

# NLTS2 Data Brief

A Report From the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 • September 2005, Vol. 4, Issue 2



National Center on Secondary  
Education and Transition  
Creating Opportunities for Youth With  
Disabilities to Achieve Successful Futures



NLTS2 is being  
conducted by SRI International

## Family Expectations and Involvement for Youth with Disabilities

By Lynn Newman

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) has brought an increased awareness of the importance of family-school connections by focusing on the integral role parents play in assisting their children's learning, encouraging parents to be actively involved in their children's education, and including, for the first time in the history of federal education legislation, a specific statutory definition of parent involvement.

The evidence is persuasive and consistent that families play a critical role in nurturing their children's educational growth (Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Berla, 1994; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2003). Family support for learning is important for all students, but it may be particularly important for children with disabilities. One of the main tenets of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, last amended in 2004 (IDEA 2004) has been parents' participation in decision-making related to their children's education. However, despite legislative support for parental involvement, little information has been available until now to examine the actual level of family support for education that is given to middle- and high-school-age students with disabilities.

The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) provides the first national picture of the involvement of families in the educational development of their secondary-school-age children with disabilities.<sup>1</sup> This Data Brief describes family involvement at home and at school, including a comparison of levels of involvement for families of youth with disabilities with those for families in the general population. It also discusses involvement in a school-based activity that is specific to families of youth with disabilities: participation in individualized education program (IEP) meetings. Finally, parent expectations for their children's attainment of postsecondary education and independence are highlighted.

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<sup>1</sup> NLTS2 has a nationally representative sample of more than 11,000 youth who on December 1, 2000, were ages 13 through 16, receiving special education, and in at least seventh grade. Information from NLTS2 is weighted to represent youth with disabilities nationally as a group, as well as youth in each of the 12 federal special education disability categories used in NLTS2. The information reported here was gathered from parents/guardians of NLTS2 youth in telephone interviews or through mail questionnaires in the spring and summer of 2001.

This publication is available online at  
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The *NLTS2 Data Brief* is produced by the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition (NCSET), in partnership with the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2).

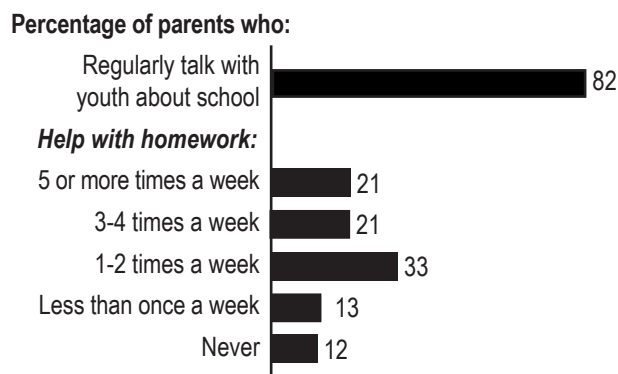
## Involvement at Home

Families of most students with disabilities are very involved in supporting their children's educational development at home. Most families report regularly talking with their children about school (82%) and helping with homework at least once a week (75%; Exhibit 1). One in five families provide homework assistance as often as five or more times per week.

Students with disabilities are more likely to receive help with homework than are their peers in the general population. The difference in homework support is especially apparent for those who receive frequent help: students with disabilities are five times as likely as their peers in the general population to receive homework assistance frequently (Exhibit 2). Only 4% of secondary school students in the general population receive help with homework five or more times a week, compared with 21% of youth with disabilities who receive homework assistance that often. At the other end of the homework-help spectrum—students who rarely receive help—students in the general population are almost twice as likely as those with disabilities to receive homework assistance never or rarely. Almost half (45%) of students in the general population receive homework help less than once a week; in contrast, only 24% of those with disabilities receive such infrequent assistance.

