

Outcomes of Approved Special Education Programs in the Private Sector

Plans for Exiting Students: 2007-2008

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NAPSEC Outcomes Project**

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Executive Summary

Study Period 2007-2008

During the 2007-2008 school year, 2,881 transfer students and 930 graduates/aged-out students with available plans exited from 99 NAPSEC schools (37% of the membership) operating 170 educational programs in 13 states and 5 federal educational regions. In total, about 14,880 students with emotional/behavioral disabilities, learning disabilities, medical disabilities, and pervasive developmental disabilities were enrolled in the schools that participated in the study.

Highlights for Transfer Students include:

1. 95% of the transfer students attended a NAPSEC-member school for 5 years or less.
2. 65% of these students left a NAPSEC-member school with plans to attend an educational program in their home district. Of these, 19% had plans to attend a regular education classroom within district.

Highlights for Graduates/Aged-Out Students include:

1. About 73% of the graduates/aged-out students were enrolled in a NAPSEC school for 5 years or less.
2. Almost 61% of the graduates/aged-out students planned to enter the mainstream (2-year/4-year college or trade/technical training, competitive employment, or military)
3. 24% planned to enter a vocational rehabilitation activity (vocational rehabilitation training, supported or sheltered employment).
4. 8% had plans to enter an adult program in the community (adult partial care or nonvocational day program).
5. Graduates/aged-out students from Emotional/Behavioral Disorder programs (75%) and Learning Disorder programs (86%) were the most likely to have plans to enter the mainstream.

Introduction

For almost a decade, the National Association of Private Special Education Centers (NAPSEC) has been collecting and analyzing data about the postschool outcomes of students with severe disabilities who attend the approved private special education programs of its members. Little attention has been paid to the postschool outcomes of these students who comprise about 1% of all students in our country with disabilities and are often the most disabled among all students who receive special education services.

From 2000-2001 through 2003-2004, NAPSEC, an association of about 270 approved private special education schools and agencies, conducted an annual exit study of the students who exited from its member schools. During the 2007-2008 academic year, this effort began again in order to add to the knowledge base for this segment of the special education population. This report, therefore, documents the postschool outcome plans of these students by reporting the educational settings to which the transfer students planned to move and the adult settings to which the graduates/aged-out students planned to enter.

Method

Each NAPSEC-member school was asked to supply information on every student who exited from a program over the course of the previous academic year. Exiting students were defined as transfer students, students who left the NAPSEC-member program to move on to another educational program, and graduates/aged-out students, those who left a NAPSEC-member school because he/she received a high school diploma, a certificate of completion, or aged out. Demographic and program information was collected on the students who dropped out of school during the course of the study. Dropouts, however, were excluded because their plans were not available.

The exiting students were further identified as attending 1 of 5 specific special educational programs. The schools were given a definition for each program category and were asked to classify the program from which each student exited by using one predominant program category. The programs were defined as follows: 1) Preschool Disorders Programs – for students with any disorder identified at the Preschool stage; 2) Pervasive Developmental Disorders Programs – for students with speech/language impairments, mental retardation, 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 Participating Programs and Students

During the 2007-2008 academic year, 99 NAPSEC schools (37% of the membership), which operated 170 education programs (139 day, 31 residential), volunteered to participate. The participating schools reported that 14,800 students were enrolled in these programs. Of those enrolled, 11,049 (75%) were day students and 3,751 (25%) were residential students. Of the day students, 8,025 (73%) were male and 3,024 (27%) were female. Of the residential students, 2,706 were male (72%) and 1,045 (28%) were female. One hundred eleven students (3.6%) dropped out of school in the 2007-2008 academic year. Of these, 84 were male and 27 were female; 50 were White, 44 Black, 13 Hispanic, 3 Asian, and 1 was a Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander.

