



Cultivating Successful Transitions

A needs assessment of youth and students with disabilities in Texas

April 2016



The University of Texas at Austin
Child & Family Research Institute
School of Social Work

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SPONSOR/FUNDER

This project was conducted with support by and in collaboration with the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS). Points of view in this document are those of the authors and participants and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The research team would like to thank DARS staff and staff at Education Service Centers who assisted in scheduling focus groups. We also express our utmost gratitude for professionals, parents and youth who took time to share their personal stories with us.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Faulkner, M., Jordanova, T., Gerlach, B. & Sheley, E. (2016). *Cultivating successful transitions: A needs assessment of youth and students with disabilities in Texas*. Austin, TX: The University of Texas at Austin.

Executive Summary

This report details findings from a needs assessment sponsored by the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS), to understand the experiences of youth and students with disabilities as they transition into post-secondary school activities such as work and/or higher education. Youth and students were identified as an underserved population in a statewide comprehensive needs assessment of Texans with disabilities in 2014. The current study sought feedback in regards to both divisions which comprise DARS: the Division for Blind Services (DBS) and the Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS). While some findings apply to both divisions, others are specific to one or the other, as indicated.

This needs assessment utilized multiple methods to gather and analyze information. Data collection began in May 2015 and concluded in October 2015. Initial interviews were conducted in May and June with nine stakeholders to gather basic information to guide focus groups. Next, from June 30 to July 31, 14 focus groups with DARS staff, education professionals and community stakeholders occurred across Texas. Community stakeholders included anyone in a community other than DARS staff and educators who have a vested interest in students with disabilities. Thus, community stakeholder groups included many parents, youth and professionals in the community. Special effort was made to contact parents whose children may not attend public school. Based on the initial themes from these focus groups, online surveys were developed. Surveys were completed in September and October by 844 DARS staff, educators and other community professionals, as well as youth and parents.

Data from the focus groups and interviews were analyzed using content analysis. Data from the surveys was consolidated to produce descriptive statistics. Both sets of data were then analyzed together through an iterative process to develop the main findings of this needs assessment.

Limitations in the methods exist and should be considered when examining the findings presented in this report. Survey and focus group participants were part of a convenience sample that might not represent the views of any specific group. While significant effort was taken to distribute the survey and information about focus groups to as many eligible individuals as possible within certain selected regions, those who completed the survey and attended the focus groups were self-selecting and could potentially be unique from those that did not participate. Therefore the results cannot be generalized to the entire population of youth and students with disabilities or other stakeholders. Additionally, sample sizes, especially those of DBS consumers, were small and thus might not be representative of the larger DARS consumer and stakeholder communities.

Overall findings highlight the reality that there are many professionals and parents across Texas who are deeply committed to cultivating individualized paths for students with disabilities to maximize their full potential as adults. There is no one system that is performing perfectly, nor is there just one system at fault for barriers that exist for students. Rather, there is movement towards a realization that collaboration between systems needs to be established as a practice and resources committed to assist students and families.

Resources are needed to overcome unique barriers faced by students with disabilities. One potential barrier for student success is the level of engagement of their caregivers. All caregivers parent children differently, and sometimes guidance is needed to assist caregivers in striking the right balance between over-involvement and disengagement. For instance, some caregivers are overly involved with their child to the point that they do not allow educators or DARS staff to explain to a child the details of his or her disability. Conversely, some parents assume that their child will never be able to work and they ignore information the school provides to them about DARS.

Another very pertinent barrier is the inconsistent relationship between DARS and schools at the local level. To put this barrier into perspective, Texas has over 1,200 school districts, 5 DRS and 12 DBS regions and over 398,000 students identified as having a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Given the large numbers and diversity of Texas, relationships between schools and DARS vary. Some schools have high regard for their DARS representative while others cannot identify their DARS representative. In general, DRS Counselors begin engaging with students in their senior year of high school. While some DRS Transition Counselors attempt to engage with high school sophomores or juniors, the engagement is too late for most students. DRS staff, educators, parents and youth felt that information needs to be provided to families beginning earlier, with a general consensus of the 9th grade as a good starting point. Recently, DRS staff began serving students with disabilities at age 14. However, in order to engage with more families beginning in the 9th grade, more Transition Counselors are needed. In contrast, DBS begins engaging with students much earlier, when students are 10 years of age. Consumers of DBS services have found this earlier start time to be beneficial. It should be noted that there is a significantly smaller number of students with blindness than those with other disabilities.

Lack of community resources are also a barrier for students, particularly those students living in rural areas that lack public transportation and job opportunities. Attitudes of employers may also inhibit job opportunities by reinforcing stigmas that youth with disabilities are not employable.

Certain populations of students may be underserved based on focus group and survey results. Students who are '504' students are often not referred to DARS. Students who are on a 504 plan are students with disabilities who receive services to improve access to education, but do not receive modifications to the curriculum. Thus, '504' students differ from those who are on a special education plan, where the curriculum is modified. In addition to '504' students, both DARS staff and educators report that students with serious emotional disturbances and students with autism spectrum disorders pose unique challenges for finding and maintaining employment. Students without stable caregiver support systems such as youth who are homeless and/or foster youth are challenging for both DARS and schools because caregiver advocacy is a strong predictor of success. Finally, students who have substance abuse issues and/or criminal histories are difficult for DARS to place in employment.

In order to address the barriers presented above, specialized services are needed to help students with disabilities maximize occupational outcomes. These specialized services include: career exploration; job placement services; job skills training; social skills training; ongoing support at

job; self-advocacy training; and supported employment services. In particular, providing skills training at schools, or access to community skills training classes while still in school, is a top priority identified by DARS staff, caregivers and youth. Additionally, in planning for a student's future, the desires and goals of the student must be a part of the dialogue between the school, DARS and parents. Another important service relates to ongoing support at the place of employment. Youth and parents requested that their cases remain open longer because the transition into employment can be difficult for any young adult and job coaching may be needed longer than 90 days, which is when a case is typically closed.

With increased federal attention on students with disabilities due to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), there is amplified awareness and enthusiasm for improving opportunities for students with disabilities. There are changes that can be made across systems to improve collaboration and experiences of students such as providing models and support for regular local collaborations between schools and DARS. In addition, DARS staff needs to be allowed and encouraged to be more creative and innovative when working with students rather than just provide services and close a case.

A final theme that emerged from focus group data is the uncertainty around the future of the vocational rehabilitation agency given upcoming structural changes that will move the vocational rehabilitation programs to the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and eventually merge DBS and DRS into one entity. Many are excited about the increased focus on youth and students and hope the TWC will be able to continue building resources for youth and students.



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Introduction

In 2014, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) was passed replacing the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. WIOA increased focus on services to students with disabilities by emphasizing the need for students to practice job skills, be involved in career planning and get real world experience while still in secondary education settings. WIOA also requires states to make “pre-employment transition services” available to all youth and students by mandating states dedicate at least 15 percent of the federal vocational rehabilitation (VR) funds for such services. In Texas, DARS VR Counselors, some with a transition-only caseload and others with a mixed adult and transition caseload, primarily serve this function.

Federal requirements also mandate that each state conduct a needs assessment of vocational rehabilitation needs every three years to inform service delivery and identify populations that are underserved. In 2014, the Child and Family Research Institute partnered with DARS to conduct a statewide needs assessment. Findings of that assessment suggested that youth and students with disabilities are an underserved population in Texas. Given the findings of the statewide needs assessment and the federal attention on this population, DARS again partnered with the Child and Family Research Institute to provide additional information about the specific needs of youth and students with disabilities.

This needs assessment sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What barriers/resources do youth and students with disabilities face during transition to post-secondary employment and/or higher education?
2. What populations of youth and students are underserved?
3. What are the service needs of youth and students with disabilities as they transition to employment or higher education?
4. How can service barriers and needs be best addressed?

The needs assessment team utilized multiple methods to collect data including individual interviews, focus groups and online surveys. Data collection occurred between May and October, 2015. Special effort was made to contact parents whose children may not attend public school. Based on the initial themes from these focus groups, online surveys were created for DARS staff, educators and other community professionals, and youth and parents. A detailed account of the methods can be found in Appendix A.

This report is structured around the main findings from the needs assessment. These findings include barriers faced by youth and students with disabilities, specialized services needed to help youth and students with disabilities and systemic improvements that can cultivate successful transitions for youth and students with disabilities. Both qualitative and quantitative findings are presented in each section, along with areas of opportunities for growth. Because the amount of data from this project was substantial, only relevant graphs and quotes related to the theme are presented in each section. However, demographic information and detailed charts to every survey question can be found in Appendix B.

The needs assessment sought feedback in regards to the two divisions within DARS: the Division for Blind Services (DBS), which provides services to individuals who are blind or have visual impairments, and the Division for Rehabilitation Services (DRS), which serves individuals with disabilities other than blindness. While some findings apply to both divisions, others are specific to one or the other, and are indicated as such when that is the case.

Barriers faced by students with disabilities

Participants in this needs assessment provided detailed information about barriers that youth and students with disabilities face as they move into adult occupations and/or higher education. In some cases, barriers were more often identified by a particular participant group (parents, DARS staff, stakeholders or education professionals), but all barriers were consistently identified in focus groups, stakeholder interviews and/or surveys as being barriers. These barriers relate to family barriers, schools and DARS collaboration, lack of resources at many schools and additional resources needed by DARS.

Family engagement may not be balanced in a way to help student succeed

Parent involvement was highlighted as a key to successful transitions in each focus group. However, parent involvement was also discussed as the largest barrier. As one participant stated, “The key is support of the family. Sometimes the parents are the barrier because they don’t want their child to go to work and get hurt, so they let them stay home and they foster (not working).” Forty-three percent of survey respondents who were students or parents noted that lack of family support was a barrier for student success.

Parents may shelter child too much

In three focus groups with DARS and/or school representatives, discussions addressed difficulties professionals may have in working with parents who do not want their child to know they have a disability. Professionals recounted stories of attempting to provide outreach with parents and connect them to services in the community, only to have the parent tell them that their child did not have a disability. In working with students, professionals note that students will follow their parents’ lead. Without the support of the parent, DARS staff members are not able to get involved with a child until they reach the age of 18 and can consent to services on their own.

“The student has to become a self-advocate early on in order for their outcome to be better. And then the parent has to know enough to help their child become an advocate. And at one point, you know, even myself as a parent, I have to step back and I have to let my son have his own voice and say, ‘this is what I want,’ and make those decisions, whether I agree with them or not.”

-focus group participant

Parents may underestimate a child’s capabilities

Participants in four focus groups noted that there are some parents who do not fully understand their child’s disability and/or capacity for employment in adulthood and thus, they underestimate their child’s ability for employment. Professionals noted that those parents who did not understand their child’s disability tended to struggle less with understanding physical

disabilities and more with cognitive or mental health related disabilities. Both DARS staff and education professionals felt that part of their role was to help the parent understand the disability and the child's vocational capabilities. Both groups of professionals were sensitive to the fact that families may go through a "healing process" when they first fully understand their child's capabilities.

Parents may have unrealistic expectations for their child

While some parents were noted as underestimating their child's capabilities, other parents were described as setting goals beyond what their child could likely achieve. Unrealistic expectations were discussed in four focus groups. Incidentally, three of those four groups had also addressed parents underestimating their child's abilities. DARS staff and education professionals conveyed that schools often provide incomplete information to parents or do not engage parents in realistic conversations about the future.

According to focus group participants, there are parents who feel that their child can succeed in higher education despite the low academic levels of the student. Schools may reinforce these goals without helping parents plan for how to accomplish that goal.

“ There is also another side of this problem where the parents themselves have such high expectations of their son/daughter and are clueless of their true limitations. A great deal of communication and understanding needs to take place to educate the parents and the students about the real world and the world of work. ”

-focus group participant



Having an advocate is key

In six focus groups, participants noted that many parents learn to navigate systems and are able to advocate efficiently for their children. While student advocacy was also mentioned, the role of a parent as an advocate was noted as critical for student success. In some cases, parents stated that monitoring and learning about their child's disability became a full-time job for them. Several parent focus group participants reported quitting their jobs to home-school their children and others reported being a stay-at-home parent in order to be more active in their child's education. Parents struggled to teach themselves how to navigate systems and felt they had become experts. Both professionals and parents felt that there are youth who do not have

anyone in their lives to be advocates. In particular, they expressed concern for foster students not having an advocate.

“ And if there was a predictor that I could say of an unsuccessful or successful case, it would be parental involvement, no matter what the disability is. And if they don't have a parent, an aunt, a grandparent, or older brother or sister, they have to have a support system available. ”

-focus group participant

Parents may fear losing SSI/SSDI benefits

Loss of social security benefits was a consistent issue raised by stakeholders, DARS staff and educators. The topic was discussed in eight focus groups and identified as a significant barrier by survey participants. Over 50% of educators and other professionals reported that loss of benefits was a significant barrier for parents. Forty percent of all other survey participants indicated that loss of benefits was a significant barrier.

Benefits planning is one of the top needs identified by survey participants. When asked about how often services are received, participants responded that benefits planning occurs rarely or sometimes. Over 40% of DARS staff, over 70% of educators and professionals and over 80% of caregivers and youth reported that benefits planning occurs never or just sometimes.

Focus group participants supported the importance of this topic by describing in detail some of their challenges. Professionals who participated in focus groups spoke about the confusion experienced by families. In some cases, families fear that allowing their

Figure 1. Percent of survey respondents indicating concerns over the loss of SSI/SSDI benefits is a significant barrier

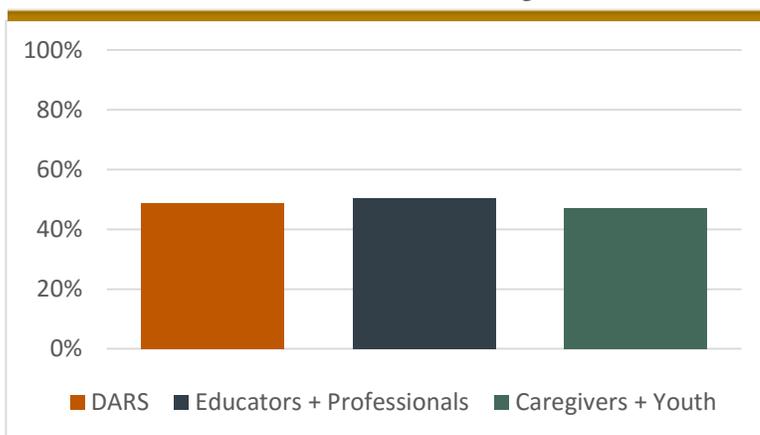
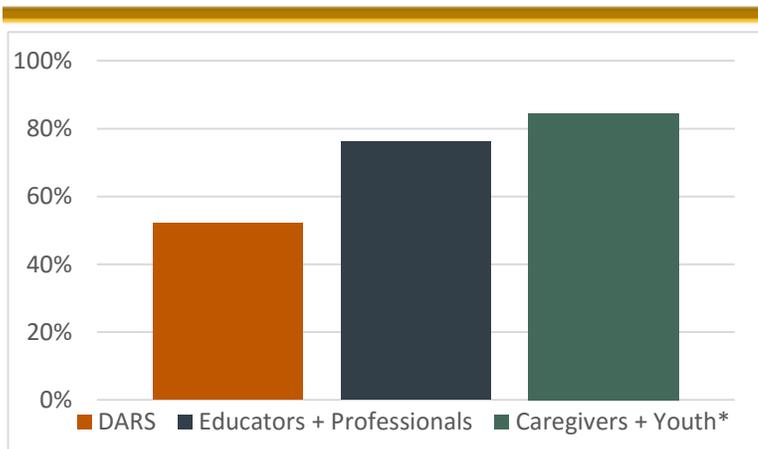


Figure 2. Survey respondents reporting need for benefits planning is never or sometimes met



young adult to work will result in them losing all of their benefits, including much needed Medicaid or Medicare. As such, caregivers avoid vocational services and assume that their child will never work. Professionals feel that benefits need to be explained and repeatedly discussed with parents early and often in order to combat misinformation about losing SSDI.

Connections between schools and DARS are inconsistent

In focus groups, participants felt that DARS Transition Counselors were incredibly helpful when they were able to develop a relationship with the school. Educators and DARS staff indicated that they wanted better relationships. The subthemes discussed below describe the challenges that exist in many areas in relation to the collaboration between DARS and schools. It is important to note that the collaboration between these systems was never described as completely the fault of one system or the other. Rather, participants acknowledged needing improvement by both systems.

The relationship between DARS and schools is inconsistent

The relationship between DARS and schools varied widely with some educators reporting wonderful relationships with their DARS representative and others reporting no engagement with their DARS representative. Likewise, DARS representatives reported that some schools and school districts actively include them while others do not engage with them despite multiple outreach attempts. The result is that parents are confused by conflicting information they may receive from both groups.

“ (The DARS counselor) would not see (my son) when he was at high school because she just said ‘we can't help him.’ Really? The person that comes to the school that I work at was, until she got promoted, the best thing I've ever seen, phenomenal. She came into my school and she reached out, helped, met with, placed, worked with, on the level of every one of those kids. Amazing. I have never seen anyone like that woman. Amazing. ”

—focus group participant (mother of student with disability who is also a teacher)

In 12 of the 14 focus groups, participants discussed inconsistency in the information that they receive from DARS representatives and the degree of engagement from DARS representatives. In three focus groups, some participants noted that they did not know their DARS representative. In six focus groups, some participants described their DARS representative as not helpful. However, in five focus groups, participants noted that their DARS representative was helpful and at least one participant noted that their DARS representative was regularly on campus.

It is important to note that while many participants reported that inaccurate information and lack of collaboration were significant barriers, DBS staff reported that these were less of a barrier

than other participant groups. Just over 10% of DBS staff reported that inaccurate information and lack of collaboration with schools were barriers. In focus groups, DBS staff clarified that because they have the ability to provide services to families when the students are young children, DBS staff are able to develop strong relationships with families and follow the student through school. Thus, they felt that they had a greater advantage in building relationships with schools.

Focus group participants also spoke about Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) meetings and the potential benefits of having DARS representatives attend those meetings. In two focus groups, participants reported that DARS staff regularly attend ARD meetings. In three focus groups, participants reported that DARS staff are invited to attend ARD meetings, but they rarely attend. Two focus groups with DARS representatives had discussions about DARS representatives wanting to be invited to ARD meetings. In general, participants felt that having DARS representatives at ARD meetings was beneficial. In early high school years, those meetings could be an introduction and reminder for the caregiver and student about the services DARS offers. In later high school years, participation in ARD meetings could help a caregiver and student plan for work or higher education. While participation in ARDs was generally thought to be a positive approach to engaging caregivers with DARS, it was also acknowledged by participants that DARS would not have the resources to attend every ARD meeting.

Figure 3. Percent of survey respondents reporting issues were significant barriers

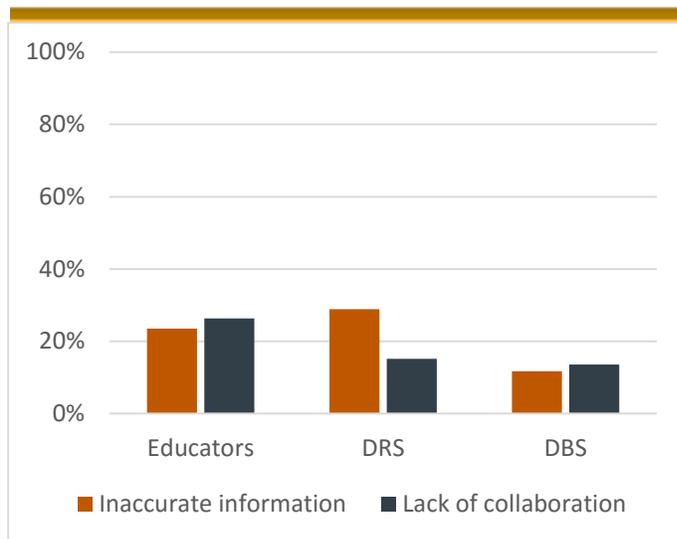


Figure 4. How often DARS visits schools

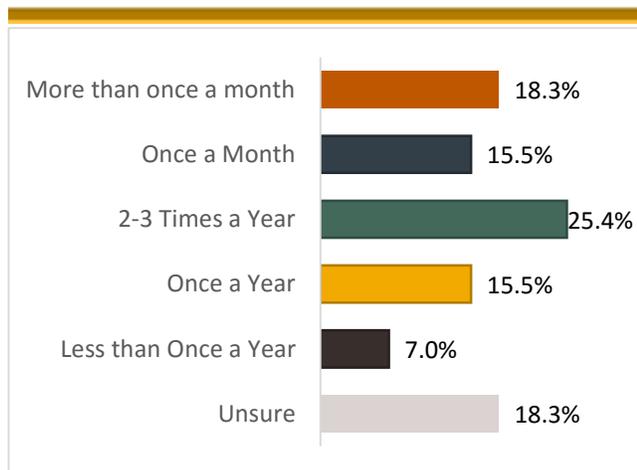
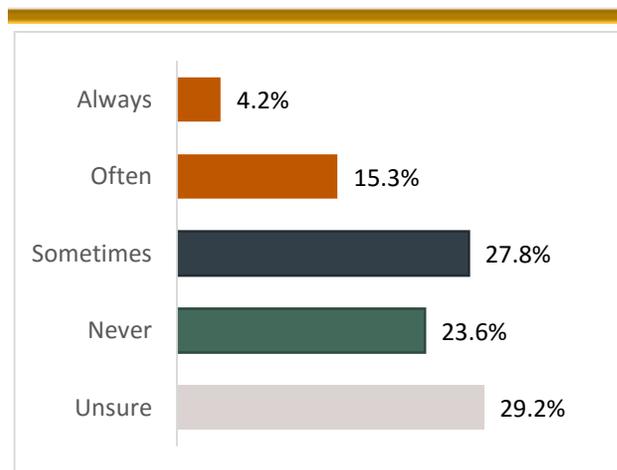


Figure 5. How often DARS attends ARDS when invited

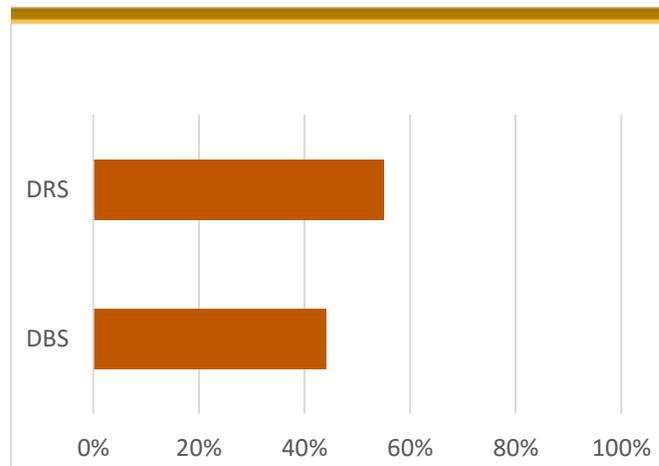


DRS engages with students too late

The issue most often mentioned in every focus group was the time and age at which DRS gets involved in a student's planning. In some cases, DRS had gotten involved with students in their junior year of high school, but many participants reported that DRS becomes involved in the students' senior year. In contrast, DBS staff reported being involved with youth beginning at the age of 10 years old. As such they are able to develop trusting relationships with students and caregivers. One DBS staff expressed her excitement for a student on her caseload who was about to graduate from high school. She conveyed that her ability to work with the youth from the age of 10 had assisted in helping the child pursue higher education.

DRS staff expressed a desire to become involved with students at an earlier age in order to help guide students and parents. Over half of the DRS staff who completed the survey reported that the age students are referred impacts their ability to work with youth a lot. In focus groups, DRS transition counselors expressed a desire to engage with youth earlier to maximize the youth's chance of success.

Figure 6. Percent of DARS staff responding that age of referral impacts their ability to work with youth



“Coming from the DBS side, I can't imagine not getting (students) until they're a sophomore or a junior in high school because so much of what we build starts so much earlier with camps, with independent living skills, making sure that they have those opportunities, talking to the parents at 10, 11, 12 years old, 'yes your child is going to be employed.'”

-focus group participant

However, they had reservations about engaging with students earlier than the junior year for several reasons. First, they felt that parents and students are not focused on vocational goals at that point in high school. Second, they did not feel that there was enough staffing available to connect with every student who would need a DRS counselor. Finally, those DRS counselors who are not transition counselors felt that there was little benefit to bringing a student on their caseload who would not be able to work for several years.

The right age for involvement varied for participants. One mother simply stated, “I wish we had known about DARS before the end of 12th grade.” In general, participants felt that the 12th grade was far too late to begin working with DARS. Parents in focus groups tended to want early

introductions to DRS services even if they would not be engaging in those services for a long time. Over 30% of educators who participated in the survey felt DRS should be involved with youth prior to the 9th grade. DRS staff tended to believe the 10th or 11th grades were ideal times to get involved with students. Both educators and DBS staff were split between believing that DBS should get involved with students prior to the 5th grade or after the 8th grade. Overall, a very small percentage of educators and DARS staff feel that engaging with student post-graduation is ideal. Staff and educators want services to start well before graduation. All participants felt that caregivers and their children needed support throughout their lives, regardless of who provides that support.

Figure 7. DRS ideal time to get involved

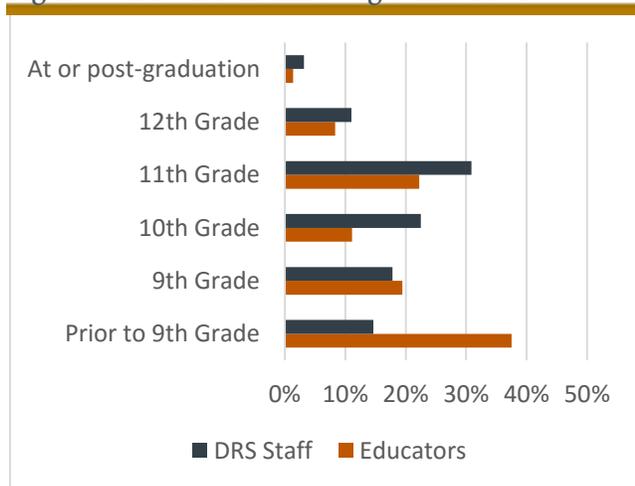
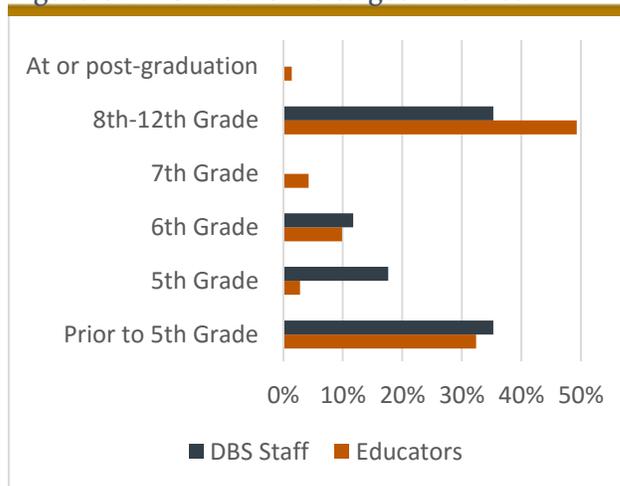


Figure 8. DBS ideal time to get involved



“Children and youth with disabilities need services from birth or identification in order to be successful in moving into independence and employment. It takes a long time and a lot of work to help both the consumer and family get to those goals. It is not an easy journey and they need a consistent, competent, capable guide to get there. The good news is if they get that (guidance) the outcome is mostly terrific. It is very penny wise and pound foolish not to invest in these folks through childhood. It is not only the right thing to do; it is the most economical thing to do as well, in the long run.”

—focus group participant

School assessments and expectations sometimes differ from those of DARS

Lack of collaboration between DARS and schools tends to result in differences in assessments of students. Ten focus groups discussed that parents and youth sometimes develop unrealistic vocational goals while in the school system. Both DARS staff and educators described this issue and reasons for the issue.

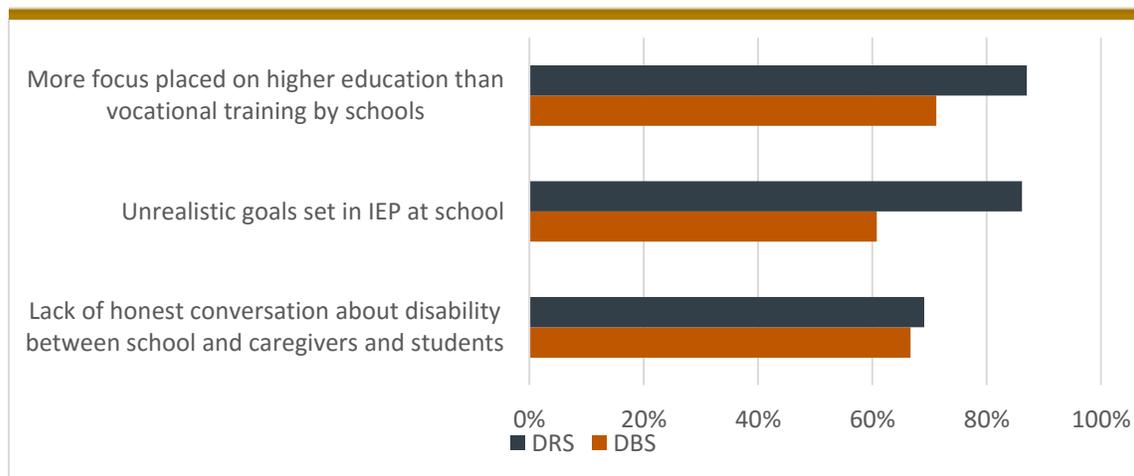
The majority of DARS staff who completed the survey indicated that barriers exist related to unrealistic goals. They also indicated that schools avoid honest conversations about their student’s abilities. As such, many youth feel that they can successfully complete college and have careers despite not being on grade level.

“ Parents do not understand that even though their child may be included in a class such as chemistry or algebra, it does not mean that they are learning the same material and held to same standard. Parents think their child can go to college when in fact their child is reading at a 2nd grade level. ”

-focus group participant

Several DARS staff members described parents and schools who included career opportunities such as doctor or astronaut in a student’s Individualized Education Plan (IEP) when a student was actually functioning well below grade level and would likely need supported employment. One DARS staff described how the school would list these goals and then discreetly include a line that the student needed supported employment. The worker reported that the school staff “do not say that out loud.”

Figure 9. Percent of DARS staff indicating issues as a barrier in their work with schools sometimes or a lot of the time



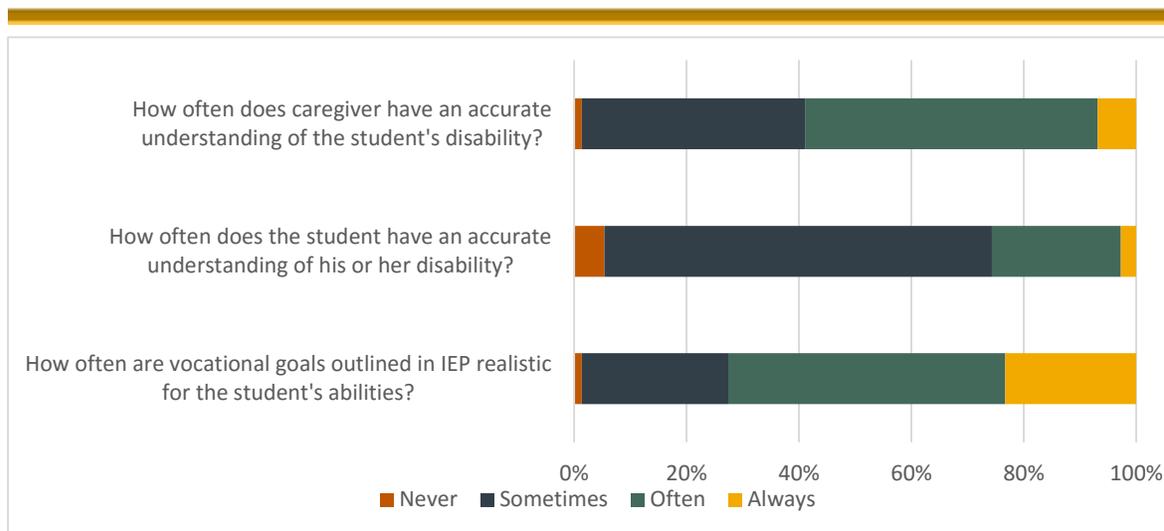
Education professionals confirmed that there is often a discrepancy between the student’s abilities and vocational goals. Education professionals responded that the majority of the time caregivers have an understanding of the student’s ability. However, about 75% of the time, students do not have an accurate understanding of their disability. Education professionals also noted that at least 25% of the time, IEP goals are not realistic. DARS staff felt that the lack of realistic goals may be due to the perspective of schools wanting to have a student with a disability graduate, but not necessarily helping that student envision a future.

As a result, some DARS staff felt that they were forced into positions where they had to give conflicting and sometimes disappointing assessments to students. DARS staff described this role as a “dream killer” or “reality-checker.” They expressed a desire to work more closely with schools in order to better set the student up for success.

“ We need to spend these whole four years working together, getting you on a realistic plan. Because what I find that the schools do, they work it kind of differently. ”

–focus group participant

Figure 10. Percent of education professionals responding to the following questions



Although many participants discussed the need to be realistic when developing plans with youth, some parents and one former DARS client indicated that they had succeeded in college despite the opinions of their DARS workers and even the college itself. However, they did note that caregiver support and advocacy was critical to that success.

“ The attitude of colleges seems to be that if they can't make it on their own they don't belong in college. Many of these students need more accommodations and can be quite successful in college. I know of two young men who are brilliant but dropped out due to lack of support. Our son is a junior in college with a 3.0+ GPA, but it takes enormous parental support. ”

–focus group participant

DARS needs additional resources

DARS employees expressed a great desire to help youth and students and recounted several success stories during focus groups. Likewise, educators and parents had many stories about positive relationships with DARS. However, as discussed in previous sections, there are frustrations with DARS related to lack of consistency with schools and parents. At the root of many of those frustrations is an understanding that DARS needs additional resources to be able to meet all the needs of students.

There are not enough DARS Transition Counselors

Survey and focus group participants addressed the need for additional Transition Counselors. In 13 of the focus groups, lack of Transition Counselors was mentioned 136 times. All focus group participants spoke to the value of having quality Transition Counselors, but recognized that Transition Counselors were covering too many high schools. In one large urban area, there were three Transition Counselors covering over 50 high schools.

Figure 11. Counselor’s time to serve youth & students, compared to adults

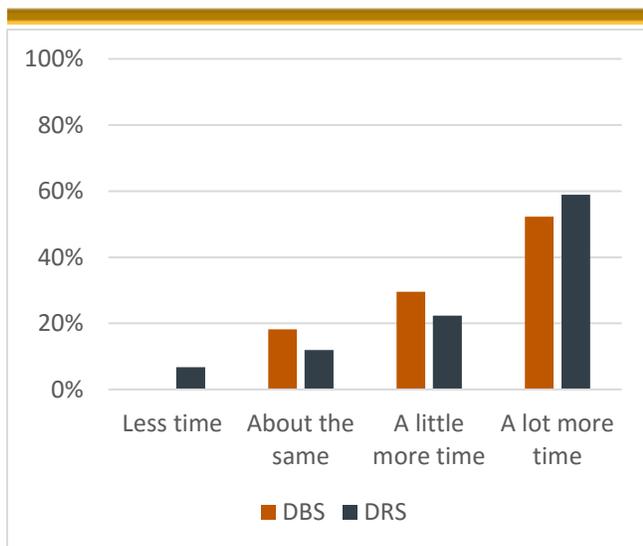
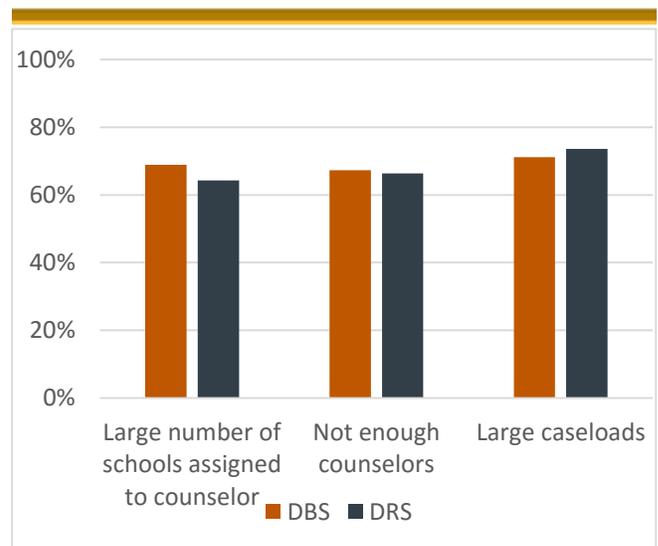


Figure 12. Percent of DARS staff indicating that issue impacts their ability to provide services sometimes or a lot of the time



In areas without Transition Counselors, regular Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselors work with high school students. DARS staff reported that Transition Counselors are better prepared to work with students. Students require more time and have unique needs compared to the average adult consumer that a regular VR Counselor may work with. Over half of DARS staff that completed the survey reported that working with students takes ‘a lot more’ time in comparison to adults. The more intense services needed by students further reduces the number of students who can be directly served by Transition Counselors. Transition Counselors reported needing adjusted caseloads to meet the needs of youth.

“ I think that more Transition Counselors, period, would create more opportunities for the counselors themselves to do more for the schools and to create more communication. If it's just you and you're a Transition Counselor, you have two big schools. You can give more of your time to those schools, as opposed to just, ‘Okay, 30 minutes – that’s all I've got, let's go!’ ”

-focus group participant

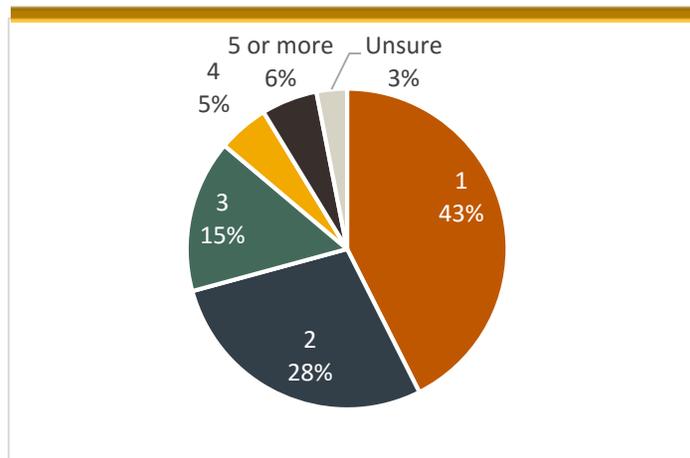
Consumers are unhappy with the high turnover of DARS Counselors

High turnover of DARS Counselors was a topic discussed in seven focus groups. Of the youth and parents who responded to our survey, 33% reported they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with turnover at DARS. Over 50% of the DBS and DRS staff that responded to our survey also indicated that high turnover rates impacted their ability to provide services.

More than half of the youth and parents surveyed had more than one DARS Counselor during their time being served by DARS. Only 43% of students and parents reported having the same DARS Counselor during their time being served by DARS. An additional 28% had two counselors and 15% had three counselors.

