

issue brief

Post-School Outcomes for Transitioning Youth with Developmental Disabilities Can we Predict Integrated Employment?

While strides have certainly been made, youth with disabilities continue to have less than desirable post-school outcomes (Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine & Garza, 2006). Although youth with developmental disabilities typically stay in school longer than their peers and often receive costly long-term funded supports as adults, national surveys document dismal employment outcomes for adults with developmental disabilities (Butterworth, Smith, Hall, Migliore & Winsor, 2008; Migliore & Butterworth, 2008).

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For example, Butterworth et al. (2008) found only 21.9% adults with developmental disabilities were engaged in integrated employment (defined as paid work in the community) while 78.1% were engaged in sheltered or non-work activities (e.g., recreation).

In a recent analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) database, Carter, Austin and Trainor (in press) documented that 26% of transition-age youth with intellectual disabilities were working for pay (as reported by the youth and his/her family). However, the authors noted that 43% of those transition-age youth were working in jobs where most of their co-workers have disabilities. These jobs may have included enclaves, mobile crews, or sheltered work activities with sub-minimum wage or stipends paid by a community rehabilitation provider rather than directly from an employer. To date

these distinctions are not clearly captured in extant research. Moreover, there continues to be a need to accurately document the employment outcomes of transitioning youth with developmental disabilities and to identify those factors that influence the postsecondary attainment of direct hire jobs that pay above minimum wage.

This brief presents a condensed summary of a research study designed to more clearly define post-school employment outcomes, document the post-school outcomes for youth with developmental disabilities, and examine the predictors of successful integrated employment for youth with developmental disabilities, as defined by eligibility for long term funding support from state developmental disabilities agencies.



method

The term integrated employment has not been used consistently in research, policy, and practice however there is agreement that it refers to paid work in the community. Community rehabilitation providers that provide support to individuals with developmental disabilities have various models of integrated employment. For the purposes of this study individuals were categorized by the following outcomes.

Competitive Integrated Employment: individual works in community-based job with *typical peers* and is paid at least minimum wage *by employer*.

Other Integrated Employment: individual works in a paid community job alongside other peers with disabilities (enclave/ crew) and/or makes less than minimum wage.

Unpaid/Sheltered/Non-Work Activities: individual participates in unpaid community-based job or any facility-based work/non-work activities.

The study sought to identify those variables that best predict the various types of integrated employment outcomes (competitive and other). This was accomplished by surveying staff at 59 community rehabilitation providers across Maryland. The survey specifically asked them about youth with developmental disabilities who exited school in 2008. Surveys were completed on 338 youth who were out of school for approximately one and half years.

Respondents were asked to indicate the subjects' current employment status and provided information about the variables listed below. Each of these variables have been identified as potentially predictive of employment outcomes.

Variables Reported on Survey

- Race/ethnicity (Caucasian/non-Hispanic)
- Male Gender
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI) recipient status
- Self-Management Skills
- Self-Determination Skills
- Community Mobility Skills
- Lives with Family
- Family Expressed Preference for Paid Community Employment
- Family Involvement
- School Setting- Typical High School
- School Setting- Post-Secondary Education
- Work Experience- Unpaid
- Work Experience- Stipend
- Work Experience- Paid

findings

The study found that the majority of the subjects were placed in unpaid/sheltered/non-work (193 or 57.1%) rather than some type of integrated employment. Most notable is that only 14.2% of the youth were engaged in competitive integrated employment (see Table 1).

TABLE 1

	No.	%
Unpaid/Sheltered/Non-Work	193	57.1%
Competitive Integrated Employment	48	14.2%
Other Integrated Employment	97	27.8%

The study further examined the relationship of the empirically-derived predictor variables and integrated employment. Table 2 shows the bivariate relationship.

TABLE 2	X ²	R ²
Gender	2.10, p=.350	.01
Caucasian/Non-Hispanic race/ethnicity ^{ab}	8.43, p=.015	.03
Receives SSI ^{ac}	13.88, p=.001	.05
Family involvement (rating scale)	4.48, p=.106	.02
Lives with family ^{ab}	9.86, p=.007	.03
Family expressed preference for integrated employment ^{ab}	60.58, p=.000	.19
Self-management skills (rating scale) ^{ab}	60.17, p=.000	.19
Self-determination skills (rating scale) ^{ab}	41.24, p=.000	.14
Community mobility skills (rating scale) ^{ab}	66.09, p=.000	.21
School setting		
Attended post-secondary program ^{ab}	8.53, p=.014	.03
Attended typical high school ^{ab}	10.64, p=.005	.04
Work experience		
Paid work during secondary school ^{ab}	27.77, p=.000	.09
Stipend work during secondary school	.08, p=.962	.00
Unpaid work during secondary school	.47, p=.789	.00
Has a VR Counselor ^a	8.34, p=.015	.03
Received VR funding prior to exiting school	.16, p=.924	.00
Community economy (unemployment rate) ^{ab}	7.05, p=.001	

Note:

All tests based on X² with 2 df. Nagelkerke Pseudo R² is analogous, but not identical to, the change in R² estimate from OLS Regression.

^aSignificant variables (p<.10)

^bVariables entered into the logistic regression testing model.

^cVariables not entered into the logistic regression model because of missing data

^dCommunity economy was not assessed with the CRP survey; It was measured by the unemployment rate for the zip code in which the CRP was located.

The variables found to have a significant relationship (p<.10) with integrated employment outcomes were further analyzed using a process called multinomial logistic regression. This process yielded a model of the variables that best predicted integrated employment outcomes for transition-aged youth with development disabilities. The following five variables in our model had a unique significant relationship with integrated employment.

1. Family member expressed preference for paid community employment ($\chi^2=24.03$, p<.001)
2. Paid work experience during school ($\chi^2=9.68$, p=.008)
3. Community mobility skills ($\chi^2=6.03$, p=.049)
4. Self-management skills ($\chi^2=6.16$, p=.046)
5. Race/ethnicity ($\chi^2=6.26$, p=.044)

The two most prominent variables that predicted integrated employment were family members who expressed a preference for paid community employment and paid work experience prior to exit from secondary school. These two variables were further analyzed to determine their odd ratio for predicating various types of integrated employment. The odds ratio is a way of comparing whether the probability of a certain event is the same for two groups. In this study, youth whose families expressed preference for integrated employment were 6.48 times more likely to achieve integrated competitive employment and 2.71 times as likely to achieve integrated other employment. Youth with previous paid work experiences were 4.53 times more likely to be engaged in integrated competitive employment and 2.15 times more likely to be engaged in integrated other employment.

summary

As made evident by this study transition age youth with developmental disabilities have not fully benefited from the paradigm shift toward integrated employment. The significant impact of families expressing a preference for integrated employment suggests a need for a substantial shift of resources and focus to the role of families in transition to employment planning. Long identified as an important component, the findings suggest that in addition to paid work experience, empowering families may be the most critical aspect of the transition planning process for students with developing disabilities who may require more logistical supports from their families than their peers with high incidence disabilities.

As previous research found (e.g., Fabian, 2007; Luecking & Fabian, 2000; Test et. al., 2009), this study strongly supports the value of paid work experience prior to exit from secondary education for youth with developmental disabilities. The study further distinguishes between paid and unpaid work experiences. The findings suggest that if integrated employment is the post-school goal, youth should be engage in authentic paid work experiences. While this study has expanded our understanding of the relationship between empirically-derived predictors and the various post-school outcomes for youth with developmental disabilities, it is important to continue to examine and clarify specific predictors of integrated employment. By doing so, secondary and transition practices can be aligned with other federal mandates for integrated opportunities.

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