New Directions in Special Education: Eliminating Ableism in Policy and Practice

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Progress We Have Made

- Institutionalization of students with cognitive disabilities has largely been eliminated.
- The school completion rate of youth with disabilities increased and the dropout rate decreased by 17 percentage points between 1987 and 2003. (NLTS2)
- With these changes, 70% of cohort 2 youth with disabilities had completed high school. (NLTS2)
Progress We Have Made

• A sizable increase also was noted in the percentage of youth who had left school at least a year before the interview, suggesting that youth were increasingly leaving high school with their same-age peers in the general population. (NLTS2)

• Membership in organized community groups (e.g., a community sports team, hobby club, or performing group) more than doubled, so that 28% of cohort 2 youth were group members. (NLTS2)

Progress We Have Made

• The rate of postsecondary education participation by youth with disabilities more than doubled over time, increasing to 32% the share of cohort 2 youth who had been out of high school up to 2 years, and who had enrolled in a 2- or 4-year college or a postsecondary vocational, technical, or business school. (NLTS2)
Progress We Have Made

• The greatest growth in postsecondary enrollment (17 percentage points) was apparent for 2-year colleges; 21% of cohort 2 youth had attended once since high school. (NLTS2)

• Attendance at 4-year institutions also increased significantly (8 percentage points), so that 10% of youth with disabilities had been students in such schools since high school. (NLTS2)

Progress We Have Made

• In 2003, 70% of youth with disabilities who had been out of school up to 2 years had worked for pay at some time since leaving high school; 55% had done so in 1987. (NLTS2)

• Over time, considerably more out-of-school youth with disabilities earned above the federal minimum wage (70% vs. 85% of cohorts 1 and 2, respectively). (NLTS2)
Progress We Have Made

- Engagement in the combination if postsecondary education and paid employment since high school quadrupled, to 22% in cohort 2. (NLTS2)

- An increase in youth pursuing employment alone was apparent (11 percentage points), so that 44% of cohort 2 youth had been engaged since high school in this way. (NLTS2)

Progress We Have Made

- Youth with hearing or visual impairments had among the highest rates of school completion in cohort 2; 82% and 94% of the 2 groups, respectively, had finished high school. (NLTS2)

- Youth with visual impairments had the largest increase in paid employment since high school; they joined cohort 2 youth with hearing impairments in having 62% employment rate, similar to the rate for youth with disabilities as a whole. (NLTS2)
Progress We Have Made

Youth with Emotional disturbances:
• These youth demonstrated a substantial improvement (16 percentage points) in their school completion rate. (NLTS2)

Changes in Postschool Outcomes Associated with Gender
• Whereas cohort 1 boys were almost twice as likely as girls to have worked for pay since leaving high school, the employment rates of the two groups were similar in cohort 2. (NLTS2)
• By cohort 2, the 19-percent age-point difference between cohort 1 boys and girls in their overall engagement in school, work, or preparation for work was virtually eliminated. (NLTS2)

Challenges

Youth with Emotional disturbances:
• Youth with emotional disturbances had a dramatic increase over time (33 percentage points) in ever having been in disciplinary trouble at school, fired from a job, or arrested. Almost 9 in 10 youth with emotional disturbances had one or more of these experiences by the time they had been out of secondary school up to 2 years, the highest rate of any disability category. (NLTS2)
Challenges

• Without a high school diploma, dropouts did not share in the significant increase in postsecondary education enrollment that occurred among youth with disabilities who completed high school; fewer than 1 in 10 had enrolled in any postsecondary education since leaving high school, primarily vocational, technical, or business schools. (NLTS2)
Challenges

• Only about one-fourth of dropouts had enrolled in a high school completion program, suggesting that their postsecondary education options remain limited. (NLTS2)

Challenges

• Course failures are much higher among students with disabilities.
Challenges

• Youth from households in the lowest income group did not have a significant improvement in postsecondary education participation, continuing the gap between income groups that existed in cohort 1. (NLTS2)

• Youth from the lowest income households did not share with their highest-income peers an increase in having been employed at some time since leaving high school, so that they lagged significantly behind that group on that measure, as well as on their rate of current employment. (NLTS2)

Challenges

• Only white youth with disabilities experienced a significant increase in postsecondary education enrollment overall and in the pursuit of both employment and postsecondary education since high school.
Changes Occur

1. Improved Attitudes

2. Improved Educational Practice

All within a rights-based policy environment.

Factors Associated with Improved Outcomes
- Earlier Intervention
- Integration
- Parent Involvement
- Minimizing suspensions
- Access to challenging curriculum