

Students With Disabilities

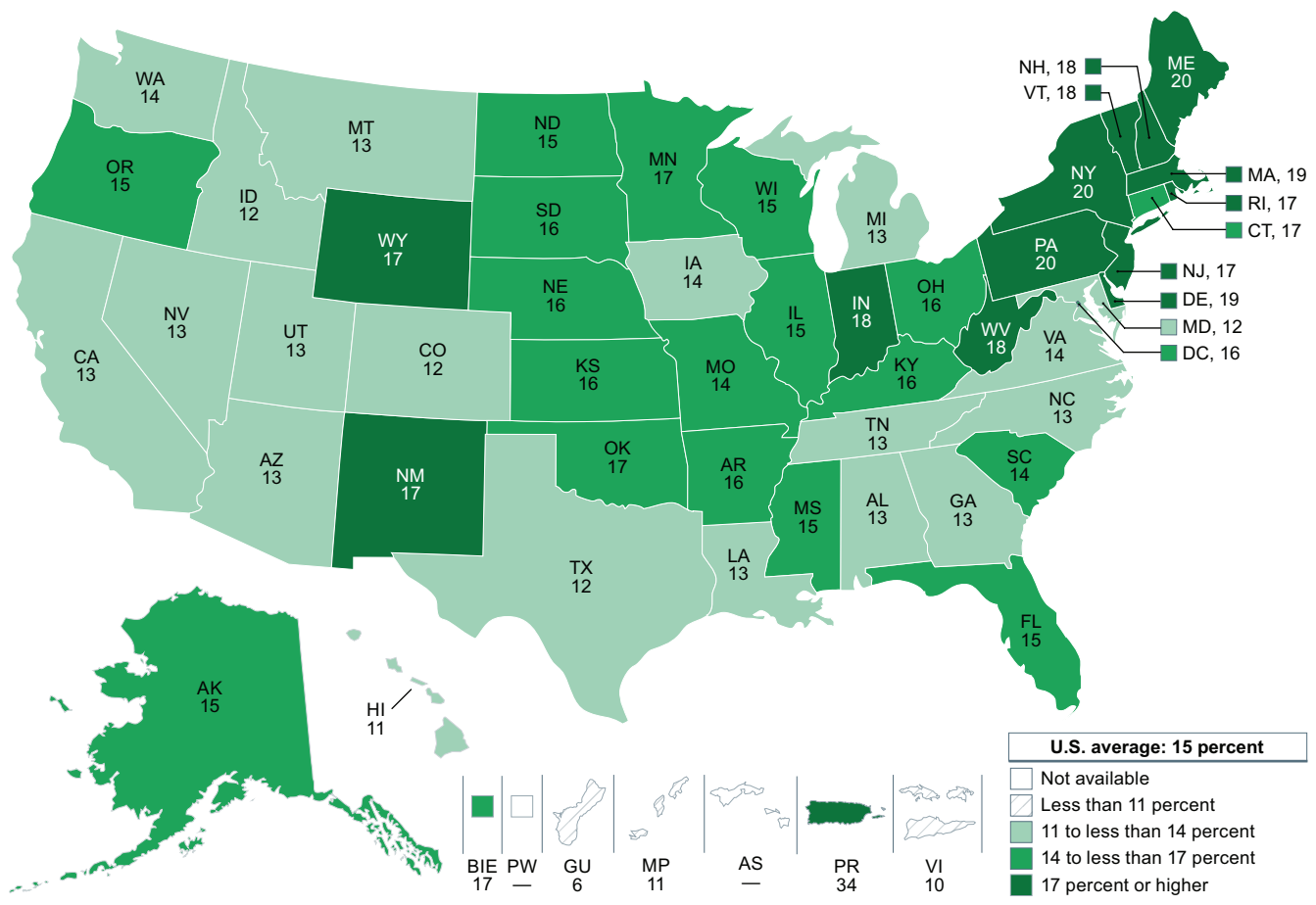
In 2021–22, the number of students ages 3–21 who received special education and/or related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was 7.3 million, or the equivalent of 15 percent of all public school students. Among students receiving special education and/or related services, the most common category of disability was specific learning disabilities (32 percent).

