

Outcomes of Approved Special Education
Programs in the Private Sector:

Results of a Statewide Survey

Plans for Exiting Students: 2015-2016

Report Number 17 of the ASAH Outcomes Project

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Executive Summary

For close to 20 years, ASAH, an organization of 94 approved private special education facilities in New Jersey, has sponsored an outcomes study to report the discharge plans of the students with severe disabilities who were enrolled in the nonpublic special education programs operated by its members. ASAH has undertaken this task because other investigations into the outcomes of students from special education have not focused on the students with the most severe disabilities, those who are enrolled in ASAH-member programs because the highly individualized and intensive specialized services they require are not available in the public sector.

Each student in this study has an Individual Education Program (IEP) which, as legally mandated, was developed by the public school district. The IEP comprehensively describes the intensive therapeutic services and curriculum modifications each student needs to succeed. By offering the specialized programs prescribed in the IEP to students with severe disabilities, ASAH-member schools partner with the local public school district by implementing the IEP. In doing so, ASAH members play a critical role along the continuum of special education. Because of the programs offered by ASAH-member facilities, children and youth with severe disabilities gain access to the benefits of education and can also look forward to leading meaningful and productive lives in their communities as adults.

Below are the highlights of the report for the 2015-16 academic year which focuses on the discharge plans made by students who exited from ASAH-member programs. These exiting students were either transfer students who moved from an ASAH-member facility to another educational setting or graduates (including those who reached the legal age-limit for receiving educational services) who received a secondary school diploma.

Transfer Students

Study findings for the 1,018 students who transferred during the 2015-16 school year indicate that the intensive, therapeutic, IEP-prescribed services offered by ASAH-member programs successfully assisted these students to develop, remediate, and/or strengthen their skills. The majority of the transfer students were able to plan to enroll in an appropriate program within the local public school district after leaving the ASAH-member facility:

- 41% (422 students) planned to enter or return to an educational program within the local public school district.
- 18% (185 students) planned to enter or re-enter regular education settings in their local public school district. Of these, 10 % (98 students) planned to do so without supports, while the remaining 8% (87 students) planned to access the regular education setting with IEP-prescribed supports.

- 23% (237 students) planned to enter other educational settings within the local district, such as an alternate school program (7%) or a self-contained classroom (16%).
- Another 59% (596 students) planned to move to settings outside the local district. These included plans for 40% (402 students) to enroll in an out-of-district special education day school programs; 9% (93 students) to enter a residential school; 5% (47 students) to receive home instruction; and 5% (54 students) to make other plans, such as entering the juvenile justice system or facilities for drug, medical, or psychiatric treatment.
- Since 91% of these students (930) attended an ASAH-member special education programs for 5 years or less, evidence is provided that enrollment in an approved private special education program is not a barrier to returning to an appropriate in-district public school program in a timely fashion.

Graduates

Study findings for 689 students who graduated during the 2015-16 school year indicate that ASAH-member programs provided the IEP-prescribed instruction, support, and guidance as these older adolescents and young adults made the transition to adulthood with plans to pursue productive and meaningful roles as adults engaged in their communities:

- 95% (655 graduates) left an ASAH-member program with plans to enter productive and/or engaged adult roles.
- 53% (367 graduates) planned to enter a mainstream activity. This included 37% (256) with plans to enroll in post-secondary 4-year/2-year college or trade/technical school; and 16% (111) with plans to join the competitive employment workforce or the military.
- 22% (153 graduates) had plans to enter vocational rehabilitation, including 7% (50) vocational rehabilitation training, 10% (70) supported employment, or 5% (33) sheltered employment.
- 20% (135 graduates) made plans to enter an appropriate adult program in the community, including 4% (29) adult partial care or nearly 16% (106) nonvocational day programs.
- 83% (62 graduates) from Learning Disorders programs and 77% (181 graduates) from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs were the most likely to make plans to enroll in postsecondary education, obtain a competitive job, or enlist in the military.
- It is important to highlight that 77% of graduates from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs, a population often associated with poor outcomes, had plans to enroll in a 4-year college/2-year college (41%), trade/technical school (9%), or to enter the job market (24%) or the military (3%).

Introduction

For close to 20 years, ASAH, an organization of 94 approved private special education facilities in New Jersey whose members are dedicated to serving individuals with special needs and their families, has sponsored an outcomes study to report the discharge plans of the students with severe disabilities who were enrolled in special education programs operated by its members. ASAH has undertaken this task because other investigations into the outcomes of students from special education, most notably the National Longitudinal Transition Studies (1993, 2004, 2010), have not focused on the students with the most severe disabilities, those who are enrolled in ASAH-member programs because the highly individualized and intensive specialized services they require are not available in the public sector.

Each student in this study has an Individual Education Program (IEP) which, as legally mandated, was developed by the public school district. The IEP comprehensively describes the intensive therapeutic services and curriculum modifications each student needs to succeed. By offering the specialized programs prescribed in the IEP to students with severe disabilities, ASAH-member schools partner with the local public school district by implementing the IEP. In doing so, ASAH members play a critical role along the continuum of special education. Because of the programs offered by ASAH-member facilities, children and youth with severe disabilities gain access to the benefits of education and can also look forward to leading meaningful and productive lives in their communities as adults.

