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# REPORTS

## **MATCHING IN-SCHOOL PREDICTORS OF POST-SCHOOL SUCCESS TO VARIABLES IN THE NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL TRANSITION STUDY 2012**

Clare Papay, Meg Grigal, & Alberto Migliore



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**MOVING TRANSITION FORWARD**

INSTITUTE FOR COMMUNITY INCLUSION, UMASS BOSTON

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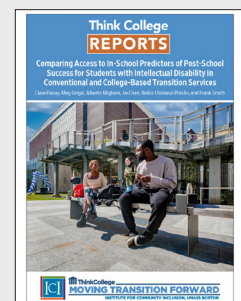
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The Moving Transition Forward: Exploration of College-based and Conventional Transition Practices for Students with Intellectual Disability and Autism (ID/A) project examines the composition and impact of existing transition practices for students with ID/A. Through this Institute for Education Sciences (IES)-funded project, researchers from the Institute for Community Inclusion are conducting a series of secondary analysis studies with national datasets to define, explore, and compare critical aspects of two transition approaches. In this report, we describe the process we went through to prepare for subsequent analysis, which looks at the extent to which research-based and promising in-school predictors of post-school success are implemented in transition services for youth with ID/A. In this report, we also describe our process for identifying variables in the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 dataset that correspond with the predictors of post-school success identified by Test et al. (2009), Mazzotti et al. (2016), and Mazzotti et al. (2021). This report is intended as a precursor to the first analysis, as it provides a detailed description of our variable identification process for other researchers to use and to understand our approach more deeply.

**Read the companion report:** Comparing Access to In-School Predictors of Post-School Success for Students with Intellectual Disability in Conventional and College-based Transition Services. By Clare Papay, Meg Grigal, Alberto Migliore, Jie Chen, Belkis Choiseul-Praslin, and Frank Smith



## Introduction

In 2009, Test and colleagues at the National Secondary Transition Technical Assistance Center (NSTTAC, now the National Technical Assistance Center on Transition: the Collaborative [NTACT:C]) conducted a systematic review of correlational literature on secondary transition for students with disabilities to identify in-school predictors of post-school success. Using the quality indicators for correlational research proposed by Thompson et al. (2005), Test et al. reviewed 22 correlational research studies and identified 16 in-school predictors of outcomes in the areas of employment, postsecondary education, and independent living for students with disabilities. These predictors were categorized as having a potential or moderate level of evidence based on the number and type (exploratory or a priori) of studies and consistent significant correlations between the predictor and outcome variables.

For the first time, this list of predictors includes guidance on aspects of transition programming that teachers and other professionals could target to support students with disabilities to achieve success after graduation. However, the list of evidence-based predictors used only the variable definitions drawn from each research study; transition professionals would need more comprehensive definitions for these predictors to be useful. To achieve this, Rowe et al. (2015) developed operational definitions and essential characteristics of each predictor through a Delphi study of experts in the field of secondary transition or career/technical education. The resulting definitions “narrow the research-to-practice gap by giving educators information to align secondary transition programs with high quality research shown to increase the likelihood of positive post-school outcomes for youth with disabilities” (Rowe et al., 2015, p. 124).

Building on the work of Test et al. (2009) and Rowe et al. (2015), Mazzotti et al. (2016) reviewed correlational research published after 2009 and identified four new in-school predictors of post-school outcomes. The review also added to the level of evidence for nine of the existing predictors. Mazzotti et al. (2021) conducted another update to the review of correlational research, identifying three new predictors and providing further evidence for 14 existing predictors. As of February 2021, there were 23 in-school predictors of post-school success, 16 of which have been operationally defined (see Table 1).

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### **The purpose of this report is to identify available variables in the NLTS 2012 Phase I dataset that correspond with the in-school predictors of post-school success identified in previous research.**

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The bulk of the correlational research reviewed to identify the predictors was based on analyses of two important studies on secondary transition of students with disabilities: The National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS; 1985-1990) and the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2; 2001-2009). These studies included nationally representative samples of youth with disabilities and captured the transition experiences and outcomes of youth with disabilities over time through surveys of parents, students, and teachers. A third study in this series, NLTS 2012, was conducted in 2012-2013 and captured data on the transition experiences of students with disabilities through interviews with students and parents in a single school year. Phase I data from NLTS 2012 is available to researchers through a restricted use license agreement with the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, n.d.). Phase II of the NLTS 2012 will add to the available data by gathering





## Methods

### NLTS 2012 DATASET

The NLTS 2012 dataset includes a national sample of about 13,000 students with and without disabilities who were in grades 7 to 12 during the 2011-12 school year. The sample included all 12 disability categories recognized by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as well as students without disabilities. The nationally representative sample was selected using a two-step process. First, researchers selected a stratified national probability sample of school districts. Of the 572 school districts selected, 76% participated in the study. Next, researchers selected a stratified sample of nearly 22,000 youth with and without disabilities from the participating districts. About 11,000 youth and about 13,000 parents of these youth completed a computer-assisted telephone interview (48% response rate). School districts provided supplemental administrative information about the sample. More details about the research methodology of the NLTS 2012 Phase I study is available in Burghardt et al. (2017).

