

Plans for Exiting Students: 2000-2001

One Year Follow-Up: Alumni from Class of 2000

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NAPSEC Outcomes Study

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Introduction

In the last decade, important steps have been taken to learn the outcome of special education conducted within the public school setting. The National Longitudinal Transition Study (1993), for example, focused on children whose special needs could be met within their districts. With its emphasis on secondary school in-district special education, the NLTS did not focus on students in private, out-of-district, special educational settings.

The outcomes for students in private out-of-district special education remains largely unexplored. The NLTS concluded that few students with disabilities attend special schools and that those who did differed from in-district students in the same disability categories along several dimensions. Out-of-district special education students tended to be older, to lack an assigned grade level, to receive lower scores on self-care and functional mental skills, and to receive, perhaps due to their relatively more severe disabilities, more related and support services than in-district students with disabilities.

Because of concern about whether the complex needs of special education students enrolled in out-of-district, special education schools are being met by the programs they are attending, the National Association of Private Special Education Centers (NAPSEC), undertook a survey in the 2000-2001 academic year. NAPSEC is a non-profit association that represents private special education programs and affiliated state associations in order to ensure the access of individuals with disabilities to appropriate private special education programs and services as part of the special education continuum. The settings to which transfer students planned to move upon leaving a NAPSEC-member

school and the plans made by the graduate/aged out students were examined. In addition, students who had previously graduated as members of the Class of 2000 were contacted one year later in order to learn the degree to which: 1) they were presently engaged in post-school education, training, employment, vocational rehabilitation, or adult programs; and 2) they were living in the community as well as independently.

The Programs

One hundred twenty-two NAPSEC schools (42% of the membership), operating 216 educational programs, volunteered to participate in the study. These schools were located in 20 states and 8 Federal education regions (See Table 1). Of the participants, 78% were located in 9 states in the Northeast Region (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, and Rhode Island) and Mid-Atlantic Region (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania). Sixty-seven percent of the programs in the study were day programs, while 33% were residential.

Each participant was asked to supply information on every student that exited from a program over the course of the previous academic year. Exiting students were defined as transfer students, students who left a NAPSEC program to move on to any other educational program, and graduates/aged out students, those who left a member school because of receiving a high school diploma, a certificate of completion, or aging out. Dropouts were excluded because their plans were not available. However, 192 students (4.6%) were reported to have dropped out during this time period.

The exiting students were further identified as attending one of five specific special educational program categories: Preschool Disorders, Pervasive Developmental Disorders, Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, Medical Disorders, or Learning Disorders. The schools were given definitions for each category and were asked to classify their programs using one predominant program category. The definitions were:

- 1) Preschool Disorders – includes students eligible for preschool programs due to a cognitive, medical, language, and/or emotional/behavioral disorders.
- 2) Pervasive Developmental Disorders – includes students eligible for programs for disorders such as autism, severe cognitive disorders, severe learning and/or language disorders, Asperger's disorder.
- 3) Emotional/Behavioral Disorders – includes students eligible for programs for emotional disorders (such as, anxiety disorders, depression, thought disorders, mood disorders), behavioral disorders, and juvenile offenders.
- 4) Medical Disorders – includes students eligible for programs for auditory disorders, visual disorders, cerebral palsy, muscular dystrophy, brain injury, birth defects, spina bifida, etc.
- 5) Learning Disorders – programs for students with learning and/or language disorders – mild to moderate, cognitive disorders – mild to moderate.