Summary of Previous Findings

From 1999-2000 through 2003-2004, ASAH members participated in a series of exit studies to document the discharge plans of transfer and graduating students. These exit studies were reinitiated in 2006-2007 as a 5-year tracking study. Report #12 provides the exit findings for the 2011-12 academic year as well as the outcomes over 5 academic years (2006-2007 through 2010-2011). The 5-year findings demonstrated that the rate of return to local school district programs over 5 years for transfer students ranged from 38% to 55% with a 5-year average of about 49%. The plans to return to regular education classrooms, with or without supports, over 5 years ranged from 15% to 22% with a 5-year average of 19%. Moreover, rates over 5 years for graduates planning to be productively engaged, according to their individual abilities, in their communities ranged from 92% to 93% with a 5-year average of more than 92%. Over this 5-year period, the rates for plans to enter the mainstream roles of postsecondary

education, including trade school, or competitive employment, including military service were observed to range from 57% to 69% with a 5-year average of 61%.¹

In addition to sponsoring studies to track the discharge plans of students enrolled in its member facilities, ASAH joined with MANSEF, the Maryland Association of Nonpublic Special Education Facilities, to examine the transition experiences of 294 students with severe emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD) from the Classes of 2006 and 2007 two years after they exited from a member program. The outcomes for these 294 students from the approved private special education sector in New Jersey and Maryland were compared to the outcomes of EBD youth served in public school that were followed in the National Longitudinal Transitional Study 2 (NLTS2), a national study funded by the U.S. Department of Education. In this joint study, the students and their parents were contacted annually and interviewed by phone by employees of Potsdam Institute of Applied Research, State University of New York, and Potsdam.

When compared to NLTS2 youth, the youth who attended approved private special education facilities had more positive transition experiences, which included greater levels of engagement, employment, enrollment in post-secondary education, and independent living as well as lower rates of involvement with the criminal justice system (Carran, Murray, Kellner, & Ramsey, 2014).

The Current Report: Exit Plans for 2015-16 and 5-Year Exit Plan Tracking 2011-12 to 2015-16

The present study will document the settings to which transfer students planned to move as well as the plans made by the graduates when these students exited from an ASAH-member program during the 2015-2016 academic year. In addition, this report will describe the 5-year outcomes reflected in the discharge plans for students who exited between the academic years of 2011-12 through 2015-16.²

Method

Each ASAH-member school was asked to provide information about 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 ASAH-member program to move to another education program, and

¹ See *Outcomes of Approved Special Education Programs in the Private Sector, Reports 3-5 and 12*, ASAH, 2125 Route 33, Hamilton Square, NJ 08690 (e-mail: info@asah.org).

² See *Outcomes of Approved Special Education Programs in the Private Sector, Reports 13-16*, which describe outcomes of discharge plans from 2011-12 through 2014-15r, ASAH, 2125 Route 33, Hamilton Square, NJ 08690 (e-mail: info@asah.org).

graduates, those who left an ASAH-affiliated school because they received a high school diploma.

Demographic and program information were collected on the students who dropped out of school during the course of the study. Dropouts, however, were excluded from the study because their plans were not available.

The exiting students were further identified as attending one of five specific special education programs. The participants 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) Developmental Disorders Programs – for students with speech/language impairments, intellectual disabilities, autism, and 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. This data was collected from each participating school and entered in a database for analysis.

Participating Programs, Student Demographics, Discharge Plans

Overall, 73 ASAH-member schools (78% of the membership) operating 161 educational programs volunteered to participate in the study. Of the participants, 143(89%) offered day programs, 1 (<1%) offered a residential program, and 17 (11%) offered both day and residential programs. When the participants were examined in regard to the type of specialized programming offered by their facilities, the following emerged: 53 (33%) served students with Developmental Disorders; 35 (22%) focused on students with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders; 25 (15%) were for students with Medical Disorders; 26 (16%) were offered to those with Learning Disorders; and 22 (14%) were for students with Preschool Disorders. Taken together, 7,959 students were enrolled in these programs, 5,486 males (69%) and 2,473 females (31%).

Participating schools were located in 15 of New Jersey's 21 counties. Table 1 shows how the schools were distributed among these counties.

Table 1. Participating Schools by New Jersey County*
N=73

	#	%
Bergen	14	19.2
Burlington	3	4.1
Camden	3	4.1
Essex	10	13.7
Gloucester	3	4.1
Mercer	5	6.9
Middlesex	3	4.1
Monmouth	9	12.3
Morris	2	2.7
Ocean	2	2.7
Passaic	2	2.7
Somerset	10	13.7
Sussex	2	2.7
Union	4	5.5
Warren	1	1.4
Total	73	100

The greatest number of participating schools, 14 or 19%, was found in Bergen county. Essex and Somerset counties were next (10 facilities each; 14%) or) and were closely followed by Monmouth county (9 facilities; 12%). Mercer county had 5 participating schools (7%), while Union county had 4 (over 5%). Burlington, Camden, Gloucester, and Middlesex counties each housed 3 ASAH-member facilities (4%). Two schools (3%) were located, respectively, in Morris, Ocean, Passaic, and Sussex counties. Finally, Warren county had 1(1%) participating ASAH-member school.

