

**TO ASSURE THE FREE
APPROPRIATE PUBLIC EDUCATION OF
ALL CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES**

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Section 618

Twenty-third Annual Report to Congress
on the
Implementation of the
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

U.S. Department of Education

2001

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This report was produced under U.S. Department of Education Contract No. HS97020001 with Westat. Judith Holt served as the contracting officer's technical representative.

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2001

(Published March 2002)

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Contents

	<u>Page</u>
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	xix
I. RESULTS	
High School Graduation Among Students with Disabilities	I-1
Graduation and Dropout Rates for Students with Disabilities	I-1
Graduation and Dropout Rates by Disability	I-2
Graduation and Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity	I-3
Summary	I-5
Participation and Performance of Students with Disabilities in State	
Assessment Systems	I-7
Participation	I-7
Performance	I-9
Change in Participation Rates and Performance Levels of Students with Disabilities	I-12
Alternate Assessment	I-15
Difficulties in Reporting Data for Students with Disabilities	I-16
Summary	I-17
Challenges To Providing Secondary Education and Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities	I-19
Challenges Affecting Secondary Education and Transition Services....	I-20
Outcomes for Students with Problem Behaviors in School: Issues, Predictors, and Practices	I-33
Students with Problem Behavior: Outcomes	I-33
Students with Problem Behavior: Predictable Failure	I-35
Practices Affecting Student Outcomes	I-37
Summary	I-42
Results Experienced by Children and Families Entering Early	
Intervention	I-49
Short-Term Outcomes for Children	I-50
Long-Term Outcomes for Children	I-54
Family Outcomes	I-54
Conclusion	I-57

Contents (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
 II. STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS	
Characteristics of Children and Families Entering Early Intervention.....	II-1
Child Characteristics.....	II-2
Family Characteristics	II-10
Conclusion	II-12
 Preschoolers Served Under IDEA.....	 II-17
The Number of Preschool Children Served Under Part B of IDEA	II-17
Race/Ethnicity of Preschoolers Served Under IDEA.....	II-19
Summary	II-20
 Students Ages 6 Through 21 Served Under IDEA.....	 II-21
Changes in Numbers of Students Served.....	II-21
Students Served by Disability Category.....	II-22
Age-Group Distribution	II-24
Race/Ethnicity of Students with Disabilities.....	II-26
Summary	II-28
 Limited English Proficient Students with Disabilities.....	 II-31
The School-Aged LEP Population	II-31
Characteristics of the LEP Student Population.....	II-33
Identification and Assessment of LEP Students with Disabilities	II-35
Summary	II-38
 III. PROGRAMS AND SERVICES	
Educational Environments for Students with Disabilities	III-1
Trends in the Data.....	III-2
Factors Associated with Educational Environments	III-3
Summary	III-5
 Family Involvement in the Education of Elementary and Middle School Students Receiving Special Education.....	 III-7
Family Involvement in School Activities	III-9
Family Involvement in Activities Related to Children's Disabilities.....	III-10
Support for Education at Home.....	III-17
Alternate Dispute Resolution.....	III-31
Summary and Conclusions	III-31

Contents (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Special Education Teacher Recruitment and Hiring	III-35
Description of SPeNSE	III-35
The Demand for Special Education Teachers.....	III-36
Teacher Recruitment Efforts	III-38
Criteria Used in Hiring Teachers	III-40
Barriers To Hiring Teachers.....	III-41
Conclusions	III-43
Services Received by Children and Families Entering Early	
Intervention	III-47
Receipt of Early Intervention Services and Types of Services.....	III-48
Location of Early Intervention Services.....	III-50
Types of Providers of Early Intervention Services.....	III-51
Reasons for Missing Early Intervention Services.....	III-53
Perceived Progress Toward IFSP Outcomes	III-53
Summary	III-54
Using Implementation Data To Study State, District, and School	
Impacts	III-59
Introduction.....	III-59
Implementation Research Defined	III-61
Examples of Coordinated Uses of Implementation and Impact	
Studies.....	III-61
Implications for SLIIDEA	III-64
Conclusion	III-67
IV. POLICIES	
State Improvement and Monitoring	IV-1
Part C: General Supervision and Administration.....	IV-6
Part C: Child Find/Public Awareness	IV-7
Part C: Early Intervention in Natural Environments	IV-8
Part C: Family-Centered Services	IV-9
Part C: Early Childhood Transition	IV-10
Part B: Parent Involvement.....	IV-11
Part B: Free Appropriate Public Education in the Least	
Restrictive Environment	IV-12
Part B: Secondary Transition	IV-13
Part B: General Supervision	IV-14

