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Youth and Parent Participation in Transition Planning in the U.S.A.: Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 (NLTS 2012)

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to use data from the United States' National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 (NLTS 2012) to present descriptive information on youth and parent participation and youth's role in required Individualized Education Program (IEP)/transition planning meetings by disability category and age groupings (14-22 year olds, 14-15 year olds, and 16-22 year olds). The study found that youth and parent attendance in IEP/transition planning meetings was high across disability categories, but the extent to which youth and parents met with teachers to discuss transition goals was much lower. Data from NLTS 2012 and a previous U.S. study, the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2 (NLTS2), were compared for youth's participation with school staff in discussing transition goals. A significant decline in participation was found over the past decade. Logistic regression analyses illustrated differences in youth and parent participation and youth's role by disability category.

It has been 45 years since the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA, P.L. 94-142) in the U.S. in 1975. Over this period, there has been a steady strengthening of the intent that parents be full partners with school staff in educational planning for their children and that youth with disabilities become fully engaged in playing an active and meaningful role in the planning process and in setting post high school goals for further education, employment, and community living (Johnson, 2020; Martin et al., 2004; Wagner et al., 2012). For transition-age youth and their parents, individualized education program (IEP)/transition planning meetings have become the foundation upon which services and supports are to be identified and planned for based on the youth's strengths, preferences, and interests. Documenting the progress that has been made over the years in achieving greater levels of youth participation in the planning process is necessary in informing both policy and practice in special education and transition services in the U.S. The National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 (NLTS 2012) provides the most recent opportunity to re-examine youth and parent participation in IEP/transition planning using a nationally representative sample.

The first federal legislation requiring transition services for students with disabilities in the U.S. was included in the 1990 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA 1990 established several requirements pertaining to youth and parent participation in IEP meetings when transition goals are to be considered. The age at which transition planning was to occur for youth was set at 16 years. IDEA was again reauthorized in 1997 requiring that the IEP team, including youth and their parents, examine the youth's courses of study (such as advanced placement courses or vocational education programs) starting when the student was 14 years old, and then by the time the child reached 16 years of age, the IEP team was to develop interagency responsibilities or linkages (20 U.S.C. § 1414 (d) (A) (vii)).

The reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 removed the requirement that IEP teams begin transition planning at age 14 and shifted transition planning back to "not later than the first IEP to be in effect when the child is 16. . . ." (Section 300.320 (b)). It should be pointed out that the final regulations of IDEA 2004 did not limit a state's interest in continuing to address transition service needs beginning at age 14 (or earlier), and several states chose to retain the younger age of 14 as the age when transition services were to be considered by the IEP team (Johnson, 2020). Additionally, IDEA requires the IEP team to include "appropriate measurable postsecondary goals based upon age-appropriate transition assessments related to training, education, employment, and, where appropriate, independent living skills" (Section 300.320 (b) (1)) and to specify "the transition services (including courses of study) needed to assist the child in reaching those goals" (300.320 (b) (2)).

Implementing these legislative requirements has been challenging with significant inconsistencies noted across and within states in achieving the intent and goals of the transition service requirements to fully involve youth and parents in the IEP/transition planning process (Hasazi et al., 1999; Landmark & Zhang, 2012). Additional research is needed to refine our understanding of youth and parent participation in transition planning meetings and to identify approaches and strategies that lead to meaningful involvement.

The IDEA 2004 regulations require that students, 16 years of age, be notified of and invited to the IEP/transition planning meeting if one of the purposes of the annual meeting is discussion of transition service needs. The regulations, however, are limited to inviting the student and do not require steps or measures that the school should take to ensure active and meaningful student participation during the planning meeting process. Research has documented that youth are attending IEP/transition planning meetings in greater numbers (Lipscomb et al., 2017), but the extent to which this attendance leads to meaningful participation during these meetings is much less understood. Griffin et al (2014) suggested that teachers who report youth participation in transition planning meetings equate youth attendance with youth participation.

Researchers have consistently reported that youth participation in IEP/transition planning is an important opportunity for youth to learn, develop, and demonstrate self-determination skills, which are critically needed in determining school and postschool goals, making choices, and navigating future environments following high school completion (Martin et al., 2006; Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Research has also provided supporting evidence that when students are involved in planning, their involvement leads to higher levels of goal attainment (Shogren et al., 2019), increased graduation rates (Doren et al., 2012), and positive impact on postschool outcomes (Test et al., 2009). Researchers have also found differences in the transition planning experiences of students based on disability label, finding that the role and contribution of students with more significant disabilities (e.g., intellectual disability, autism, multiple disabilities, etc.) is far less than for students in other disability categories (Griffin et al., 2014; Johnson et al., 2020; Shogren & Plotner, 2012).

