

## Parent Expectations for Youth with Intellectual Disability and Autism Compared with Other Youth

By Belkis Choiseul-Praslin, Clare Papay, Meg Grigal, Alberto Migliore, and Jie Chen

### INTRODUCTION

Research has long established the impact and importance of parent expectations on the postsecondary outcomes of youth with disabilities (see: Doren et al., 2012; Mazzotti et al., 2016). A consistent theme among the findings is that youth whose parents hold high expectations for their future are more likely to experience positive outcomes. In a review of studies conducted using the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) data, Mazzotti et al. (2016) found parent expectations to be a positive predictor of post-school education and employment outcomes and an emerging predictor of independent living outcomes.

Much of our knowledge about parent expectations for youth with disabilities comes from analyses of two older datasets, the National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) and NLTS-2. The third round of the NLTS studies, released in 2012 (hereafter NLTS 2012), provides a more recent data source for understanding the experiences of transition age youth with disabilities, with data from 2012-2013. As part of a larger study on transition experiences of youth with intellectual disability (ID) or ID and autism (collectively abbreviated to ID/A), we examined parent expectations for living and financial independence and compared their expectations to those of parents of youth in other disability groups.

**Using the NLTS 2012 data, we set out to identify the extent to which parents expected youth with and without disabilities to obtain living and financial independence by age 30.**

### METHODS

The NLTS 2012 involved a nationally representative sample of about 12,000 youth with and without disabilities who were between 7th and 12th grade (13-21 years old) during the 2011-2012 school year. In the sample, 9,600 students had an individualized education program (IEP) in accordance with the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), 600 had a 504 plan but no IEP, and 1,800 did not have a 504 plan nor an IEP. Mathematica Policy Research collected this data and made it available for secondary analysis. Details about the research methodology used to collect the NLTS 2012 data can be found in Bloomenthal et al. (2017) and Burghardt et al. (2017).

Using the NLTS 2012 data, we set out to identify the extent to which parents expected youth with and without disabilities to obtain living and financial independence by age 30. To do this, we conducted a secondary analysis of the NLTS 2012 data specifically focusing on parent expectations of:

- youth with ID or ID and autism (ID/A)
- youth with autism but not ID
- youth with other disabilities
- youth with a 504 plan but no IEP
- youth with neither a 504 plan nor an IEP

We analyzed parent expectations for living and financial independence as (a) neither, (b) either, or (c) both. We created this variable using '*p\_y\_livingexp*' (parent expects youth to be living independently by age 30) and '*p\_y\_finanexp*' (parent expects youth to be financially self-supporting by age 30). We used descriptive analysis and calculated Cohen's *h* to ascertain the differences in parent expectations between disability groups.