### VARIABLE IDENTIFICATION PROCESS

We began the variable identification process by conducting a thorough review of the predictor definitions and essential characteristics (Rowe et al., 2015). We located the original research reviewed by Test et al. (2009), Mazzotti et al. (2016), and Mazzotti et al. (2021) and identified the variables in those studies that were significantly correlated with post-school outcomes. Additionally, we closely examined the variable definitions in those original research studies.

With this foundation of understanding, we next reviewed the NLTS 2012 data dictionary and published reports (e.g., Bloomenthal, et al., 2017; Burghardt et al., 2017; Lipscomb et

administrative data to provide further information on the secondary and post-school experiences of some of these youth (National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance [NCEE], n.d.).

The availability of the NLTS 2012 data provides an opportunity to closely examine the transition programming provided to students with disabilities using more recent data than either the NLTS or NLTS2 datasets. The purpose of this report is to identify available variables in the NLTS 2012 Phase I dataset that correspond with the in-school predictors of post-school success identified by Test et al. (2009), Mazzotti et al. (2016), and Mazzotti et al. (2021). Knowing which predictor variables are or are not available in the NLTS 2012 dataset will assist researchers with secondary data analysis efforts and will help inform the design of future longitudinal data collection studies. The following describes the process we undertook to identify these corresponding variables and to clarify which in-school predictors of post-school success were and were not present in the NLTS 2012 dataset.

al., 2017) to identify potential variables that matched the predictor constructs. We sought variables that were either fully aligned with prior research (e.g., questions that were asked in NLTS or NLTS2 surveys and were worded identically when asked in the NLTS 2012 parent or student surveys) or that were closely aligned with the predictor definitions and essential characteristics (e.g., a survey question in NLTS 2012 that was different to prior research but addressed the same construct). We conducted an iterative review process to determine we had selected the variables that most closely matched the predictors. This often involved going back and rereviewing the data dictionary, the predictor definitions, and the original research studies to ensure our final list of variables constituted the best match. We used a consensus model to ensure full agreement on our final decisions.

For most of the predictors, we were able to identify a single corresponding variable from the NLTS 2012 dataset, but for five predictors (paid employment/work experience, parent expectations, parent involvement, self-care/independent living skills, and self-determination/self-advocacy) we identified more than one variable indicative of the predictor. Three predictors (psychological empowerment, self-realization, and youth autonomy) are constructs for which groups of variables in NLTS 2012 can be combined to create an index (Burghardt et al., 2017; Petcu et al., 2017; Shogren et al., 2017).



## Results

In the following section, we give the operational definition of each predictor (Rowe et al., 2015), describe the original research from which the predictor was identified, and explain the corresponding variable(s) we identified in NLTS 2012. We group the findings into three categories based on whether we identified a close match (i.e., variable closely matches prior research and provides good indication of the construct), weak match (i.e., variable either differs from prior research or provides an incomplete indication of the construct), or no match (i.e., no variable in the dataset provides an indication of the construct) between the predictor and NLTS 2012 variables. We provide a summary of this information in Table 2.

### CLOSE MATCH

We were able to locate a close match in the NLTS 2012 dataset for 11 of the predictors of post-school life: interagency collaboration, paid employment/work experience, parent expectations, parent involvement, psychological empowerment, self-care/independent living skills, self-determination/self-advocacy, self-realization, travel skills, work-study, and youth autonomy/decision-making.

**Interagency collaboration** is a clear, purposeful, and carefully designed process that promotes cross agency, cross program, and cross disciplinary collaborative efforts leading to tangible transition outcomes for youth. Researchers identified this predictor based on two studies, one in which students who received assistance from higher numbers of community agencies were found to have more successful outcomes (Bullis et al., 1995), and one in which significant positive correlations were found between interagency transition council characteristics and students' postsecondary education outcomes (Repetto et al., 2002). The variable *p\_y\_transagency*, (staff from