Enacted in 1975, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) 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/or related services. Data collection activities to monitor compliance with IDEA began in 1976. The number of students ages 3-21 receiving IDEA services in the United States¹ increased from 6.4 million in school year 2010-11 to 7.3 million in school year 2021-22.² Taken as a percentage of total public school enrollment, this equates to an increase from 13 to 15 percent of students.³ During the coronavirus pandemic,

the number of students receiving IDEA services dropped by 1 percent between 2019-20 and 2020-21 (from 7.3 to 7.2 million students), marking the first time this number had decreased since 2011-12. In 2021-22, IDEA enrollment largely rebounded to its 2019-20 prepandemic level (7.3 million students). Meanwhile, total public school enrollment dropped by 3 percent from fall 2019 to fall 2020 and then remained around the same number in fall 2021 (see [Public School Enrollment](#)). As a result, the percentage of public school students who were served under IDEA continued its upward trend each year during the pandemic and was higher in 2021-22 (15 percent) than in 2019-20 (14 percent).

Percentage of Students Served Under IDEA by State and Jurisdiction

Figure 1. Students ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as a percentage of public school enrollment, by state and jurisdiction: School year 2021–22



— Not available.

NOTE: The U.S. average is for the 50 states and the District of Columbia. Percentages are calculated and categorized using unrounded data. For Louisiana, data on 3- to 5-year-olds served under IDEA are for 2020–21 instead of 2021–22 because 2021–22 data for this age group were not available for this state. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved February 23, 2023, from <https://data.ed.gov/dataset/idea-section-618-data-products>. National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education,” 2021–22. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 204.70.

In school year 2021-22, across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, the percentage of students served under IDEA ranged from 11 to 20 percent of total public school enrollment.⁴ The number of students receiving IDEA services was equivalent to

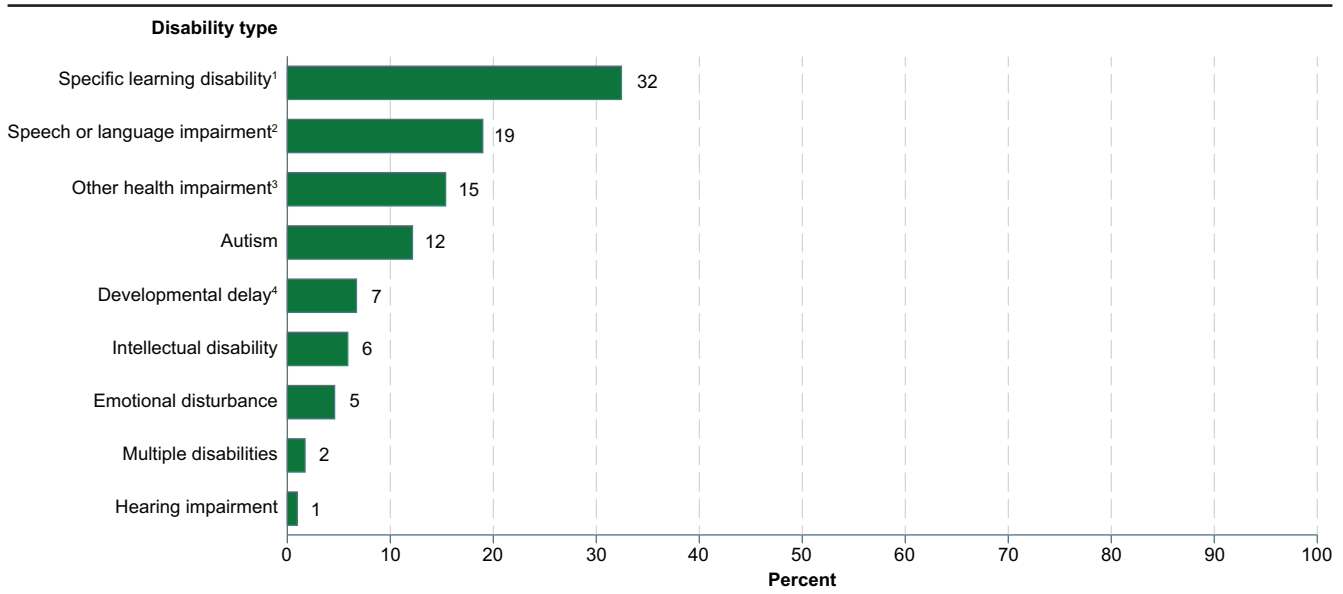
- 20 percent of total public school enrollment in New York, Pennsylvania, and Maine; and
- less than 12 percent of total public school enrollment in Idaho, Texas, and Hawaii.