The Exiting Students and Exit Plans

During the study period, 1,972 students exited from ASAH-member approved private special education facilities. The students who exited tended to be White (53%), male (66%), High School (73%) students, between the ages of 12 and 17 years (49.5%), who were enrolled in an Emotional/Behavioral Disorders program (48%) from 1 year to 5 years (57%). About 25% of the exiting students received

subsidized lunch. Transfer students accounted for about 62% (1,216) of all exiting students; about 36% were graduates (708); more than 2% were dropouts (487)³.

Staff acknowledged that the discharges were “planned” for 87% of the exiting students and that appropriate supports were in place for them to be carried out; staff viewed the discharge plans as “positive” for 87% of the exiting students and indicated that these students were considered “ready” to move on to the next setting or phase of life.

³ In total, schools reported that 48 students dropped out (34 males, 14 females; 25 White, 12 Black, and 11 Hispanic; 46 from programs for Emotional/Behavioral Disorders, 1 from programs for Developmental Disorders, and 1 from programs for Medical Disorders).

Table 2. Characteristics of All Exiting Students, Programs, and Plans
n=1,972

Characteristics	#	%
<u>Program Classifications</u>		
Preschool Disorders	24	1.2
Learning Disorders	142	7.2
Medical Disorders	171	8.7
Development Disorders	692	35.1
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders	943	47.8
<u>Reason for Exit</u>		
Transfer Student	1,216	61.7
Graduate	708	35.9
Dropout	48	2.4
<u>Grade Level</u>		
Preschool	39	2.0
Elementary School	232	11.8
Middle School	250	12.7
High School	1,451	73.5
<u>Race Ethnicity</u>		
White	1,041	52.8
Black	585	29.7
Hispanic	290	14.7
Asian	54	2.7
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific and American Indian/Alaskan Native Islander	2	.1
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	1,297	65.8
Female	675	34.2
<u>Ages at Exit</u>		
3-5 years	39	2.0
6-11 years	232	11.8
12-17 years	977	49.5
18-21+ years	724	36.7
<u>Length of Stay</u>		
Less than 1 year	296	15.0
1-5 years	1,127	57.2
6-10 years	188	9.5
11+ years	96	4.9
Not Available in Records	265	13.4
<u>Subsidized Lunch</u>		
Yes	494	25.1
No	1,213	61.5
Not Available in Records	265	13.4

Table 2 (continued)	#	%
<u>Status of Planning Information</u>		
Available in Records	1,707	86.6
Not Available in Records	265	13.4
<u>Staff Assessment of Exit</u>		
Planned		
Yes	1,707	86.6
No	265	13.4
Positive		
Yes	1,707	86.6
No	265	13.4

Discharge planning information was available for 1,707, about 87% of the exiting students. Of these, 1,018 were transfer students, while 689 were graduates.

The Transfer Students with Plans at Discharge

Demographics and Other Relevant Information

The exit plans for 1,018 transfer students were available for this study. Table 3 sets forth the demographic and other relevant data about this group of students.

Table 3. Demographic and Other Relevant Information of Transfer Students with Plans at Discharge

n=1,018

<u>Program Classification</u>	#	%
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders	561	55.1
Developmental Disorders	308	30.3
Preschool Disorders	20	2.0
Medical Disorders	94	9.2
Learning Disorders	35	3.4
<u>Program Type</u>		
Day	809	79.5
Residential	44	4.3
Day & Residential	165	16.2
<u>Grade Level</u>		
Preschool	34	3.3
Elementary School	192	18.9
Middle School	187	18.4
High School	605	59.4
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
White	510	50.1
Black	325	31.9
Hispanic	154	15.1
Asian	27	2.7
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander- American Indian/Alaskan Native	2	.2
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	678	66.6
Female	340	33.4

<u>Table 3 (continued)</u>	#	%
<u>Age at Exit</u>		
3-5 years	34	3.3
6-11 years	192	18.9
12-17 years	550	54.0
18-21+ years	242	23.8
<u>Length of Stay</u>		
< 1 year	260	25.5
1-5 years	670	65.8
6-10 years	88	8.7

As Table 3 indicates, about 55% (561) of the students exited from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs; 30% (308) from Developmental Disorders programs; 9% (94) from Medical Disorders programs; 3% (35) from Learning Disorders programs; and 2% (20) from Preschool Disorders programs. While 809 (80%) of these students were enrolled in day programs, 165 students (16%) attended programs for both day and residential students, and 44 students (4%) attended residential programs. Approximately 59% (605) were enrolled in High School, 18% (187) in Middle School, 19% (192) in Elementary School, and about 3% (34) in Preschool before exiting from the ASAH-member special education program. When race/ethnicity was examined, 50% (510) were White, 32% (325) were Black, 15% (154) were Hispanic, 3% (27) were Asian, and less than 1% (2) came from a Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander background. When gender was analyzed, 67% (678) were male, while 33% (340) were female. About 3% (34) of the transfer students were between the ages of 3-5 years; 19% (192) were between the ages of 6-11 years; 54% (550) were between the ages of 12-17 years; and 24% (242) were between the ages of 18-21 years. Finally, when length of stay was determined, more than 25% (260) of the transfer students were enrolled in an ASAH-member program for less than a year. Approximately 66% (670) were enrolled from 1 to 5 years. About 9% (88) were enrolled for 6-10 years. Taken together, more than 91% (930) of these exiting students attended an ASAH-member school for 5 years or less.