Family involvement in the education-related activities at home measured by NLTS2 varies across disability categories. Youth with emotional disturbances are among the least likely to receive

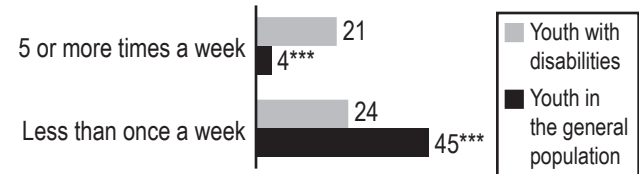
### Exhibit 1: Involvement at Home of Families of Secondary School Students with Disabilities



Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.

### Exhibit 2: Frequency of Receiving Help with Homework for Secondary School Students with Disabilities and in the General Population

Percentage of parents who help with homework



Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews and U.S. Department of Education, NCES, National Household Education Survey, 1996 parent survey (responses calculated for youth ages 13-17).

Statistical significance: \*\*\*p<.001.

help with homework. Families of youth with emotional disturbances are the least likely to help with homework frequently (18%) and the most likely to provide homework assistance less than once a week (36%). Students with multiple disabilities, autism, or orthopedic impairments receive the most frequent homework assistance, with 31% to 36% helped five or more times a week, compared with 20% of those with learning disabilities.

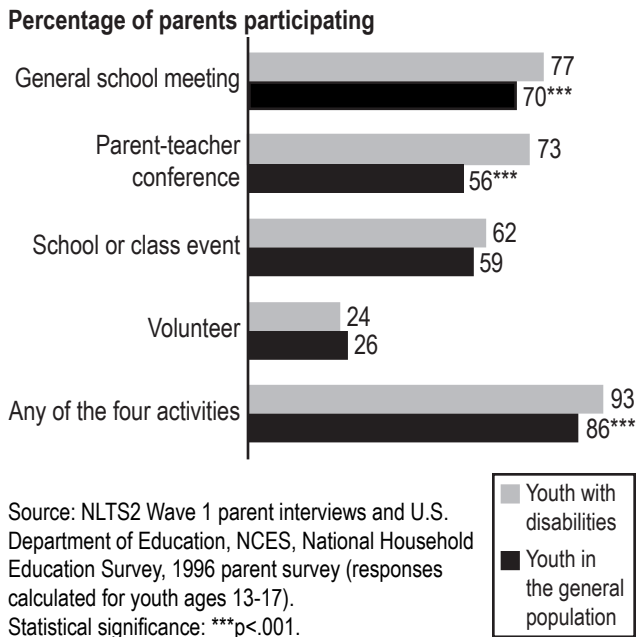
## Involvement in School-Based Activities

Families of secondary-school-age students with disabilities participate in a wide range of school-based activities, including schoolwide meetings (e.g., back-to-school nights or PTA meetings), conferences with individual teachers, student or class activities (e.g., attending science fairs or musical performances), and volunteering at school (e.g., chaperoning class field trips or serving on school committees) (Exhibit 3).

Overall, 93% participate in at least one of these types of school-based activities. Approximately three out of four parents report attending school meetings (77%) and parent-teacher conferences (73%). Almost two-thirds (62%) report attending school or class events. Parents also report volunteering at school, although to a lesser extent than other types of school-based involvement, with about one-quarter volunteering.

Among parents of youth with disabilities who participate in school activities, the frequency of their involvement varies by type of activity. Parents who participate are most frequently at the school

**Exhibit 3: Involvement in School-Based Activities by Families of Secondary School Students with Disabilities and in the General Population**



for school or class events, such as science fairs, student performances, sports activities, and awards assemblies. Of those who attend school or class events, 45% report attending five or more events during a school year.

Families of students with disabilities are as involved as their peers in the general population; and, for some types of school-based activities—general school meetings (77% vs. 70%) and parent-teacher conferences (73% vs. 56%)—they are more involved (Exhibit 3).