**Table 1: Description of in-school predictors of post-school success.**

In-school predictor of post-school success	Description
Career awareness	Learning about opportunities, education, and skills needed in various occupational pathways to choose a career that matches one's strengths and interests.
Community experiences	Activities occurring outside of the school setting, supported with in-class instruction, where students apply academic, social, and/or general work behaviors and skills.
Exit exam requirements/ high school diploma status	Exit exams are standardized state tests, assessing single content area (e.g., algebra, English) or multiple skill areas, with specified levels of proficiency that students must pass to obtain a high school diploma. Diploma status is achieved by completing the requirements of the state awarding the diploma including the completion of necessary core curriculum credits.
Goal setting	Setting goals for each year (i.e., IEP goals) and adult life (i.e., post-school goals) and involving youth in development of these goals
Inclusion in general education	Access to general education curriculum and engagement in regular education classes with peers without disabilities.
Interagency collaboration	A clear, purposeful, and carefully designed process that promotes cross agency, cross program, and cross disciplinary collaborative efforts leading to tangible transition outcomes for youth.
Paid employment/work experience	Work experience is any activity that places the student in an authentic workplace, and could include work sampling, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment. Paid employment can include existing standard jobs in a company or organization or customized work assignments negotiated with the employer, but these activities always feature competitive pay (e.g., minimum wage) paid directly to the student by the employer.
Parent expectations	Parents hold high expectations for their youth; including that the youth will have a job and/or attend postsecondary education after graduation.
Parent involvement	Parents/families/guardian(s) are active and knowledgeable participants in all aspects of transition planning (e.g., decision making, providing support, attending meetings, and advocating for their child).
Program of study	An individualized set of courses, experiences, and curriculum designed to develop students' academic and functional achievement to support the attainment of students' desired post-school goals.
Psychological empowerment	The belief in the relationship between one's actions and outcomes.
Occupational courses	Individual courses that support career awareness, allow or enable students to explore various career pathways, develop occupational specific skills through instruction, and experiences focused on their desired employment goals.
Self-determination/self-advocacy	The ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, evaluate options, take initiative to reach one's goals, and accept consequences of one's actions.
Self-care/independent living skills	Skills necessary for management of one's personal self-care and daily independent living, including the personal management skills needed to interact with others, daily living skills, financial management skills, and the self-management of health care/wellness needs.
Self-realization	Understanding one's strengths and support needs.
Social skills	Behaviors and attitudes that facilitate communication and cooperation (e.g., social conventions, social problem solving when engaged in a social interaction, body language, speaking, listening, responding, verbal and written communication).
Student support	A network of people (e.g., family, friends, educators, and adult service providers) who provide services and resources in multiple environments to prepare students to obtain their annual transition and post-secondary goals aligned with their preferences, interests, and needs.
Technology skills	Competence in using a computer or other technology.
Transition program	Prepares students to move from secondary settings (e.g., middle school/high school) to adult-life, using comprehensive transition planning and education that creates individualized opportunities, services, and supports to help students achieve their post- school goals in education/training, employment, and independent living.
Travel skills	Skills that enable the student to travel to places outside of the home.
Vocational education	A sequence of courses that prepares students for a specific job or career at various levels from trade or craft positions to technical, business, or professional careers.
Work-study	A work-study program is a specified sequence of work skills instruction and experiences designed to develop students' work attitudes and general work behaviors by providing students with mutually supportive and integrated academic and vocational instruction.
Youth autonomy/ decision making	Youth have autonomy and make decisions about their short-term and long-range plans.

Adapted from Rowe et al. (2015), Mazzotti et al. (2016), and Mazzotti et al. (2020).



a community service agency attended the transition-planning meeting), provides the best indicator of interagency collaboration in NLTS 2012 data.

**Paid employment/work experience** refers to two things. First, paid employment can include existing standard jobs in a company or organization, or customized work assignments negotiated with the employer. These activities always feature competitive pay (e.g., minimum wage) paid directly from the employer to the student. Second, work experience is any activity that places the student in an authentic workplace, and could include work sampling, job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships, and paid employment. This predictor is based on 15 research studies that have found positive correlations between paid employment or work experience and post-school outcomes. All of these studies found a positive correlation for paid work experience or having a paid job in high school (e.g., Carter et al., 2012; Doren & Benz, 1998; Wagner et al., 2014). Although Mazzotti et al. (2016) lists unpaid work-study experience as a predictor of later employment in the study by Carter et al. (2012), a closer inspection of this study suggests that only paid work experience and not unpaid work experience was a correlate of employment. In the NLTS 2012 data, the variable `y_y_anypaidjob`, (youth had a paid work experience in the past year), is the best indicator of paid employment/work experience.

**Parent expectations** was a predictor identified by Mazzotti et al. (2016) and therefore was not given an operational definition by Rowe et al. (2015). Researchers identified this predictor based on nine studies that found parent expectations for the youth to attend postsecondary education, be employed, or live independently correlated positively with the youth's attainment of those goals (Chiang et al., 2012; Doren et al., 2012; Papay & Bambara, 2014;

Wagner et al., 2014). In the NLTS 2012, three variables are available: `p_y_edexpect` (parent educational expectations for the youth), `p_y_livingexp` (parent expects youth to be living independently by age 30), and `p_y_finanexp` (parent expects youth to be financially self-supporting by age 30).

Parent involvement means that parents/families/guardians are active and knowledgeable participants in all aspects of transition planning (e.g., decision making, providing support, attending meetings, and advocating for their child). Researchers identified this predictor based on two studies: one that found the percentage of attendance by at least one parent at Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings in 11th or 12th grade correlated positively with employment outcomes (Fourqurean et al., 1991) and one that found parent involvement in education at home, as measured by a scale based on how often a parent spoke to the youth about school experiences and helped with homework, correlated positively with postsecondary education outcomes (Wagner et al., 2014). In the NLTS 2012 parent survey, section C asks specifically about parent involvement. Question C1 asks about parent involvement in activities at school, such as attending a general school meeting or volunteering at the

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**We were able to locate a close match in the NLTS 2012 dataset for 11 of the predictors of post-school life: interagency collaboration, paid employment/work experience, parent expectations, parent involvement, psychological empowerment, self-care/independent living skills, self-determination/self-advocacy, self-realization, travel skills, work-study, and youth autonomy/decision-making.**