Discharge Plans by Specialized Program

Table 4 shows the distribution of the exit plans of the transfer students at the point of discharge by the specialized program in which they were enrolled before exiting school.

Table 4. Discharge Plans for Transfer Students by Specialized Program

n =1,018

Education Setting	Preschool n =20		Learning n = 35		Medical n= 94		DD n = 308		E/BD n = 561		Total n = 1,081	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
In-District Education												
General Education, Not Special Education, Without Supports	9	45.0	10	28.5	9	9.6	6	1.9	64	11.4	98	9.6
General Education, Not Special Education, With Supports	1	5.0	3	8.6	13	13.8	30	9.8	40	7.1	87	8.6
Subtotal: Returns to In-district General Education	10	50.0	13	37.1	22	23.4	36	11.7	104	18.5	185	18.2
Alternate School	0	0	3	8.6	10	10.7	1	.3	60	10.7	74	7.3
Special Education, Self-Contained LEA	0	0	9	25.7	13	13.8	44	14.3	97	17.3	163	16.0
Subtotal: Returns to Other In-district Programs	0	0	12	34.3	23	24.5	45	14.6	157	28.0	237	23.3
Subtotal: All Returns to In-district Programs	10	50.0	25	71.4	45	47.9	81	26.3	261	46.5	422	41.5
Out of District Special Education Day Program	9	45.0	9	25.7	23	24.5	181	58.8	180	32.1	402	39.5
Residential	0	0	1	2.9	4	4.2	21	6.8	67	11.9	93	9.1
Home Instruction	0	0	0	0	17	18.1	6	1.9	24	4.3	47	4.6
Other	1	5.0	0	0	5	5.3	19	6.2	29	5.2	54	5.3
Total	20	100	35	100	94	100	308	100	561	100	1,018	100

Results for Transfer Student Discharge Plans

As Table 4 indicates, 41% of the transfer students (422) left an ASAH-member special education program with plans to return to an educational program within their local public school district. About 18% (185) had plans to return to general education. While 10% planned to return without supports (98), another 9% (87) planned to enter a regular education program with supports. An additional 23% (237) planned to return to other in-district programs that offered a range of support to accommodate their special needs (alternate school, 78%; self-contained classroom, (16%).

About 50% (10) of the students who transferred from Preschool Disorders programs, 71% (25) from Learning Disorders programs, 48% (45) from Medical Disorders programs, 26% (81) from Developmental Disorders programs, and 47% (261) from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs planned to enter educational programs within their local districts.

When in-district returns to general education programs alone are examined the following emerges: 50% (10) of the students from Preschool Disorders programs, 37% (13) of the students from Learning Disorder programs, 23% (23) of the students from Medical Disorders programs, 12% (36) of the students from Developmental Disorders programs, and 19% (104) of the students from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs planned to enroll in general education programs, with and without support, within their local school district upon discharge from an ASAH-member special education facility.

Transfer to In-District Education Programs Over 5 Years: 2011-12 to 2015-16

Table 5 summarizes the degree to which the plans of the transfer students reflect movement to in-district programs, including regular education programs, for the 5 academic years of 2011-2012 through 2015-16.

Table 5. Transfer Student Return to In-District Education: 2011-2012 through 2015-2016

	In-District Regular Education ^a		Other In-District Education ^b		Total In-District Education		Outside District Education ^c	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2011-2012 (45% participation) n= 691	130	19	264	38	394	57	297	43
2012-2013 (48% participation) n=693	84	12	156	23	240	35	453	65
2013-2014 (47% participation) n=599	110	18	140	23	250	42	349	58
2014-2015 (57% participation) n=766	97	13	195	25	292	38	474	62
2015-2016 (78% participation) n=1,018	185	18	237	23	422	41	596	59

^a Regular education, including supported inclusion

^b Resource room, alternate school, self-contained LEA

^c Out-of-district special education day program, residential program, home instruction, other placement (e.g., correctional, psychiatric, medical, or developmental facility)

For the 2015-2016 school years, 422 students (42%) planned to return to in-district programs. Of these, 185 (18%) planned to return to regular education programs, while 237 (23%) planned to enroll in “other” in-district programming, such as, alternate school (7%) or self-contained LEA (16%). Finally, 596 students (58%) left with plans to transfer to other education programs outside of their local district, such as, another private approved special education day program, a residential program, home instruction, or another setting (e.g., correctional, psychiatric, medical, or developmental facility).

When the planning results for the transfer students for 2015-16 are compared to 2014-15 school year, it is clear that a greater proportion of students planned to transfer to in-district programs (38% in 2014-15

vs. 42% in 2015-16) and that more of these students planned to enter in-district programs for regular education (13% in 2014-15 vs. 18% in 2015-16).

When the planning results from 2011-12 through 2015-16 are examined as a 5-year average, the following emerges. (See Table 6 below.)

Table 6. 5-Year Average of Transfer Student Return to In-District Education:
2011-2012 through 2015-2016

5 Year Average n= 753

	In-District Regular Education ^a		Other In-District Education ^b		Total In-District Education		Outside District Education ^c	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2011-12 to 2015-16	121	16	198	26	319	42	434	58

a Regular education, including supported inclusion

b Resource room, alternate school, self-contained LEA

c Out-of-district special education day program, residential program, home instruction, other placement (e.g., correctional, psychiatric, medical, or developmental facility)

On average, for the 5 academic years of 2011-12 to 2015-16, 42 % of the transfer students planned to enroll in programs within their local public school district. Of these, 16% had plans to in-district programs for regular education, while 26% planned to enter “other” in-district programs (alternate education or self-contained LEA). The remaining 58% made plans for entry into programs outside of the district.

