

NLTS2 Data Brief

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Youth Employment

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Youth employment is the norm in American society. Approximately 80% of youth report holding jobs during their high school years (National Research Council, 1998). Entry into the labor market often begins early, with about half of youth ages 12 and 13 reporting that they work (Rothstein & Herz, 2000). Although statistics are gathered regularly about youth employment in the general population, comparatively little was known about employment patterns of youth with disabilities until the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) collected data from 1987 to 1990.¹ The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)² began updating and expanding data on youth with disabilities in 2001, including information on employment. Information reported here comes from telephone interviews and a mail survey conducted in 2001 with parents and guardians of youth with disabilities, and from comparisons made with 1987 NLTS employment data. Findings from NLTS2 are generalizable to youth with disabilities nationally who were 13 to 16 years old in December of 2000, and to each of 12 federal disability categories and to each age group (e.g., all 13-year-old students with disabilities, all 14-year-old students with disabilities, etc.). According to parents' reports, almost 60% of youth with disabilities are employed during a 1-year period—some at work-study jobs, but the vast majority at non-school-related jobs.

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¹ Information from NLTS and employment data comparing youth with disabilities in 1987 and 2001 were first reported in *Youth with disabilities: A changing population* (Wagner, Cameto, & Newman, 2003).

² NLTS2 has a nationally representative sample of more than 11,000 youth who on December 1, 2000 were ages 13 through 16, receiving special education, and in at least 7th grade. Information from NLTS2 is weighted to represent youth with disabilities nationally as a group, as well as youth in each of 12 federal special education disability categories. The information reported here was gathered from parents/guardians of NLTS2 youth in telephone interviews or through mail questionnaires in the summer and fall of 2001.



National Center on Secondary
Education and Transition
Creating Opportunities for Youth With
Disabilities to Achieve Successful Futures



NATIONAL LONGITUDINAL
TRANSITION STUDY 2



NLTS2 is being
conducted by SRI International

Work-Study Employment

Work-study employment involves part-time work for students, on or off the school campus, that is sanctioned by the school. Through work-study, students learn basic as well as job-specific skills, and may receive school credit, pay, or both. Approximately 15% of youth with disabilities hold work-study jobs in a given year, which represents a six percentage point increase since 1987. Increases of 14 to 18 percentage points were significant for youth with mental retardation, emotional disturbances, or multiple disabilities.

The most common work-study placements are at food service (19%), maintenance (16%), and clerical (15%) jobs (Exhibit 1). More than 90% of youth in work-study jobs receive school credit and/or pay for their work. Students typically receive school credit (48%) or both pay and credit (28%), with 15% receiving pay only. Older youth are more likely than younger youth to have work-study jobs. Work-study employment rates are approximately 10% for youth 15 years of age or younger, 15% for 16-year-olds, and 19% for 17-year-olds.

The percentage of youth with work-study jobs varies for youth in different disability categories. Youth with speech impairments or learning disabilities are the least likely to have work-study jobs (7% and 10%, respectively). In contrast, approximately 30% of youth with mental retardation, autism, multiple disabilities, or deaf-blindness hold work-study jobs.

Regular Paid Employment

According to parents, 54% of youth with disabilities are employed in regular paid jobs (other than work-study) in a 1-year period. This percentage is greater than the 50% of same-age youth in the general population who were employed in 1998 (i.e., the most recent year with comparable data),³ and an improvement of nine percentage points for youth with disabilities since 1987. One-third of youth with disabilities work during both the summer and the school year, with fewer (15%) working only during the summer and still fewer

Exhibit 1. Most Common Types of Jobs Held by Working Youth With Disabilities

	Percentage	
	Work-Study	Regular
Maintenance*	16	24
Personal care	9	19
Food service	19	16
Trades**	9	8
Retail***	8	6
Clerical****	15	6

* Includes cleaning and groundskeeping.

** Includes auto repair and apprenticeship at skilled trades.

*** Includes sales and cashiering.

**** Includes office work; sorting, folding, and stuffing; and stocking.

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews.

