

Issue Brief

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Comparing YTED Enrollees with Other Youth with Disabilities in Pennsylvania

The Youth Transition Exploration Demonstration (YTED) is funded by an Interventional Cooperative Agreement Program grant from the Social Security Administration. The demonstration aims to (1) test whether intensive employment services improve employment and other outcomes for youth with disabilities who are transitioning to adulthood and (2) strengthen cooperation and coordination among organizations that serve youth with disabilities.

In this brief, we compare the characteristics of youth who enrolled in YTED in 2025 with all youth with disabilities living in Pennsylvania and the YTED service area. YTED enrollees differed substantially from the two comparison populations across most measures. On average, YTED enrollees had lower levels of educational attainment, had a lower employment rate, and worked fewer hours per week. YTED enrollees were also more likely to live in households with family, friends, or on their own than in group settings. However, Medicaid coverage was similar among YTED enrollees and the two comparison populations. These findings have implications for the generalizability of YTED findings to the broader population of youth with disabilities.

Introduction

Compared with their peers without disabilities, fewer youth with disabilities work or enroll in postsecondary education (Cobb et al. 2013; Newman et al. 2011). Among 1.8 million youth ages 16 to 24 with a disability in 2021, 31 percent were employed, compared to 51 percent of their peers without a disability (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022). Many youth with disabilities depend on public income support and go on to receive disability benefits as adults (Hemmeter et al. 2017).

In 2023, the Social Security Administration (SSA) awarded Mathematica a cooperative agreement to direct the Youth Transition Exploration Demonstration (YTED) under the Interventional Cooperative Agreement Program (ICAP). The

Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) implements the demonstration using its own funds. Mathematica and its subgrantee, the Center for Transition and Career Innovation at the University of Maryland, oversee and support the implementation. Mathematica is conducting an evaluation of YTED.

OVR provides vocational rehabilitation services to help people with disabilities living in Pennsylvania prepare for, obtain, or maintain employment. To be eligible for OVR services, a person must (1) have a documented mental or physical disability that causes a substantial impediment to employment; (2) be able to benefit from OVR services; and (3) need OVR services to prepare for, enter, engage in, or retain employment (Disability Rights Pennsylvania 2018). As part of determining

eligibility for services, OVR will typically request medical records or evaluations that document a person's disability.

In the 2024 program year, Pennsylvania OVR served more than 47,000 participants, making Pennsylvania OVR the fifth largest state vocational rehabilitation agency by participants served. Of these participants, more than 55 percent were between the ages of 16 and 24 (Rehabilitation Services Administration n.d.) – the age group eligible for YTED enrollment.

Youth between the ages of 16 and 24 are eligible to enroll in YTED if they have a disability that would qualify them for OVR services but do not currently have a signed Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE).¹ Additionally, whereas OVR serves people with disabilities throughout the state, youth eligible for YTED must live in Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, or Philadelphia counties or certain sections of Bucks County.

The goals of YTED are to (1) test whether intensive employment services improve employment and other outcomes for youth with disabilities who are transitioning to adulthood and (2) strengthen cooperation and coordination among organizations that serve youth with disabilities. OVR will enroll up to 350 youth who meet the YTED eligibility criteria. Mathematica will randomly assign half of YTED enrollees to the usual services (control) group and half to the YTED services (treatment) group. Youth in the usual services group receive information about how to apply to OVR (if they have not already applied) and continue to be eligible for all existing services. Youth in the YTED services group have an OVR case opened for them and are assigned to a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor with specialized YTED training. YTED services group members receive OVR services that help them develop career goals and connect with intensive job training programs

and other services to support their goals. For the purposes of YTED, an intensive job training program is one that lasts for at least a few months, provides training and education for different types of jobs, and may offer college credit or hands-on training experiences. Some examples of job training programs accessible to YTED enrollees include apprenticeships, pre-apprenticeships, and specific programs like [Year Up](#) and [OVR's Hiram G. Andrews Center](#).

In this brief, we use YTED enrollment survey data and American Community Survey (ACS) data to compare the socioeconomic characteristics of YTED enrollees who enrolled in the first year of implementation (2025) with those of two populations of youth with disabilities: those living (1) in Pennsylvania and (2) in the YTED service area. These comparisons reveal whether YTED enrollees are similar to other youth with disabilities in similar geographies. The comparisons also shed light on the implications for the generalizability of YTED findings to the broader population of youth with disabilities.