Participating schools were located in 5 of the federal education regions and 13 states. As Table 1 shows, about 73% of the schools were located in the Mid-Atlantic region (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania) and about 13% were in the Northeast region (Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and Rhode Island). While 6% were in the Appalachia region (Virginia), the remaining 8% were in the North Central (about 3% from Ohio and Illinois) and the Western region (about 5% from Arizona and California).

Table 1

Participating NAPSEC-Member Schools
by Federal Educational Region¹

n=99

<u>Region/Participating State</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
<u>Northeast:</u> ²		
Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, Rhode Island	13	13.1
<u>MidAtlantic:</u> ³		
Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania	72	72.7
<u>Appalachia:</u> ⁴		
Virginia	6	6.1
<u>North Central:</u> ^{5,6}		
Illinois, Ohio	3	3.0
<u>Western:</u> ^{7,8,9}		
Arizona, California	5	5.1
Total	99	100.0

¹ No participants from the Pacific Region

² No participants from New Hampshire, Vermont, Maine, Puerto Rico, or Virgin Islands

³ No participants from the District of Columbia

⁴ No participants from Kentucky, Tennessee or West Virginia

⁵ No participants from Southeast Region

⁶ No participants from Iowa, Michigan, or Wisconsin

⁷ No participants from Southwest or MidContinent Regions

⁸ No participants from Nevada or Utah

⁹ No participants from Northwest Region

Students exited from 139 day programs (82%) and 31 residential programs (18%). About 36% of these programs were Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs (61 programs); 26% were Pervasive Developmental Disorders programs (44 programs); 17% were Learning Disorders programs (29 programs); 13% were Medical Disorders programs (23 programs); and 8% were Preschool Disorders programs (13 programs).

The Exiting Students

Description

As Table 2 shows, during the study period, 4,865 students exited from a NAPSEC-member program. The exiting students tended to be male (72%), White (51%), High School students (64%), between the ages of 12 and 17 years (55%), from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs (68%). These students tended to be in a NAPSEC-member program from 1-5 years (50%) and the majority (78%) did not receive subsidized lunch. Transfer students accounted for a little more than 77% of the exiting students; graduates/aged-out students were about 21%; and dropouts were 2%. According to NAPSEC-member school staff, close to 77% of the exiters experienced a “planned” exit. In short, student, family/guardian, NAPSEC-member program staff, and local school district staff concurred with plans for the student to move to a new educational program. NAPSEC-member school staff rated the exits as “positive” in 81% of the cases. Again, program staff from the NAPSEC-member school agreed with local school district staff that the student was ready to move to a another appropriate educational program.

The demographic and other relevant characteristics of these students are presented in Table 2.

Table 2

**Demographic and Other Relevant Information
of Exiting NAPSEC Students**

n=4,865

Characteristic	n	%
<u>Program Classification</u>		
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders	3,304	67.9
Pervasive Developmental Disorders	502	10.3
Preschool Disorders	465	9.6
Medical Disorders	239	4.9
Learning Disorders	355	7.3
<u>Program Type</u>		
Day	3,385	69.6
Residential	1,480	30.4
<u>Reason for Exit</u>		
Transfer	3,751	77.1
Graduate/Aged-Out	1,003	20.6
Dropouts	111	2.3
<u>Grade Level</u>		
Preschool	487	10.0
Elementary School	465	9.6
Middle School	812	16.7
High School	3,101	63.7
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
White	2,485	51.1
Black	1,691	34.8
Hispanic	580	11.9
Asian	47	1.0
American Indian/Alaskan Native	51	1.0
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander	11	.2
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	3,521	72.4
Female	1,344	27.6
<u>Ages at Exit</u>		
3-5 years	485	10.0
6-11 years	419	8.6
12-17 years	2,667	54.8

18-21+ years	1,294	26.6
<u>Length of Stay</u>		
< 1 year	1,011	20.8
1-5 years	2,415	49.6
6-10 years	292	6.0
11+ years	93	1.9
Not Available	1,054	21.7
<u>Subsidized Lunch</u>		
Yes	1,049	22.0
No	3,816	78.0
<u>Status of Planning Information</u>		
Available in Records	3,811	78.3
Not Available	1,054	21.7
<u>Staff Assessment of Exit</u>		
Planned		
Yes	3,745	77.0
No	1,120	23.0
Positive		
Yes	3,945	81.0
No	920	19.0

Planning information was available for 3,811 students (78% of the exiting students). Of these students with known plans, 2,881 were transfer students and 930 were graduates/aged-out students/aged-out students.