Family involvement in educational activities at school varies by disability category, with more variation in attending a school or class event or volunteering at school than in attending a general school meeting. Families of students with speech or orthopedic impairments are consistently among the most likely to participate in school meetings (82% and 78%) or in school or class events (68% and 68%), or to volunteer at the school (32% and 34%). Families of students with emotional disturbances or mental retardation are among the least likely to participate in three of the four types of school-based activities—school meetings (72% and 72%), events (50% and 57%), and volunteering (15% and 21%)—but they are among the most likely to attend parent-teacher conferences (73% and 74%).

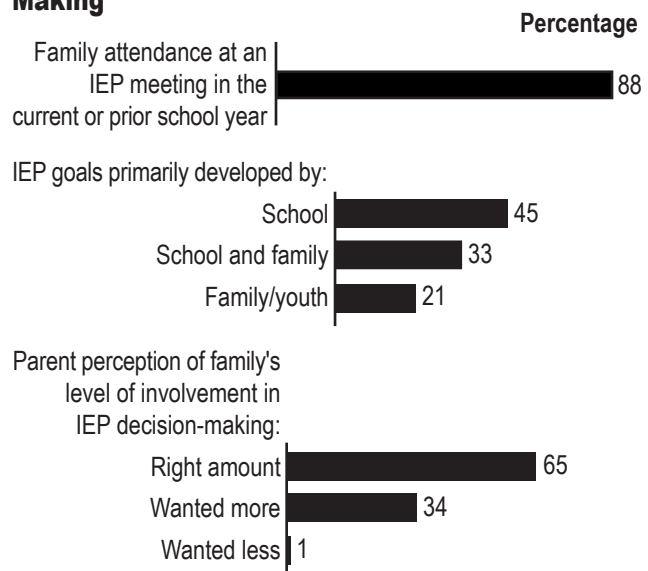
**Involvement in the Individualized Education Program (IEP) Process**

Participation in the development of their children’s IEP is a type of family-school partnership specific to families of students with disabilities who qualify for special education services. Nearly 9 out of 10 parents of secondary-school-age students with disabilities (88%) report participating in at least one IEP meeting in the current or prior school year (Exhibit 4). Teachers’ perceptions of parents’ involvement in their children’s IEP meetings are consistent with parents’ reports of their own involvement. According to teachers, 83% of parents had attended the most recent IEP meeting in the current school year. Although this is slightly lower than the parent-reported attendance rate of 88%, some difference would be expected since teachers’ reports are for a 1-year period instead of the 2-year period reported by parents.

Family attendance at IEP meetings does not always ensure active participation in the decision-making process. Slightly more than half of the families report being involved in developing IEP goals. When asked how they feel about their family’s involvement in decisions about their children’s IEP, about one-third want to be more involved.

Families of students with other health impairments (96%) or traumatic brain injuries (96%)

**Exhibit 4: Family Involvement in IEP Decision-Making**



Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.

are among those most likely to attend IEP meetings. Families of students with mental retardation (85%) or speech impairments (86%) are among those least likely to attend IEP meetings.

## Family Expectations

NLTS2 findings suggest that family expectations for the future help shape the academic engagement and achievement of youth with disabilities, irrespective of the nature of the youth's disabilities and their levels of functioning. If other factors are equal, youth with disabilities whose parents expect them to go on to postsecondary education after high school have more positive engagement and achievements while in high school than youth whose parents do not share that optimism for the future (Newman, 2005).

A majority of youth with disabilities, but not all, have parents who expect them to experience future success in many aspects of education and independence. When parents were asked how likely they thought it was that their adolescent children with disabilities would reach several independence milestones,<sup>2</sup> 85% or more expect their children "definitely" or "probably" will graduate from high school with a regular diploma and live independently (Exhibit 5). Although virtually all youth (97%) are expected to be able to find paid employment, parents are somewhat less certain that these jobs will pay enough for youth to achieve financial independence. Four out of five youth are expected to be able to support themselves financially, without family or government support.