Contents (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
The Comprehensive Planning Process for the IDEA Part D National Activities Program: Challenge and Opportunity.....	IV-17
The IDEA Part D National Activities Program Comprehensive Planning Process	IV-17
Part One: Soliciting the Opinions of Key Part D National Activities Program Consumers	IV-18
Part Two: Soliciting Expert Opinions on the Key Issues Associated with Consumers' Priorities and How the Part D National Activities Program Might Respond.....	IV-21
Part Three: Using the Planning Process To Develop the IDEA Part D National Activities Program Plan	IV-31
 The Office of Special Education Programs' National Assessment Program	 IV-33
Child-Based Longitudinal Studies	IV-33
Issue-Based Studies	IV-35
Status of the National Assessment Program	IV-37

Appendices

Appendix A. Data Tables

Section A. Child Count Tables

Table AA1	Number of Children Served Under IDEA, Part B by Age Group, During the 1999-2000 School Year.....	A-1
Table AA2	Number of Children Ages 6-21 Served Under IDEA, Part B by Disability, During the 1999-2000 School Year	A-2
Table AA3	Number of Children Ages 6-11 Served Under IDEA, Part B by Disability, During the 1999-2000 School Year	A-5
Table AA4	Number of Children Ages 12-17 Served Under IDEA, Part B by Disability, During the 1999-2000 School Year	A-8

Contents (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Table AA5	Number of Children Ages 18-21 Served Under IDEA, Part B by Disability, During the 1999-2000 School YearA-11
Table AA6	Number of Children Served Under IDEA, Part B by Disability and Age, During the 1999-2000 School YearA-14
Table AA7	Number of Children Served Under IDEA, Part B by Age, During the 1999-2000 School Year.....A-15
Table AA8	Percentage (Based on Estimated Resident Population) of Children Served Under IDEA, Part B by Age Group, During the 1999-2000 School Year.....A-19
Table AA9	Percentage (Based on Estimated Resident Population) of Children Ages 6-21 Served Under IDEA, Part B by Disability, During the 1999-2000 School YearA-20
Table AA10	Percentage (Based on Estimated Resident Population) of Children Ages 6-17 Served Under IDEA, Part B by Disability, During the 1999-2000 School YearA-23
Table AA11	Percentage (Based on Estimated Enrollment) of Children Ages 6-17 Served Under IDEA, Part B by Disability, During the 1999-2000 School Year.....A-26
Table AA12	Number of Children Served Under IDEA by Disability and Age Group, During School Years 1990-91 Through 1999-2000.....A-29
Table AA13	Number of Students Ages 3-5 Served Under IDEA, Part B by Race/Ethnicity, During the 1999-2000 School YearA-32

Contents (continued)

		<u>Page</u>
Table AA14	Number of Students Ages 6-21 Served Under IDEA, Part B by Race/Ethnicity and Disability, During the 1999-2000 School Year.....	A-34
Table AA15	Percentage (Based on Estimated Resident Population) of Children Ages 3-5 Served Under IDEA, Part B by Race/Ethnicity, During the 1999-2000 School Year.....	A-62
Table AA16	Percentage (Based on Estimated Resident Population) of Children Ages 6-21 Served Under IDEA, Part B by Race/Ethnicity, During the 1999-2000 School Year.....	A-63
Section B. Educational Environments Tables		
Table AB1	Number of Children Ages 3-5 Served in Different Educational Environments Under IDEA, Part B, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-78
Table AB2	Number of Children Ages 6-21 Served in Different Educational Environments Under IDEA, Part B, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-80
Table AB3	Number of Children Ages 6-11 Served in Different Educational Environments Under IDEA, Part B, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-108
Table AB4	Number of Children Ages 12-17 Served in Different Educational Environments Under IDEA, Part B, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-136
Table AB5	Number of Children Ages 18-21 Served in Different Educational Environments Under IDEA, Part B, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-162

