 shows, over 31% (307 graduates/aged-out students) planned to go on to a 4-year/2-year College or a Trade/Technical School. About 14% (132 graduates/aged-out students) were discharged with plans to enter Competitive Employment or the Military. Taken together, about 45% of the graduates/aged-out students (439) planned to enter a Mainstream Activity by participating in postschool education or technical training, seeking competitive employment, or enlisting in the military.

More than 21% (210 graduates/aged-out students) planned to enter a Vocational Rehabilitation Activity by participating in a vocational rehabilitation training program (8%) or in supported (8%) or sheltered employment (5%).

Another 21% (208 graduates/aged-out students) planned to enter a Community-Based Program Activity by enrolling in an adult partial care (2.5%) or nonvocational day program (19%).

About 4% (35 graduates/aged-out students) made plans to engage in “Other” adult settings or circumstances. While 19 students had plans to enter psychiatric, drug rehabilitation, or correctional facilities, 16 of these “Other” exiters reported plans to enter the role of homemaker and/or parent.

Finally almost 9% (85 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. Fifty-six of these students came from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs

At discharge, graduates/aged-out students from Learning Disorders programs (97%) were the most likely to make plans to enter the mainstream by enrolling postsecondary education, the competitive workforce or the military. Graduates/aged-out students from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs (57%) were the next most likely group with plans to engage in mainstream activities, and were followed by those from Medical Disorders programs (46%). Graduates/aged-out students from Developmental Disorders programs were the most likely to plan to participate in vocational rehabilitation (33%) as well as community-based programs (42%).

### **Postschool Plans: School Years 2012-13 and 2013-14**

Table 9 shows the postschool plans for graduates/aged-out students for the 2012-2013 and 2013-14 school years.

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

School Year % Members All Exiters	Mainstream Activity <sup>a</sup>		Vocational Rehabilitation Activity <sup>b</sup>		Community- Based Program Activity <sup>c</sup>		Total Engagement		Other Engagement/ 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

<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 Nonvocational Day Programs

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

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For the 2013-2014 school year, 45% (439 graduates/aged-out students) planned to enter Mainstream Activities; 22% (210 graduates/aged-out students) made plans to enter Vocational Rehabilitation Activities; and 21% (208 graduates/aged-out students) planned to go to Community-Based Adult Program Activities. Upon discharge, 88% (857 graduates/aged-out students) made plans to be engaged as they made the transition from school to adult life in their communities. Although more students made plans to enter Mainstream Activity mainstream during the 2013-14 study year as compared to the prior year, the percent of students was relatively lower. Likewise, more of these students appear to have entered Community-Based Activity by number and percentage in the current study year. The numbers and percentage of

graduates/aged-out students with plans for entering Vocational Rehabilitation Activity, however, remained stable from 2013-12 to 2013-14.

### **Living Arrangements**

More than 72% of the graduates/aged-out students (705) planned to live with a parent, other relative, or guardian. About 14% (138) made plans to live independently (7.6%) or semi-independently (6.6%). Approximately 12% (119) had plans to live in a group home (87), skill development or foster home (12), residential treatment center (15), or developmental center (5). Finally, almost 2% (15) had plans to enter another living arrangement, such as, a medical (6), psychiatric (3), drug treatment (4), or correctional facility (2).

### **Discussion**

Understandably, most discussions of the outcomes of special education target the results for students transitioning into adulthood. This exploration, however, adds an examination of the discharge plans for those who remained students and transferred from a NAPSEC-member's facility. Since little is known about the phases of the career of a special education student, including one who received special educational services in a setting outside of the local school district, this focus was added to begin to identify the type of setting these youngsters moved to when they left the NAPSEC-member school. Although IDEA supports the notion of offering special education services in the least restrictive environment along a continuum, confusion remains regarding how to best implement this vision. Because our nation continues to move toward a policy of educating students with disabilities in more inclusive settings (McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012), some forget that there are students with disabilities, especially those with severe and multiple disabilities, whose needs cannot be addressed in public school or inclusive settings. Students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, for example, do not

presently appear to be achieving academic success in inclusive settings (Kauffman, Mock, & Simpson, 2007; Wagner, Friend, Bursuck, Kutash, Duchnowski, Sumi, & Epstein, 2006). Recently, Fuchs, Fuchs, Compton, Wehby, Schumacher, Gersten, & Jordan (2015) noted that what is needed, at least when examining the best ways to teach mathematics to students with learning disabilities is “a definition of access to the general education curriculum that is based on empirical evidence of adequate learning---regardless of the setting in which or the instructional methods by which that learning is achieved.” Since students with disabilities are comprised of a wide range of subgroups, a major challenge for the field of special education is finding effective ways to meet the highly individualized learning needs of all students with disabilities. When appropriate supports and services are available, some students with disabilities benefit from in-district programs. Others, however, require out-of-district programs to meet their learning needs as laid out in the IEP. The transfer students in this study were sent to NAPSEC-member programs by their sending districts so they could receive the intensive supports they needed to remediate and/or strengthen their skills.