The Transfer Students

Description

There were 2,881 transfer students with known plans. Of these, 2,171 students (75%) were male, while 710 (25%) were female. Approximately 51% were White, 35% were Black, 12% were Hispanic, .9% were Asian, 1% were American Indian/Alaskan Native and the remaining .1% were of Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander background. While 1,931 (67%) of the transfer students attended day programs, 950 students (33%) attended residential programs.

By Grade Level

More than 48% attended High School, nearly 23% Middle School, about 13% Elementary School, and close to 15% Preschool. See Table 3.

Table 3

Transfer Students by Grade Level

n= 2,881

	#	%
Preschool	450	15.6
Elementary School	380	13.2
Middle School	653	22.7
High School	1,398	48.5
	2,881	100.0

By Length of Stay

Table 4 presents the length of stay for the transfer students for the duration of their enrollment in a NAPSEC-member program. As this table shows, about 63% of the transfer students attended a NAPSEC-member program for between 1 and 5

years. Another 32% were in attendance for less than 1 year. Taken together, about 95% of these students were in a NAPSEC-member program for less than 1 year up until 5 years.

Table 4

Length of Stay for Transfer Students

n= 2,881

	#	%
< 1 year	925	32.1
1-5 years	1,825	63.3
6-10 years	131	4.6
Total	2,881	100.0

The Educational Plans By Program

When the transfer students are examined according to the programs in which they were enrolled, the following emerges. About 66% (1,906 students) attended Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs; 15% (426 students) were enrolled in Preschool Disorders programs; 8% (239 students) went to Pervasive Developmental Disorders programs; 6% (167 students) attended Learning Disorders programs; and 5% (143 students) were in Medical Disorders programs. See Table 5 for the distribution of the plans made by these students.

Table 5

Educational Plans for Transfer Students

n=2,881

Education Setting	Preschool n=426		E/BD n=1,906		PDD n=239		Learning n=167		Medical n=143		Total n=2,881	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Regular Education, Not Special Education	38	8.9	98	5.1	17	7.1	40	23.9	7	4.9	200	6.9
Regular Education, Vocational	0	0	12	.6	0	0	6	3.6	1	.7	19	.7
Regular Education, Supported Inclusion	45	10.6	227	12.0	17	7.1	31	18.6	15	10.5	335	11.6
Subtotal: Returns to Regular Education	83	19.5	337	17.7	34	14.2	77	46.1	23	16.1	554	19.2
Resource Room	0	0	33	1.7	4	1.7	7	4.2	1	.7	45	1.6
Alternate School	0	0	168	8.8	7	2.9	9	5.4	6	4.2	190	6.6
Special Education, Self -Contained LEA	325	76.3	593	31.1	76	31.8	37	22.1	45	31.4	1,076	37.3
Subtotal: All Returns to In-district Programs	408	95.8	1,131	59.3	121	50.6	130	77.8	75	52.4	1,865	64.7
Out of District Special Education	16	3.7	363	19.0	91	38.1	24	14.4	40	28.0	534	18.5
Residential	0	0	251	13.2	18	7.5	7	4.2	4	2.8	280	9.7
Home Instruction	2	.5	47	2.5	4	1.7	3	1.8	16	11.2	72	2.5
Other	0	0	114	6.0	5	2.1	3	1.8	8	5.6	130	4.5
Total	426	100	1,906	100	239	100	167	100	143	100	2,881	100