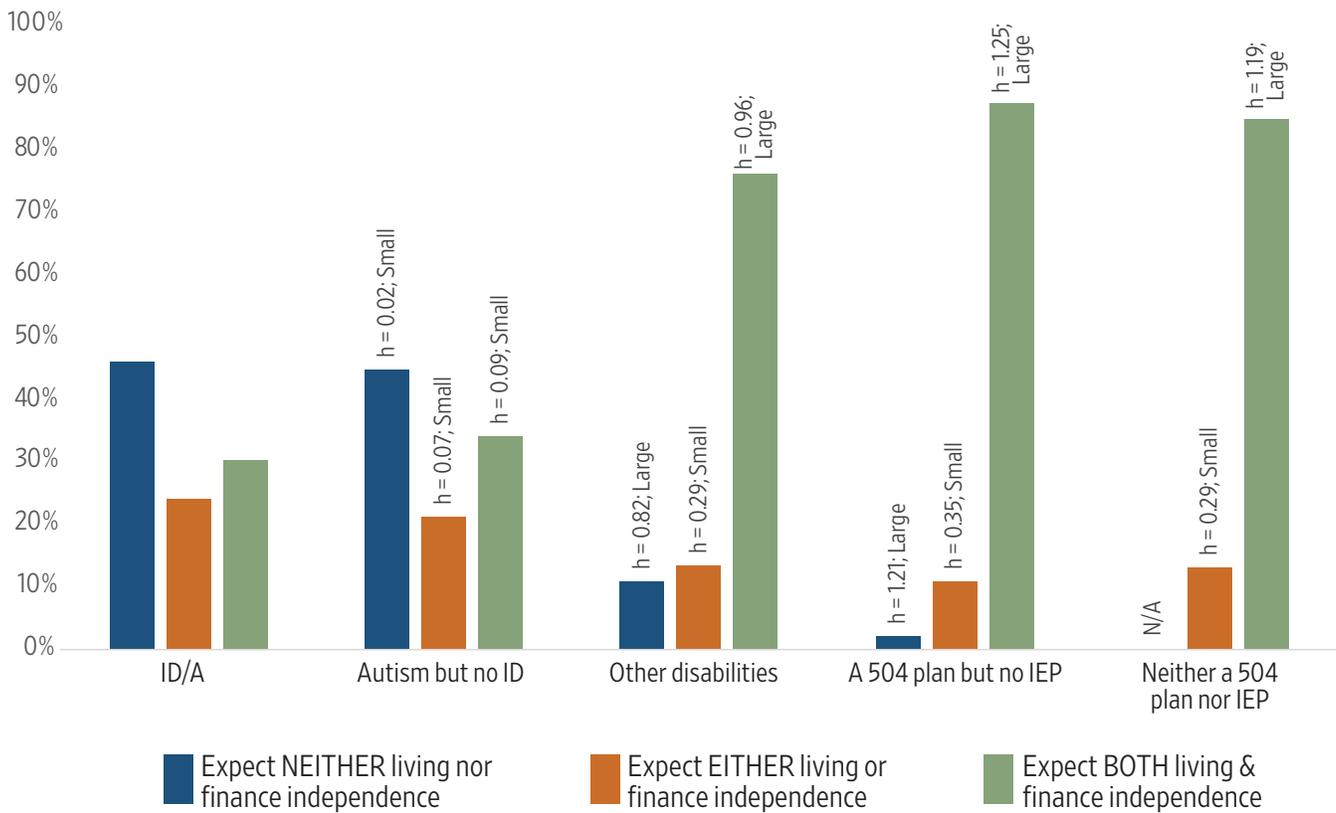
## FINDINGS

Figure 1 shows parents of youth with ID/A and parents of youth with autism but no ID held similar expectations for their child to have *both* living and financial independence (30% and 34%, respectively). However, there was a stark difference between parents of youth with ID/A and parents of youth with other disabilities (76%,  $h = 0.96$ ), parents of youth with 504 plans but no IEP (87%,  $h = 1.25$ ), and parents of youth with neither a 504 plan nor an IEP (85%,  $h = 1.19$ ) on expectations for both living and financial independence. The large effect sizes for each of these groups shows parents hold higher expectations for youth with other disabilities

or youth with no disability than they do for youth with ID/A in meeting both types of independence outcomes.

Parents of youth with ID/A (46%) and parents of youth with autism but no ID (45%,  $h = 0.02$ ) were far more likely than parents of youth with other disabilities (11%,  $h = 0.82$ ) and parents of youth with 504 plans (2%,  $h = 1.21$ ) to expect neither living nor financial independence. The effect sizes indicate much higher percentages of parents of youth with ID/A having no expectations for living and financial independence than parents of youth with other disabilities or parents of youth with neither 504 plans nor IEPs.

**FIGURE 1. PARENT EXPECTATIONS FOR LIVING AND FINANCIAL INDEPENDENCE**



	Parents of youth with:				
	ID/A	Autism but no ID	Other disabilities	A 504 plan but no IEP	Neither a 504 plan nor IEP
Expect NEITHER living nor finance independence	46%	45%	11%	2%	Not applicable
Expect EITHER living or finance independence	24%	21%	13%	11%	13%
Expect BOTH living & finance independence	30%	34%	76%	87%	85%

## IMPLICATIONS

When broken down by disability type/group, our findings align with past studies on parent expectations (Doren et al., 2012; Mazzotti et al., 2016). The differences in reported expectations were greatest for parents of youth with ID/A and parents of youth with autism but no ID over parents of youth with other disabilities, parents of youth with 504 plans but no IEP, and parents of youth with neither a 504 plan nor an IEP. Parents of youth with ID/A and parents of youth with autism but no ID generally held lower expectations for meeting both types of independent living outcomes and were far more likely to expect neither of these outcomes than parents of any other group.

Although transition knowledge and services have improved, the outcomes of youth with disabilities, and in particular students with ID/A, have remained relatively stagnant over the years. Youth with ID/A still have among the poorest post-school outcomes of any disability group in postsecondary education, employment, and independent living (see: Roux et al., 2015; Sanford et al., 2011). This begs the question, **do parents hold lower expectations because educators present limited post-school options for independence?** It is worth considering if these data offer a glimpse of a self-fulfilling prophecy, reflecting the kind of information presented to parents of youth with ID/A and autism by secondary schools and educators during the transition planning process.

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If educators and transition specialists believe students with ID/A have limited capacity to earn enough money (financial independence) to get an apartment or home away from their family (living independence), it is possible they will offer transition experiences to students that align with these beliefs. These limited experiences then cultivate lower expectations for independence outcomes for parents of these students (Grigal & Papay, 2018). Though this is likely unintentional, when parents are presented with limited post-school options for their child's future, they may be less likely to believe their child can achieve higher markers of success. This may keep parents' expectations low and students' outcomes poor.

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