Contents (continued)

		<u>Page</u>
Table AB6	Number of Children Ages 3-21 Served in Correctional Facilities and Parent-Initiated Private Schools Under IDEA, Part B, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-188
Table AB7	Number of Children Served in Different Educational Environments Under IDEA, Part B by Age Group During School Years 1989-90 Through 1998-99.....	A-189
Table AB8	Number of Children Ages 6-21 Served in Different Educational Environments Under IDEA, Part B by Disability, During School Years 1989-90 Through 1998-99.....	A-191
Table AB9	Number of Children Ages 3-5 Served in Different Educational Environments by Race/Ethnicity Under IDEA, Part B, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-195
Table AB10	Number of Children Ages 6-21 Served in Different Educational Environments by Race/Ethnicity Under IDEA, Part B, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-213
Table AB11	Number of Children Ages 3-21 Served in Correctional Facilities and Parent-Initiated Private Schools by Race/Ethnicity Under IDEA, Part B, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-235

Section C. Personnel Tables

Table AC1	Total Number of Teachers Employed (in Full-Time Equivalency) To Provide Special Education and Related Services for Children and Youth Ages 3-5 with Disabilities, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-240
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Contents (continued)

		<u>Page</u>
Table AC2	Total Number of Teachers Employed (in Full-Time Equivalency) To Provide Special Education and Related Services for Children and Youth Ages 6-21 with Disabilities, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-241
Table AC3	Number and Type of Other Personnel Employed (in Full-Time Equivalency) To Provide Special Education and Related Services for Children and Youth Ages 3-21 with Disabilities, by Personnel Category, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-242
Section D. Exiting Tables		
Table AD1	Number of Students Age 14 and Older Exiting Special Education, During the 1998-99 School Year	A-252
Table AD2	Number of Students with Disabilities Exiting Special Education by Age Group, During the 1998-99 School Year	A-278
Table AD3	Number of Students with Disabilities Exiting School by Graduation with a Diploma, Graduation with a Certificate, and Reached Maximum Age by Age, During the School Years 1989-90 Through 1998-99.....	A-291
Table AD4	Number of Children Ages 14-21 ⁺ Exiting Special Education by Race/Ethnicity, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-292

Contents (continued)

		<u>Page</u>
Section E. Discipline Tables		
Table AE1	Number of Children with Disabilities Subject to Unilateral Removal by School Personnel for Drug or Weapon Offenses, Removal Based on a Hearing Officer Determination Regarding Likely Injury, or Long-Term Suspension/Expulsion, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-310
Table AE2	Percentage of Children (Based on Child Count) with Disabilities Subject to Unilateral Removal by School Personnel for Drug or Weapon Offenses, Removal Based on a Hearing Officer Determination Regarding Likely Injury, or Long-Term Suspension/Expulsion, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-324
Table AE3	Number of Children with Disabilities Subject to Unilateral Removal by School Personnel for Drug or Weapon Offenses or Removal Based on a Hearing Officer Determination Regarding Likely Injury, During the 1998-99 School Year by Race/Ethnicity	A-338
Table AE4	Percentage of Children (Based on Child Count) with Disabilities Subject to Unilateral Removal by School Personnel for Drug or Weapon Offenses or Removal Based on a Hearing Officer Determination Regarding Likely Injury, During the 1998-99 School Year by Race/Ethnicity	A-343
Section F. Population and Enrollment Tables		
Table AF1	Estimated Resident Population for Children Ages 3-21	A-348
Table AF2	Estimated Resident Population for Children Birth Through Age 2.....	A-349