In the sections below, we summarize and interpret the findings of these comparisons. We begin by comparing educational attainment levels of YTED enrollees and the two comparison populations, then comparing several employment characteristics. We then examine the differences in Medicaid coverage and living arrangements between YTED enrollees and the two comparison populations. Finally, we discuss potential interpretations and implications of the findings. Appendix A describes our sample, methods, and data sources. Exhibit B.1 in Appendix B presents a detailed comparison of characteristics between YTED enrollees and youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania and in the YTED service area.

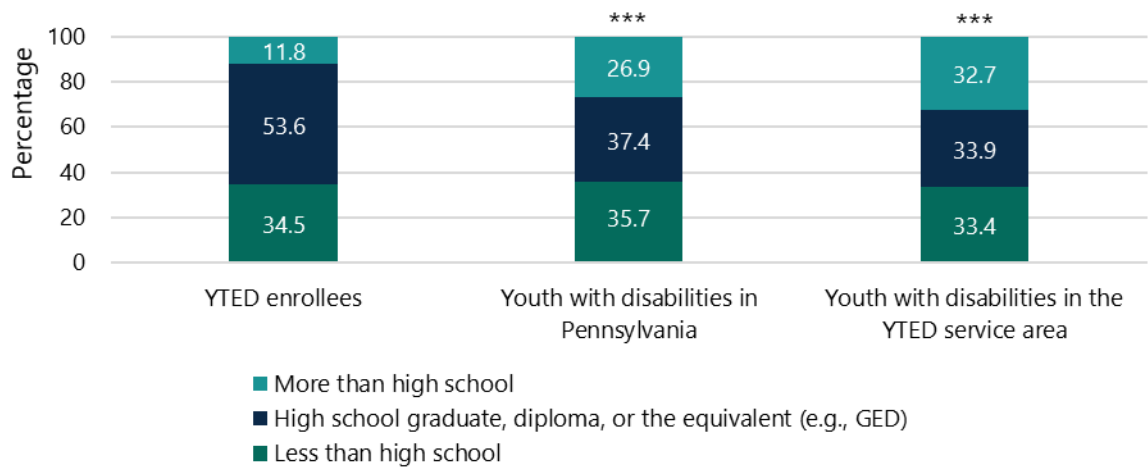
¹ Given the relatively small participant base of OVR's Philadelphia Bureau of Blindness and Visual Services (BBVS) office, youth who have a signed IPE with the Philadelphia BBVS office are still eligible for YTED enrollment to promote representation of these youth in YTED.

Characteristics of YTED enrollees and comparison populations

We analyzed six characteristics for the comparisons. Some characteristics are measured slightly differently for the YTED and comparison populations because of differences in the underlying data (see Appendix A for more details). Characteristics of YTED enrollees differed substantially from those of the two comparison populations across five of the six characteristics examined.

YTED enrollees had relatively low levels of educational attainment at enrollment (Exhibit 1). More than a quarter of youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania (26.9 percent) and roughly a third of youth with disabilities in the YTED service area (32.7 percent) completed education beyond high school. Conversely, only 12 percent of YTED enrollees had completed education beyond high school at the time of YTED enrollment. However, more than half of YTED enrollees had received a high school diploma or the equivalent by enrollment.

Exhibit 1. Educational attainment of YTED enrollees, youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania, and youth with disabilities in the YTED service area

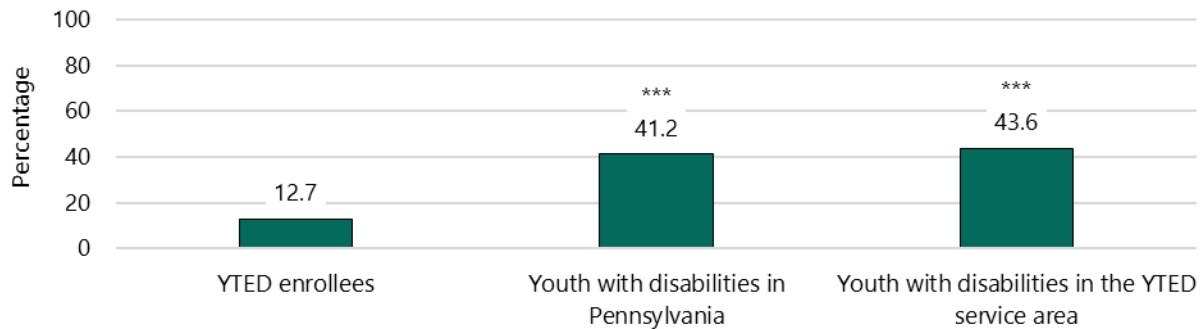


*/**/*** The educational attainment distribution relative to that of YTED enrollees is significantly different (p -value is less than .10/.05/.01) using a chi-square test.

