

Summer Employment and Community Experiences of Transition-Age Youth With Severe Disabilities

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ABSTRACT: *Although early work experiences during high school represent one of the most consistent predictors of postschool employment for young adults with disabilities, little is known about how these adolescents might access these valuable transition experiences. This study examined the summer employment and community activities of 136 high school students with severe disabilities. The majority of youth was either not working (61.7%) or reported sheltered employment (11.1%). The most prominent predictors of summer employment status were holding a job during the spring semester and teacher expectations for employment. Recommendations for research and practice focus on increasing the capacity of schools, families, and communities to support the involvement of youth with severe disabilities in meaningful summer activities.*

Preparation for the world of work has long been a central focus of transition education. Since the emergence of transition initiatives in the 1980s (Halpern, 1985; Will, 1984), the inception and expansion of legislative transition mandates in the 1990s (via Individuals With Disabilities Education Act 1990, 1997), and the recent policy emphases focused on increased accountability for improving postschool outcomes in the 2000s (Bassett & Kochhar-Bryant, 2006), schools have been called upon to better equip youth with disabilities with the skills, opportunities, and link-

ages needed to assume meaningful careers. The Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) clearly articulates this commitment to students with disabilities by stating that an overarching purpose of special education is to “prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living” as one component of a national policy aimed at “ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities” (20 U.S.C. § 1400 (33)(c)(1)).

This heightened emphasis on employment preparation has been driven by at least three fac-

tors. First, the pervasiveness and persistence of disappointing postschool employment outcomes for young adults with disabilities has prompted ongoing concerns about the availability, relevance, and efficacy of secondary transition services (e.g., Blackorby & Wagner, 1996; Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985). For individuals with severe disabilities—who are more likely than any other disability group to encounter unemployment, underemployment, and segregated jobs after exiting high school—these concerns are especially salient (e.g., Heal & Rusch, 1995; Rusch & Braddock, 2004). For example, the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) found that only 24.8% of young adults with cognitive disabilities, 31.5% of young adults with autism, and 32.4% of young adults with multiple disabilities were employed 2 years after exiting high school (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Garza, & Levine, 2005). Second, obtaining work experiences during high school is among the most prominent and well-documented predictors of favorable post-school employment outcomes in the transition literature (e.g., Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Benz, Yovanoff, & Doren, 1997). Third, working during high school can make sizeable contributions to positive adolescent development by enhancing students' autonomy; influencing their vocational identity; shaping their career awareness and aspirations; developing their workplace values, skills, and knowledge; and promoting collateral skill development (Vondracek & Porfeli, 2003). Collectively, these research findings present a significant challenge to schools, highlighting the necessity of thoughtfully and deliberately addressing the individualized, employment-related strengths and needs of youth with severe disabilities within transition education.

Although research on transition services typically has focused on programming delivered during the school year, the summer months may offer an especially propitious time for youth with severe disabilities to gain work-related experiences that could further their transition-related goals and equip them for their future careers (Hughes et al., 2004; Trainor, Carter, Owens, & Swedeen, 2008). The availability of jobs for youth typically spikes during the summer months, as evidenced by contemporary data suggesting that between 35% and 58% of youth without disabilities are working at

any given point during the summer (Sum, McLaughlin, Khatiwada, & Palma, 2008; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). Summer work experiences also avoid potential drawbacks associated with working during the school year, including interference with study time, extracurricular involvement, peer interactions, and access to the general curriculum (e.g., Singh, Chang, & Dika, 2007). For youth who may experience substantial skill loss during the 3-month hiatus from school, summer work experiences may help circumvent vocational, social, and functional skill regression. Finally, youth with severe disabilities who are meaningfully engaged in the summers between the ages of 14 and 22 could gain a combined total of 1 to 2 years of additional opportunities to further develop their employment, self-determination, social, and recreational skills, as well as establish relationships in the community.

Unfortunately, little is known about the summer employment experiences of youth with severe disabilities. During Wave 1 of the NLTS-2, parents were asked whether or not their children with disabilities worked at all during the previous summer and, if so, approximately how many hours. Only 31.6% of youth with cognitive disabilities, 10.9% of youth with autism, and 18.6% of youth with multiple disabilities were reported to have worked during the summer of 2000; approximately two thirds of these youth worked less than 16 hr per week (Wagner, Cadwallader, & Marder, 2003). Although this retrospective snapshot of summer job status provides insight into whether youth have work experiences outside the school year, additional data are needed to elucidate the types and characteristics of jobs held by youth with severe disabilities, as well as the supports received to find and maintain these jobs. Such information—when coupled with reports of barriers to summer employment experienced by youth and their families—would provide important insight into how schools, employers, and families might collectively expand summer learning opportunities for these youth.

At the same time, research is needed that sheds light on the various factors that contribute to why some youth with severe disabilities are working summer jobs in their communities and others are not. Prior research exploring the employment experiences of youth and young adults

served under a broad range of disability categories suggests three sets of factors that may be especially salient in relation to summer work outcomes. First, demographic variables such as age, gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and community type (e.g., urban, suburban, rural) have each been identified as significant predictors of youth employment (e.g., Doren & Benz, 1998; Fabian, 2007; Heal & Rusch, 1995; Wagner et al., 2005; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Marder, 2003). In general, youth with disabilities who are younger, female, racial/ethnic minorities, living in poverty, and/or living in rural areas tend to fare more poorly on employment-related outcomes.

Second, an essential element of quality transition education involves equipping youth with skills that expand their career opportunities and improve the likelihood of success on the job. Although our knowledge base is not yet sufficiently developed enough to directly link acquisition of discrete skills to specific postschool outcomes, research has called attention to the potential influence various skills might have on the likelihood that youth will find and maintain employment. For example, social skills have long been cited as having a prominent influence on both job retention and social integration (Benz et al., 1997; Carter & Wehby, 2003). Similarly, in their follow-up study, Wehmeyer and Schwartz (1997) found that young adults with disabilities who scored higher on self-determination assessments as youth were more likely to be employed and earn more per hour after high school. In addition, youth demonstrating greater skills and knowledge related to identifying job opportunities, interviewing, and work performance are expected to more readily obtain employment (Hughes et al., 2004).

Third, factors external to the demographics and skill sets of youth also are likely to shape their employment experiences. A range of career assessment, planning, and exploration activities have been advocated as recommended programmatic efforts to increase the broad employability of youth throughout their schooling (Carter, Trainor, Cakiroglu, Swedeen, & Owens, in press; National Alliance for Secondary Education and Transition, 2005). Moreover, hands-on, direct work experiences during the school year—whether paid or unpaid—can help youth build their resumes, make connections with local em-

ployers, raise expectations for future employment, and, potentially, carry over into the summer months (Wagner et al., 2005). Finally, the work-related expectations that teachers hold for their students with disabilities can influence the opportunities, instruction, and supports youth receive, as well as determine which transition goals actually receive attention (Carter, Trainor, Sun, & Owens, 2009).

