

# Children and Youth With Disabilities

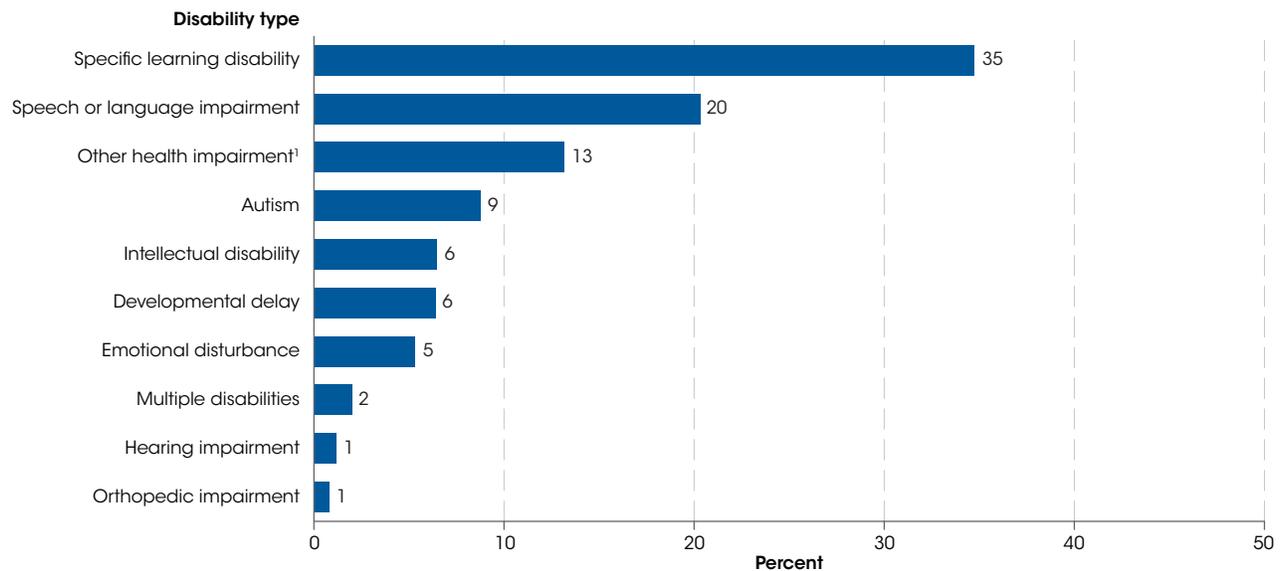
*In 2014–15, the number of children and youth ages 3–21 receiving special education services was 6.6 million, or 13 percent of all public school students. Among children and youth receiving special education services, 35 percent had specific learning disabilities.*

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 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.

special education services increased from 4.7 million, or 11 percent of total public school enrollment, to 6.7 million, or 14 percent of total public school enrollment.<sup>1</sup> Both the number and percentage of children and youth served under IDEA declined from 2004–05 through 2011–12. The number and percentage of children and youth served appeared to level off between 2012–13 and 2014–15. By 2014–15, the number of children and youth served under IDEA was 6.6 million, or 13 percent of total public school enrollment.

From school years 1990–91 through 2004–05, the number of children and youth ages 3–21 who received

**Figure 1. Percentage distribution of children and youth ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, by disability type: School year 2014–15**