Results for Transfer Students

As Table 5 indicates, nearly 65% of the transfer students left a NAPSEC-member school with plans to return to an educational program within the local district. Over 19% of the students planned to return to regular education classes (Regular Education, Not Special Education, 6.9%; Regular Education, Vocational, .7%; Regular Education, Supported Inclusion, 11.6%), while over 45% planned to return to other programs within the district (Resource Room, 1.6%; Alternate School, 6.6%; or Self-contained Classroom, 37.3%). When the plans to return to regular education are examined by disability, the following emerges. Students from Learning Disorders Programs (46.1%) were the most likely to plan to return to regular education classrooms. Students from the other categories made plans to return as follows: from Preschool Disorders programs, 19.5%; from Medical Disorders programs, 16.1%; from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, 17.7%; from Pervasive Development Disorders programs, 14.2%. Altogether, about 96% of the students who transferred from Preschool Disorders programs, 78% from Learning Disorders programs, 59% from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, 52% from Medical Disorders programs, and 51% from Pervasive Developmental Disorders programs had plans to enter educational programs within their local school districts.

As a summary, Table 6 shows the degree to which the plans of the transfer students reflect a return to an in-district program, including a regular education setting.

Table 6 Transfer Student Return to In-District Education

	Regular Education ^a		Other In-District ^b		Total In-District	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
2007-2008 (37% participation) n= 2,881	554	19	1,311	46	1,865	65

a Regular education, including supported inclusion

b Resource room, alternate school, self-contained LEA

Taken together, 1,865 students (65%) planned to return to in-district programs. Of these 554 students (19%) planned to return to regular education classrooms, while 1,311 students (46%) planned to enter “other” in-district programming, such as, resource room, alternate school, or self-contained LEA.

Conclusions for Transfer Students

About 32% of the transfer students remained in a NAPSEC-member program for less than 1 year, while about 63% were enrolled from 1 to 5 years. Taken together, more than 95% of these students remained in a NAPSEC-member program from less than 1 year up until 5 years. About 65% of the students who attend and then transfer out of a NAPSEC-member program develop plans to return to educational programs within their local school districts. Close to 19% are able to return to regular education classrooms. Of those who planned to return to regular education classrooms, students from Learning Disorders programs (about 46%) and Preschool Disorders programs (more than 19%) were the most likely to plan to return to their district. When all plans to return to in-district programs are examined,

students from NAPSEC-member schools make such plans at the following rates: 96% from Preschool Disorders programs; 78% from Learning Disorders programs, 59% from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs; 52% from Medical Disorders programs; and 51% from Pervasive Developmental Disorders programs.

The Graduates/Aged-Out Students

Description

There were 930 graduates/aged-out students with known plans. Of these, 67% were male, while 33% were female. Approximately 60% were White, 29% were Black, 9% were Hispanic, 1% were Asian, and 1% were of Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander background. There were no reported American Indian/Alaskan Natives. About 51% (475 students) came from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, approximately 24% (221 students) from Pervasive Developmental Disorders programs, 17% (159 students) from Learning Disorders programs, and 8% (75 students) from Medical Disorders programs. Finally, 89% (826 graduates/aged-out students) came from day programs, while 11% (104 graduates/aged-out students) came from residential programs.

Length of Stay

Table 7 shows the length of stay in a NAPSEC-member program for the graduates/aged-out students who exited.

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

n= 930

	#	%
Graduates/aged-out students/Aged-out Students		
< 1 year	86	9.3
1-5 years	590	63.4
6-10 years	161	17.3
11+ years	93	10.0
Total	930	100.0

As Table 7 demonstrates, slightly more than 9% of the graduates/aged-out students were in NAPSEC-member programs for less than 1 year; 63% for 1-5 years; over 17% for 6-10 years; and 10% for 11 or more years. The majority of the graduates/aged-out students (73%) were in NAPSEC-member programs from less than 1 year up until 1 to 5 years.