At the same time, a variety of other non-work-related summer experiences might further the transition goals of youth by enabling them to explore or deepen their interests, preferences, and strengths. Indeed, Vondracek and Porfeli (2003) note that career exploration often “occurs informally, and includes avocational activities such as hobbies and leisure pursuits” (p. 111). Studies addressing the extracurricular and community involvement of high school students with severe disabilities, however, suggest that such participation is particularly limited during the school year (Kleinert, Miracle, & Sheppard-Jones, 2007; Wagner, Cadwallader, et al., 2003). Additional research is needed to identify avenues beyond employment through which youth with severe disabilities might be engaged in their communities during the summer, as well as whether such activities come in lieu of or in addition to work experiences.

This study examined the summer employment and community participation experiences and outcomes of youth with severe disabilities. Specifically, we sought to answer the following research questions: What are the summer employment experiences of youth with severe disabilities? What barriers do these youth and their families encounter? What student and programmatic factors are associated with the summer employment status of youth with severe disabilities? To what extent are these youth involved in other community experiences (apart from work) during the summer months?

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

We examined the summer employment and community participation experiences of 136 youth with severe disabilities. To be included in this

study, students had to (a) be receiving special education services under a primary or secondary disability category of cognitive disability, autism, or multiple disabilities; (b) be eligible for the state's alternate assessment; and (c) provide assent and parental consent to participate. Because no consensus definition of *severe disabilities* has yet emerged in the research literature, we relied upon eligibility for alternate assessment as an inclusion criterion (i.e., students who were considered by their schools to be unable to participate in statewide assessments even with substantial accommodations). More than half of all students with disabilities eligible for the alternate assessment in the state were male (62.4%); 70.1% were European American, 16.6% were African American, and 12.7% were other races/ethnicities.

Youth participating in our study ranged in age from 13.9 to 21.8 ($M = 18.2$; $SD = 1.8$), and slightly more than half were male (52.9%). The majority (85.3%) was European American, 11.8% were African American, and 2.9% reported other races/ethnicities (i.e., Asian American, American Indian). Twenty-six students (19.1%) were in 9th grade, 18 (13.2%) were in 10th grade, 36 (26.5%) were in 11th grade, 37 (27.2%) were in 12th grade, and 19 (14.0%) received services in 18 to 21 programs. More than one quarter (28.7%) of students were eligible for free/reduced lunch (FRL). Most youth were reported to be served under the primary disability category of cognitive disabilities (85.3%), followed by autism (10.3%) and orthopedic impairments (4.4%); 61.0% were reported to have one or more secondary disabilities.

SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES

The students in this study attended 29 different high schools participating in a broader project addressing employment and community participation outcomes of transition-age youth with disabilities conducted in a Midwestern state. To recruit a sample of high schools serving economically, geographically, and ethnically diverse communities, we extended invitations to schools throughout the state using both broad announcements through the state transition listserv and at a state transition conference, as well as more targeted invitations to specific schools and districts.

However, we did not select schools on the basis of the quality of transition programming or local economic conditions. The demographics of these schools closely mirrored those of high schools throughout the state on the variables of gender, race/ethnicity, and FRL status, but not total school enrollment. Average student enrollment at these high schools was 1,339 ($SD = 650$; range, 135–2,386), somewhat higher than the state average ($M = 641$). Across schools, race/ethnicity of the student population ranged from 4.0% to 98.3% European American ($M = 78.7\%$), 0.6% to 22.2% Latino ($M = 6.0\%$), 0.3% to 89.7% African American ($M = 10.6\%$), 0% to 13.3% Asian American ($M = 3.8\%$), and 0% to 5.3% American Indian ($M = 0.9\%$). The percentage of students eligible for FRL averaged 24.7% (range, 1.2%–80.6%). Participating schools served geographically diverse communities; 31.0% were rural, 34.5% were suburban, and 34.5% were urban. Monthly unemployment rates for all working-age adults in this state ranged from 5.0% to 5.3% during June, July, and August 2007, relative to overall national unemployment rates ranging from 4.5% to 4.6%.

SUMMER EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOME MEASURES

We conducted structured telephone interviews to gather information about the employment and community experiences of participating youth at two time points during the summer—beginning mid-June and again beginning early August. Responses from either family members (e.g., parents, guardians, siblings, residential staff) and/or the youth themselves were used to profile the summer employment and community experiences of participating youth. We compiled and adapted items for this interview protocol by drawing upon instruments used in descriptive and longitudinal studies involving youth with and without disabilities (e.g., Hughes et al., 2004; *National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988*, U.S. Department of Education; NLTS-2, U.S. Department of Education; U.S. Department of Labor's *National Longitudinal Survey of Youth of 1997*).

Employment Status. We asked whether youth were currently working at the time of the telephone interview. Work status was coded as (a) not

working; (b) sheltered, paid work experience (i.e., working within a congregate work program for piece-rate or subminimum wage); (c) unpaid work experience (i.e., working in a community setting); or (d) competitive, paid work experience (i.e., working in a community setting at competitive wages). For youth working in any type of job (i.e., b–d), we asked a series of questions to obtain information about job responsibilities (coded into one or more of 24 job categories, including assembly, animal care, babysitting, cashier, cleaning); hours worked per week; typical work schedule; hourly pay; length of employment; person(s) helping youth find the job; provision of school or agency support (i.e., periodic checks by staff on youth's employment experiences); and transportation modes. Table 1 in the Results section provides example response options; the structured interview protocol is available from the corresponding author. If youth were not working, we asked whether they were interested in finding summer employment. If the answer was yes, we asked respondents (a) how long youth had been seeking employment, (b) what steps youth had taken to search for a job, (c) who helped youth with job searches, (d) and what perceived barriers to finding a job existed. If the answer was no, we asked respondents to share why youth were not looking for summer employment.

Community Activities. To gauge participation in other community activities, we also asked whether youth were involved in each of 24 non-work-related activities (see Figure 1 in the Results section) during the previous 2 weeks. If respondents mentioned additional activities that could not be subsumed under an existing category, we tallied it as "other activity."

Evaluative Questions. During the second telephone interview (in August), we asked respondents to rate their overall satisfaction using a 4-point Likert-type scale (i.e., very satisfied, somewhat satisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, very dissatisfied) with how they (their child) spent the summer. In addition, we asked respondents to rate using a 4-point Likert-type scale (i.e., a lot, somewhat, a little, not at all) the extent to which they felt their (their child's) summer activities helped them (their child) to make progress toward the youth's goals for the future.

PREDICTOR MEASURES

In addition to student demographic variables (age, gender, race/ethnicity, FRL status, and geographic location using U.S. Census locale codes for the high schools), we collected the following predictor measures during the spring semester.

