

## Children and Youth With Disabilities

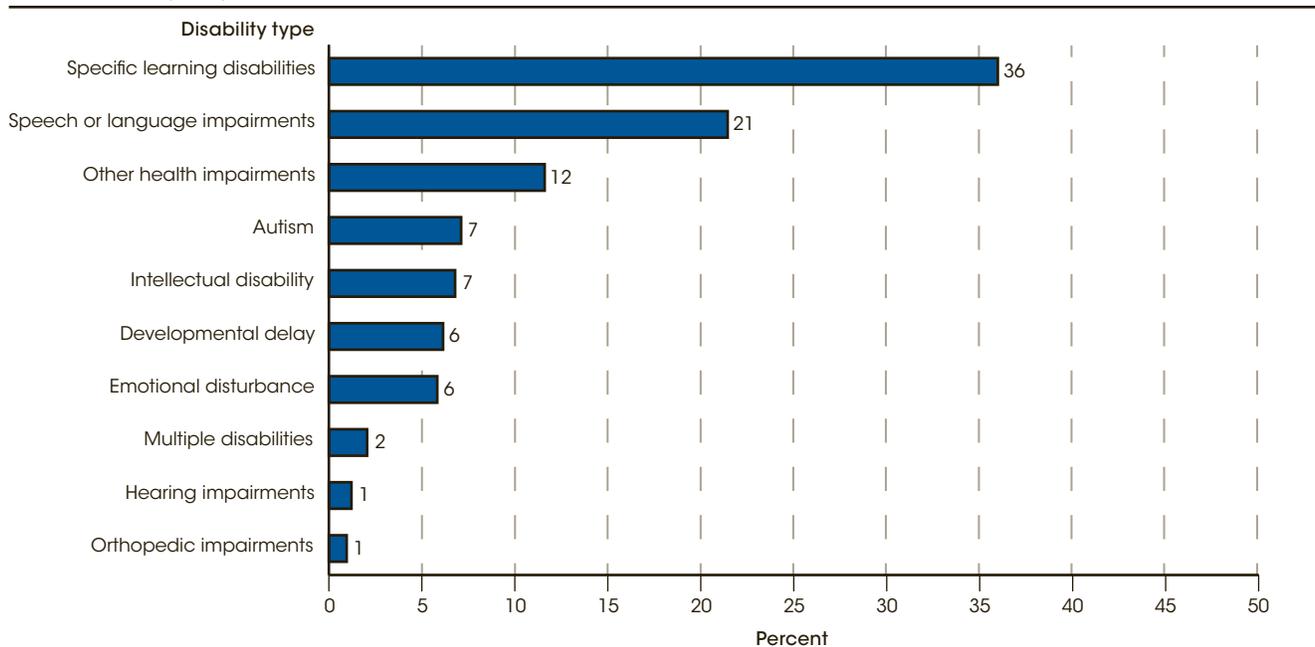
*The number of children and youth ages 3–21 receiving special education services was 6.4 million in 2011–12, or about 13 percent of all public school students. Some 36 percent of the students receiving special education services had specific learning disabilities.*

Enacted in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), formerly known as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA), mandates the provision of a free and appropriate public school education for eligible children and youth ages 3–21. Eligible children and youth 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 years 1990–91 through 2004–05, the number of children and youth ages 3–21 who received

special education services increased, as did their percentage of total public school enrollment: 4.7 million children and youth ages 3–21, or about 11 percent of public school enrollment, received special education services in 1990–91, compared with 6.7 million, or about 14 percent, in 2004–05. The number and percentage of children and youth served under IDEA have declined each year from 2005–06 through 2011–12. By 2011–12, the number of children and youth receiving services had declined to 6.4 million, corresponding to 13 percent of total public school enrollment.

**Figure 1. Percentage distribution of children ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, by disability type: School year 2011–12**



NOTE: Deaf-blindness, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairments are not shown because they each account for less than 1 percent of children served under IDEA. Due to categories not shown, detail does not sum to total.