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**Table 2. In-school predictors of post-school success and corresponding NLTS 2012 variables.**

In-school predictor of post-school success	NLTS 2012 variable description	Variable name	Survey
<b>CLOSE MATCH</b>			
Interagency collaboration	Staff from a community service agency attended the transition-planning meeting	p_y_transagency	P
Paid employment/ work experience	(1) Youth had a paid work experience in the past year	y_y_anypaidjob	Y
Parental expectations	Parent expects youth will be financially self-supporting	p_y_finanexp	P
	Parent expects youth will be living independently	p_y_livingexp	P
	Parent's educational expectations for the youth	p_y_edexpect	P
Parental involvement	(1) Parent or another household adult attended an IEP meeting in the past two years	p_p_iepmeet	P
	(2) Parent or another household adult talked with youth about school regularly or occasionally	p_p_talksch	P
	(3) Parent or another household adult helped youth with homework at least 3 times per week	p_p_helphomework	P
Psychological empowerment	Youth's rating of self on questions based on the Arc's Self-Determination Scale subsection on Psychological Empowerment	P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P8	Y
Self-care/ independent living skills	How well the youth dresses and feeds themselves	D25a and D25b	P
	Activities of daily living index	p_y_daily_index	P
Self-determination/self-advocacy	Youth provided at least some input in IEP and transition planning	y_y_goalsomeinput	Y
	Youth played at least an equal part in developing plan goals	p_y_goals	P
	Youth provided at least some input in IEP and transition planning	p_y_goalsomeinput	P
Self-realization	Youth's rating of self on questions based on the Arc's Self-Determination Scale subsection on Self-Realization	P9a, b, c, d, e, f, g	Y
Travel skills	Youth can get to places outside home very well or pretty well	D26c	P
Work-study	Youth had a paid or unpaid school-sponsored work activity in the past year	y_y_schjob	Y
Youth autonomy/decision making	Personal autonomy index	y_y_autonomy_index	Y
<b>WEAK MATCH</b>			
Career awareness	Received help identifying possible career options	K9g1	Y
Career and technical education (previously vocational education)	Attended a school that was a vocational/technical school	B3	P
Inclusion in general education	Attended a school that was not for youth with disabilities only	p_y_school = 1 (regular school for a variety of students)	P
Occupational courses	Youth took classes to prepare for a career of interest	F2	P
Social skills	Youth communicates by any means with little or no trouble	p_y_communicate	P
Transition program	Transition plan meeting by youth's school occurred	E3	P
<b>NO MATCH</b>			
Community experiences	No match	-	-
Exit exam requirements/high school diploma	No match	-	-
Goal setting	No match	-	-
Program of study	No match	-	-
Student support	No match	-	-
Technology skills	No match	-	-

P = Parent survey, Y = Youth survey.



school. Questions C3 and C4 correspond to the variables used by Wagner et al. (2014): how often a parent or adult in the household talks to the youth about school and how often a parent or other adult in the household helps the youth with homework. Variables `p_p_talksch` and `p_p_helphomework` in the dataset correspond to these survey questions. An additional variable, `p_p_iepmeet`, provides data on whether the parent attended an IEP meeting in the last two years.

**Psychological empowerment** was a predictor identified by Mazzotti et al. (2021) and therefore was not given an operational definition by Rowe et al. (2015). Psychological empowerment refers to one's belief in the relationship between actions and outcomes (Mazzotti et al., 2021) and is a component of self-determination. Researchers identified this predictor based on two studies (Petcu et al., 2017; Shogren et al., 2017) that found a positive correlation with education, employment, and independent living outcomes. In the NLTS 2012 data, variables P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, and P8 are questions based on the Arc's Self-Determination Scale subsection on Psychological Empowerment. These variables can be used to construct a scale of psychological empowerment following similar procedures used by Petcu et al. (2017) and Shogren et al. (2017).

**Self-care/independent living skills** are skills necessary for managing one's personal self-care and daily independent living, including the personal management skills needed to interact with others, daily living skills, financial management skills, and the self-management of health care/wellness needs. Researchers identified this predictor based on eight studies that found positive correlations between higher levels of self-care skills or receiving independent living skills instruction and post-school outcomes (e.g., Carter et al., 2012; Papay & Bambara, 2014). In the NLTS and NLTS2,



researchers created a self-care skill scale based on how well youth dress and feed themselves. The NLTS 2012 includes both of these as survey questions (D25a and D25b), therefore a similar self-care scale can be computed. The NLTS 2012 also includes a scale that is more closely indicative of independent living: activities of daily living index (`p_y_daily_index`). This index is a measure of the extent to which the youth is able to complete several typical teenage tasks independently, based on both the number of tasks completed and how well or often youth complete them (e.g., using an ATM without help, making appointments without help). Each component measure has categorical values ranging from 0 (low) to 3 (high). The index is the average of parent ratings on each of the seven component measures with values ranging from 0 to 3.