Other studies offer perspectives on psychological and motivational factors that contribute to youth participation. Youth engagement is an important construct, useful in understanding aspects of youth' participation in transition planning meetings. Beyond a youth's mere attendance at a meeting, however, there needs to be a better consideration of the youth's commitment to the process, and perceptions of social competence and sense of belonging (Christenson et

al., 2007). Youth who are given the opportunity to express a preference for and engage in chosen activities and courses of study are also likely to achieve better outcomes (Cameto et al., 2004; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003).

IDEA 2004 also requires that parents be notified when the purpose of the IEP meeting is the consideration of transition services. Research has shown that parent participation in transition planning plays an important role in ensuring a successful transition for their child with disabilities (Wagner et al., 2012). Studies have also found parent involvement and expectations for their child's abilities, skills, and future educational and employment choices have a powerful influence on the outcomes their child will achieve as an adult (Doren et al., 2012; Landmark et al., 2007; Landmark & Zhang, 2012). Parent expectations have been linked to their child's academic achievement, school engagement, graduation rates, and postschool outcomes (Doren et al., 2012; Landmark et al., 2007). Hetherington et al. (2010) identified several key factors associated with increasing parent participation in transition planning. These included: (a) the need for schools to encourage collaboration with parents, (b) appreciation of family context with acknowledgement of parental knowledge of their children, and (c) parent advocacy training in order to maximize parents' knowledge of both the system and their rights. Wagner et al. (2012) found that parents with higher levels of involvement in supporting their child's education at home and in school were significantly more likely to attend IEP transition planning meetings.

There has been limited large-scale research on factors that influence youth and parent participation in IEP/transition planning meetings. To date, the second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS2), which was conducted in 2000-2003, has been the primary source of data used by U.S. researchers to examine transition and related issues (Cameto et al., 2004; Newman, 2005; Shogren, & Plotner, 2012; Wagner et al., 2012). More recently, the National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 (NLTS 2012), conducted from 2011-2013, provided an opportunity to re-examine the relationship of youth, parent, and school factors associated with youth and parent participation in IEP/transition planning. The NLTS 2012 youth and parent surveys included some of the same items as the NLTS2 surveys. Therefore, our purpose in this study was to use NLTS 2012 data to examine a subset of variables specifically pertaining to youth and parent participation in IEP/transition planning meetings and the role youth played during these meetings, and to compare youth participation over time, using NLTS2 and NLTS 2012 data. Specific questions of interest in the present study were:

1. What youth and families' characteristics are represented in the NLTS 2012 data set?
2. To what extent do youth and parents participate in IEP and transition planning meetings, including youth's role in meetings, in relation to specific age groupings?
3. Are there differences in youth participation in developing a transition plan by disability category across time (comparing NLTS 2012 and NLTS2 data)?
4 Are there variations in youth participation in IEP/transition planning meetings by disability category after controlling for youth/parent demographics, parent expectations, and youth's educational history?

METHOD

NLTS 2012

NLTS 2012 is the third in a series of national longitudinal transition studies intended to examine youth with disabilities receiving services under IDEA. NLTS 2012 is the first NLTS study in the series to permit direct comparison of youth with and without IEPs. The focus of this study was specifically on the sample of special education youth (youth with IEPs) in IDEA's 12 disability categories. NLTS 2012 data collection was conducted from February-October 2012 and from January-August 2013. A total of 10,459 parent surveys of youth with IEPs was completed (60% response rate). Across the two years of data collection, 8,960 surveys of youth with IEPs were completed, representing a 51% response rate. The youth were enrolled in grades 7-12 or in a secondary ungraded class when surveyed.

Because the focus of this study was youth and parent participation in IEP/transition planning, we were interested in including youth in three age groupings: 14-15 year olds and 16-22 year olds, as well as the overall group of 14-22 year olds. IDEA 2004 requires that youth be invited to the IEP meeting when transition goals will be discussed, beginning at age 16. IDEA 1997, however, required youth to be invited at age 14 to discuss and review courses of study. Despite this change from IDEA 1997 to IDEA 2004, several states in the NLTS 2012 sample retained age 14 as the point at which youth are to be invited to an IEP/transition planning meeting. Youth who were 14-15 years old were deemed a group of interest to identify the percentage of youth who participated earlier in their educational career.

Because the NLTS 2012 sample was a stratified random sample, designed to generalize to the national U.S. population of youth with disabilities, analyses must use weighted data (Burghardt et al, 2017). In our analysis, we used all youth weights because the time of the survey is not related to our research questions. For example, in the present study, the sample was weighted so that the descriptive statistics obtained on IEP/transition meeting participation status would be population estimates of the level of participation of youth with disabilities across the nation. This approach allowed for a broader level of

generalization of study findings to the national U.S. population of youth across IDEA disability categories.