Significantly fewer YTED enrollees were employed at enrollment relative to the comparison populations (Exhibit 2). More than 40 percent of youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania and in the YTED service area were employed at the time of survey response. In contrast, only 13 percent of YTED enrollees were employed at the time of the enrollment survey.

Because the employment rate is higher for those who complete education beyond high school compared with those who complete high school or less education (National Center for Education Statistics 2024), the higher employment rate seen in the ACS comparison populations aligns with the fact that a larger share of those youth have completed education beyond high school, compared with YTED enrollees.

Exhibit 2. Employment rates among YTED enrollees, youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania, and youth with disabilities in the YTED service area

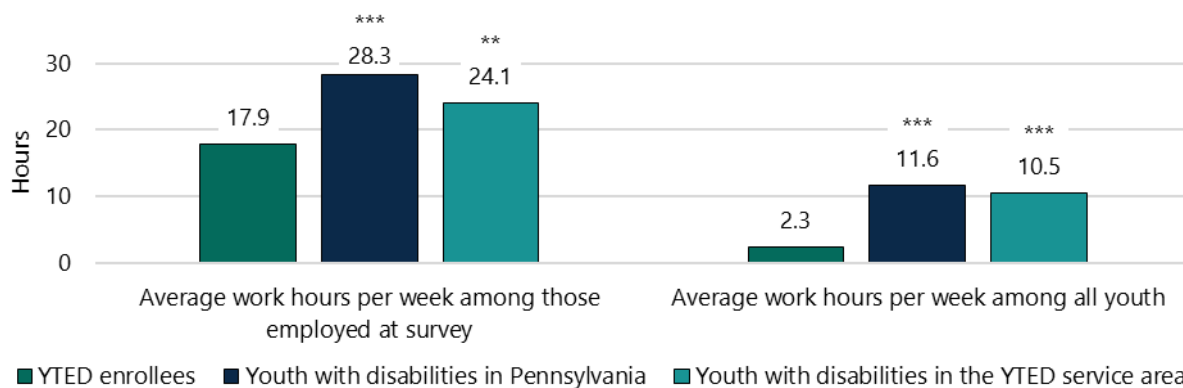


*/**/*** Difference compared to mean of YTED enrollees is significantly different from zero (p -value is less than .10/.05/.01) using a two-tailed t -test.

YTED enrollees worked relatively fewer hours per week on average (Exhibit 3). We assessed two work-hour measures: (1) average work hours per week among those employed and (2) average work hours per week among the entire population. Compared with YTED enrollees who were employed at enrollment, working youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania and in the YTED service area worked an average of 10 and 6 hours more per week, respectively. Assuming a 40-hour work week, on average, employed youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania and the YTED service area worked 60 to 70 percent of a work week, whereas employed YTED enrollees worked less than 45 percent of a work week.

Examining work hours per week among all youth, including both those working and not working at time of survey completion, the differences between YTED enrollees and the ACS comparison populations become more striking. On average, youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania and in the YTED service area worked nearly five times more hours per week than YTED enrollees. This difference in part reflects that a greater share of the ACS comparison populations (41.2 percent in Pennsylvania, 43.6 percent in the YTED service area) were employed relative to new YTED enrollees (12.7 percent).

Exhibit 3. Average work hours per week among YTED enrollees, youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania, and youth with disabilities in the YTED service area

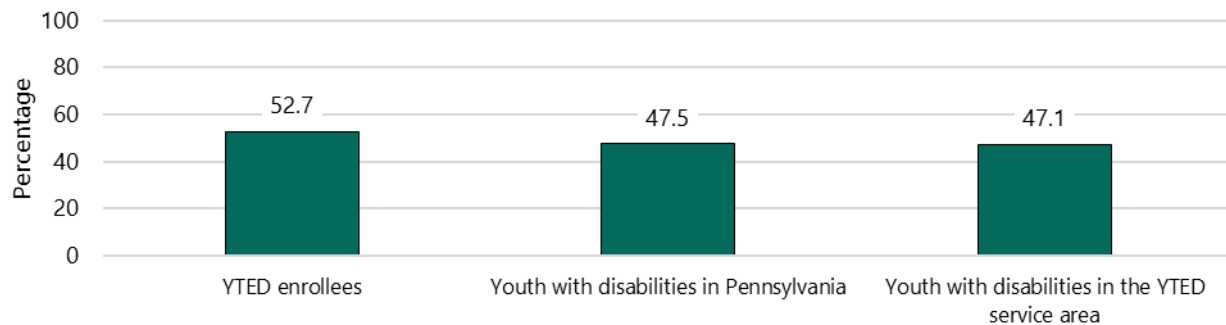


*/**/*** Difference compared to mean of YTED enrollees is significantly different from zero (p -value is less than .10/.05/.01) using a two-tailed t -test.