Contents (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Table AF3	Estimated Resident Population for Children Ages 3-5.....A-350
Table AF4	Estimated Resident Population for Children Ages 6-17A-351
Table AF5	Estimated Resident Population for Children Ages 18-21A-352
Table AF6	Estimated Resident Population (Number) for Children Ages Birth Through 2 by Race/ Ethnicity for the 1999-2000 School Year.....A-353
Table AF7	Estimated Resident Population (Number) for Children Ages 3-5 by Race/Ethnicity for the 1998-99 School YearA-355
Table AF8	Estimated Resident Population (Number) for Children Ages 6-21 by Race/Ethnicity for the 1998-99 School Year.....A-357
Table AF9	Enrollment for Students in Grades Pre-Kindergarten Through Twelve.....A-359
Section G. Financial Table	
Table AG1	State Grant Awards Under IDEA, Part B, Preschool Grant Program and Part CA-360
Section H. Early Intervention Tables	
Table AH1	Number of Infants and Toddlers Receiving Early Intervention Services December 1, 1999.....A-361
Table AH2	Number of At-Risk Infants and Toddlers Receiving Early Intervention Services (Duplicated Count) December 1, 1999A-362

Contents (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Table AH3	Early Intervention Services on IFSPs Provided to Infants, Toddlers, and Their Families in Accordance with Part C December 1, 1998.....A-363
Table AH4	Number and Type of Personnel Employed and Contracted To Provide Early Intervention Services to Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and Their Families, December 1, 1998.....A-366
Table AH5	Number of Infants and Toddlers Birth Through Age 2 Served in Different Early Intervention Settings Under Part C, December 1, 1998.....A-370
Table AH6	Number of Infants and Toddlers Ages Birth Through 2 Exiting Part C Programs, During the 1998-99 School Year.....A-372
Table AH7	Number of Infants and Toddlers Ages Birth Through 2 Served Under IDEA, Part C by Race/Ethnicity, During the 1999-2000 School Year.....A-374
Table AH8	Number of Infants and Toddlers Ages Birth Through 2 Served Under IDEA, Part C by Race/Ethnicity: At Risk, December 1, 1999A-376
Table AH9	Percentage of Students Ages Birth Through 2 Served Under IDEA, Part C by Race/Ethnicity, Based on Estimated Population, During the 1999-2000 School Year.....A-378
Table AH10	Number of Infants and Toddlers Birth Through Age 2 by Early Intervention Services Provided by Race/Ethnicity, During the 1998-99 School Year.....A-379

Contents (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Table AH11 Number of Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and Their Families Served Under Part C, by Program Settings and Race/Ethnicity in Accordance with Part C, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-409
Table AH12 Number of Infants and Toddlers Ages Birth Through 2 Exiting Part C Programs, by Race/Ethnicity, During the 1998-99 School Year.....	A-429
Appendix B. Technical Assistance to States: The Regional Resource and Federal Center Network	

List of Tables

	<u>Page</u>
Table I-1	Number and Percentage of Students Age 14 and Older with Disabilities Graduating with a Standard Diploma or Dropping Out, 1998-99..... I-4
Table I-2	Number and Percentage of Students Age 14 and Older with Disabilities Graduating with a Standard Diploma by Race/Ethnicity, 1998-99..... I-5
Table I-3	Percentage of Students Receiving Special Education Services Who Participated in State Assessments I-8
Table I-4	Summary of Reports on Educational Results on Students with Disabilities..... I-10
Table I-5	Status of Alternate Assessments Across States I-15
Table I-6	Percentage of Successful Predictions for ITBS Scores Below the Mean in Illinois I-37
Table I-7	Steps for Conducting a Functional Behavioral Assessment and Implementing a Behavioral Intervention Plan..... I-41
Table I-8	Milestone Attainment in Different Domains by Age Group at Entry to Early Intervention Services..... I-52
Table I-9	Families' Perceptions of Entering Early Intervention, the IFSP Process, and the Initial Services Provided..... I-56
Table II-1	Functional Characteristics of Children Entering Early Intervention as Reported by Caregivers II-3
Table II-2	Birth Histories of Children Entering Early Intervention..... II-5
Table II-3	Health Status of Children Entering Early Intervention II-7
Table II-4	Behaviors of Children Entering Early Intervention as Reported by Their Caregivers..... II-9
Table II-5	Family Structure of Children Entering Early Intervention..... II-11

