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Contextualizing School Engagement During Transition for Students Receiving Special Education and English Learner Services

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Abstract

School engagement is an important factor in academic success and social belonging for postsecondary education. Dually identified students receiving special education and English learner services may face obstacles to engagement. We conducted secondary analyses of the National Longitudinal Transition Study from 2012 to provide a description of high school engagement. We then examined engagement through interviews with 26 dually identified students from a large district in the northeastern United States. A contribution of this mixed-methods study is that while national data revealed somewhat limited engagement in extracurricular activities and inconsistent attendance, student interviews reflected self-perceptions of positive engagement. Implications for research and practice include further examining inner-group variation and increasing school–community partnerships for expanded engagement.

Keywords

postsecondary education, transition, multilingual learners, disability, special education, high school, qualitative

School engagement is linked to positive secondary experiences and postsecondary outcomes, such as obtaining a high school diploma and enrolling in postsecondary education (Zaff et al., 2017). Historically, empirical studies of school engagement focused on dropout prevention interventions (Reschley & Christenson, 2012). In special education, transition planning and education target the improvement of postschool outcomes, yet explicit connections with secondary engagement scholarship are surprisingly rare. Few special education transition studies incorporate theoretical or empirical support from the extant scholarship on school engagement and, in turn, studies of school engagement infrequently focus on disability or ableism. While dually identified students served by both special education and English learner (EL) services often face steep challenges to obtaining a high school diploma and continuing their education, few studies have examined their secondary engagement and its role in transition.

We conducted a secondary analysis of the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 and a qualitative study of 26 dually identified high school students. The purpose was to add context and depth to our examination of high school engagement. The purpose of the qualitative study was to examine how national findings related to data from a local group of participants, exploring engagement with greater depth and from the perspectives of these students. First, we review what is known about engagement and how it informs postschool outcomes and thus transition education for all students—with and without disabilities. Next, we share findings from our secondary analysis resulting in a national snapshot of engagement for dually identified secondary students. We then present qualitative findings that extend our quantitative study. Finally, we discuss key implications of these findings for research and practice.

An Argument for Further Examination of School Engagement

School engagement is a complex construct with, at a minimum, three domains: cognitive, behavioral, and social-emotional. Engagement across the three domains is often measured using survey tools that have been normed on dominant group respondents (Suárez-Orozco et al., 2010), and gaps exist in our understanding of who is engaged, why some groups of students do or do not engage, and how engagement works to leverage positive outcomes (Reschley & Christenson, 2012). Although there are exceptions,

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engagement scholarship largely represents a "one-size-fits-all" stance (Fredricks et al., 2019, p. 387). School engagement for the dually identified population deserves further study, particularly when the extant literature provides evidence of the importance of engagement in relation to transition.

School Engagement and Postschool Outcomes

While no single definition exists, students' behavioral, emotional, and cognitive interactions with their educational experiences comprise the commonly accepted tridimensional construct of engagement (Fredricks et al., 2019). Indicators of behavioral engagement include attendance, school discipline records, and participation in extracurricular activities. Emotional engagement, which can also include social engagement, is indicated by students' perceptions of school and relationships with teachers and peers. The third dimension, cognitive engagement, is indicated by participation in learning activities such as attending to instructions and responding to and asking questions (Darr, 2012). In addition, both how students construct views of the self (e.g., self-concept, self-efficacy, self-determination) and the contexts in which they live, learn, and work contribute to school engagement (Bingham & Okagaki, 2012).

Dually Identified High School Students' Engagement

About 10% of U.S. students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) also receive services as English learners (McFarland et al., 2017). Dually identified students may face compounded challenges to engagement and subsequent positive postschool outcomes associated with the manifestations of disability, the challenges of learning and using two languages simultaneously, and/or marginalization associated with ableism, linguicism, racism, xenophobia and other forms of identity-based biases and aggressions. A lengthy history of studies of school engagement and postsecondary education goal setting among immigrant populations suggest that support of school engagement is closely connected to students' family and community ties outside the walls of their schools (Stanton-Salazar, 2001). Less is known about protective factors that may promote engagement and that are associated with dually identified students' assets and positive school experiences.