In this study, 81% of the educational staff at the NAPSEC agreed that the discharged students were ready to leave the out-of-district school. About 26% of these students attended their out-of-district program for less than 1 year, while 68% were enrolled from 1-5 years in order to meet their educational goals. Taken together, 94% of these students attended the out-of-district placement for 5 years or less. Because they received the individualized supports they needed, 55% of the transfer students were able to leave the NAPSEC-member school with plans to enter or return to their local school district. Of these, 19% had plans to enter or return to regular education classrooms, including those offering supported inclusion. In short, most of these students appear to have sufficiently benefited from attending a NAPSEC-member program, one

that has been an educational partner with the sending local district. These students, as other researchers have discovered, are now able to return to the local school districts that sent them to the out-of-district program (Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004).

Although IDEA is forty years old, researchers continue to struggle to understand the challenges faced by youth 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). While the discharge plans of the graduates/aged-out students with disabilities who left a NAPSEC-member school during the 2013-14 school year, reflect these challenges, they also demonstrate that NAPSEC-member schools addressed a wide range of needs in helping these students make transition plans. On the whole, taking individual abilities, challenges, and needs into account 88% of the graduates/aged-out students planned to be appropriately productive and/or engaged in adult roles in their communities. About 45% made plans for involvement in the mainstream, 22% in vocational rehabilitation, and nearly 21% in community-based adult day programs in which vocational and/or nonvocational needs (such as, medical, psychiatric, social) could be addressed.

Overall, about 45% of the graduates/aged-out students with disabilities had plans to enter the mainstream upon discharge. This included 97% of the students with Learning Disorders, 57% of the graduate/aged-out students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, close to 46% of those with Medical Disorders, and about 18% of students with Development Disorders. More than 31% planned to enter 2- or 4-year colleges or trade/technical schools, while nearly 14% planned to enter the competitive job market or military service. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014), 30% of students with disabilities at the transition ages of 20-24 years were employed as compared to 64% of students in the same age group without disabilities. One cannot help but



wonder to what extent these outcomes of our study reflect the severity of the disabilities of these students and can be deemed successful.

In fact, some of the most encouraging findings relate to the plans made by the students from Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders programs. The literature has consistently reported the poor outcomes for this disability group which is often characterized by low graduation rates, poor work experiences, involvement in antisocial behavior, and difficulty in establishing stable roles and relationships. (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). It is, therefore, promising that 57% of the graduates/aged-out students from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs left a NAPSEC-member program with plans to be involved in positive mainstream adult roles. More than 37% planned to enter 2- or 4-year colleges or trade/technical schools, while 20% planned to enter the competitive job market or military service. The highly individualized and intensive services they received as students in a NAPSEC-member program, services that were specifically tailored to their unique educational, behavioral, and emotional needs, helped these students acquire the skills needed by individuals with disabilities to develop positive career paths (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Burchart, 2004; Lindstrom et al., 2013). Since future employment is related to previous employment, future studies should investigate the degree to which and the manner in which NAPSEC-member programs expose students with disabilities to vocational training and work experiences before graduation/aging-out (Shandra and

Hogan, 2008; Federal Partners in Transition Workgroup, 2015). Schools of relatively small size with small class size and staff specifically trained to work and form relationships with students with Emotional/Behavioral disorders, such as those who belong to NAPSEC, appear to help these students develop prosocial behavior and adapt to new roles (Chen, Symons, & Reynolds, 2011; Carran et al., 2014). 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 vast majority of the graduates/aged-out students (97%) from Learning Disorders programs were able to make plans to enter mainstream roles. More than 88% planned to enter 2- or 4-year colleges or trade/technical schools, while 9% planned to enter the competitive job market or military service. It appears that these students, perhaps due to the nature of their disability as well as the highly specialized educational supports they received in the NAPSEC-member programs in which they were enrolled, were the most likely of all of the disability groups examined in this study to answer the challenge of Fuchs et al. (2015) in regard to gaining access to the general curriculum.

Almost 46% of the graduate/aged-out students with Medical Disorders also reported they were entering the mainstream. While 36% planned to enter 2- or 4-year colleges or trade/technical schools, another almost 10% planned to enter competitive employment. Within this group, those with the most severe medical disabilities (30%) planned to attend community-based program that emphasized support instead of employment or postsecondary education. It is interesting that this program category includes graduates/aged-out students who are able to enter the mainstream as well as those who will continue to require intensive supportive services as adults. Perhaps the findings for students from this program can best demonstrate the enormity of

the diversity and range of the students with disabilities who attend NAPSEC-member schools. Despite these differences, staff helped each graduate/aged-out student develop a plan.

Finally, the plans of graduates/aged-out students with Developmental Disorders emphasized entering a vocational rehabilitation program (33%) to obtain employment skills or a supportive adult program in the community (42%) with a support focus. However, 18% of these students had plans to enter the mainstream with 9% making plans to enter 2- or 4-year college or trade/technical school and another 9% planning to enter competitive employment.

### **Conclusion**

NAPSEC-member schools continue to educate and support students with disabilities by offering the individualized, intensive special education programs needed to gain access to the curriculum. In partnership with the local public schools, these schools continue to fill a critical role in special education. When the local school district partners with the private approved special education programs offered by members of NAPSEC, the complex individual needs of the students with disabilities can be met and remediated. Such a partnership reflects a clear vision of IDEA, one in which children with disabilities receive appropriate services along the continuum of special education.

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