Living Arrangements of Transfer Students

At discharge, 79% of the transfer students (809) planned to live with a parent, other relative, or guardian. Less than 1% (6) planned to live independently (4) or semi-independently (2). About 6% (60) had plans to live in a skill development/foster home (11) or group home (49). Another 9% (91) planned to enter a residential treatment facility. About 3% (27) indicated plans to enter a development (3), psychiatric (14), or medical (10) treatment facility. About 2% (21) had plans to enter the juvenile justice

system. Finally less than 1% (4) had plans to enter treatment programs, such as those offered for drug and alcohol problems.

The Graduates

There were 689 graduates whose discharge plans were available for this study. Table 7 sets forth the demographic and other relevant data about this group of exiting students.

Table7. Demographic and Other Relevant Information of Graduates with Plans at Discharge

n= 689

<u>Program Classification</u>	#	%
Developmental Disorders	328	47.6
Emotional/Behavioral Disorders	236	34.2
Learning Disorders	75	10.9
Medical Disorders	50	7.3
<u>Program Type</u>		
Day	596	86.5
Residential	8	1.2
Day & Residential	85	12.3
<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>		
White	391	56.7
Black	176	25.5
Hispanic	99	14.4
Asian	19	2.8
Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander- American Indian/Alaskan Native	4	.6
<u>Gender</u>		
Male	465	67.5
Female	224	32.5
Table 7 (cont'd)		
<u>Age at Exit</u>		
12-17 years	625	90.7
18-21+ years	64	9.3

Table 7 (cont'd)		
<u>Length of Stay</u>		
< 1 year	35	5.1
1-5 years	394	57.2
6-10 years	164	23.8
11+ years	96	13.9

As Table 7 indicates, of the 689 graduates who exited with a plan, about 48% (328) came from Developmental Disorders programs; 34% (236) from Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders programs; 11% (75) from Learning Disorders programs; and 7% (50 graduates) from Medical Disorders programs. While 87% (865) of the graduates were enrolled in day programs, about 12% (85) attended programs that offered services to both day and residential students, and 1% (8) were enrolled in programs that were exclusively residential. When race/ethnicity was examined, 57% (391) were White, more than 25% (176) were Black, 14% (99) were Hispanic, close to 3% (19) were Asian, and less than 1% (4) were of American Indian/Alaskan Native and Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander race/ethnicity. When gender was analyzed, 68% (465) of the graduates were male, while 32% (224) were female. Close to 91% (625) were between the ages of 12-17 years, while about 9% (64) were between the ages of 18-21 years. About 5% (35) were enrolled in an ASAH-member program for less than 1 year; about 57% (394) for 1 to 5 years; 24% (164) for 6 to 10 years; and nearly 14% (96) for more than 11 years. When the categories of “less than 1 year” and “1-5 years” are combined, it is clear that more than 62% (429) were enrolled in an ASAH-member program for 5 years or less, while 38% (260) were enrolled in these specialized programs for 6 years or more.

The Postschool Plans for Graduates by Specialized Program

Table 8 presents an analysis of the graduates' postschool plans at discharge according to the special education program in which they were enrolled at the point of graduation. The table attempts to demonstrate the activities in which the graduates intended to become engaged as mainstream activity (2-

year/4-year college, trade or technical school, competitive employment, military service); vocational rehabilitation activity (vocational rehabilitation training program, supported employment, sheltered employment), community-based program activity (adult partial care program, adult nonvocational day program). Participants could also report other activities as well as no plans for engagement (no postgraduate education, training, employment, or program).

Table 8. Postschool Plans for Graduates by Specialized Program

n =689

Postschool Plans	DD n = 328		E/BD n = 236		Learning n = 75		Medical n = 50		Total n =581	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Engagement										
Four Year College	8	2.4	24	10.2	31	41.3	2	4.0	65	9.4
Two Year College	48	14.6	72	30.5	17	22.7	5	10.0	142	20.6
Trade/Technical School	14	4.3	22	9.3	8	10.7	5	10.0	49	7.1
Competitive Employment	35	10.7	57	24.2	6	8.0	7	14.0	105	15.3
Military	0	0	6	2.5	0	0	0	0	6	.9
Mainstream Activity^a	105	32.0	181	76.7	62	82.7	19	38.0	367	53.3
Voc Rehab Training Program	38	11.6	7	3.0	3	4.0	2	4.0	50	7.2
Supported Employment	52	15.9	13	5.5	4	5.3	1	2.0	70	10.2
Sheltered Employment	32	9.7	1	.4	0	0	0	0	33	4.8
Vocational Rehabilitation Activity^b	122	37.2	21	8.9	7	9.3	3	6.0	153	22.2
Adult Partial Care	17	5.2	6	2.5	2	2.7	4	8.0	29	4.2
Nonvocational Day Program	79	24.1	6	2.5	2	2.7	19	38.0	106	15.4
Community-Based Program Activity^c	96	29.3	12	5.0	4	5.4	23	46.0	135	19.6
Other Engagement	0	0	0	0	2	2.7	2	4.0	4	.6
No Engagement: No Education/Training, Job or Program	5	1.5	22	7.3	0	0	3	6.0	30	4.3
Total	328	100	236	100	75	100	50	100	689	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 Program Activity – Partial Care and Nonvocational Day Programs

d Engaged in other activities involving, for example, correctional, psychiatric, or medical intervention or not engaged in any productive activity