A small body of extant research provides preliminary indications that engagement is a salient issue for students who receive special education, EL services, or both. Reschley and Christenson (2006) found that students with disabilities exhibited behaviors that indicated "less desirable engagement," such as getting in trouble and coming to class unprepared, and this significantly, negatively correlated with receiving a high school diploma. Povenmire-Kirk and colleagues (2010), for example, found that dually identified students faced competing time and responsibility demands between home and school that negatively impacted school engagement, and that educators were either unaware of these struggles or did not know how to address them. These findings suggest that educators and dually identified students may have different definitions of engagement and/or divergent postsecondary expectations opening the possibility of misaligned goals and strategies. We addressed three research questions to examine engagement for this population:

Research Question 1: What are the school engagement perceptions and experiences of a national sample of dually identified high school students?
Research Question 2: How do the school engagement perceptions and experiences of this population compare with those of other students with disabilities and with those of students in the general population?
Research Question 3: How do dually identified students consider and explain their choices in high school engagement relative to the transition to postsecondary education?

Method

To understand the scope and breadth of engagement for dually identified youth, we conducted a secondary analysis of the 2012 National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS 2012). To provide depth and context to the national data, we conducted a localized qualitative study that included interviewing 26 dually identified youth about their perceptions and experiences with high school engagement. We used a sequential, mixed methods design; our questions and procedures for the qualitative examination were generated from and dependent upon the findings from our quantitative examination (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2011).

Quantitative Study: Secondary Analysis of the NLTS 2012

The NLTS 2012 study has a nationally representative sample of approximately 22,000 secondary school students, including students with disabilities in each of the 12 federally defined disability categories. The majority have an IEP (81%) and another 5% have a 504 plan. In addition, there is a comparison sample of students in the general population with no IEP or 504 Plan (14%). The sample was created based on a two-stage sampling process, which included first a stratified national probability sample of school districts and then a random sample of students within districts.

Parent and youth surveys. Parent and youth telephone surveys and web-based interviews, conducted in English and

Spanish, were completed in 2012 and 2013. At that point, youth were ages 12 to 23 and most still were in secondary school. Approximately 12,900 parent surveys (59% response rate) and 11,130 youth surveys (51% response rate) were completed. Nonresponse bias analyses suggest that weighting was successful in limiting the potential for bias. Weighting and nonresponse bias analysis are further described in the *NLTS 2012 Design Documentation* (Burghardt et al., 2017).

Weighting and identification of EL status. During the sampling process, school districts provided EL status and the primary language spoken in the home for sample youth. The EL status was missing for approximately 2,690 students in the sample; these students were deleted from the current study's sample. The remaining EL subsample was reweighted to ensure that those with identified EL status were nationally representative of the full EL population by age and disability.

Sample. Students needed to have a completed youth survey and to have been in school in the reference school year to be included in the current study. The sample included 620 ELs with disabilities, comparison samples of 6,720 students with a disability and an IEP who were not ELs, and 1,980 youth in the general population (those without an IEP). All reported sample sizes are rounded to the nearest ten, per Institute of Education (IES) data reporting requirements for a restricted-use data set.

The EL students with a disability were more likely to have a specific learning disability (LD) than were other students with a disability and were less likely to have autism, emotional disturbance, multiple disabilities, or other health impairments. As compared with their peers in the general population, EL students with a disability were more likely to be male. They also were more likely than both other groups of students to be Hispanic or Latino (77% vs. 18% of other students with disabilities and 25% of those in the general population) and to live in households with lower incomes, with almost 80% living in households with incomes of less than US$40,000/year. In addition, they were more likely than other students to attend poorly performing schools. Approximately one third attended schools that performed at the bottom quarter of their state on academic proficiency measures.

Measures. Measures focused on the secondary school engagement experiences of dually identified students during high school, including indicators of social-emotional engagement (e.g., student feels part of the school and feels happy to be at school) and behavioral engagement (e.g., attendance and disciplinary referrals). The NLTS 2012 variables selected for this study align with indicators of engagement established in previous studies. For example, behaviors indicating youth's engagement at school include attendance and being on time for class (Fredricks et al., 2019), avoidance of disciplinary referrals for suspension and expulsion (Gregory & Skiba, 2019), and extracurricular participation (Fredricks et al., 2019).

Analysis. Descriptive analyses focused on the experiences of dually identified students as a whole. Comparisons were made in students with disabilities who were not ELs and students in the general population. Missingness varied from 0% to 5% across variables. All statistics were weighted to be representative of a larger population of secondary students; no imputation of missing values was conducted. Weighted means and percentages are presented for ELs with disabilities, students with disabilities who were not ELs, and students in the general population. A standard error is included for each mean and percentage. An F test was used to determine whether the difference between the group averages of ELs with disabilities and those of students in each of the other two groups was greater than would be expected to occur by chance. Statistically significant differences were set at a probability of .05.