NLTS2 was the second longitudinal study, which began in 2001 through funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs to establish a nationally representative sample of approximately 11,000 parents and their child receiving special education services in grades 7-12. Several NLTS2 youth and parent survey items were replicated in NLTS 2012 to allow for comparisons across time. This study used one item from the NLTS2 youth survey, *"youth met with school staff to develop a transition plan"*, to examine the changes from the NLTS 2 and NLTS 2012 data sets across time.

Data Sources

NLTS 2012 Youth Survey: Survey items used in this analysis addressed whether the youth attended an IEP meeting in the past two years, was invited to a transition planning meeting, and met with school staff to develop an IEP/transition plan, as well as the role the youth played in the transition planning meeting. In addition, a range of demographic information on the youth was used in the study analysis. Demographic data included IDEA disability category, gender, grade level, race, free/reduced priced lunch, household income, highest level of parent education, school type, and English learner (EL) status.

NLTS 2012 Parent Survey: Survey questions included whether the parent attended an IEP meeting in the past two years and whether the parent was invited to a transition planning meeting, as well as whether their child met with school staff to develop a transition plan; they also included the parent's report on the role the youth played in the transition planning meeting. In addition, background characteristics and socioeconomic status were collected, including household size; primary language used at home; race and ethnicity; and parent's income, education, and marital status.

Data Analyses

For research questions one to three, descriptive statistics were used to illustrate characteristics of the youth sample. Chi square tests were conducted to determine differences in youth's and parents' level of participation in IEP/transition planning meetings and youth's and parents' reports on youth's role and contribution during transition planning meetings. In order to test the two independent datasets (NLTS2 and NLTS 2012), several chi-square tests were also conducted to examine the homogeneity to determine whether the proportion of youth who reported having met with school staff to develop a transition plan was the same for NLTS2 and NLTS 2012 by disability categories. We used unweighted data to report actual data in relation to specific items and weighted percentages to represent population estimates. For research question four we conducted four separate logistic regression analyses with each of the four dependent variables and covariates described below. The sample for this analysis included youth 14 to 22 years of age.

Dependent variables. In this analysis of NLTS 2012 data, we included four items, two from the parent survey and two from the youth survey:

1. During this or last school year, did you or another adult in the household go to a meeting about an Individualized Education Program, or IEP, for [youth's] special education program or services? (Parent Survey, E2);
2. Did [you/name of youth] meet with adults at school to set goals for what [you] will do after high school and make a plan for how to achieve them? Sometimes this is called a transition plan? (Youth Survey, L2);
3. Which of the following best describes [youth's] role in the IEP and transition planning meeting? (Parent Survey, E5a); and
4. Which of the following best describes [your] role in your IEP and transition planning meeting? (Youth Survey, L2a).

Independent variable. The independent variable was the 12 IDEA disability categories.

Covariates. Covariates related to youth demographics were age, gender, race, English language status, free-reduced lunch status, and the youth's level of functioning. Covariates related to family demographics were household income, highest education level attained by the parent(s). We included one item asking parents to rate their expectation about the youth's future education. Finally, we included three variables to control for youth's education history: youth ever held back a grade, ever expelled from school and youth ever had out-of-school suspension.

Analysis was conducted using SAS 9.4 PROC SURVEYFREQ and PROC SURVEYLOGISTIC procedures. All estimates were weighted to the population level, and variances were adjusted in accordance with the complex sampling design. Adjusted odds ratio and confidence interval were presented for each of the 12 disability categories using specific learning disability as the reference group, controlling for all of the covariates listed earlier. Several variables were recoded before conducting the data analyses. This was done to transform variables by grouping categories or values together or to change a continuous variable into a binary or categorical variable. For example, four codes used in the survey to indicate a youth's free/reduced lunch status were combined into *Yes* and *No* responses for the present analysis.

Missing Data. Due to the survey design, participants skipped some survey items based on previous items. Thus, missing data were missing by design, not missing at random. Missing data were not imputed for this study. The

missing rate varied based on the items included for each analysis. Missing rates are noted in the footnotes of each data table.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: Description of Youth Surveyed in NLTS 2012

Table 1 presents the demographics for youth by age grouping. The total sample included 6,340 youth ages 14-22 (2,810 ages 14-15 and 3,530 ages 16-22). The NLTS 2012 youth' mean age was 15.9 years, with the largest percentage (51.7%) in grades 9-10. Approximately two-thirds of the youth were male. The sample of youth was primarily non-Black (Caucasian) (67.3 %), followed by any Black (22.5%), Hispanic (7.6%), and multi/other (2.6%). More than half (57.5%) qualified for free, reduced, or free and reduced priced lunch by federal program eligibility standards. Approximately, one-fourth of the youth were living in households with the lowest income bracket ($20,000 or less), and one-fourth were in the middle-income group ($20,001-$40,000). Most of the participants (85.9%) attended a regular middle or high school. The remaining youth were served in schools that served only youth with disabilities (4.7%), alternative schools (2.8%), charter schools (2.3%), and vocational-technical schools (1.8%). Over half the sample of parents (52.8%) had a high school diploma, GED, or had less than a high school education. More than one-fourth (27.3%) held a four-year or graduate degree from a college or university. A total of 8.1% of the youth were English learners.