**Self-determination/self-advocacy** is the ability to make choices, solve problems, set goals, evaluate options, take initiative to reach one's goals, and accept consequences of one's actions. Researchers identified this predictor based on eight studies that showed a positive correlation between self-determination or self-advocacy skills and successful post-school outcomes (e.g., Doren et al., 2012; Carter et al., 2012). Variables in the NLTS 2012 do not precisely match those from previous research, but there are two survey questions that result

in three variables that can provide an indicator of self-determination: L2a, youth's perspective on their role in their IEP and transition planning (from which the following variable is derived: *y\_y\_goalsomeinput*, youth provided at least some input in IEP and transition planning); and E5, parent's perspective on the youth's role in IEP and transition planning (from which the following two variables are derived: *p\_y\_goals*, youth played at least an equal part in developing plan goals; and *p\_y\_goalsomeinput*, youth provided at least some input in IEP and transition planning).

**Self-realization** was a predictor identified by Mazzotti et al. (2021) and therefore was not given an operational definition by Rowe et al. (2015). Self-realization refers to having an understanding of one's strengths and needs (Mazzotti et al., 2021) and is a component of self-determination. Researchers identified this predictor based on one study (Shogren et al., 2017) that found a positive correlation with employment and independent living outcomes. In the NLTS 2012 data, variables P9a, b, c, d, e, f, g are questions based on the Arc's Self-Determination Scale subsection on Self-Realization. These variables can be used to construct a scale of self-realization following similar procedures used by Shogren et al. (2017).

**Travel skills** was a predictor identified by Mazzotti et al. (2016) and therefore was not given an operational definition by Rowe et al. (2015). These are skills that enable the student to travel to places outside of the home. Researchers identified this predictor based on two studies that both included a variable indicating youths' ability to get to places outside the home independently (Carter et al., 2012; McDonnall, 2011). In NLTS 2012, a similar variable is available: D26c, (how well youth can get to places outside the home).

**Work-study** is a program consisting of a specified sequence of work skills instruction and experiences designed to develop students' work attitudes and general work behaviors by providing students with mutually supportive and integrated academic and vocational instruction. Researchers identified this predictor based on five studies that found a positive relationship between either a particular work-study program (Baer et al., 2003; Fabian et al., 1998; Flexer et al., 2011; Luecking & Fabian, 2000) or paid or unpaid work-study experiences (Carter et al., 2012) and successful post-school outcomes. In NLTS 2012, the variable *y\_y\_schjob*, (youth had a paid or unpaid school-sponsored work activity in the past year) can provide an indication of work-study.

**Youth autonomy/decision making** was a predictor identified by Mazzotti et al. (2016) and therefore was not given an operational definition by Rowe et al. (2015). Researchers identified this predictor based on six studies that used a youth autonomy scale in NLTS2 (e.g., Berry et al., 2012; Doren et al., 2012; Shogren et al., 2017). A similar scale is available in NLTS 2012: *y\_y\_autonomy\_index*, (youth personal autonomy index score). This index score is based on seven questions asked of the youth and has values from 0 (low) to 3 (high).



## WEAK MATCH

We were able to locate a weak match for six predictors: career awareness, career and technical education, inclusion in general education, occupational courses, social skills, and transition program.

**Career awareness** is learning about opportunities, education, and skills one needs in various occupational pathways to choose a career that matches their strengths and interests. Researchers identified this predictor through two studies that found significant positive correlations between receiving job search instruction (Carter et al., 2012) or exiting high school with job search skills (Benz et al., 1997) and post-school outcomes. The closest match in NLTS 2012 is variable K9g1, (youth reported school staff provided them with help identifying possible career options), although this variable does not provide any indication of the student's job search skills or instruction provided to develop job search skills.

**Career and technical education** (previously referred to as vocational education) is a sequence of courses that prepares students for a specific job or career at various levels from trade or craft positions to technical, business, or professional careers. Researchers identified this predictor based on 12 studies that found positive correlations between variables such as career counseling (e.g., Chiang et al., 2012), vocational coursework in high school (e.g., Halpern et al., 1995), or job readiness training (Flexer et al., 2011) and post-school employment or postsecondary education outcomes. This is the only predictor to have met NTACTION's criteria as an "evidence-based predictor" (Mazzotti et al., 2021). There are no variables on career and technical education coursework in NLTS 2012. The type of school the youth attends (B3) could provide some indication of this construct, if youth are reported to be attending a vocational/technical school, but this

would leave out students who received career technical education in a regular school or other type of school.

**Inclusion in general education** means the student has access to the general education curriculum and is engaged in regular education classes with peers without disabilities. Researchers identified this predictor as having a significant correlation with post-school outcomes in 16 studies. Across these studies, different variables have been used as an indicator of inclusion, including the number or percentage of hours spent or credits earned in general education settings (Heal & Rusch, 1995; Rojewski et al., 2015; Wagner et al., 2014), receiving English language arts or math instruction in a general education setting (Lombardi et al., 2013), and participation in regular school rather than a special school (Chiang et al., 2012; Leonard et al., 1999). This latter variable, attending a regular rather than special school ( $p\_y\_school = 1$ ), is the only variable available in the NLTS 2012 that gives any indication of whether the student is included in general education. There is no information in the NLTS 2012 about students' instructional settings. It is not an ideal match since it is possible students may be in an entirely segregated classroom within a regular school. However, since it aligns with the two previous studies on which this predictor was based, it is the only choice for a corresponding variable.