Table 1

Participating NAPSEC Schools by Federal Educational Region

N=122

<u>Region/Participating State</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Northeast:</u> ¹ Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island	26	21.3
<u>Mid-Atlantic:</u> ² Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania	69	56.6
<u>Appalachia:</u> ³ Tennessee, Virginia	11	9.0
<u>Southeast:</u> ⁴ Florida, Georgia, Mississippi	3	2.5
<u>North Central:</u> ⁵ Illinois, Minnesota	8	6.6
<u>Southwest:</u> ⁶ Texas	2	1.6
<u>Mid-Continent:</u> ⁷ Kansas, Missouri	2	1.6
<u>Western:</u> ⁸ Arizona	1	.8
Total	122	100.0

¹ No participants from Maine, Vermont, Puerto Rico, or Virgin Islands² No participants from the District of Columbia³ No participants from Kentucky or West Virginia⁴ No participants from Alabama, North Carolina, or South Carolina⁵ No participants from Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, or Wisconsin⁶ No participants from Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, or Oklahoma⁷ No participants from Colorado, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, or Wyoming⁸ No participants from California, Nevada, or Utah

Almost 35% of the programs were for Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, 24% for Pervasive Developmental Disorders, 17% for Learning Disorders, 13% for Medical Disorders, and about 11% for Preschool Disorders.

The Exiting Students

Four thousand one hundred sixty-seven students exited during the study period. Planning information was available for 3,496 students (84%). Of these, 2,853 were transfer students and 643 were graduate/aged out students.

The exiting students tended to be male (72%), Caucasian (53%) or African-American (29%), and between the ages of 14-18 years, attending beginning High School classrooms (48%), or between the ages of 5-11 years (21%), attending Elementary School classrooms. The majority attended day programs (73%) and experienced a planned (77%) and positive (76%) exit from the NAPSEC-member program, according to the staff. About 48% of the students qualified for the subsidized school lunch program, an indicant of socio-economic need.

The Transfer Students

There were 2,853 transfer students with known plans. Of these, 76% were male, while 24% were female. Almost 56% were Caucasian, nearly 31% were African-American, and 11% were Hispanic. The remaining 2% were Asian. Thirty-seven percent attended High School, 28% Middle School, 23% Elementary School, and 12% Preschool. More than 63% attended Emotional/Behavioral Disorder Programs, while about 10% exited from Pervasive Developmental

Disorder and Learning Disorder programs, respectively. Another 13% attended Preschool Disorder programs, while the remaining 3% went to Medical Disorder programs.

Table 2

**Educational Plans for Transfer Students
by NAPSEC Member Program**

N=2,853

New Education Setting	Preschool N=373		PDD N=294		ED/BD N=1804		Medical N=85		Learning N=297		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Regular Education, Not Special Education	106	28.4	15	5.1	185	10.3	4	4.7	54	18.2	364	12.8
Regular Education, Private/Parochial	3	.8	3	1.0	29	1.6	0	0	33	11.1	68	2.4
Regular Education, Vocational	0	0	1	.3	24	1.3	0	0	9	3.0	34	1.2
Regular Education, Supported Inclusion	51	13.7	27	9.2	125	6.9	13	15.3	18	6.1	234	8.2
Resource Room	2	.6	9	3.1	39	2.2	0	0	0	0	50	1.7
Alternate School	0	0	4	1.4	110	6.1	1	1.2	11	3.7	126	4.4
Special Education, Self Contained LEA	153	41.0	114	38.7	460	25.5	31	36.5	66	22.2	824	28.9
Subtotal: All Returns to In-district Education	315	84.5	173	58.8	972	53.9	49	57.7	191	64.3	1,700	59.6
Out of District Special Education	50	13.4	71	24.2	436	24.2	20	23.5	83	27.9	660	23.1
Residential	0	0	18	6.1	267	14.8	7	8.2	10	3.4	302	10.6
Other	3	.8	26	8.8	91	5.0	5	5.9	8	2.7	133	4.7
Home Instruction	5	1.3	6	2.1	38	2.1	4	4.7	5	1.7	58	2.0
Total	373	100.0	294	100.0	1,804	100.0	85	100.0	297	100.0	2,853	100.0

Results

Overall, nearly 60% of the transfer students left a NAPSEC-member program with plans to return to an in-district educational program. More than 16% of the students planned to return to Regular Education classes, while almost 10% planned to return to Regular Education with Supported Inclusion or Resource Room. Almost 29% of the students planned to move on to Self-contained special education classrooms in the public schools. Eighty-five percent of the students who transferred out of Preschool Disorders programs, 59% from Pervasive Developmental Disorders programs, 54% from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, 58% from Medical Disorders programs, and 64% from Learning Disorders programs had plans to enter educational programs in their home districts (See Table 2).