List of Tables (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Table II-6	Socioeconomic Characteristics of Families of Children Entering Early Intervention II-13
Table II-7	Comparison of Race/Ethnicity Representation in the Part B and General Preschool Populations for 1999-2000..... II-20
Table II-8	Changes in Number of Students Ages 6 Through 21 Served Under IDEA by Disability Category, 1990-1991 and 1999-2000..... II-23
Table II-9	Percentage and Number of Children Served Under IDEA by Disability and Age Group During the 1999-2000 School Year: High-Incidence Disabilities II-26
Table II-10	Percentage of Students Ages 6 Through 21 Served by Disability and Race/Ethnicity, 1999-2000 School Year..... II-27
Table II-11	Students in Need of and Enrolled in LEP Services by Race/Ethnicity 1997..... II-34
Table III-1	Percentage of Students Ages 6 Through 21 with Disabilities Educated Outside the Regular Class Less than 21 Percent of the School Day and the Percentage Served in Regular School Buildings: 1984 to 1998..... III-2
Table III-2	Percentage of Students Ages 6 Through 21 with Disabilities Served in Different Educational Environments: 1998-99 III-4
Table III-3	Family Involvement in School Activities, by Disability Category..... III-11
Table III-4	Family Involvement in Activities Related to Students' Disabilities, by Disability Category III-13
Table III-5	At-Home Educational Support Activities, by Student Disability Category III-19
Table III-6	Family Involvement, by Student Age..... III-22
Table III-7	Family Involvement, by Household Income III-25

List of Tables (continued)

	<u>Page</u>
Table III-8	Family Involvement, by Student Ethnicity..... III-28
Table III-9	Proportion of Administrators Viewing New Special Education Hires To Be Excellent Personnel by Size of School District III-37
Table III-10	Percent of Districts Using Different Methods To Recruit Special Education Teachers and Related Services Providers..... III-38
Table III-11	Percent of Districts Using Different Selection Criteria for General and Special Education Teachers III-41
Table III-12	Percent of Districts Viewing Factors as a Barrier To Obtaining Qualified Special Education Teachers in the Last 3 Years III-42
Table III-13	Early Intervention Services Received by Children and Families During the First 6 Months, as Reported by Service Providers III-49
Table III-14	Locations of Early Intervention Services Received During the First 6 Months After the Initial IFSP as Reported by Service Providers..... III-51
Table III-15	Types of Providers of Early Intervention Services to Children and Families During the First 6 Months After the Initial IFSP as Reported by Service Providers III-52
Table III-16	Reasons Children and Families Missed Early Intervention Services During the First 6 Months After the Initial IFSP as Reported by Service Providers III-54
Table IV-1	Schedule of 1999-2000 and 2000-2001 Continuous Improvement Monitoring Reviews IV-6
Table IV-2	Summary Table for OSEP's National Assessment Program..... IV-38
Table A-1	State Reporting Patterns for IDEA, Part B Child Count Data 1999-00, Other Data 1998-99.....A-449

