

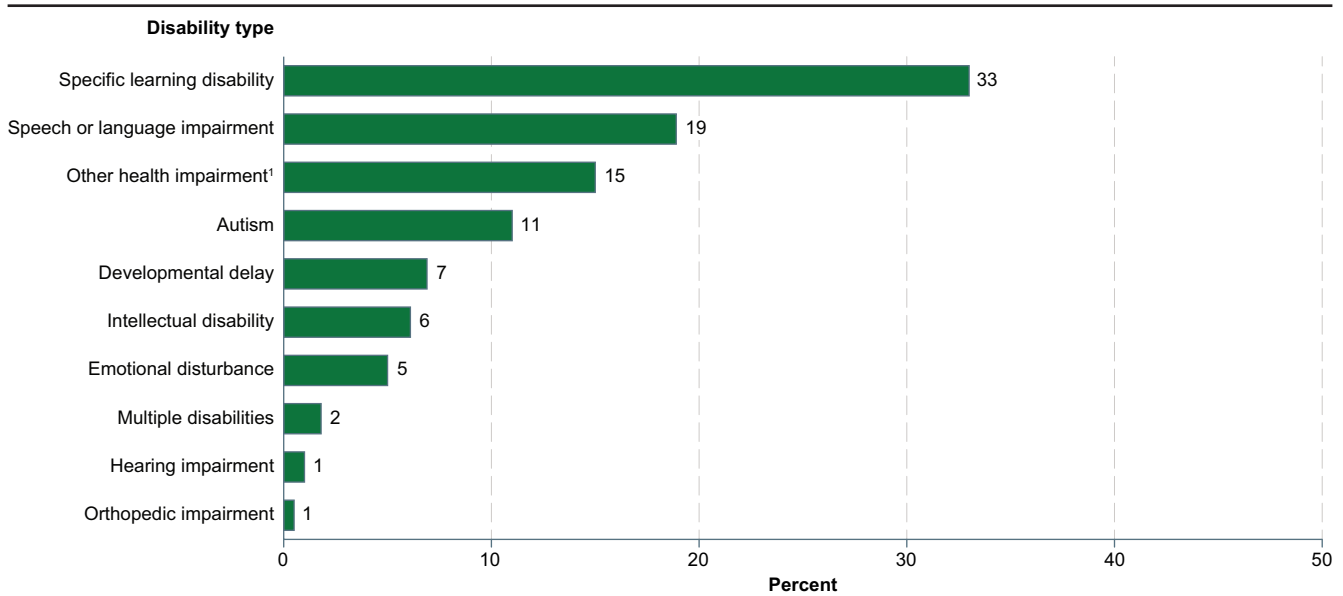
## Students With Disabilities

*In 2019–20, the number of students ages 3–21 who received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was 7.3 million, or 14 percent of all public school students. Among students receiving special education services, the most common category of disability (33 percent) was specific learning disabilities.*

Enacted in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), formerly known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, mandates the provision of a free and appropriate public school education for eligible students ages 3-21. Eligible students are those identified by a team of professionals as having a disability that adversely affects academic performance and as being

in need of special education and related services. Data collection activities to monitor compliance with IDEA began in 1976. From school year 2009-10 through 2019-20, the number of students ages 3-21 who received special education services under IDEA increased from 6.5 million, or 13 percent of total public school enrollment, to 7.3 million, or 14 percent of total public school enrollment.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1. Percentage distribution of students ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by disability type: School year 2019–20**



<sup>1</sup> Other health impairments include having limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems such as a heart condition, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poisoning, leukemia, or diabetes.