Research Question 2: Youth and Parent Participation in IEP/Transition Planning Meetings and Youth's Role

A majority of the youth across the three age groupings in Table 2 reported having attended an IEP meeting in the past two years (*79.2% for ages 14-22, 76.0% for ages 14-15, and 82.6% for ages 16-22*). A similar but somewhat higher percentage of youth reported having been invited to their IEP/transition planning meeting. Significantly fewer youth, however, reported having met with school staff to develop a transition plan (*69.3% for ages 14-22, $p<.001$, 63.6% for ages 14-15, $p<.05$ and 71.6% for ages 16-22, $p<.05$)*. Although IDEA 2004 requires that youth be invited to their IEP meeting not later than age 16, a significant percentage (43%) of the total sample of younger youth ages 14-15 reported attending a meeting in the past two years.

A large majority of parents of youth also reported having attended an IEP meeting in the past two years. Across the three age groupings in Table 2, a total of 92.3% attended for youth ages 14-22 while 94.4% for ages 14-15, and 90.1% for ages 16-22. Similar results were noted for parents who reported being invited to a transition planning meeting. Fewer parents, however, reported meeting with school staff to develop a transition plan (*57.4% for parents of youth aged 14-22, $p<.01$, 52.6% for parents of youth aged 16-22, $p<.05$, and 59.5% for parents of youth aged 14-15, $p<.05$)*. Responses for parents were lower than those for youth on this survey question.

Table 2 also examines the roles youth played during IEP/transition planning meetings. Item responses included: youth was present in discussions but participated very little or not at all; youth provided some input; or youth took a leadership role, helping set the direction for the discussions, goals, and plans. Irrespective of the three age groupings, approximately one-fourth of youth reported taking a leadership role and helping set the direction for the meeting (*23.7% for youth ages 14-22; 20.9% for ages 14-15; and 25.9% for ages 16-22*). Approximately, half the youth provided some input, and one-third, although present in the discussion, participated very little or not at all. Parents were also requested to report on their child's role in the IEP/transition planning meeting. The percent of parents reporting that their child took a leadership role, helping set the direction for the discussion during the IEP/transition planning meeting was lower than reported by their child. Parent responses were analogous across the three age groupings (*15.1% for parents of youth aged 14-22; 15.1% for parents of youth aged 14-15; and 15.1% for parents of youth aged 16-22*). Similar to their child's responses, half the parents reported that their child provided at least some input during the meeting.

Table 2 also illustrates that about four out of 10 youth, while they were present for the discussion, participated very little or not at all. Parents also reported on youth's contribution (a little, some, mostly youth) in coming up with goals during the IEP/transition planning meeting. Similar findings are evident in Table 2 across the three age groupings. Parents reported that less than 10% of the youth played a primary role in coming up with goals during the meeting (*8.0% for youth ages 14-22; 5.5% for youth ages 14-15; and 9.1% for youth ages 16-22)*.

Research Question 3: Youth Participation in IEP/Transition Planning Meetings across Time

A comparison of NLTS2 and NLTS 2012 was conducted on one key measure. Table 3 shows the percentage of youth aged 15-19 years who met with school staff to develop a transition plan by disability category. Parent responses to this item occurred in NLTS2's Wave 1 data collection, which was conducted in 2001-2003. The comparison being made extends over a decade. Across all disability categories, there was a significant decline in the percent of parents reporting that their child met with school staff to develop a transition plan (*78.7% for NLTS2 and 70.9% for NLTS 2012; $p < .01$*). It should also be noted that three disability categories: multiple

Table 1
Youth Demographics by Age Group (NLTS 2012)