List of Figures

	<u>Page</u>
Figure I-1	Percentage of Students Age 14 and Older Graduating with a Standard Diploma, 1993-94 to 1998-99 I-2
Figure I-2	Special Education Dropout Rates, 1993-94 to 1998-99 I-3
Figure I-3	Differences on Criterion-Referenced Mathematics Tests Between 8 th Grade Students with and Without Disabilities in 10 States I-11
Figure I-4	Change in Test Participation Rates of Students with Disabilities Over Previous Testing Years I-13
Figure I-5	Changes in Test Performance Levels of Students with Disabilities Over Previous Testing Years I-14
Figure II-1	Distribution of General Health Status Rating of Children in Early Intervention Versus Children Under 5 General Population II-8
Figure II-2	Preschoolers Receiving Services Under Part B 1992-93 - 1999-2000 II-18
Figure II-3	Percentage of Students with Disabilities Served Under Part B of IDEA by Age Group, 1990-91 and 1999-2000..... II-25
Figure III-1	Percentage of Children Ages 6 Through 21 with High-Incidence Disabilities Served in Regular School Buildings During the 1998-99 School Year III-5
Figure III-2	Family Involvement in School Activities III-9

Executive Summary

In the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Congress directed the U.S. Department of Education to undertake a national assessment of activities carried out under the Act (§674(b)). This volume of the *Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* includes a number of modules reporting on the results of the National Assessment, as stipulated in Section 674(b)(4)(B) of the IDEA Amendments of 1997. For this reason, the format of this report varies somewhat from that of other recent volumes.

Section I—Results

The results section includes five modules. The first module presents State-reported data on high school graduation rates for students with disabilities. The second provides information about the participation and performance of students with disabilities in State assessment systems. It also discusses alternate assessments. The third module describes challenges to providing secondary education and transition services to youth with disabilities and presents strategies for meeting those challenges. Outcomes for Students with Problem Behaviors in School is the fourth module. It examines trends and outcomes for students with problem behaviors and describes effective prevention practices. The last module in this section presents data from the National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study (NEILS).

High School Graduation Among Students with Disabilities

- Graduation rates for students age 14 and older with disabilities have climbed steadily since 1993-94. During this same time, the dropout rate among this population has declined.
- Graduation rates for students age 14 and older with disabilities varied by disability category; students with visual impairments had the highest graduation rate, while students with emotional disturbance had the lowest graduation rate.
- Graduation rates also varied by race/ethnicity, ranging from 63.4 percent among white students to 43.5 percent among black students.

Participation and Performance of Students with Disabilities in State Assessment Systems

- According to public reports collected from States in 1999, participation rates in State assessments varied from 33 percent to 97 percent of students with disabilities. The performance levels of students with disabilities also varied widely.
- The assessment participation rates of students with disabilities have increased in over half of the States and remained the same in another 25 percent of States. Only one State reported participation rates that are lower than in previous years.
- Differences in data collection and management systems may contribute to difficulties in reporting data for students with disabilities.

Challenges To Providing Secondary Education and Transition Services for Youth with Disabilities

- Individual education program (IEP) teams must work to ensure that high expectations are maintained and students with disabilities are afforded opportunities to develop skills through a wide range of curricular options, including vocational education, service learning, community work experience, and adult living skills.
- Diversity in graduation requirements is complicated by an increasingly diverse set of possible diploma options within individual States. In addition to the standard high school diploma, some States offer special education diplomas, certificates of completion, occupational diplomas, and others.
- Because of the critical role that parents play in assisting their children in making the transition from school to adult life, additional attention must be given to establishing strategies and methods needed to actively engage them in discussions and decisions concerning school and postschool options.

Outcomes for Students with Problem Behaviors in School: Issues, Predictors, and Practices

- About 50 percent of students identified under IDEA as having emotional and behavioral disorders drop out of school. Once they leave school, these

students lack the social skills necessary to be successfully employed; they consequently suffer from low employment levels and poor work histories.

- Poverty is the single greatest predictor of academic and social failure in America's schools.
- For students with problem behavior, positive behavioral supports help to prevent many of the predictable behavior problems that typically begin a pattern of escalating academic and social failures.