Conclusions for Transfer Students

A large proportion (60%) of the severely disabled students who attend and then transfer from a NAPSEC member's program subsequently develop plans to return to in-district educational programs. Moreover, program staff agree with such plans. In 77% of the cases, staff planned these transfers and, in 76% of the cases, staff from a NAPSEC-member school rated the transfer plan as "positive." This suggests that NAPSEC programs support plans for the return of students to in-district programs and points to the important role served by private special education on the continuum of special education.

The Graduates/Aged Out Students

Overall, about 32% of the graduate/aged out students planned to go on to a two-year/four-year college or to a trade, technical, or other training school. About 18% had plans to enter competitive employment or the military. Thus, about 50% of the graduate/aged out students planned to enter a post-school educational or training program, seek employment, or enlist in the military. Another 37% planned to enter a vocational rehabilitation or supported/sheltered employment program, while 9% had plans to enroll in a partial care or nonvocational day program. Less than 1% planned to enter another setting, such as a correctional facility or psychiatric hospital. Fewer than 4% had no plans to enter an educational, vocational, rehabilitative, or supportive program or to obtain a job after completing secondary school (See Table 3).

Table 3

**Post-School Plans for Known Graduate/Aged Out Students
By NAPSEC Member Program**

N=643

	Pervasive Developmental N=88		ED/BD Programs N=322		Medical N=78		Learning N=155		Total	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
<u>Post-School Setting</u>										
Four Year College	0	0	37	11.5	5	6.4	16	10.3	58	9.0
Two Year College	3	3.4	48	14.9	7	9.0	36	23.2	94	14.6
Trade/Technical School	0	0	36	11.2	0	0	5	3.2	41	6.3
Other Training	0	0	4	1.2	5	6.4	3	2.0	12	1.9
Competitive Employment	8	9.1	69	21.4	9	11.5	22	14.2	108	16.8
Armed Forces	0	0	7	2.2	0	0	2	1.3	9	1.4
Vocational Rehabilitation Program	15	17.0	43	13.4	6	7.7	5	3.2	69	10.7
Supported Employment	22	25.0	35	10.9	6	7.7	39	25.2	102	15.9
Sheltered Employment	14	15.9	23	7.1	11	14.1	18	11.6	66	10.3
Adult Partial Care	2	2.3	1	.3	6	7.7	2	1.3	11	1.7
Nonvocational Day Program	21	23.9	3	.9	19	24.4	3	2.0	46	7.2
Other*	0	0	2	.6	0	0	1	.6	3	.5
No Post-School Education/ Training, Job, or Program	3	3.4	14	4.4	4	5.1	3	1.9	24	3.7
Total	88	100.0	322	100.0	78	100.0	155	100.0	643	100.0

* "Other" represents outcomes such as entry into a correctional facility or psychiatric hospital.

Living Arrangements

About 67% of the graduate/aged out students had plans to live with a parent, other relative or guardian. Almost 19% planned to live independently (14.9%) or semi-independently (3.7%). About 13% planned to live in a skill development home, foster home, or developmental center. Ten percent planned to live in a group home, while 1% had plans to reside in a residential treatment center. Less than 1% planned another living arrangement, such as entry into a correctional facility or psychiatric hospital.

Conclusions for Graduates/Aged Out Students

NAPSEC programs appear to be strongly involved in helping their students make plans for a productive, prosocial transition into adulthood. Furthermore, the majority of these students had plans to live in the community, primarily with a parent, other relative, or guardian. Nearly 50% of the graduates/aged out students planned to enter a 4-Year/2-Year College, Trade/Technical School, or Competitive Employment/Armed Forces. Overall, almost 96% of these students planned to enter mainstream post-school education training, employment, vocational rehabilitation, or other appropriate supportive community-based adult programs.

