

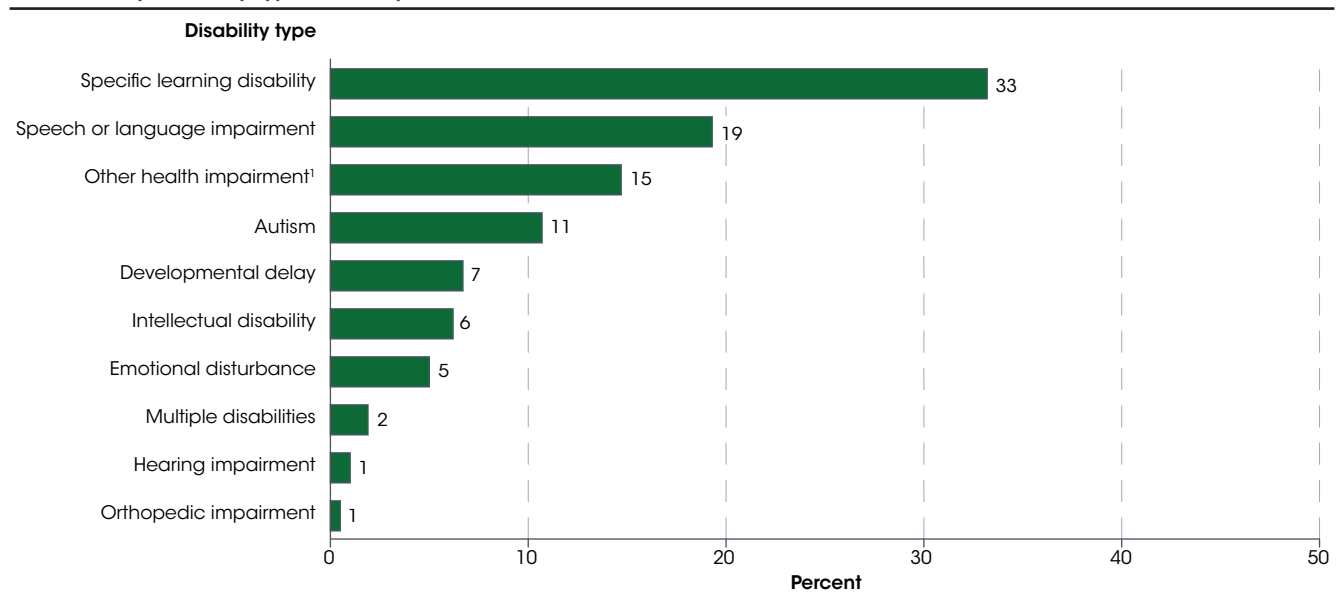
Students With Disabilities

In 2018–19, the number of students ages 3–21 who received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was 7.1 million, or 14 percent of all public school students. Among students receiving special education services, 33 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 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 2000–01 through 2004–05, the number of students ages 3–21 who received special education services under IDEA increased from 6.3 million, or 13 percent of total public school enrollment, to 6.7 million, or 14 percent of total public school enrollment.¹ Both the number and the percentage of students served under IDEA declined from 2004–05 through 2011–12. Between 2011–12 and 2018–19, the number of students served increased from 6.4 million to 7.1 million and the percentage served increased from 13 percent of total public school enrollment to 14 percent of total public school enrollment.

Figure 1. Percentage distribution of students ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), by disability type: School year 2018–19



¹ 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.