Results Experienced by Children and Families Entering Early Intervention

- Data on physical health indicate that many parents of children entering early intervention reported their child's health to be very good or excellent; however, the proportions were smaller than those reported for the general child population under age 5.
- Children who begin early intervention at less than 12 months of age are much more likely to have a diagnosed condition or a risk condition.
- In NEILS, several different long-term outcomes for former recipients of early intervention are being examined, including the need for future services, physical health, developmental attainments, academic skills, memberships in groups such as being a member of a sports team, and interpersonal relationships such as friendships.

Section II—Student Characteristics

This section contains information about the characteristics of children and students receiving services under IDEA. The populations reported are children and families entering early intervention, preschoolers, students ages 6 through 21, and limited-English-proficient (LEP) students with disabilities.

Characteristics of Children and Families Entering Early Intervention

- In 1999-2000, 205,769 children and their families in the United States received early intervention services under Part C of IDEA. This figure represents 1.8 percent of the Nation's infants and toddlers.
- Among the children receiving early intervention, there was a high incidence of children of very low birth weight in all racial/ethnic groups, but the proportions differed by race/ethnicity.

- Families of nearly all children in early intervention reported that their children had a place to go for regular medical care and were covered by health insurance.

Preschoolers Served Under IDEA

- States reported serving 588,300 preschool children with disabilities during the 1999-2000 school year, or 5 percent of all preschoolers who lived in the United States and Outlying Areas during the year.
- State-reported data for 1999-2000 indicate that 67 percent of preschoolers who received services under IDEA were white, 16 percent were black, 14 percent were Hispanic, 2 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native.
- The racial distribution of preschool children served was generally comparable between 1998-99 and 1999-2000. From 1998-99 to 1999-2000, the proportion of Hispanic preschoolers served grew by 1.7 percent, while the proportion of white preschoolers served declined 1.6 percent.

Students Ages 6 Through 21 Served Under IDEA

- The number of students ages 6 through 21 with disabilities served under Part B of IDEA reached 5,683,707, a 2.6 percent increase over the 1998-99 school year.
- Specific learning disabilities continued to be the most prevalent disability among this population, representing half of the students with disabilities served under IDEA.
- Black students with disabilities exceeded their representation among the resident population. The most striking disparities were in the mental retardation and developmental delay categories.

Limited English Proficient Students with Disabilities

- The Office for Civil Rights estimated that 174,530 students with disabilities needed services for limited English proficiency in 1997.

- Although LEP students in the United States come from a variety of national, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, the majority are from Spanish-speaking homes. Spanish was the first language of almost 73 percent of LEP students.
- Researchers believe that culturally and linguistically diverse students may be disadvantaged in the assessment and evaluation process.

Section III—Programs and Services

The five modules in this section examine some of the programs and services available within schools for children with disabilities and their families and include preliminary results on programs and services from the National Assessment Program studies. The module on educational environments contains State-reported data on the settings in which children receive services. The second module presents data on family involvement and elementary and middle school students from the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS). Special Education Teacher Recruitment and Hiring is the third module. It provides data and analyses from the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE). The fourth module uses NEELS data to describe the services received by children and families entering early intervention. The last module in this section describes SLIIDEA (State and Local Implementation of IDEA) and presents preliminary findings.

Educational Environments for Students with Disabilities

- The percentage of students ages 6 through 21 with disabilities served in both regular schools and in regular education classes within those schools has continually increased.
- Of the students ages 6 through 21 served outside the regular classroom for less than 21 percent of the school day, approximately 70 percent were white, 14 percent were black, 12 percent were Hispanic, 2 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native.
- Students with emotional disturbance, mental retardation, and multiple disabilities were more likely to receive services outside the regular classroom for more than 60 percent of the school day.

Family Involvement in the Education of Elementary and Middle School Students Receiving Special Education

- Information from the first SEELS family interview portrays several dimensions of family involvement for students with disabilities and their variation for students with different disabilities, ages, racial/ethnic backgrounds, and household incomes.
- Participation in parent information, support, or training sessions was fairly consistent across income levels.
- Families that expressed reservations about their level of involvement in the individualized education program process were disproportionately from black, Hispanic, and Asian/Pacific Islander families and from low-income households.