DARS staff reported that turnover often impacts them as they have to cover colleague’s cases. Changes in counselors are also disruptive for students and youth. Parents, youth and educators all reported that changes in DARS staff were incredibly burdensome as families had to repeat their stories to a new counselor. They also reported that a new counselor sometimes would provide contradictory information to that provided by a previous counselor.

Figure 13. Percent of parents and youth reporting numbers of counselors

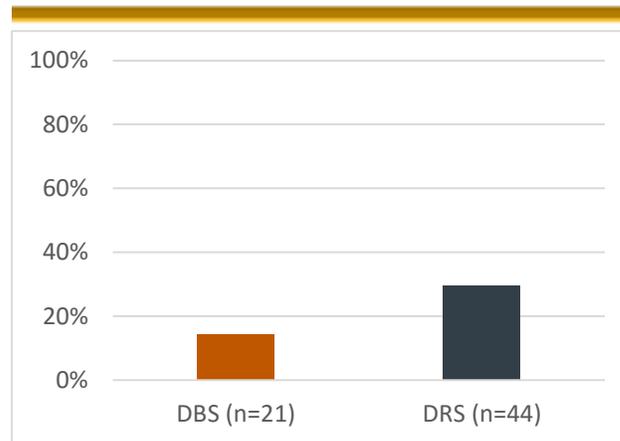


Takes too long to get services

Participants in six focus groups, primarily stakeholder groups, discussed the length of time it takes for youth and students to get services. Additionally, 30% of parents and youth who completed the survey reported dissatisfaction with the length of time to receive DRS services, while 14% reported dissatisfaction with the length of time to receive DBS services.

In many cases, participants reported that the length of time to receive services was related to the turnover of counselors. Other participants described bureaucratic barriers that delayed them receiving the services they needed. One survey respondent provided a detailed account of a catch-22 requiring her to get a job before completing a driver's training course but needing to be able to drive to obtain a job.

Figure 14. Percent of parents and youth reporting being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the length of time until services received



“ DARS process seemed slow, we went to an intake meeting in April and our counselor transferred to another job and our case was not transferred. I called to set up another meeting and got in in October. After that slowly all fell into place and she started a job with a trainer in July. ”

-focus group participant

Some consumers report problems communicating with DARS

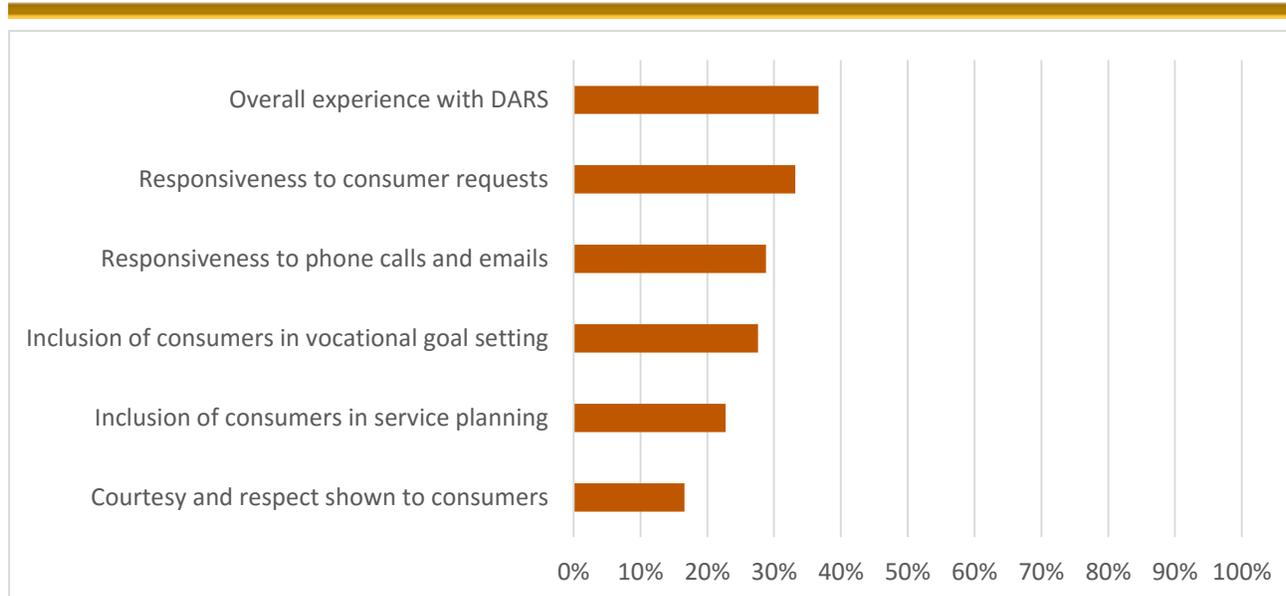
In general, survey respondents reported satisfaction with DARS services. However, in six focus groups, participants did discuss problems communicating with DARS, particularly in relation to staff turnover. Thirty-three percent of parents and youth reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with DARS responsiveness to consumer requests and 29% reported being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with DARS Counselors' responsiveness to phone calls and emails.

Some consumers also report having negative interactions with DARS staff

Both focus group and survey respondents discussed multiple negative interactions with DRS and DBS staff. Five focus groups discussed negative attitudes. In the survey, 17% of parents and youth reported being dissatisfied with the courtesy and respect that DARS counselors show consumers. Some parents and youth also responded to survey questions indicating they were dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with certain issues, such as the inclusion of consumers in goal setting (28%) and service planning (23%). Thirty-seven percent of respondents were dissatisfied with their overall experience with DARS.

Please note that results are not separated by DBS and DRS consumers, because the DBS consumer sample sizes were too small (ranging from 6 to 22 respondents) to report on their own. Additionally, it is important to note that while these survey results represent the experiences of the survey respondents, they may not be representative of all DARS consumers, since the survey did not use a random sample. Please also refer to the DARS Consumer Satisfaction Survey, which uses a random sample technique and thus may provide more accurate results.

Figure 15. Percent of parents and youth reporting they are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied



Communities may not be able to meet the needs of youth and students

Although much of this needs assessment focused on DARS and schools, meeting the needs of youth and students with disabilities requires more resources and support than either system can provide. Thus, multiple discussions in focus groups centered on lack of job opportunities and other services available in rural areas. Participants also indicated that stigma against individuals with disabilities is a barrier to students and youth finding employment.

Few resources in rural areas

In eight focus groups, participants discussed unique challenges of youth in rural areas. Additionally, survey respondents in rural areas were more likely to report that resources in their communities were inadequate. In general, parents and youth in rural areas reported inadequate job availability at higher rates than parents and youth in urban areas. DARS staff were also more likely to report that developing community partnerships and relationships with employers was more difficult in rural areas. Parents and youth in rural areas noted that job training programs were inadequate in their community. DARS staff also responded that lack of programming in rural areas was problematic.

Rural areas also pose issues for DARS to reach youth and students. Given the lack of Transition Counselors, large caseloads and turnover of DARS staff, there are often not enough DARS Counselors available to collaborate with schools. Some parents reported driving an hour or more to access a DARS office. Many acknowledged that long distances are the reality of our state, but that there are perhaps more creative ways to reach students.

“ And the other thing about services is that it's going to vary significantly across the state and generally in your more rural communities; there are just not as many services. I mean that's just – that's reality. ”

–focus group participant

“ Better access to services in rural areas of Texas. It is almost impossible to get DARS support in these rural areas. Small schools or Special Ed Co-ops are limited on getting DARS to come and give information on transition services. ”

–focus group participant



Figure 16. Percent of parents, youth and professionals indicating resource in their community is inadequate; by urban-rural location

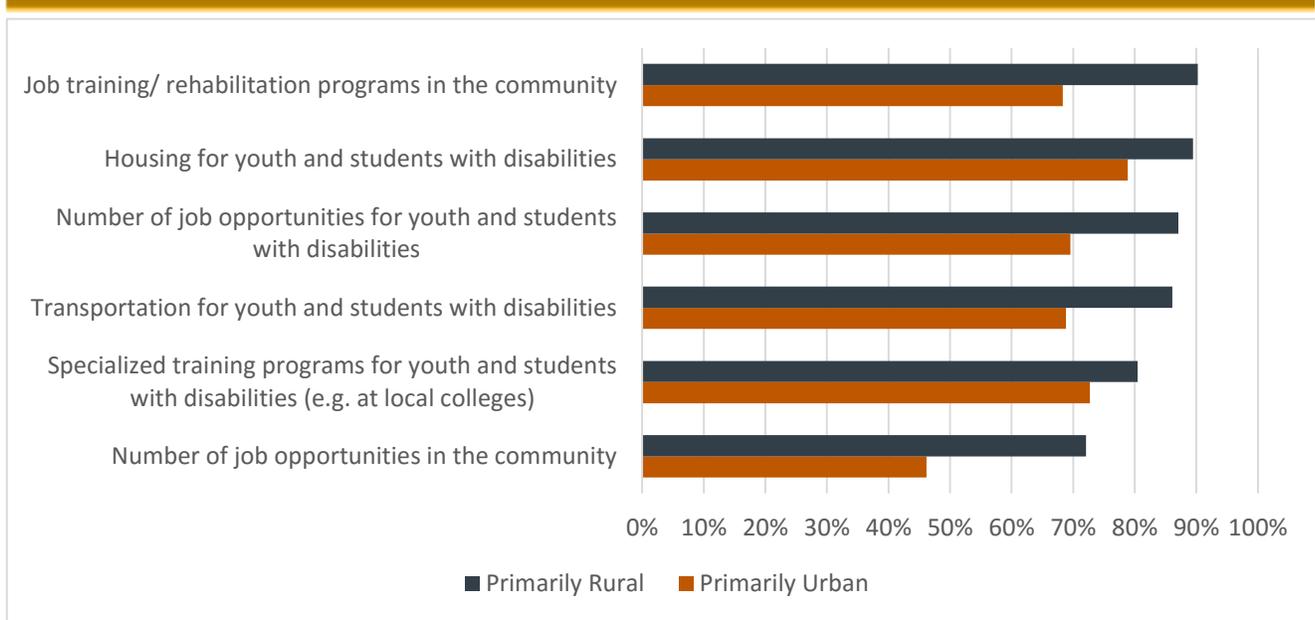
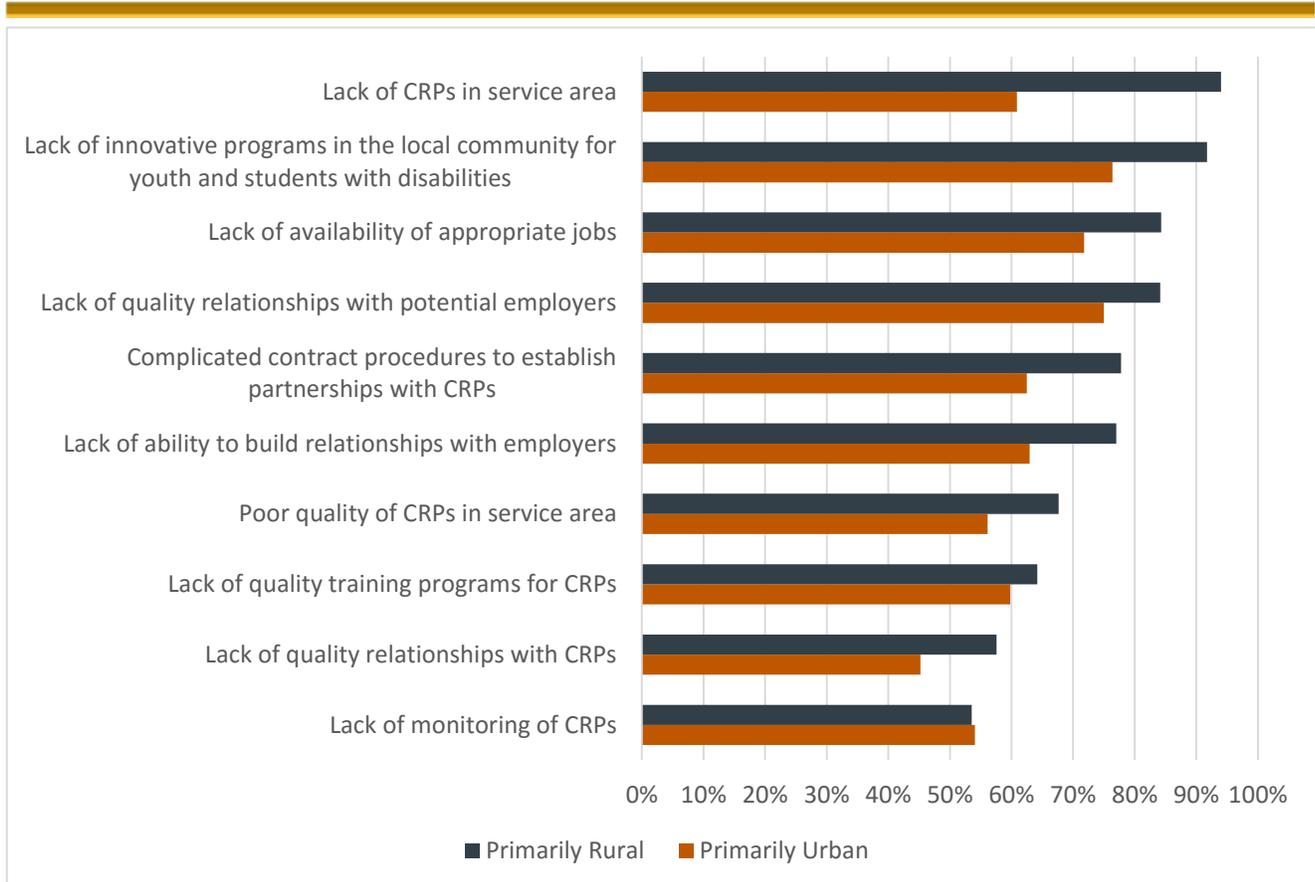


Figure 17. Percent of DARS staff indicating that an issue is a problem some or a lot of the time; by urban-rural location



Stigma regarding ability to work is a barrier

Participants in eight focus groups discussed stigma primarily by employers, which created a barrier for work opportunities. As a result, more than half of professionals, educators and parents reported there were not enough job opportunities for people with disabilities in their communities. The lack of jobs was discussed in terms of stigma. Employers doubt the ability of individuals to work due to a disability.

Figure 18. Percent of respondents reporting inadequate number of jobs for youth and students with disabilities in their community

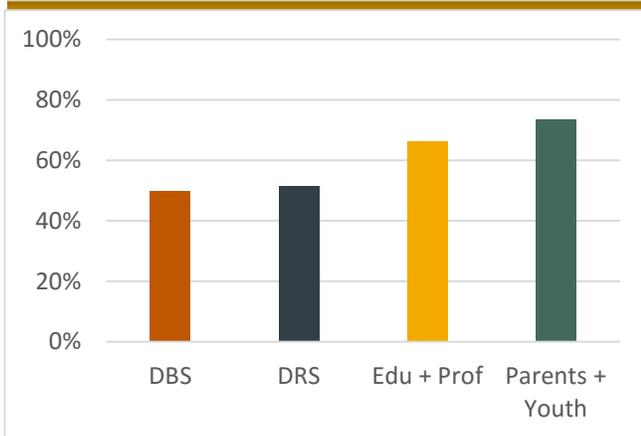
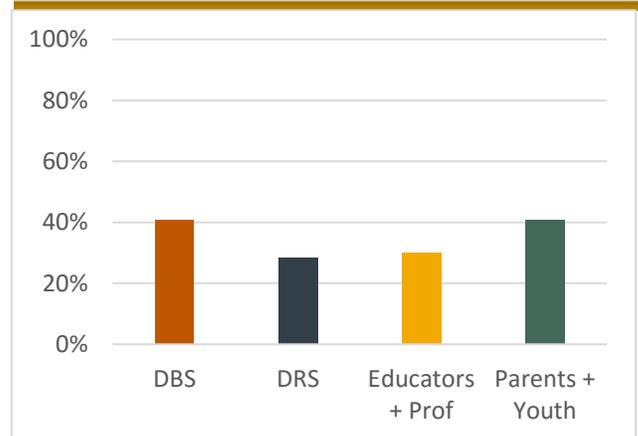


Figure 19. Percent of respondents reporting employer attitudes as a significant barrier in their community



“The more they see (our children) out there, the more they know that they're just like everybody else. But we keep them hidden – a lot of times we're sheltering them, but when you're getting them out into the community, people say, ‘I didn't realize someone blind could do that?’ or ‘I didn't realize somebody could...’”
-focus group participant

DARS staff spoke about certain employers that regularly hire their consumers and employers who have changed their mind after working with someone with a disability. However, attitudes of employers were reported by many survey respondents, particularly parents and professionals, as a significant barrier to employment. One mother described a door literally being shut in her path when she accompanied her child to ask about employment.

“You just show that it's not like the stereotype, that we can function. Now maybe not as fast as everyone else, but we can function. There might be some barriers that we have to overcome because of our vision shortcomings, but we still can be productive in society. And I think that's one of the biggest challenges that we have to face when parents come to us, ‘He's blind, he can't see, what can we do?’ We just have to try to be patient and overcome those stigmas that society has.”
-focus group participant

Populations of students with disabilities who may be underserved

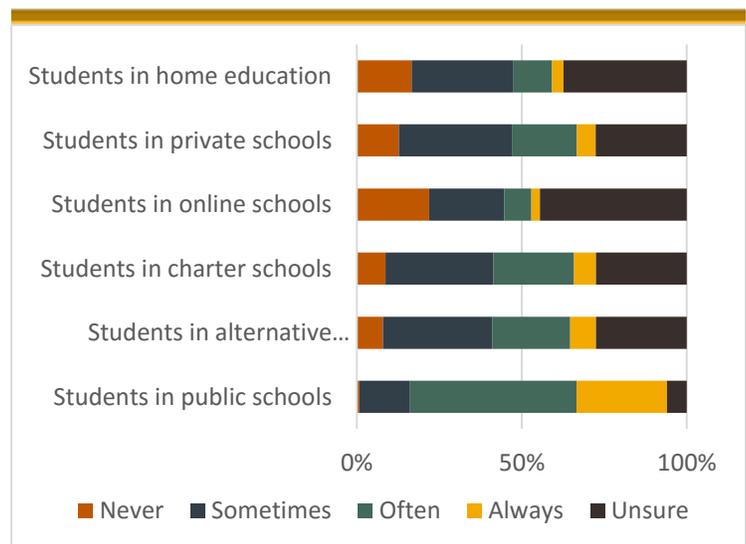
Even though DARS serves many individuals each year and has increased attention on youth and student populations, there are populations of youth and students who may not be reached through traditional outreach and referrals. In this needs assessment, two primary populations were identified as potentially being underserved: youth in non-traditional school settings and youth with certain disabilities.

Youth who are not in traditional public schools may be underserved

Since the majority of youth in Texas attend traditional public schools, it is logical that DARS' primary focus would be on providing outreach to those schools, particularly given resource constraints. Both DRS and DBS staff who responded to the survey reported that they felt students in public schools were often or always served, but they were mostly unsure about students in other schools types such as charter, alternative or private schools. Private schools were mentioned in five focus groups and participants generally reported that the private schools did not offer the support or guidance they needed to connect with DARS. However, private schools did have education professionals who provided some support.

Home education was mentioned in six focus groups and parents providing home education participated in several stakeholder groups. These parents reported that they had learned over the course of their child's life how to self-advocate and that they used that skill to try to get help from DARS. They credited their networks with each other as a tool for helping support one another. Home education parents desired more collaboration with DARS.

Figure 20. Percent of DARS staff who report student needs are met



“ One of the things that we're seeing is that home education is the number one growing education method for our kids, especially our kids that have disabilities. And for the reasons you've said is why it's growing, because they feel like the schools are limited in what they can provide their kids. Even more so in homeschool we are limited. We don't even have the services that are provided to the public schools at this point. So we really are here to represent the under-served students that have a very limited avenue since we're not in the traditional school system. ”

—focus group participant

One DARS staff member also reported that the key to outreach with home education populations is to find social groups and build trust. However, as with outreach in public schools, resources to build those collaborations are limited.

“ I’ve had quite a few charter students when I was a transition counselor and private and home-schooled and all that good stuff. I think one, to get that good connection you have to get into those parent and social groups within the community because once I had one person at that school they all called me. And so they found out because they were on the Special Olympics team and so it’s getting into those different groups, so getting then wasn’t an issue as long as they were willing to. I couldn’t then go to 50 different little, tiny charter schools. They were willing to come to me. ”

–focus group participant

Youth and students with certain disabilities may be underserved

Stakeholders and DARS staff reported certain disabilities and populations may be underserved. In seven focus groups, participants, particularly DARS staff, responded that students who only receive Section 504 services are often underserved because they are not referred to DARS. Section 504, of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, requires schools to make changes to the learning environment and provide services to meet the needs of students with disabilities. In contrast, the provision of special education falls under IDEA regulations, which apply to 13 specific disabilities (i.e., autism, specific learning disabilities, speech or language impairments, emotional disturbance, traumatic brain injury, visual impairment, hearing impairment, and other health impairments). Thus, Section 504 is broader in scope than special education, since it includes other disabilities which might not qualify for special education. Additionally, IDEA is stricter than Section 504 in the regulations that schools must follow in terms of time frames, parental participation, and formal paperwork requirements.

“ Even though we've encouraged the schools and we've discussed with the schools that we also work with the students who are in 504, I see still a deficiency in that. It's mostly students who are in the Special Education or receiving Special Education services that get referred. ”

–focus group participant

Along with 504 students, students with autism spectrum disorders were mentioned in six focus groups. Educators, parents and community members felt that DARS counselors were reluctant to serve youth with autism spectrum disorders because there are limited opportunities for community employment. Stakeholders felt DARS is more comfortable working with youth with intellectual disabilities.

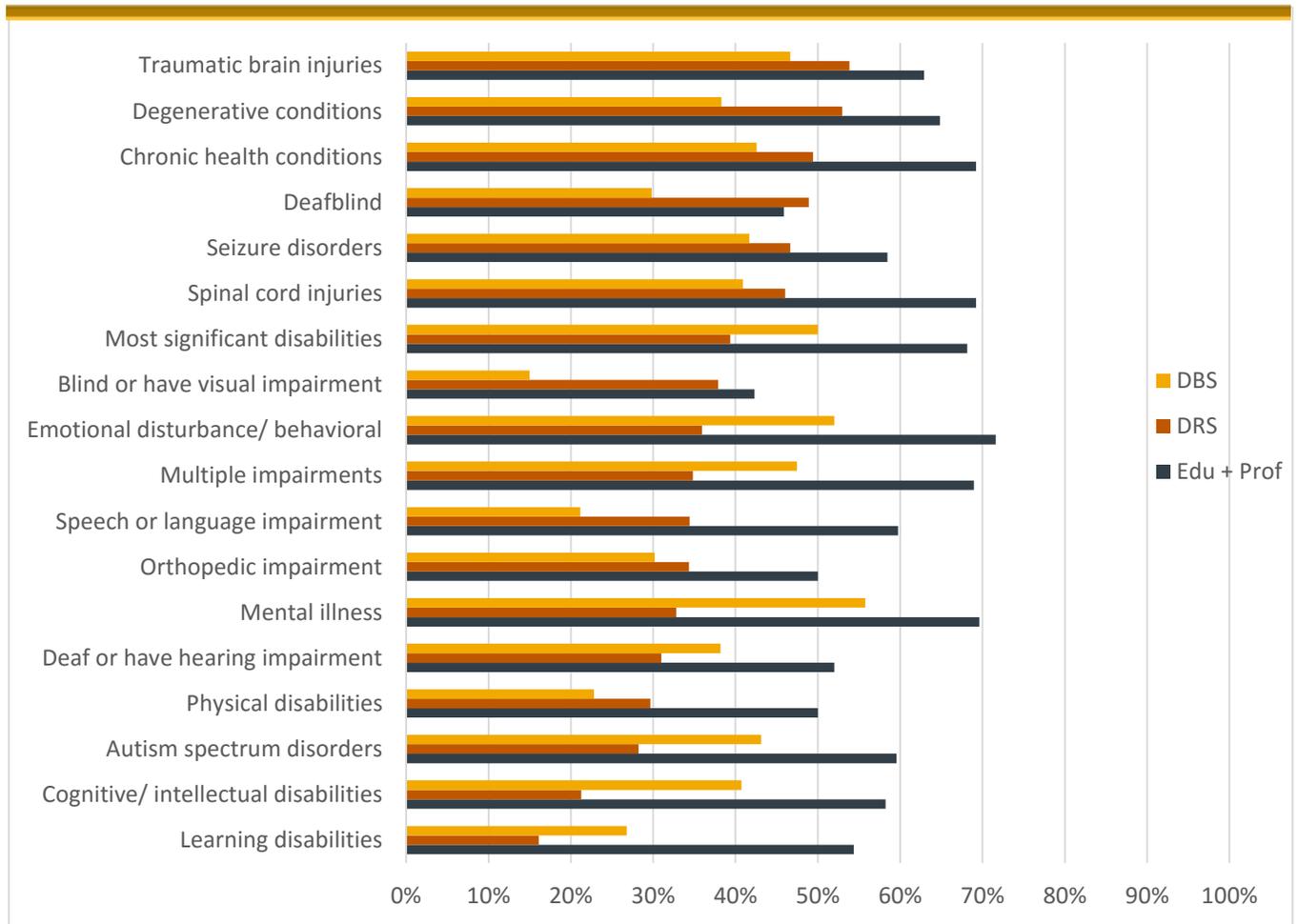
Youth with behavioral and/or mental health issues were also identified as an underserved population. DARS staff and Community Rehabilitation Program (CRP) representatives noted that behavioral issues were generally major barriers to employment as employers may not understand mental health as a disability.

“ At some of our schools that our counselors are assigned to 95 percent of the disabilities are severe emotional disturbances and I think that's a challenge. A lot of times you've got a lot of people involved so you're navigating with the psychiatrist and the doctor and the family and the school and the counselor and all those people... ”

—focus group participant

Other populations that were mentioned as being underserved include youth who are homeless/in foster care, youth with a criminal history, youth with medical conditions and youth who have substance use issues.

Figure 21. Participants reporting frequency that needs are met “sometimes” or “never” for populations



Specialized services are needed

During stakeholder interviews, focus groups, and within the survey, study participants were asked: what are the most important service needs for students with disabilities during transition from school to employment? There were a variety of needs that were identified, including skill development to prepare students for the workforce.

“ Sometimes an ounce of prevention can be worth a pound of cure. We certainly want to give kids the opportunity to walk before they run and sometimes they might need this additional training that they may not have gotten in high school to be more successful as an adult. ”

-focus groups participant

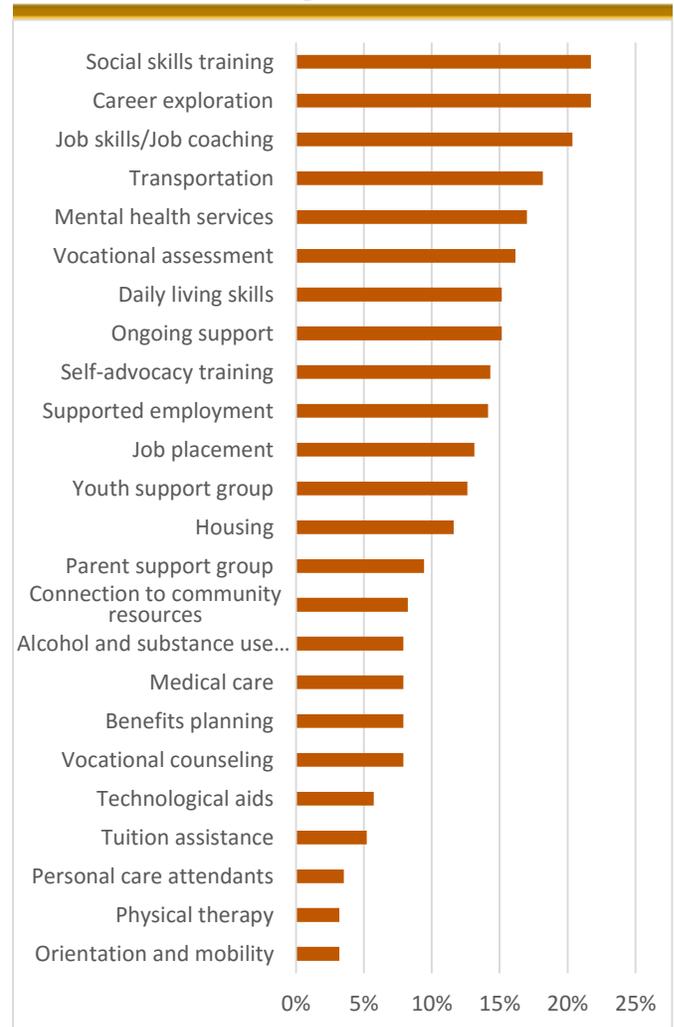
In 13 out of 14 focus groups, a lack of vocational and social skills training at schools was one of the top points of discussion. Additionally, nine focus groups also identified a lack of career exploration as a need or barrier to successful outcomes for students. The need for youth self-advocacy skills was also highlighted in four out of six community focus groups and two out of six DARS staff focus groups.

The top five services needs indicated by parents and youth survey respondents, were:

1. Career exploration;
2. Job placement services;
3. (tie) Job skills training;
Social skills training;
4. (tie) Ongoing support at job;
Self-advocacy training; and
5. Supported employment services.

DARS staff, educators, and community stakeholders were also asked to identify the needs in their community which are never or rarely met. Then they were asked to select the top 3 that they thought are most important for DARS to focus on to improve employment outcomes for youth and students with disabilities. Based on those rankings, the top five service needs identified were: (1) Social skills training; (2) Career exploration opportunities; (3) Job skills training; (4) Transportation; and

Figure 22. Percent of survey respondents reporting unmet need is most important for DARS to focus on



(5) Mental health services. Supported employment was also ranked highly by DBS staff and Educators; while DRS staff also ranked daily living skills highly.

Vocational counseling was not ranked as one of the highest needs, as many DARS counselors already provide that service. However, it is important to note that one of the main barriers identified in the previous section was a lack of understanding of disability and the setting of realistic vocational goals by youth and parents, which can be addressed through vocational counseling. Thus, the main service need is earlier vocational counseling.

Skills Training

One of the identified barriers, mentioned in the previous section, was that services and skills training start too late, often after students graduate from school, especially for DRS consumers. Thus, providing skills training at schools, or access to community skills training classes while still in school, was highlighted as being a top priority and one of the greatest needs by both DARS staff and parents and youth. For example, one member of a stakeholder focus group said:

“ I also think that maybe some actual job skills like they do in the school system, even earlier than they're doing now, would be wonderful [...] If the whole point is for our children to be employed as adults and we know that they're learning cycle is much longer, then we need to start earlier so that we can embed those skills into them. ”

–focus group participant

However, many survey and focus group participants also pointed out that in rural areas, many such programs are nonexistent. For example, one survey respondent stated that the only service available for Asperger's teenagers to socialize was 40 miles away. While a DARS counselor from a rural area said:

“ Students need some work experiences and we're not really able to provide any of those in the area where I live. [...] That's a huge thing that they need. The schools regularly are asking me is there some way that you can help us and help these students and get some more services. We try to be creative, but we're still pretty limited. ”

–focus group participant

As a result of these challenges, many youth with disabilities are not receiving the vocational, social, and self-advocacy skills that would aid them in a successful transition to the workforce. Instead, if they are missing this foundation, they might stumble through the transition process. In one focus group, a parent explained how her son was not having success in his job because he didn't have proper job skills training such as setting a timer so as not to take too long on his breaks.

The following subsections provide more specific examples of training and service needs identified by the needs assessment.

Job skills

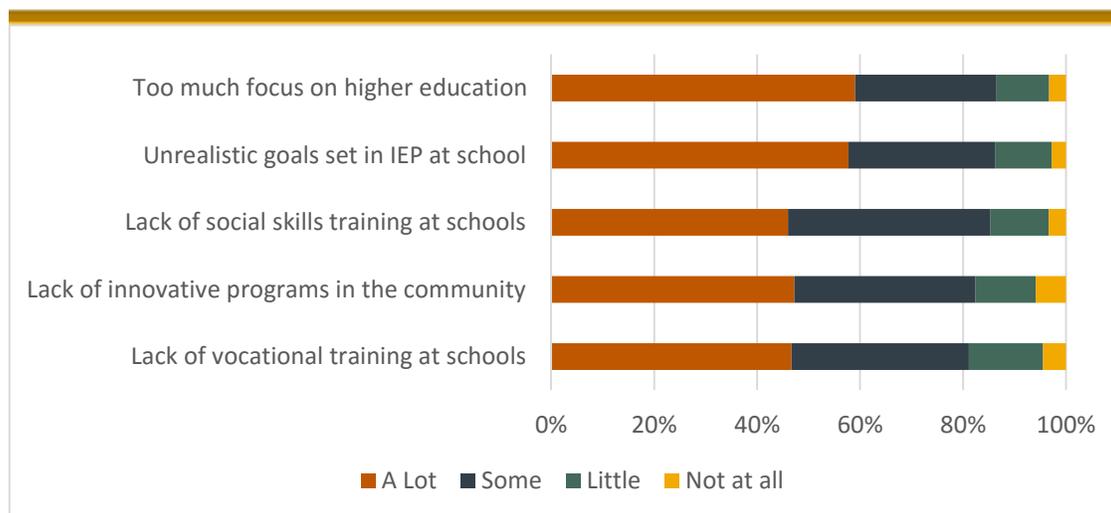
One emergent theme from focus groups was the need for more job training experiences for students prior to graduation. Parents often felt that schools should return to offering vocational training programs once again, in order to better prepare students with disabilities for employment and real life. However, they also acknowledged that the lack of vocational training at schools is in part due to limited funding and shifting priorities.

“ As a parent I think that our school needs, high school years this last few especially, there needs to be something in school more technology type something to give them some skills outside of school, because the larger percentage of our kids that face those disabilities are not going to college. [...] They need some vocational skill. We've taken too much out of the schools and it's just now getting to be in our larger school districts... ”

—focus group participant

DARS employees also believe that schools currently have too much of a focus on higher education rather than vocational training, with this listed as the top barrier by DRS staff. In total, 59% of DRS staff and 35% of DBS staff stated this barrier impacted their ability to provide quality services to youth and students with disabilities “a lot”. Additionally, lack of vocational training at schools was considered a barrier “a lot” of the time by 47% of DRS staff and 34% of DBS staff.

Figure 23. Top five barriers experienced by DRS Counselors in serving youth and students with disabilities



Educators also see a need for more vocational training and work experience during school; however they need resources and assistance with providing those services. For example, one educator made the following request:

“ [DARS should] start working with the school during high school. Collaborate with school to begin job coaching and assisting the school with creating job site opportunities around the community. ”

–focus group participant



Social and daily living skills

Lack of social skills training at schools was one of the top three barriers identified by DRS. Additionally, DARS and education professionals ranked social skills training as the unmet need that DARS should most focus on in improving services. Parents also ranked social skills training in the top three needs. This is important to note because job and social skills go hand-in-hand. A large portion of focus group participants noted that beyond simply providing job training, additional soft skills are required for youth with disabilities to find successful employment. These soft skills can include how to get to work on time, how to listen to supervisors and how to communicate with coworkers. One DARS staff member said:

“ It does go beyond just the vocational. I mean, when you’re building that confidence, when you’re teaching them social skills. ”

–focus group participant

While both DARS counselors and educators agree that these are important skills, there might be disagreement on who should provide them. A DARS staff member responded in the survey that schools pay little attention to daily living skills like handling money, using public transportation, and reading a tape measure. While an educator believed that DARS should be responsible for this, stating that “it would be helpful for DARS to work with students on daily living skills, job choices and education, transportation, and how to be independent with their money.”

Additionally, DARS and education staff commented on the barrier that limited resources pose on both of their systems to provide job and social skills training. One educator in a focus group showed frustration that there was only one person designated as a travel trainer in the region, and thus “the kids that aren’t ever going to drive, and a lot of those are autistic, are not able to have travel training.” A DARS counselor in another focus group stated:

“The resources seem to be limited and I know that DARS is really looking for a lot of summer camps or looking for opportunity for training, build(ing) self-advocacy for life skills, soft skills and that’s been a challenge [...] this year and I was hoping to get it off the ground so that we can make it available for our transitioning students and we have not been able to do that.”

–focus group participant

Mental health services

As mentioned in the previous section about underserved populations, youth and students with emotional, behavioral, and mental health disabilities often do not have their needs met. This is due to a lack of mental health services and resources in communities across Texas. DARS staff, educators, and community stakeholders listed mental health services as one of the top five areas that DARS should focus on to improve services for youth and students with disabilities.

“Many students have psychological disabilities, and there aren't enough resources for that. Funding is being stretched or denied in Texas for these needs.”

–survey respondent

In an open-ended survey question asking for suggestions on how vocational services for youth with disabilities could be improved, some parents wanted more guidance on how individuals with a mental health issue can be accommodated in the workplace and how to increase tolerance for mental health issues in the workforce.

Self-advocacy training

Discussions in focus groups with DARS and educational staff brought to light that often parents, and especially students, do not have a clear understanding of their disabilities. According to survey results, 41% of educators reported that parents only “sometimes” or “never” understand their child’s disability, while 74% reported that students only “sometimes” or “never” understand the extent of their disabilities. One way to address this issue is by providing classes and training on self-advocacy.

Self-advocacy is also important in the workplace, where some parents have fears that their children could be taken advantage of. One parent survey response summarized this well:

“ These individuals are sometimes challenged by their typical counterpart such as co-workers and even confused by various members of management teams. Consumers need additional guidance to help them understand the correct protocol for addressing fair work practices in the workplace. I would like to see a fair work and safety advocacy related service, provided by DARS. This service would provide a support to help identify and answer work related concerns or questions. To advise the consumer on how to best respond, to effectively advocate if he/she feels challenged, due to the nature of a disability, in the workplace. ”

–survey respondent

Survey responses also supported the need for self-advocacy training. Lack of knowledge about disability laws was considered a significant barrier by over a third of parents and youth (35%) and by 29% of DARS and educational professionals. One DARS staff member made the following suggestion in the survey: “More attention in school training programs should be given towards [students] learning their rights under the various disability acts and in learning to advocate for themselves. If they can advocate for what they want, the other issues will diminish.”



Transportation Needs

Transportation is another significant need that was mentioned in 11 out of 14 focus groups and rated by educators and DARS staff as a top service that DARS should focus on. When asked about what barriers youth and students with disabilities face, one DARS staff member said: “transportation, transportation, transportation; to hold a job you have to be able to get there.”

Transportation is a need for both DBS and DRS consumers. One CRP employee stated,

“Some parents complain that transportation is a huge issue. Once people with IDD become adults, many of them – most of them can’t drive, and many of them can’t use public transportation effectively. Or more often than that, the parents are afraid to allow the adult with IDD to use public transportation.”

–focus group participant

DBS staff in focus groups identified transportation as a barrier for all their clients. A DBS consumer in one focus group explained that even though she had access to transportation, it was still her biggest issue in regards to employment.

“Transportation is terrible... every day, even though I go to work at 9:00, I get there at 7:00 because the transportation system there does not think that I need to be there on time. They think I should be there two hours ahead. [...] I would sit outside for two hours waiting for my co-workers to get there. Transportation is my biggest issue.”