Qualitative Study: Ethnographic Interview Study

The qualitative study adhered to key characteristics of ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019). The first author and qualitative team leader spent multiple years in the field as a participant, a participant-observer, and an observer to contextualize data. We conducted interviews with youth, family, and educators. Analysis for this study focused on student data.

Sample. Subsequent to receipt of institutional review board approvals, we used purposive sampling to select schools with dually identified students. We then employed diversity sampling (Patton, 2015), implementing one inclusion criterion: Participants were secondary students receiving both special education and EL services. Once students expressed interest, we recruited their parents and teachers. Table 1 lists the participants and key sociodemographic information; all were identified at school as having a disability, as evidenced by having an IEP, and all received EL services. English, in addition to at least one other language, was used at home with varying degrees of frequency and its use ranged among family members.

Research team. Our team maintained an ongoing discussion of our positionalities in alignment with the long-standing methodological principle that positionality should be both transparent and understood as a lens through which research is conducted. In acknowledgment of the contributions of identity and group membership to positionality (Trainor & Bal, 2014), we considered, at a minimum, the following

Table 1. Interview Participants.

Pseudonym	Home language	Family's national origin/heritage	Sex	Age	Grade
School 1					
Han	Mandarin	Chinese	Male	16	10th
Kevin	Undisclosed	Chinese	Male	Undisclosed	12th
Lan	Mandarin	Chinese	Female	16	Undisclosed
Ping	Undisclosed	Chinese	Male	Undisclosed	11th
Wanshan	Mandarin	Chinese	Male	Unsure	12th
Weigong	Mandarin	Undisclosed	Male	Undisclosed	12th
Wu	Mandarin	Undisclosed	Male	17	11th
School 2					
Ernesto	Spanish	Honduran	Male	18	11th
Raihan	Bengla	Bangladeshi	Male	16	10th
Zamora	Spanish	Honduran	Female	18	11th
School 3					
Chaima	Arabic	Palestinian	Female	17	12th
Isidro	Spanish	Puerto Rican	Male	17	11th
Karlo	Spanish	Mexican	Male	17	12th
Matthew	Spanish	Mexican	Male	15	9th
Mona	English	Yemeni	Female	17	12th
School 4					
Adam	Spanish & English	Dominican Republic & American	Male	16	9th
Emily	Spanish	Puerto Rican	Female	17	10th
Hector	Spanish	Undisclosed	Male	Undisclosed	10th
Linda	Spanish	Mexican	Female	16	10th
School 5					
Fernanda	Spanish	Undisclosed	Female	19	12th
Ignacio	Spanish	Undisclosed	Male	17	9th
Ismael	Spanish	Mexican	Male	18	12th
Ulises	Spanish	Dominican Republic	Male	16	Undisclosed
Zerlina	Spanish	Ecuadorian	Female	17	12th
School 6					
Daniel	Spanish	Salvadoran Guatemalan	Male	16	10th
Quentin	Spanish	Dominican Republic	Male	Undisclosed	9th

aspects of individual and team characteristics (Trainor & Bal, 2014) in regard to both data collection and analysis: We had a range of research experience, from more than 20 years to less than 1 year, in conducting interviews and working with people with disabilities. Bilingual interviewers included a U.S.-born woman who developed Spanish fluency at both home and school and a Mandarin-speaking international student from mainland China. The majority of the team identified as White without disabilities.

Interview procedures. After receiving participants' consent to interview and record, we employed an icebreaker activity designed to build rapport with secondary student participants.

We used an open-ended, conversational approach with a semi-structured interview guide. Questions were grouped into the following main categories: students' future goals (e.g., *What are some of your goals for life after high school?*), current experiences in high school (e.g., *In what ways do you and your family plan for life after high school? With your teachers?*), and transitioning from the current experience to future educational experiences (e.g., *What kinds of disability-related supports do you use now? English language-related? Have you thought or discussed about how to get these supports in college*?). The interview guides and procedures align with a constructivist, grounded theoretical framework, as we addressed what is known about disability and transition while also reserving time, space, and opportunity for participants to introduce topics unanticipated by the research team. Based on our quantitative study on engagement, we also asked students about extracurricular activities, attendance, and discipline. Originally, the study design included two interviews of each student; 19 of the 26 participants were interviewed twice prior to the pandemic-related school closure in March 2020. The remaining seven students (six Chinese and one Latinx) were interviewed once.