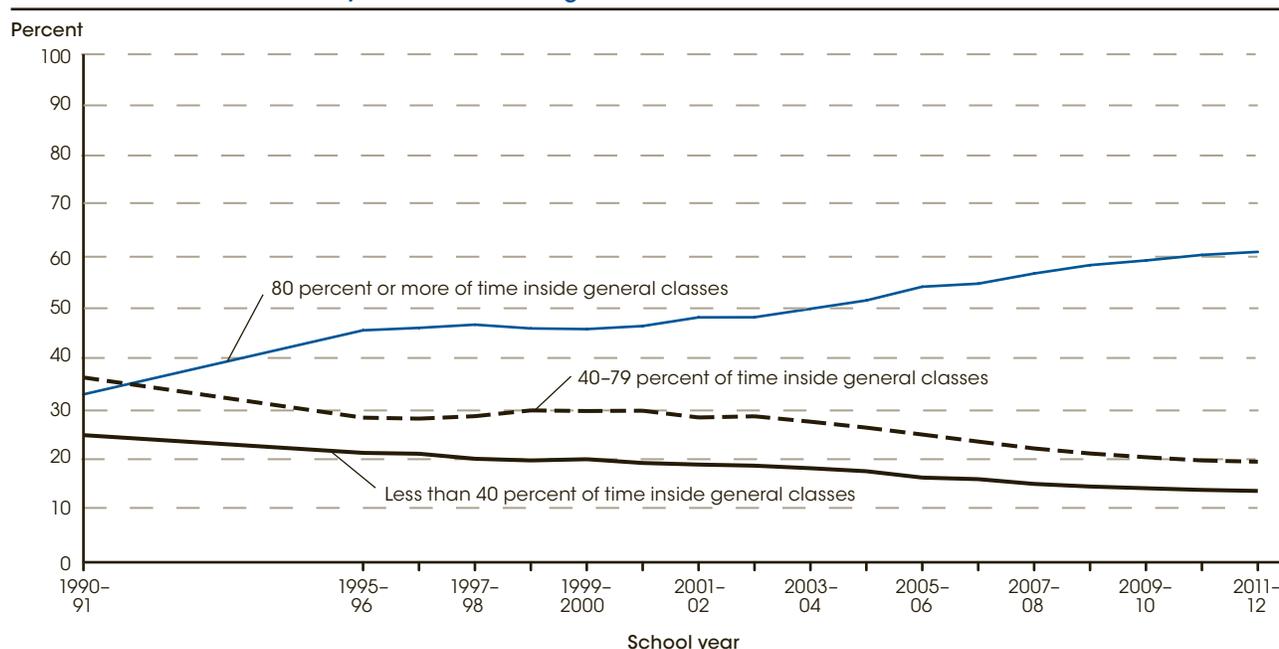
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved March 21, 2013, from <http://tadnet.public.tadnet.org/pages/712>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 204.30.

For more information, see the Reader's Guide and the Guide to Sources.

A higher percentage of children and youth ages 3–21 received special education services under IDEA for specific learning disabilities than for any other type of disability in 2011–12. A specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. In 2011–12, some 36 percent of all children and youth receiving special education services had specific learning disabilities, 21 percent had speech or language impairments, and 12 percent had other health impairments (includes 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, intellectual disabilities, developmental delay, and emotional disturbances each accounted for between 6 and 7 percent of children and youth served under IDEA. Children and youth with multiple disabilities, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, traumatic brain injury, and deaf-blindness each accounted for 2 percent or less of those served under IDEA.

**Figure 2. Percentage of students ages 6–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, placed in a regular public school environment, by amount of time spent inside general classes: Selected school years 1990–91 through 2011–12**