Although the literature of special education consistently expresses concern about the poor outcomes for students with emotional/behavioral difficulties (SRI International, 1993; Malmgren, Edgar & Neel, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1999), only 4% of such students left a NAPSEC-

member program with no plans for entry into an appropriate education, training, employment, or adult program. While 32% of the graduate/aged out students from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs had plans to enter college or trade/technical school, 18% planned to enter competitive employment/military, and 46% made plans to enter vocational rehabilitation or supported/sheltered employment.

Likewise, only 3% of students from Pervasive Developmental Disorders programs, 5% from Medical Disorders programs, and 2% from Learning Disorders programs left without plans for post-school education/training, employment, or entry into an appropriate adult program. This would appear to indicate that NAPSEC-member programs are successful in helping students with diverse special needs make plans for bridging the transition into the adult world. Perhaps these programs can foster prosocial planning for such students because they are in the unique position of being able to provide intensely supportive, individualized services.

One Year Follow-Up: Class of 2000

The Programs

Seventy-six schools, operating 107 programs in 14 states and 7 federal educational regions, participated in the study. More than 80% of the participants came from 7 states in the Northeast (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island) and Mid-Atlantic (Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania) regions.

Each participant was asked to contact every student who graduated, received a certificate of completion from, or aged out of one of their school's programs in June, 2000. The alumni were contacted by phone and every effort was made to interview the alumni as well as the parent/other relative/guardian. Each respondent was asked whether the alumni were: attending 4-year or 2-year college, trade, technical, or other training program; participating in competitive employment or the military; enrolled in a vocational rehabilitative, supported or sheltered employment program; participating in an adult partial care or nonvocational day program; without post-school education/training, employment, or appropriate adult programs. They were also asked about their living arrangements (independently; semi-independently; with parent, guardian or other relative; in a skill development or foster home; in a group home; in a residential treatment facility; in another facility, such as a developmental center, psychiatric hospital, correctional facility). These responses were then recorded and analyzed.

Of the 551 alumni, 67% were male and 33% were female; 66% were Caucasian, 24% were African-American, 6% were Hispanic, 2% were Asian, and 2% came from other racial/ethnic groups.

Results

When entry into a 4-year/2-year college or trade/technical school (29%) or involvement in competitive employment or the Armed Forces (25%) were examined, 54% of the alumni were found to be engaged in such activities at the one-year follow-up (See Table 4).

Table 4

Post-School Activity by Program Focus: Class of 2000

N=551

	Pervasive Developmental N=108		ED/BD Programs N=247		Medical N=74		Learning N=122		Total N=551	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Four Year College	1	.9	25	10.1	9	12.2	17	13.9	52	9.4
Two Year College	2	1.9	50	20.3	8	10.8	18	14.8	78	14.2
Trade/Technical School	1	.9	21	8.5	1	1.4	7	5.8	30	5.4
Competitive Employment	6	5.6	82	33.2	3	4.0	32	26.2	123	22.3
Armed Forces	0	0	9	3.6	0	0	4	3.3	13	2.4
Main Stream Subtotal	10	9.3	187	75.7	21	28.4	78	64.0	296	53.7
Vocational Rehabilitation Program	8	7.4	11	4.5	1	1.4	12	9.8	32	5.8
Supported Employment	36	33.3	11	4.5	6	8.1	12	9.8	65	11.8
Sheltered Employment	18	16.7	2	.8	7	9.5	8	6.6	35	6.3
Vocational Rehabilitation Subtotal	62	57.4	24	9.8	14	19.0	32	26.2	132	23.9
Adult Partial Care Program	3	2.8	4	1.6	6	8.1	1	.8	14	2.5
Nonvocational Day Program	19	17.6	3	1.2	22	29.7	3	2.4	47	8.6
Community Based Adult Subtotal	22	20.4	7	2.8	28	37.8	4	3.2	61	11.1
Other*	1	.9	7	2.8	4	5.4	1	.8	13	2.4
No Post-School Education/Training, Job or Program	13	12.0	22	8.9	7	9.5	7	5.8	49	8.9
Total	108	100.0	247	100.0	74	100.0	122	100.0	551	100.0

* "Other" represents outcomes such as entry into a correctional facility or psychiatric hospital.

