



National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities

Key Points of **Translating National Data into State and Local Practice**

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*A Teleseminar presented by
The National Dropout Prevention Center
for Students with Disabilities*

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On February 6, the National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD) presented a teleseminar, “Translating National Data into State and Local Practice.” Dr. José Blackorby, a program manager for Disability Policy at SRI International, presented research that focused on how data from multiple studies and perspectives can be used for program planning and implementation at the state and local levels.

Also participating in the teleseminar was Dr. Loujeania Bost, who is the director of the NDPC-SD. Dr. Bost has an extensive background in working with students with disabilities and was the Chief of Statewide Compliance Monitoring and Technical Assistance for the Pennsylvania Department of Education. She has been a public school teacher, a program administrator serving adults and adolescents with mental retardation, and a researcher.

NDPC-SD, along with its partners, the Education Development Center, Inc. located in Newton, Massachusetts, and the Intercultural Development Research Association of San Antonio, Texas, welcomed listeners to the first teleseminar on Dropout Prevention for Students with Disabilities for the 2006 year. Participants from more than 32 state education departments (including Hawaii and the Virgin Islands), parent training and information centers, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), several universities and technical assistance centers, local education agencies, and other agencies concerned about outcomes for students with disabilities attended.

NDPC-SD’s seminars are designed to: (1) provide evidence-based information that will be useful to state education agencies, school districts, and schools in the design and implementation of effective dropout prevention programs to help students with disabilities stay in school and graduate, and (2) create dialogue between researchers who have successfully implemented effective approaches to reduce dropout rates, as well as state education agencies and local school personnel seeking to establish such programs.

The complete teleseminar transcript is available on NDPC-SD’s web site (<http://www.dropoutprevention.org>). NDPC-SD is also making these *Key Points* available on its web site to community members, educators, policymakers and parents in both Spanish and English.

KEY POINTS

Key Point: National research on students with disabilities has a long, 30-year history that has helped inform policymakers and educators.

Milestones throughout those 30 years of research include the following.

- The first national study on students with disabilities was in the 1970s with the passage of the *Education of All Handicapped Children’s Act* (EHA) which looked at how EHA was being implemented. The study, conducted by SRI International, looked to see if Child Count was being implemented—if students were being identified, if multidisciplinary teams were being appropriately put together, and whether students were actually getting services they were entitled to under the law.
- A new set of research questions in the early 1980s generated a series of studies that looked at what happened to students with disabilities after they had been provided access to special education services. Did they finish school? Did they get jobs once they left school? Did they go on to college? Those studies found that there were difficulties that students with disabilities faced once they left school, including low employment rates.
- OSEP’s 10-year (1983 to 1993) National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) yielded valuable information that could be generalized at the national level. Findings showed that students with disabilities have very high dropout rates and have low employment rates. These findings were used to inform the 1991 re-authorization and to set priorities for resources needed for research and technical assistance.
- OSEP commissioned an additional seven studies, including a national Transition Study that covered the full range of students with disabilities in all content areas,

the National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study (infants and toddlers with disabilities), the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (the second version of the NLTS), the Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education and the Special Education Expenditure Project.

Key Point: Longitudinal studies provide insights into how things change over time.

“Our understandings of what disability is and how we define it and how we measure it have changed over time, and even at the level of which disabilities are included under IDEA.”

- Over time, the distribution across disability has changed; students have been placed in different disability categories over time.
- There are fewer students being identified over the last 13 years in the category of mental retardation. There are many more students receiving services in the area of “other” health impairment (i.e., attention deficit and hyperactivity).

Key Point: Disabilities is a complicated construct.

- Across all disability categories, there are some students who were reported to have difficulties in just one area, but there are also some who were reported to have two, three or more areas of difficulty.
- Disabilities proportionally affect more boys than girls. About two-thirds of students and youth with disabilities are boys, compared to one-third who are girls. This is particularly pronounced in the areas of emotional disturbance and autism.
- Disabilities also proportionally affect African Americans more than any other ethnic group. Furthermore, the disproportionality observed among African Americans is centralized in four of the disability categories: mental retardation, emotional disturbance, traumatic brain injury and multiple disabilities.
- While there are students with disabilities across all economic strata, it is the case that students with disabilities are more likely to live in lower-income families. This is particularly evident with mental retardation and emotional disturbance.

Key Point: There is tremendous diversity in the settings of specialized education services.

- Students spend less than 20 percent of their time outside the general education setting.
- Some students are more included in general education settings than others. Students who have speech or language impairments are most likely to spend the most time in general education settings. Students with mental retardation, autism, or multiple disabilities are most likely to spend time in segregated settings. There is equal distribution of time and setting for students with hearing impairments, visual impairments, orthopedic impairments, etc.
- As students get older, they spend less time in general education settings. African American students are more likely to be in segregated settings and less likely to be in integrated settings, in comparison to students who are White, Hispanic or Asian/Pacific Islander.
- Students who spend more time in general education language arts tend to be in better health than their peers in special education. Also, students in general education language arts settings can speak better than their peers who are in special education, although not to the same degree. The same pattern is evident for social skills, self-care skills and cognitive skills.
- Per year, approximately \$80 billion is spent delivering services to students with disabilities. Fifty percent is special education funding, 27 percent is from regular education, and the remainder is spent on special programs.
- Providing services to students with multiple disabilities or autism is more expensive than providing services to students with learning disabilities or speech impairments.

Key Point: Most parents report being satisfied with the education being provided to their children.

- Over half (52 percent) of parents report being “very satisfied,” 34 percent are “somewhat satisfied,” and a relatively small number of parents are “somewhat dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” with the education their child receives.



- There are many more students getting As, Bs, and Cs than students getting lower grades. Students with visual impairments or language impairments are more likely to get As than students with learning disabilities or mental retardation. Students with emotional disturbance are more likely to get low grades.
- Students with mental retardation, traumatic brain injury, and multiple disabilities tend to have proportionally lower scores on the Woodcock Johnson letter word identification test than students with speech impairments or visual impairments. Students who are included mostly in general education settings tend to have the highest scores.

Key Point: **Students who have stability in their school careers are more likely to complete school.**

- Fourteen percent of students are suspended or expelled in the last year of elementary school. That more than doubles to 30 percent in secondary school. This is particularly disturbing given that disciplinary actions increase the chance that the student will drop out of school.
- About half of the students with emotional disturbances have been suspended or expelled within the last year, regardless of whether they are in elementary or secondary school. But suspension or expulsion increases are evident in other disability categories as well: students with speech impairments rise from 5 percent in elementary school to 18 percent in high school. The same is true for students with visual impairments.
- In elementary school, 4 percent of students have changed schools at least four times; that goes up by a factor of three when they get into secondary school. The mobility rate is highest for students with emotional disturbances, but it is also high for students in most other disability categories.

Key Point: **Students surveyed recognize that school is a part of their success in life but also express some reservations that they will actually be able to succeed in school.**

- Sixty percent of students surveyed say they do not know how to do better in school. Sixty-five percent think they have no control over the grades they get in school.
- The majority of students surveyed agree that school is part of helping them succeed in life. And most also agree that school is the best place for them to learn.

If you would like to contact Dr. Blackorby, you are welcome to e-mail him directly at jose.blackorby@sri.com. You can also visit the NDPC-SD web site at <http://www.dropoutprevention.org> to learn more about working together to provide successful school outcomes for students with disabilities.



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