**Occupational courses** are individual courses that support career awareness, allow or enable students to explore various career pathways, develop occupational specific skills through instruction, and include experiences focused on their desired employment goals. Researchers identified this predictor based on two studies: Halpern et al. (1995) found students who passed more than half or all of their courses in curriculum areas that included specialized vocational instruction were more likely to enroll



in postsecondary education. Heal and Rusch (1995) found students who took higher numbers of hours of occupational courses were more likely to be employed after high school. The NLTS 2012 contains one variable, F2, (during the last school year, the youth took courses in high school designed to expose them to or prepare them for a career of interest). Parents answered yes/no to this survey question, and there is no data available on the location or number of hours spent in career-related instruction.

**Social skills** are behaviors and attitudes that facilitate communication and cooperation (e.g., social conventions, social problem solving when engaged in a social interaction, body language, speaking, listening, responding, verbal and written communication). Researchers identified this predictor based on eight studies that identified a positive relationship between higher social skills and successful post-school outcomes (e.g., Chiang et al., 2013; Halpern et al., 1995). Although the NLTS and NLTS2 included several questions for parents about the youth's social skills, NLTS 2012 does not include these questions. The closest approximation is the variable `p_y_communicate`, which provides an indication of how well the youth communicates using any means by combining across variables related to speaking (for youth who do not have hearing problems or trouble speaking) and communication by other means (for youth who have hearing problems or trouble speaking). This variable is similar to the NLTS2 variables included in the study by Carter et al. (2012), one of the studies from which the social skills predictor was identified, although it provides an incomplete indication of the youths' other social skills.

**A transition program** prepares students to move from secondary settings (e.g., middle school/high school) to adult-life, using comprehensive transition planning and education that creates individualized



opportunities, services, and supports to help students achieve their post-school goals in education/training, employment, and independent living. This predictor is based on six studies that found a positive correlation between either a particular transition program (Benz et al., 2000; Repetto et al., 2002) or general transition planning services (Halpern et al., 1995; Newman & Madaus, 2015; Newman, Madaus, et al., 2016; Park & Bouck, 2018) and successful post-school outcomes. One variable, E3, (transition plan meeting by youth's school occurred), is available to provide an indication of this predictor, although this variable does not provide any indication of the type or nature of transition programming.

### NO MATCH

We were unable to locate a match for six predictors: community experiences, exit exam requirements/high school diploma status, goal setting, program of study, student support, and technology skills.

**Community experiences** are activities occurring outside of the school setting, supported with in-class instruction, where students apply academic, social, and/or general work behaviors and skills. Researchers identified this predictor

based on a study by White and Weiner (2004) that found students who participated in community-based training had more successful employment outcomes. NLTS 2012 includes no survey questions about location of instruction, therefore it was not possible to find a match for this predictor.

**Exit exam requirements/high school diploma status**

refers to two things. Exit exams are standardized state tests, assessing a single content area (e.g., algebra, English) or multiple skill areas, with specified levels of proficiency that students must pass to obtain a high school diploma. Diploma status is achieved by completing the requirements of the state awarding the diploma, including the completion of necessary core curriculum credits. Researchers identified this predictor based on three studies that found a positive correlation between receiving a standard diploma and successful post-school outcomes (Connors et al., 2014; Heal & Rusch, 1994; Wagner et al., 2014). In the NLTS 2012 study, all youth in the sample were in school and there was no information provided about their expected high school diploma status. Furthermore, there was no information collected on the exit requirements of the school. Therefore, it was not possible to find a match for this predictor.

**Goal setting** was a predictor identified by Mazzotti et al. (2016) and therefore was not given an operational definition by Rowe et al. (2015). Researchers identified the predictor based on two studies that found a positive correlation between having vocational IEP goals (Carter et al., 2012) or having a post-school goal about attending postsecondary education (Chiang et al., 2012; Wei et al., 2016) and post-school outcomes. In the NLTS 2012 data, there are no variables about the students' IEP or post-school goals, therefore it was not possible to find a match for this predictor.

Program of study means an individualized set of courses, experiences, and curricula designed to develop students' academic and functional achievement to support the attainment of students' desired post-school goals. Researchers identified this predictor based on three studies (Newman, Marschark et al., 2016; Shandra & Hogan, 2008) that found a positive correlation between a particular program of study and post-school employment. There are no variables in NLTS 2012 about the composition of any youth program of study (e.g., courses taken).

**Student support** is a network of people (e.g., family, friends, educators, and adult service providers) who provide services and resources in multiple environments to prepare students to obtain their annual transition and post-secondary goals aligned with their preferences, interests, and needs. Researchers identified this predictor based on seven studies that examined the impact of family and other supports on youths' post-school outcomes (Doren & Benz, 1998; Halpern et al., 1995; Heal et al., 1999; Roessler et al., 1990). The NLTS 2012 does not include any variables providing an indication of this predictor.