Employment Skills. Special educators evaluated the employment-related strengths of youth using the Transition Planning Inventory (TPI; Clark & Patton, 1997/2006), a standardized, 46-item assessment tool used to assess students' knowledge and skill performance across nine transition domains (e.g., employment, daily living, health, community participation). The employment section consists of five items addressing the extent to which youth (a) understand the requirements of their preferred occupation; (b) make informed occupational choices that reflect their interests, preferences, and abilities; (c) know how to obtain a job; (d) demonstrate general job skills and work attitudes for keeping and advancing within a job; and (e) have the specific knowledge and skills needed to perform a particular job. Special educators rated youths' current level of competence using a 6-point Likert-type scale with anchors of *strongly agree* (0) and *strongly disagree* (5). Average ratings across these five items were calculated, with items marked *don't know* or *not relevant* omitted from this analysis. The scale has been shown to have adequate test-retest and internal reliability, as well as satisfactory content, criterion, and predictive validity (Clark & Patton; Smith, 1995). Average scores for youth in this analysis were 2.17 ($SD = 1.07$; range, 0–4.40), with higher scores indicating greater perceived strengths in the area of employment. Coefficient alpha was .88.

Self-Determination. Special educators also assessed the self-determination of youth using the AIR Self-Determination Scale (Wolman, Campeau, DuBois, Mithaug, & Stolarski, 1994). The 18 items on the Capacity section address students' (a) ability to perform specific self-determination behaviors, (b) perceptions of the efficacy of self-determined behaviors, and (c) knowledge about self-determination and the behavior it requires. Each item is rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from *never* (1) to *always* (5) to indicate how frequently the youth engages in each

behavior. Strong reliability and validity have been documented within several studies (Carter, Lane, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006; Wolman et al.). We calculated average scores for the entire Capacity section, with higher ratings reflecting greater capacity of youth to engage in self-determined behavior. Average scores for youth in our final sample were 2.66 ($SD = 0.69$; range, 1.00–4.22); coefficient alpha was .97.

Social Skills and Problem Behaviors. Special educators assessed the social skills and problem behaviors of participating youth using the Social Skills Rating System—Secondary Teachers Version (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990). The Social Skills Scale consists of 30 items addressing behaviors related to the subdomains of cooperation, assertion, and self-control. The Problem Behavior Scale includes 12 problem behaviors equally distributed across internalizing and externalizing subdomains. All items are rated on a 3-point Likert-type scale, ranging from *never* (0) to *very often* (2). The SSRS evidences strong psychometric properties and has been widely used in both research and practice (Gresham & Elliott). Average standard scores for youth in our final sample were 90.19 ($SD = 17.64$; range, 46–131) for the Social Skills Scale and 104.49 ($SD = 12.48$; range, 85–133) for the Problem Behavior Scale. Coefficient alpha for the two scales was .95 and .82, respectively.

Career Preparation Activities. Special educators completed a questionnaire asking them to indicate whether each youth had participated in any of nine career preparation activities during high school. These activities included (a) career interest assessments; (b) career goal setting and planning; (c) workplace visits or tours; (d) occupation-specific job skills training; (e) vocational education/applied technology classes; (f) social skills training; (g) transportation skills training; (h) employment search strategies (e.g., resume writing, mock interviews); and (i) person-centered planning related to career goals. Respondents could list additional activities. If any additional activities could not be subsumed under an existing category, we tallied it as an additional activity. A summative index ranging from 0 to 10 was constructed to represent involvement in career preparation activities. Youth in our final sample had participated in an average of 3.76 different career

preparation activities ($SD = 2.07$; range, 0–9); coefficient alpha was .74.

Spring Work Experience. Spring work experience was defined as holding a paid or unpaid job at any point during the semester immediately prior to the summer during which we followed youth. We obtained spring work status either (a) from questionnaires completed by youth and/or their parents during the spring semester, or (b) during summer telephone interviews when respondents indicated that a youth's summer job had begun prior to the end of the semester. Based on this information, we constructed a dummy variable to represent the youth's work experiences in the spring (0 = no, 1 = yes). More than half (52.7%) of our final sample had obtained some type of work experience during the spring.

Teacher Expectations for Employment. During the spring semester, special educators completed a questionnaire asking whether they expected each youth to work during the upcoming summer. Response options included *yes*, *unsure*, or *no*, representing an ordinal scale reflecting the extent to which teachers expected youth to work in the summer. Teachers indicated that they expected 36.6% of youth to work part-time or full-time during the summer, did not expect 51.6% to work during the summer, and were unsure of about 11.8% of youth.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

After obtaining appropriate institutional review board, district, and school approvals, we worked with project liaisons at 29 high schools to distribute study invitations to youth with disabilities and their parents or guardians to participate in a study addressing the summer employment and community experiences of youth. We asked liaisons to send home consent and assent forms to all students with severe disabilities enrolled in their school. Of the 140 youth with severe disabilities for whom we obtained study permission, four could not be reached at any point during the summer, resulting in a final sample size of 136. Although we did not learn from liaisons the exact number of parents who received study invitations, approximately 1% of students with disabilities are eligible for alternative assessment, suggesting an

approximate participation rate of 40% (i.e., 136/338).

Assessment packets containing the TPI (Clark & Patton, 1997/2006); AIR Self-determination Scale (Wolman et al., 1994); SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990); and a questionnaire addressing the school and community experiences of youth were distributed to special educators who worked with each student. Teachers completed the tools independently during the spring semester and returned them to the research team. We used information from parents or youth provided during telephone interviews to profile the summer employment and community experiences, consistent with related follow-along studies (cf., Bullis & Yovanoff, 2006; Doren & Benz, 1998). At Time 1 (June 2007), 71.4% of telephone interviews were conducted with parents/guardians, 25.7% with youth themselves, and 2.9% with youth and another person (e.g., parent). At Time 2 (August 2007), 78.3% of interviews were conducted with parents/guardians, 17.7% with youth themselves, and 4.0% with youth and another person. Information regarding employment status was gathered via mail survey for three students not reached during the Time 1 telephone calls. The average number of call attempts was 3.7 ($SD = 4.0$; range, 1–23) at Time 1 and 3.5 ($SD = 3.8$; range, 1–17) at Time 2.

DATA ANALYSIS

Employment Status. Because some youth may have held multiple jobs at each time point or across time points (e.g., working one job in June, but changing jobs by August), we analyzed and reported employment characteristics by job type (i.e., paid, unpaid, sheltered) rather than by participant. When a student worked the same job at both interview time points, information about their job duties, work schedule, supports used to find and/or maintain employment, and transportation were aggregated across interview time points to include all responses for that job. Weekly hours and wage variables were averaged across the time points for the same jobs. For unemployed youth who were looking for work, we analyzed descriptive information about their job search (e.g., number of applications submitted or job interviews) at both interview time points to

show changes in job-seeking patterns. Likewise, we analyzed reasons given for not looking for work at both interview time points.