A similar share of youth across the YTED enrollee group and two comparison populations had Medicaid coverage (Exhibit 4). Roughly half of youth across all three populations had Medicaid coverage, and the differences in Medicaid coverage between

YTED enrollees and the comparison populations were not statistically significant. This finding suggests that youth with disabilities tend to require means-tested medical coverage at similar rates regardless of whether they are pursuing employment.

Exhibit 4. Medicaid coverage rates among YTED enrollees, youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania, and youth with disabilities in the YTED service area

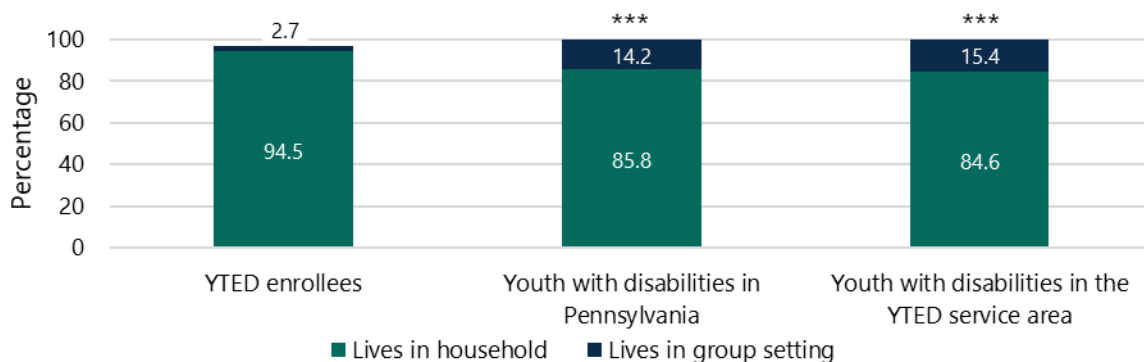


*/**/*** Difference compared to mean of YTED enrollees is significantly different from zero (p -value is less than .10/.05/.01) using a two-tailed t -test.

YTED enrollees were relatively more likely to live in a household with family or friends and less likely to live in a group setting (Exhibit 5). Nearly all YTED enrollees reported living in a household, as opposed to a group setting, at the time of YTED enrollment. Comparatively, 86 percent of youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania and 85 percent of youth with disabilities in the YTED service area reported living in a household. Because enrollment in YTED is voluntary, this difference

may be indicative of barrier-based selection. That is, youth who have unstable housing (for example, a shelter or transitional house) or more complex health needs that require a higher level of care may be less likely to enroll in YTED, even if they are eligible. This difference may also signal that youth who live in a household—either independently or with family or friends—may have access to more assistance or be more motivated to seek support in pursuing employment when transitioning to adulthood.

Exhibit 5. Living arrangements of YTED enrollees, youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania, and youth with disabilities in the YTED service area



*/**/*** The living arrangement distribution relative to that of YTED enrollees is significantly different (p -value is less than .10/.05/.01) using a chi-square test.

Discussion

Though youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania and in the YTED service area generally shared similar socioeconomic characteristics, YTED enrollees differed meaningfully from both ACS comparison populations across most measures. YTED enrollees were less likely to have completed education beyond high school, were less likely to be employed, and worked fewer hours per week on average. YTED enrollees were also more likely to live in households with family, friends, or on their own. However, similar shares of YTED enrollees and the ACS comparison populations reported having Medicaid coverage.

Youth with disabilities enrolled in YTED are those who could most benefit from YTED services. The differences between YTED enrollees and the ACS comparison populations—particularly in employment characteristics—indicate a greater need among YTED enrollees for support in finding and maintaining employment compared with other youth in Pennsylvania and in the YTED service area. YTED enrollees may look more like typical vocational rehabilitation (VR) applicants than the broader population of youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania. Similar to YTED enrollees, a substantial share of VR applicants is unemployed, and the largest share of VR applicants has received a high school diploma or equivalent but has not received any education beyond high school (Donahue et al. 2024).