In other U.S. jurisdictions in 2021-22, the number of students ages 3-21 who received special education and/or related services under IDEA was equivalent to 31 percent of total public school enrollment. The number of students receiving IDEA services was equivalent to

- 34 percent of total public school enrollment in Puerto Rico;
- 11 percent of total public school enrollment in the Northern Mariana Islands;
- 10 percent of total public school enrollment in the U.S. Virgin Islands; and
- 6 percent of total public school enrollment in Guam.⁵ Additionally, 17 percent of students in Bureau of Indian Education schools received special education and/or related services under IDEA.

Types of Disabilities

Figure 2. Percentage distribution of students ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by selected disability type: School year 2021–22



¹ 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.
² Speech or language impairment 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.
³ 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.
⁴ Although federal law does not require that states/entities and local education agencies categorize children according to developmental delay, if this category is required by state law, they are expected to report these children in the developmental delay category.
 NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia only. Percentages by disability type indicate the specific disability for which a child is receiving services under IDEA. If a child has multiple types of disabilities but is receiving services under IDEA for only one type of disability, then the child is categorized under that specific disability. If a child is receiving services for more than one type of IDEA-defined disability, then the child is categorized under “multiple disabilities.” Orthopedic impairment, 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.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved February 23, 2023, from <https://data.ed.gov/dataset/idea-section-618-data-products>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 204.30.

Among students who received special education and/or related services under IDEA in school year 2021-22, the disability types⁶ with the largest reported percentages of students were

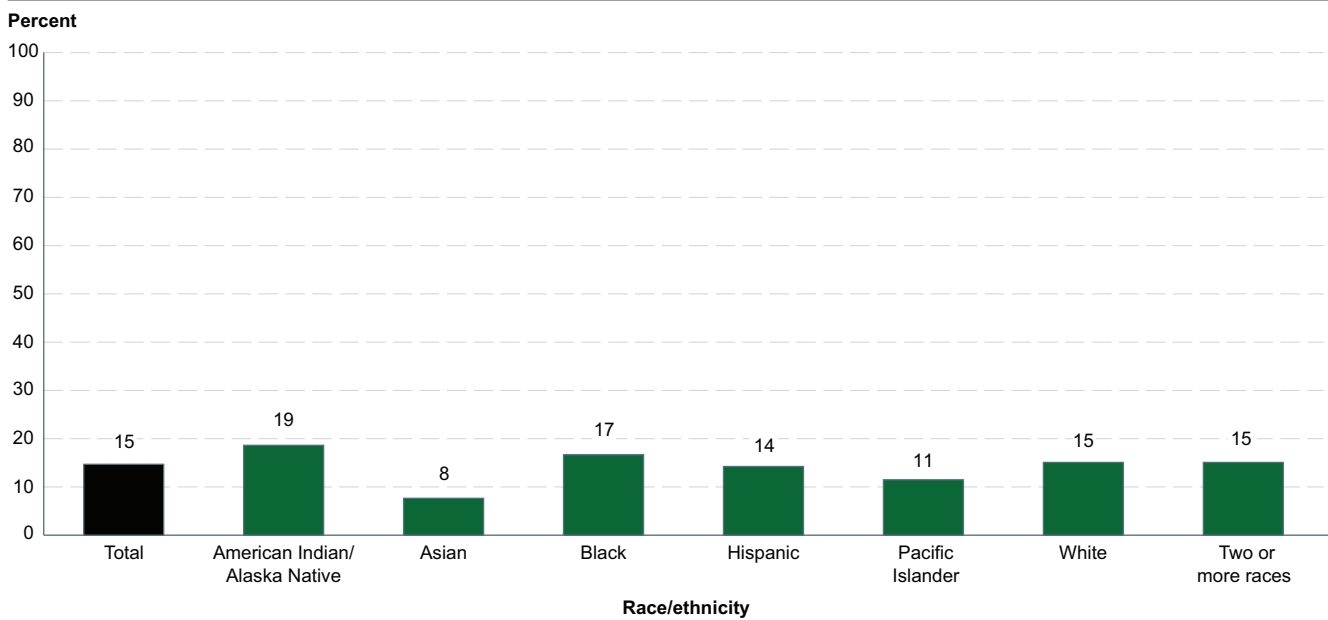
- specific learning disabilities (32 percent);⁷
- speech or language impairments (19 percent);⁸
- other health impairments (15 percent);⁹ and
- autism (12 percent).