Data Analysis

Digital recordings were transcribed and translated. Analysis included multiple readings of interviews, creating and operationalizing codes, inductive and deductive coding, analytic memo writing, and generating and reviewing emergent themes. While we employed aspects of a constructivist grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006), we also conducted a constant comparative analysis (Miles et al., 2014). The first analytic tool allowed us to examine topics that emerged through participants' words and to bring the analytic lenses of engagement and capital theory to the data. The purpose of the later analytic tool was to examine participants' perspectives and experiences through lenses of disability, multilingualism, immigration, minoritization, and economic hardship. Analysis was done iteratively, examining initial and relational coding in repeated stages of analysis. We used analytic memos and concept maps, in addition to analytic reports, as tools to summarize our analyses.

Results

The secondary analysis of the NLTS 2012 shaped open-ended questions for subsequent qualitative analysis. Thus, quantitative and qualitative results are presented in this sequence.

Nationally Representative Engagement Perceptions and Experiences

To answer the first and second research questions, we used indicators of engagement that were identified in previous studies. We conducted a secondary analysis of the nationally representative NLTS 2012 data to understand the behavioral (e.g., attendance and disciplinary referrals) and the social-emotional (e.g., comfort at school and relationships with teachers) engagement of dually identified students. Other types of engagement, such as cognitive/academic engagement, had too few indicators included on the NLTS 2012 for analysis. As shown in Table 2, we compared the engagement of dually identified students to both *other students with disabilities* and to *students in the general population*. For ease of reading, we have used these terms consistently here.

Social-emotional engagement. Like their peers in both other groups, many dually identified students felt positive about school. About half of the dually identified students expressed positive feelings about school engagement, as measured by the following variables: feeling close to people at school (51%), feeling part of the school (61%), and feeling safe at school (68%). Interestingly, dually identified students were more likely to report feeling happy at school (68%), as compared with other students with disabilities (58%) and students in the general population (61%). Dually identified students were about as likely to get into fights at school as other students with disabilities (14% for both groups), and this was significantly more likely than for students in the general population (8%). Dually identified students, similar to students in the general population (28%), reported being teased (27%) at a significantly lower rate compared to other students with disabilities (38%).

When it came to dually identified students' perceptions of their teachers, they and their peers in both comparison groups felt noticed, supported, and cared for by teachers. On more than one item, dually identified students and other students with disabilities were significantly more likely to indicate feeling encouraged by their teachers than students in the general population. Dually identified students (61%) were significantly more likely than both other groups to feel that they were treated fairly by teachers.

Behavioral engagement. Dually identified students' behavioral engagement was mixed. Similar to other students with disabilities (33%), dually identified students (28%) were not likely to participate in clubs and sports. This type of participation was significantly lower than that of students in the general population (48%). Other indicators of limited behavioral engagement included absences and late arrivals to class. Like other students with disabilities, dually identified students were more likely to be late to class (23%) or miss class (5%) than were students in the general population. Although this difference was significant, a relatively small subgroup of dually identified students said they missed instruction more than once a week due to absences and lateness, with 22% reporting no late arrivals and 80% reporting no absences. Although dually identified students reported getting in trouble at rates similar to both other groups of students, dually identified students (22%) were significantly less likely to receive out-of-school suspension than were other students with disabilities (30%) but significantly more likely than students in the general population (13%). At the same time, expulsion rates (8%) for both groups of students with disabilities were similar for students with disabilities, and this was significantly higher than for students in the general population (2%).

Results from the secondary analysis of the NLTS 2012 yielded a breadth of engagement findings that were representative of dually identified secondary students across the United States, but they also introduced questions about students' experiences that could best be answered by going to the local context and speaking with students, families, and teachers.

Local, Contextualized Engagement Perceptions and Experiences

To answer the third research question, we examined interview data from dually identified students who spoke with us about their transition to adulthood. We focused this analysis

Table 2. Secondary School Engagement of Dually Identified Students, Other Students With Disabilities, and Students in the General Population.