Characteristics	Age 14-22		Age 14-15		Age 16-22	
	% [a]	n	% [a]	n	% [a]	n
Total youth with IEP	100.0	6,340	100.0	2,810	100.0	3,530
Disability Group						
Autism	6.4	710	5.8	320	7.1	390
Deaf-blindness	0.0	100	0.0	30	0.0	70
Emotional disturbance	9.6	750	9.3	340	9.8	410
Hearing impairment	1.3	360	1.3	170	1.3	200
Intellectual disability	11.3	890	8.2	320	14.6	570
Multiple disabilities	3.1	670	2.3	230	3.9	450
Orthopedic impairment	1.0	310	0.9	130	1.2	180
Other health impairment	15.0	820	16.5	420	13.4	390
Specific learning disability	46.7	920	49.7	450	43.4	470
Speech or language impairment	2.3	390	2.7	230	2.0	160
Traumatic brain injury	0.7	200	0.6	80	0.7	120
Visual impairment	0.5	190	0.4	80	0.5	110
IEP but unspecified disability	2.1	40	2.2	20	2.0	20
Gender						
Male	67.3	4,110	68.1	1,860	66.5	2,250
Female	32.7	2,210	31.9	940	33.5	1,270
Grade level						
7th grade	3.6	200	6.0	180	1.1	20
8th grade	15.3	830	28.9	790	0.7	40
9th grade	28.4	1,510	46.1	1,250	9.5	250
10th grade	23.3	1,390	17.8	530	29.1	860
11th grade	17.9	1,220	0.4	10	36.5	1,200
12th grade	10.0	1,010	0.0	0	20.6	1,010
Ungraded	1.0	140	0.6	40	1.5	100
Other qualifying	0.6	60	0.2	10	0.9	50
Race						
Non-Black	67.3	4,200	66.9	1,850	67.7	2,340
Any Black	22.5	1,390	22.7	620	22.4	770
Multi / Other	2.6	160	2.3	70	2.9	80
Hispanic	7.6	420	8.1	190	7.1	230
Free/Reduced Lunch						
No	42.6	2,240	39.8	940	45.6	1,300
Free	40.2	1,960	42.5	930	37.6	1,030
Reduced	5.8	320	5.8	170	5.8	150
Free or reduced	11.5	620	11.9	280	11.0	340
Household Income						
$20,000 OR LESS	27.9	1,650	27.8	730	28.0	920
$20,001 TO $40,000	25.5	1,480	26.5	690	24.4	790
$40,001 TO $60,000	15.9	930	15.0	400	16.8	530
$60,001 TO $80,000	11.3	640	11.4	290	11.3	350

Table 1, *continued*

Characteristics	Age 14-22		Age 14-15		Age 16-22	
	% [a]	n	% [a]	n	% [a]	n
$80,001 TO $100,000	7.5	470	7.3	200	7.7	270
$100,001 TO $120,000	3.3	210	3.2	100	3.5	110
OVER $120,000	8.6	510	8.8	240	8.4	270
School Type						
Regular school	85.9	5,090	88.2	2,380	83.4	2,710
Special school disability only	4.7	540	3.7	160	5.8	390
Vocational/technical school	1.8	90	1.0	30	2.7	60
Charter school	2.3	130	2.6	60	1.9	70
Alternative school	2.8	170	2.2	60	3.5	110
Other	2.5	170	2.3	70	2.8	100
Highest Education level						
Graduate degree	9.3	660	9.2	280	9.4	390
4-year college degree	18.0	1,150	17.3	520	18.8	630
2-year college degree	13.8	870	14.2	410	13.5	460
Technical or trade school degree	6.1	360	6.7	160	5.4	200
High school diploma or GED	38.4	2,340	37.5	1,030	39.4	1,310
Less than high school	14.4	830	15.1	370	13.6	450
EL Status						
No	91.9	5,240	90.8	2,320	93.0	2,920
Yes	8.1	420	9.2	210	7.0	220

Note. EL = English Learner; Highest education level= level attained by parent respondent or spouse.[a] Valid percentages calculated based on valid responses, missing responses were excluded from the percentage calculation. Weighted missing rate among all the variables ranged 0%-19.60%. The unweighted n is rounded to the nearest 10.

disabilities, orthopedic impairment, and traumatic brain injury experienced the most significant decline of youth reported meeting with school staff to develop a transition plan between NLTS2 and NLTS 2012.

Research Question 4: Logistic Regression Models of Youth's IEP/Transition Planning Participation and Role

Logistic regression analyses were performed to explore relationships among four dependent variables: (a) parent reporting on meeting with teachers to discuss future goals, (b) youth reporting on meeting with teachers to discuss future goals, (c) parent reporting on youth's role in the IEP/transition planning meeting, and (d) youth's self-report on their role. Youth demographic and school-related factors included gender, age, ethnicity, free/reduced lunch, English learner, youth's functional abilities, and youth's educational history (out-of-school suspensions, ever expelled from school, and ever held back a grade level). Family characteristics included household income, highest education level attained by the parent or parent's spouse, parental involvement in school activities and events, and parent expectations.

Table 4 illustrates only the relationships between disability category and IEP/transition planning participation and youth's role after controlling for youth and family characteristics. No significant differences were found in parent responses to the survey item about meeting with teachers to set goals. In examining youth responses, the analysis showed that compared to youth with a specific learning disability (SLD), youth with autism ($p < .05$, $OR = .62$) and multiple disabilities ($p < .01$, $OR = .451$) were less likely to meet with teachers to set goals and make a plan for how to achieve them. Based on the parents' survey responses to a question about their perception of the youth's role, youth with autism ($p < .001$, $OR = 0.46$), intellectual disabilities ($p < .01$, $OR = 0.59$), and multiple disabilities ($p < .001$, $OR = 0.36$) were less likely to provide input during IEP/transition planning meetings than youth with SLD. Youth responses indicated that youth with autism were less likely than youth with SLD to provide input during the IEP/transition planning meeting ($p < .05$, $OR = 0.60$).