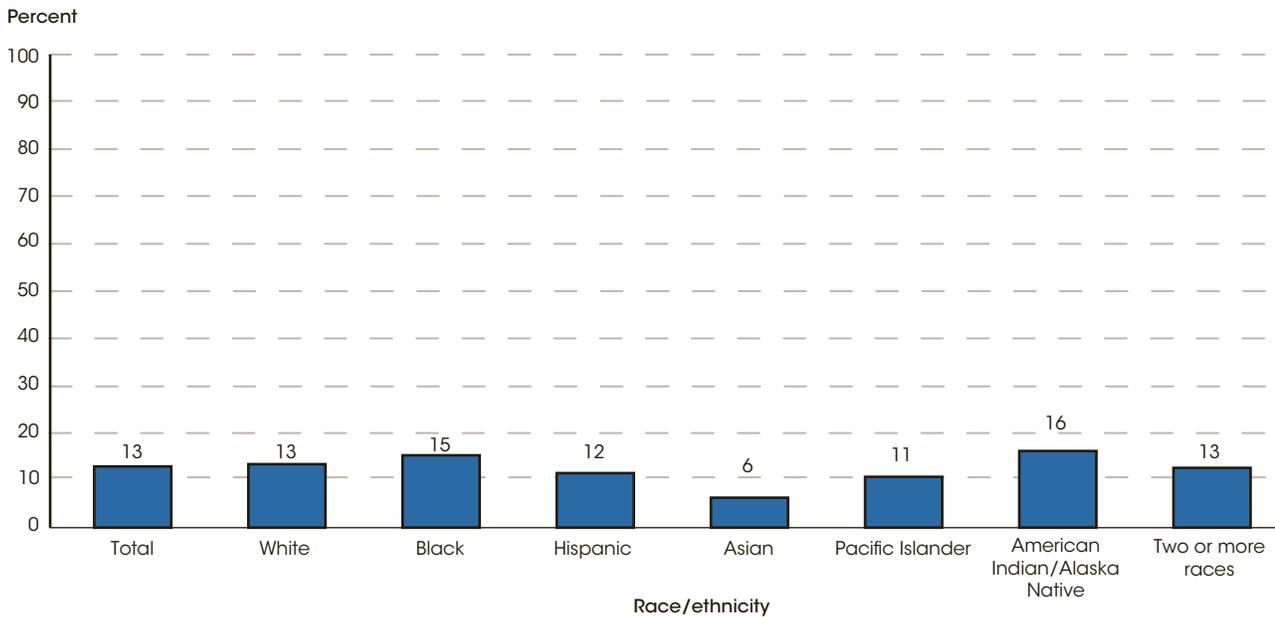
NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), selected years, 1990–2009; and IDEA database, retrieved May 22, 2013, from <http://tadnet.public.tadnet.org/pages/712>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 204.60.

About 95 percent of school-age children and youth ages 6–21 who were served under IDEA in 2011–12 were enrolled in regular schools. Three percent of children and youth ages 6–21 who were 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; and less than 1 percent each were in separate residential facilities (public and private), homebound or in hospitals, or in correctional facilities. Among all children and youth ages 6–21 who were served under IDEA, the percentage of children and youth who spent most (80 percent or more) of their school day in general classes in regular schools was higher in 2011–12 than in any other year. For example,

in 1990–91 some 33 percent of children and youth ages 6–21 spent most of their school day in general class, compared with 47 percent in 2000–01 and 61 percent in 2011–12. In 2011–12, the percentage of students served under IDEA who spent most of their school day in general classes was highest for students with speech or language impairments (87 percent). Sixty-six percent of students with specific learning disabilities and 64 percent of students with visual impairments spent most of their school day in general classes. In contrast, 17 percent of students with intellectual disabilities and 13 percent of students with multiple disabilities spent most of their school day in general classes.

For more information, see the Reader’s Guide and the Guide to Sources.

**Figure 3. Percentage of children 3–21 years old served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, by race/ethnicity: School year 2011–12**



NOTE: Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.  
SOURCE: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved March 21, 2013, from <http://tadnet.public.tadnet.org/pages/712>. U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 2011–12. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, table 204.50.

In school year 2011–12, the number of children and youth ages 3–21 who were served under IDEA as a percent of total enrollment in public schools differed by race/ethnicity. The percentage of children and youth served under IDEA was highest for American Indians/Alaska Natives (16 percent), followed by Blacks (15 percent), Whites (13 percent), children and youth of two or more races (13 percent), Hispanics (12 percent), Pacific Islanders (11 percent), and Asians (6 percent). For each racial/ethnic group, the percentages of children and youth receiving services for specific learning disabilities and for speech or language impairments together accounted for over 50 percent of children and youth served under IDEA.

The percentage distribution of children and youth ages 3–21 who received various types of special education services in 2011–12 varied by race/ethnicity. For example,

the percentage of students with disabilities served under IDEA for specific learning disabilities was lower among Asian children (23 percent) than among children overall (36 percent). However, the percentage of students with disabilities who were served for autism was higher among Asian children (17 percent) than among children overall (7 percent). Additionally, students who received services for emotional disturbances accounted for 8 percent of Black children served under IDEA, compared with 6 percent of children overall. Among children and youth that received services, the percentages of American Indians/Alaska Natives (9 percent), Pacific Islanders (9 percent), and students of two or more races (10 percent) who received services for developmental delay under IDEA were higher than the percentage of children overall (6 percent).

**Reference table:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2013*, tables 204.30, 204.50, 204.60

**Glossary:** Disabilities, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Regular school