	Dually identified students		Other students with disabilities		Students in the general population	
Indicators of engagement	%	*SE*	%	*SE*	%	*SE*
Perceptions about school						
Student agrees a lot that they:						
Feel close to people at school	50.94	3.39	49.19	1.05	51.77	1.68
Feel happy to be at school	67.92	3.06	57.98**	1.03	58.84**	1.64
Feel part of the school	61.07	3.25	55.48	1.04	61.21	1.61
Feel safe at school	68.34	3.21	67.72	0.97	69.43	1.48
Negative experiences at school						
Teased or called names at school	27.31	3.10	38.33***	1.04	28.16	1.56
Others making up rumors to make others not like the student	23.23	2.88	27.35	0.94	21.30	0.82
Items stolen from lockers	16.19	2.49	22.40*	0.87	22.96*	1.46
Attacked or in fights at school or on way to or from school	13.90	2.40	14.18	0.73	8.29*	1.08
Perceptions about teachers/adults at school						
Teachers encourage students to do their best						
Agrees a lot	78.45	2.62	74.86	0.91	70.14**	1.49
Disagrees	6.17	1.41	7.88	0.54	8.85	0.90
Teachers treat students fairly						
Agrees a lot	61.18	3.31	53.42*	1.05	53.44*	1.67
Disagrees	13.36	2.38	18.40	0.81	16.25	1.21
School adult tells him/her when does a good job						
Agrees a lot	76.93	2.75	71.39	0.93	69.88*	1.49
Disagrees	4.60	1.24	6.62	0.53	5.36	0.73
School adult listens to him/her						
Agrees a lot	65.16	3.25	65.60	1.00	66.96	1.57
Disagrees	8.18	2.05	8.29	0.56	6.26	0.73
School adult believes in him/her						
Agrees a lot	78.40	2.61	73.17	0.92	76.53	1.39
Disagrees	6.40	1.87	6.12	0.48	4.13	0.65
School adult cares about him/her						
Agrees a lot	69.81	3.14	69.75	0.98	65.08	1.62
Disagrees	8.64	1.76	8.32	0.58	6.76	0.77
School adult notices when s/he is not there						
Agrees a lot	56.98	3.39	61.29	1.03	58.32	1.66
Disagrees	14.30	2.54	11.42	0.68	11.02	1.01
School adult wants him/her to do their best						
Agrees a lot	83.04	2.44	81.45	0.80	80.51	1.29
Disagrees	4.19	1.31	3.76	0.40	3.78	0.64
Student behaviors						
Youth participated in a school sport or club in the past year	27.72	2.89	32.59	0.94	47.48***	1.68
Frequency youth was late to class this school year						
More than once a week	22.88	2.81	20.21	0.86	13.18**	1.07
Never	21.68	2.83	27.00	0.94	32.48	1.60
Frequency youth cut or skipped class this school year						
More than once a week	5.27	1.30	3.92	0.41	1.96*	0.40
Never	79.67	2.47	82.47	0.78	87.08**	0.98

(continued)

Table 2. (continued)

Indicators of engagement	Dually identified students		Other students with disabilities		Students in the general population	
	%	*SE*	%	*SE*	%	*SE*
Frequency youth was late for school this school year						
More than once a week	9.20	1.78	9.52	0.59	7.95	0.86
Never	33.76	3.24	34.08	1.01	36.79	1.65
Got in trouble for acting out this school year						
More than once a week	8.27	1.89	9.49	0.62	4.60	0.69
Never	56.49	3.39	57.63	1.05	67.81	1.62
Youth has received an out-of-school suspension	21.03	2.42	30.01***	0.88	13.23**	1.02
Youth was expelled from school	8.19	1.77	7.65	0.51	2.60**	0.45
Sample *N*[a]	620		6720		1820	
Weighted *N*	244,330		2,347,590		19,602,330	

Source. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 (NLTS 2012), parent/youth surveys.
[a]Sample size rounded to nearest 10, as required by the Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, for restricted-use data sets.
All comparisons with English learners with disabilities: *$p < .05$. **$p < .01$. ***$p < .001$.

on dually identified students' perceptions of high school and their reasons for engaging at school and in the larger community. We sought to better understand our quantitative findings.

Engaging by being present. We asked dually identified students about school engagement behaviors such as attending school, being on time, joining extracurricular activities, and participating in IEP meetings. Most readily stated that they rarely or never missed school. Ulises stood out for having received an award for perfect attendance. Other regular attenders said that their parents' expectations were a factor. Chaima said, "I can never take a sick day 'cause my mom thinks that you're never too sick to go to school." Despite conceptualizing themselves as having regular attendance, students' estimates of their absences and late arrivals were seemingly incongruent, ranging from missing two classes to 2 days of instruction per week.

Reasons for absences and late arrivals varied. The single greatest reason for absences, according to students, was public transportation delays. Lengthy commutes of over an hour by train and bus also played a role in attendance according to participants. According to the students, family obligations also contributed to late arrivals. Emily said she missed classes to translate for her mother at appointments, and Linda was responsible for walking a sibling to elementary school before going to school. Other absences may have been related to disability; Isidro and Daniel both reported that doctor appointments conflicted with school, and Ismael said he was occasionally tardy because he received testing accommodations during the school day. In general, these dually identified students did not connect concern about their grades or academic engagement to attendance, and if this was a concern none mentioned discussing it with teachers.