–focus group participant

Often people have to rely on family and friends. However, there are youth who do not have the support of families or their families may not have reliable transportation. Daily rides to work are a challenge for youth who rely on others to get them to work on time.

As a result, some families choose to relocate to more urban areas to find transportation. However, even relocation can cause barriers in urban areas, as schedules and routes do not always coincide with non-traditional work hours and locations.



Appropriate jobs that meet consumers' interests and abilities

Career exploration and job placement were the top needs identified by parents and youth in the survey. Additionally, when rating their satisfaction with DARS services, the following items received the lowest ratings: “consistency between different counselors”, “appropriateness of job placement” and “willingness of DARS staff to be creative/think outside-the-box.” However, it is important to note that generally, the majority of parents and youth who responded to the survey were satisfied with the DARS services that they had received.

Based on information from five focus groups, parents and youth felt DARS counselors often didn't provide vocational options that met youth and student interests and cognitive and physical abilities. This issue may be related to unrealistic vocational goals as discussed earlier in this report, but it is also related to the types of available job opportunities in the community.

DARS staff agree that appropriate job placements and apprenticeships are crucial to assist with a transition to employment. However, they point to a lack of jobs and partner organizations in rural communities, cumbersome DARS policies and disinterest from employers, as issues that prevent them from finding compatible matches.

Figure 24. Top service needs identified by parents and youth

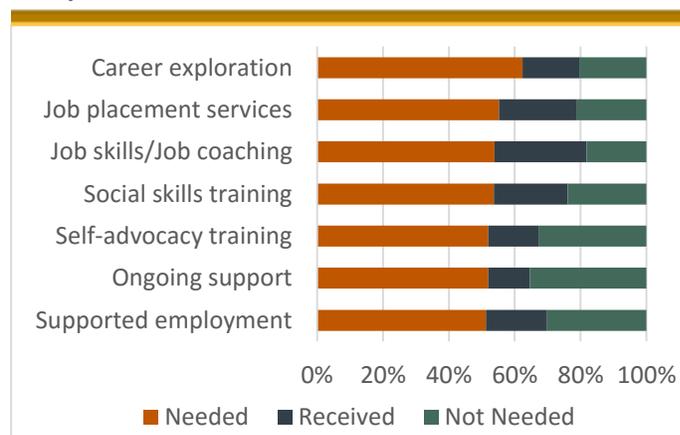
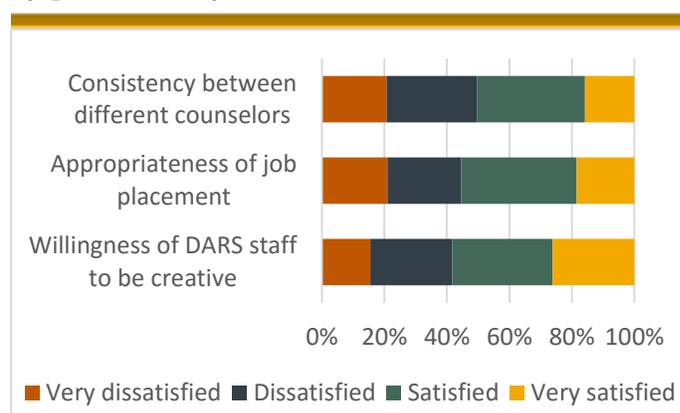


Figure 25. DARS services with the lowest satisfaction by parents and youth



“ We need the Department of Labor to get involved and develop internships/ apprenticeships in the rural area. This can be a complicated process and employers are hesitant to get involved. We do not have the time to market these potential resources but they are desperately needed. ”

—survey respondent

Long-term Support

Ongoing support at place of employment and supported employment were top needs identified by parents and youth in the survey. Fifty-two percent of parents and youth needed, but did not receive ongoing support after DARS services ended. Additionally, the fact that DARS provides temporary and short-term services was brought up in interviews and focus groups as a barrier for some youth to maintain employment. Some study participants also felt that a monitoring focus that tracks the number of closed cases might incentivize DARS counselors to close cases prematurely.

Some youth may need longer duration of services

Each consumer is different, and the need for services to be person-centered was highlighted by a few study participants. Some community stakeholders felt frustration that the duration of DARS services were not always tailored to the needs of different consumers. One parent in a focus group asked:

“ If you need a coach for eight months and after that eight months, you know, you have more potential to be successful on that job site because you've had eight months and not three months, why wouldn't you do that? Based on what that person's need is and not just the typical [duration]? ”

-focus group participant

DARS counselors also saw a need for longer duration of services for some consumers. In one focus group, a counselor described consumers with a severe emotional disturbance on his case load that needed long-term training and support beyond classes that last a few weeks at a time. The counselor suggested that a program be developed where consumers work for two days a week, and have training three days a week, as a way to provide long-term services.

Some youth may need long-term support at place of employment

During focus groups and interviews, reference to a “90 day monitoring period” was often made both by community stakeholders and DARS staff members. This is the typical period that DARS counselors monitor consumers after they gain employment. If the consumer is able to maintain employment during this time, then the counselor is able to close the case. However, community stakeholders believe that this time period is not enough for some consumers, specifically for students and youth transitioning into employment. The concerns were that after the case is closed, some consumers lose employment when the extra support services provided by DARS end.

DARS staff members also acknowledged that there is a need for long-term supports for certain students and youth with disabilities, especially since the services DARS provides are temporary. While there are some long-term support services available through waiver programs, they often have long, 10-15 year waitlists, and are thus not practically available to many consumers.

“ I have my young man with IDD and he’s been employed in the community since he was about 16 years old, and the reasons we’ve left some of the employments or we’ve been dismissed from employments is he’s had the job coaching. It’s been wonderful, they’ve provided that support, but then when he’s left alone after a period of time he regresses [...] there’s not someone that’s checking on him dedicated to them that continues to help him. And so long-term employment, you know, doesn’t happen. ”

–focus group participant

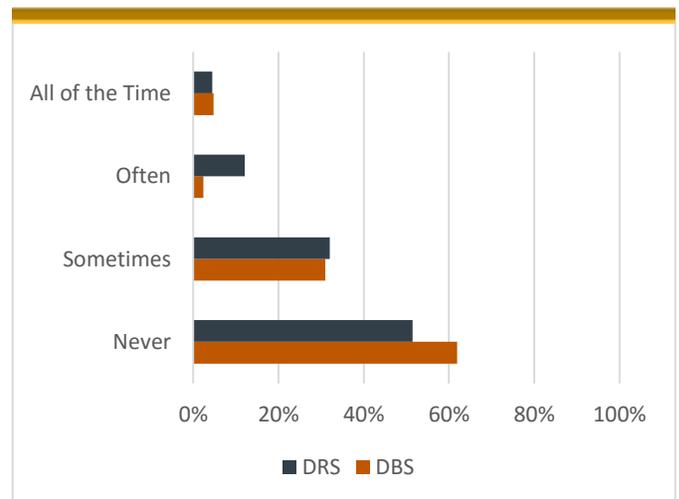
While community stakeholders and DARS staff agree that a lack of long-term supports acts as a barrier to maintaining employment for some individuals with certain types of disabilities, they also note that providing such supports would require a large amount of resources. For example, one community member in an interview stated: “some folks may need a job coach forever. And so I mean that’s huge. Who funds that? Where does the funding come from for that? In order for an individual to be successful?” This sentiment was echoed by parents and DARS employees in focus groups as well.

DARS should monitor high quality services, and not close cases too early

Half of all focus groups brought up the possibility that some DARS cases of youth and students with disabilities are being closed too early. That is, counselors might feel pressure to close a case before the consumer is really established with all resources in place, and ready to go out into the workforce on their own.

Survey results showed that while 62% of DBS staff and 51% of DRS staff “never” feel pressure to close case early, still a large percentage of staff members do feel such pressure. About a third of DRS and DBS survey respondents felt pressure to close a case “sometimes”, while 7% of DBS and 16% of DRS staff felt this pressure “often” or “all of the time”.

Figure 26. Percent of DARS employees report feeling pressured at time to close cases



A DARS staff member in a focus group stated that some counselors close cases after 90 days of monitoring, but that working with students transitioning from secondary education poses unique challenges that require more time than that. In the community focus groups, participants also shared their perceptions that DARS staff might have too many demands on them that detract from providing high quality services to consumers. Participants suggested that caseworkers should not be evaluated based on the number of cases that they close, but on the quality of the life of the consumer.



Systems can cultivate successful transitions

Many of the barriers and service needs faced by youth and students with disabilities during transition to employment can be addressed through changes to systems within DARS and schools. The suggestions for system changes highlighted below are ones that were echoed by many needs assessment participants.

This needs assessment focused primarily on the relationships between DARS and schools, as they are often the central players involved in transition to employment for youth and students with disabilities. However, there are also other systems at play, including services for youth that are provided by the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) and other state and local agencies. Further research is needed on how these systems could also be changed to maximize resources and improve the overall transition to employment process.

Collaboration between DARS and schools can be improved

A sense of optimism was present at the DARS and educator focus groups. Both groups recognized that they have the same ultimate goals of helping youth and students with disabilities reach their fullest potential and successfully transition into adulthood and the workforce. However, they also acknowledged that there is room to improve communication and collaboration between the two groups.

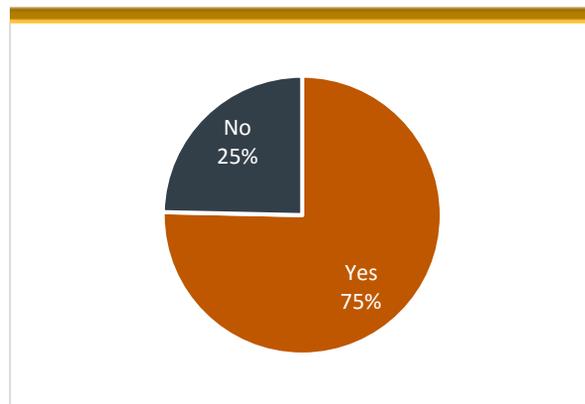
Fostering early collaboration and information sharing with schools

In speaking directly with teachers and other school district staff at two educator-specific focus groups, it was clear that educators wanted greater collaboration with DARS. Educators wanted more information about what services DARS offers consumers, who can be referred to services

and when, assistance with developing work experience opportunities in the communities, greater participation in IEP and ARD meetings, and more consistent communication. In some cases, educators did not even know who their DARS representative was, or how to contact them. While 75% educators who participated in the survey knew who their DARS representative was, a quarter did not.

A few suggestions on how collaboration could be improved were offered in the focus groups. Suggestions included having meetings between DARS and school staff over the summer to coordinate schedules, developing a better understanding of each other's roles and needs, sharing pertinent information about services and students, and in general, developing a plan to work as a team.

Figure 27. Percent of educators reporting that they know their DARS Representative



“The DARS people need to meet [teachers] halfway, and initially in the summer at about this time of the year, let's have a meeting, collaborate and DARS can say, this is my load and I can only be at your district on a Tuesday or Wednesday. Well, we'll work that out. That transition plays such a huge role in the student's IEP, and we can be dinged for it. We are going to have to hold these meetings on these days because that is when the DARS representative is here.”

—focus group participant

One barrier faced by DARS counselors that was discussed earlier in this report was the development of unrealistic vocational plans at the school. This barrier can be avoided with increased collaboration and communication. In an interview, a stakeholder described how transition planning should be set up to have all players at the table together, different systems having their own transition plan. In some cases, the schools, DARS, child welfare systems and mental health systems are all working separately on behalf of the same child. Additionally, a focus group participant suggested that more training be provided on how DARS counselors and educators can better share assessments and information that they each gather separately for the individual plan for employment (IPE) and individual educational plan (IEP).

DARS staff also indicated in the focus groups and survey that they wanted better collaboration with schools. Overall, they thought collaboration with schools was good, but some wanted better relationships. Transition Counselors reported wanting to be invited to more ARDs, but felt that schools were not notifying them. Overall, DARS staff felt hopeful about the shifts towards focusing on students and anticipated that they will have more time to work in schools.

Increase early DARS participation in ARD meetings and other planning meetings

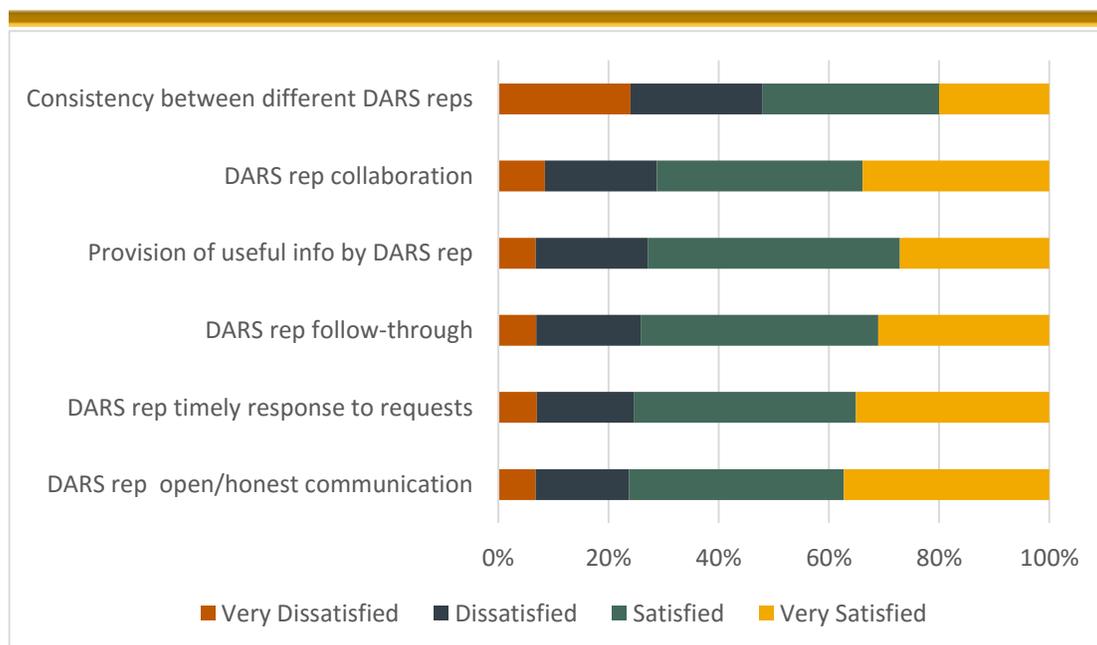
Early participation in ARD meetings helps bring everyone on the same page earlier, and helps to build a trusting relationship across all parties. As one counselor in a DARS focus group explained:

“ It’s all about kind of establishing that trust and a support connection there [...] Attending the ARD meetings, I know it’s a hardship sometimes but I think that helps tremendously in supporting that student and building trust with the family and with the personnel at the district. I try to attend as many as I can. Plus, that gives me an opportunity to provide feedback whenever they have a goal that is kind of out there. ”

–focus group participant

DBS counselors felt that ARD meetings were crucial for them to get to know students and their families. However, many educators who participated in focus groups and the survey had a different experience with their DARS counselors. Many expressed disappointment that even when invited, DARS representatives were not able to attend ARD meetings. This inconsistency between different counselors in terms of attendance at ARD meetings and general collaboration with schools was what educators were least satisfied with in the survey. Forty eight percent of educators were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with consistency between different DARS representatives.

Figure 28. Percent of educators reporting satisfaction with DARS Representative



Improve consistency of DARS and school practices

As discussed in the previous section, inconsistency both in the DARS and schools systems can pose a barrier to collaboration and ultimately to service provision to youth and students with disabilities. Inconsistency in schools can relate to: referral processes, information distribution about DARS, providing sufficient notice when inviting counselors to ARD meetings, available skills training programs at the school, and the level of knowledge and engagement from teachers and administrators. Inconsistencies within DARS relate to: frequency of school visits, level of marketing and outreach about services, what age or grade counselors accept students, and the general level of engagement and follow-up with schools and consumers.

In the survey, educators, parents and youth all listed consistency between different DARS counselors as the item that they were least satisfied with. One previously discussed cause of inconsistency within DARS was that there are different counselor types: those that solely serve youth and students, and those that have a mixed or predominantly adult caseload. Additional sources of inconsistency stem from regional and local management, office culture, and other variables.

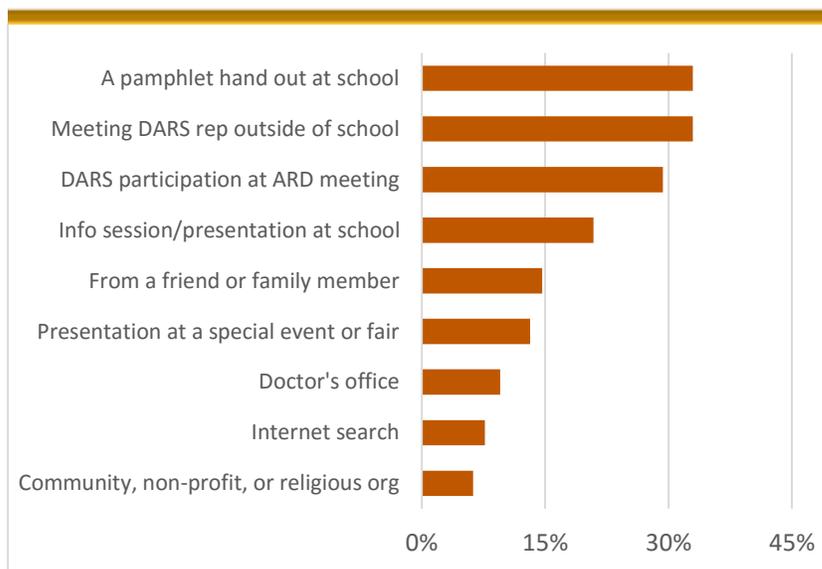
Possible solutions suggested in focus groups include inter-disciplinary training, lowering caseload demands and consistent policy implementation related to WIOA.

Improved outreach to the community

Statements commonly heard in the focus groups and stakeholder interviews indicate that the general public has little understanding of DARS' purpose and how decisions are made at DARS. Altogether, 12 focus groups discussed how parents, teachers, or other community members were unaware of or misinformed about the services offered by DARS, while eight focus groups spoke to the need for more community-level outreach about DARS to increase knowledge and utilization of services. Eight focus groups also discussed the need for presentations at schools to better inform parents, while five focus groups had discussions about how handing out pamphlets alone was not enough.

Finally, eight focus groups, four with DARS staff and four with community members, discussed the need to educate employers and the larger community to reduce stigma that individuals with disabilities face. As discussed earlier, attitudes of employers posed some of the largest barriers to youth and students with disabilities during transition to employment.

Figure 29. Means by which parents and youth reported hearing about DARS



A pamphlet handout at schools and meetings with DARS outside of school were the most common methods that parents and youth heard about DARS. Most survey respondents were already receiving DARS services, so this survey does not represent families which may have never heard of DARS within the community or schools.

However, even those parents whose children were receiving services explained that they were unclear about what exactly DARS could provide. Additionally, there was confusion about the general process. Forty-nine percent of parents stated that information about DARS and vocational programs in their community was inadequate. To solve this issue, many focus groups participants offered suggestions, such as providing videos that teachers could show parents or webinars on the DARS website.

“ It seems to me that DARS could easily set up some seminars and workshops around different topics for parents and guardians. Let’s say it’s a two-hour session. Well, from a DARS point of view, I don’t have to spend all that time working with an individual. I can do ten parents at once or 20 parents [...] Maybe they do it already. If they do, I sure don’t know about it. ”

–focus group participant

Some counselors we spoke to in focus groups were already trying out different ways to market DARS services, such as going to community fairs and conducting presentations to parents after work at schools. Others have made connections with homeschool and other community networks. However, other counselors discussed how they are already overburdened with their caseloads and do not have the time to engage in additional marketing activities. They suggested a need to hire more counselors or create a new position in charge of marketing and outreach.

Reduce administrative burdens and encourage innovation

Eleven focus groups had themes surrounding issues regarding contracts with community rehabilitation programs (CRPs) and employers. DARS staff participants believed that the contract procedures could be significantly streamlined. Complicated and lengthy contract procedures not only use valuable counselor time that is already stretched, but also discourage organizations and businesses from participating in programs.

In addition to streamlining contracts, some DARS staff noted the need for additional administrative staff to help with paper work. One staff person suggested the need for an administrative assistant just for Transition Counselors. Other DARS staff members in focus groups wanted more flexible policies that allow staff to develop new, creative and high quality programs for youth and students.

Finally, DARS counselors in one focus group and several survey respondents, felt that upper management at DARS should experience what it is like to be in the field periodically throughout the year, in order to have a realistic understanding of the burden that some policies impose. The sense from staff was that new documentation policies were overly burdensome and direct conversations with upper management might be better facilitated if upper management was more accessible.



System changes to create more resources in rural areas

Currently, DARS staff in rural areas have the responsibility to procure contracts with community service providers and develop relationships with employers to provide career exploration and job placement opportunities. However, as discussed in earlier sections of this report, this is a very difficult task, as there are very few resources in rural areas.

In focus groups and survey responses, participants asked if there is a systematic way that the state can get involved to create more opportunities for youth and students with disabilities who live in rural areas. For example, one survey respondent requested that supported employment vendor procurement and set up be streamlined to gain more vendors in all regions.

A few stakeholders and survey participants indicated that moving vocational rehabilitation services under the Texas Workforce Commission (TWC) has potential to assist in developing these important vocational services in rural and other areas. Stakeholders who were interviewed believed that more work opportunities could arise through TWC's networks of employers, but would also require the proper education and outreach.



Conclusion

The purpose of this needs assessment was to understand the needs of students with disabilities who may be entering the workforce and/or seeking higher education. Based on the findings above, the most concise means of summarizing these findings is that ‘it takes a village.’ Every student, regardless of ability, needs support from multiple systems to thrive. For students with disabilities, there are additional supports needed within communities. However, all supports cannot come from one entity. Even though this needs assessment was funded by DARS and largely focuses on the workings of DARS, findings from the needs assessment suggest share responsibility. Figure 30 below provides a visual framework for supporting students with disabilities.

Figure 30. Model for cultivating successful transitions



This needs assessment suggests that the students should be the center of any efforts and decisions regarding employment. To the extent possible, the student must be involved in planning so that their desires are considered and so that they develop an understanding of accommodations they may need in employment. Perhaps even more importantly, student involvement helps develop advocacy skills needed during the transition to adulthood.

Caregiver advocacy was identified as the backbone of the student support system. However, caregivers often had a difficult time striking a balance between being over-involved and under-involved in their child's life. Successful caregivers become highly educated about their child's disability and systems that can help their child. However, the role of caregivers is isolating. Caregiver support and education is a wise investment for any community.

Educators also play a key role in the success of a student with a disability. Like caregivers, educators and schools are inconsistent in their supports for students. Resources vary by school district. In particular, rural school districts may struggle to find available resources internally and externally to support students with disabilities. In order to build those resources, strong collaborative relationships between DARS, schools and community agencies are crucial. Models for developing collaborative workgroups should be developed and supported by DARS.

Vocational Counselors at DARS assist students with career planning and provide resources available through the agency. However, DARS needs more Transition Counselors to meet the needs of students. Participants in this needs assessment overwhelming spoke about the need to have DRS engage with students throughout high school similar to the DBS model of early engagement. The challenge is that working with students as consumers takes more time for counselors. Thus, early engagement would result in more consumers who are more time consuming. Those schools that have positive relationships with a Transition Counselor had overwhelmingly positive experiences. More Transition Counselors are needed to build collaborative relationships with schools, continuously provide caregivers information and build trust with students.

A major barrier to employment is lack of jobs and job training programs. The responsibility for jobs does not fall solely on any one community entity. However, strong community collaborations can assist in educating employers about the abilities of students.

Finally, there are four primary community resources that greatly impact the ability of students to be gainfully employed. First, transportation is a barrier in many communities, particularly suburban and rural communities that lack public transportation. More creative solutions for transportation are needed. Second, housing is a barrier. Students and caregivers reported the need for more independent living services. Stigma against individuals with disabilities is a major barrier as well. Employers who do not understand the capabilities of an individual are unlikely to hire individuals. There is work that needs to be done to address this stigma through targeted public information campaigns. Finally, job availability and job training availability are significant community barriers. In some areas, there were no resources for students to develop employable job skills or soft skills needed for employment.

Given that multiple entities are needed for student success, collaboration, communication and cooperation are needed at the local level. Community collaborations need to include DARS, schools, employers, higher education institutes, job training programs, caregiver representatives and student representatives.

Appendix A: Methods

The purpose of this study was to understand the experiences of youth and students with disabilities as they transition into post-secondary school activities such as work and/or higher education. The needs assessment utilized multiple methods to gather and analyze information. Data collection began in May 2015 and concluded in October 2015

Data collection

First, in May and June 2015, interviews were conducted with nine stakeholders including DARS staff, advocates and a caregiver. Stakeholders were recommended by DARS or sought out by the research team. This first step in the process allowed the research team to gather preliminary information in order to develop focus group guides.

Based on the stakeholder interviews, three focus groups guides were developed. One guide was developed for use with DARS staff, another guide was developed for use with education professionals and the final guide was developed for ‘community stakeholder’ groups which could include caregivers, current or former students, employers, CRPs and any other party involved with students with disabilities.

In order to cover the state, at least one focus group was planned for each of the five Division of Rehabilitation Services (DRS) regions. DARS identified six cities in the state and provided the research team a list of these cities. DARS selected these cities to represent diverse perspectives, including those of rural, suburban, and urban populations. Focus groups occurred between June 30 and July 31, 2015.

Table 1. Focus group locations with number of participants from different populations

	DARS Staff	Consumers/Stakeholders	Educators
San Antonio	7	14	5
Laredo	8	5	
Dallas/Ft. Worth	8	12	7
Crockett	2	3	
Houston	8	5	
Amarillo	10	3	

DARS assisted in coordinating focus groups with DARS staff by sending out internal emails and/or providing the research team lists of names. DARS also shared any key stakeholders they knew of in an area. Stakeholders who completed individual interviews also shared their lists of relevant stakeholders in key areas and/or offered to advertise the focus groups through their listserves. Education Service Centers were contacted to coordinate focus groups with educators in the area. Educators were the most difficult group to coordinate for focus groups as the data collection occurred in the summer. However, education service centers were able to provide space and help with coordination if it aligned with their trainings that were happening in the

summer. Excluding DARS staff who did not receive compensation, focus group participants were provided \$25 gift cards to cover their time and transportation costs for attending the focus groups.

Interviews were conducted in person or by telephone depending on the schedule of the stakeholder. Interviews lasted between 45 and 60 minutes. Focus groups were primarily conducted in meeting rooms at DARS offices or education service centers and lasted 60 minutes. Stakeholders were interviewed by the research team's project manager. Focus groups were conducted by two research team members. One member conducted the focus group and one member took notes and coordinated consent forms. The research team's project manager participated in every focus group to ensure consistency. All interviews and focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Field notes were also taken and compared to transcriptions to ensure accuracy.

Based on the initial themes from these focus groups, online surveys were created for DARS staff, educators and other community professionals, as well as youth and parents. The survey was emailed by DARS internally to staff. The survey was open for two weeks, between September 21 and October 5, 2015, and multiple reminder emails were sent. For community stakeholders and educators, emails were sent through contact lists initially compiled by DARS, for the six locations identified for the focus groups. Emails about the survey were also sent to advocacy and community groups who agreed to distribute the survey on their listserves. Finally, individuals who participated in educator and community stakeholder groups were asked to forward the survey to their contacts. An open link to the survey was available on the study website as well. If they chose, survey participants could be entered into a drawing for one of eight \$100 gift cards. DARS staff were not able to enter into the gift card drawing. The survey was available in English, Spanish and Vietnamese. A total of 1153 individuals opened the survey, 1096 initiated the survey past the first page, while 844 individuals completed the survey in its entirety. Thus, there was survey dropout and certain questions were answered by more respondents than others. Question sample sizes are given for charts in Appendix B.

Data analysis

Data from the focus groups, interviews and open-ended survey questions were analyzed using content analysis. An initial coding scheme was developed by the research team members who had conducted focus groups and interviews. One transcript was coded by five research team members. From that coding, the coding scheme was revised. Through an iterative process, two additional transcripts were coded by all five members until the coding scheme was finalized. Next, coders worked in pairs to code transcripts and establish reliability between coders. After coders were coding 75% of the transcripts the same, the remaining transcripts were divided among four coders. The lead coder checked all transcripts to verify codes and emerging themes.

Data from the surveys were consolidated to produce descriptive statistics. Percentages and charts in the main body of this report exclude respondents who marked "unsure" as a question response, while the charts in Appendix B summarize the total number of responses for all question categories, including "unsure." After quantitative data analysis, survey data were matched to the themes in the focus groups to analyze for consistency between focus group themes and survey data. The research team then looked for strong overlap between survey data

and focus group themes to develop the findings outlined in this report. Admittedly, the amount of data from this study is voluminous. However, the findings presented are items that were consistently identified through focus groups and survey data.

Human subjects protections

This study was reviewed and approved by The University of Texas at Austin's Institutional Review Board (study number 2015-04-0092).

Informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all participants. Adults who participated in key informant interviews and focus groups provided written informed consent and were offered a copy of the consent form to keep for their records. Youth under the age of 18 were approved to participate in this study with a completed parental consent form, however, no one younger than 18 participated. For the online survey, informed consent was obtained from the participant before they begin the survey and no documentation of informed consent was acquired to keep the survey anonymous.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Every effort was made to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the participants. Participants were informed of how their privacy and confidentiality will be protected. The identities of adults who participate in key informant interviews and individuals who participate in focus groups are known to the UT research team. However, the only record of names is signatures on consent forms which are stored in a locked filing cabinet in a secure office. Audio files will be transcribed and stored securely for one year and then erased. Audio files are labeled by date and sequence rather than more specific identifying information. All information from the focus groups will be summarized and reported in aggregate form.

Survey participants were asked about their professional background and their zip code. No other potentially identifiable information was recorded. Data from the online survey are anonymous. All results are reported in aggregate form to maintain confidentiality. All data will be stored on password and virus protected computers on a secure network for no longer than three years. Access to the network is granted by the principal investigator to study personnel. Only study personnel have access to identified data stored on the secure network.

Limitations

Limitations in the methods exist and should be considered when examining the findings presented in this report. Survey and focus group recruitment occurred primarily through email, and participants were part of a convenience sample that might not represent the views of any specific group. While significant effort was taken to distribute the survey and information about focus groups to as many eligible individuals as possible within certain selected regions, those who completed the survey and attended the focus groups could potentially be unique from those that did not participate; therefore the results cannot be generalized to the entire population of youth and students with disabilities or stakeholders. Additionally, sample sizes, especially those of DBS consumers, were small and thus might not be representative of the larger DARS consumer and stakeholder communities.

Appendix B: Detailed Charts

DARS Staff Survey

Respondent Characteristics

Figure 31. DARS employees' service divisions

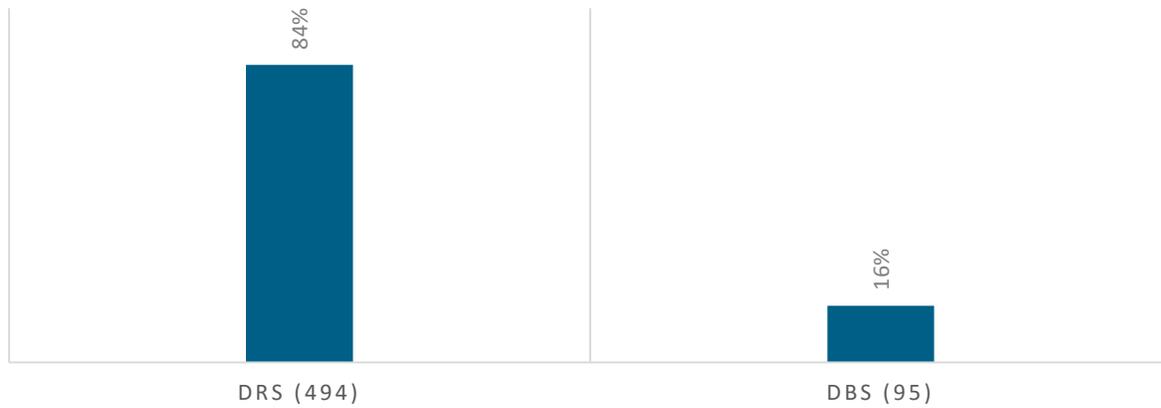


Figure 32. Geographic service locations by DARS division

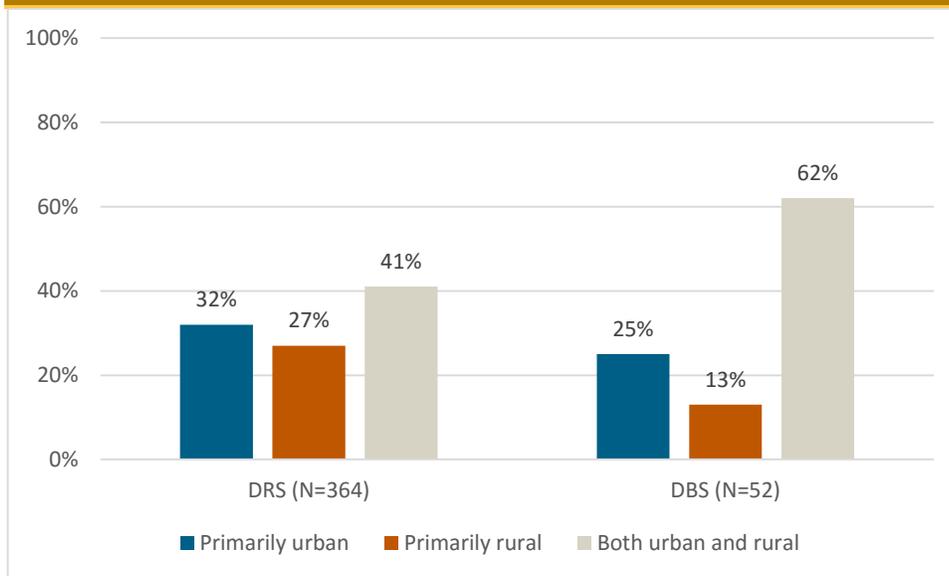


Figure 33: Survey respondents by DRS service region (N = 355)

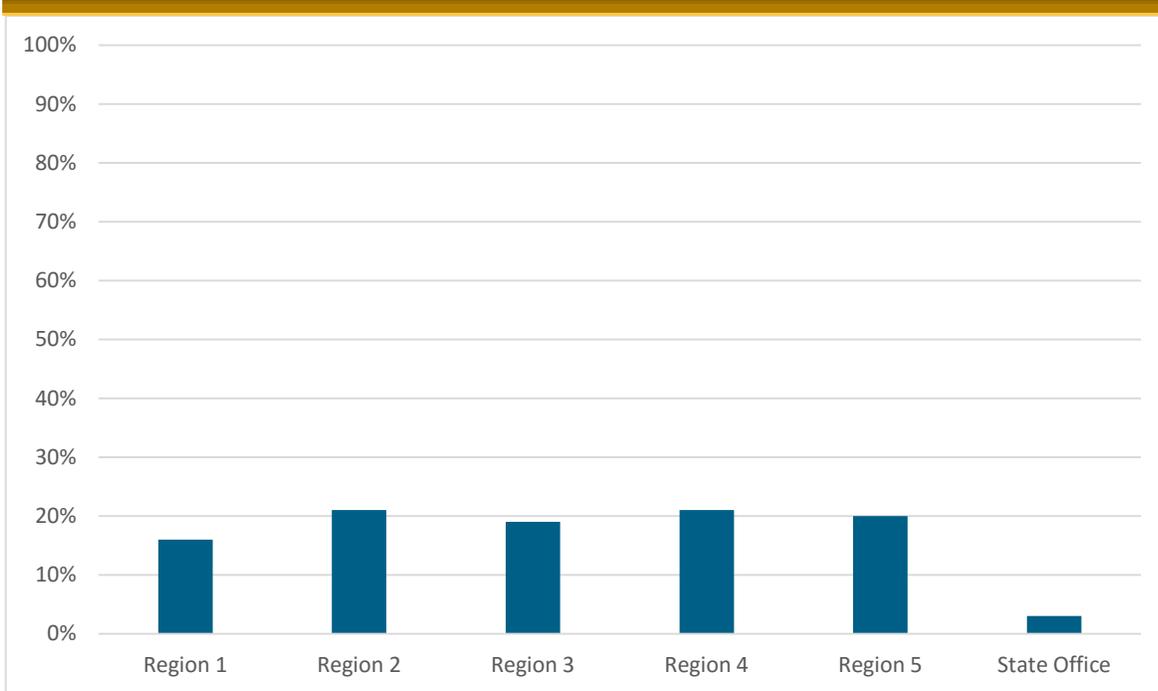


Figure 34: Survey respondents by DBS service region (N = 48)

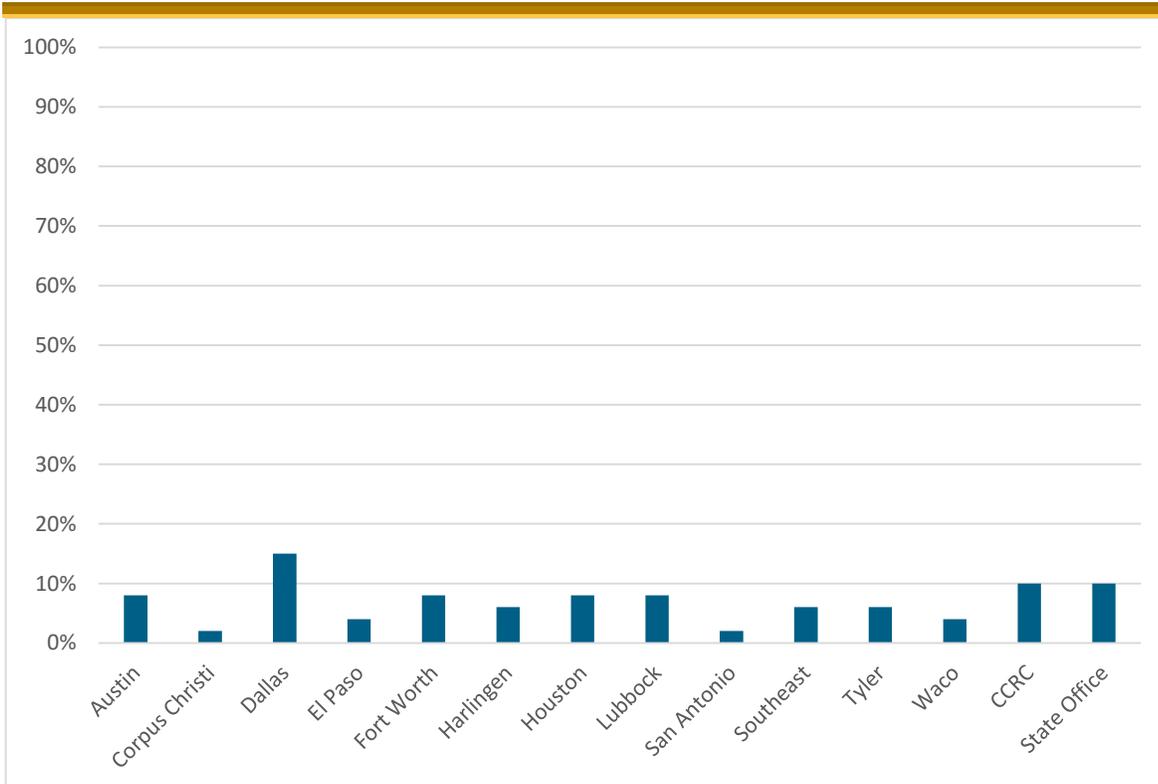


Figure 35. Participants' current positions held within DARS

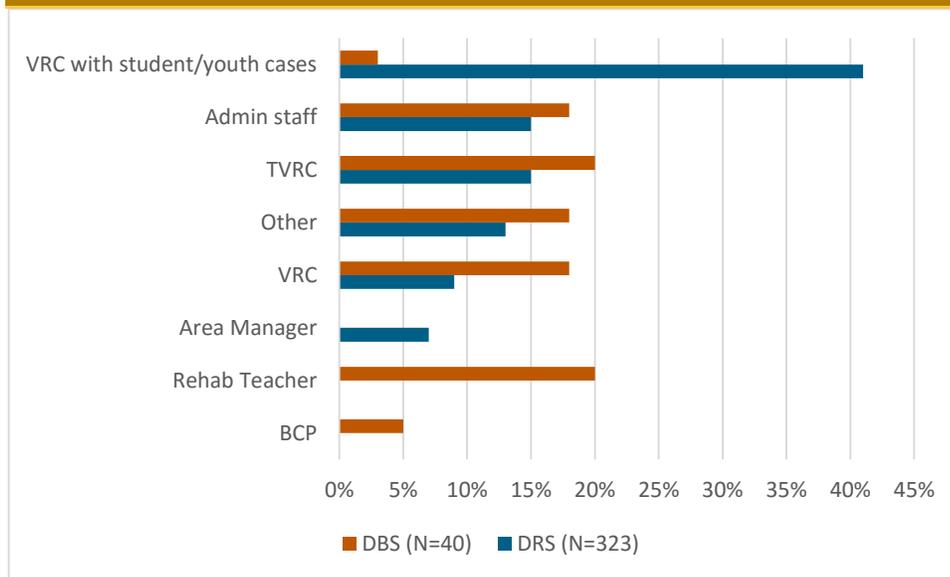


Table 2. Length of employment with DARS

	DRS (N=314)	DBS (N=41)
<i>Less than one year:</i>	7%	7%
<i>More than one year:</i>	93%	93%
<i>Average</i>	10.63	12.87
<i>Median</i>	9	11
<i>Range</i>	1-43	1-36