Table 2
Youth and Parent Participation in IEP/Transition Planning

Participation	Age 14-22		Age 14-15		Age 16-22	
	%[a]	n	%[a]	n	%[a]	n
Youth participation						
Attended IEP/transition planning meeting	79.2	4,330	76.0	1,860	82.6	2,470
Invited to IEP/transition planning meeting	91.5	2,740	88.8	530	92.5	2,210
Met with school staff to develop a transition plan	69.3***	2,210	63.6*	440	71.6*	1,770
Parent participation						
Attended IEP/transition planning meeting	92.3	5,770	94.4	2,560	90.1	3,210
Invited to IEP/transition planning meeting	90.0	2,800	90.1	570	90.0	2,230
Met with school staff to develop a transition plan	57.4**	2,710	52.6*	550	59.5*	2,150
Youth role in IEP/transition planning meeting (Youth report)						
Participated little or not at all	30.1	920	31.5	360	29.0	570
Provided some input	46.2	1,290	47.6	500	45.1	790
Took leadership role	23.7	650	20.9	220	25.9	440
Youth role in IEP/ transition planning meeting (parent report)						
Participated little or not at all	40.4	1,980	41.0	450	40.2	1,530
Provided some input	44.5	1,730	43.9	430	44.8	1,300
Took leadership role	15.1	540	15.1	130	15.1	420
Youth's Contribution in coming up with goals						
A little	60.5	2,750	60.4	660	60.6	2,090
Some	31.5	1,300	34.1	310	30.3	990
Mostly Youth	8.0	310	5.5	60	9.1	260

Note. $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$[a] The valid percentages were calculated based on valid responses, so the missing responses were excluded from the percentage calculation. The weighted missing rate among all the variables ranged 1.09% -56.83%.

DISCUSSION

Youth and Parent Participation in IEP/Transition Planning Meetings

Across the three age groupings (ages 14-22, 14-15, and 16-22), a majority of youth reported being invited to an IEP/transition planning meeting. It appears that the IDEA 2004 requirement that a youth be invited to the IEP/transition planning meeting is being followed by states in the U.S. Fewer youth, one in five, reported not attending an IEP meeting, and approximately 30% reported not having met with school staff to set goals related to their transition plan.

An important finding of this study is the significant number of youth ages 14-15 who reported attending an IEP/transition planning meeting. Approximately, four in 10 of the sample of 14-22 year olds were 14-15 years old. This suggests that several states included in the NLTS 2012 sample have either continued to retain the younger age requirement of 14 from the IDEA 1997 requirements or place a high value on early planning and intervention. Other countries may want to examine their own requirements for involvement of students with disabilities in transition planning and determine whether planning at earlier ages might be beneficial. Ravenscroft et al. (2017), for example, in their study of transition processes across eight European Union (EU) member countries advocated that a transition plan for a student should be done early so as to allow for decisions and adaptations to be made prior to the time of exiting school.

We examined the role youth played in IEP/transition planning meetings. Of those youth who attended the IEP/transition planning meeting, approximately 70% provided some input or took a leadership role. Three out of 10 of these young people, however, participated little or not at all during the meeting. It has been well documented that even when youth are extended an opportunity to attend the IEP/transition planning meeting, they do not receive instruction regarding the meeting purposes and procedures and have little or no preparation on the role they can potentially play in expressing strengths, needs, interests, and preferences (Hasazi et al., 1999; Martin et al., 2006). A growing

Table 3
Comparing Youth Participation across Time: Youth Who Met with School Staff to Develop a Transition Plan (ages 15-19)

	NLTS 2		NLTS 2012		
Disability Group	%	n	%	n	χ^2
Total youth with IEP	78.7	4,710	70.9	2,970	7.3**
Disability group					
Autism	70.1	320	59.4	320	3.1
Deaf-blindness	82.2	30	71.5	40	0.8
Emotional disturbance	73.5	90	69.1	370	1.0
Hearing impairment	82.5	80	70.7	180	3.7
Intellectual disability	78.2	160	69.1	440	3.5
Multiple disabilities	71.7	270	55.2	340	6.7*
Orthopedic impairment	84.9	130	65.3	140	13.1***
Other health impairment	76.6	120	72.9	360	0.6
Specific learning disability	80.1	80	74.4	450	2.0
Speech or language impairment	75.6	100	67.1	160	1.5
Traumatic brain injury	78.4	60	60.9	100	6.1*
Visual impairment	82.5	110	74.7	90	1.4