Results for Postschool Plans

As Table 8 shows, 37% (256) made plans to enroll in a 4-year/2-year College or a Trade/Technical School. About 16% (111) were discharged with plans to enter Competitive Employment or the Military. In short, 53% of the graduates (367) exited with plans to enter a Mainstream Activity to participate in postschool education, technical training, competitive employment, or military service. Moreover, 22% (153) planned to enter a Vocational Rehabilitation Activity by participating in a vocational rehabilitation training program (7%; 50 graduates) or in supported (10%; 70 graduates) or sheltered employment (5%; 33 graduates). Another 20% (135 graduates) planned to enter a Community-Based Program Activity by enrolling in adult partial care (4%; 29 graduates) or nonvocational day programs (15%; 106 graduates). Less than 1% (4 graduates) had plans to enter “Other” adult settings, such as psychiatric, drug rehabilitation, or correctional facilities. Finally, about 4% (30 graduates) left the ASAH-member program without specific plans to enter a postschool educational, vocational, rehabilitative, or supportive community program or to obtain a job after completing their secondary program.

At discharge, 83 % (62) of the graduates from Learning Disorders programs and 77% of the graduates (181) from Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders programs were the most likely to plan to enter Mainstream Activity by enrolling in postsecondary education, trade or technical school, or joining the competitive workforce or the military.

At 37%, graduates from Developmental Disorders programs (122) were the most likely to enter Vocational Rehabilitation Activity. Close to 12% (38) planned to enter a vocational rehabilitation training program, while 16% (52) planned to enter supported employment, and another 10% (32) planned to go to a sheltered employment program.

Graduates from Medical Disorders programs (46%; 23 graduates) and those from Developmental Disorders programs (29%; 96 graduates) were the most likely to plan to participate in Community-based Program Activity. Among those from Medical Disorders programs, 8% (4) had plans to enter adult partial care and 38% (19) planned to be part of a nonvocational day program. Among those from Developmental Disorders programs, 5% (17) had plans to enter adult partial care and 24% (79) planned to be part of a nonvocational day program. Finally, graduates from Emotional/ Behavioral Disorders programs (10%; 22 graduates) were the most likely to leave school without a specific discharge plan. Not one graduate from a Learning Disorders program was reported to leave an ASAH-member program without a plan.

Postschool Plans by Activity: 2011-12 to 2015-16

Table 9 summarizes the postschool plans made by the graduates from 2011-12 through 2015-16 according to the engagement activity .

Table 9. Postschool Plans of Graduates by Activity: 2011-12 to 2014-15

	Mainstream Activity ^a		Vocational Rehabilitation Activity ^b		Community-Based Program Activity ^c		Total Engagement		Other Engagement/ Not Engaged ^d	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
2011-2012 (45% participation) n=404	241	60	83	20	61	15	385	95	19	5
2012-2013 (48% participation) n=403	223	55	77	19	80	20	380	94	23	6
2013-2014 (47% participation) n=527	249	47	84	16	147	28	480	91	47	9
2014-2015 (57% participation) n=581	288	50	125	21	110	19	523	90	58	10
2015-2016 (78% participation) n=689	367	53	153	22	135	20	655	95	34	5

^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

^d Engaged in other activities involving, for example, correctional, psychiatric, or medical intervention or not engaged in any productive activity

From 2014-15 to 2015-16, engagement has increased in mainstream activity (53% vs 50%), vocational rehabilitation activity (22% vs 21%), as well as community-based programs a (20% vs 19%). Moreover, there is a notable decrease in engagement in other or no activities (34% vs 58%).

Postschool Plans by Activity from 2011-12 to 2015-16: 5-Year Average

The postschool planning results for the graduates from 2011-12 through 2015-16 are presented in terms of a 5-year average. (See Table 10 below.)

Table 10. 5-Year Average of Postschool Discharge Plans by Activity:
2011-2012 through 2015-2016

5 Year Average n= 521									
Mainstream Activity ^a		Vocational Rehabilitation Activity ^b		Community-Based Program Activity ^c		Total Engagement		Other Engagement/ Not Engaged ^d	
#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
274	52	104	20	107	21	485	93	36	7

^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

^d Engaged in other activities involving, for example, correctional, psychiatric, or medical intervention or not engaged in any productive activity

On average from 2011-12 to 2015-16, 52 % (274) of the graduates planned to pursue postsecondary education, including trade/technical school, competitive employment, or the military. Another 20% (104) planned to pursue vocational rehabilitation activity (training, supported employment, sheltered employment). Moreover, 21% (107) had plans to enter community-based programs, such as partial care or nonvocational day programs. Finally, 7% (36) had other plans (including entering a correctional, drug, or psychiatric facility) or left without a plan to be an engaged adult.

Postschool Living Arrangements

About 78% of the graduates (536) planned to live with a parent, other relative, or guardian, while about 12% (81) planned to live independently (69) or semi-independently (12). About 8% (54) had plans to live in skill development/foster homes (4) or group homes (50). The remaining nearly 3% (18) planned to live in residential treatment centers (9), psychiatric or medical settings (8), or enter a correctional facility (1).