Table 3. Length of employment working in the disability field

	DRS (N=321)	DBS (N=45)
<i>Less than one year:</i>	3%	2%
<i>More than one year:</i>	97%	98%
<i>Average</i>	15.41	18.11
<i>Median</i>	15	17
<i>Range</i>	1-43	1-40

Figure 36. Percent of employees who currently have a caseload

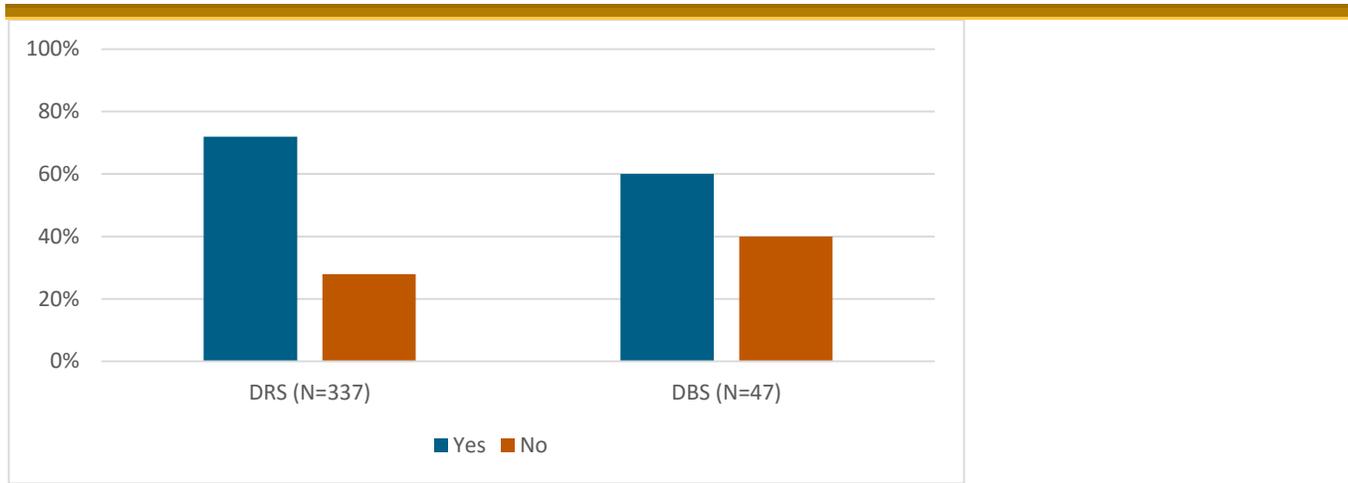


Table 4. Number of individuals on current caseloads

	<i>DRS (N=221)</i>			<i>DBS(N=26)</i>		
	Youth/ Students Only (N=31)	Adult Only (N=10)	Mixed (N=180)	Youth/ Students Only (N=10)	Adult Only (N=3)	Mixed (N=13)
<i>Average</i>	70.94	81.1	95.19	79.56	44.67	71.71
<i>Median</i>	66	85.5	91	80	55	56
<i>Range</i>	2-150	22-150	8-235	3-106	1-138	9-206

Figure 37. Percent of participants from Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin, DARS employees

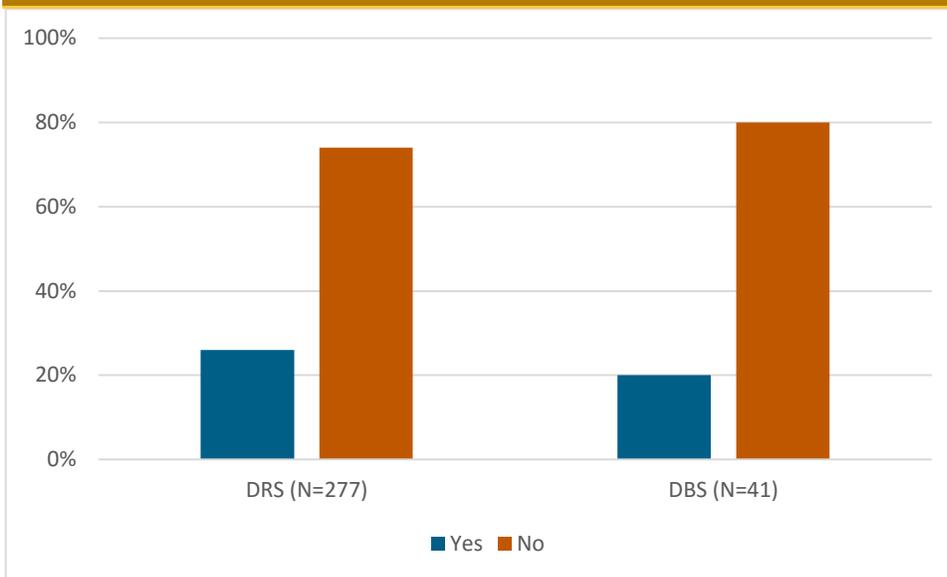


Figure 38. Race/ethnicity, DARS employees

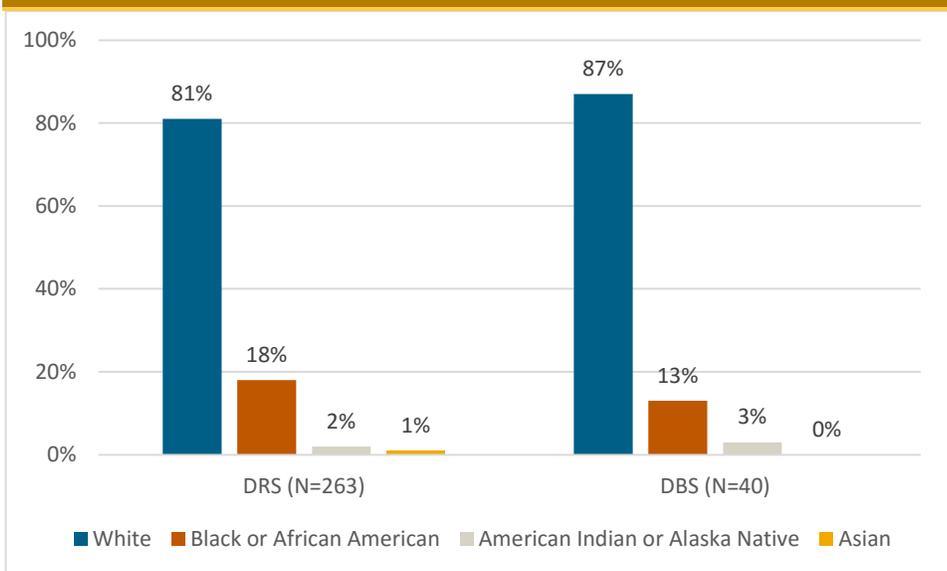


Figure 39. Percent of respondents proficient in a language other than English, DARS employees

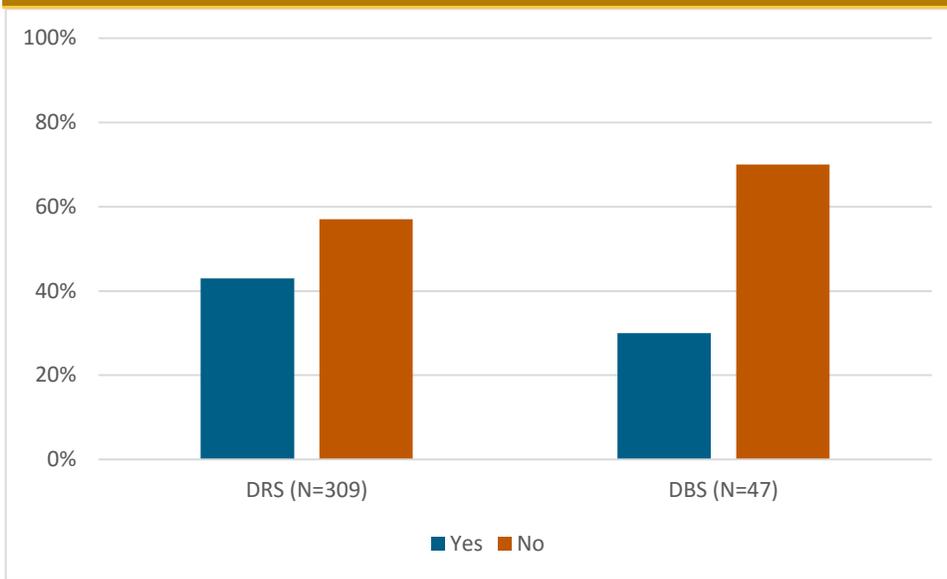
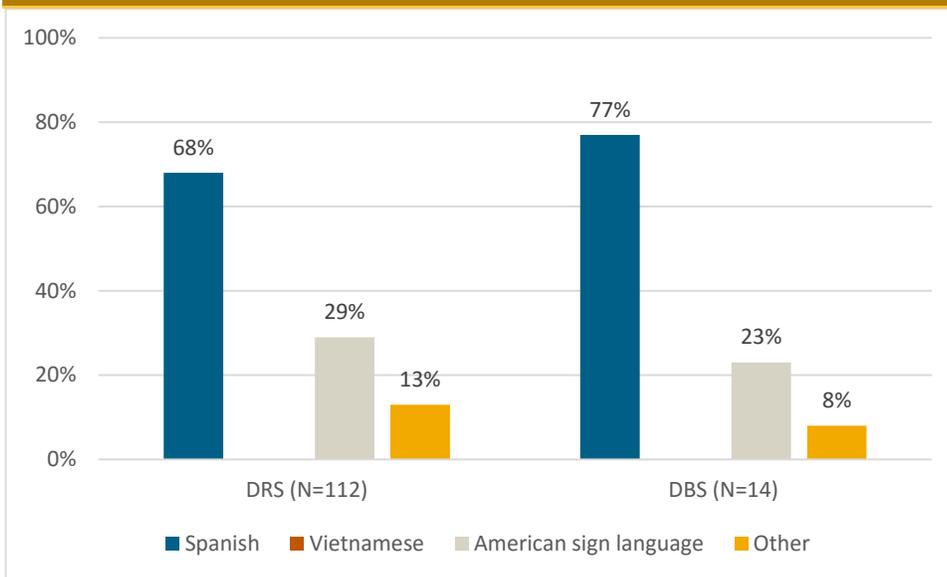


Figure 40. Languages used other than English, DARS employees



Survey Questions

Figure 41. Frequency of service needs met within DRS (N = 455)

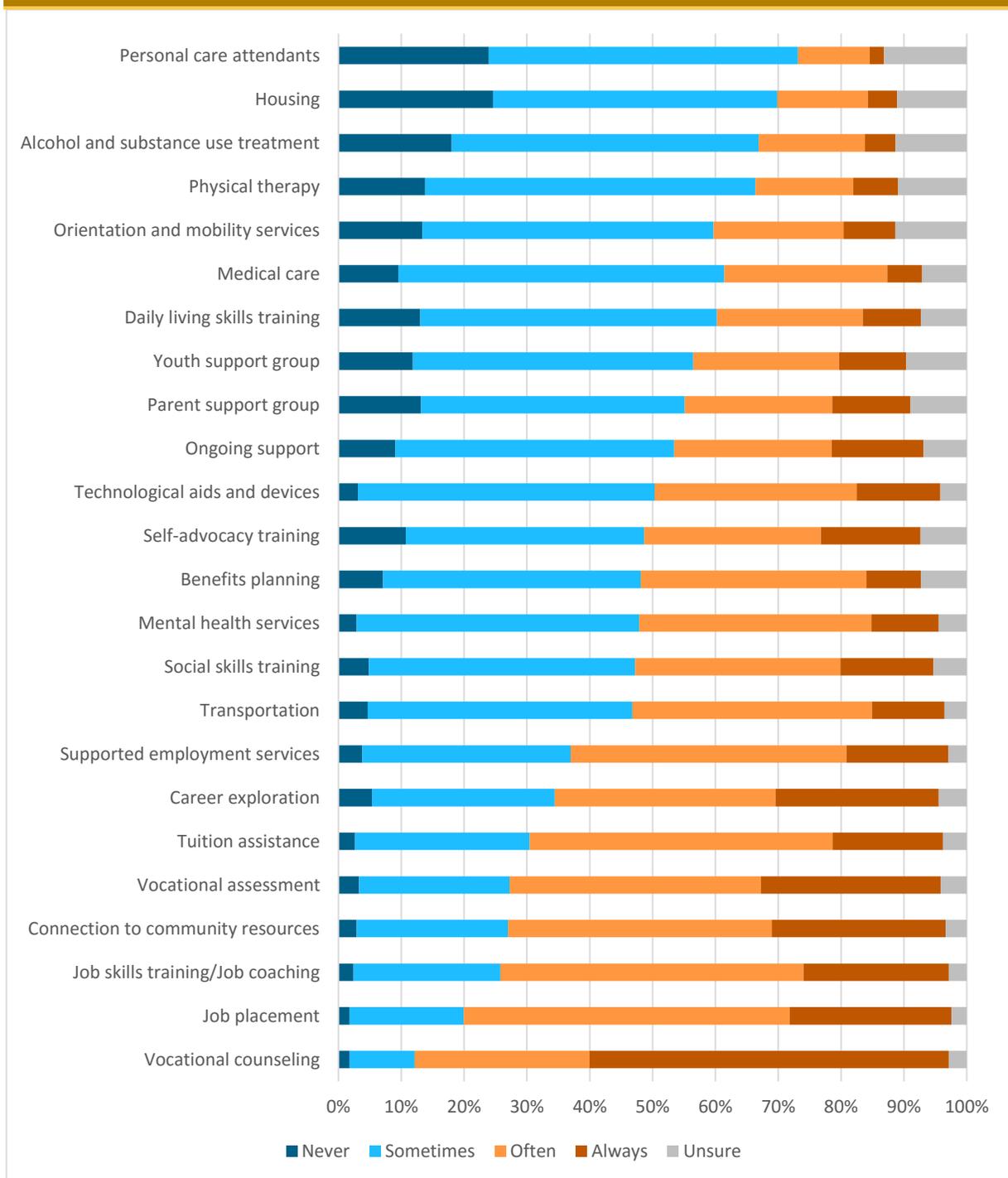


Figure 42. Frequency of service needs met within DBS (N = 82)

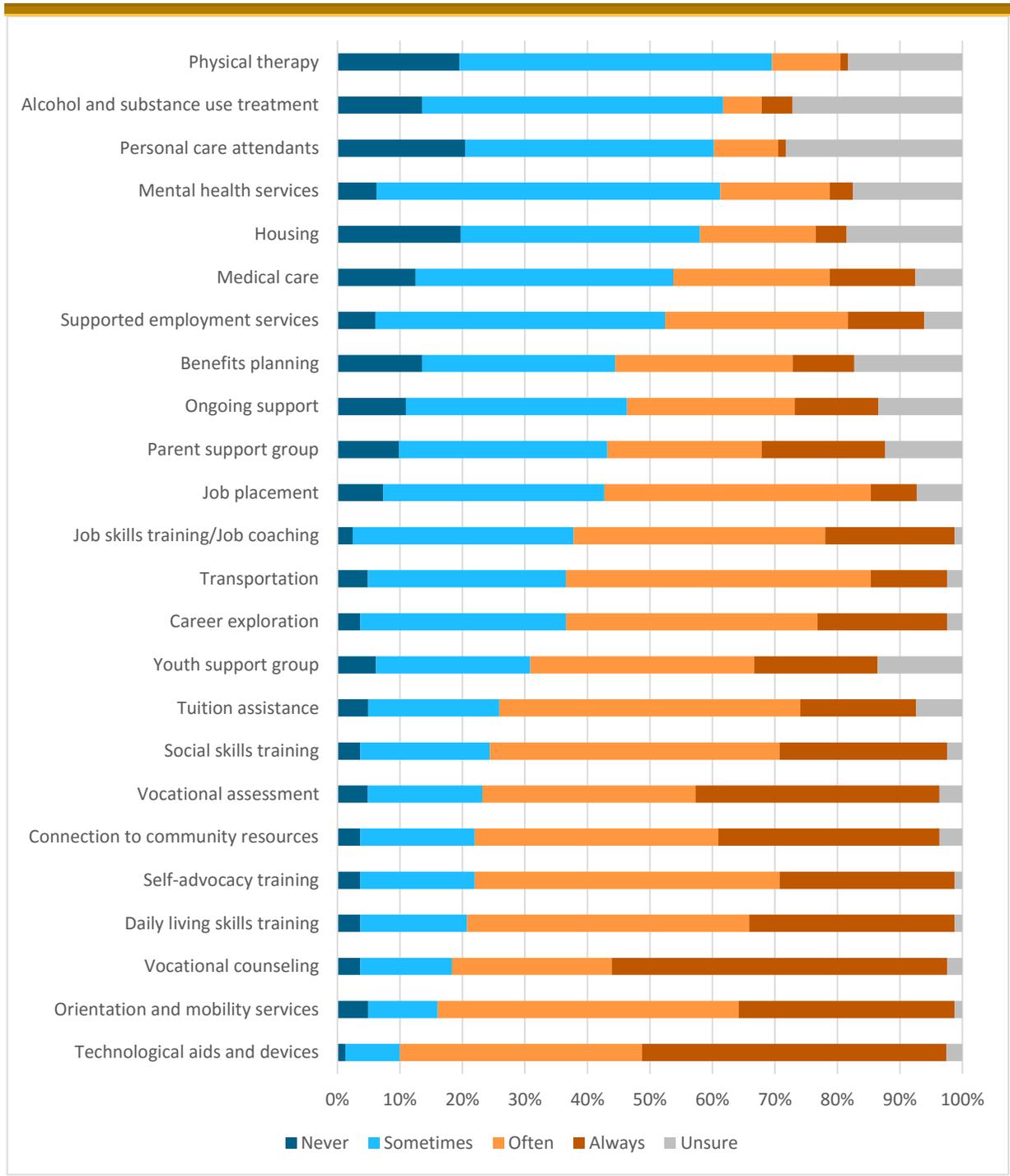


Figure 43. Most important services that are currently not met, DRS and DBS

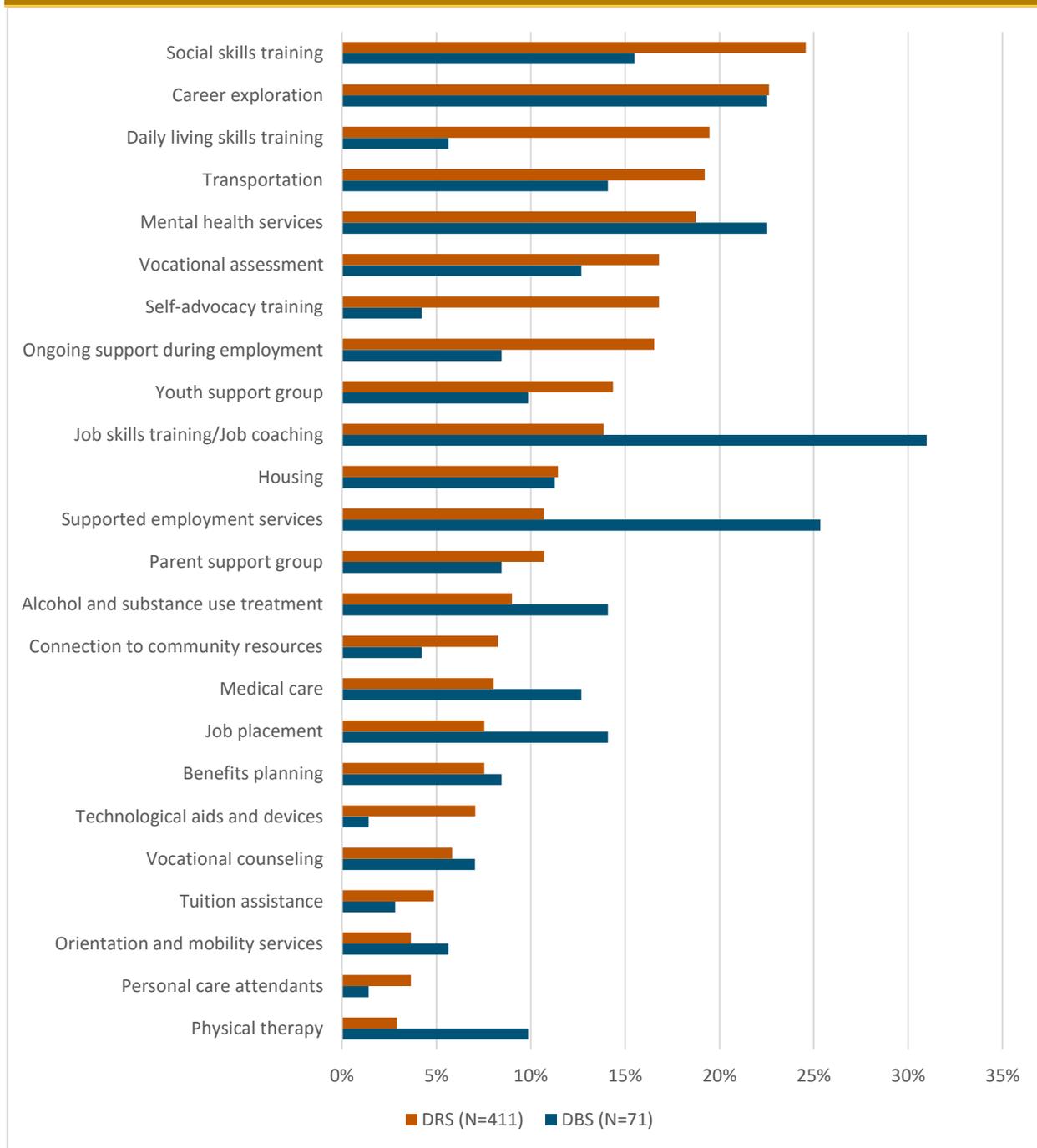


Figure 44. Inadequate resources with an impact on successful transition to employment, DRS and DBS

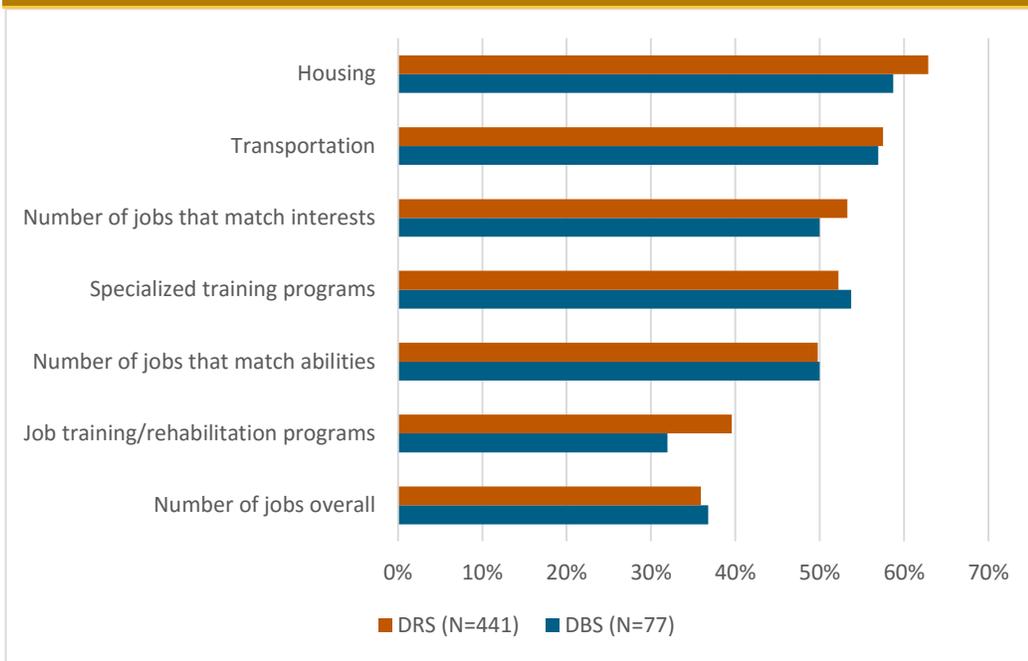


Figure 45. Significant barriers to successful employment, DRS and DBS

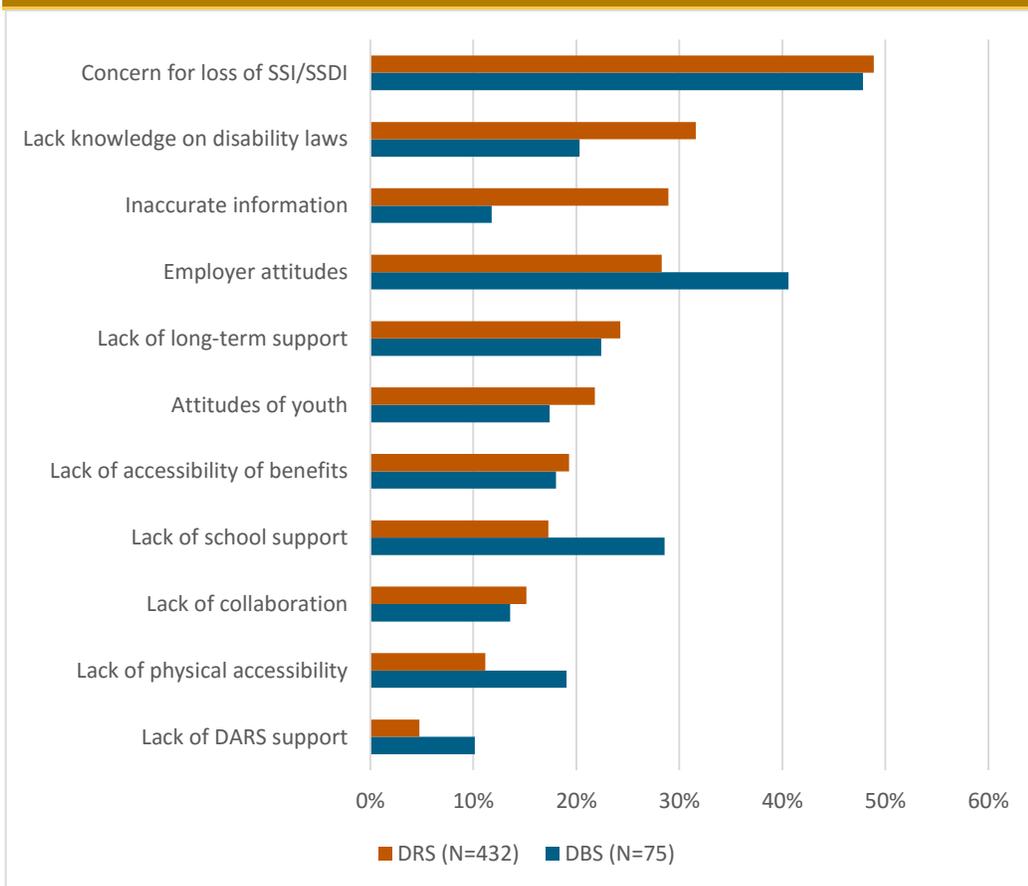


Figure 46. Frequency that service needs are met in different school settings for DRS (N = 422)

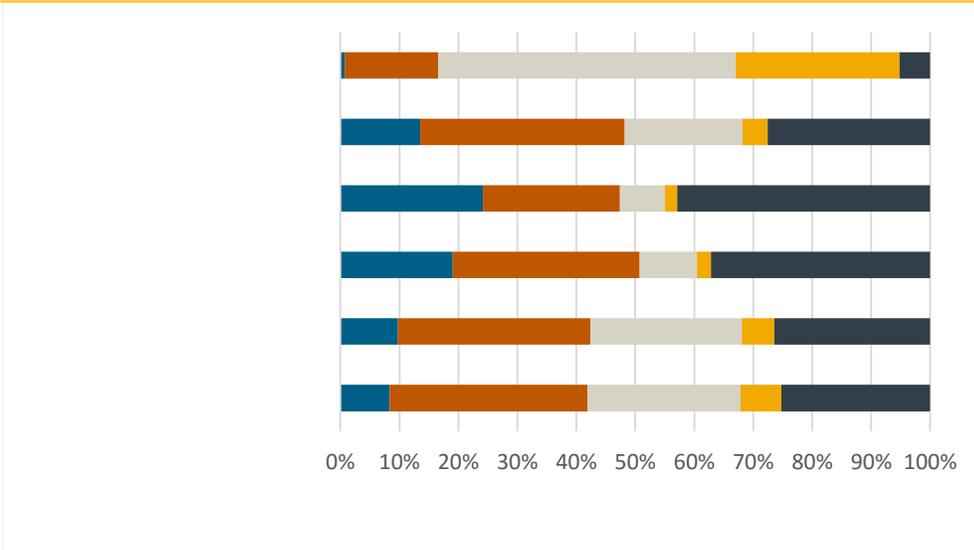


Figure 47. Frequency that service needs are met in different school settings for DBS (N = 75)

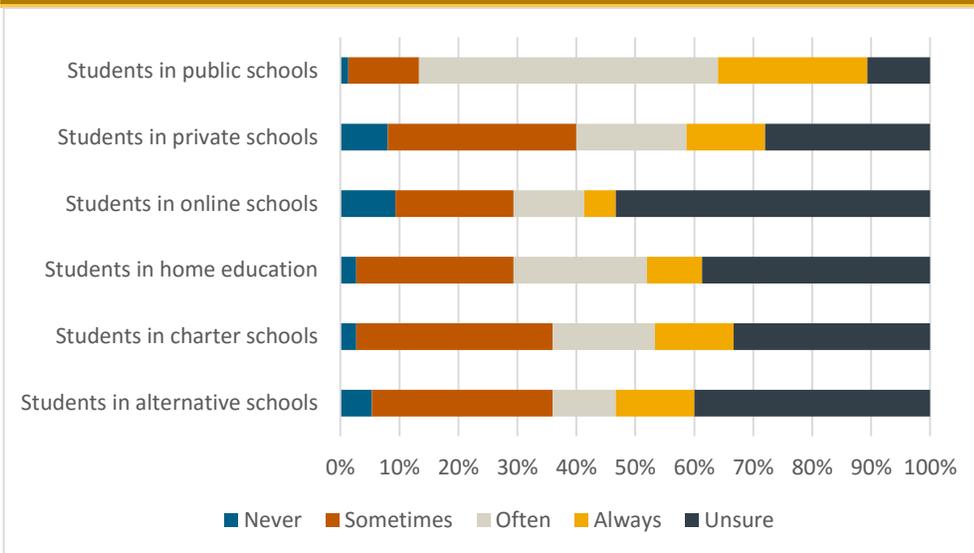


Figure 48. Frequency of needs met for youth and students with disabilities in various life circumstances; DRS Staff (N = 419)

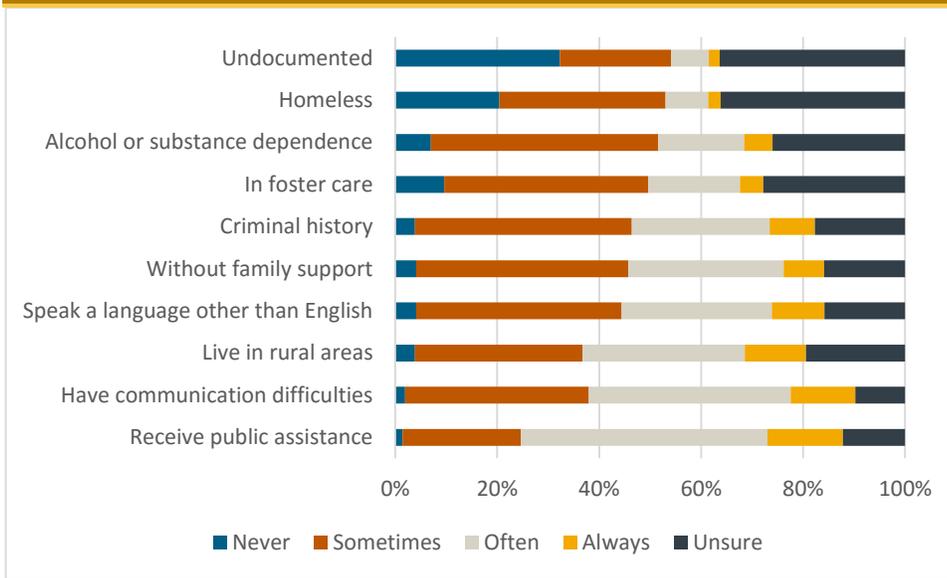


Figure 49. Frequency of needs met for youth and students with disabilities in various life circumstances; DBS Staff (N = 419)

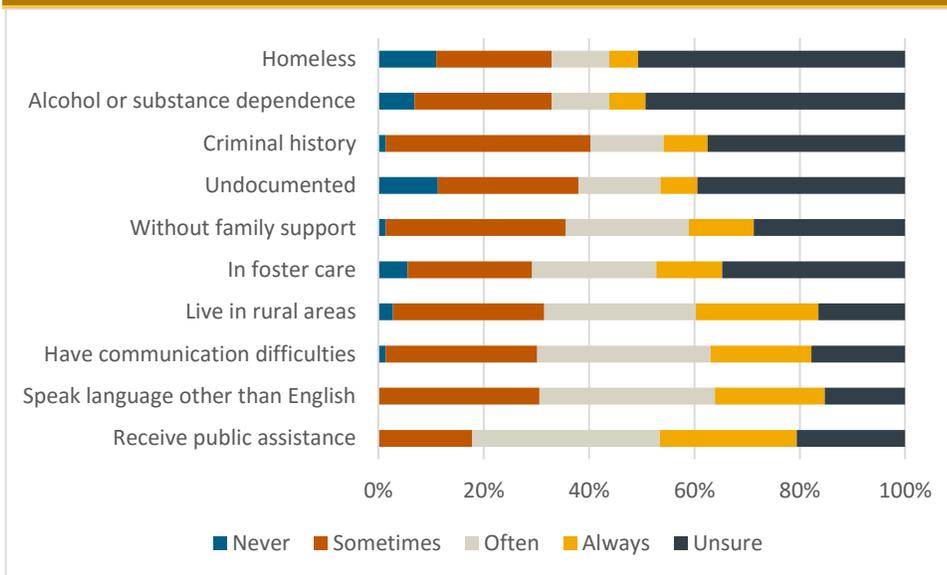


Figure 50. Frequency of needs met by type of disability in DRS (N = 408)

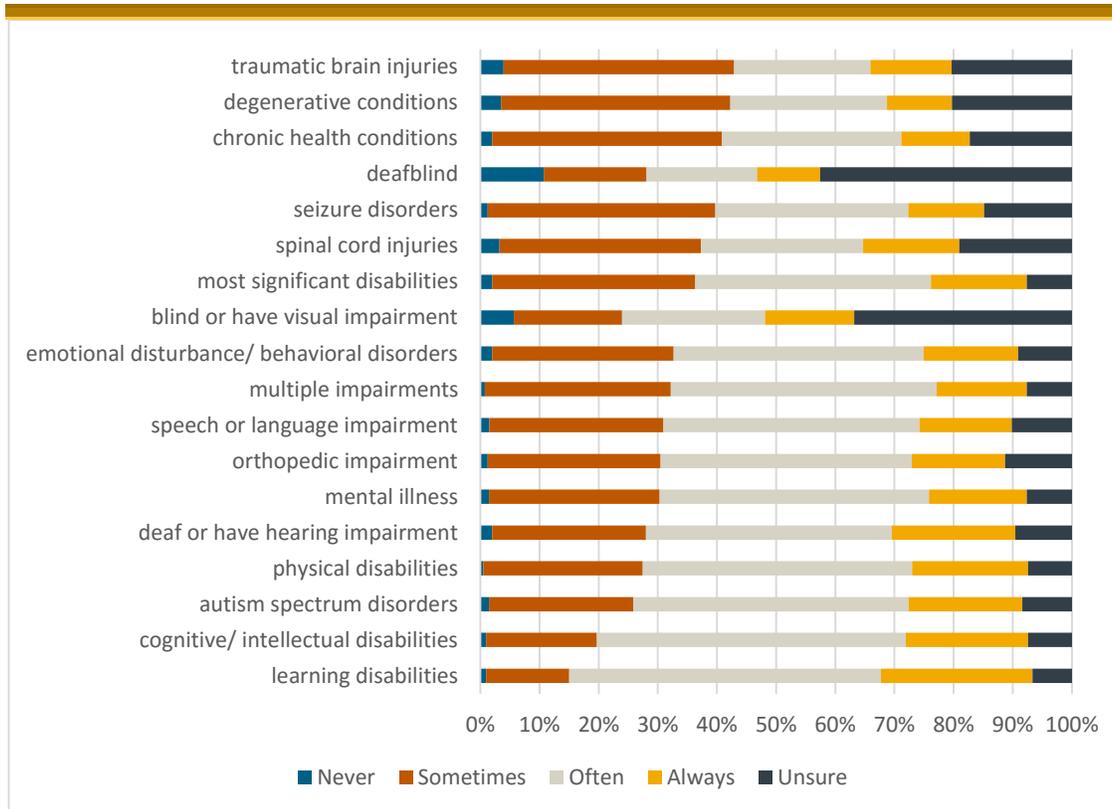


Figure 51. Frequency of needs met by type of disability in DBS (N = 68)