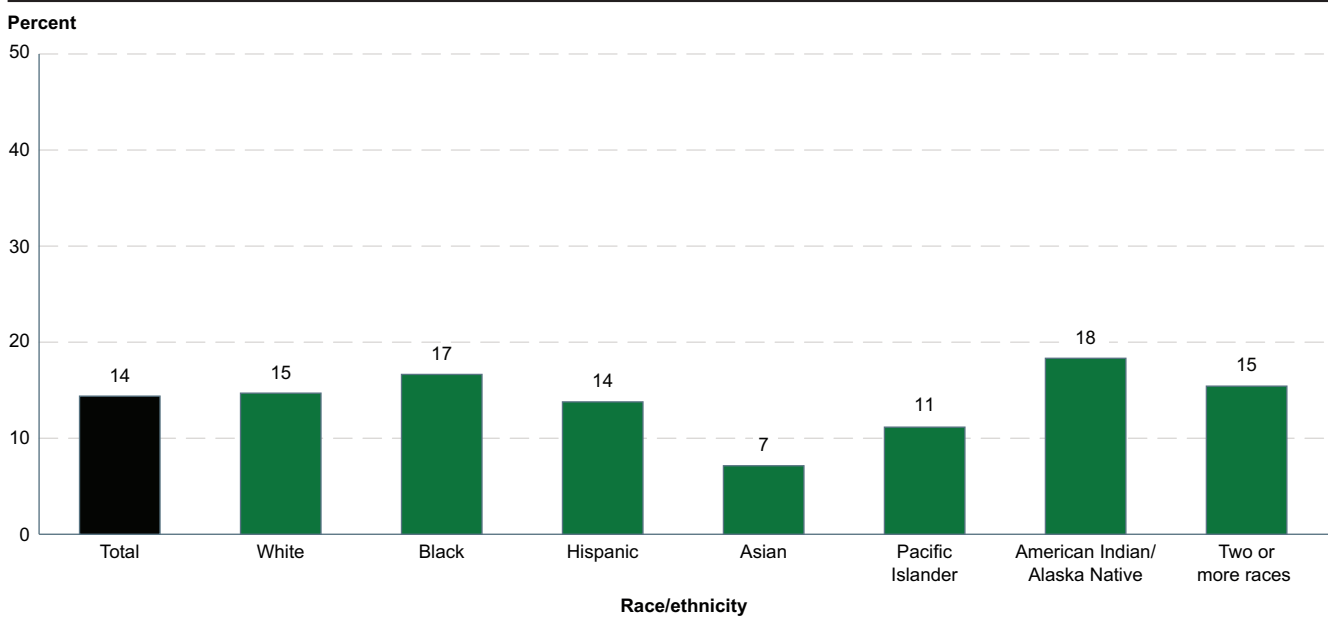
NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia only. Visual impairment, traumatic brain injury, and deaf-blindness are not shown because they each account for less than 0.5 percent of students served under IDEA. Due to categories not shown, detail does not sum to 100 percent. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bcc>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 204.30.

Among students who received special education services under IDEA in school year 2019-20, the category of disabilities with the largest reported percentage of students was “specific learning disabilities.” A specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. Thirty-three percent of all students who received special education services had specific learning disabilities, 19 percent had speech or language impairments,<sup>2</sup> and 15 percent had other health impairments (including having limited

strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems such as a heart condition, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poisoning, leukemia, or diabetes). Students with autism, developmental delays, intellectual disabilities, and emotional disturbances each accounted for between 5 and 11 percent of students served under IDEA. Students with multiple disabilities, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, traumatic brain injuries, and deaf-blindness each accounted for 2 percent or less of those served under IDEA.

**Figure 2. Percentage of students ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by race/ethnicity: School year 2019–20**



NOTE: Based on the projected total public school enrollment in prekindergarten through grade 12 by race/ethnicity. Although data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia, data limitations result in inclusion of a small (but unknown) number of students from other jurisdictions. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved February 4, 2021, from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bcc>; and National Center for Education Statistics, National Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Projection Model, 1972 through 2029. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 204.50.