In addition, 24% were enrolled in vocational rehabilitation or supported/sheltered employment programs, while another 11% were participating in community-based adult partial care or nonvocational day programs. About 11% were not engaged in post-school education/training, employment or an appropriate adult program.

Moreover, when the post-school activities of alumni who attended Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs were examined, 37% were found to be involved in competitive employment. This yields a slightly lower rate than the 41% employment rate achieved by special education students with behavioral problems from the public schools who have been out of school less than 2 years.¹ (Malmgren, Edgar, & Neel, 1998).

When the living arrangements were examined, 68% of the alumni were found to be living in the community with a parent, other relative, or guardian. Fifteen percent of the alumni were living independently, a rate that compares favorably to the 13% independent living rate reported for special education students from public schools who have been out of school for 2 years or less.² (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996).

Conclusions for Alumni: Class of 2000

The alumni in the study seem to be engaged in socially productive adult activities in the community one year after leaving a NAPSEC-member program. When examined by program focus, 87% of the alumni from Pervasive Developmental Disorders programs, 88% of the alumni from Emotional/

¹ The rate for students from regular education out of school less than 2 years is 59%.

² The rate for students from regular education out of school less than 2 years is 33%.

Behavioral Disorders programs, 85% of the alumni from Medical Disorders programs, and 93% of the alumni from Learning Disorders programs were engaged in college, trade/technical school, competitive employment, vocational rehabilitation, supported/sheltered employment, adult partial care, or nonvocational day programs.

The 37% rate of entry into competitive employment for NAPSEC alumni with behavioral problems who have been out of school for one year approaches the 41% employment rate for special education students out of public school programs for 2 years or less (Malmgren, Edgar, & Neel, 1998). Likewise, the 15% rate of independent living for alumni from all NAPSEC programs out of school for one year compares favorably with the 13% rate for special education students from public schools out of school two years or less (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996).

Discussion

Given the many concerns about educating this vulnerable segment of the special education student population, it is encouraging to discover that a substantial number of the transfer students left the out-of-district NAPSEC-member programs with plans to return to their home districts and, in many cases, to less restrictive educational environments. This suggests that some youngsters require the intensive supports and services of an out-of-district program on a temporary basis in order to achieve gains which make possible their successful initial entry or return to an in-district educational program.

Given the further concerns about special education students who attend private special education schools making a successful post-school transition into adulthood, it is also promising that such a high proportion of the graduate/aged out students exited from their programs with transitional plans in place to pursue post-school educational training, vocational, or rehabilitative careers in the community. It is particularly encouraging that 50% of students attending Emotional/Behavioral programs, a group for whom such intense concern is expressed in the literature (e.g., SRI International, 1993; Malmgren, Edgar, & Neel, 1998; U.S. Department of Education, 1999), made positive post-school plans to enter college, trade school, competitive employment, or the military. Since transitional planning has been identified as one major element that contributes to post-school success for these students (SRI International, 1993), it is important to discover that the private special education programs are helping students make these crucial transitional plans.

Most important, the one-year follow-up study of the alumni from the Class of 2000 marks an important first step toward learning the degree to which the plans of the graduate/aged out students from NAPSEC-member programs are realized. It is noteworthy that 56% of the alumni reported enrollment in college, trade or technical school, or the work force. Included in this were the high risk alumni from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, who, one year after graduation, reported 39% participation in post-secondary school education or training and 37% involvement in employment or the military.

Private out-of-district, special education programs appear to help a diverse student population succeed. For some students, these programs are temporary

settings in which the skills needed to ultimately succeed with in-district programming can be developed. For other special education students, private special education schools offer the programs of choice throughout their educational careers, since these schools have the optimal educational settings for those whose special needs cannot be effectively met in any other environment. Finally, one year after leaving a private special education program, the vast majority of the alumni from the Class of 2000 are functioning as productive members of their communities. Future studies will be needed to learn the degree to which this positive entry into the world of adulthood is maintained and further enhanced.

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