Special Education Teacher Recruitment and Hiring

- SPeNSE was designed to address concerns about nationwide shortages in the number of personnel serving students with disabilities and the need for improvement in the qualifications of those employed.
- As of October 1, 1999, there were 12,241 funded positions left vacant or filled by substitutes because suitable candidates could not be found. While administrators were able to hire only some of the new teachers they needed, they felt that 85 percent of all newly hired teachers and service providers in the last three years were excellent at the time they started.
- Two additional barriers to hiring cited by administrators are the district's geographic location and insufficient salary and benefits. Both were cited as great or moderate barriers to hiring by 50 percent or more of the administrators.

Services Received by Children and Families Entering Early Intervention

- Most families receiving services under Part C received between two and six different services.
- The most common types of early intervention providers were service coordinators, speech and language therapists, occupational and physical therapists, child development specialists, and special educators.

- Service providers gave positive progress ratings for the majority of children receiving services under Part C.

Using Implementation Data To Study State, District, and School Impacts

- SLIIDEA's charge is to understand both the implementation and the impact of policy changes made in the IDEA Amendments of 1997 at the State, district, and school levels.
- It is expected that SLIIDEA will show evidence that States and localities have to various degrees addressed issues such as service coordination, accountability systems, and procedural safeguards needed to achieve the goals of IDEA.
- States can use legislation, written requirements, or guidance and inducements such as incentives, rewards, sanctions, technical assistance, financial assistance, and accountability through public reporting to influence special education activities at the local level.

Section IV—Policies

This section of the annual report contains three modules. The modules describe State improvement and monitoring activities, the planning process used to develop the Part D National Activities Program, and the National Assessment Program.

State Improvement and Monitoring

- Many of the States that OSEP has monitored during the past three years do not yet have effective systems for identifying and correcting noncompliance with Part C requirements.
- OSEP found that some States have gone beyond the Part C requirements to develop especially strong linkages between parents, the Part C system, and school districts to support smooth and effective transition.
- In the past three years, OSEP has found that noncompliance regarding transition requirements persists in many States. Although more IEPs for students age 16 or older now include transition content, the statements of needed transition services do not meet Part B requirements.

The Comprehensive Planning Process for the IDEA Part D National Activities Program: Challenge and Opportunity

- OSEP conducted long-term planning sessions with staff, gathering information about the lessons learned from prior planning efforts and recommendations for the new process.
- The process incorporates collaboration with regular education and other Federal offices and agencies as well as direct input from grassroots consumers at the family, school, community, and State levels.
- OSEP looks upon the expert-based opinion provided by the five panels thus far in the National Activities Program planning process as the beginning of an ongoing conversation between the agency and stakeholder representatives.

The Office of Special Education Programs' National Assessment Program

- The National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study (NEILS) looks at infants and toddlers and their families who are receiving early intervention services through Part C of IDEA. The study will describe the characteristics of program participants, the type and level of services they are receiving and who is providing them, the outcomes realized by children and families during Part C participation, and the association of characteristics of the participants and services with outcomes.
- PEELS (Pre-elementary Education Longitudinal Study) will study children ages three to five. Study focuses will include an examination of the critical transition between preschool and kindergarten and of outcomes achieved by students who participated in preschool special education programs.
- The Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) will follow a nationally representative sample of students as they move from elementary to middle school and from middle to high school.
- The National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS-2) will collect data on students ages 13 to 16 to determine their individual and household characteristics; achievement scores on standardized assessments; secondary school performance and outcomes; and early adult outcomes in the employment, education, independence, and social domains.

- SPeNSE (Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education) focuses on the adequacy of the workforce and will attempt to explain variation in workforce quantity and quality based on State and district policy.
- The State and Local Implementation of IDEA (SLIIDEA) study was designed to evaluate the implementation and impact of IDEA with a focus on implementation issues in six cluster areas.
- SEEP (Special Education Expenditure Project) examines how Federal, State, and local funds are used to support programs and services for students with disabilities.