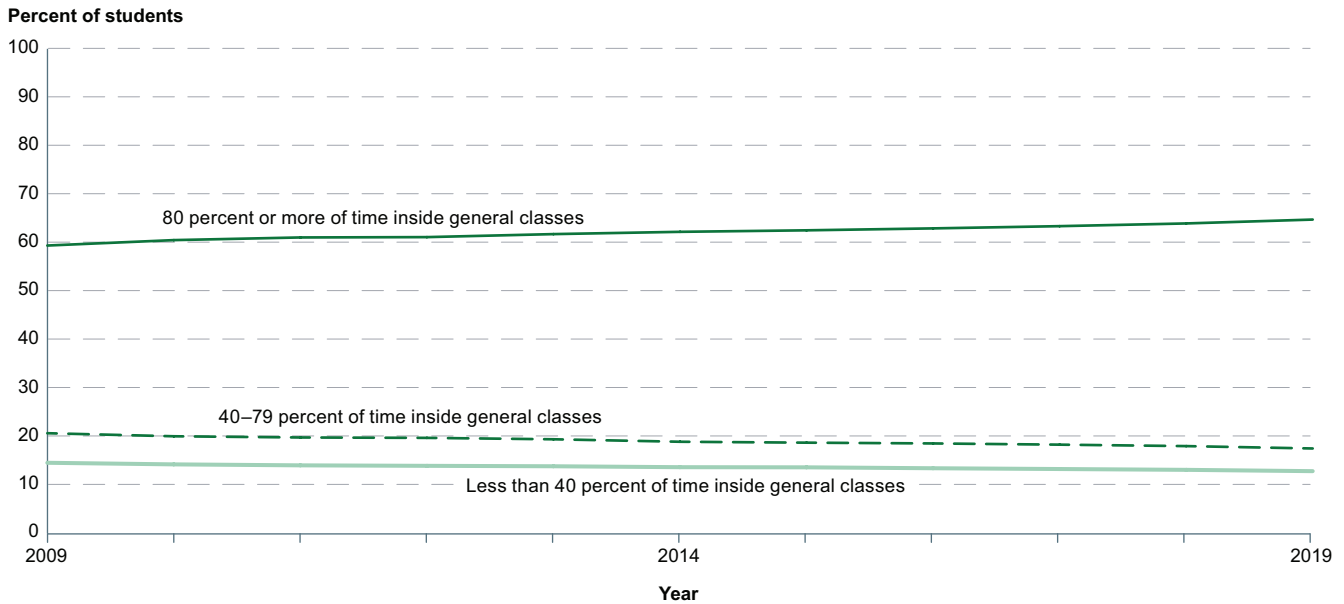
In school year 2019-20, the percentage of students served under IDEA was highest for American Indian/Alaska Native students (18 percent), followed by Black students (17 percent), and students of Two or more races (15 percent), which were all at least one percentage point higher than the percentage of public school students served under IDEA overall (14 percent). The percentage was lowest for Pacific Islander students (11 percent) and Asian students (7 percent).

The percentage distribution of students receiving special education services for various types of disabilities differed by race/ethnicity in school year 2019-20. For most racial/ethnic groups, specific learning disabilities and speech or language impairments were the two most common types of disabilities, accounting for at least 43 percent of students receiving IDEA services. Among Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander students ages 3-21, specific learning disabilities and speech or language impairments together accounted for 50 percent or more of those who received special education services in school year 2019-20. For Asian students, in contrast, although these two disabilities accounted for 43 percent of students receiving IDEA services, the most common disability for Asian students was autism (25 percent). The percentage of students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds receiving IDEA

services due to autism ranged from 7 to 12 percent. After Asian students, the groups for whom specific learning disabilities and speech or language impairments made up the smallest percentage of students receiving IDEA services were Black students and students of Two or more races (49 percent each). Among students served under IDEA, a higher percentage of students from these two groups were reported as having emotional disturbances (7 percent each) and other health impairments (16 percent each) than for students overall (5 percent and 15 percent, respectively).<sup>3</sup>

Separate data on special education services for males and females are available only for students ages 6-21,<sup>4</sup> rather than ages 3-21. Among those 6- to 21-year-old students enrolled in public schools in school year 2019-20, a higher percentage of male students (18 percent) than of female students (10 percent) received special education services under IDEA. In addition, the percentage distribution of 6- to 21-year-old students who received various types of special education services in 2019-20 differed by sex. For example, the percentage of students served under IDEA who received services for specific learning disabilities was higher for female students (44 percent) than for male students (33 percent), while the percentage who received services for autism was higher for male students (14 percent) than for female students (5 percent).