Community Activities. To obtain an overall picture of what activities youth participated in during the summer months, we calculated the percentage of youth reported to be involved in each of 25 categories (i.e., 24 + “other”) of community activities at either or both interview time points. We then constructed a summative index of the total number of activity categories—ranging from 0 to 25—to represent each student’s overall involvement in community activities outside of work. We used independent sample t tests to compare differences in the average number of activity categories reported by youth who were or were not working.

Predictor Analysis. To efficiently represent the employment data, we collapsed data from the two interview time points and coded a youth’s overall summer work status into one of three categories: not working at either time point (0); only unpaid or sheltered work at one or both time points (1); and competitive, paid work at one or both time points (2). These three mutually exclusive categories captured the spectrum of possible employment outcomes in an ordered way and reflected a hierarchy of valued outcomes. For such variables that are “both discrete and ordinal,” ordinal categorical modeling is the most appropriate method (Borooah, 2002, p. 5). Other categorical modeling methods such as multinomial logit regression or loglinear modeling are insensitive to the ordered nature of the outcome variable, whereas general linear modeling methods such as linear regression impose assumptions for continuous variables unsuitable for ordinal variables (Agresti & Finlay, 1999; Borooah).

We performed the ordinal regression analysis via the SPSS procedure PLUM (polytomous universal model). We used the logit link (i.e., log of the odds) as it is more interpretable. Whereas binary logistic regression only predicts the log odds of one event occurring

$$(\text{odds} = \frac{\text{prob}(\text{event})}{1 - \text{prob}(\text{event})}),$$

ordinal regression involved two or more odds corresponding to cumulative probabilities of being in a certain category or in the lower categories. For

example, the trichotomous outcome variable for our analysis was specified by two odds: the odds of having no job at all (code of 0) against having any type of job (code of 1 or 2), and the odds of not having a paid job (code of 0 or 1) against having a paid job (code of 2).

For ordinal regression, as the dependent variable is specified by two or more odds, an important assumption is parallel slope—that a given predictor has parallel effect on the two or more logits. This assumption can be checked with the Wald test. If this assumption does not hold, other methods such as multinomial regression should be used despite the loss of efficiency (Borooah, 2002). As in other regression analyses, ordinal regression coefficients B indicate the direction and strength of relationship between a predictor and the outcome variable. A positive B means that increases in the predictor are associated with the higher ordered category of the outcome variable (i.e., paid, competitive employment status). The strength of its effect is expressed in terms of changes in odds ratio (calculated as e^B).

As noted previously, the transition literature has largely focused on demographic, skill-related, and programmatic factors associated with youth outcomes, with the latter two representing viable avenues for focusing intervention efforts. We examined the extent to which these three sets of factors were associated with summer employment outcome for youth with severe disabilities. In the first model, we focused on whether summer employment status varied with youth's demographic profiles (i.e., student age, gender, race/ethnicity, FRL eligibility, high school geographical locale code). Next, we added the skill-related assessments (i.e., employment skills, self-determination, social skills, problem behaviors) to form the second model. In the third model, we added factors that were more specifically related to employment, including teacher expectations for summer employment, spring work experience, and participation in career preparation activities. These sets of variables were blocked together and entered in this order to explore the contributions of skill-related and programmatic factors over and above demographic factors. The total impact of each block of variable was assessed by the log likelihood ratio test ($\Delta\chi^2$). Ordinal regression analysis also yields some pseudo R^2 statistics, which measure the strength of

the association between the dependent variable and the predictor variables, although not directly comparable to the R^2 in linear regression analyses. In this article, we report the Cox & Snell R^2 . This analysis addressed the 93 youth for whom we had information on all of these variables. This subgroup did not differ from the larger sample ($N = 136$) on any demographic variables collected.

RESULTS

WHAT ARE THE SUMMER EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCES OF YOUTH WITH SEVERE DISABILITIES?

Slightly more than one third ($n = 52$; 38.2%) of youth with severe disabilities participated in at least one type of work experience during the summer months (see Table 1). Specifically, 22 students (16.1%) held competitive jobs, 17 students (12.5%) held unpaid jobs, and 15 students (11.0%) held sheltered jobs. (Two students held jobs in more than one type of employment category during the summer.) Competitive jobs most frequently involved job responsibilities related to cleaning (40.9%), food services (27.3%), stocking (22.7%), or assembly-related work (22.7%). Similarly, unpaid jobs typically involved duties related to cleaning (41.2%), clerical tasks (11.8%), assembly-related work (11.8%), or farming (11.8%). Sheltered jobs all involved assembly-related work (100%), in addition to either stocking (20.0%) or cleaning (6.7%).

Hours and Wages. The average number of hours worked per week, work schedules, and wages of youth varied widely depending on the type of employment held. The typical number of hours worked per week averaged 10.3 hr ($SD = 7.7$; range, 2–30) for competitive jobs; 12.0 hr ($SD = 10.4$; range, 2–40.5) for unpaid jobs; and 17.8 hr ($SD = 9.6$; range, 4–40) for sheltered jobs. Only 3 youth worked full-time (i.e., more than 35 hr per week) at either time point during the summer. Youth in competitive jobs (and to a lesser degree unpaid jobs) worked varied schedules throughout the week, including days, evenings, and weekends; youth in sheltered jobs worked almost exclusively during the weekdays (see Table 1). Youth holding competitive jobs earned an average of \$6.80 per hour ($SD =$

TABLE 1

Job Characteristics of Employed Youth Across the Summer

<i>Characteristic</i>	<i>Type of Job Held by Youth</i>		
	<i>Competitive</i> (n = 22)	<i>Sheltered</i> (n = 15)	<i>Unpaid</i> (n = 17)
Job duties			
Animal care (dog walking, vet assistant)	—	—	5.9%
Assembly work, sorting, stuffing	22.7%	100%	11.8%
Camp counselor	4.5%	—	—
Cashier (grocery store, fast food, other)	4.5%	—	—
Child care center or day care	4.5%	—	—
Cleaning (janitorial, maid)	40.9%	6.7%	41.2%
Clerical (filing, secretary, typist)	4.5%	—	11.8%
Computers (data entry, programming)	4.5%	—	—
Farming (working with animals, in field)	—	—	11.8%
Food services (busboy, waiter, cook)	27.3%	—	—
Grounds maintenance or landscaping	—	—	5.9%
Retail sales (clothing or department store)	4.5%	—	—
Stocking (grocery, drug, or other store)	22.7%	20.0%	5.9%
Other job duties	9.1%	—	17.6%
Typical schedule			
Mornings	54.5%	80.0%	76.5%
Afternoons	40.9%	33.3%	52.9%
Evenings	27.3%	6.7%	17.6%
Weekdays	68.2%	93.3%	82.4%
Weekends	22.7%	—	5.9%
Who helped youth find the job			
Teacher or other school staff	63.6%	80.0%	58.8%
Parent	22.7%	13.3%	23.5%
Friend of youth or family	9.1%	—	—
Employment agency	13.6%	13.3%	5.9%
Youth himself/herself	4.5%	—	5.9%
Another relative	—	—	5.9%
Neighbor	—	6.7%	—
Another person	9.1%	—	5.9%
Transportation to/from work			
Ride from a family member	54.5%	13.3%	35.3%
Special transportation or taxi	40.9%	73.3%	52.9%
Walks or rides bike	4.5%	6.7%	11.8%
Carpool	—	20.0%	11.8%
Public bus	4.5%	6.7%	—
Other transportation	4.5%	—	5.9%

Note. More than one category could be coded, resulting in totals exceeding 100%.