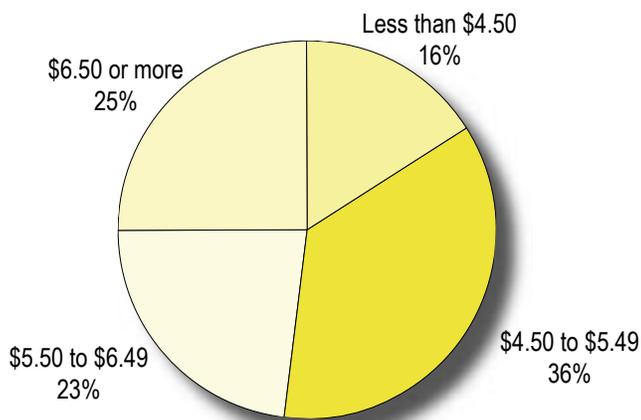
(4%) working only during the school year. Their employment status varies during a 1-year period, however; only 22% are employed at a given point in time. The most common regular jobs held by youth are in maintenance (24%), personal care (19%), and food service (16%; Exhibit 1).

Hours worked differ between summer and school-year jobs. During the school year, only 20% of youth work more than 16 hours, with many more (50%) working eight or fewer hours per week. During the summer, youth work more hours, with about half working more than 16 hours per week.

Hourly wages of \$4.50 to \$6.49 are reported for about 60% of youth with disabilities (Exhibit 2). One-fourth earn \$6.50 or more, and one-sixth earn less than \$4.50. Compared with youth in the

³ Calculated from data for 13- to 17-year-olds from the 1998 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Exhibit 2. Hourly Pay of Youth With Disabilities



Percentage of youth with a regular job

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews

general population, youth with disabilities are less likely to have earnings in the highest and lowest categories and more likely to be earning \$4.50 to \$6.49.⁴

Disability Differences in Employment

Employment rates vary considerably across disability categories. Youth with learning disabilities, emotional disturbances, other health impairments, or speech impairments are the most likely to be employed in a 1-year period (50% to 60%), with their rates of employment equaling or exceeding that of the general population of youth (50%).⁵ In contrast, 15% of youth with autism, approximately one-fourth of youth with multiple disabilities, deaf-blindness, or orthopedic impairments, and about one-third of youth with mental retardation or visual impairments are employed in a 1-year period. Increases in overall employment rates from 1987 to 2001 range from 4 to 17 percentage points across disability groups, including significant increases for youth with learning disabilities or with speech, orthopedic, or other health impairments (10 to 17 points).

Demographic Differences in Employment

Age. The relationship of age to employment follows a similar pattern for youth with disabilities and youth in the general population, with employ-

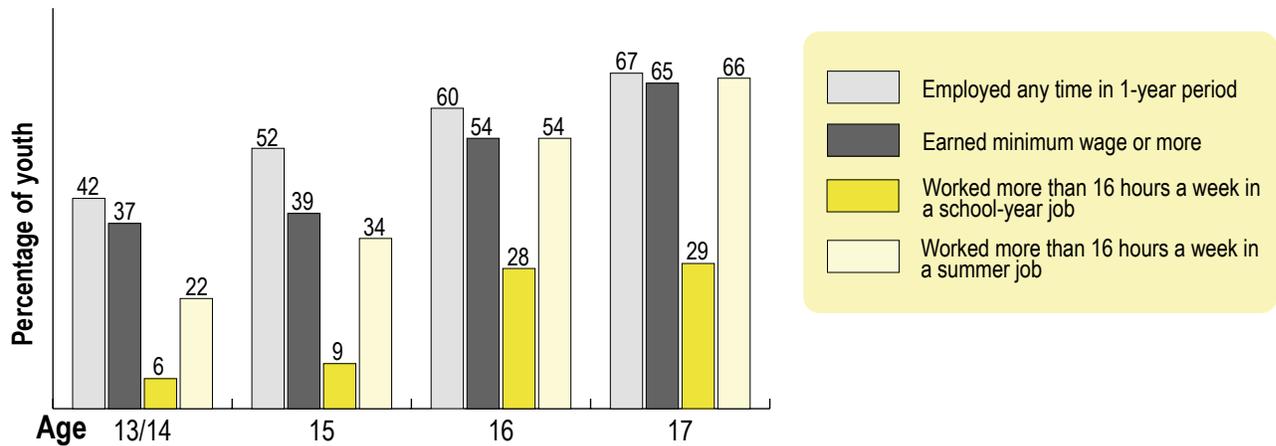
ment rates, hours worked, and hourly pay being higher and the types of jobs held being different for older youth. Among 13- and 14-year-olds, 42% work during a 1-year period. The employment rate is 67% among 17-year-olds, a 25 percentage point difference. This pattern is found for youth who work both in the summer and during the school year rather than one or the other. Higher employment rates are associated with older youth (Exhibit 3), a pattern found in every disability category. However, youth with learning disabilities experience the greatest overall difference and youth with traumatic brain injuries, multiple disabilities, or deaf-blindness the least.