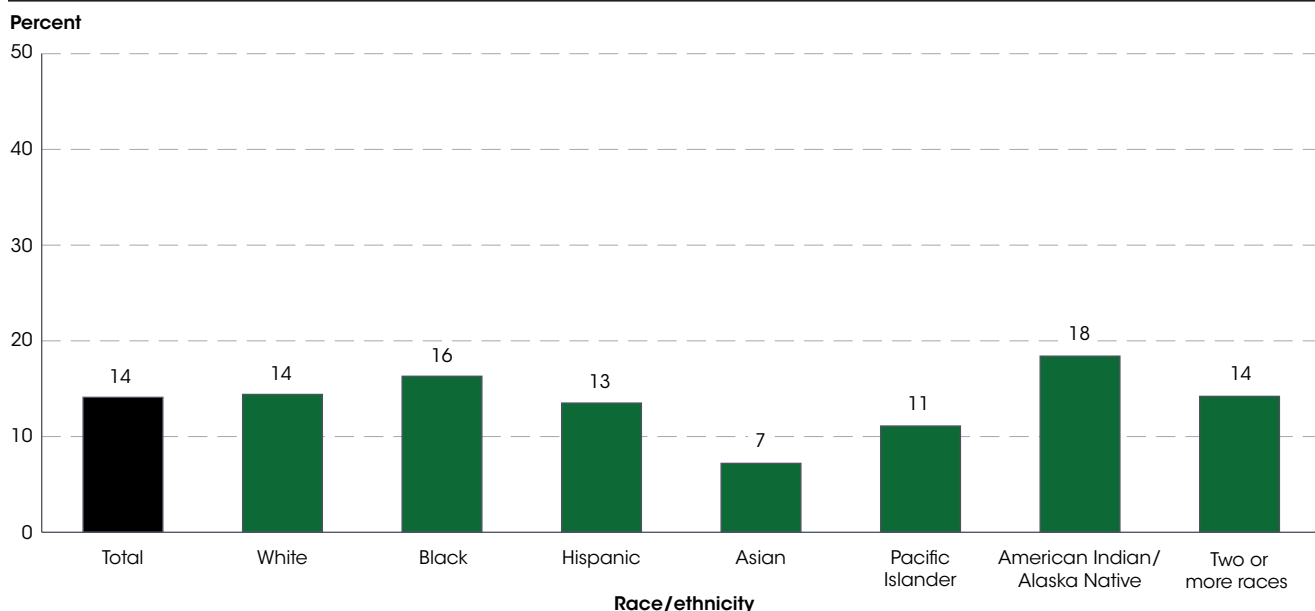
NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia only. Includes 2015–16 data for 3- to 21-year-olds in Wisconsin due to unavailability of more recent data for children served in Wisconsin. Visual impairment, traumatic brain injury, and deaf-blindness are not shown because they each account 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 20, 2020, 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 2019*, table 204.30.

In school year 2018–19, a higher percentage of students 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 2018–19, some 33 percent of all students who received special education services had specific learning disabilities, 19 percent had speech or language impairments, 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 2018–19



NOTE: Based on the 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. Includes 2015–16 data for 3- to 21-year-olds in Wisconsin due to unavailability of more recent data for children served in Wisconsin. 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 20, 2020, from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#boc>; and National Center for Education Statistics, National Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Projection Model, 1972 through 2029. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 204.50.

In school year 2018–19, the percentage (out of total public school enrollment) of students ages 3–21 who received special education services under IDEA differed by race/ethnicity. The percentage of students served under IDEA was highest for American Indian/Alaska Native students (18 percent), followed by Black students (16 percent), White students and students of Two or more races (14 percent each), Hispanic students (13 percent), Pacific Islander students (11 percent), and Asian students (7 percent).

Among Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, Pacific Islander, and White students ages 3–21, the percentage of students who received special education services in 2018–19 for specific learning disabilities combined with the percentage who received services for speech or