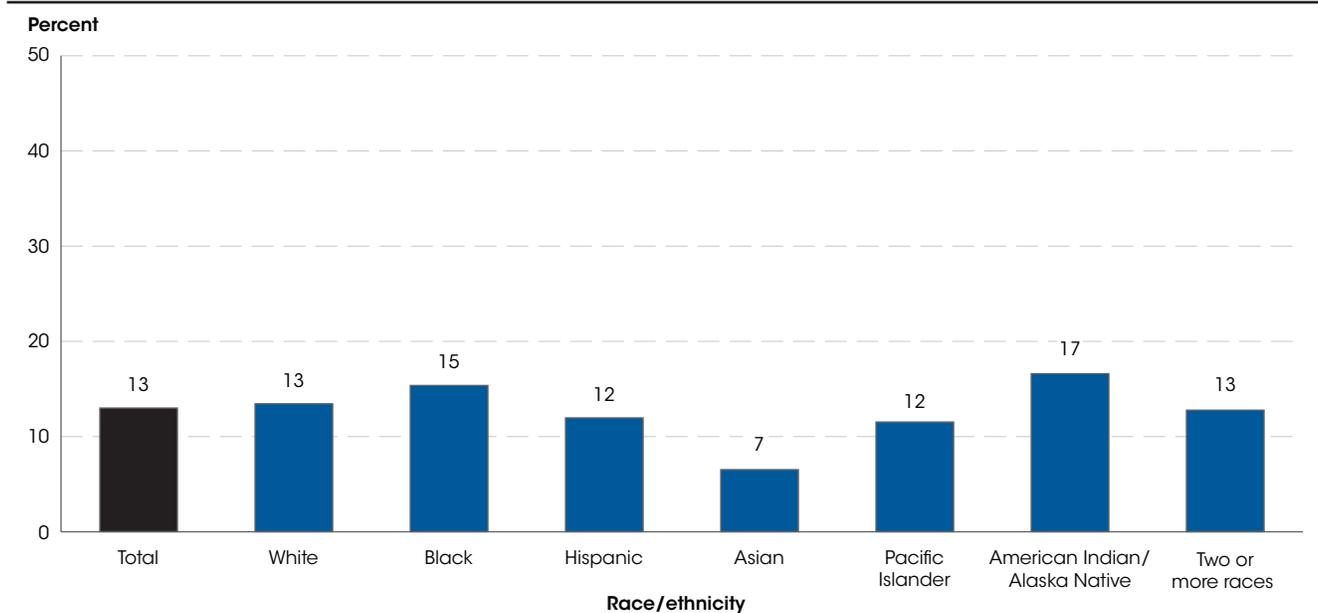


<sup>1</sup> Other health impairments include having limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems such as a heart condition, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poisoning, leukemia, or diabetes.  
 NOTE: Deaf-blindness, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment are not shown because they each account for less than 0.5 percent of children 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 estimates.  
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved July 26, 2016, from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bcc>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.30.

In school year 2014–15, 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. 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 2014–15, some 35 percent of all children and youth receiving special education services had specific learning disabilities, 20 percent had speech or language impairments, and 13 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). Children and youth with autism, intellectual disabilities, developmental delays, and emotional disturbances each accounted for between 5 and 9 percent of children and youth served under IDEA. Children and youth 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 children and youth ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, by race/ethnicity: School year 2014–15**



NOTE: Based on the total enrollment in public schools, prekindergarten through 12th grade. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Although rounded numbers are displayed, the figures are based on unrounded estimates.  
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved July 26, 2016, from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bcc>; and National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 2014–15. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.50.

In school year 2014–15, the percentage (out of total public school enrollment) of children and youth ages 3–21 served under IDEA differed by race/ethnicity. The percentage of children and youth served under IDEA was highest for those who were American Indian/Alaska Native (17 percent), followed by Black (15 percent), White and of Two or more races (both at 13 percent), Hispanic and Pacific Islander (both at 12 percent), and Asian (7 percent). In each racial/ethnic group except for Asian, the percentage of children and youth receiving services for specific learning disabilities combined with the percentage receiving services for speech or language impairments accounted for over 50 percent of children and youth served under IDEA. The percentage distribution of various types of special education services received by