Engaging by joining clubs and activities. Participation in school-sponsored extracurricular activities varied across individuals. Most dually identified students stated that they were somewhat involved in school clubs or programs, but they also readily provided examples of leaving clubs because of other responsibilities. Those who were actively involved in clubs included Zerlina who said that, with the support from her teacher, she started an extracurricular film club. Raihan spoke about how he took initiative, with encouragement from a teacher, to join a club that reflected his passion for boxing. Several students such as Zamora and Quentin were members of school-sponsored sports teams, including soccer and wrestling. Reasons for not joining, or quitting clubs, often had to do with academic challenges and shortages of free time. Isidro, who likes to sing, did not think that joining the music club was a great idea. He said, "Oh no, I don't think I can go. Not for now. I mean, I'm like more concentrated in school so I can pass my classes to be a police officer." Similarly, Karlo shared that he was in the soccer club and enjoyed practicing after school. Asked about his continued participation in the club, Karlo said, "Nah . . . I feel like it stresses me out you know, you gotta focus on this, but I wanna focus on my work at school and get good grades and all that, so I said pass." Students were interested in school-based clubs, but time management was a challenge.

Engaging in academics. Dually identified students spoke frequently about their focus on academics; they expressed concern about whether their engagement in their classes would

be sufficient preparation for postsecondary education. They shared their concerns that the work was difficult, and despite putting time into their studies, they shared many examples of how they relied on their teachers to support their academic engagement. Most students were comfortable getting help with learning challenges (e.g., asking for extra time, seeking individual help from teachers) and English language learning (e.g., improving speaking, increasing reading, and accessing translations). Students also said that they asked for teachers' advice regarding transition to postsecondary education, asking for help with applications, or seeking advice about how to find a postschool program that aligned with their career goals. Help-seeking, according to students, was frequently, but not always, met with teachers' assistance and affirmations. Both Lan and Han, both speakers of Mandarin, expressed discomfort, sharing that they experienced communication barriers when they sought additional help on assignments. Kevin, also a speaker of Mandarin, said that he sought teachers' help to some degree of success both during class and after school. He added, though, "I've annoyed them. They say it'll be party time when I graduate!"

Many students, but not all, indicated asking for help was simple. They did not delineate the kinds of help they sought by program or class, neither did they differentiate by systems of services (special education or EL services). One strategy was asking teachers who knew them well and responded in affirming ways. Another help-seeking approach seemed to be that of proximity, asking whichever teacher was closest and available. Examples included Hector looking to his science teacher when working on a science fair project, Ernesto turning to his special education teacher for advice about getting into college, and Lan looking for help with her English from her "Chinese teacher," who was supporting her in learning English.

Students were less likely to identify their EL services and teachers by name in discussions of academic engagement, although students related increasing their understanding of English to their academic engagement and school success. Lan's efforts to remain academically engaged were waning, and her candor about this was unique. She felt her understanding of both English and Chinese was limited and that, especially where English was concerned, her efforts were futile and would be a barrier to college. She also had strained relationships with her family and teachers and expressed feeling unsupported. Upon asking for additional help, she said her teacher told her to study harder. She said, "They told me to go home and figure it out for myself. I couldn't think of anything. Just memorization. What else can you do? Just rote memorization."

In addition to teachers, students seemed familiar with their school counselors. As a freshman, Daniel had met with the school counselor about the state achievement tests required for graduation, while seniors like Weigong and Fernanda met with their respective school counselors to get information about transitioning to postsecondary education. Weigong said that he discussed his goals for college and his parents' preference that he get a job after high school with his school counselor. The school counselor, he said, was helping him find an internship.

Engaging in community. Dually identified students shared numerous and robust examples of engagement outside the context of daily school life. They identified spending free time engaged in family-oriented activities that included both fun and responsibility such as hanging out, caring for siblings, and working in family businesses. Students identified family members who connected them to employment as a way to explore their interests and strengths, to gain experiences, and to financially contribute to individual and family expenses. Ulises said his father helped him enroll in a community policing program in support of Ulises' long held dream to become a police officer. While Fernanda tutored a friend's bilingual children, Emily, Hector, and Weigong accompanied their parents to work for pay.