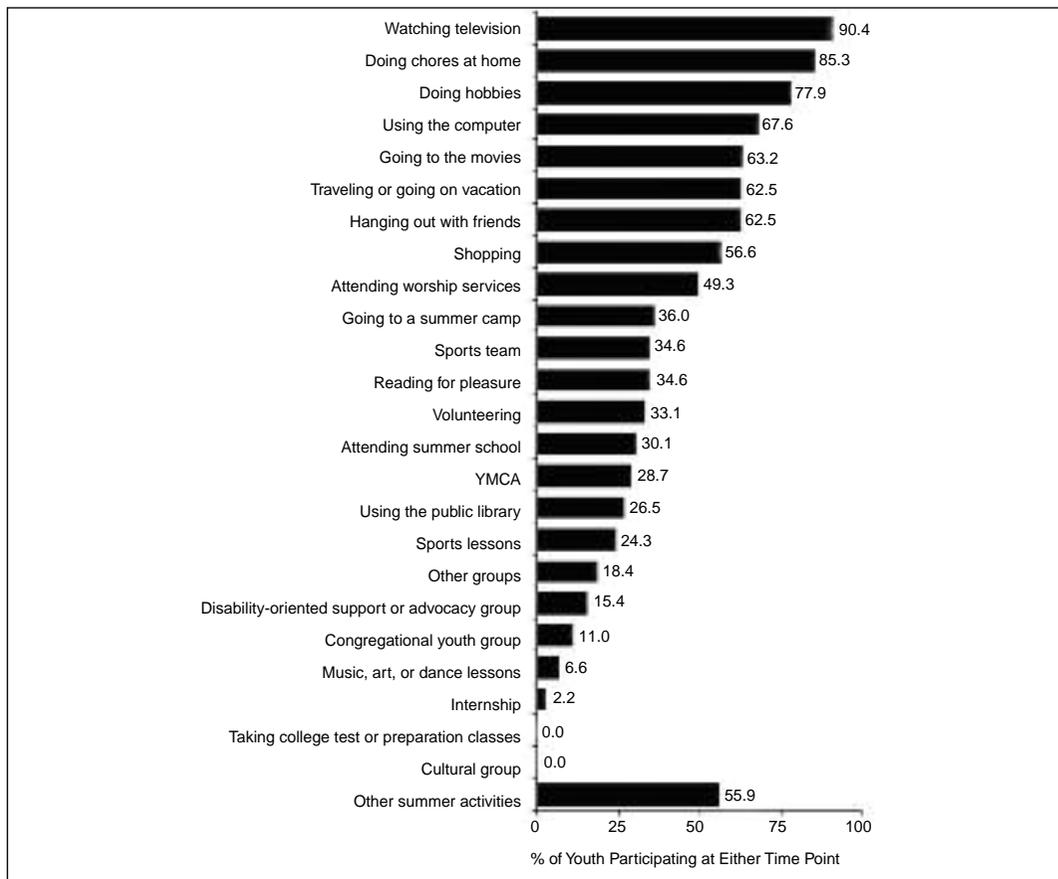
\$1.32); youth holding sheltered jobs typically earned “piece rate” wages (e.g., \$0.10 per unit).

Job-Related Supports. Respondents most often indicated that school staff (63.6%), parents (22.7%), and employment agencies (13.6%) had been responsible for helping youth find competitive jobs; school staff (58.8%) or parents (23.5%) had been responsible for helping find unpaid

jobs; and school staff (80.0%) had most often been responsible for finding sheltered jobs (see Table 1). Most youth had someone from their school or an employment agency who provided at least intermittent support during the summer, including 59.1% of competitive jobs, 70.6% of unpaid jobs, and 66.7% of sheltered jobs. Transportation avenues also differed somewhat by

FIGURE 1

Percentage of Youth Participating in Nonwork-Related Community Activities at the Beginning and/or End of the Summer



type of job. Youth holding competitive jobs typically found transportation with family members (54.5%) or took special transportation (40.9%), youth holding unpaid jobs most often took special transportation (51.9%) or rode with family members (38.5%), and youth holding sheltered jobs most often took special transportation (73.3%) or carpooled with co-workers (20.0%).

Changes Over Time. Of the 20 youth who held competitive jobs at the beginning of the summer, 15 (75.0%) were still working the same job at the end of the summer, 2 (10.0%) were no longer working, 2 (10.0%) could not be reached, and 1 (5.0%) had switched to a sheltered job. Of the 14 youth who held sheltered jobs at the beginning of the summer, 4 (28.6%) were working the same job at the end of the summer and 10 (71.4%) were no longer working. Of the 17 youth who held unpaid jobs at the beginning of the

summer, 10 (58.8%) were working the same job, 4 (23.5%) were no longer working, 2 (11.7%) could not be reached, and 1 (5.9%) had switched to a competitive job. The primary reason given for no longer working sheltered or unpaid jobs was that these had been temporary employment situations; reasons given for leaving competitive jobs included having found a better job and traveling with family. Only 2 youth who were not working at the beginning of the summer were reported to be working toward the end of the summer.

Job Search Efforts. At the beginning of the summer, 19 (11.8%) unemployed youth were actively looking for employment. Youth were receiving help with their job search efforts from a family member ($n = 8$; 42.1%); school personnel ($n = 6$; 31.6%); and/or an employment agency ($n = 6$; 31.6%). Five youth did not have anyone helping them search for a job. Seven of the youth

TABLE 2

Reasons Given for Youth Not Looking for Summer Jobs

<i>Reasons Given by Respondents</i>	<i>Time 1</i>		<i>Time 2</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
Parents do not want youth to work	24	36.9	21	28.8
Barriers to finding/maintaining work (e.g., lack of transportation, lack of support, skill deficits)	20	30.8	16	21.9
Disability severity or medical condition	16	24.6	11	15.1
Scheduling conflicts/involvement in other activities	7	10.8	12	16.4
Work is not considered a priority or goal at this time	8	12.3	24	32.9
Youth is considered too young to work	4	6.2	4	5.5
Other reasons	7	10.8	3	4.1

Note. More than one category could be coded per youth, resulting in totals exceeding 100%.

had not submitted any applications, and 16 youth did not interview for jobs during the past month. Toward the end of the summer, 5 of these 19 students were still looking for work, 11 had abandoned the job search, 1 had found a job, and 2 could not be reached.