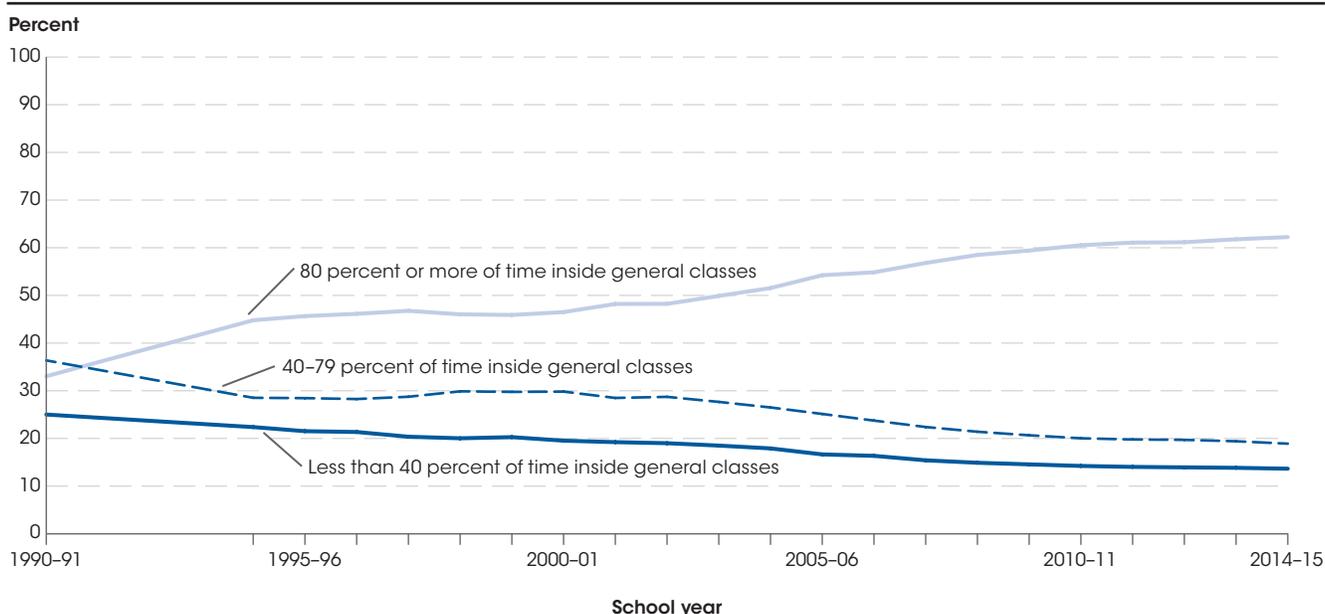
children and youth ages 3–21 in 2014–15 differed by race/ethnicity. For example, the percentage of children and youth with disabilities receiving services under IDEA for specific learning disabilities was lower among Asian children and youth (22 percent), children and youth of Two or more races (30 percent), and White children and youth (31 percent) than among children and youth overall (35 percent). However, the percentage of children and youth with disabilities receiving services under IDEA for autism was higher among Asian children and youth (20 percent), children and youth of Two or more races (10 percent), and White children and youth (10 percent) than among children and youth overall (9 percent). Additionally, of children and youth who were served under IDEA, 7 percent of Black children and youth and

7 percent of children and youth of Two or more races received services for emotional disturbances, compared with 5 percent of children and youth served under IDEA overall. Among children and youth who received services under IDEA, each racial/ethnic group other than Hispanic had a higher percentage of children and youth receiving services for developmental delays than the overall percentage of children and youth receiving services for developmental delays (6 percent).

Separate data on special education services for males and females are available only for students ages 6–21, rather than children and youth ages 3–21. Among those

6- to 21-year-old students enrolled in public schools in 2014–15, a higher percentage of males (16 percent) than females (9 percent) received special education services under IDEA. The percentage distribution of students who received various types of special education services in 2014–15 differed by sex. For example, the percentage of students served under IDEA who received services for specific learning disabilities was higher among female students (44 percent) than among male students (36 percent), while the percentage served under IDEA who received services for autism was higher among male students (11 percent) than among female students (4 percent).

**Figure 3. 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 2014–15**



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved November 10, 2016, from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bcc>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 204.60.