The findings about living arrangements could suggest an opportunity for expanded YTED recruitment efforts. Youth with some disabilities who live in group settings are less likely to be employed compared with their counterparts living in households (Schwartz et al. 2021). Therefore, OVR may consider expanding its recruitment efforts to strengthen outreach to youth living in group settings—such as shelters, transitional homes, and group homes. Such an effort could help develop an enrollment base that is more representative of the broader population of youth with disabilities in the YTED

service area and reach additional youth with disabilities who could likely benefit from YTED services.

Differences between YTED enrollees and other youth with disabilities in similar geographies provide important context for interpreting the generalizability of future YTED evaluation findings. The differences in observed characteristics suggest that YTED is currently reaching a subset of youth with disabilities who are less educated and who may face greater economic challenges than the broader population of youth with disabilities in similar geographies. As a result, evaluation findings may be particularly informative for understanding the effectiveness of YTED among youth with disabilities with lower educational attainment levels and higher levels of economic need.

Several factors could contribute to differences between the socioeconomic characteristics of YTED enrollees and those of the ACS comparison populations:

- YTED enrollees are eligible for OVR services because they have a disability that presents a “substantial impediment to employment” (Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry n.d.). ACS respondents, however, self-report their functional difficulties and are not asked how these functional difficulties affect their ability to work. Therefore, YTED enrollees may be relatively more likely than ACS respondents with disabilities to have conditions that create a substantial obstacle to employment. These differences in disability status between YTED enrollees and the ACS comparison populations may be correlated with differences in economic characteristics.
- One of OVR’s primary recruitment sources for YTED is transition-aged youth who are already seeking OVR services. Outreach to OVR may be correlated with employment-related characteristics, such as desire to work.

- Enrollment in YTED is voluntary, and research suggests that the characteristics of people who choose to participate in a demonstration

can be different from those of the entire eligible population (Nichols et al. 2021; Patnaik et al. 2022).

The research reported herein was derived in whole or in part from research activities performed pursuant to a cooperative agreement from the U.S. Social Security Administration (SSA) funded as part of the Interventional Cooperative Agreement Program. The opinions and conclusions expressed are solely those of the author(s) and do not represent the opinions or policy of SSA or any agency of the Federal Government. Neither the United States Government nor any agency thereof, nor any of their employees, makes any warranty, express or implied, or assumes any legal liability or responsibility for the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of the contents of this report. Reference herein to any specific commercial product, process or service by trade name, trademark, manufacturer, or otherwise does not necessarily constitute or imply endorsement, recommendation or favoring by the United States Government or any agency thereof.

Appendix A. Data and Methods

Data and samples

This issue brief contains data from the Youth Transition Exploration Demonstration (YTED) enrollment survey and the American Community Survey (ACS).

YTED enrollment survey. To facilitate the evaluation, Mathematica collects information about people who enroll in the demonstration. The enrollment survey data include information about socioeconomic characteristics and employment at the time of enrollment. We obtained this information for people who enrolled into YTED between February 7, 2025, and November 25, 2025.

ACS. The ACS is a U.S. Census Bureau survey that collects detailed annual data on characteristics of the U.S. population through a random sample of households. We used information from the IPUMS USA version of the 2024 one-year ACS file (Ruggles et al. 2025). The 2024 one-year ACS file aligns most closely with the timing of enrollment of the sample of YTED participants.

The ACS includes information about individual and household characteristics, including demographics, employment, earnings and labor force participation, and schooling and educational attainment. The survey uses a standardized set of six questions to identify disability status. The questions focus on functional difficulties rather than medical diagnoses, asking respondents to report whether they have serious difficulty with hearing, vision, cognitive function, ambulatory function, self-care, or independent living. We categorized ACS respondents as having a disability if they indicated serious difficulty in at least one of

those six areas. Unlike OVR's eligibility criteria, which requires written documentation of a disability, often from a medical provider, indicators of disability status in the ACS are self-reported.

We compared the characteristics of YTED enrollees with two populations:

1. Youth ages 16 to 24 whose households responded to the 2024 ACS; who live in Pennsylvania; and who reported one or more disability type (hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and/or independent living difficulty) at the time of the survey. To select the sample of youth who lived in Pennsylvania, we selected respondents where the Federal Information Processing Standard (FIPS) state code was equal to 42 (Pennsylvania).
2. Youth ages 16 to 24 whose households responded to the 2024 ACS; who live in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, or Philadelphia counties in Pennsylvania; and who reported one or more disability type (hearing difficulty, vision difficulty, cognitive difficulty, ambulatory difficulty, self-care difficulty, and/or independent living difficulty) at the time of the survey. To select the sample of youth who lived in these five counties in Pennsylvania, we selected respondents where the FIPS state code was equal to 42 (Pennsylvania) and the FIPS county code was equal to 017 (Bucks), 029 (Chester), 045 (Delaware), 091 (Montgomery), or 101 (Philadelphia).