The relationship of age to employment follows a similar pattern for youth with disabilities and youth in the general population, with employment rates, hours worked, and hourly pay being higher and the types of jobs held being different for older youth.

The types of jobs youth hold change as youth grow older, most noticeably between the ages of 15 and 16. Younger teens are more likely to hold jobs in maintenance and personal care, often informal jobs such as gardening and baby-sitting. Older youth are more likely than younger teens to have food service jobs; for example, 11% of 15-year-olds hold food service jobs, compared with

⁴ Earnings for youth in the general population were calculated from data for 13- to 17-year-olds from the National Adolescent Health Survey. Two differences should be noted. First, in the National Adolescent Health Survey, hourly earnings were reported by youth, rather than by their parents (see Rothstein & Herz, 2000, regarding the effects of differences in respondent regarding youth employment). Second, the time periods differ; NLTS2 data were collected in 2001, and the National Adolescent Health Survey was conducted in 1996. The minimum wage was \$4.25 per hour at the time of data collection for NAHS, and \$5.15 at the time of NLTS2.

⁵ Calculated from data for 13- to 17-year-olds from the 1998 National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics).

Exhibit 3. Employment Experiences of Youth With Disabilities, By Age

Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews

22% of 16-year-olds. Retail and clerical jobs also are more typical for older youth.

The number of hours worked per week in summer jobs is higher with each year of age. Only about one-fourth of 13- and 14-year-olds work more than 16 hours per week; however, more than 66% of 17-year-olds do.

Although the percentage of youth who work during the school year is smaller than those who work in the summer at all ages, the hours worked at school-year jobs is higher for older youth. Among 13- and 14-year-olds, few (6%) work more than 16 hours, compared with 29% of 17-year-olds.

Younger teens are more likely to receive lower wages than older youth. Youth 13 to 15 years old are more likely to be paid less than \$5.50 per hour, whereas 16-year-olds are more likely to be paid \$5.50 or more.

Gender. In the general population, boys and girls have similar employment rates (Rothstein & Herz, 2000). Employment rates of youth with disabilities follow similar patterns. Compared with 1987, girls' employment rates have increased, narrowing the gender gap from 12 percentage points in 1987 to five percentage points in 2001.