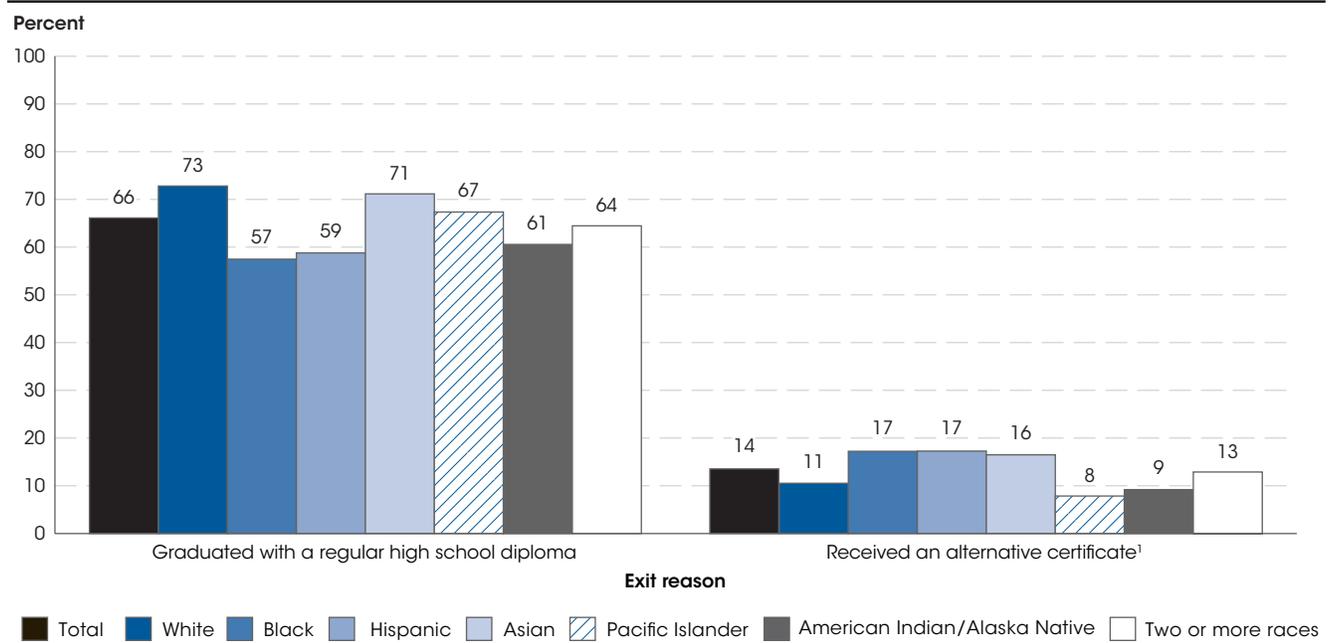
Educational environment data are also available for students ages 6–21 served under IDEA. About 95 percent of students ages 6–21 served under IDEA in fall 2014 were enrolled in regular schools. Some 3 percent of students served under IDEA were enrolled in separate schools (public or private) for students with disabilities; 1 percent were placed by their parents in regular private schools; and less than 1 percent each were in separate residential facilities (public or private), homebound or in hospitals, and 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 33 percent in fall 1990 to 62 percent in fall 2014. In contrast, during the same period, the percentage of those who spent 40 to 79 percent of

the school day in general classes declined from 36 to 19 percent, and the percentage of those who spent less than 40 percent of their time inside general classes also declined, from 25 to 14 percent. In fall 2014, 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 (87 percent). Approximately two-thirds of students with specific learning disabilities (69 percent), visual impairments (66 percent), other health impairments (65 percent), and developmental delays (64 percent) spent most of the school day in general classes. In contrast, 16 percent of students with intellectual disabilities and 13 percent of students with multiple disabilities spent most of the school day in general classes.

Data are also available for students ages 14–21 served under IDEA who exited school during school year 2013–14, including exit reason.<sup>2</sup> In 2013–14, approximately 392,000 students ages 14–21 who received special education services under IDEA exited school:

About two-thirds (66 percent) graduated with a regular high school diploma, 18 percent dropped out, 14 percent received an alternative certificate,<sup>3</sup> 2 percent reached maximum age, and less than one-half of 1 percent died.

**Figure 4. Percentage of students ages 14–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B, who exited school, by selected exit reason and race/ethnicity: School year 2013–14**



<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 receiving a regular 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. Data for all other figures in this indicator are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia only. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity.  
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 October 20, 2016, from <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, table 219.90.

Of the students ages 14–21 served under IDEA who exited school in 2013–14, the percentage who graduated with a regular high school diploma, received an alternative certificate, or dropped out differed by race/ethnicity. The percentage of exiting students who graduated with a regular high school diploma was highest among White students (73 percent) and lowest among Black students (57 percent). The percentage of exiting students who received an alternative certificate was highest among Hispanic students and Black students (both at 17 percent) and lowest among Pacific Islander students (8 percent). The percentage of exiting students who dropped out in 2013–14 was highest among American Indian/Alaska Native students (29 percent) and lowest among Asian students (8 percent).

Of the students ages 14–21 served under IDEA who exited school in 2013–14, the percentages who graduated

with a regular high school diploma, received an alternative certificate, or dropped out also differed by type of disability. The percentage of exiting students who graduated with a regular high school diploma was highest among students with visual impairments and speech or language impairments (both at 78 percent) and lowest among those with intellectual disabilities (41 percent). The percentage of exiting students who received an alternative certificate was highest among students with intellectual disabilities (35 percent) and lowest among students with speech or language impairments (8 percent). The percentage of exiting students who dropped out in 2013–14 was highest among students with emotional disturbances (35 percent) and lowest among students with visual impairments (6 percent).

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**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Data for students ages 3–21 and 6–21 served under IDEA are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia only.

<sup>2</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>3</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.

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**Reference tables:** *Digest of Education Statistics 2016*, 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*]

**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