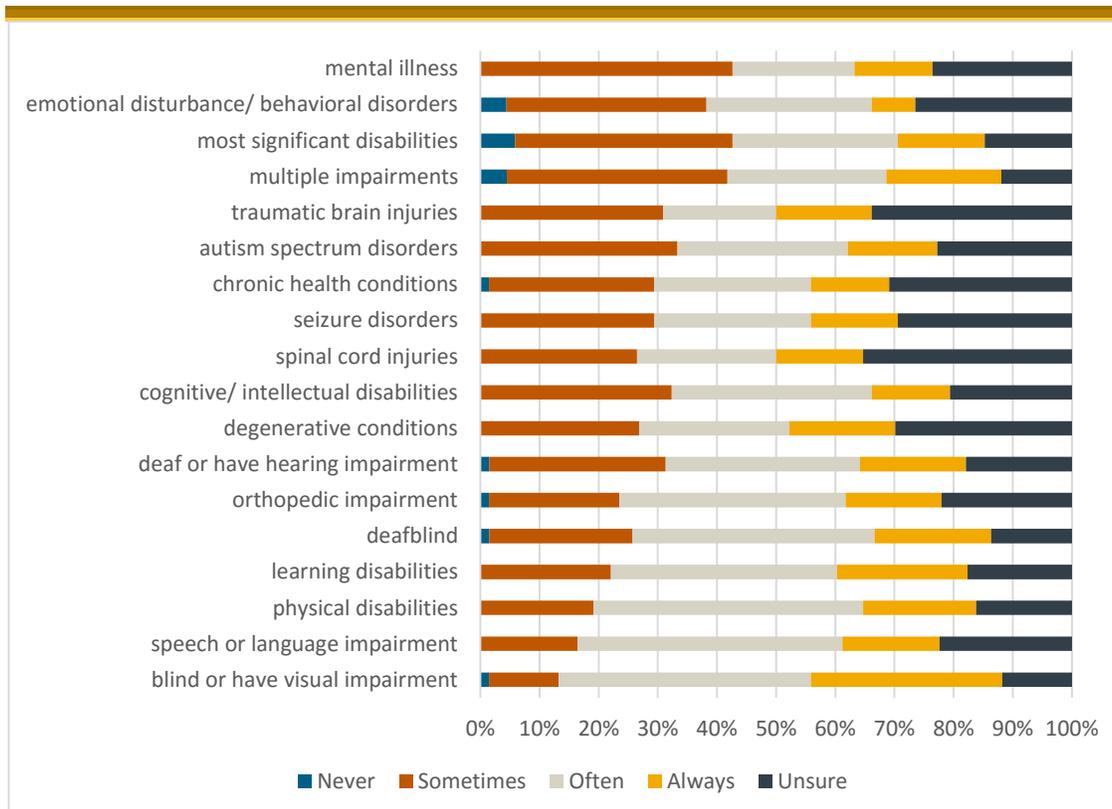


Figure 52. Issues that impact the quality of services when working with schools for DRS Staff (N = 400)

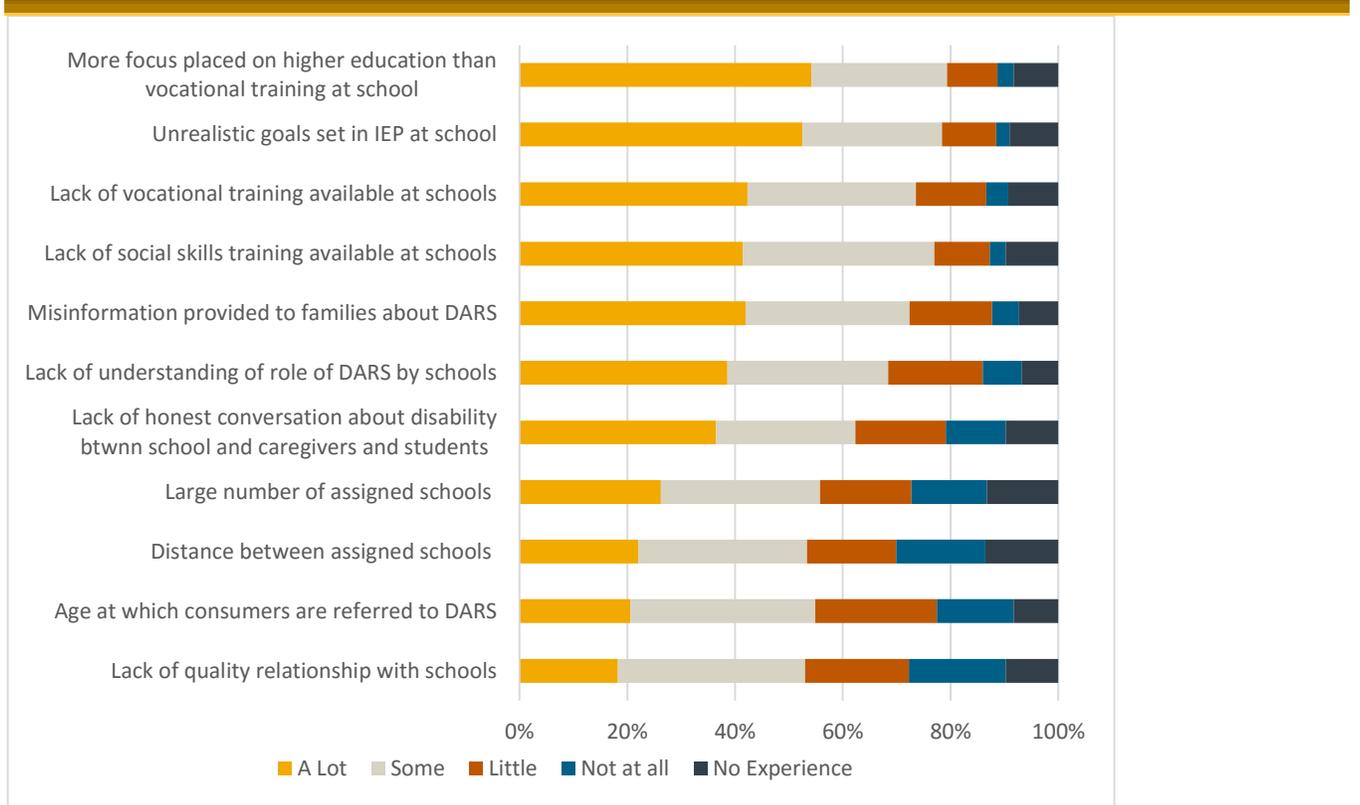


Figure 53. Issues that impact the quality of services when working with schools for DBS Staff (N = 64)

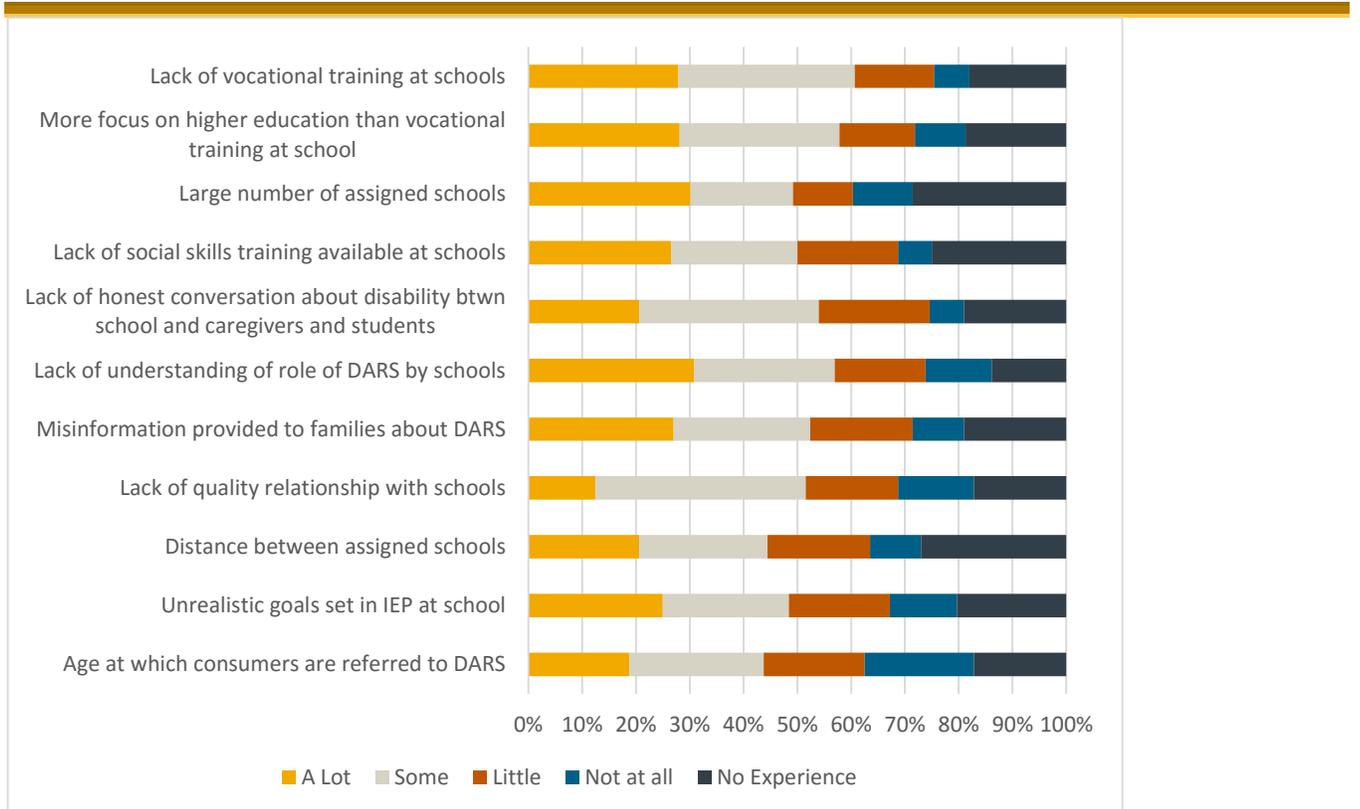


Figure 54. Issues that impact the quality of services when working with CRPs/employers for DRS (N = 398)

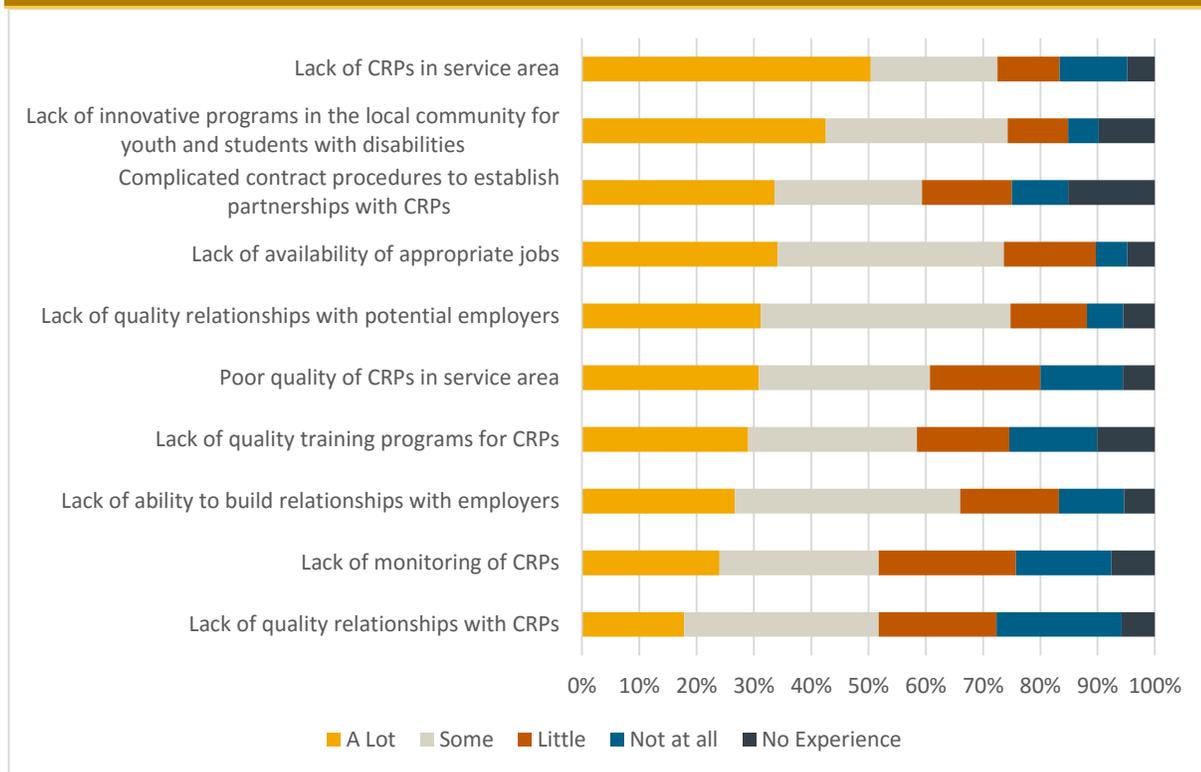


Figure 55. Issues that impact the quality of services when working with CRPs/employers for DBS (N = 61)

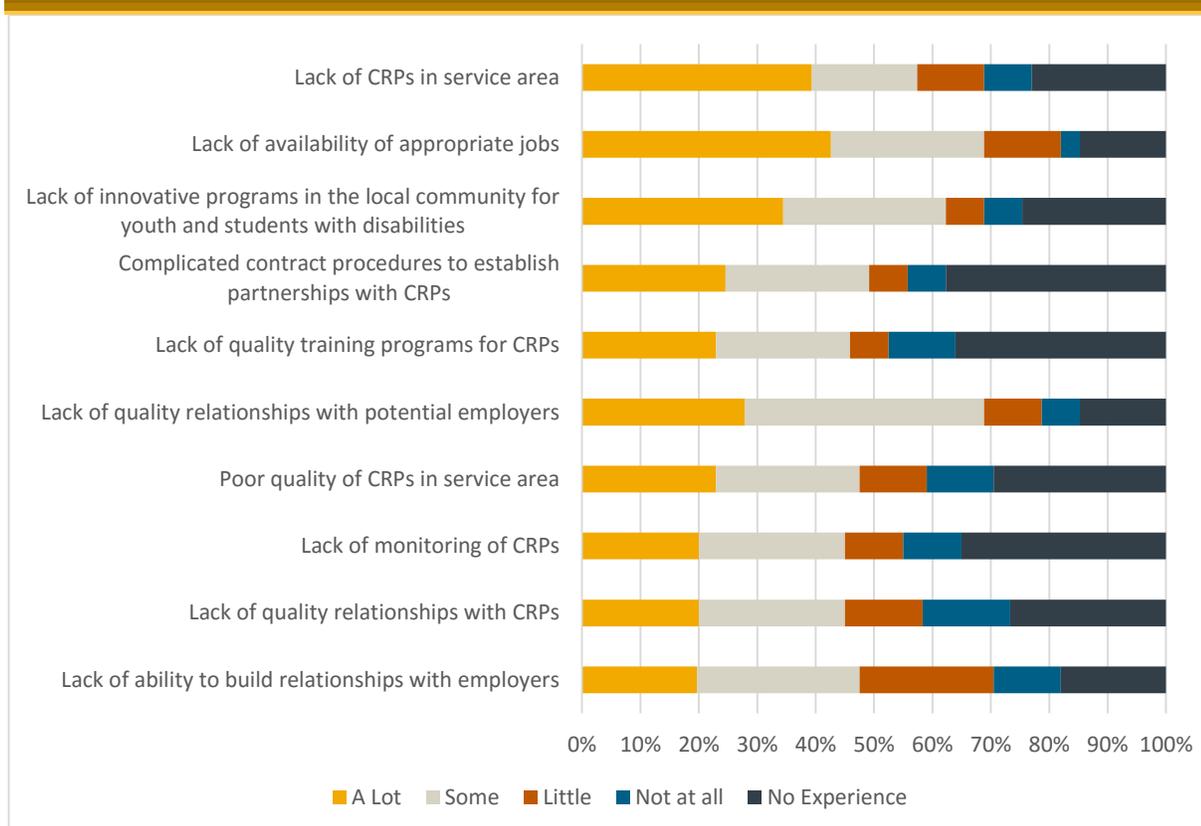


Figure 56. Frequency of agency issues that impact quality of overall services to students in DRS (N = 385)

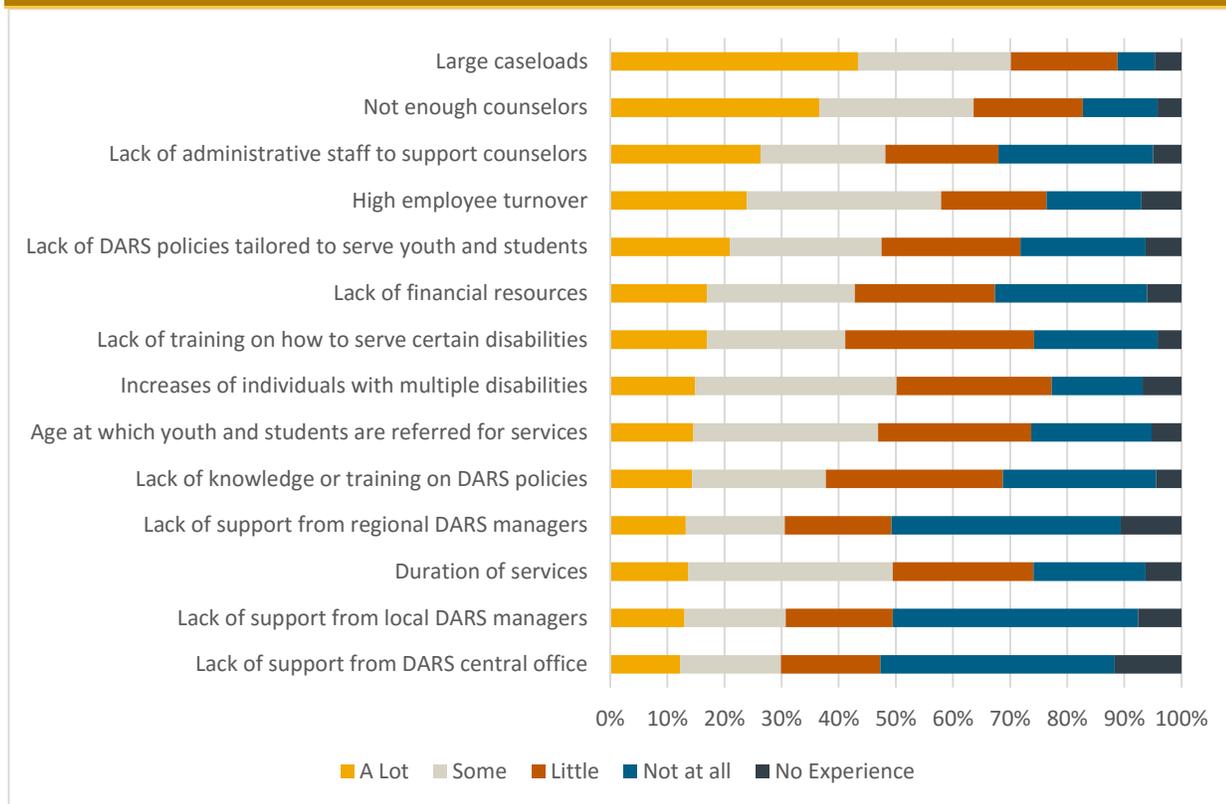


Figure 57. Frequency of agency issues that impact quality of overall services to students in DBS (N = 55)

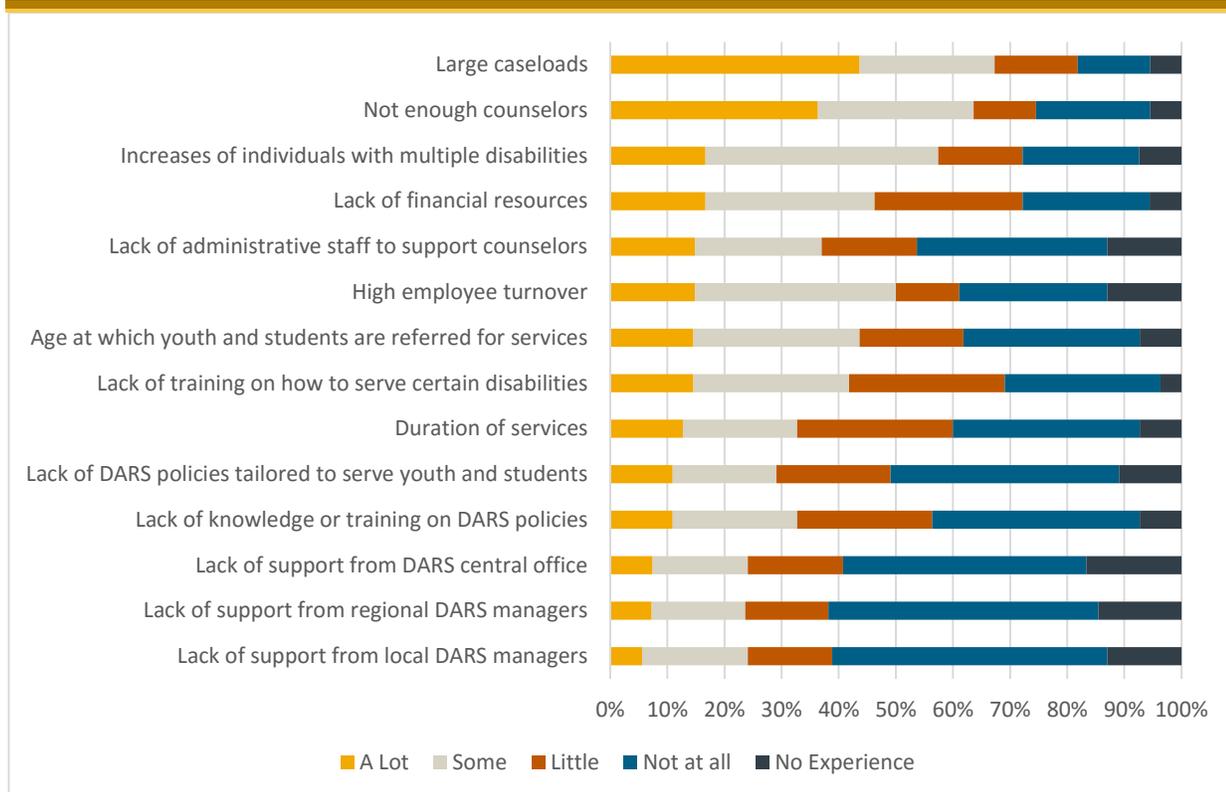


Figure 58. Frequency of barriers experienced by DRS counselors working with transition age students

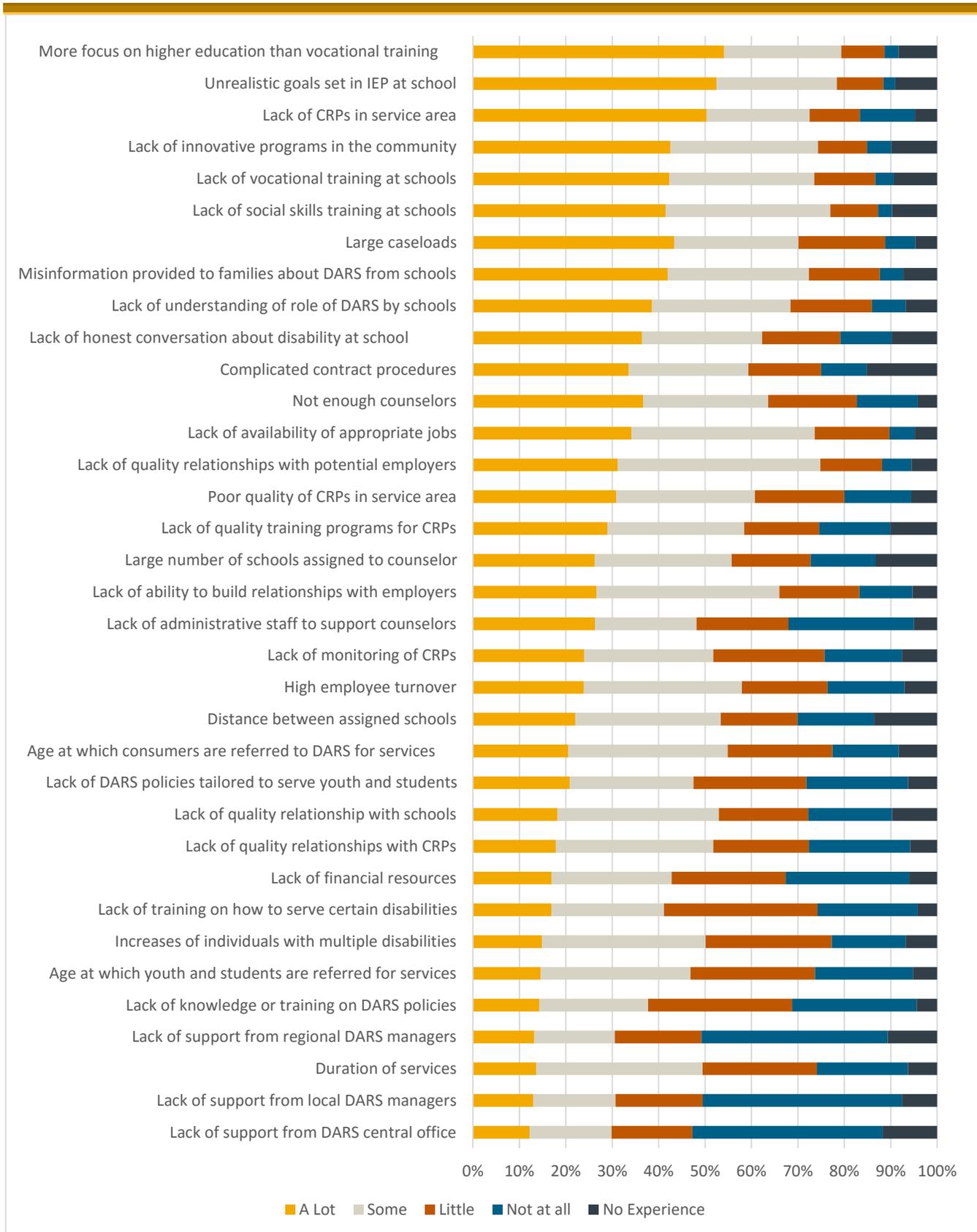


Figure 59. Frequency of barriers experienced by DBS counselors working with transition age students

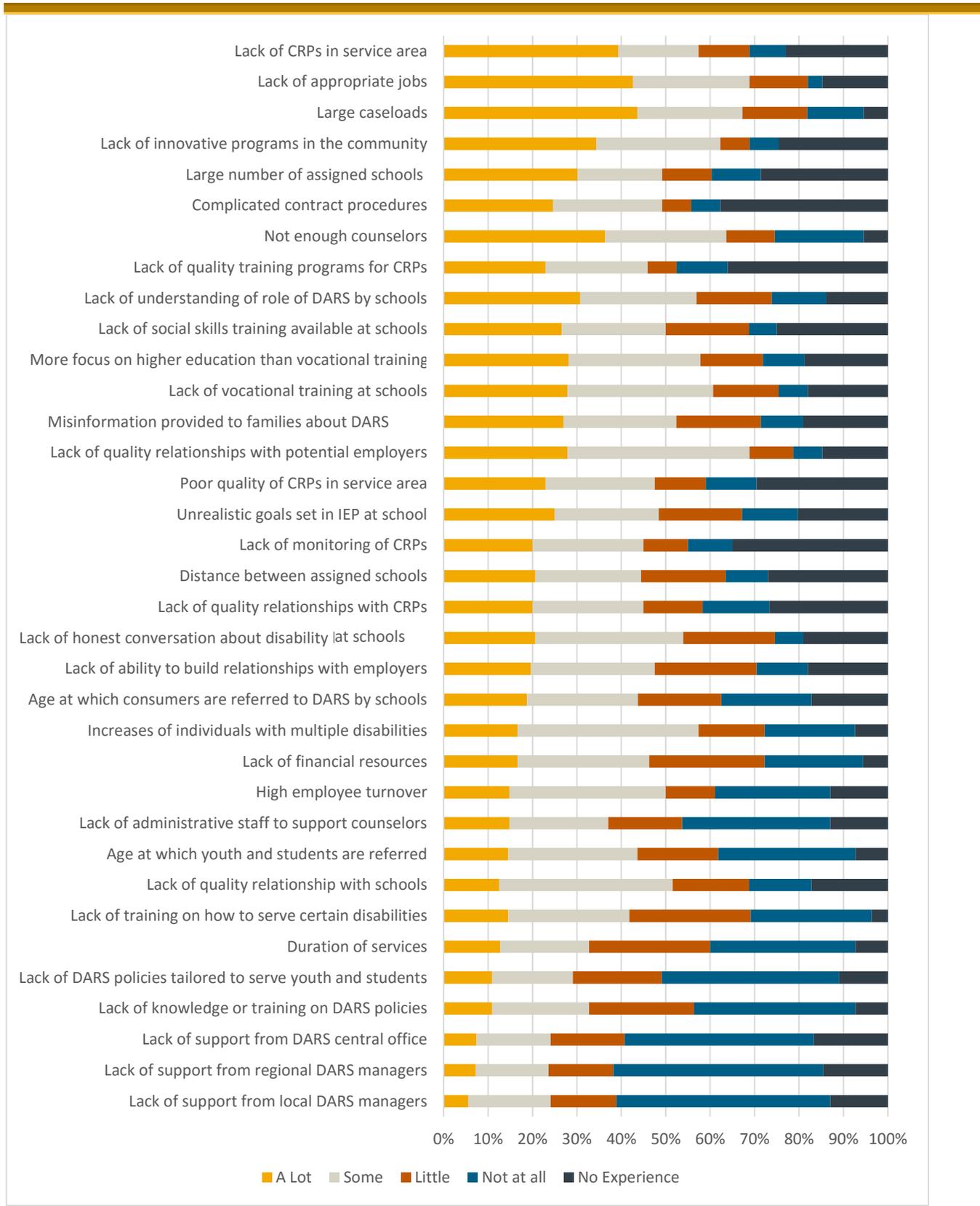


Figure 60. Referral sources of students to DRS (N = 389)

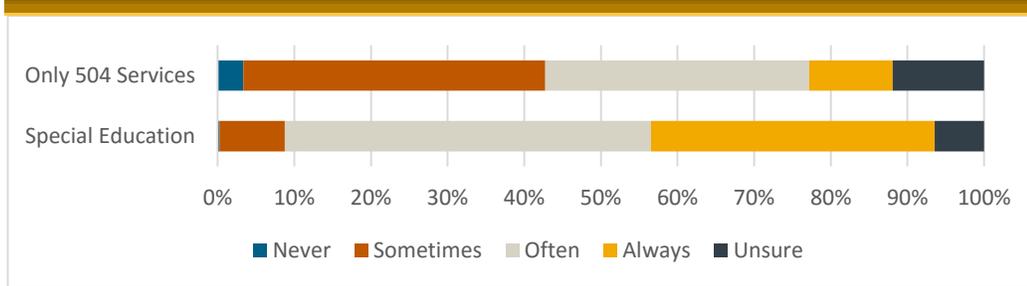


Figure 61. Referral sources of students to DBS (N = 56)

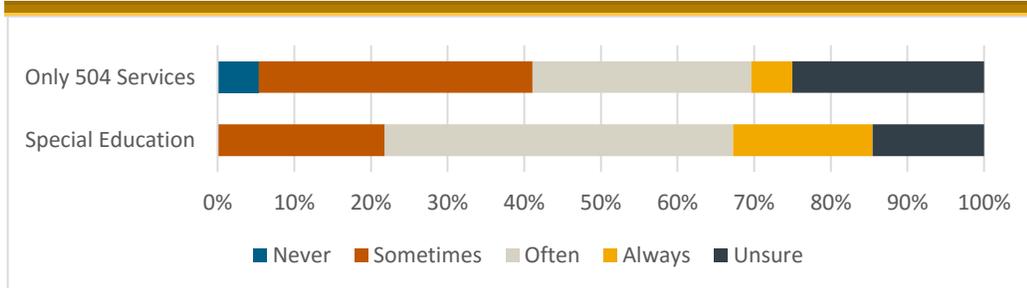


Figure 62. Ideal time to begin vocational planning with DRS (N = 191; Note: survey display logic showed this question to only a subset of survey participants who responded that they had a caseload)

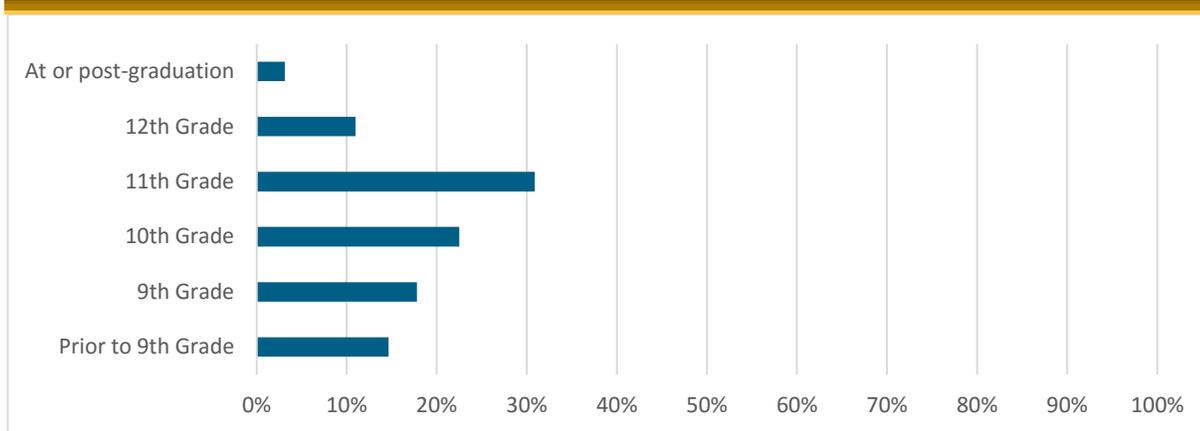


Figure 63. Ideal time to begin vocational planning with DBS (N = 17; Note: survey display logic showed this question to only a subset of survey participants who responded that they had a caseload)

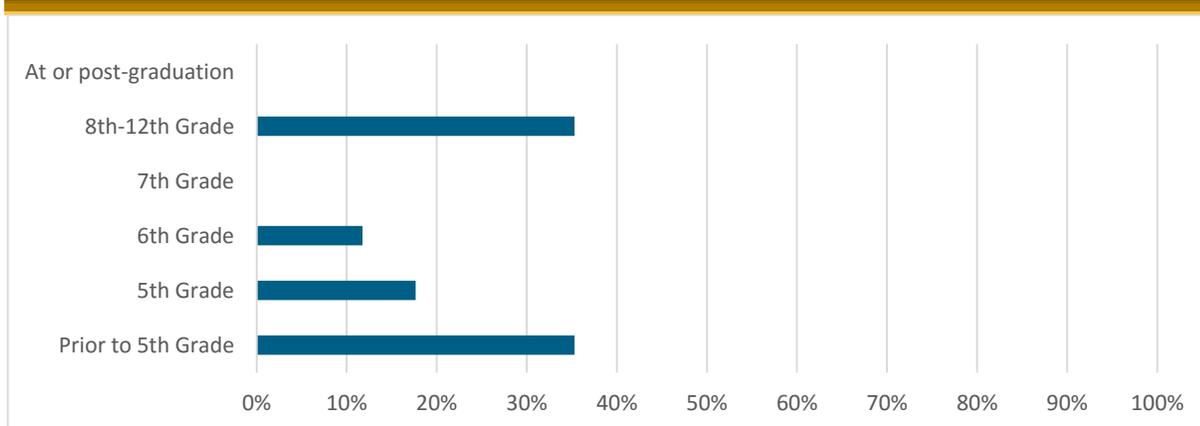


Figure 64. Time required to serve youth as compared to adults

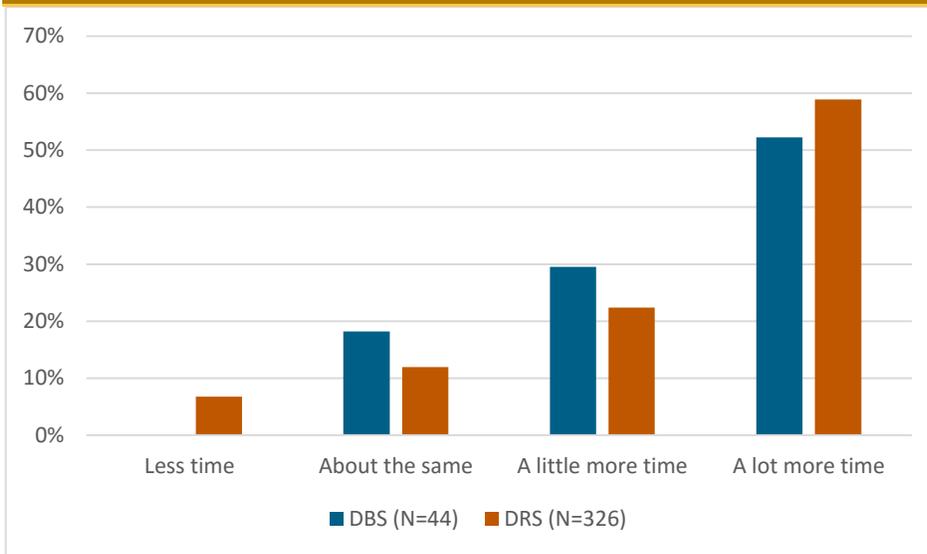
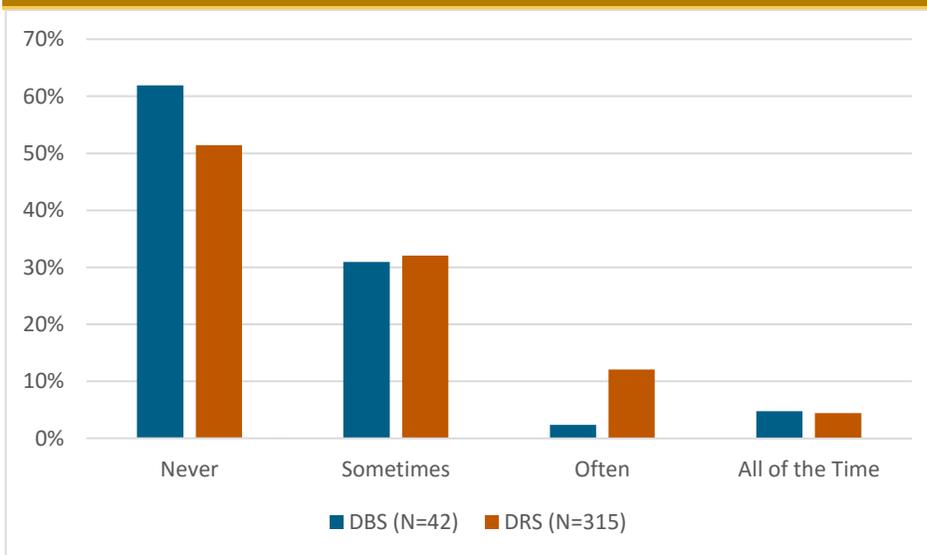


Figure 65. Frequency that counselors feel pressure to close a case regardless of readiness



Stakeholder Survey

Respondent Characteristics

Figure 66. Categories of stakeholder survey participants (excludes DARS employees)

Note: If you fall into more than one category, please select the category you feel most represents you.