Exhibit A.1 shows the sample sizes of YTED enrollees and the two comparison populations.

Exhibit A.1. YTED enrollee and ACS sample sizes

Sample	Sample size	
YTED enrollees	110	
Sample	Sample size (unweighted)	Sample size (weighted)
Youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania	1,316	140,494
Youth with disabilities in the YTED service area	278	37,229

ACS = American Community Survey; YTED = Youth Transition Exploration Demonstration.

Analysis methods

We calculated the mean characteristics of YTED enrollees and the ACS comparison populations. We used ACS person weights during all analyses to account for the ACS sampling design. For each characteristic comparison, we calculated the difference in means across groups and then used statistical testing to assess whether the difference was statistically significant. For categorical variables, we used chi-squared tests to assess whether the distribution among YTED enrollees differed from the distributions among (1) youth with disabilities in Pennsylvania and (2) youth with disabilities in the YTED service area. For binary and continuous variables, we used bivariate *t*-tests. In our results, we indicate whether a difference in means is statistically significantly different at *p*-value thresholds of 10 percent, 5 percent, and 1 percent.

The characteristics of interest included education, employment, and socioeconomic characteristics. Some characteristics are measured slightly differently across groups because of differences in the underlying data:

- Medicaid coverage is measured at the individual level for ACS respondents and at the household level for YTED enrollees.
- Average work hours per week are measured over the preceding 12 months for ACS respondents and during the enrollee's current or most recent job for YTED enrollees.
- YTED enrollees were considered to live in a household if in the month before enrollment they (1) owned their own home or apartment, (2) rented their home or apartment, (3) lived with friends or relatives and paid rent, or (4) lived with friends or relatives and did not pay rent. YTED enrollees were considered to live in a group setting if in the month before enrollment they (1) were homeless or lived in emergency or temporary housing; (2) lived in a halfway house, sober house, or other transitional housing; (3) or lived in a group home. We used the ACS group quarters statuses of "Households" or "Group Quarters" to determine living arrangements for ACS respondents.

Appendix B. Additional Exhibit

Exhibit B.1. Characteristics of YTED enrollees and comparison populations

Characteristic	YTED enrollees (N = 110)	Youth with disabilities throughout Pennsylvania (N = 1,316)		Youth with disabilities in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties (N = 278)	
	Percent (A)	Percent (B)	Difference (A - B)	Percent (C)	Difference (A - C)
Medicaid coverage	52.7	47.5	5.2	47.1	5.6
Employed at survey	12.7	41.2	-28.4***	43.6	-30.9***
Average work hours per week among those employed at survey	17.9	28.3	-10.4***	24.1	-6.2**
Average work hours per week among all youth	2.3	11.6	-9.4***	10.5	-8.2***
Education level			***		***
Less than high school	34.5	35.7	-1.2	33.4	1.1
High school graduate, diploma, or the equivalent (e.g., GED)	53.6	37.4	16.2	33.9	19.8
More than high school	11.8	26.9	-15.1	32.7	-20.9
Missing	s	NA	NA	NA	NA
Living arrangements			***		***
Lives in household	94.5	85.8	8.7	84.6	10.0
Lives in group setting	2.7	14.2	-11.5	15.4	-12.7
Other	s	NA	NA	NA	NA
Missing	s	NA	NA	NA	NA

Source: YTED baseline survey; 2024 American Community Survey data obtained from IPUMS USA.

Note: This table shows the characteristics of 2025 YTED enrollees and two comparison populations: (1) youth with disabilities throughout Pennsylvania, and (2) youth with disabilities in Bucks, Chester, Delaware, Montgomery, and Philadelphia counties in Pennsylvania. It also shows whether differences in the characteristics between YTED enrollees and the comparison populations are statistically significant. Statistics from American Community Survey data are weighted to account for the American Community Survey sampling design.

s = These cells contain estimates for fewer than four observations.

Note: */**/** Difference is significantly different from zero (p -value is less than .10/.05/.01) using a two-tailed t -test or a chi-square test.

GED = General Education Development; NA = not available; YTED = Youth Transition Exploration Demonstration.

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