DISCUSSION

Transfer Students

Although studies of the outcomes of special education usually concentrate on results for the students who have graduated from or aged-out of eligibility for special education services, our efforts have additionally tracked the discharge plans for school-aged children and youth with IEP's who have been enrolled in approved nonpublic special education programs. Since there is a paucity of information about the trajectory for students who enter special education careers, findings from the ASAH-sponsored studies might contribute to the knowledge base of special education by shedding light on the patterns of movement taken by these students as they traverse the range of settings and programs available to them.

That 41% of the transfer students in this study made plans to move to programs within their local public school districts is consistent with the national trend (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs, 2015; McLeskey, Landers, Williamson, & Hoppey, 2012). Furthermore, that 18% of the transfer students had plans to move to regular education classrooms (nearly 10% without supports and nearly 9% with supports), while 23% planned to enroll in other in-district programs indicates that the ASAH-member programs met the highly individualized needs of the students with disabilities as prescribed in each IEP. These transfer students were able to plan entry into programs within the public school district because their skills had been sufficiently developed, remediated, and/or strengthened while enrolled in the nonpublic special education program to enable them to now access appropriate educational services available within the

public sector. Since 91% of these students attended the nonpublic special education programs for 5 years or less, evidence is provided that attending an ASAH-member program is not a barrier to returning to an appropriate in-district public school program in a timely fashion. Clearly these findings demonstrate that the ASAH-member programs succeeded in implementing the prescribed IEP and fulfilling their commitment as IEP partners with the local public school districts.

It would appear that the remaining 59% of the transfer students, those who did not plan to enter a local district program, continued to need very intensive and individualized services. As per our previous findings, about 39% of these students made plans to enter another out-of-district day program, perhaps one with even more specialized and intensive services to meet student need. About 9 % planned to enter a residential school program, while nearly 5% had plans to receive home instruction. Finally, more than 5% had “other” plans at discharge (e.g., entering a medical, psychiatric, drug treatment or correctional facility). This finding may be seen as further evidence of the severity of the disabilities of these students when compared to those who can find appropriate in-district special education programs. In the future, researchers should design studies which permit the students in special education to be tracked through all phases of their careers according to their disability group as well as the severity of their disability. More refined approaches to track movement could help to better determine the factors which contribute to and support learning success for these students.

Graduates

Since few investigations have been adequately designed to provide the critical guidance needed to help close the achievement gap between general and special education students, concerns continue to be expressed throughout the literature about understanding the main factors that lead to positive outcomes for students 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; Trainor, Morningstar, & Murray, 2016; Wehman, Sima, Ketchum, West, Chan, & Luecking, 2014). Nor does the outcomes literature adequately address the differences between students from different disability groups. Although research designs that make

use of well-defined, specific variables are sometimes successful in helping to reveal these distinctions, the list of distinguishing factors is complex and lengthy and remains a challenge (Shogren, Kennedy, Dowsett, & Little, 2014; Trainor et al., 2016). The recently released findings of NLTS 2012 take important steps to describe the different postschool outcomes by disability group, but these reflect the lives of students who were able to access in-district special education programs (Lipscomb, S., Haimson, J., Liu, A.Y., Burghardt, J., Johnson, D.R., & Thurlow, M.L, 2017). In contrast, this study attempts to clarify some of the differences in outcome between disability groups for student who were enrolled in nonpublic special education programs.

Taken together, 95% of the graduates made plans, based upon their individual needs, capacities, and strengths, to be engaged adults in their communities. About 53% had discharge plans directed to involvement in mainstream activities. Those with learning (83%) and emotional/behavioral disabilities (77%) were the most likely to make such plans.

Graduates with Learning Disorders

As we have pointed out previously, it is perhaps not surprising that a high proportion of the graduates from Learning Disorders programs planned to be involved in the mainstream. Educators have long focused on developing sound strategies to help this high-incidence group within special education achieve success with learning. Perhaps this success with learning in school has ultimately prepared this group for success in adulthood (McLeskey, & Waldron, 2011). That 75% of the students with Learning Disorders made plans to pursue postsecondary education is consistent with the national trend that students from this disability group increasingly enter postsecondary education (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005; Newman, Wagner, Cameto, & Knokey, 2009; Newman, Wagner, Cameto, Knokey, & Shaver, 2010; Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagel, Shaver, & Wei, 2011; Hamblet, 2015). This tendency to seek post-secondary school may account for the NLTS2 findings which indicate that students with Learning Disorders are the most likely to be employed 8 years after leaving high school (Newman, Wagner, Knokey, Marder, Nagel, Shaver, & Wei, 2011). With a high proportion of these students planning to defer work to receive postsecondary education, only 8% planned to seek competitive

employment after leaving school. Another 9% made plans to enter vocational rehabilitation programs, presumably to obtain assistance in preparing to enter the workforce in the future. Since work experience during high school and parental expectations have been found to have a positive impact on students with disabilities seeking employment as adults, future studies should ascertain how many exiting students held jobs during high school and what expectations parents had of their children working after leaving school (Trainor et al., 2016; Wehman et al., 2014). Exploring these factors may be particularly salient when exploring the outcomes of graduates who are presumably faced with more severe disabilities than their public school peers. Moreover, follow-up of graduates with learning disabilities over time would be invaluable in helping us better understand whether students with more severe learning disabilities than those who participated in NLTS2 have successful adult experiences that compare well to those of their public school peers.