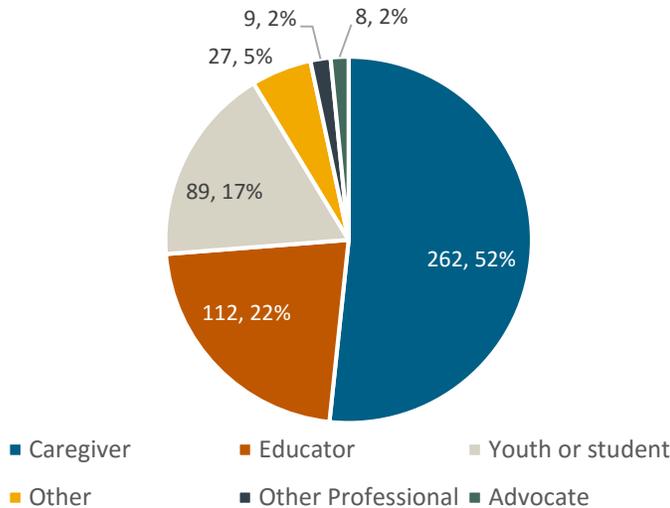


Figure 67. Familiarity with DARS service divisions

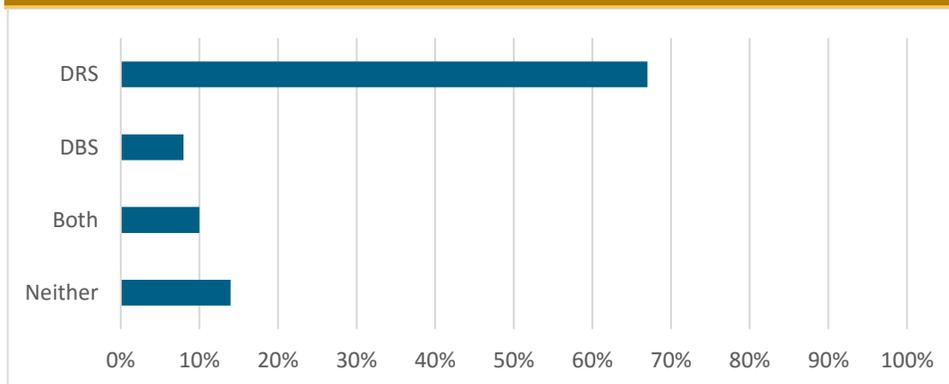


Figure 68. Geographic locations, educators, youth and caregivers

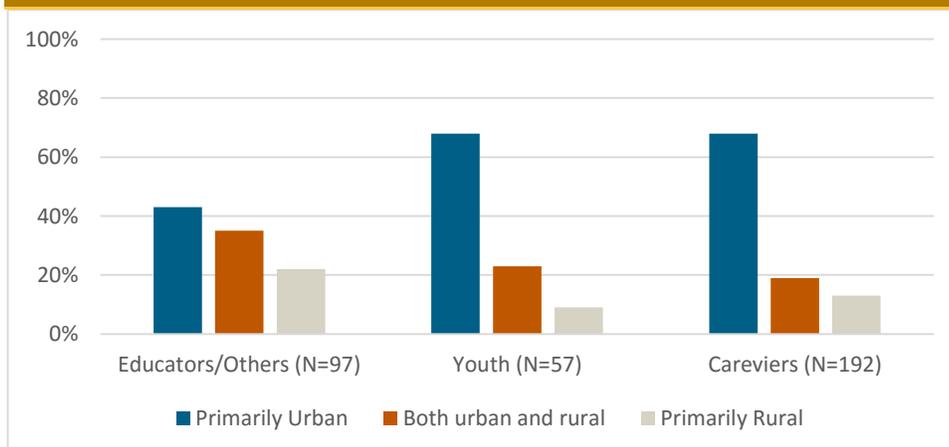


Figure 69. Percent of participants from Hispanic, Latino or Spanish Origin, educators, youth and caregivers

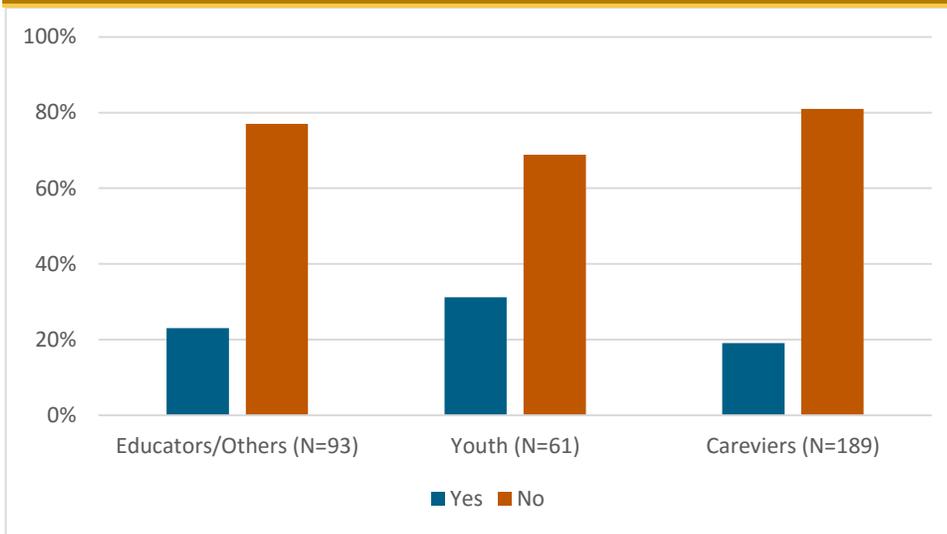


Figure 70. Race/ethnicity, educators, youth and caregivers

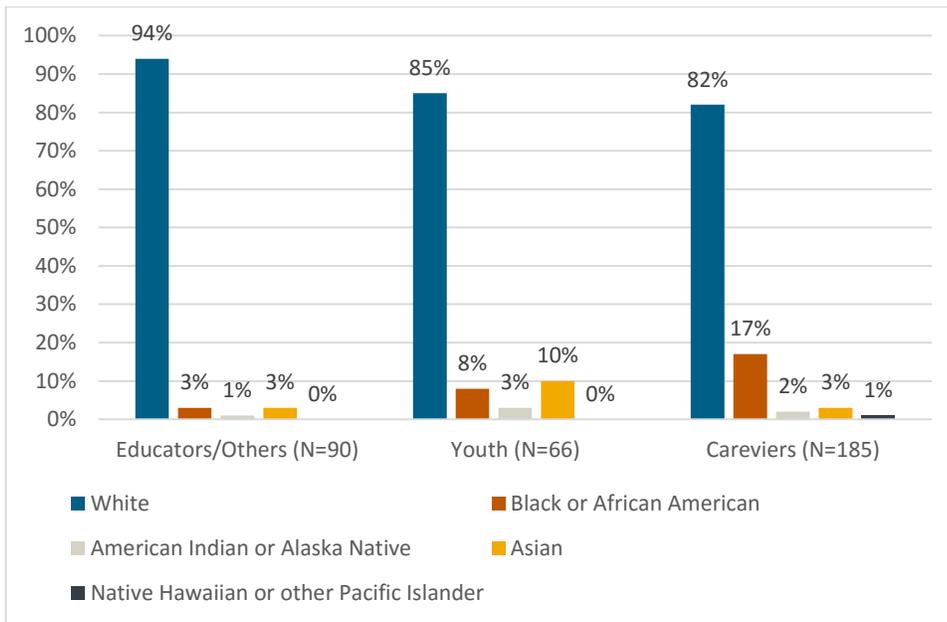


Figure 71. Percent of respondents proficient in a language other than English, educators, youth and caregivers

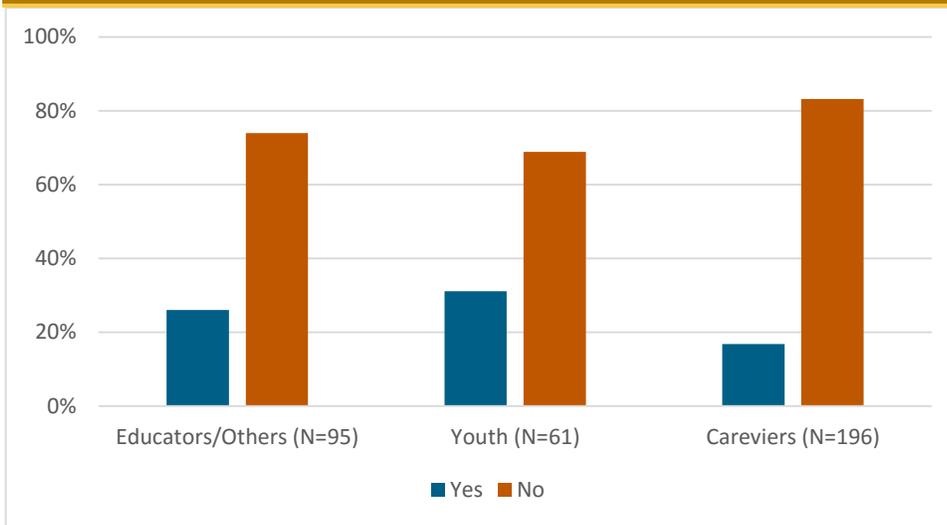
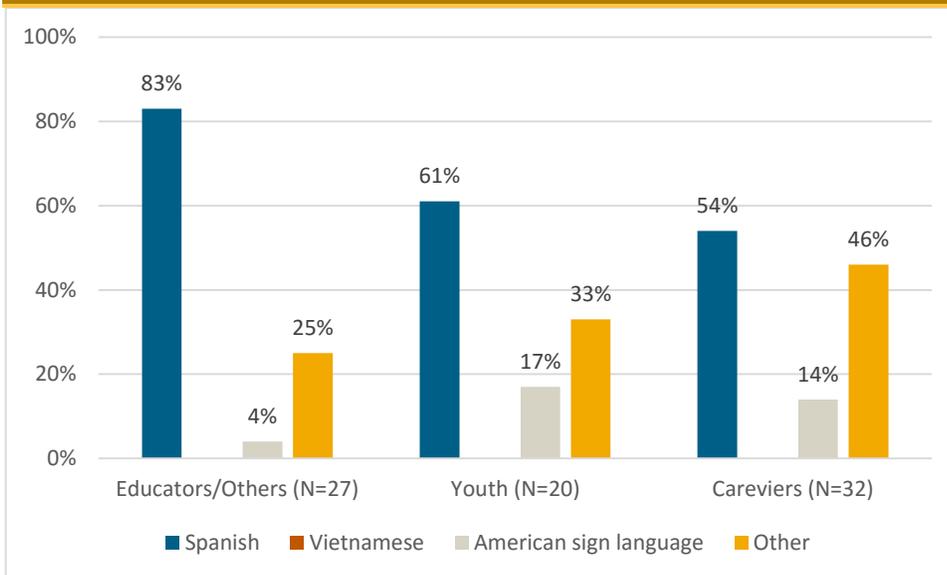


Figure 72. Languages used other than English, educators, youth and caregivers



Educators and Other Professionals Characteristics

Figure 73. Respondents' professional/advocacy role in transition process (N = 25)

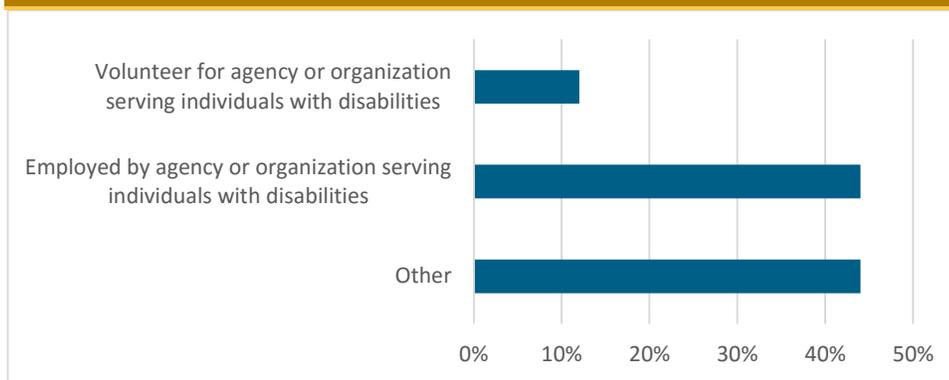


Figure 74. Percent of educators in various positions

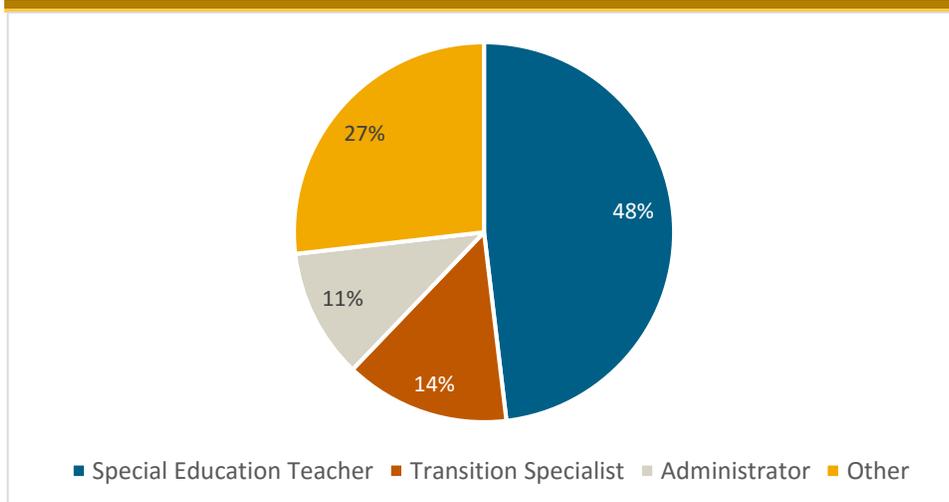
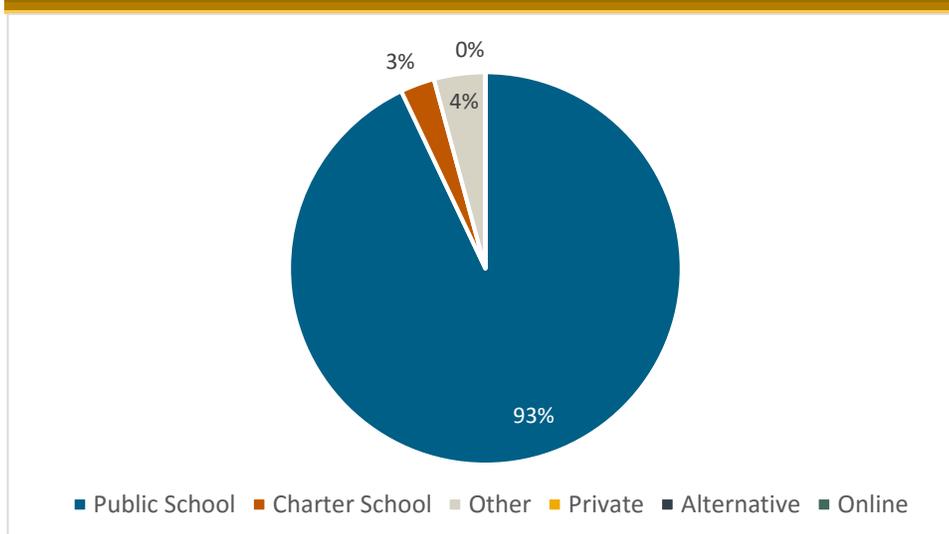


Figure 75. Percent of professionals in various school settings



Educators and Other Professionals Survey Questions

Figure 76. Frequency of service needs met, educators (N = 92)

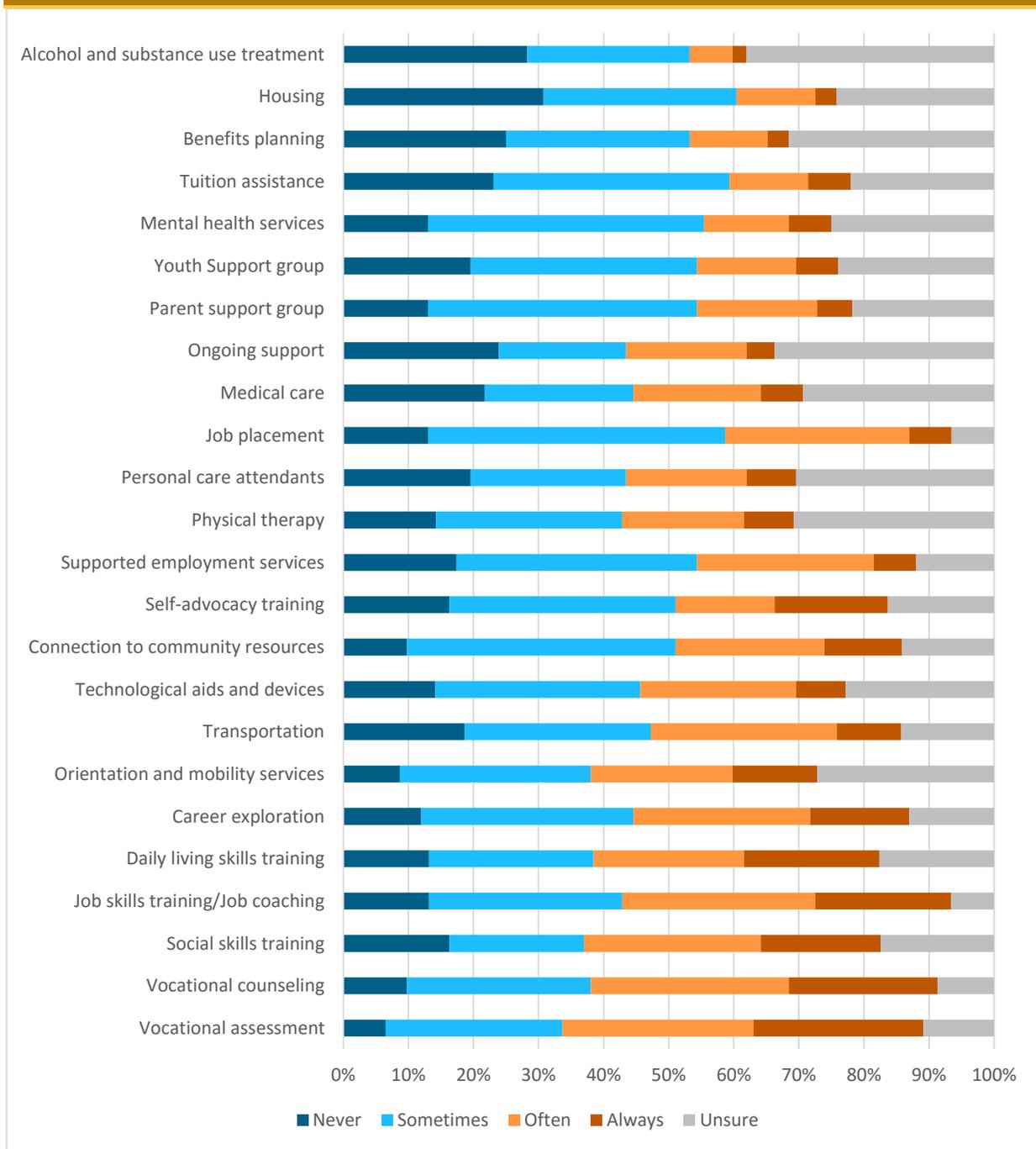


Figure 77 . Frequency of service needs met, other professionals (N = 36)

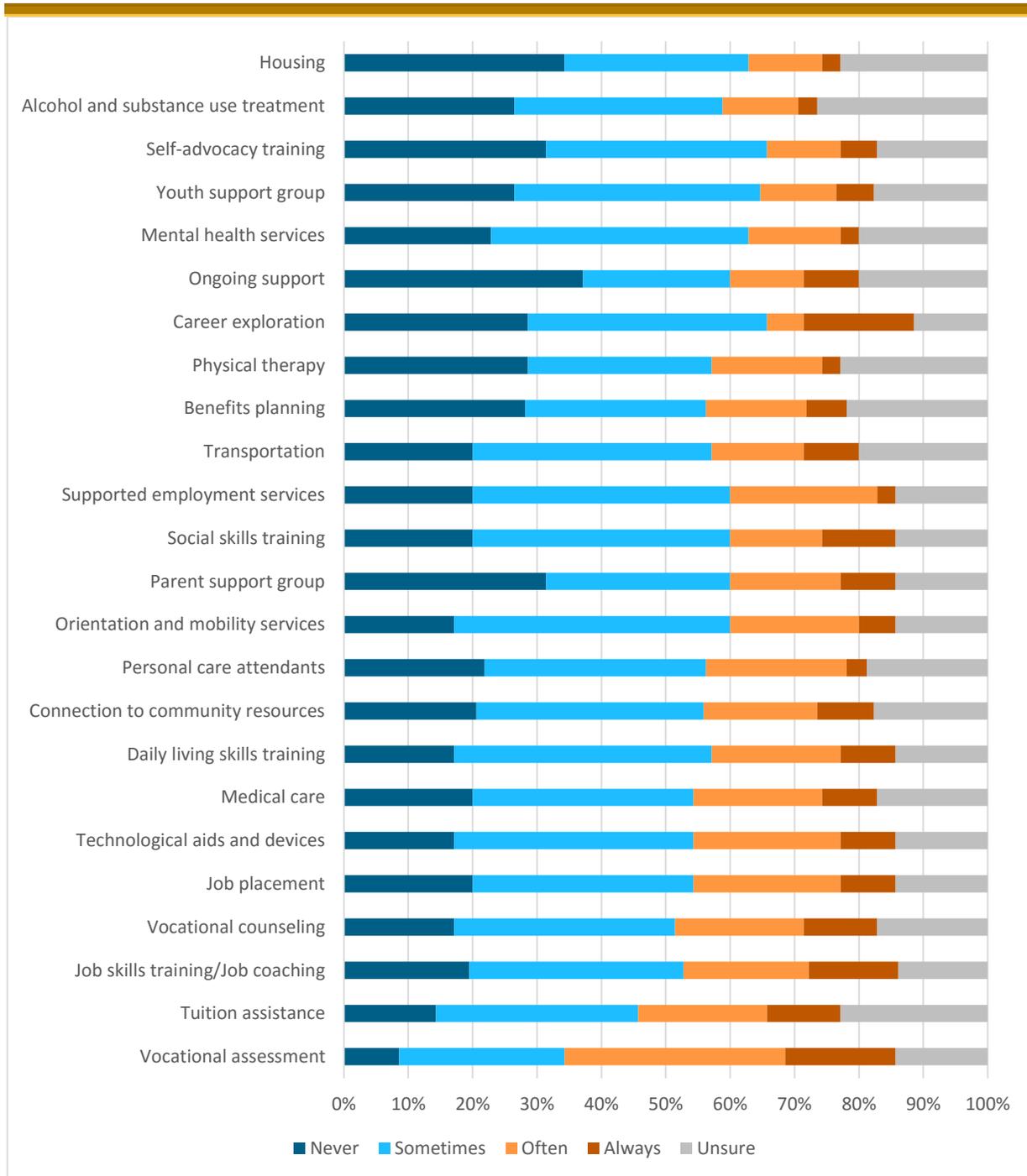


Figure 78. Most important services that are currently not met, educators and other professionals

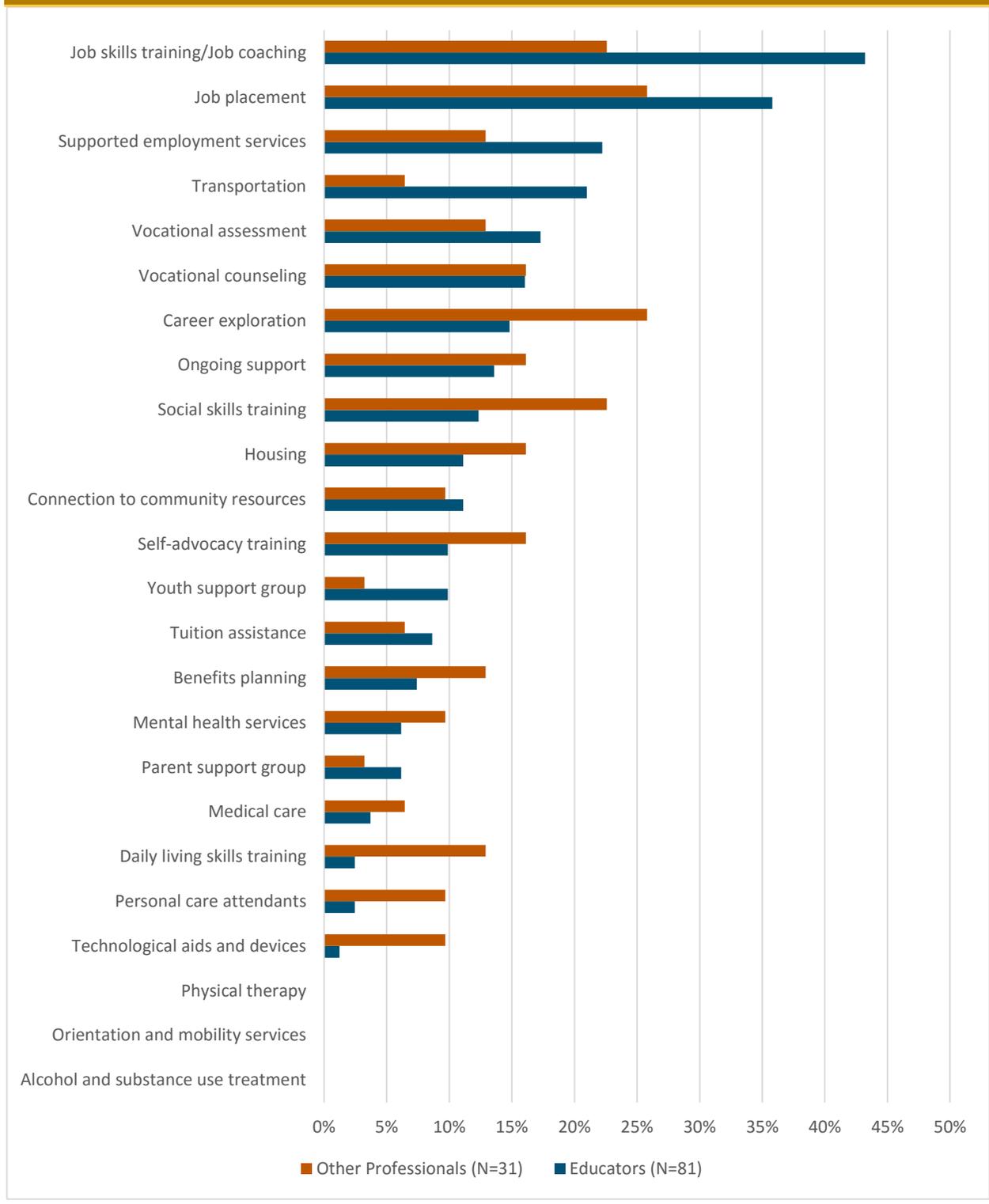


Figure 79. Inadequate resources with an impact on successful transition to employment, educators and other professionals

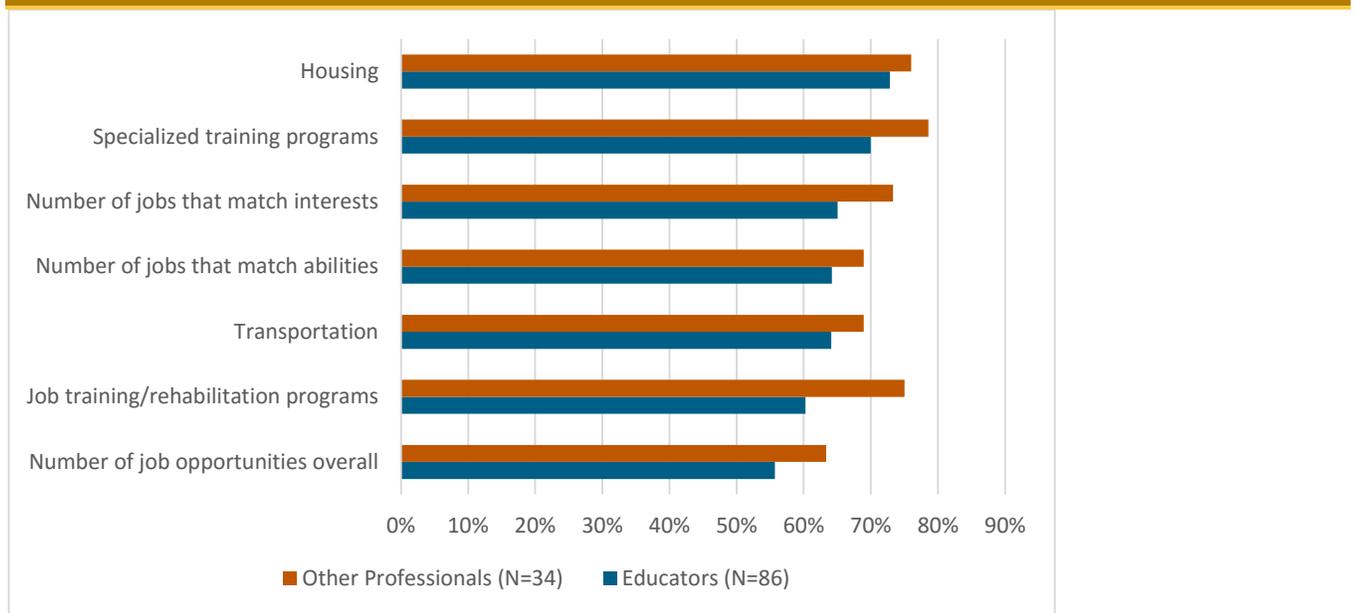


Figure 80. Significant barriers to successful employment, educators and other professionals

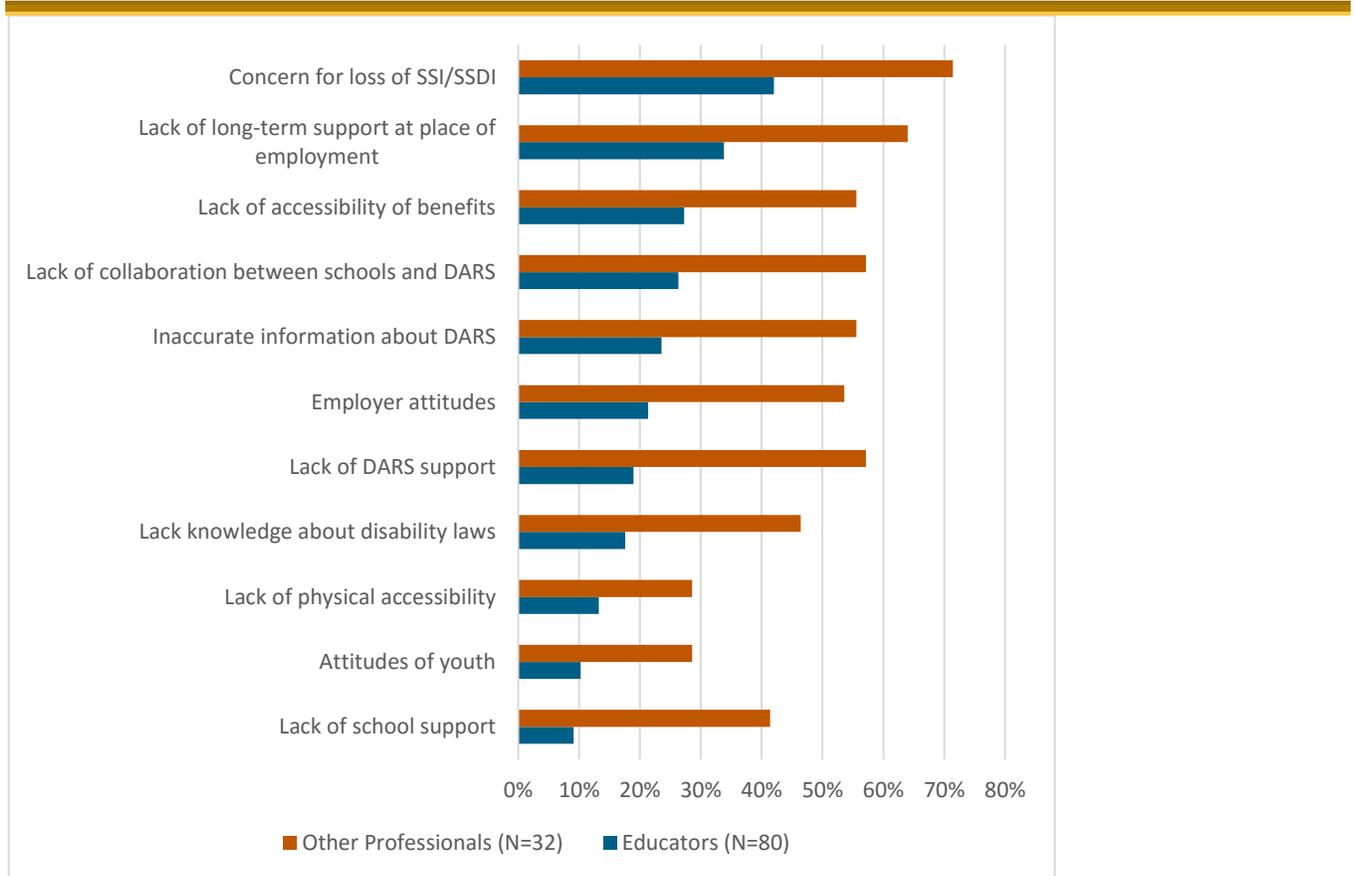


Figure 81. Frequency that service needs are met in school settings, educators (N = 80)

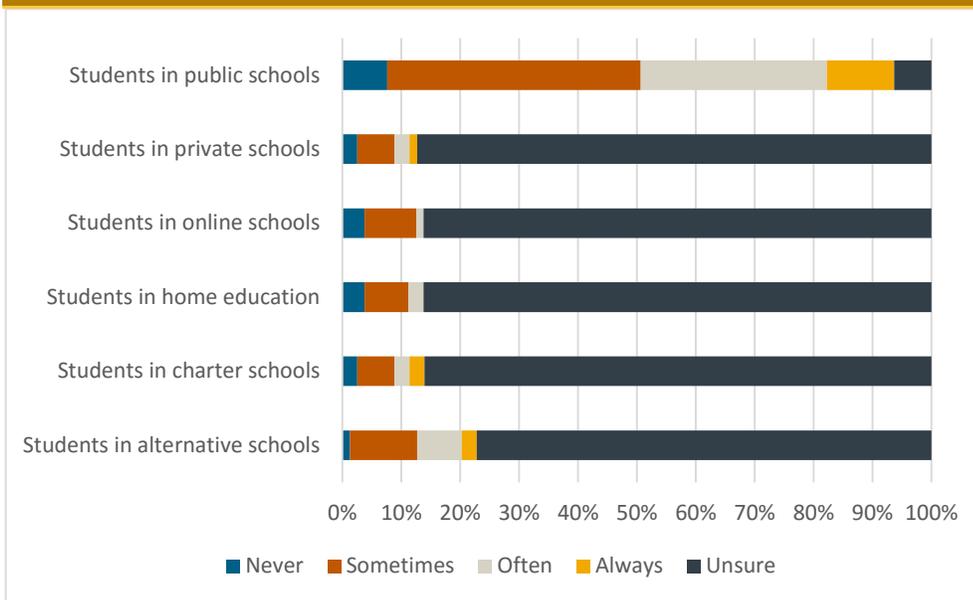


Figure 82. Frequency that service needs are met in school settings, other professionals (N = 32)

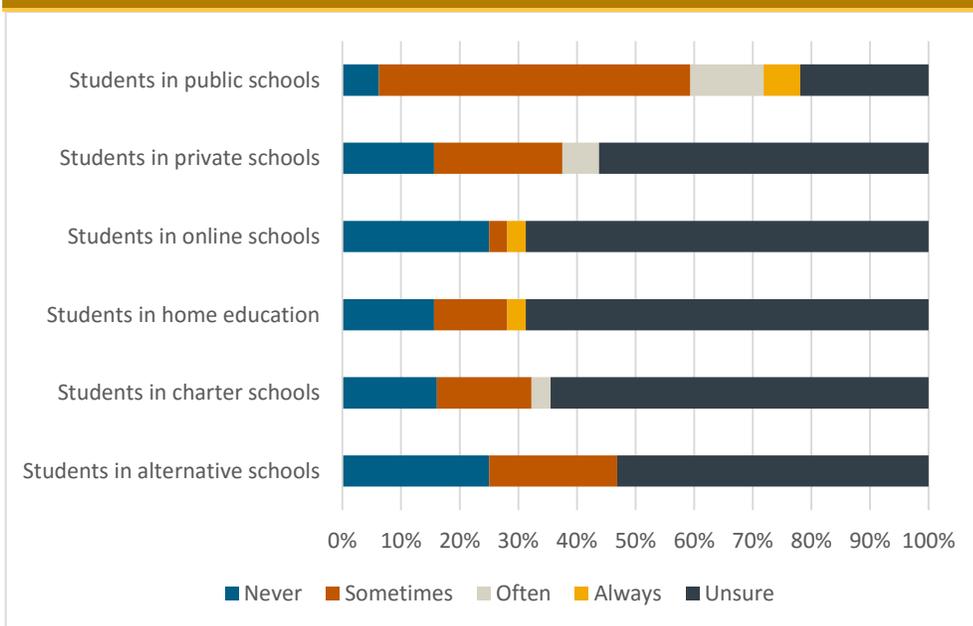


Figure 83. Frequency of needs met for various life circumstances, educators (N = 78)

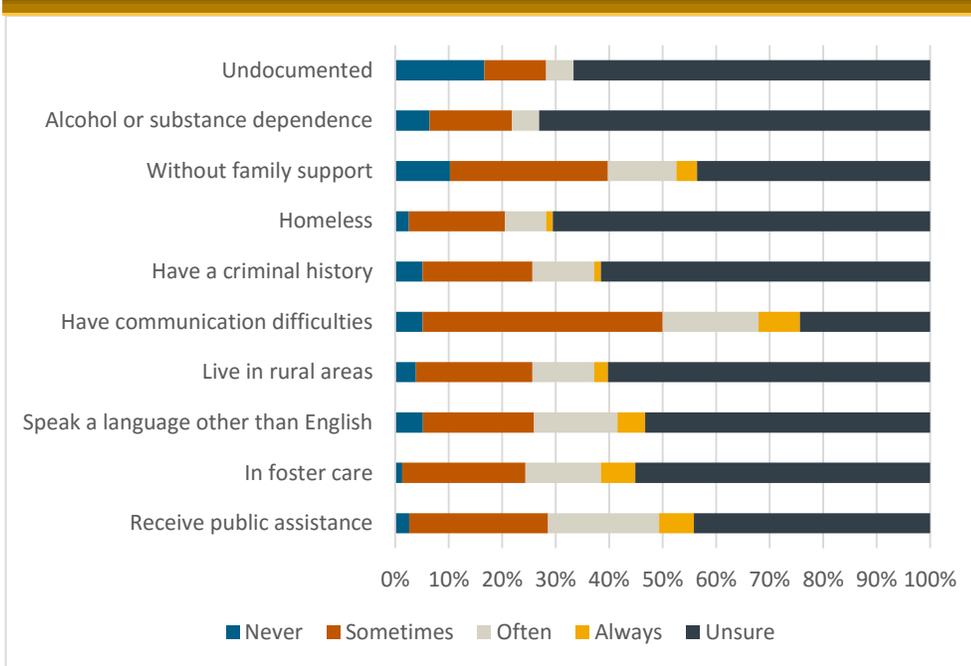


Figure 84. Frequency of needs met for various life circumstances, other professionals (N = 32)