Students with developmental delays,¹⁰ intellectual disabilities, and emotional disturbances each accounted

for between 5 and 7 percent of students served under IDEA. The percentage of students served under IDEA was 2 percent or less for each of the following disability types: multiple disabilities, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, traumatic brain injuries, and deaf-blindness.

Characteristics and Educational Environments of Students

Figure 3. Percentage of students ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by race/ethnicity: School year 2021–22



NOTE: Based on total public school enrollment in prekindergarten through grade 12 by race/ethnicity. Data in this figure are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia as well as 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 25, 2023, from <https://data.ed.gov/dataset/idea-section-618-data-products>; and National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education,” 2021–22. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 204.50.

In school year 2021–22, the number of students served under IDEA as a percent of total enrollment for different racial/ethnic groups was

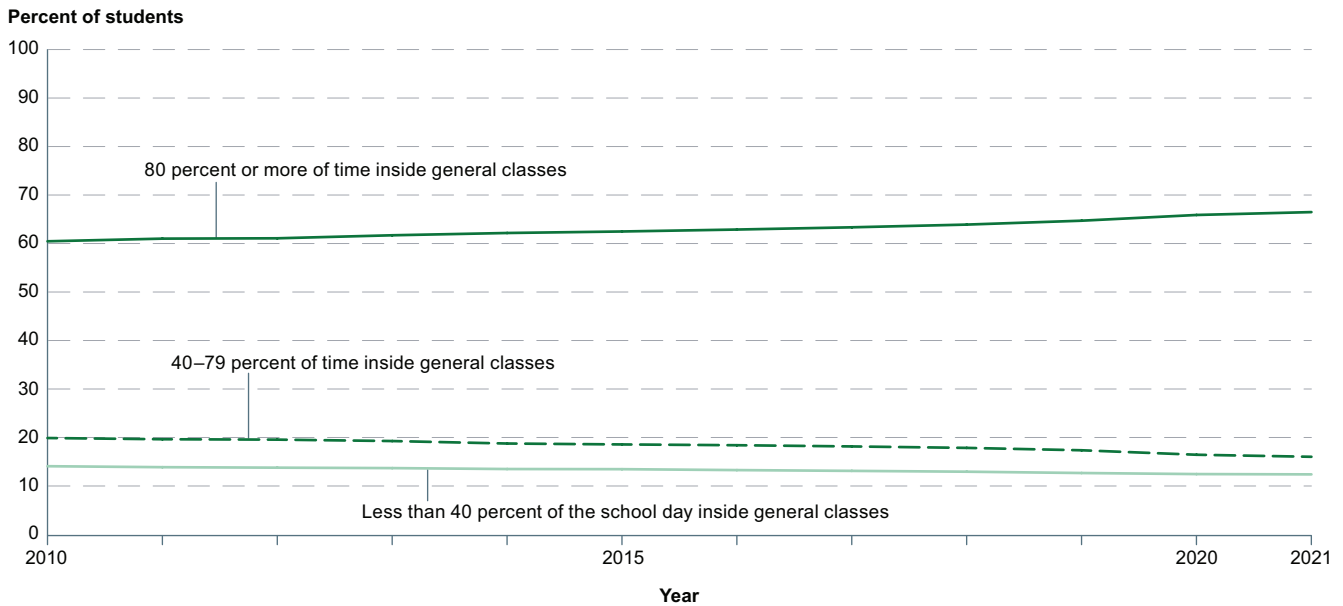
- highest for American Indian/Alaska Native (19 percent) and Black (17 percent) students; and
- lowest for Pacific Islander (11 percent) and Asian (8 percent) students.

The percentage distribution of students receiving special education and/or related services for various types of disabilities differed by race/ethnicity in school year 2021–22. 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 41 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 more than 50 percent of those who received special education and/or related services. In contrast, although these two disabilities accounted for 41 percent of Asian students receiving IDEA services, the most common disability for Asian students was autism

(29 percent). The percentage of students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds receiving IDEA services for autism ranged from 8 to 13 percent.