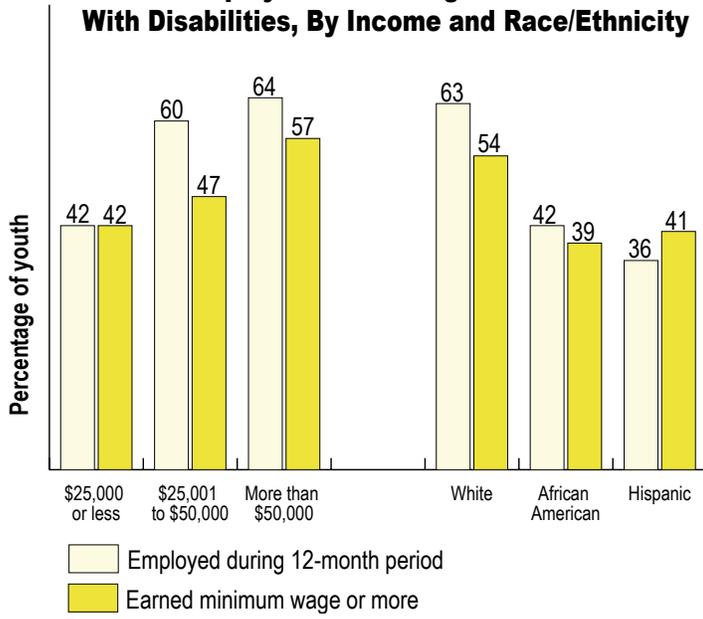
Maintenance jobs are the most common type of job for boys, accounting for about one-third of their employment. In contrast, personal care jobs are the most common for girls, accounting for

almost half of their employment. The wage differences between boys and girls are most clearly seen at the high and low ends of the earning spectrum. Twice as many girls (23%) as boys (11%) earn less than \$4.50 per hour, and twice as many boys (31%) as girls (16%) earn \$6.50 or more. Boys also are more likely than girls to work more hours.

Household Income. In the general population, youth from families with higher incomes have higher rates of employment and higher wages (Herz & Kosanovich, 2000; Johnson & Lino, 2000). Youth with disabilities from families with higher incomes, like their peers in the general population, have a higher rate of employment and earn higher wages. The employment rate for youth with disabilities from families with incomes of more than \$25,000 is approximately 20 percentage points higher than that of youth from lower-income families (60% for middle-income and 64% for higher-income vs. 42% for low-income; Exhibit 4). Gains in rates of employment between 1987 and 2001 are seen only for youth from middle-income families (\$25,001 to \$50,000).

When working, youth from low-income families are more likely to earn lower wages than youth from high-income families (44% vs. 29% for \$4.50 to \$5.49 per hour). Additionally, youth from low-income families are less likely to earn higher wages than youth from high-income families (13% vs. 36% for \$6.50 or more per hour).

Exhibit 4. Employment and Wage Levels of Youth With Disabilities, By Income and Race/Ethnicity



Source: NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews

Race/Ethnicity. Race/ethnicity is associated with the likelihood of employment for both youth in the general population (Gardecki, 2001) and youth with disabilities. Despite significant gains since 1987 for African American and Hispanic youth with disabilities, overall and relative to white youth, employment rates continue to be higher for white youth (62%) than for African American (42%) or Hispanic youth (36%). When employed, African American youth are more likely to earn lower wages than white youth (52% vs.

Despite significant gains since 1987 for African American and Hispanic youth with disabilities, overall and relative to white youth, employment rates continue to be higher for white youth.

32% for \$4.50 to \$5.49 per hour) and less likely to earn higher wages than white youth (13% vs. 36% for \$6.50 or more per hour).

Conclusion

Holding a job is an important marker for youth as they begin to take on adult roles and responsibilities. The patterns of regular paid employment for most youth with disabilities (those with learning disabilities; emotional disturbances; or speech, hearing, or other health impairments) have improved from 1987 to 2001 to the extent that they have become similar to those of youth in the general population. Improvements in the rates of school-sponsored work-study jobs for youth in other disability categories (those with mental retardation, emotional disturbances, or multiple disabilities) have given more of these youth opportunities to experience the maturational benefits of employment.

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For More Information

For more information on the subject of this *NLTS2 Data Brief*, see Wagner, M., Cadwallader, T. W., & Marder, C. (with Cameto, R., Cardoso, D., Garza, N., Levine, P., & Newman, L.). (2003). *Life outside the classroom for youth with disabilities*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International, available on the Web site: www.nlts2.org.

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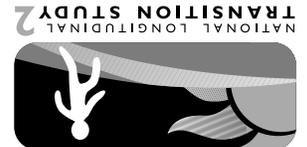
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