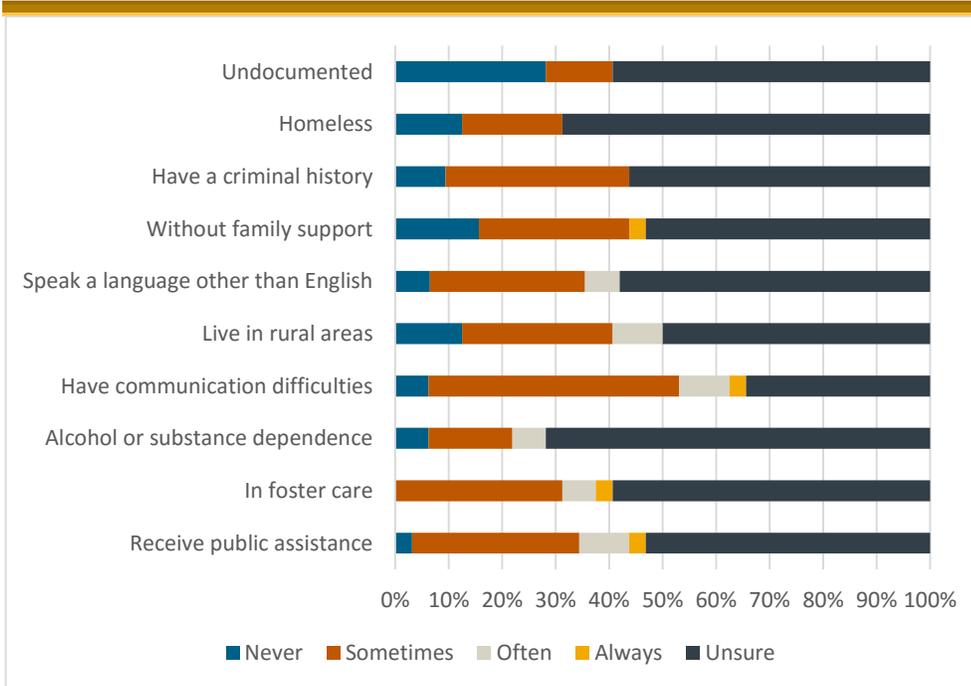


Figure 85. Frequency of needs met by type of disability, educators (N = 74)

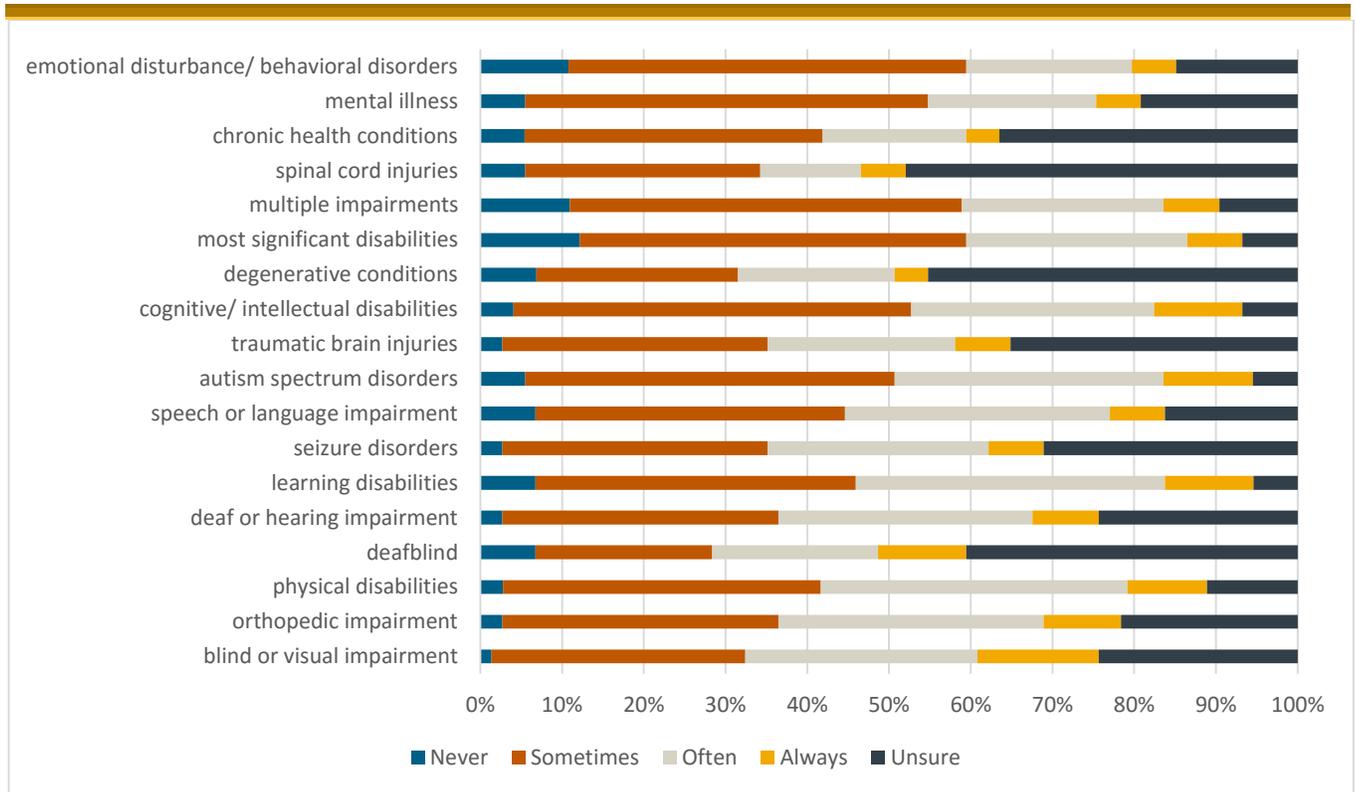
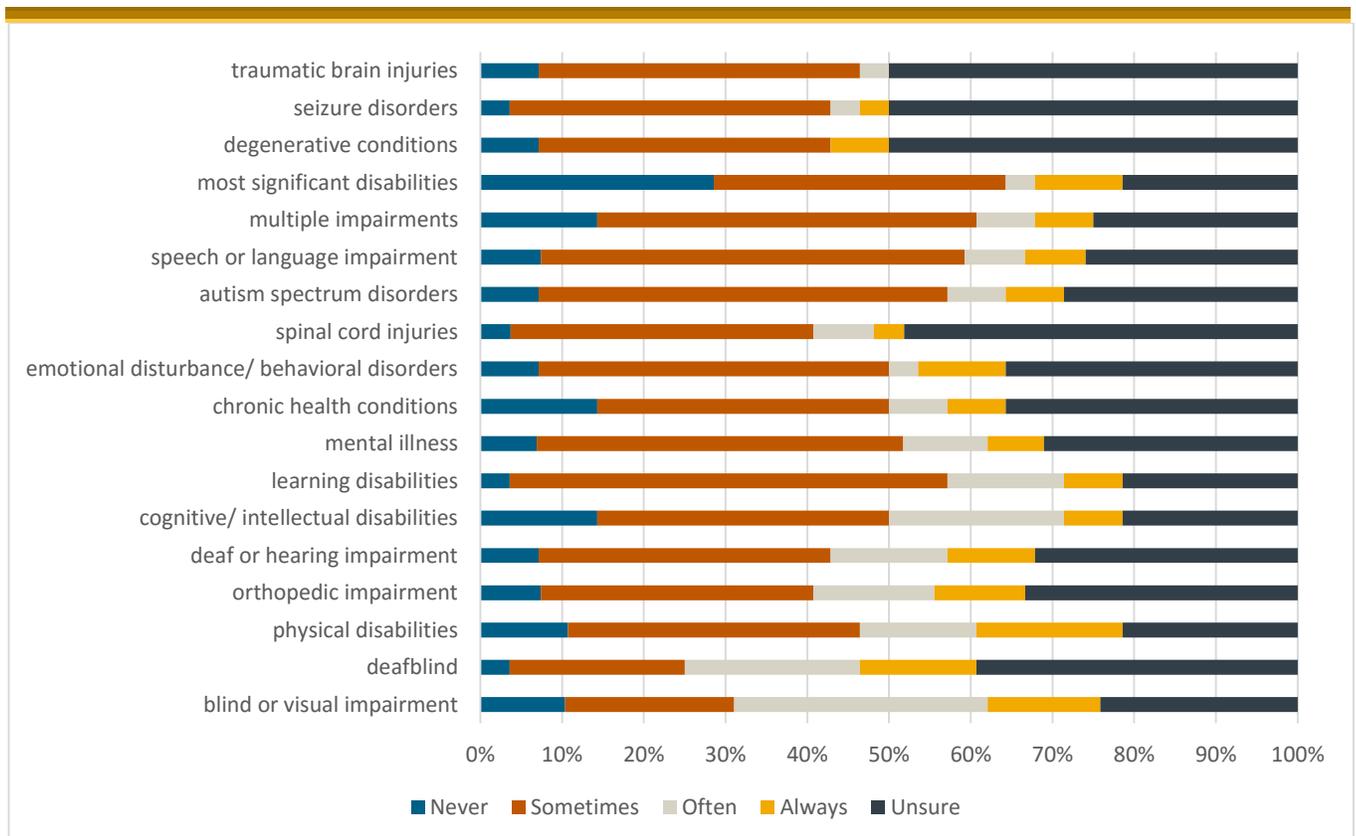


Figure 86. Frequency of needs met by type of disability, other professionals (N = 29)



Educator Only Questions

Figure 87. Educator specific questions (N = 74)

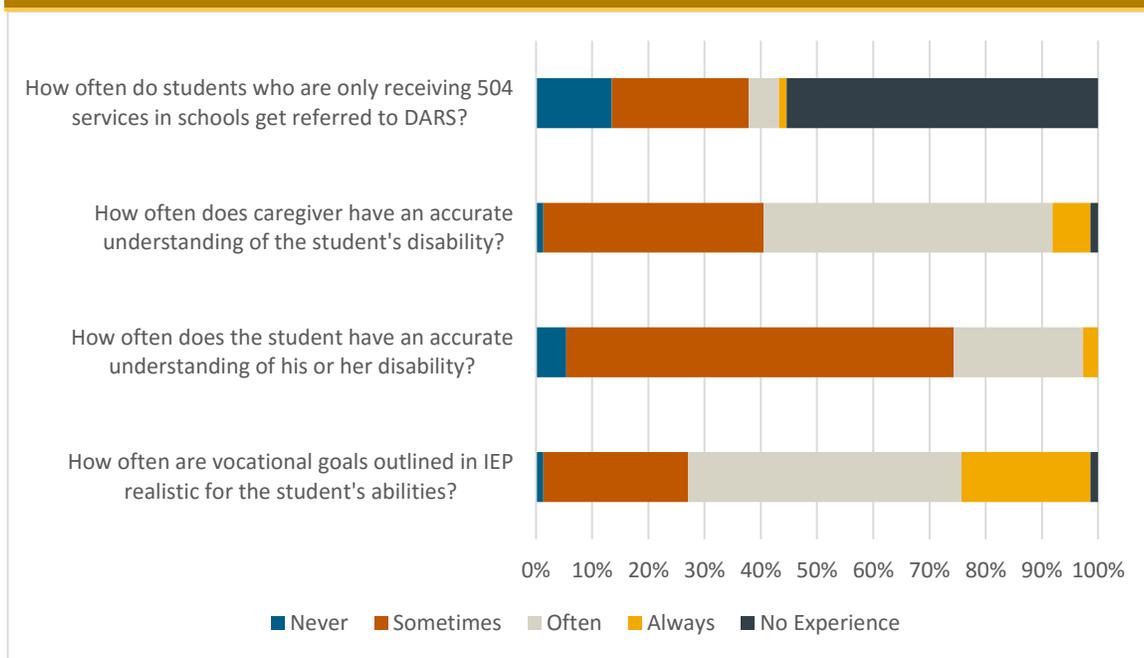


Figure 88. Educators' knowledge about transition policies (N = 73)

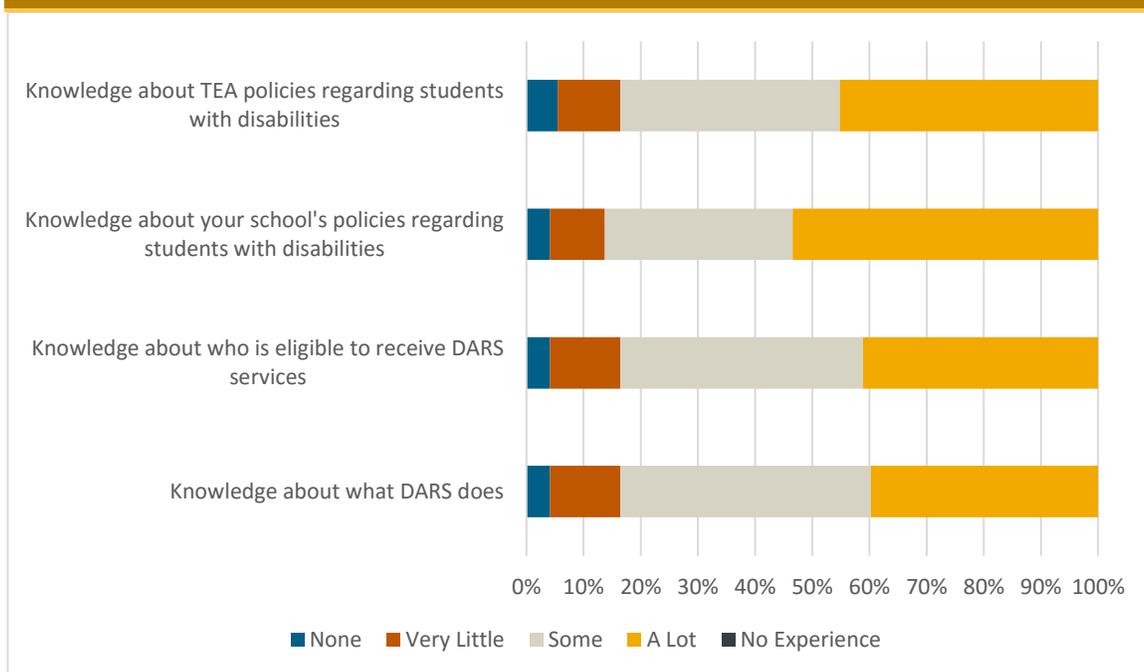


Figure 89. Time of referrals to DBS, educators (N = 67)

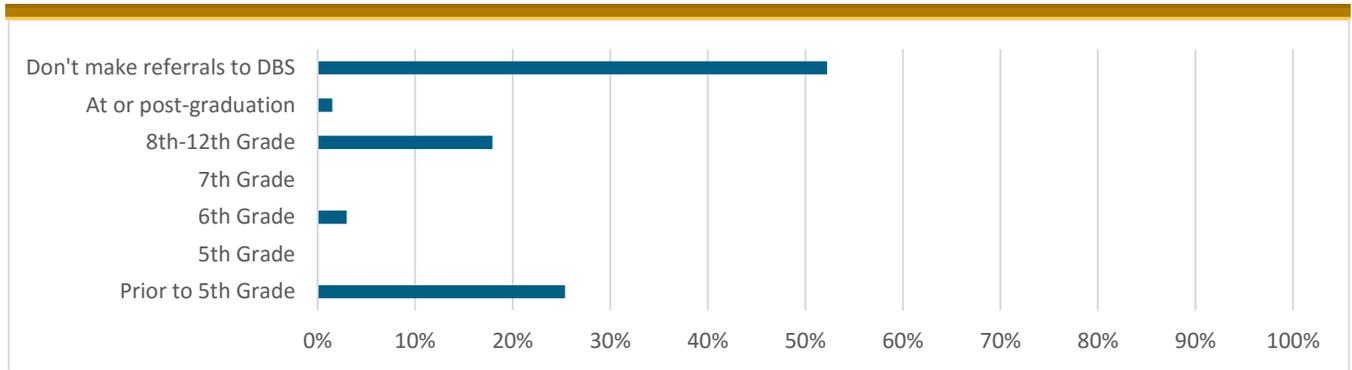


Figure 90. Ideal time to refer students to DBS, educators (N = 71)

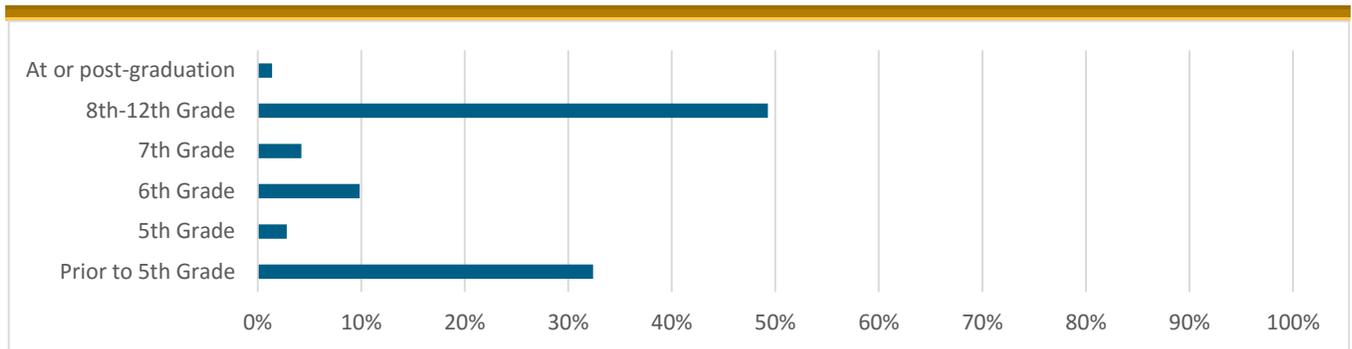


Figure 91. Time of referrals to DRS, educators (N = 72)

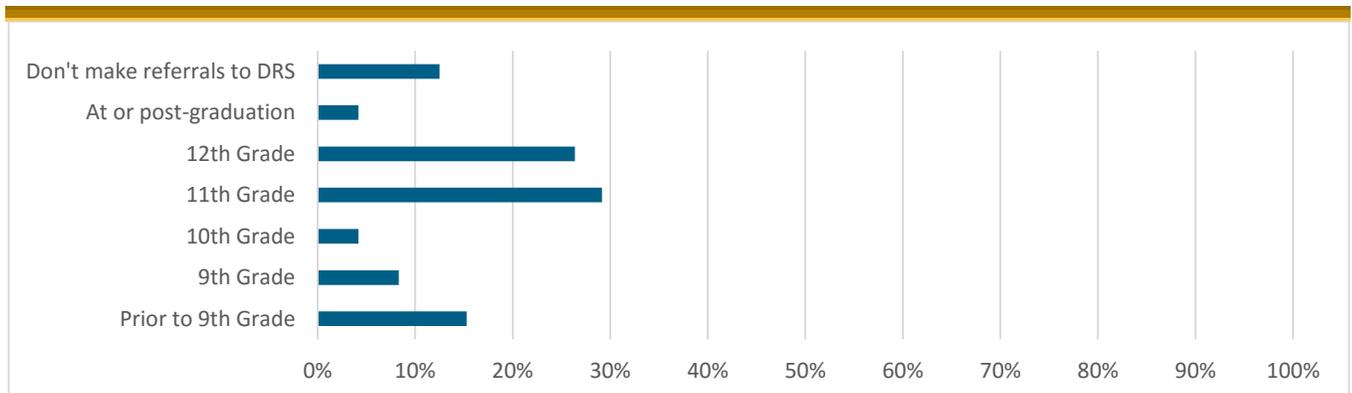


Figure 92. Ideal time to refer students to DRS (N = 72)

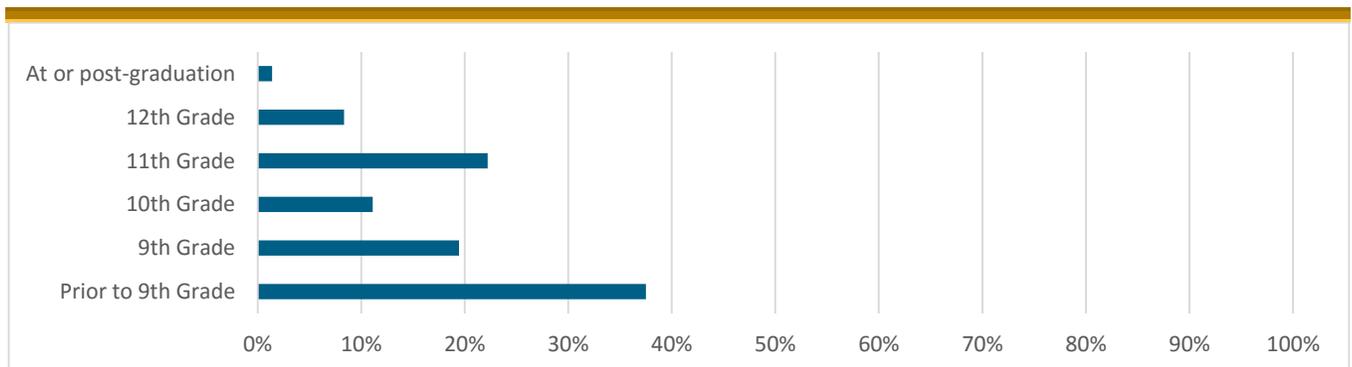


Figure 93. Percent of educators who know their DARS representative (N=73)

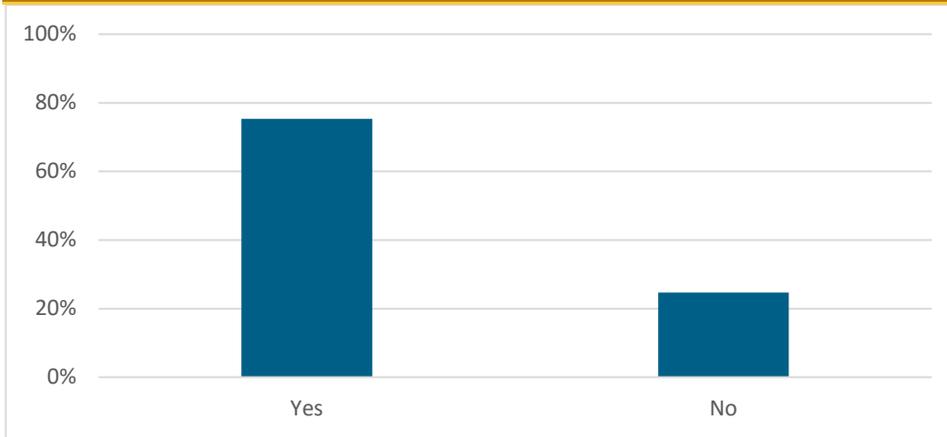


Figure 94. Frequency of visits by DARS representative to school (N=71)

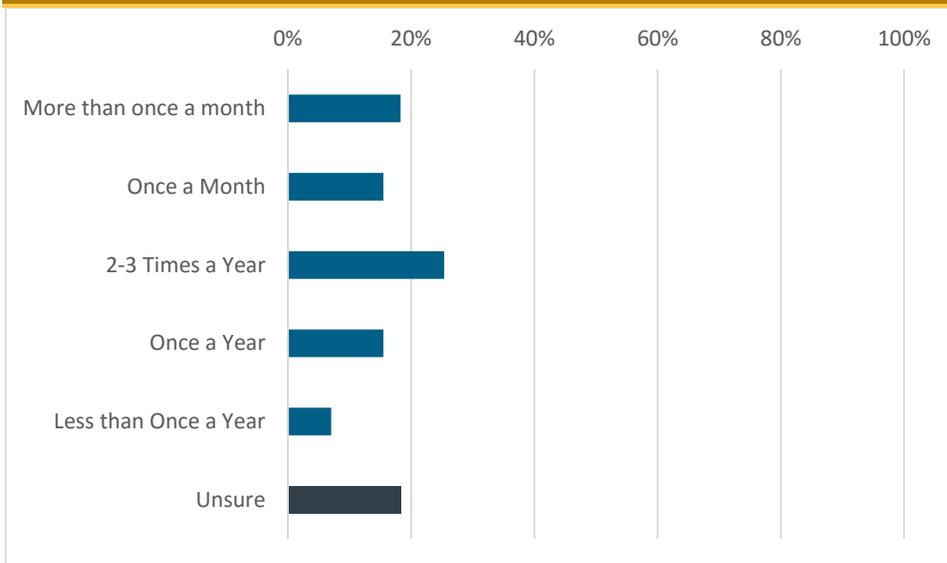


Figure 95. Frequency of DARS staff attending ARD meetings when invited (N=72)

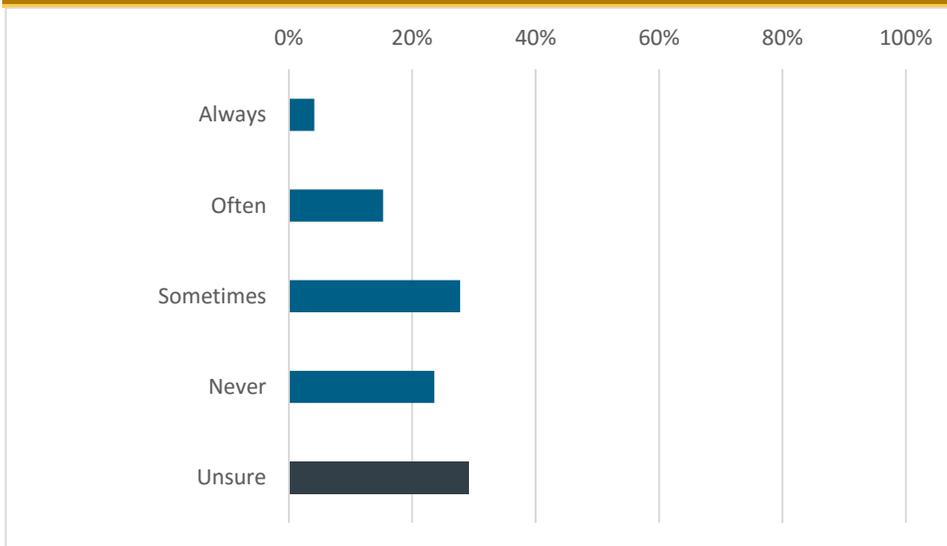
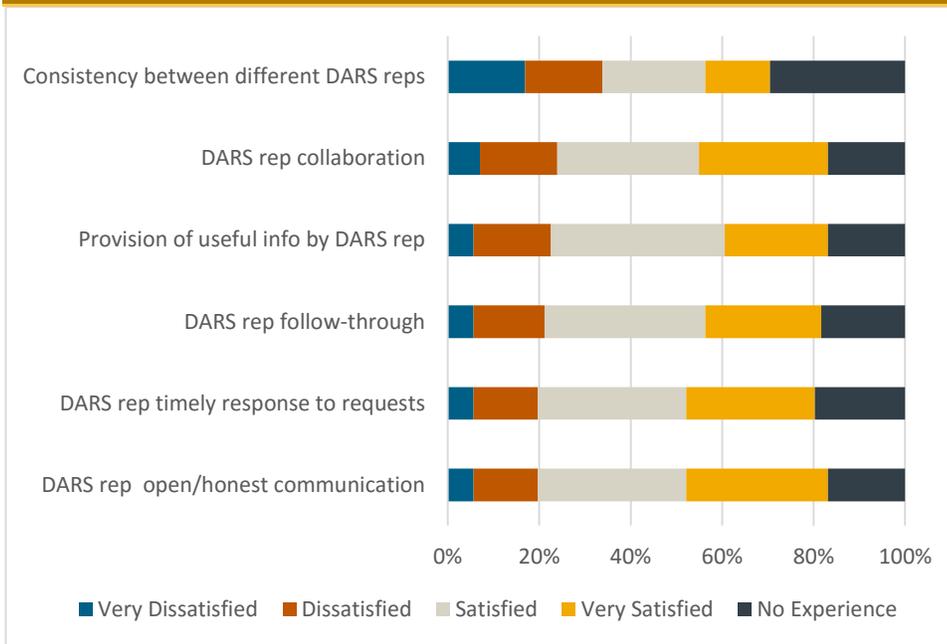


Figure 96. Educators' satisfaction with DARS representative (N = 71)



Parent and Youth Characteristics

Figure 97. Percent of respondents with specific disability types, youth and caregivers

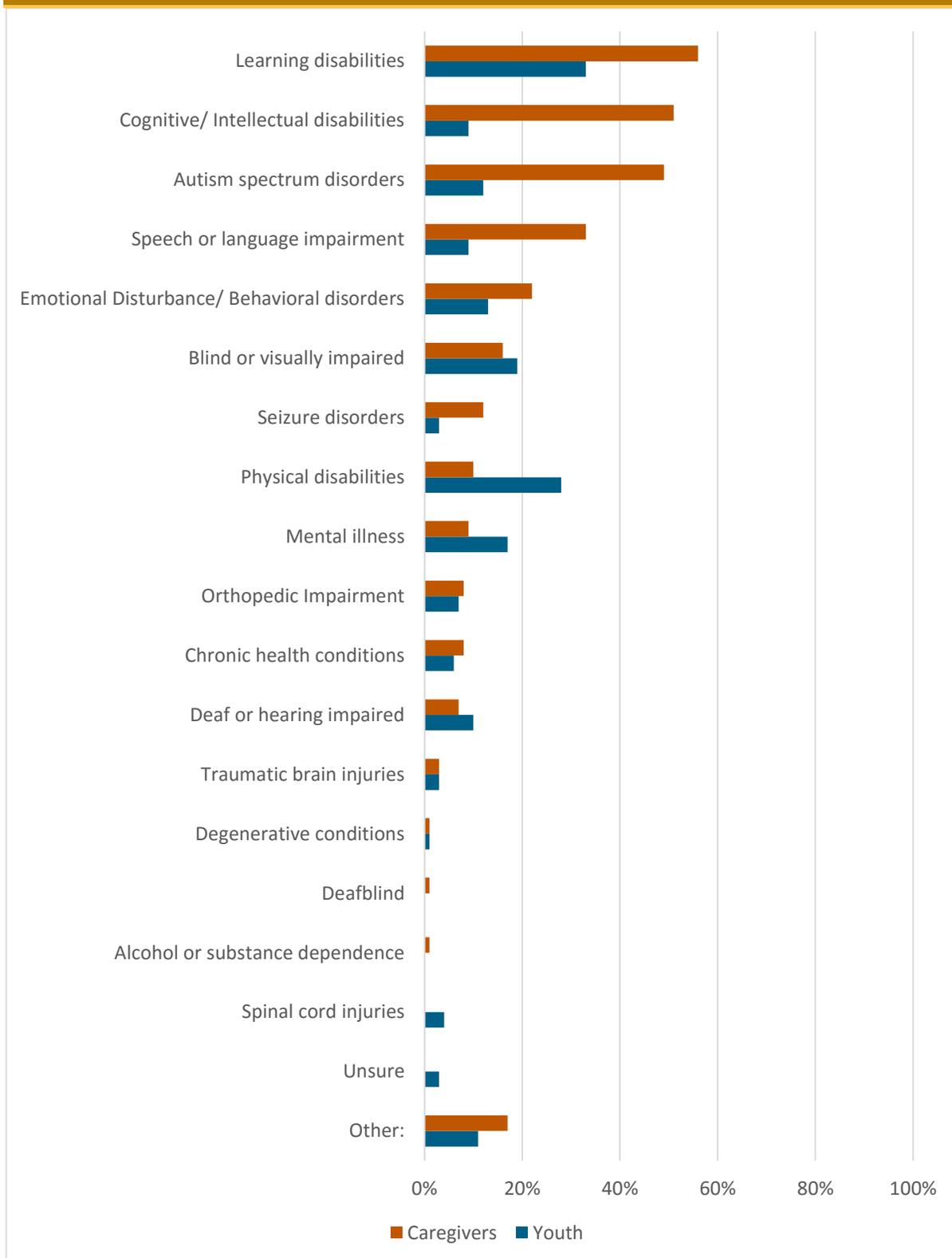


Figure 98. Caregiver relationship to consumer

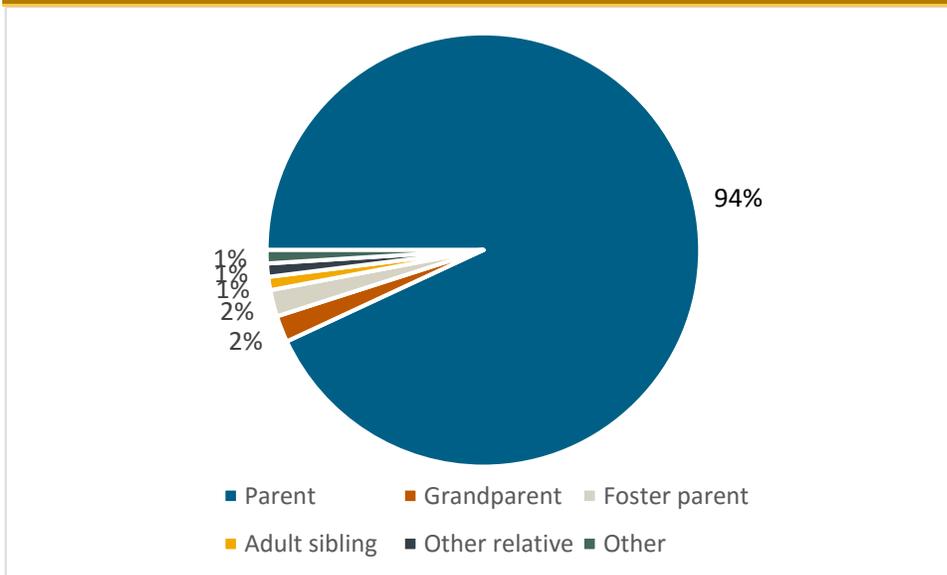
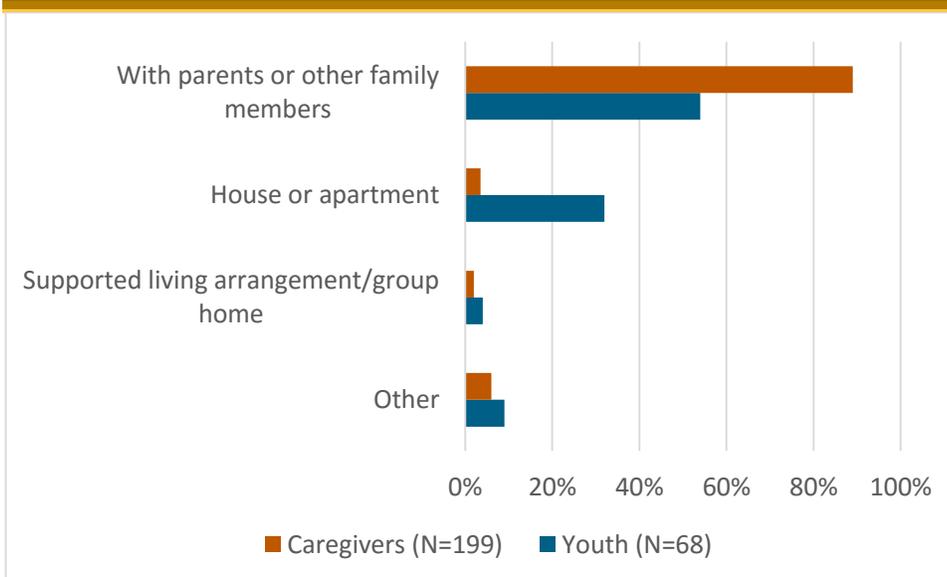


Table 5. Age of consumer being served, youth and caregivers

	Youth (N=66)	Caregivers (N=192)
<i>Average</i>	22.11	20.13
<i>Median</i>	22	20
<i>Range</i>	15-37	9-38

Figure 99. Current living situation, youth and caregivers



Parent and Youth Survey Questions

Figure 100. Frequency of service needs met, caregivers (N = 230)

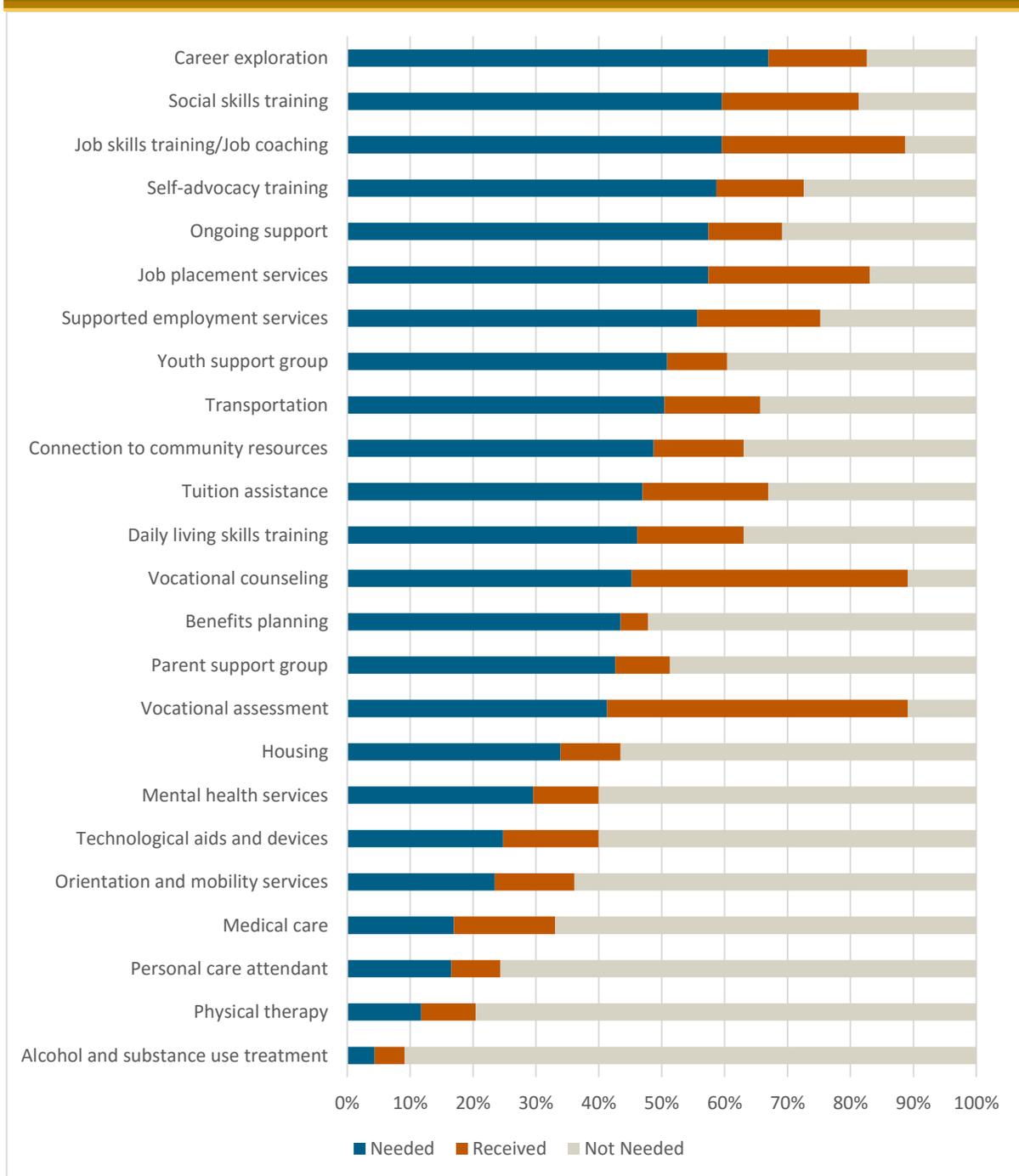


Figure 101. Frequency of service needs met, youth (N=78)