Reasons for Not Working. Almost half ($n = 65$; 47.8%) of youth in this study were not looking for work at the beginning of the summer. We coded the narrative responses for why youth were not looking for summer employment into seven broad categories (see Table 2). The two most frequently cited reasons for not looking for work included parents' desire for their children not to work (36.9%) and the presence of specific barriers to finding and maintaining employment (30.8%), such as limited transportation and limited availability of supports.

WHAT FACTORS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH SUMMER EMPLOYMENT OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH?

The results of testing parallel lines showed that ordinal regression was appropriate for our data. For all three models we ran, the Wald tests for parallel slopes showed no significant deviation from this assumption (p values of chi-square tests ranging from .315 to .997). With this justification, we report in Table 3 the regression coefficients and the corresponding standard errors, as well as the odds ratios and their 95% confidence intervals for each model.

In the first model, age was positively associated with summer employment outcomes. For

each 1-year increase in age, with other variables held constant, the expected ordered logits (i.e., log odds) increased by .29 ($p = .028$). Using odds ratios to interpret this effect, we found that the odds of getting any kind of job (i.e., versus getting no job at all), and the odds of getting a paid job (i.e., versus getting an unpaid job or getting no job), were both 1.34 times greater with each additional 1-year increment in age. The changes in the two odds were equal given the parallelism assumption, which held true for our data. Students' gender ($p = .858$), race/ethnicity ($p = .782$), or FRL eligibility ($p = .357$) were not found to be associated with employment outcomes. When we added skill-related variables to the model (Model 2), only employment skills had a significant effect on summer employment outcomes above and beyond demographic variables. A unit change in employment skills ratings led to .69 increase in expected ordered logits ($p = .021$); that is, the odds of getting a job and the odds of getting a paid job were 1.99 times larger. Summer employment outcomes were not associated with self-determination ($p = .523$), social skills ($p = .986$) or problem behaviors ($p = .199$) ratings.

Above and beyond demographics and skill-related factors, spring work experiences and teacher expectations for summer work were both positive predictors of summer employment outcomes (Model 3). When teachers reported expecting students to work in the summer, the expected ordered logits increased by 2.73 ($p < .001$), compared to students whom teachers did not expect to work in the summer. Specifically, the odds for getting a job and the odds for having a paid job

TABLE 3
Predictors of Summer Employment Outcomes (n = 93)

Variables	Model 1			Model 2			Model 3					
	B	(s.e.)	OR	CI	B	(s.e.)	OR	CI	B	(s.e.)	OR	CI
Age	.29*	(.13)	1.34	1.03–1.73	.26	(.14)	1.30	.98–1.71	–.05	(.19)	.96	.66–1.38
Gender (female vs. male)	.08	(.43)	1.08	.46–2.53	–.08	(.50)	.93	.35–2.46	.27	(.58)	1.30	.43–3.96
Ethnicity (nonwhite vs. white)	.20	(.72)	1.22	.30–4.96	.17	(.74)	1.18	.28–5.01	.46	(.94)	1.58	.25–9.98
Free lunch eligibility (no vs. yes)	.52	(.57)	1.68	.56–5.09	.72	(.91)	1.80	.58–5.58	–.13	(.71)	.88	.22–3.51
Employment skills					.69*	(.30)	1.99	1.11–3.59	.33	(.36)	1.39	.69–2.83
Self-determination capacity					–.36	(.56)	.70	.24–2.08	–.23	(.63)	.79	.23–2.73
Social skills					.00	(.02)	1.00	.96–1.04	–.02	(.03)	.98	.93–1.03
Problem behavior					.03	(.02)	1.03	.99–1.07	–.01	(.03)	.99	.94–1.04
Summer work expectations (yes vs. no)									2.73***	(.69)	15.25	3.96–58.77
Summer work expectations (unsure vs. no)									–.21	(.95)	.81	.13–5.28
Spring work experience (yes vs. no)									1.66*	(.67)	5.28	1.43–19.50
Career preparation activities									–.02	(.17)	.98	.66–1.38
			χ^2 (df)		22.46*	(10)			7.15	(4)		36.29*** (4)
			Pseudo R ² change		.22				.05			.24

Note. Coefficient B is the unstandardized maximum likelihood estimate (MLE) generated from ordinal regression using the logit link function. To control for possible effects of the geographical locations from which the schools were drawn, we also included locale codes in the first block. The overall Wald test of this variable was nonsignificant in the first step ($Z = 5.62$, $df = 6$, $p = .467$), and remained so through the second and third steps. Due to the limited space, the specific coefficient corresponding to each locale category is not presented in this table. OR = odds ratio. CI = confidence interval. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

were 15.25 times larger when teachers expected students to work. Model-based predicted probability showed that among those whom teachers expected to work in the summer, there was a 49% likelihood of getting a paid summer job, a 37% likelihood of getting an unpaid or sheltered job, and only a 14% chance of remaining unemployed. Conversely, when teachers indicated they were unsure about a student's summer work plans, the chance of getting a paid job was 3%, the chance of getting an unpaid/sheltered job was 16%, and the chance of getting no job at all was 81%. This converse pattern was also observed for students whom teachers did not expect to work in the summer (5%, 21%, 74% for the three employment outcomes, respectively).

In addition, all other factors held constant, having spring work experience made a significant difference in summer employment, leading to a 1.66 increase in log odds ($p = .013$), equivalent to 5.28 times larger odds of having a better employment outcome. The predicted probability indicates that spring work experiences contributed to the likelihood of having a paid job (36% chance) or unpaid job (35% chance), versus a 29% likelihood of having no job during the summer. Not having spring work experience, however, greatly hampered youths' summer employment chances. The estimated chance of not getting a job was as high as 80%, whereas the likelihood of getting an unpaid job or a paid job was only 16% and 4%, respectively. Career preparation activities did not have any effect on summer employment outcomes ($p = .894$).

TO WHAT EXTENT ARE YOUTH INVOLVED IN OTHER ACTIVITIES DURING THE SUMMER MONTHS?

Overall, youth participated in a broad range of activities at either or both time points (see Figure 1). The most commonly reported activities were watching television, doing chores at home, doing hobbies, using the computer, and going to the movies. The least commonly reported activities were taking or preparing for college entrance exams; participating in a cultural club or group; doing an internship; taking music, art, or dance lessons; and involvement in a faith community youth group. At the beginning of the summer,

youth participated in an average of 7.4 ($SD = 2.8$) different activities, with 28.6% of youth participating in between 1 and 5 different activities, 57.9% participating in between 6 and 10 different activities, and 13.5% participating in between 11 and 15 different activities. Toward the end of the summer, youth were participating in an average of 8.1 ($SD = 2.9$) different activities, with 21.3% of youth participating in between 1 and 5 different activities, 58.3% participating in between 6 and 10 different activities, and 20.5% participating in between 11 and 15 different activities.