**Technology skills** was a predictor identified by Mazzotti et al. (2021) and therefore was not given an operational definition by Rowe et al. (2015). Researchers identified this predictor based on two studies that found computer competence and computer skills were variables that positively correlated with post-school employment (Wehman et al., 2015; Zhou et al., 2013). Although the NLTS2 included questions about computer skills, there are no questions in NLTS 2012 matching this predictor.

## Discussion

In preparation for future research, we sought to determine which of the predictors of post-school outcomes identified by Test et al. (2009), Mazzotti et al. (2016), and Mazzotti et al. (2021) aligned with variables in the NLTS 2012 dataset. In this process, there were 17 predictors for which we were able to locate corresponding variables in the NLTS 2012 dataset, of which 11 had a close match and 6 had a weak match. There were six predictors that did not have corresponding variables in the NLTS 2012 dataset. We begin our discussion by reviewing the reasons why we determined certain variables to be a weak rather than close match.

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For the variables that constituted a weak match, in some cases, this meant we were able to locate a variable in the NLTS 2012 dataset that aligned with a variable in one of the original research studies through which Test et al. (2009), Mazzotti et al. (2016), and Mazzotti et al. (2021) identified predictors of post-school success; yet, the NLTS 2012 variable does not sufficiently meet the operational definition developed by Rowe et al. (2015) and therefore provides an incomplete picture of whether or not the predictor of post-school success was present. In other cases, a weak match meant the variable met some of the operational definition but lacked an element, such as frequency or duration, that was present in the original research studies reviewed by Test et al. (2009), Mazzotti et al. (2016), and Mazzotti et al. (2021).

For example, Rowe et al. (2015) defined the predictor of *inclusion in general education* as meaning the student has access to general education curriculum and is engaged in regular education classes with peers without disabilities. The NLTS 2012 Phase I dataset does not have any variables indicating whether students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum or are engaged in regular education classes with peers without disability. Given this, it might appear there is no variable aligning with this construct. However, the NLTS 2012 does have a variable for “student attended a regular rather than special school.” Two of the studies from which the predictor of inclusion in general education is identified (Chiang et al., 2012; Leonard et al., 1999) use “participation in regular school rather than a special school” as their variable indicating inclusion in general education. Therefore, given the NLTS 2012 variable was the same as those used to identify the predictors of post-school success, we deemed it a match but characterized it as a weak match. An obvious flaw in using the NLTS 2012 variable as a reflection of inclusion in general education is that attending a regular school does not preclude the possibility of the student with disabilities receiving substantially separate or segregated instruction in the regular school. Given the lack of information in the NLTS 2012 Phase I dataset regarding access to general education curriculum and engagement in regular education classes, future researchers may chose not to use this variable as an indicator of inclusion in general education.

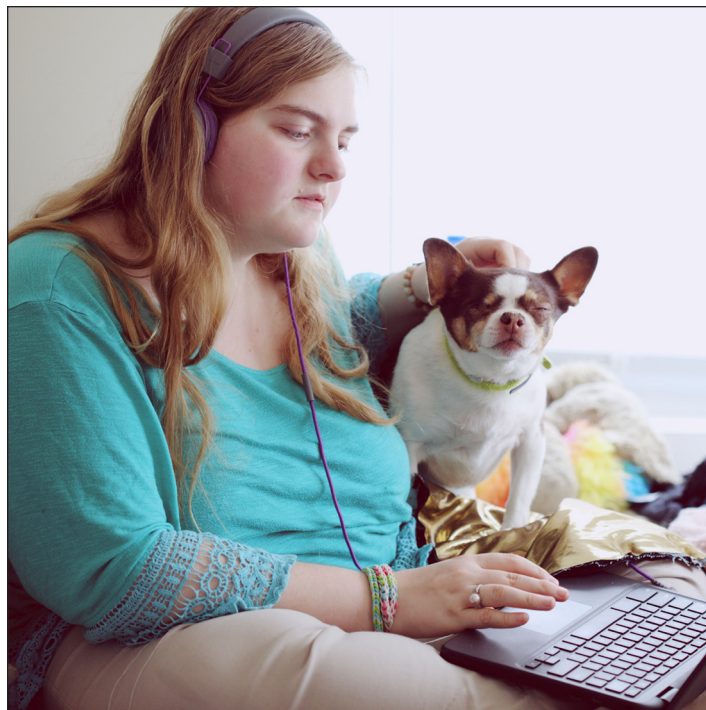
We identified a similar concern when looking at the NLTS 2012 dataset to find a match for the predictor of *social skills*. The closest approximation is the variable *p\_y\_communicate*, which provides an indication of how well the youth communicates using any means by combining across variables related to speaking and communication by other means. Because this variable is similar to the



NLTS2 variables used in the study by Carter et al. (2012), one of the original studies from which the social skills predictor was identified, we deemed it a match. However, the definition of social skills offered by Rowe et al. (2015) refers to behaviors and attitudes that facilitate communication and cooperation. The mere act of communication does not translate directly to use of communication to conduct social problem solving when engaged in a social interaction. Nor does it reflect students' body language, differentiate by their capacity to listen or respond, or differentiate between verbal and written communication. These aspects of the social skills predictor are absent from the NLTS 2012 variable thus leading us to determine it to be a weak match.