Data on special education and/or related services by sex were available for all students ages 3–21, whereas data on special education services by sex and type of disability were available only for school-age students.¹¹ Therefore, findings by sex are presented for school-age students only. As a percentage of K–12 students enrolled in public schools in school year 2021–22, more male students (18 percent) than female students (10 percent) received special education and/or related services under IDEA. In addition, the percentage distribution of school-age students receiving special education and/or related services for various types of disabilities differed by sex. For example, the percentage of students served under IDEA who received services for specific learning disabilities was higher for female students (42 percent) than for male students (30 percent), while the percentage who received services for autism was higher for male students (15 percent) than for female students (6 percent).

Figure 4. Among school-age students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), percentage who spent various amounts of time during the school day in general classes in regular schools: Fall 2010 through fall 2021



NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia only. Totals include imputations for states for which data were unavailable. Prior to 2019, “school-age children” included in this figure were students ages 6 to 21. 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. Starting in the fall 2020 data collection, school-age children include 6- to 21-year-olds and 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 25, 2023, from <https://data.ed.gov/dataset/idea-section-618-data-products-state-level-data-files>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 204.60.

Educational environment data are also available for school-age students served under IDEA. Of the school-age children served under IDEA in fall 2021,

- 95 percent were enrolled in regular schools;
- 2 percent were enrolled in separate schools (public or private) for students with disabilities;
- 2 percent were parentally placed in regular private schools;¹² and
- 1 percent were homebound or in hospitals, in separate residential facilities (public or private), or in correctional facilities.

Students served under IDEA who attended regular schools spent different percentages of time during the school day in general classes, and these percentages changed over time. Between fall 2010 and fall 2021,¹³ among all school-age students served under IDEA, the percentage who were in regular schools and spent various amounts of time in general classes changed as follows:

- the percentage who spent 80 percent or more of their time in general classes increased from 61 to 67 percent;
- the percentage who spent 40 to 79 percent of their time in general classes decreased from 20 to 16 percent; and
- the percentage who spent less than 40 percent of their time in general classes decreased from 14 to 13 percent.

In fall 2021, more than two-thirds of students with the following disabilities spent 80 percent or more of their

time during the school day in general classes:

- speech or language impairments (88 percent);
- specific learning disabilities (75 percent);
- other health impairments (70 percent);
- developmental delays (70 percent); and
- visual impairments (70 percent).

Less than one-third of students with the following disabilities spent 80 percent or more of their time during the school day in general classes:

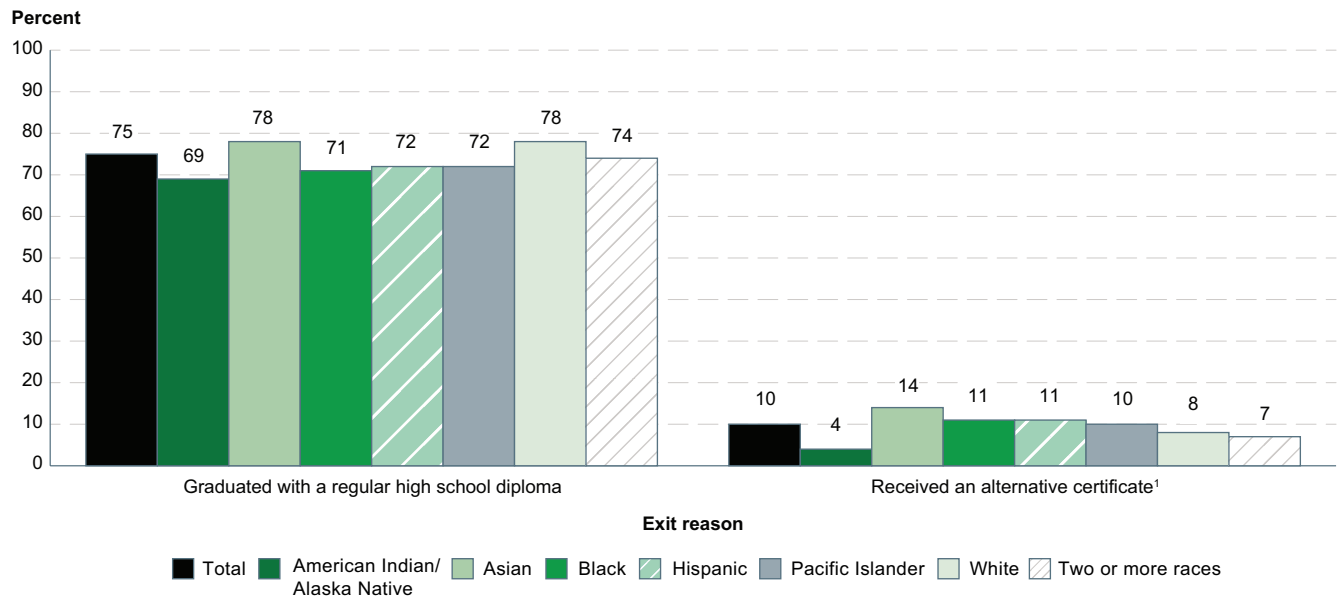
- deaf-blindness (30 percent);
- intellectual disabilities (20 percent); and
- multiple disabilities (15 percent).