We ran independent sample t tests to see if there was a difference between the mean number of activity categories reported for youth working and youth not working at each interview time point. The average number of activity categories (25 possible) reported by youth who had some type of work experience during the beginning of the summer ($M = 8.06$; $SD = 2.36$) was significantly higher than the average number reported by youth who were not working at the beginning of the summer ($M = 7.05$; $SD = 2.98$), $t(121.40) = -2.17$, $p = .032$. Differences were not found between these two groups at the end of the summer.

HOW SATISFIED WERE PARENTS AND YOUTH WITH THESE SUMMER ACTIVITIES?

Overall, 90% of parents and youth reported that they were either satisfied or very satisfied with how the youth spent the summer months. Average satisfaction ratings for youth who had some type of work experience during the summer ($M = 3.57$; $SD = 0.65$) was significantly higher than ratings for youth who did not have summer work experiences ($M = 3.28$; $SD = 0.73$), $t(119) = -2.22$, $p = .026$. Mean differences on this measure comparing youth working competitive jobs with unpaid or sheltered jobs at either interview time point were not significant. At the end of the summer, respondents were asked the extent to which summer activities had helped youth to make progress towards their personal goals for the future. For youth not working during the summer, 29.3% of respondents said a lot, 45.3% said somewhat, 20.0% said a little, and 5.3% said not at all. For youth who worked at some point during the summer, 46.8% of respondents said that summer activities had contributed a lot to youths' personal goals,

27.7% said somewhat, 17.0% said a little, and 8.5% said not at all.

DISCUSSION

Despite the longstanding emphasis on preparing students for the world of work, longitudinal and follow-up studies suggest that the promise of meaningful work remains elusive for substantial numbers of youth with severe disabilities. Myriad researchers and policy makers have emphasized the importance of ensuring that youth accrue quality work experiences during high school, accompanied by the skills and connections needed to enter the adult workforce (Johnson, Stodden, Emanuel, Luecking, & Mack, 2002; Rusch & Braddock, 2004). We explored the involvement of youth with severe disabilities in summer work experiences and other activities as a first step toward developing a set of effective strategies schools, families, and communities might use to increase access to these valuable transition experiences. This is one of the few recent studies to address the summer experiences of youth with disabilities and the first to closely explore the summer vocational and community experiences of youth with severe disabilities in almost 30 years (cf., Clarke, Greenwood, Abramowitz, & Bellamy, 1980). Our findings extend the literature on promoting early employment experiences and well-rounded transition experiences in several important ways.

First, we found that summer represents a potentially viable time for youth with severe disabilities to accrue valuable employment-related experiences (cf., Hughes et al., 2004; Trainor et al., 2008). Approximately one third of participating youth engaged in some form of work experience during the summer months, with the majority of these jobs being characterized as competitive (i.e., paid) or volunteer (i.e., unpaid) community jobs. Although we do not know the extent to which these jobs ultimately aligned with students' future career aspirations, the diversity of work responsibilities assumed by these youth generally paralleled those of youth without disabilities holding summer jobs (Morisi, 2008; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). As with all youth, summer jobs can afford an array of transition-related benefits by providing a context for

youth with severe disabilities to explore their interests, explore new occupational areas, learn important work-related skills, develop relationships with co-workers, become engaged in their communities, and make more informed decisions about what they want (and do not want) to do after high school. At the same time, such experiences can have the collateral effect of raising (a) work-related aspirations of youth and their families, and (b) expectations of employers and community members related to the contributions adolescents with severe disabilities can make to the workforce.

On the other hand, nearly one third of working youth were employed in sheltered experiences during the summer. Such segregated work environments neither reflect best practices in transition (Johnson, 2004; Test, 2004) nor echo legislative calls specifically to facilitate the movement of youth to "integrated employment (including supported employment)" (IDEA, 2004, 20 U.S.C. § 1402(34)). In addition to providing limited pay, these jobs tended to be fairly time-limited, with almost three fourths of sheltered jobs ending by the second wave of data collection. Moreover, they provided limited opportunities to explore varied job duties, focusing almost exclusively on assembly-related work. The majority of these jobs were arranged by schools and typically funded by vocational rehabilitation. Additional research is needed to discern what factors lead parents, educators, agencies and others to choose these jobs for youth. The fact that these jobs generally conferred more hours, offered transportation, involved higher levels of supervision, and were limited almost exclusively to traditional school hours (i.e., no evenings or weekends) may represent factors considered appealing by some parents or educators (Grigal & Neubert, 2004). The perceptions of adults related to the capacities of these youth or the availability of alternative options, funding, or supports in their communities may be other salient factors (Kraemer & Blacher, 2001). Because sheltered jobs during adolescence are likely to beget sheltered jobs into adulthood, intentional efforts are needed to ensure that competitive job options remain open and accessible to youth with severe disabilities beginning in high school.

Second, although we found that some youth with severe disabilities worked during the summer months, the fact that nearly two thirds of youth did not participate in any such experiences constitutes an important missed opportunity. Our descriptive findings highlight several potential issues that might represent critical elements absent for many youth. The availability of adult support—whether from educators, agencies, or family members—related to finding a job, getting to and from work, and providing assistance on the job was prominent among youth who were employed. Specifically, only two youth found their jobs on their own, almost all obtained a ride to work from someone else, and the majority reported receiving at least intermittent assistance from someone outside of their workplace. Our interviews with respondents about youth who were not working reinforced these findings. Lack of transportation and the limited availability of supports were among the central reasons given for not looking for work. At the same time, it should be noted that a substantial number of parents indicated they did not want their child to work (cf., Kraemer & Blacher, 2001), suggesting that additional efforts may be needed to communicate the potential benefits associated with adolescent employment and inform families of how working youth can retain needed public benefits, such as health care coverage and Supplemental Security Income. Unfortunately, our findings echo barriers that have been perennially cited—but still largely unaddressed—elsewhere throughout the transition and employment literature.

Summer jobs can afford an array of transition-related benefits by providing a context for youth with severe disabilities to explore their interests.

Third, we identified several prominent predictors of more favorable employment outcomes for youth with severe disabilities. Consistent with employment demographics for youth in general (Morisi, 2008), older students were more likely than younger students to be working during the summer. However, this relationship disappeared when we considered nondemographic variables.