The predictor *transition program* was matched to the NLTS 2012 variable "transition plan meeting by youth's school occurred", as the operational definition by Rowe et al. (2015). This definition includes reference to transition planning and previous studies cited reflect the use of general transition planning services. However, the occurrence of a meeting is not sufficient to represent an entire transition program. In their definition of this predictor, Rowe et al. (2015) offer a rich description of the construct of a transition program and addresses student settings, planning, activities (individualized opportunities, services, and supports) and outcomes (education/training, employment, and independent living). Due to a lack of any of these aspects, we deemed our selected NLTS 2012 variable to be a weak match.

We noted similar issues for the predictor *career awareness*. Rowe et al. (2015) define career awareness as learning about opportunities, education, and skills needed in various occupational pathways to choose a career that matches one's strengths and interests. It is in this second aspect of the definition that our review of the NLTS 2012 variables came up



short. The selected variable (the youth reported school staff provided them with help identifying possible career options) does not reflect any aspect of matching occupational knowledge to students' strengths or interests.

An outlier to these was *occupational courses*, another variable deemed a weak match, that met the definition but lacked critical elements of previously cited studies establishing the predictor. We matched this predictor with the NLTS 2012 variable, "during the last school year, the youth took courses in high school designed to expose them to or prepare them for a career (or careers) of interest." However, the studies cited as supporting occupational courses as a predictor of post-school employment (Halpern et al., 1995; Heal & Rusch, 1995) both addressed the amount of instruction provided as a significant aspect of the predictor variable, not merely that instruction occurred. The survey question used to gather data in the NLTS 2012 study sought no information about the number of hours student spent in career-related instruction, therefore we categorized the available NLTS 2012 as a weak match.

## LIMITATIONS

We acknowledge several limitations in our review of the extant literature on predictors of post-school success and matching to NLTS 2012 dataset variables. First, it is possible we may have overlooked relevant variables in the NLTS 2012 dataset, although we took every possible step to gain a thorough understanding of the available variables. Second, it is possible that researchers may wish to choose other variables that more closely match the constructs of interest in their own studies. Finally, we acknowledge some of the limitations of the available variables in NLTS 2012 Phase I dataset will be addressed by Phase II of the study. Between September 2015 and September 2022, researchers will add to the available data by gathering administrative data to provide further information on the secondary and post-school experiences of these youth (NCEE, n.d.). Administrative data sources will include school district records (e.g., high school course-taking and completion), Federal Student Aid and the National Student Clearinghouse (e.g., postsecondary education and enrollment), Social Security Administration (e.g., receipt of federal benefits), and Rehabilitative Services Administration (e.g., employment). The data gathered from these sources will be linked to the survey data gathered in Phase I to provide richer information on the transition experiences and outcomes of youth, although it will likely be a while before these data are available to researchers.

## Implications for Research

Future work to identify predictors of post-school success may seek to refine the definitions of predictors identified through earlier studies. Although the original studies were useful in generating initial predictive constructs, the operational definitions developed through the Delphi process by Rowe et al. (2015) raise the threshold of what should be considered part of each of these constructs. Subsequently, future research could use the more complete definitions of each construct in testing predictions between in-school factors and post-school success.

Additionally, researchers conducting secondary analysis of the NLTS 2012 specifically including predictors of post-school success may need to assess if a weakly matched variable is sufficient for the purposes of their research. At a minimum, those who do use these matched variables should make sure to address the issues described here as a study limitation. We acknowledge the NLTS 2012 dataset is not yet complete and subsequent versions of the dataset that include Phase II data will likely offer better matches for some of the predictor variables, especially those related to high school coursework.

Finally, as noted previously, another important aspect for future research is related to the predictor variable of paid employment/work experience. As noted previously, the definition of paid employment/work experience developed through the Delphi process by Rowe et al. (2015) introduces several types of unpaid work experiences to this predictor category. However, we did not locate any original research to directly support that addition. Mazzotti et al. (2016) list paid or unpaid work-study experiences as a predictor of later employment in the study by Carter et al. (2012), but our reading of the Carter et al. study suggests that

only paid work experience and not unpaid work experience was a correlate of employment. We would suggest future refinement of the predictors that address this, either by identifying clearer support for the construct of unpaid work experience as a predictor of post-school employment or removing unpaid work experience from the characteristics of paid employment/work experience.

## Conclusion

The identification of predictors of positive post-school outcomes by Test et al. (2009) Mazzotti et al. (2016), and Mazzotti et al. (2021) and the operational definitions Rowe et al. (2015) developed have strongly enhanced both research and practice in the field of transition. They also offer us the opportunity to view emerging data as represented by the NLTS 2012 through a different lens. We hope that by sharing our process of matching these predictors to variables in the NLTS 2012 dataset and identifying the strengths, gaps, or weaknesses in these matches will be helpful to future researchers.



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