Still, others had transnational communication and/or travel experiences, connecting with cousins and relatives in their family's home countries during which they explored their interests and expectations of life after high school by discussing older siblings' and relatives' postsecondary opportunities, maintaining friendships, and sharing familial responsibilities and connections from a distance. For example, Matthew, who wanted to be a veterinarian, said that his visits to relatives in rural Mexico informed this career goal. In another example, Ismael shared his dream of becoming an engineer and cited his family as his inspiration and source of information when he said, "Oh, I've been influenced by my cousins and my uncles that also do engineering and they made me like this so that I can go with them so they show me everything." He planned on applying to a local college, but he said his ideas about post-high school life were also informed by his cousin who was enrolled in a university in Mexico. In yet another example, Mona said that although she did not discuss her dreams of college with Yemeni relatives during return visits because these served to underscore their different life circumstances, she attributed her past international travel to her present and postsecondary desire to study Korean language and culture and her dreams of going abroad after high school.

School engagement for dually identified students, both nationally and locally, included participation in school-based experiences, in addition to engagement linked to learning and exploring in their home communities with family members. In the following section, we discuss our results and connect them to engagement scholarship and transition research about dually identified youth. Following that, we discuss research and practice implications.

Discussion

Both the national survey and the local interviews provide novel information about the perceptions and experiences of secondary dually identified students. As these students make their way through high school, they engage in school in ways that are both similar to other students, including those with and without disabilities, and in ways that draw upon their experiences as multilingual learners within immigrant families. This mixed-method study also illustrates how nationally representative data provides breadth to our understanding of this population's perceptions and experiences, and how locally focused interviews provide depth. While the NLTS 2012 data illustrate that dually identified students experienced both some satisfaction and some disengagement associated with high school, the interviews help explain why this may be so.

Engagement is important because it is linked to postschool outcomes such as graduating high school and enrolling in college (Christenson et al., 2012). In addition to providing opportunities for personal growth and learning, school engagement strengthens students' connections to their school community and increases positive postschool outcomes (Juvonen et al., 2012). While national data show that dually identified students miss class more often than other students with and without disabilities, interview data reveal that students are missing school due to additional responsibilities such as translating for parents in appointments and caring for siblings. Students' comments suggest that they may not fully understand and/or appreciate the serious ramifications of not being in class, or that their reasons for absences represent priorities that are equal to or more important than perfect attendance. The role suspensions and expulsions play in attendance issues remains unknown. The quantitative survey results illustrate inconsistent patterns of fewer suspensions and greater expulsions when compared with other groups of students, and the interview data do not help to clarify this issue.

School engagement through extracurricular clubs and activities contributes to students' interest development, promotes positive postschool outcomes, and informs postsecondary goals (Morris, 2016). While the national survey data indicate low engagement in clubs and activities from dually identified students, qualitative interviews indicate otherwise. Based on interviews, although dually identified students may encounter obstacles with school-based extracurricular clubs and activities (e.g., balancing the demands of clubs with time needed for studying or working), they continue to explore their interests in their communities and with family members, relating these to their postsecondary goals. The extent to which community-based and family-oriented activities have the same value when applying to college, enrichment, or employment opportunities, remains unclear. Teachers may be less likely to know of or recognize these activities as important examples of interest exploration and skill development. While activities outside of school may provide opportunities for exploration and skill-building, they might be more challenging to align with school-based transition planning and college and career readiness.

Based on the quantitative data alone, one might conclude that dually identified students might feel mostly positive about school without fully participating in what schools have to offer. Our qualitative results affirm dually identified students' positive feelings toward school and their teachers, however, they also explain that this group of students is balancing many demands on their time and attention including challenging academic work, family togetherness and responsibility, and early work experiences. Students' interviews offer evidence that they prioritize formal school experiences and seek help, both indicators of academic engagement. Interviews also show that dually identified students seek opportunities outside of school for planning and preparing for graduation, college, and other outcomes by exploring their interests via the Internet and through familial connections to employment and postsecondary education.