**Figure 3. Among students ages 6–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), percentage who spent various amounts of time inside general classes: Fall 2009 through fall 2019**



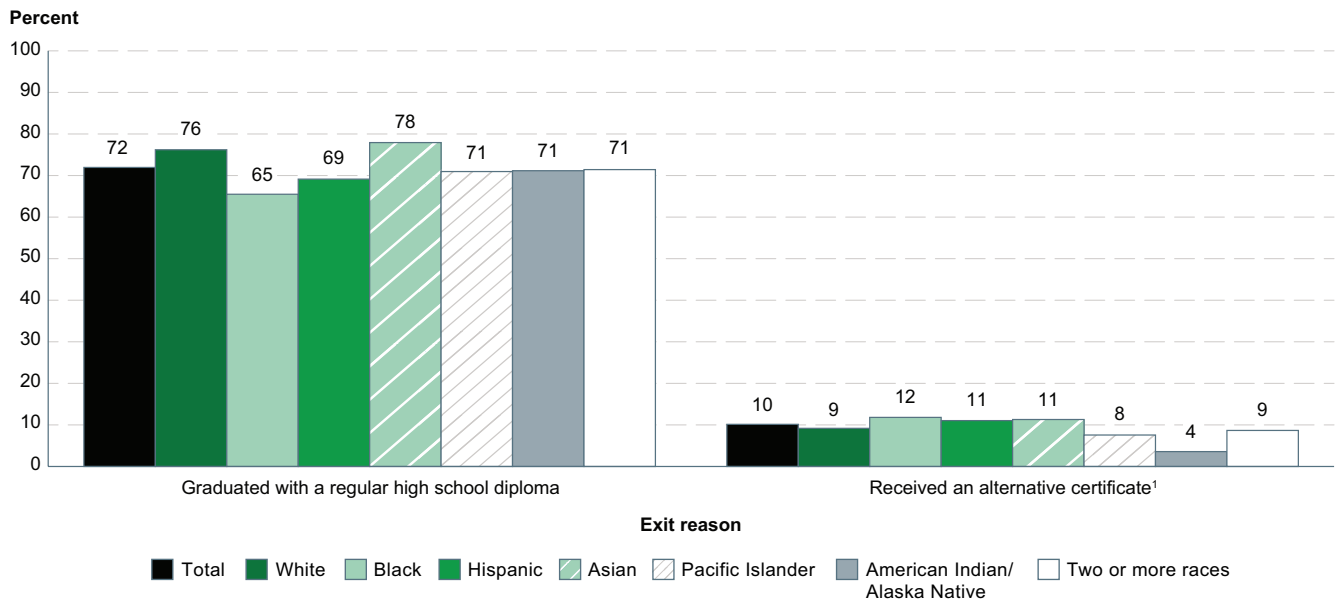
NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia only. Due to changes in reporting requirements in the fall 2019 data collection, the number of 6- to 21-year-olds served may include some 5-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved February 7, 2021, from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bcc>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 204.60.

Educational environment data are also available for students ages 6-21 served under IDEA. Ninety-five percent of students ages 6-21 served under IDEA in fall 2019 were enrolled in regular schools. Three percent of students served under IDEA were enrolled in separate schools (public or private) for students with disabilities; 1 percent were placed by their parents in regular private schools;<sup>5</sup> and less than 1 percent each were homebound or in hospitals, in separate residential facilities (public or private), or in correctional facilities. Among all students ages 6-21 served under IDEA, the percentage who spent most of the school day (i.e., 80 percent or more of their time) in general classes in regular schools increased from 59 percent in fall 2009 to 65 percent in fall 2019. In contrast, during the same period, the percentage of students who spent 40 to 79 percent of the school day in general classes decreased from 21 to 18 percent, and the percentage of students who spent less than 40 percent of their time in general classes decreased from 15 to 13 percent. In fall 2019, the percentage of students served

under IDEA who spent most of the school day in general classes was highest for students with speech or language impairments (88 percent). Approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of students with specific learning disabilities (73 percent), visual impairments (69 percent), other health impairments (68 percent), and developmental delays (67 percent) spent most of the school day in general classes. Less than one-third of students with deaf-blindness (26 percent), intellectual disabilities (18 percent), and multiple disabilities (14 percent) spent most of the school day in general classes.