The Postschool Plans by Program

Table 8 presents an analysis of the postschool plans made by these students.

Table 8

Postschool Plans of Graduates/Aged-Out Students by Program
n=930

Postschool Setting	E/BD n=475		PDD n=221		Learning n=159		Medical n=75		Total n=930	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Four Year College	47	9.9	2	.9	44	27.7	10	13.3	103	11.1
Two Year College	145	30.5	16	7.2	43	27.0	8	10.7	212	22.8
Trade/Technical School	36	7.6	2	.9	15	9.4	1	1.3	54	5.8
Competitive Employment	120	25.2	27	12.2	35	22.1	2	2.7	184	19.8
Military	10	2.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	1.0
Mainstream Activity^a	358	75.4	47	21.2	137	86.2	21	28.0	563	60.5
Vocational Rehabilitation Training Program	50	10.5	27	12.2	2	1.2	6	8.0	85	9.1
Supported Employment	15	3.2	54	24.4	13	8.2	8	10.7	90	9.7
Sheltered Employment	9	1.9	37	16.7	1	.6	5	6.7	52	5.6
Vocational Rehabilitation Activity^b	74	15.6	118	53.3	16	10.0	19	25.4	227	24.4
Adult Partial Care	2	.4	10	4.5	1	.6	4	5.3	17	1.8
Nonvocational Day Program	6	1.3	31	14.0	0	0	21	28.0	58	6.2
Community-Based Program Activity^c	8	1.7	41	18.5	1	.6	25	33.3	75	8.0
Other	4	.8	1	.5	1	.6	3	4.0	9	.9
No Education/Training, Job or Program	31	6.5	14	6.3	4	2.5	7	9.3	56	6.0
Total	475	100	221	100	159	100	75	100	930	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 Graduates/Aged-Out Students

As Table 8 shows, nearly 40% of the graduates/aged-out students planned to go on to a 4-year/2-year College or a Trade/Technical School. About 21% had plans to enter Competitive Employment or the Military. Taken together, close to 61% of the graduates/aged-out students planned to enter a Mainstream Activity by participating in postschool education or technical training, seeking employment, or enlisting in the military. More than 24% planned to enter a Vocational Rehabilitation Activity by participating in a vocational rehabilitation training program (9.1%) or in supported (9.7%) or sheltered (5.6%) employment, while 8% planned to enter Community-Based Program Activity by enrolling in an adult partial care (1.8%) or nonvocational day program (6.2%). Less than 1% planned to volunteer or to enter another setting, such as AmeriCorps or Job Corps or medical facility. Finally, about 6% of the graduates/aged-out students made no plans to enter an educational, vocational, rehabilitative, or supportive program or to obtain a job after completing their secondary program.

Moreover, graduates/aged-out students from Learning Disorders programs (more than 86%) and Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs (more than 75%) were the most likely to make plans to enter Mainstream Activity; those from Pervasive Developmental Disorders programs (more than 53%) were the most likely to plan to enter Vocational Rehabilitation Activity; and those from Medical Disorders programs (33%) were the most likely to plan to enter Community-Based Program Activity.

As a summary, Table 9 shows the postschool plans for graduates/aged-out students by the overarching Activity category.

Table 9

Postschool Plans of Graduates/Aged-Out Students by Activity

	<u>Mainstream^a</u>		<u>Voc.Rehab^b</u>		<u>Comm.-Based^c</u>		<u>Total</u>	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2007-2008 (37% participation) n=930	563	61	227	24	75	8	865	93

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

b Vocational Rehabilitation Activity – Vocational Rehab Training, Supported or Sheltered Employment

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

Living Arrangements

Almost 76% of the graduates/aged-out students planned to live with a parent, other relative, or guardian. Nearly 15% made plans to live independently (11.7%) or semi-independently (3.2%). Finally, 9% had plans to live in a skill development home, foster home, developmental center, group home, residential treatment center, an “other” living arrangement, such as, a medical or psychiatric facility.