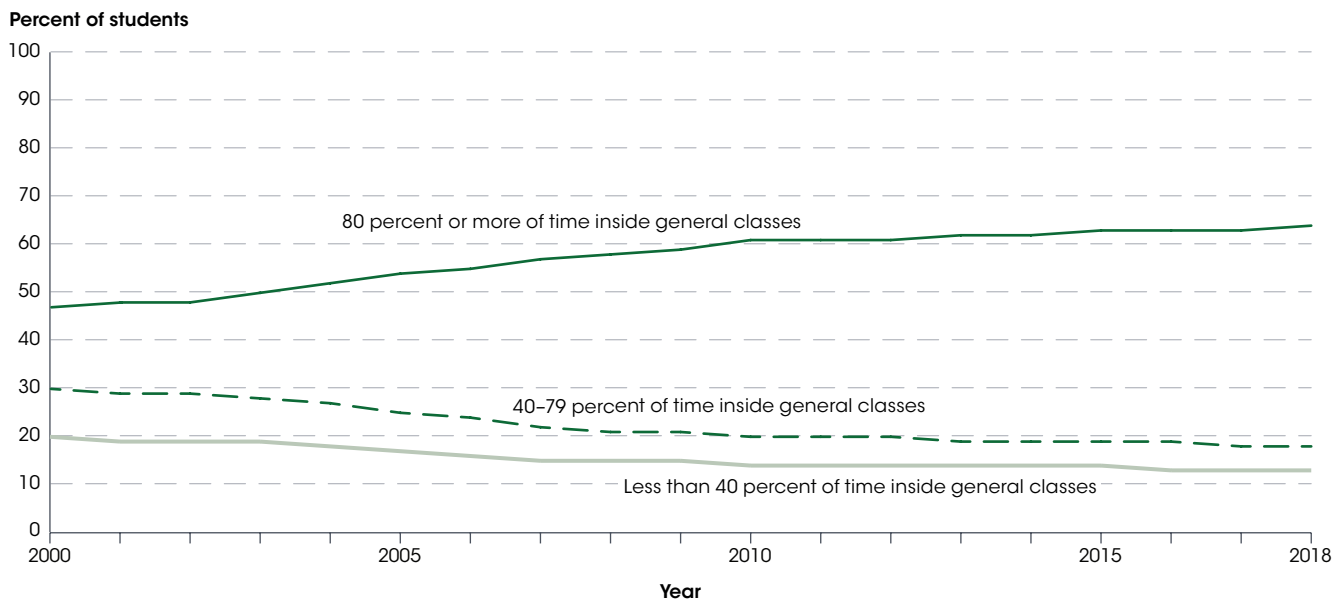
language impairments accounted for 50 percent or more of students served under IDEA. Among their peers who were Black, of Two or more races, and Asian, the percentage accounted for between 40 and 50 percent of students served under IDEA. The percentage distribution of various types of special education services received by students differed by race/ethnicity. For example, the percentage of students with disabilities who received services under IDEA for specific learning disabilities was lower for Asian students (19 percent), students of Two or more races (29 percent), and White students (29 percent) than for students overall (33 percent). However, the percentage of students with disabilities who received services under IDEA for autism was higher for Asian students (25 percent) and students of Two or more races (12 percent) than for students overall (11 percent).²

Additionally, among students served under IDEA, 7 percent each of Black students and students of Two or more races received services for emotional disturbances. In comparison, 5 percent of all students served under IDEA received services for emotional disturbances.

Separate data on special education services for males and females are available only for students ages 6–21, rather than ages 3–21. Among those 6- to 21-year-old students enrolled in public schools in 2018–19, 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 2018–19 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 (34 percent), while the percentage served under IDEA who received services for autism was higher for male students (13 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 2000 through fall 2018



NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia only. Fall 2016, 2017, and 2018 include fall 2015 data for 6- to 21-year-olds in Wisconsin due to unavailability of fall 2016, 2017, and 2018 data for children served in Wisconsin. Fall 2017 also includes fall 2016 data for 6- to 21-year-olds in Maine and Vermont due to unavailability of fall 2017 data for children in that age group served in those states.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved February 20, 2020, from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html#bcc>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 204.60.