Limitations

Several study limitations are important to consider. First, while the NLTS 2012 dataset is robust, the examination of experiences and perceptions associated with dually identified students is not the focus of the study. Key variables associated with EL services (e.g., language proficiencies, numbers of years receiving both services, access to both special education, and EL certified teachers) were not available for this secondary analysis. Second, comparisons between the national data and the local data must be made with caution. The local population comes from a large urban district in the northeastern United States with a long history of providing dual services and comparatively substantial resources for dually identified students. National survey participants reflect districts with a wider range of resources and demands for dual service provision. Third, direct assessment and observations of engagement would provide additional depth to both sources of data. Fourth, NLTS 2012 surveys were administered in either Spanish or English, although 6% of participants reported they spoke another language. Interviewees mostly elected to participate in English, but a number opted for their home language. Neither the survey nor the interviews provided a structured opportunity for participants to reflect on language choice during research participation. But languages envelop cultural understandings of terms like *disability* and phrases such as *cut class*, possibly introducing ambiguity or confusion in ways that are unique for dually identified respondents. Despite its limitations, this study provides a deeper

understanding of dually identified students' secondary school engagement resulting in key implications for researchers and teachers in schools.

Implications for Research

Dually identified students are a growing population in U.S. public schools (McFarland et al., 2017). More information about the services that dually identified students receive is critical to understanding what is supporting and hindering their school engagement, including during their transition to postsecondary life. Specifically, we need to better understand their multilingual proficiencies, the range of experiences of their family members in pursuing college and careers, and their perceptions around larger concepts such as independence, futures planning, bilingualism, and disability. While our study explores the perspectives of students, gaining additional insight from teachers and parents is another key next step.

Although school engagement was the primary focus of this study, the lines between community and school engagement may be inseparable for dually identified students and their families. Multilingual and immigrant families, including those with mixed immigration statuses, may have strong intergenerational relationships and multilingual communities outside of school. Thus far, these assets remain underexplored. Understanding the assets of these community ties serve to establish social and cultural capital (e.g., develop career interests, provide access to early work experiences) can inform how schools and teachers intervene and support students toward effective and fulfilling school engagement. Researchers should explore these questions across groups of stakeholders, such as parents, community leaders, and educators, in addition to students, to understand the scope of community engagement in which schools are embedded.

Implications for Practice

The findings have important implications for improving school engagement in service to successful transitions. In the transition process, communication and collaboration between teachers and families bridge students' engagement experiences with postschool goals. In addition to honoring students' in-school involvement, educators' understanding of the breadth of students' out-of-school activities and working to connect this engagement with students' postsecondary education goals is critical. Providing information about the demands of both secondary and postsecondary education contexts, including differences in disability and language support structures, demystifies processes associated with applying and thriving in postsecondary.

A teachers' role in fostering positive in-school experiences is critical. Encouraging findings about students' positivity about school were tempered by inconsistent engagement. Sharing explicit school procedures and expanding the cultural capital of students and families by explaining the implications of absences and offering support for getting to school is important. Increasing students' understanding of the rationale for and type of services they are receiving in high school, better equipping them to access needed supports in postsecondary school, is essential. Teachers can support increased engagement by helping students see how they are integral members and leaders in their school communities (Cervone & Cushman, 2015). Dually identified students can initiate clubs and activities that foster cross-group communication and collaboration, and they can practice self-determination when making choices about engagement aligned with their postschool goals. Teachers can also make sure that dually identified students understand the importance of engagement in college applications, helping students frame the skill-building and social connections happening outside of school so that they are noticeable on college applications. Fostering strong relationships and positivity also may increase educators' advocacy, and their support of student self-advocacy, through deeper understandings of immigration, language minority status, and negative sociopolitical climate issues.

The majority of dually identified students are also students of color with a range of cultural, racial, ability, linguistic, gender, and other intersectional identities. For teachers, exploring how their students' experiences and perceptions are informed by these identities is key to understanding their conceptualization of goals and responsibilities (Pitt & Casasanto, 2020). Cultivating relationships between educators and ELs with disabilities can facilitate belonging. Mobility and familial separation that sometimes accompanies immigration may compound issues related to engagement and may also contribute to students' feelings of safety within schools. Building trusting, culturally sustaining relationships requires teachers to know students and advocate for them.

Conclusion

Through the use of both quantitative and qualitative methods, this study points to the many ways in which dually identified students are engaged outside of school. Our findings show a discrepancy between a lack of engagement identified in the national data and an abundance of engagement uncovered in the local data. This discrepancy is partly attributable to the expanded local definition of engagement that captured activities with families and communities. This presents an opportunity for educators and researchers to look beyond formal schooling and also examine the experiences of students outside school that inform their transition trajectories. Our contribution is to look beyond traditional methods and measures that often

focus on the limitations of dually identified students and students of color, instead exploring the many facets of their lives and realities that extend beyond the boundaries of school and are shaped and informed by their families and communities.

Authors' Note

The opinions expressed are those of the authors and do not represent views of the Institute or the U.S. Department of Education.

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