Conclusions for Graduates/Aged-Out Students

NAPSEC programs appear to help the vast majority of the graduates/aged-out students make transitional plans to enter productive adult roles. While the majority of the graduates/aged-out students planned to live in the community, primarily with a parent, other relative, or guardian, close to 15% had plans to live independently (11.7%) or semi-independently (3.2%). About 61% of the graduates/aged-out students planned to enter a 4-Year/2-Year College, Trade/Technical School, or Competitive Employment/Military. Overall, 93% of these

students planned to enter Mainstream Activity (4-Year/2-Year College, Trade/Technical School, Competitive Employment or Military), Vocational Rehabilitation (Vocational Rehabilitation Training Program or Supported/Sheltered Employment), or Community-Based Program Activity (Partial Care or Nonvocational Day Program). A high percentage of those from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders (75%) and Learning Disorders (86%) programs had plans to enter Mainstream Activity; those from Pervasive Developmental Disorders (53%) planned to enter Vocational Rehabilitation Activity; and those from Medical Disorders programs made plans to enter Community-Based (33%) or Mainstream Activity (28%) after leaving a NAPSEC-member secondary school.

Discussion

Among exiting transfer students, 95% were enrolled in a NAPSEC-member program for 5 years or less during the 2007-2008 school year. (As Table 4 indicates, 32% stayed for less than 1 year; 63% stayed from 1 to 5 years). About 65% of the transfer students left a NAPSEC-member program with plans to return to their home districts; 19% of these students planned to enter the less restrictive educational environment of a regular classroom. These results demonstrate that many special education students attend NAPSEC-member schools on a time-limited basis to receive highly individualized, specialized supports to strengthen their skills so that they can eventually return to in-district programming. These findings compare favorably with other studies which show that a high proportion of students enrolled in therapeutic programs outside their local district are able to return to educational settings within the public school (Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004).

Studies also show that special education students in public school settings, when compared to their peers in general educations, are less likely to complete high school or receive further education or vocational training (Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Wagner & Blackorby, 1996). A high proportion of the graduates/aged-out students who exited from a NAPSEC-member program made transitional plans to pursue adult careers in Mainstream Activity (61%), Vocational Rehabilitation Activity (24%), or Community-Based Program Activity (8%). Taken together 93% of the graduates/aged-out students had plans to be productive adults.

The outcomes for special education students with serious emotional and behavioral difficulties in public school settings have been intensely investigated; the low graduation rates, poor work histories, and criminal justice involvement of these students points to their problematic transition into stable adult roles (Reddy, 2001; Malmgren, Edgar, & Neel, 1998; Mattison & Spitznagel, 1998; Sample, 1998; SRI International, 1993; Tobin & Sugai, 1999; U.S. Department of Education, 1999, 2000, 2001, 2001; Wagner, 1995; Wagner & Cameto, 2004; Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004). It is, therefore, reassuring that 75% of the graduates/aged-out students from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, the most highly represented of all of the programs, left a NAPSEC-member program in 2007-2008 with plans for pursuing adult roles in the mainstream. Their plans included 40% pursuing 4 year/2 year college, 8% trade or technical school, and 27% or competitive employment or military service. Moreover, the vast majority of graduates/aged-out students from all programs (93%) left a NAPSEC-member school during the 2007-2008 school year with plans to engage in productive postschool activities.

NAPSEC-member schools continue to offer an array of intensive, highly specialized and individualized programs that are not available within the local school district to special education students with a broad and diverse range of serious disabilities. The plans of transfer students indicate that they use the services offered by the NAPSEC-affiliated programs to develop and strengthen their skills so that they can return to educational programs available within their local school districts. The plans of the graduates/aged-out students demonstrate that they benefit from the intensive services available in NAPSEC-member schools, including transitional planning services, by developing plans to enter productive adult roles after graduation. NAPSEC-member programs remain focused on assuring success along the continuum of special education placements and services for students with severe disabilities and special needs.

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