Note. * $p<.05$. ** $p<.01$, *** $p<.001$. We used L2 from NLTS2012 and np2R7_E2d from NLTS2 for this table. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) and National Longitudinal Transition Study 2012 (NLTS 2012).The weighted missing rate for NLTS 2 data was 39.82% and 19.15%for NLTS 2012 data

body of research indicates that youth learn the skills necessary to be effectively involved in their IEP/transition planning meetings when they are taught self-determination and effective leadership skills, are provided an opportunity to participate, and when adult team members expect youth participation to occur (Martin et al., 2006; Shogren & Plotner, 2012). Research also suggests that youth develop their self-determination skills through direct instruction and coaching, and greater involvement in transition planning (Martin et al., 2006; Wehmeyer et al., 1998). The current process in the U.S. of preparing youth for an active role during the IEP/transition planning meeting raises concerns. Martin et al. (2004) comment that "It is naïve to presume that youth attending their IEP/transition planning meeting will learn how to actively participate and lead this process through serendipity – yet this is precisely what current practice tends to expect" (p. 4). Concern over the lack of student's active and self-determined involvement in the transition planning process is globally acknowledged by researchers and professionals (Ashton-Hay, 2016; Ravenscroft et al., 2017; Strnadova & Cumming, 2014; World Health Organization, 2011).

We found that a majority of parents were both invited to, and attended, the IEP/transition planning meeting. Significantly fewer parents, four out of 10, reported not having met with school staff to develop goals related to their child's transition plan. Parents also reported that the role the child played in the meeting was somewhat less than the role youth reported as having in the meeting. Several barriers to parent involvement have included teacher and administrator attitudes conveyed as parents lack knowledge of the process and are ill-equipped to make a contribution to the planning, making parents feel isolated, mistrustful, and not part of the transition team; being treated differently because of their race or ethnicity and feeling that the transition planning process was more focused on the document, the IEP, than their child and the child's goals (Landmark et al., 2007; Wagner et al., 2012). Geenen et al. (2003) noted that appreciation of the family context with acknowledgment of parent knowledge of their children, coupled with parent advocacy training in order to maximize parents' knowledge of both the system and their rights was particularly important in facilitating parent engagement in the transition planning process.

IEP/Transition Planning Participation across Time

NLTS 2012 found an overall decline across the 12 disability categories in the percentage of youth who met with school staff to develop an IEP/transition plan from the earlier NLTS2 study findings. Significant declines were noted for youth with multiple disabilities (NLTS2, 71.7%; NLTS-2012, 55.6%), orthopedic impairment (NLTS2, 84.9%; NLTS-2012, 65.6%), and traumatic brain injury (NLTS2, 78.4%; NLTS 2012, 60.2%). The declining participation in transition planning might be somewhat

Table 4
Logistic Regression Results for Parents and Youth Meeting with Teachers and Youth's Role in the IEP/Transition Planning Meeting by Disability Category.

	Parents met with teachers to set goals		Youth met with teachers to set goals		Parent perception of youth's role		Youth perception of their role	
Disability categories	OR	95%CI	OR	95%CI	OR	95%CI	OR	95%CI
SLD[a] (reference group)								
Autism	1.35	(0.88; 2.06)	0.62*	(0.41; 0.95)	0.46***	(0.31; 0.68)	0.60*	(0.38; 0.96)
Deaf-blindness	0.87	(0.27; 2.80)	3.05	(0.91; 10.22)	0.92	(0.19; 4.47)	1.08	(0.22; 5.18)
Emotional disturbance	1.06	(0.71; 1.57)	1.00	(0.65; 1.53)	1.05	(0.67; 1.65)	1.19	(0.78; 1.80)
Hearing impairment	1.38	(0.81; 2.37)	0.96	(0.54; 1.73)	1.25	(0.76; 2.08)	1.11	(0.61; 2.01)
Intellectual disability	1.29	(0.86; 1.92)	0.81	(0.52; 1.26)	0.59**	(0.40; 0.86)	0.90	(0.59; 1.38)
Multiple disabilities	1.12	(0.73; 1.73)	0.51**	(0.31; 0.84)	0.36***	(0.22; 0.60)	0.82	(0.48; 1.39)
Orthopedic impairment	0.72	(0.40; 1.32)	0.57	(0.32; 1.01)	0.95	(0.57; 1.59)	1.19	(0.66; 2.17)
Other health impairment	0.94	(0.65; 1.37)	0.93	(0.63; 1.39)	0.75	(0.51; 1.10)	1.21	(0.81; 1.79)
Speech or language impairment	0.68	(0.40; 1.16)	0.79	(0.42; 1.51)	0.60	(0.35; 1.05)	1.04	(0.65; 1.68)
Traumatic brain injury	1.72	(0.78; 3.82)	0.89	(0.45; 1.76)	1.66	(0.86; 3.22)	0.84	(0.43; 1.66)
Visual impairment	1.30	(0.68; 2.50)	1.12	(0.54; 2.34)	1.29	(0.62; 2.68)	1.44	(0.65; 3.18)
Weighted Missing rate	55.9%		62.0%		57.2%		62.5%	