### Exhibit 5: Family Expectations for Youth's Future Independence

#### Percentage of youth expected\* to:



Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews

\* Combines "definitely" and "probably will" responses.

\*\* Youth who have had a paid job are included as "definitely will."

<sup>2</sup> Possible responses were "definitely will," "probably will," "probably won't," and "definitely won't."

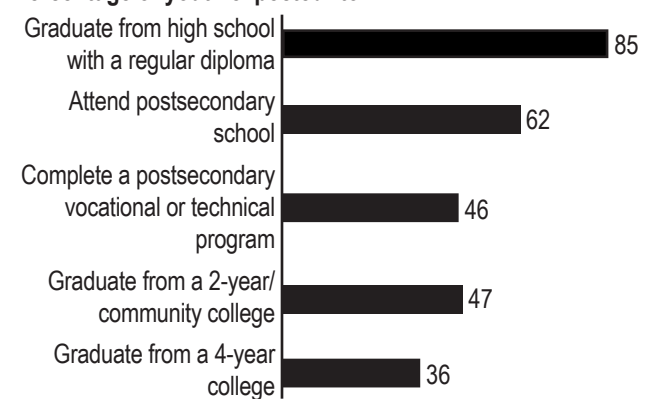
Parents of youth with disabilities also are optimistic about their children's graduation from high school with a regular diploma; 85% expect youth will "definitely" or "probably" achieve this milestone (Exhibit 6). Parents are far less confident that youth will attend and graduate from postsecondary school. About three of five youth are expected to further their education after high school. Fewer than half are expected to complete a postsecondary vocational, technical, or trade school (46%), or a 2-year college (47%). Expectations regarding graduation from a 4-year college are lower, with approximately one-third expected to complete this type of institution.

Youth with disabilities are much less likely to be expected to continue their education after high school than are their peers in the general population (62% vs. 92%).<sup>3</sup> Parents of youth with disabilities also are markedly less positive than other parents about youth's graduating from a 4-year college; 36% of those with disabilities are expected "definitely" or "probably" to complete a 4-year college program, whereas 88% of their peers in the general population are expected to receive a 4-year college diploma.

As with most aspects of youth's experiences, these expectations are not shared equally by all youth with disabilities. Expectations for postsecondary education enrollment is relatively high for youth

### Exhibit 6: Family Expectations for Youth's Future Educational Attainment

#### Percentage of youth expected\* to:



Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.

\* Combines "definitely" and "probably will" responses.

<sup>3</sup> Figures for the general population were calculated from the 1999 National Household Education Survey. Data are for 13- to 17-year-olds.



with speech/language or hearing or visual impairments. On all dimensions of independence, youth with learning disabilities or speech impairments are the most likely to be expected “definitely” to attain independence milestones. Lower educational and independence expectations are particularly common for youth with mental retardation, autism, multiple disabilities, and deaf-blindness.

## Conclusion

NLTS2 provides a national picture of families’ involvement at home and at school in support of their children’s education during the secondary school years, and families’ expectations for their children’s future achievements. Families of secondary-school-age students with disabilities are actively involved both at home and at school. Compared with their peers in the general population, families of students with disabilities are more involved in assisting with homework, and they are as involved, and at times more involved, in school-based activities. In addition, many families of youth with disabilities hold high expectations for their children’s future success in several aspects of education and independence, which have been shown to relate to higher engagement and achievement among students with disabilities while in high school. Longitudinal analyses in subsequent waves of NLTS2 will shed light on how parent roles unfold over a period of years and how family involvement and expectations affect later outcomes as youth with disabilities transition from school to early adult life.

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This report was supported in whole or in part by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, (Cooperative Agreement No. H326J000005). Although the U.S. Department of Education has reviewed this document, the contents of this document do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of other organizations imply endorsement by those organizations or the U.S. Government. The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer. This publication is available on the Web at <http://www.ncset.org>, and is available in alternate formats upon request. To request an alternate format or additional copies, contact NCSET at 612.624.2097.

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