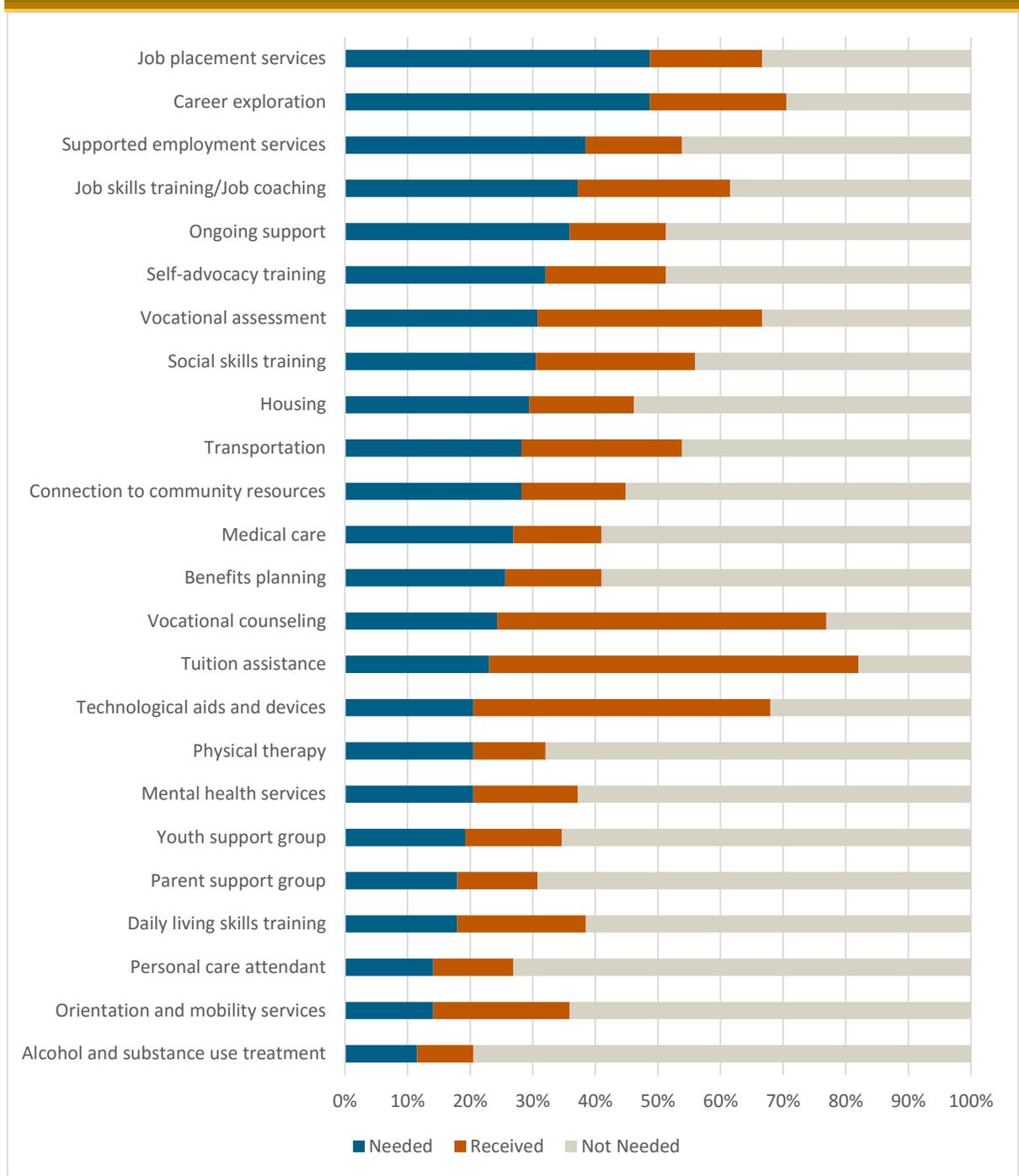


Figure 102. Resources listed as inadequate that have an impact on successful transition to employment, youth and caregivers

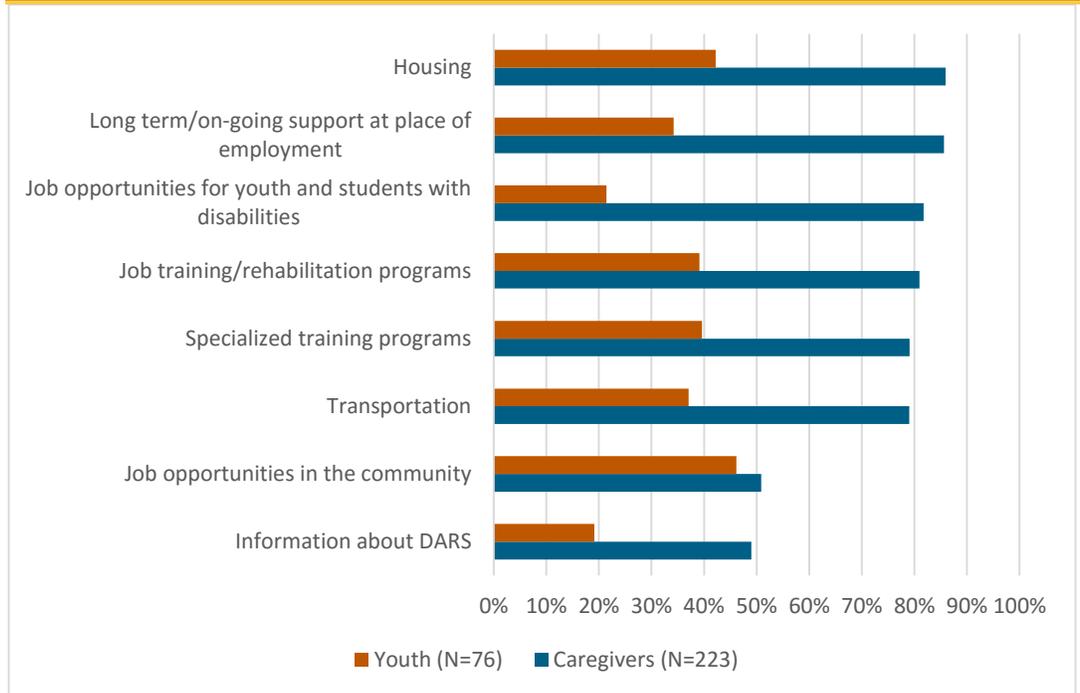


Figure 103. Significant barriers to successful employment, youth and caregivers

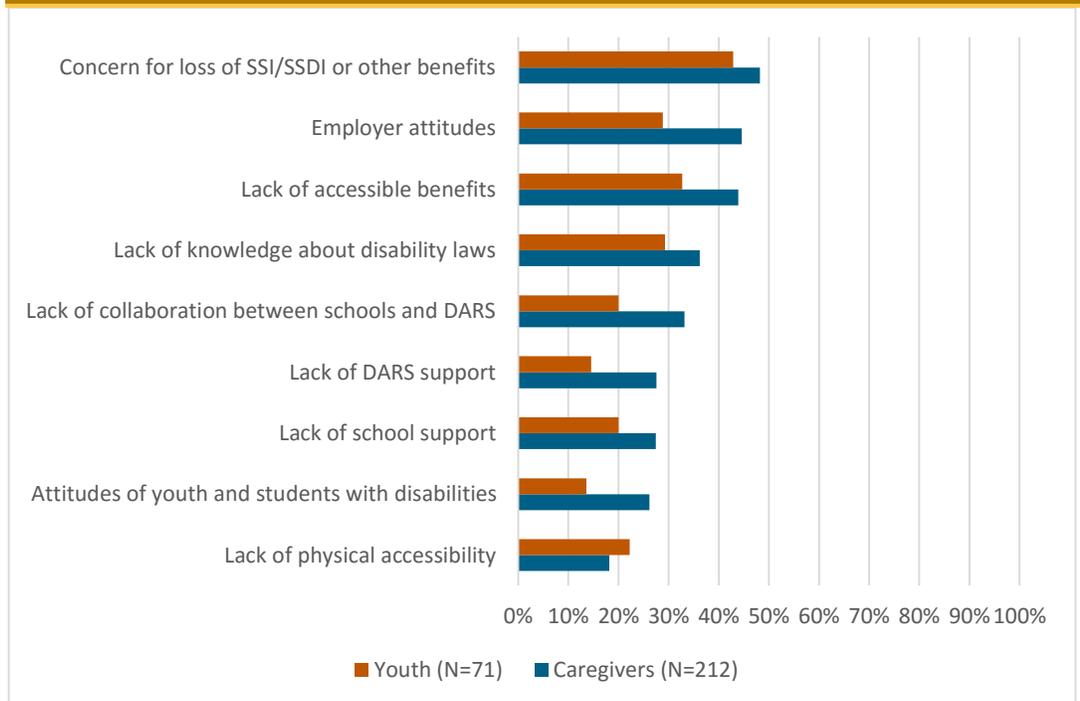


Figure 104. School settings, youth and caregivers

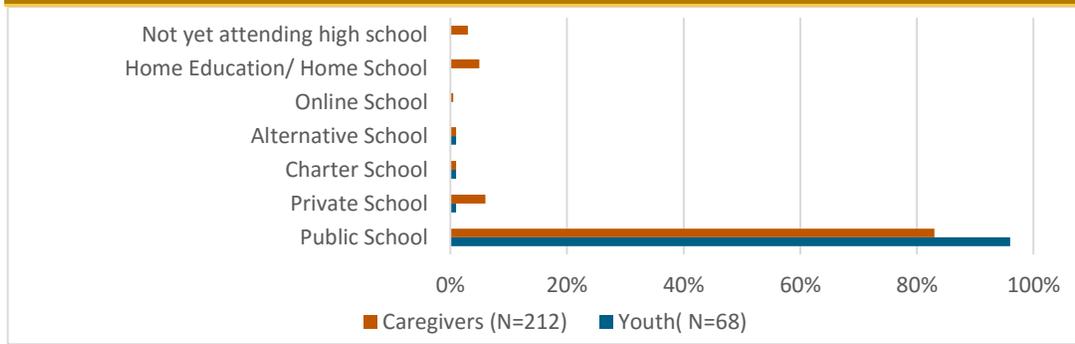


Figure 105. Experience with school systems, caregivers (N = 209)

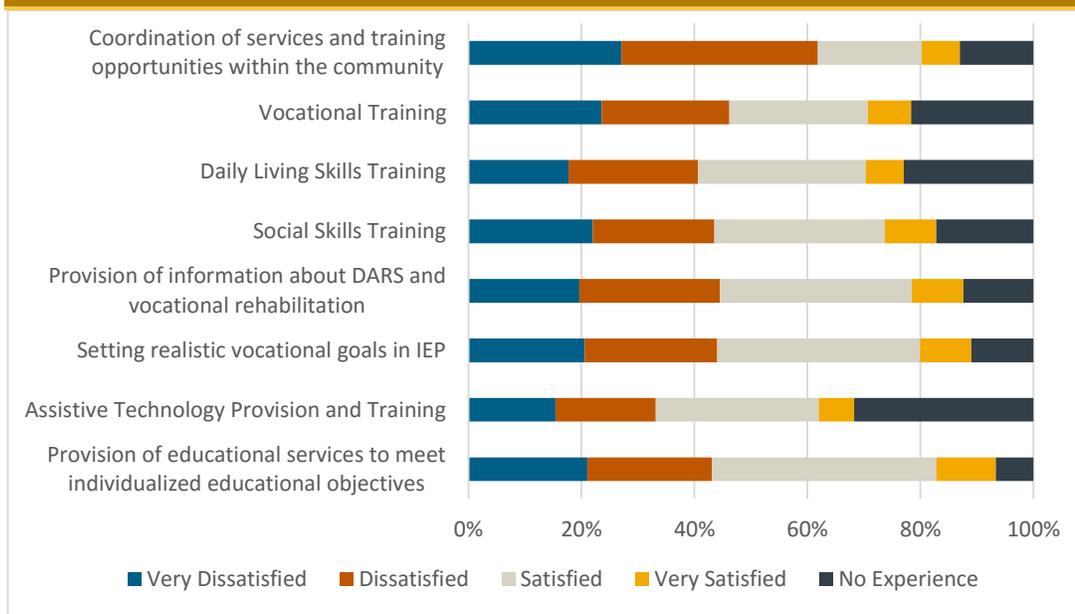


Figure 106. Experience with school systems, youth (N = 70)

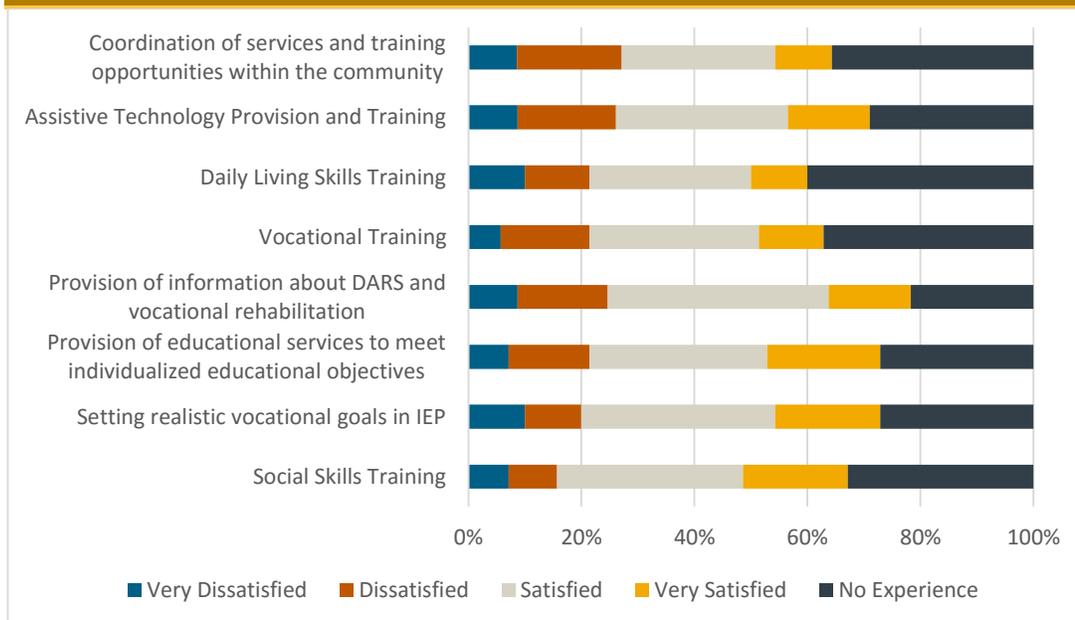


Figure 107. Percent of respondents currently receiving vocational services from DARS, youth and caregivers

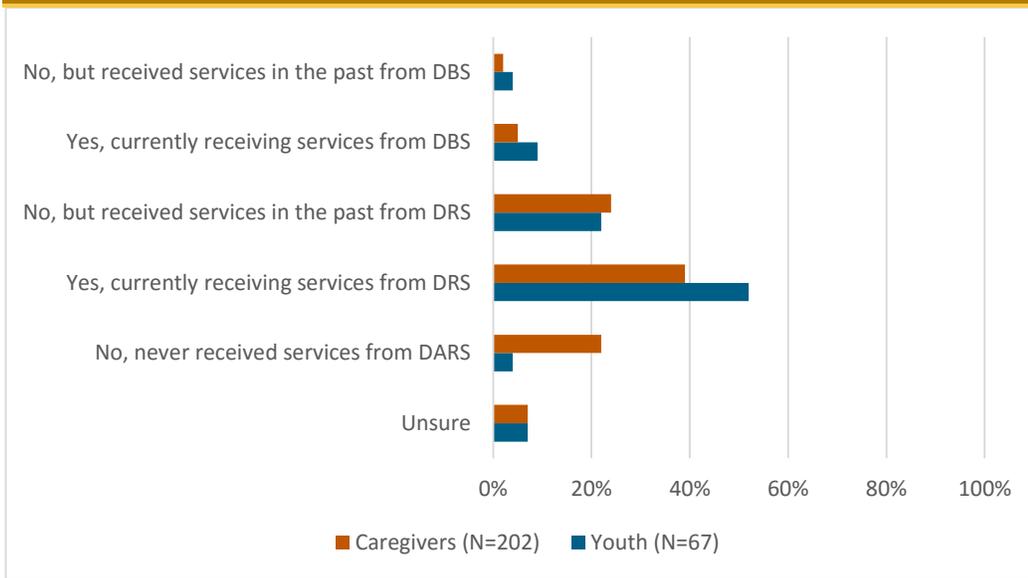


Figure 108. Reasons consumers have not received services from DARS (N = 47; respondents could select more than one option)

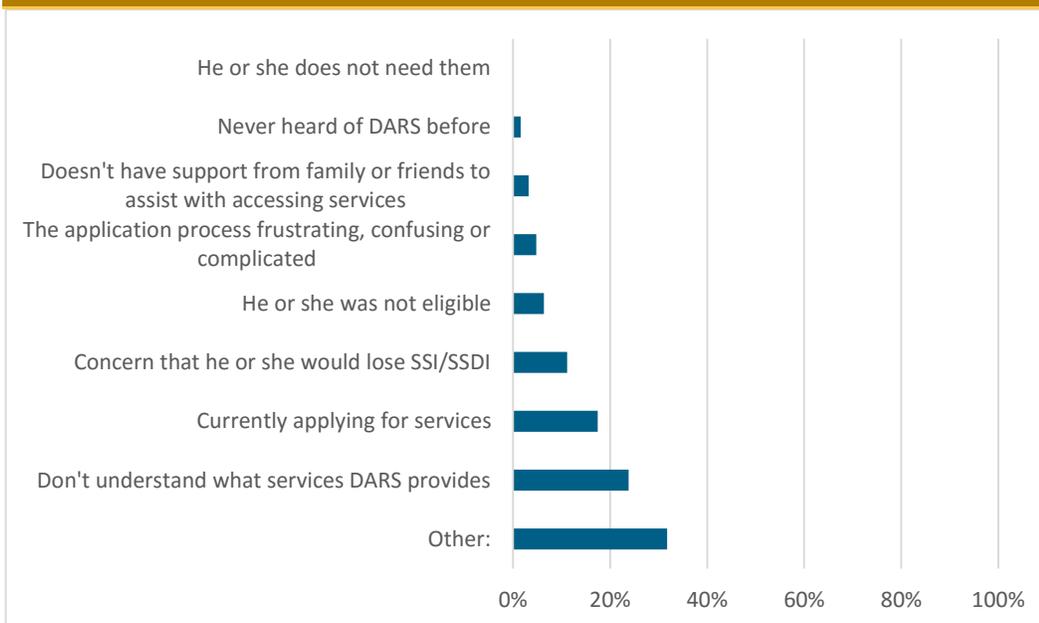


Figure 109. Referral sources, youth and caregivers (Note: respondents could select more than one option)

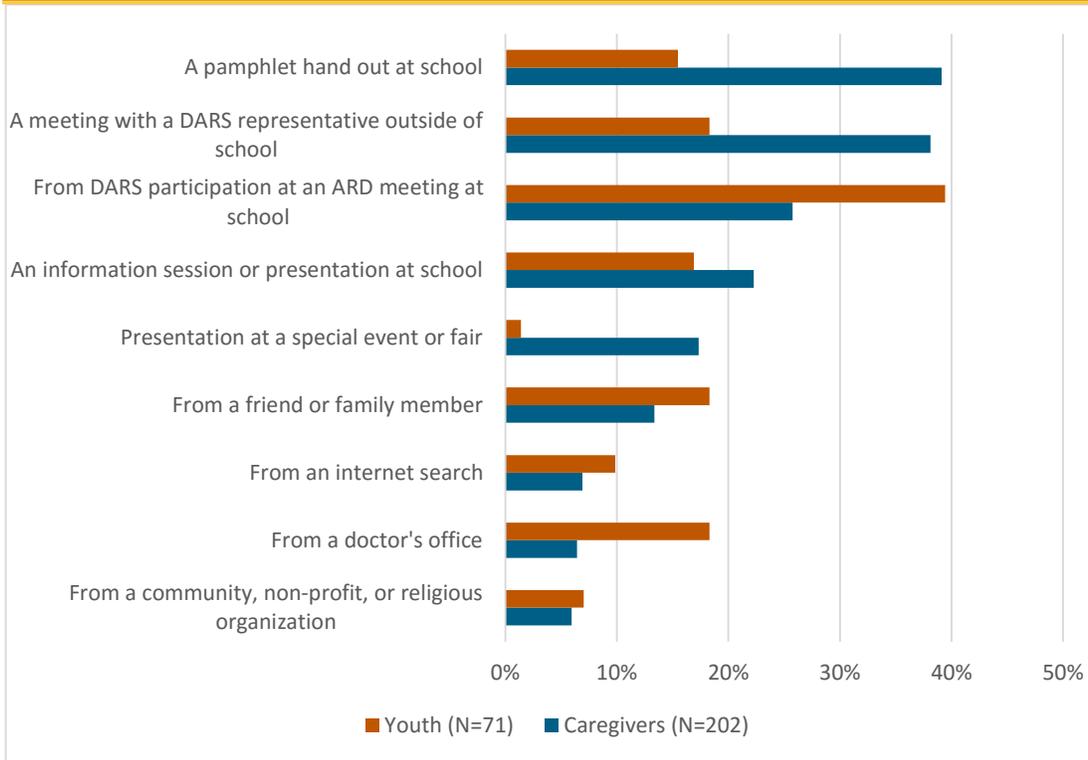


Figure 110. Time first heard about DARS, youth and caregivers

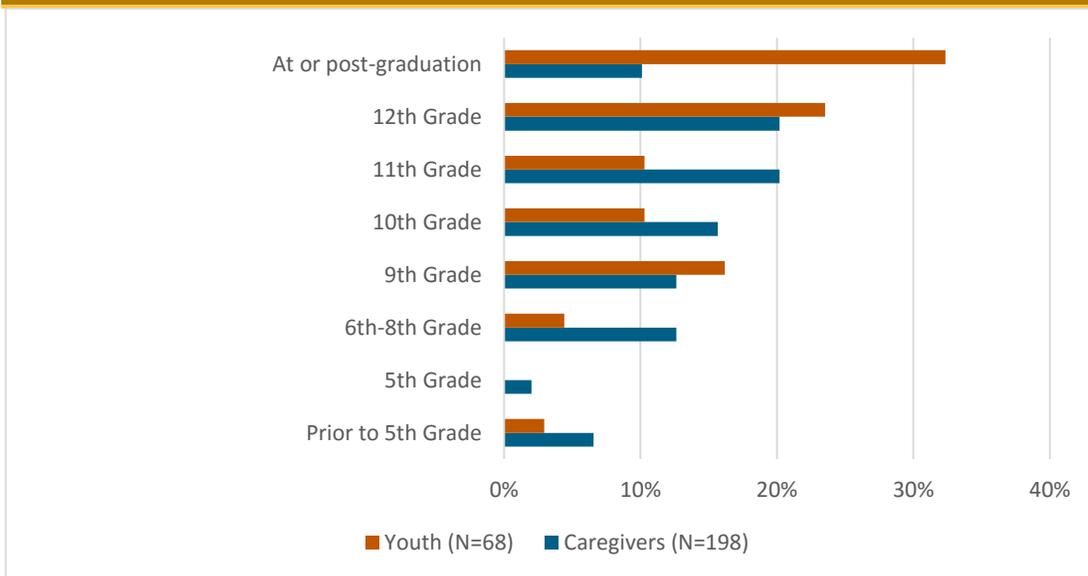


Figure 111. Overall satisfaction with DARS, caregivers (N = 136)

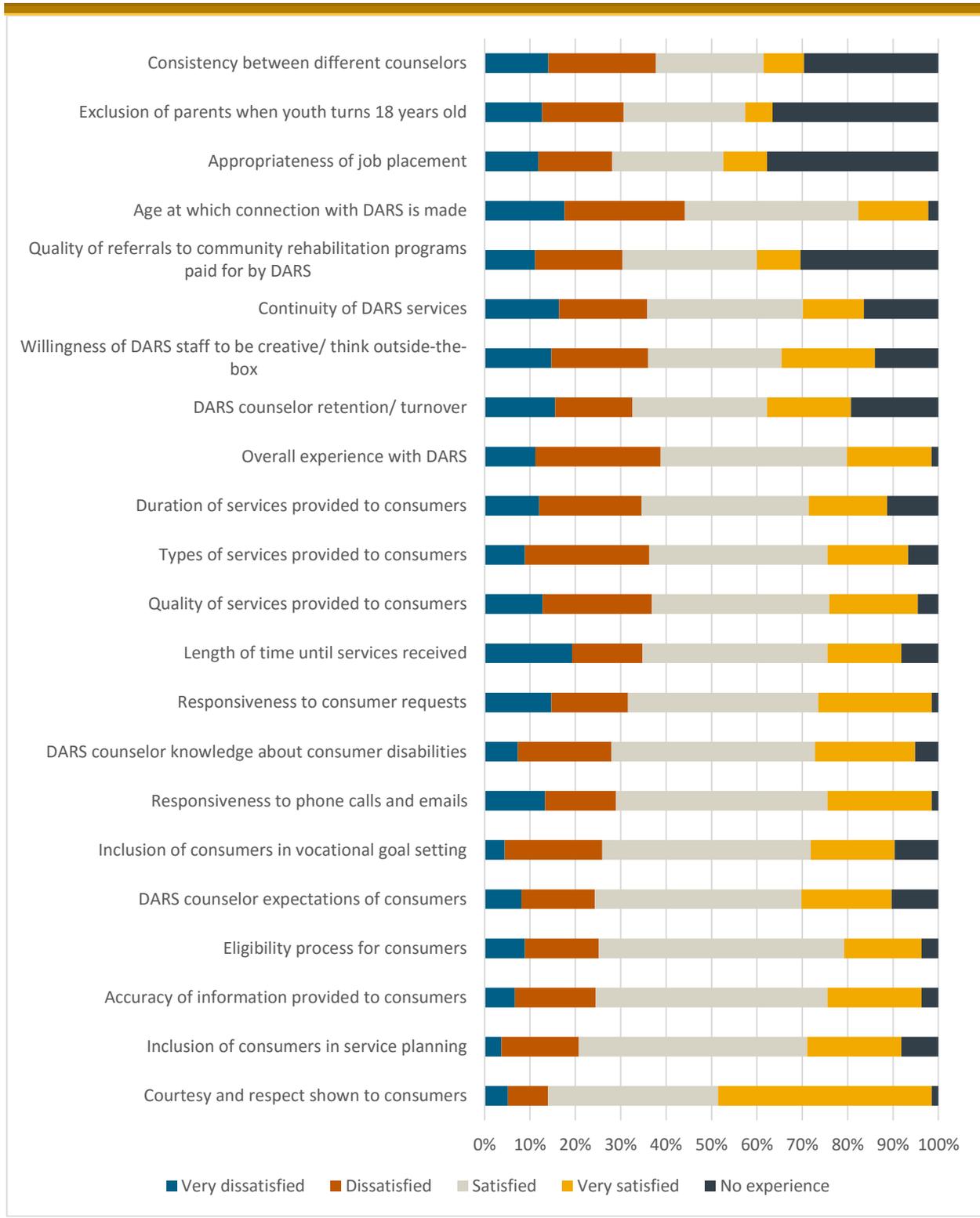


Figure 112. Overall satisfaction with DARS, youth (N = 59)

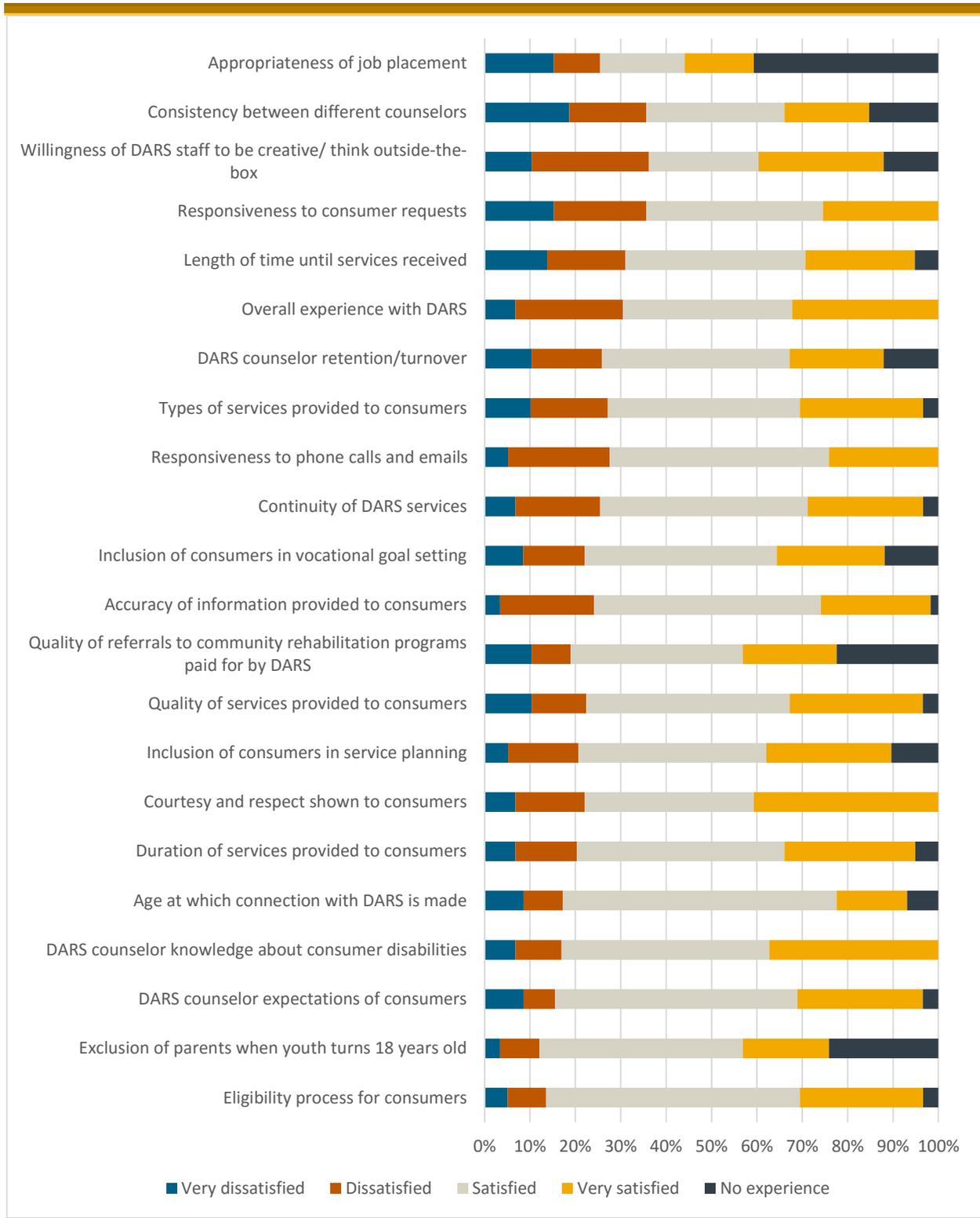


Figure 113. Satisfaction with DARS ability to collaborate, caregivers (N = 129)

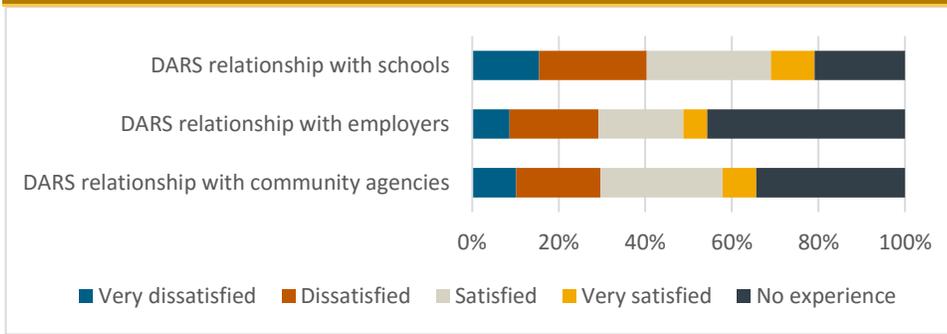


Figure 114. Satisfaction with DARS ability to collaborate, youth (N = 59)

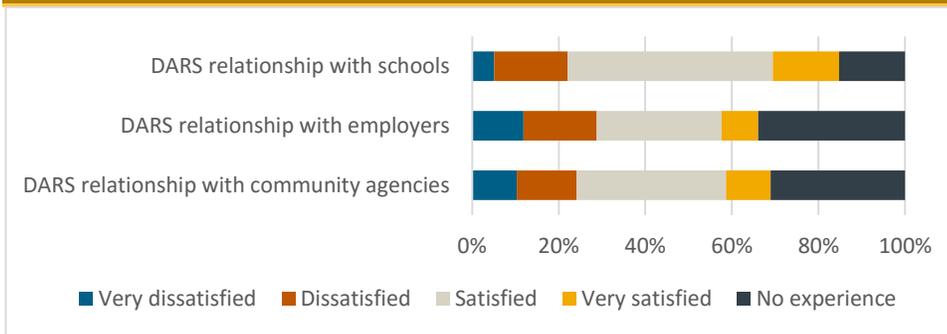


Figure 115. Number of DARS counselors seen while receiving services, youth and caregivers

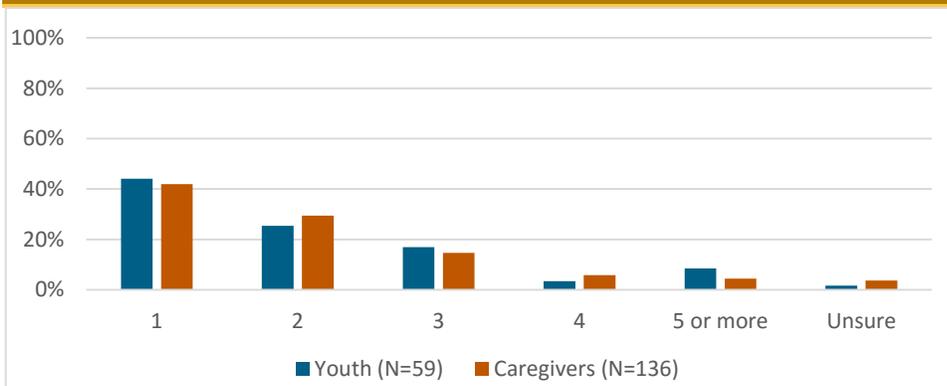


Figure 116. Level of disruption in services due to counselor turnover, youth and caregivers

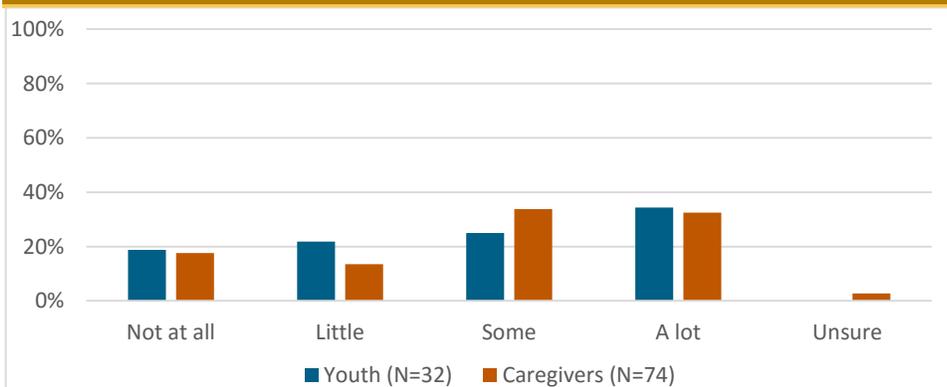
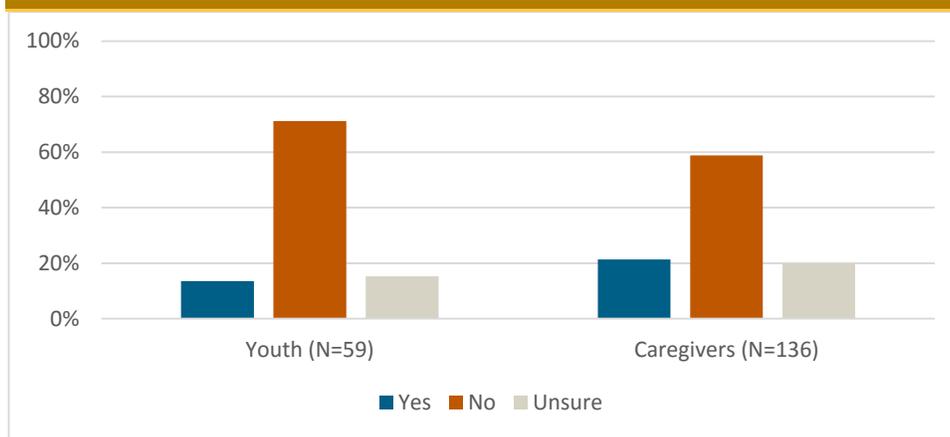


Figure 117. Percent of consumer cases closed, youth and caregivers



Please note that the following three questions have very small Ns and results should be interpreted with extreme caution.

Figure 118. Percent of consumers employed at time of case closure (Note: small Ns)

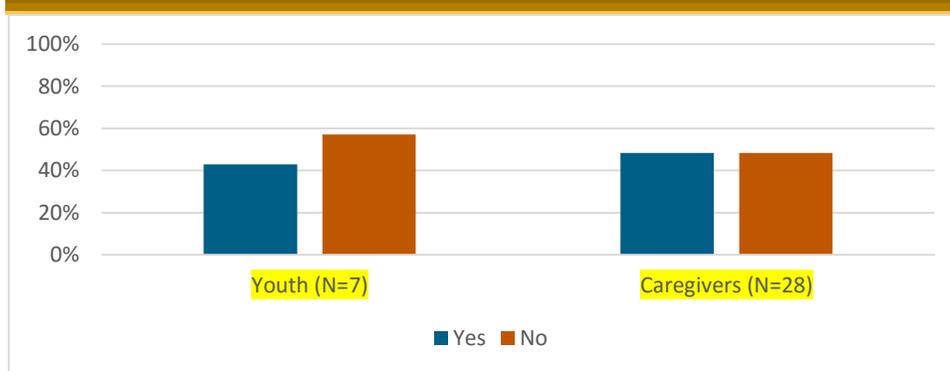


Table 6. Percent of consumers able to keep job after case closure (Note: small Ns)

	%	Response
Yes	69%	9
No	31%	4

Table 7. Reasons for terminated employment after case closure (Note: small Ns)

	%	Response
Supported employment ended	50%	2
Employer not willing to accommodate disability	25%	1
Other:	50%	2

Other responses:

Impatience with consumer

Consumer grew bored, case closed new counselor no help