Note. All models controlled for child factors (age, gender, race, English language status, free-reduced lunch status, level of functioning), family factor (household income, parental education levels, parent expectation of youth's future education, parental involvement), and student behavior (held back a grade, suspension, and expulsion). OR= odds ratio, CI = confidence interval, a = specific learning disability. $^{*}p < .05$. $^{**}p < .01$. $^{***}p < .001$.

influenced by the policy change that occurred in the 2004 IDEA Amendments that delayed the age when youth must start the planning process, from 14 to 16 years of age. For this analysis, we set the age at 15-19 for the purpose of making a direct comparison between NLTS2 and NLTS 2012. Therefore, the NLTS 2012 data may be somewhat lower because of the change in the time-frame between becoming involved in the IEP/transition planning process and meeting with school staff to discuss transition plans. This may also be affected by the way in which NLTS2 and NLTS 2012 data were collected. NLTS2 provided parents with two opportunities to report whether they ever attended a transition planning meeting, while the NLTS 2012 provided only opportunity for them to do so. When we examined the 2001 and 2003 responses of parents surveyed through this item, we found a similar pattern regarding the percentage of parents reporting favorably on this item. However, even using 2003 data alone, and comparing them to NLTS 2012, statistically significant differences were found. Regardless of what factors may account for this decrease in youth participation, it should be acknowledged as a national concern. It also suggests that this is an important measure for other countries to examine as they address the inclusion of students with disabilities in their education systems (Humanity & Inclusion, 2020)

Youth and Parent Transition Planning Participation

In conducting the logistic regression analyses, we were interested in examining the relationship between disability category and IEP/transition planning participation, controlling for several key independent variables (see Table 4). Based on this analysis, youth with autism fared less well in terms of meeting with adults at school to set goals for transition and taking an active role during the transition planning meeting. Compared to youth with specific learning disabilities (reference group), the odds for youth with autism of meeting with school staff to set transition goals and to take an active role in their IEP/transition planning meeting were far less. These findings point to potential gaps in both the manner in which youth were engaged by school staff in setting goals and planning and in being prepared to be active participants during the meeting. This analysis does not draw conclusions as to what specific factors influenced these findings because our purpose was to examine the relative influence of factors across all disability groups. What this analysis points to is the need to conduct future research specifically for youth with autism in relation to factors similar to those controlled for in this analysis, that influence the IEP/transition planning participation of youth with autism. Significant findings were also noted for two additional disability

categories: intellectual disability and multiple disabilities. Further research on factors that influence their IEP/transition planning participation is also warranted. Obtaining data from other countries on factors associated with the transition planning participation of students with more significant support needs creates an opportunity to collectively share information on effective strategies and interventions for involving these students in the planning process.

CONCLUSION

The intent and requirements of U.S. special education legislation calls for parents and youth with disabilities, no later than age 16, to fully participate in the IEP/transition planning process as a means to ensure their preferences and goals for the future are fully addressed. It is evident from the findings that a majority of parents and youth are being invited to and attend IEP/transition planning meetings. IDEA 2004 regulations require only that parents and youth be notified of and invited to the IEP/transition planning meeting. The regulations do not require, nor is there any clarity or stated expectation on the role that youth should play during the planning process. It is important, however, that both the youth and their parent be actively involved throughout the entire IEP/transition planning process. This is a critical area of development that needs further attention in the U.S., and likely also in other countries.

Research and demonstration efforts, to date, have offered several interventions and strategies that can equip youth with the knowledge and skills to assume an active role in the planning process. We know, for example, that the development of self-determination skills promotes active participation, decision-making, goal-setting, and leadership skills (e.g., Shogren et al., 2007; Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2003). Research on the effectiveness of youth-directed transition planning has also come to the forefront (e.g., Martin et al., 2006; Wehmeyer et al., 1998). Strategies have also been developed to support parents in working with their child to develop life-goals for their child's future (e.g., Field et al., 1998).

A concern raised by our findings is that the U.S. appears to be falling behind in providing youth with disabilities the opportunity to engage with school staff in the development of transition plans. The comparison between NLTS2 and NLTS 2012 (see Table 3) illustrates this decline, occurring over a period of a little more than a decade. These findings raise questions about whether schools are doing enough to engage youth with disabilities in the development of meaningful and measurable transition goals. There are, no doubt, several reasons why this has occurred. However, this finding provides an opportunity to consider important forward steps that need to be taken to ensure that youth with disabilities fully engage with school staff, as well as their parents, in the development of their transition plans. With only the existing IDEA requirements in place in the U.S., the concern is that too many schools are apparently only inviting youth to the process, resulting in nothing more than token involvement in the planning process. Implications for the U.S. and other countries are clear – specific processes and procedures should be implemented to ensure that students with disabilities are prepared to fully participate in transition planning meetings and make the transition from school to adult life.

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