The predictive value of employment-related strengths is especially noteworthy (cf., Benz et al., 1997), as efforts to promote the vocational competence of youth reside both within the purview and capacity of most high school transition programs. Indeed, considerable instructional and curricular attention appears to be focused on this transition domain during the school year (Powers et al., 2005; Wagner, Cadwallader, et al., 2003). Yet spring work experiences and teachers' expectations related to summer employment emerged as the most prominent predictors in our analysis. Youth who worked during the spring semester were significantly more likely to work during the summer, highlighting the value of making early connections to community jobs before the end of the school year. School-sponsored efforts to connect youth to community-based employment early in the semester can help ensure that youth have accrued work experience, are familiar with their job responsibilities, have access to transportation and needed on-the-job supports, and have developed relationships with co-workers and supervisors prior to the start of summer. At the same time, the degree to which teachers view youth as being likely to work during the summer months can influence the extent to which transition teams ultimately take intentional steps to prepare youth for work, facilitate connections, and collaborate with families around this issue. These findings are particularly promising, as they suggest two potential—and feasible—points of intervention for schools.

Fourth, we were somewhat surprised to discover that most student demographic and skill-related variables included in our models were not associated with more favorable employment outcomes. For example, teachers' ratings of students' self-determination capacity, social skills, and problem behaviors did not emerge as significant predictors of summer employment status, despite anecdotal links throughout the research literature. One possible explanation for these findings may relate to the manner in which these various constructs were operationalized within the specific assessment instruments we employed. For example, the SSRS (Gresham & Elliott, 1990) asks respondents to evaluate social skills and problem behaviors typically associated with success in the classroom, whereas the AIR Self-Determination

Scale (Wolman et al., 1994) provides a broader assessment of self-determination as it specifically relates to setting goals, making choices, and taking steps to attain one's goals. Perhaps other social- and self-determination-related skills, knowledge, and behaviors not measured in this study are more important to success in finding and maintaining employment.

An alternate explanation, however, may relate to the prominent—and somewhat unique—role that adults appear to play in assisting youth with severe disabilities to find and maintain their jobs. Unlike youth with high-incidence disabilities—for whom social and self-determination skills may be essential when independently identifying job openings, interviewing, and navigating daily work responsibilities—youth with severe disabilities typically require extensive support to carry out these roles. In other words, what educators, parents, and other adults do or do not do on behalf of students with severe disabilities may be at least as, if not more, important than the skills that these students do or do not possess. Such a finding should not be interpreted as diminishing the importance of delivering high-quality transition-related instruction. After all, youth who have learned to be more self-determining or to use more effective social skills may be better positioned to recruit adult assistance when it is not already available. Rather, this finding should serve to call greater attention to the influential role that adults can play in shaping the summer employment outcomes of youth, irrespective of the skills that these youth possess.

Fifth, although the employment experiences of youth were the primary focus of our study, our findings provide an initial glimpse into the other ways in which youth choose to spend their time outside of the school year. It is interesting that youth who were employed during the summer actually participated in a greater number of different activities relative to youth who were not employed, suggesting that summer work does not typically come at the expense of involvement in other activities. This finding is further supported by the very small proportion (10%) of nonworking youth indicating scheduling conflicts or involvement in other activities as the primary reason they were not working. Although most youth in this study participated in a broad range

of activities, the most frequently reported activities were ones that could readily be done without leaving the home (i.e., watching television, doing chores, doing hobbies, using the computer) and/or did not necessarily involve other peers (i.e., going to the movies, shopping, attending worship services). Group-oriented activities such as team sports, volunteering, and youth groups were less commonly reported. Given the importance of social relationships to adolescent development and overall quality of life (McIntyre, Kraemer, Blacher, & Simmerman, 2004), efforts should be made to steer youth toward inclusive activities that provide relationship-building opportunities. At the same time, research is needed that explores the availability, accessibility, and inclusiveness of activities outside of the school day and year.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations of this study suggest areas for future research. First, the absence of normative data addressing the employment and community experiences of youth without disabilities residing in these same communities limits our ability to anchor findings against typical expectations for youth during the summer months. Although comparisons to Bureau of Labor Statistics data suggest that the employment rates of youth with disabilities in our study were substantially lower rates than youth without disabilities, economic conditions can vary considerably across communities as well as across years. Future researchers should include a comparative sample of youth without disabilities attending the same high schools to establish local expectations for typical hours worked, types of jobs, and job retention across the summer.

Second, our efforts to gather a broad range of information from respondents during each of the two telephone interviews limited our ability to probe certain aspects of the summer experiences of youth in greater depth. For example, it would be helpful to obtain additional information about the job-related supports youth received, including the specific steps and strategies educators and parents took to find jobs for employed youth, the nature of the on-the-job supports youth received,

and the funding mechanisms accessed to deliver such supports (e.g., vocational rehabilitation, schools). Similarly, we only categorized—rather than richly described—the additional community activities in which youth participated. Additional research is needed to examine the settings in which these activities took place, the extent to which they could be considered inclusive, and whether they reflected the preferences of youth themselves.

Third, although we examined the experiences of youth at multiple time points during the summer, longitudinal research is needed to determine whether and how these experiences ultimately enhance the educational and postschool experiences of these youth. In other words, the willingness of schools and communities to commit the supports and resources needed to ensure that youth access meaningful summer work experiences would be enhanced by data showing that summer jobs increase the work-related skills of youth, inform their transition planning, facilitate stronger connections between academic learning and work, and improve the eventual employment outcomes of youth during the school year and after high school. In addition, following youth across multiple summers throughout high school would provide insight into how the myriad experiences youth have might coalesce with other in-school activities to contribute to a well-rounded transition experience.

Fourth, the term *severe disabilities* has been defined in widely divergent ways within the special education literature. Ultimately, the establishment of recommended transition practices is enhanced when accompanied by clear descriptions of precisely for whom educational interventions are and are not designed. We relied on school-based alternate assessment eligibility, which may be idiosyncratic across schools, districts, and states. Future researchers should incorporate additional assessment tools that provide insight into the adaptive behavior and level of support needs of participating youth. Further, we are unaware of national data describing the demographics of youth with severe disabilities; readers should consider whether the students and communities participating in this study resemble those with whom they work when considering the generalizability of these findings.

Fifth, the communication challenges experienced by many youth with severe disabilities frequently required us to obtain information about their summer experiences primarily or exclusively from their parents or others. Although this approach is certainly consistent with other follow-along studies and other research involving this segment of the school population, it limited our ability to capture more subjective evaluations of youths' summer jobs and other activities. Additional research efforts should be directed toward providing youth with severe disabilities with meaningful avenues for sharing their feedback and perspectives on their educational and community experiences.

Although summer represents an opportune time for youth to gain valuable employment experiences and participate in an array of activities in their communities, many youth with severe disabilities continue to miss out on these valuable adolescent experiences. Findings from our study highlight the importance of identifying appropriate avenues through which the planning, preparation, and support needs of youth in relation to summer employment can be intentionally and meaningfully addressed. Such efforts, if they are to be truly successful, are likely to require the contributions of parents, educators, employers, community members, and youth themselves.

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