Data are also available for students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school<sup>6</sup> during school year 2018-19. Approximately 423,000 students ages 14-21 served under IDEA exited school in 2018-19: 72 percent graduated with a regular high school diploma, 16 percent “dropped out,”<sup>7</sup> 10 percent received an alternative certificate,<sup>8</sup> 1 percent reached the maximum age<sup>9</sup> to receive special education services, and less than one-half of 1 percent died.

**Figure 4. Among students ages 14–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) who exited school, percentage who exited for selected reasons, by race/ethnicity: School year 2018–19**



<sup>1</sup> Received a certificate of completion, modified diploma, or some similar document but did not meet the same standards for graduation as those for students without disabilities. Includes two students who exited an educational program through receipt of an alternate diploma.  
NOTE: Data in this figure are for the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Bureau of Indian Education, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, the Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded data.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Section 618 Data Products: State Level Data Files. Retrieved February 2, 2021, from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, table 219.90.

Among students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school in school year 2018-19, the percentages who graduated with a regular high school diploma, received an alternative certificate, and “dropped out” differed by race/ethnicity. The percentage of exiting students who graduated with a regular high school diploma was highest for Asian students (78 percent) and lowest for Black students (65 percent). The percentage of exiting students who received an alternative certificate was highest for Black students (12 percent) and lowest for American Indian/Alaska Native students (4 percent). The percentage of exiting students who “dropped out” was highest for American Indian/Alaska Native students (24 percent) and lowest for Asian students (7 percent).

Among students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school in school year 2018-19, the percentages who graduated with a regular high school diploma, received an alternative certificate, and “dropped out” also differed by type of disability. The percentage of exiting students who graduated with a regular high school diploma was highest for students with speech or language impairments (85 percent) and lowest for students with multiple disabilities (45 percent). The percentage of exiting students who received an alternative certificate was highest for students with intellectual disabilities (32 percent) and lowest for students with speech or language impairments (3 percent). The percentage of exiting students who “dropped out” was highest for students with emotional disturbances (33 percent) and lowest for students with autism (7 percent).

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Totals presented in this indicator include imputations for states for which data were unavailable. See reference tables in the *Digest of Education Statistics* for more information. Data for students ages 3-21 and 6-21 served under IDEA are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia only. Number of children served as a percentage of total enrollment is based on total public school enrollment in prekindergarten through grade 12. Enrollment data for 2019-20 are projected.

<sup>2</sup> Speech or language impairments is defined as a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

<sup>3</sup> In 2019-20, the two most common disabilities for Black students were specific learning disabilities (35 percent) and other health impairments (16 percent). Speech or language impairments accounted for the third highest percentage for Black students, at 14 percent.

<sup>4</sup> Due to changes in reporting requirements in the 2019-20 data collection, the number of 6- to 21-year-olds served includes some 5-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten.

<sup>5</sup> Refers to students who are enrolled by their parents or guardians in regular private schools and have their basic

education paid for through private resources but receive special education services at public expense.

<sup>6</sup> Data for students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school are for the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Bureau of Indian Education, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, the Northern Marianas, Puerto Rico, the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

<sup>7</sup> "Dropped out" is defined as students who were enrolled at some point in the reporting year, were not enrolled at the end of the reporting year, and did not exit for any of the other reasons described.

<sup>8</sup> Refers to students who received a certificate of completion, modified diploma, or some similar document but did not meet the same standards for graduation as those for students without disabilities. In 2018-19, the number of students who received an alternate certificate includes two students who exited an educational program through receipt of an alternate diploma.

<sup>9</sup> Each state determines its maximum age to receive special education services. At the time these data were collected, the maximum age across states generally ranged from 20 to 22 years old.

**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2020*, tables 204.30, 204.50, 204.60, and 219.90

**Related indicators and resources:** [Disability Rates and Employment Status by Educational Attainment](#) [*The Condition of Education 2017 Spotlight*]; [English Language Learners in Public Schools](#); [Students With Disabilities](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]

**Glossary:** Disabilities, children with; Enrollment; High school completer; High school diploma; Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); Private school; Public school or institution; Racial/ethnic group; Regular school