Graduates with Emotional/Behavioral Disorders

When students from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs are considered, the literature consistently reports concerns about their poor adult outcomes. Students from this disability group are often characterized by poor graduation rates, low employment rates, difficulty forming positive relationships, and antisocial behavior (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; Wehman, Sima, Ketchum, West, Chan, & Luecking, 2014). About 50% of the graduate from this group made plans to enter postsecondary education, while an additional 27% planned to enter the competitive workforce. Another 9% planned to enter vocational rehabilitation activities and strengthen the skills needed to work. These findings, which are consistent with previous ASAH-sponsored outcomes studies, are encouraging. The highly individualized and intensive services these students received in the smaller environment of an ASAH-

member program, supported these students in acquiring the skills needed to develop positive career trajectories (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Burchart, 2004; Lindstrom et al., 2013). Students with emotional/behavioral disorders are often lost in large public schools where they are likely to encounter teachers who feel unprepared to work effectively with them (Wagner et al., 2006). The literature has consistently demonstrated that students with emotional/behavioral disorders can achieve success when they attend schools such as those offered by ASAH-member programs: they are small in size, offer classes that are also small in size, and employ staff with specialized training in teaching and forming relationships with students with emotional and behavioral issues. When such positive factors are aligned in the school environment, students with emotional/behavioral disorders are able to develop prosocial behavior and successfully adapt to new roles (Chen, Symons, & Reynolds, 2011; Carran et al., 2014). Follow up is recommended to see to what degree these graduates students implement their mainstream plans and how they fare over time as they move into the adult world. It would be helpful to know whether the success of these students as adults is related to work experiences they had in high school and what role parental expectations played in their achievements.

Graduates with Developmental Disorders

The plans of graduates from programs for Developmental Disorders were directed to vocational rehabilitation activity (37%), mainstream activity (32%) and community-based program activity (29%). That a high proportion of this group of graduates had plans to enter mainstream activity appears to reflect a shift in attitudes as well as in disability policy. About 15% of the graduates from this group planned to attend 2-year college programs and almost 11% planned to enter the competitive job market. Those who were planning to seek vocational rehabilitation emphasized training (16%) and supported employment (11%). As the literature makes clear, more and more young people with disabilities, including those with severe disabilities, are expecting to become fully functioning member of the community, including entering the competitive market place, and more and more laws are changing to support them in this goal (Novak, 2015). Nonetheless, because ASAH-member programs serve students with severe disabilities, many of the graduates from this group (29%) appear to have disabilities that were sufficiently severe to

preclude such mainstream and vocational involvement. Similar to their public school peers in NLTS 2012, these graduates, perhaps due to their intellectual and communication limitations, made plans to be engaged in community-based partial care or nonvocational day programs (Lipscomb et al., 2017).

Graduates with Medical Disorders

About 38% of the graduates/aged-out students from Medical Disorders programs also made plans to enter the mainstream with 24% planning to enter postsecondary education and 14% planning to engage in competitive employment. This group of students may also have benefitted from changes in attitudes and policy that support people with disabilities becoming integrated members of their communities. Another 6% had plans to enter vocational rehabilitation activity. Similar to their public school peers in NLTS 2012, 46% of these students, perhaps due to their relatively poor and chronic health conditions, planned to enter adult partial care or nonvocational day programs (Lipscomb et al., 2017). Moreover, this finding again appears to reflect the degree to which ASAH-member programs serve students with severe disabilities. Unfortunately, the present federal classification system does not provide adequate language to make distinctions that clearly indicate the degree of a disability.

Other Findings

About 4% of the graduates exited without making plans, while less than 1% left with “other” plans. Those who made “other” plans came from Learning Disorders programs (3%) and Medical Disorders programs (4%). No other group of graduates reported “other” plans in this study. Given that the graduates in this study have severe disabilities, it is perhaps not surprising that those who left with “other” plans needed further medical, psychiatric, or drug/alcohol treatment after leaving high school.

The graduates who left without an engagement plan came from Emotional/Behavioral Disorders programs (9%), Medical Disorders programs (6%), and Developmental Disorders programs (more than 1%). Interestingly, not one student from a Learning Disorders program graduated without a discharge plan. Future research should explore which variables were at play to lead students to leave without a plan. Did the graduates and/or their families have particular concerns about functioning in the larger the

adult community? Did lack of appropriate resources interfere with a plan being developed? Further exploration of these important issues is needed to better understand the complex interaction between family, school, and community as it relates to the transition of students with disabilities into adult roles (Shogren & Villarreal, 2013).

Conclusion

By offering highly specialized, individualized, and intensive, therapeutic services as prescribed in the IEP, ASAH-member programs successfully educate and support students with severe disabilities. The vast majority of school-aged students who are enrolled in ASAH-member programs are able to develop, remediate, and/or their strengthen skills and ultimately enter programs within their local public schools after leaving an ASAH-member program. Students who graduate from an ASAH-member program leave with postschool plans to engage in productive and meaningful roles as adults. As IEP partners with the public schools, the programs available in ASAH-member schools continue to fill a critical role on the continuum of special education.

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