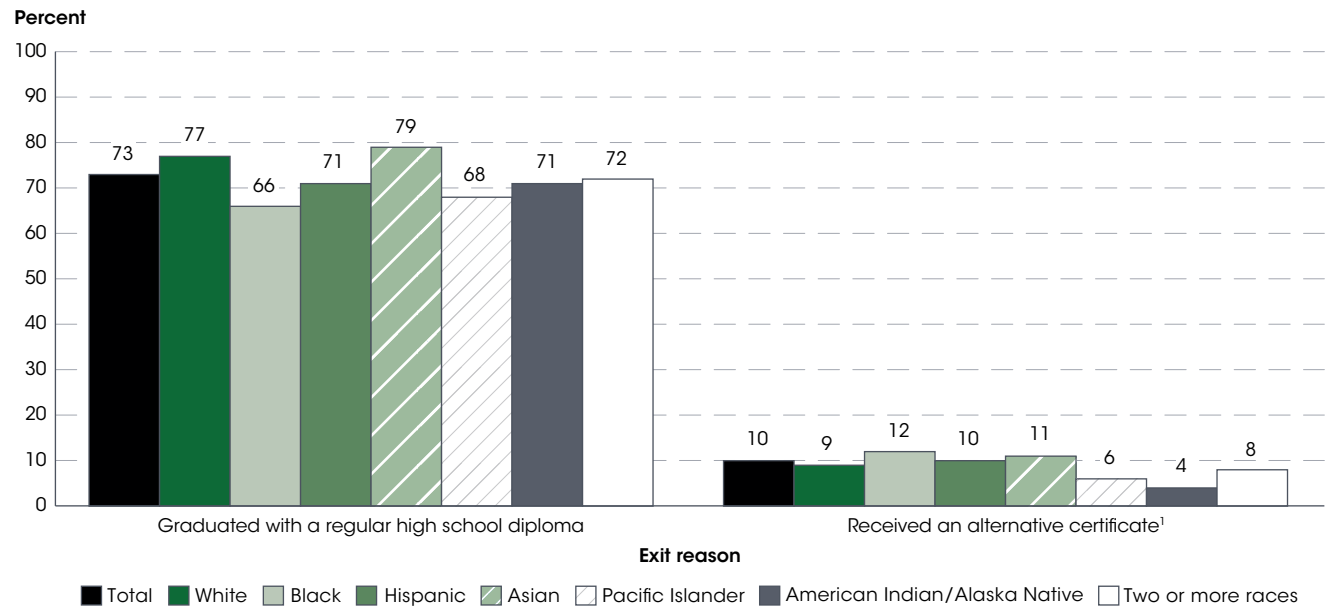
Educational environment data are also available for students ages 6–21 served under IDEA. About 95 percent of students ages 6–21 served under IDEA in fall 2018 were enrolled in regular schools. Three percent of students served under IDEA were enrolled in separate schools (public or private) for students with disabilities; 1 percent were placed by their parents in regular private schools;³ 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) inside general classes in regular schools increased from 47 percent in fall 2000 to 64 percent in fall 2018. In contrast, during the same period, the percentage of students who spent 40 to 79 percent of the school day

inside general classes decreased from 30 to 18 percent, and the percentage of students who spent less than 40 percent of their time inside general classes decreased from 20 to 13 percent. In fall 2018, the percentage of students served under IDEA who spent most of the school day inside general classes was highest for students with speech or language impairments (88 percent). Approximately two-thirds of students with specific learning disabilities (72 percent), visual impairments (68 percent), other health impairments (67 percent), developmental delays (66 percent), and hearing impairments (63 percent) spent most of the school day inside general classes. In contrast, 17 percent of students with intellectual disabilities and 14 percent of students with multiple disabilities spent most of the school day inside general classes.

Data are also available for students ages 14–21 served under IDEA who exited school during school year 2017–18, including exit reason.⁴ Approximately 414,000 students ages 14–21 served under IDEA exited school in 2017–18: over two-thirds (73 percent) graduated with

a regular high school diploma, 16 percent dropped out, 10 percent received an alternative certificate,⁵ 1 percent reached the maximum age⁶ 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 2017–18



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.
 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. Includes imputations for missing or unavailable data from Vermont. 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 20, 2020, from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data/state-level-data-files/index.html>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2019*, table 219.90.

Among students ages 14–21 served under IDEA who exited school in school year 2017–18, 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 (79 percent) and lowest for Black

students (66 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 in 2017–18 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 2017–18, 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 (86 percent) and lowest for students with multiple

disabilities (47 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 in 2017–18 was highest for students with emotional disturbances (32 percent) and lowest for students with deaf-blindness (5 percent).

Endnotes:

¹ 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 percent of total enrollment is based on total public school enrollment in prekindergarten through grade 12.

² In 2018–19, the unrounded percentage of White students with disabilities who received services under IDEA for autism was also higher than the percentage for students overall, but both rounded to 11 percent.

³ 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.

⁴ 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.

⁵ 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.

⁶ 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 2019*, 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