School Exiting

Data are also available for students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school¹⁴ during school year 2020-21. Approximately 435,000 students ages 14-21 served under IDEA exited school. Of these students,

- 75 percent graduated with a regular high school diploma;
- 14 percent “dropped out”;¹⁵
- 10 percent received an alternative certificate;¹⁶
- 1 percent reached the maximum age¹⁷ to receive special education and/or related services; and
- less than one-half of 1 percent died.

Figure 5. 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 2020–21



¹ 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 419 students from four states who exited an educational program through receipt of an alternate diploma.
NOTE: Data in this figure are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia as well as 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) Section 618 Data Products: State Level Data Files. Retrieved February 25, 2023, from <https://data.ed.gov/dataset/idea-section-618-data-products-state-level-data-files>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2022*, table 219.90.

Among students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school in school year 2020-21, 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 White and Asian students (78 percent each) and lowest for American Indian/Alaska Native students (69 percent). The percentage of exiting students who received an alternative certificate was highest for Asian students (14 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 (26 percent) and lowest for Asian students (6 percent).

Among students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school in school year 2020-21, 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 (87 percent) and lowest for students with multiple disabilities (44 percent). The percentage of exiting students who received an alternative certificate was highest for students with multiple disabilities and intellectual disabilities (36 percent and 34 percent, respectively) and lowest for students with speech or language impairments (4 percent). The percentage of exiting students who “dropped out” was highest for students with emotional disturbances (28 percent) and lowest for students with deaf-blindness (4 percent).

Endnotes:

¹ Data throughout this indicator represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia unless otherwise noted.

² 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.

³ The number of children served as a percentage of total enrollment is based on total public school enrollment in prekindergarten through grade 12. However, not all students served under IDEA receive education services in public school environments.

⁴ Throughout this indicator, percentages are calculated and categorized using unrounded data.

⁵ Data were not available for American Samoa and Palau.

⁶ Disability type refers to the specific disability for which a child is receiving services under IDEA. If a child has multiple types of disabilities but is receiving services under IDEA for only one type of disability, then the child is categorized under that specific disability. If a child is receiving services for more than one type of IDEA-defined disability, then the child is categorized under “multiple disabilities.”

⁷ 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.

⁸ Speech or language impairment 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.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ Although federal law does not require that states/entities and local education agencies categorize children according to developmental delay, if this category is required by state law, they are expected to report these children in the developmental delay category.

¹¹ Starting in the school year 2020-21 data collection, school-age students include 6- to 21-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten.

¹² 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 and/or related services at public expense.

¹³ For fall 2010 through fall 2018, school-age students include students ages 6-21. 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 in that year. Starting in the fall 2020 data collection, school-age students include 6- to 21-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten.

¹⁴ School year 2020-21 data for students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school are for the 50 states *and* the District of Columbia as well as a small (but unknown) number of students from other jurisdictions. Data from prior years included data for students from Bureau of Indian Education schools, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

¹⁵ “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.

¹⁶ 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 school year 2020-21, the number of students who received an alternative certificate includes 419 students from four states who exited an educational program through receipt of an alternate diploma.

¹⁷ Each state determines its maximum age for receiving special education and/or related 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 2022*, tables 203.10, 203.50, 204.30, 204.50, 204.60, 204.70, and 219.90

Related indicators and resources: [Disability Rates and Employment Status by Educational Attainment](#) [*The Condition of Education 2017 Spotlight*]; [English 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