

Children Enrolled in Special Education

DEFINITION

Children enrolled in special education is the percentage of children ages 3 to 21 who are enrolled in special education in Rhode Island elementary and secondary schools.

SIGNIFICANCE

Special education and related services are important resources for improving long-term outcomes for children with special needs, such as improving student achievement and graduation rates, increasing participation in postsecondary education and increasing wages.^{1,2} The No Child Left Behind Act now requires states, districts and schools to demonstrate adequate yearly progress towards proficiency in reading and math by all students, including students with disabilities. This provision is intended to increase expectations and accountability so that more students with disabilities achieve grade-level standards.³

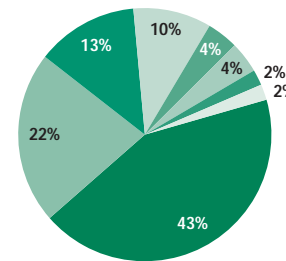
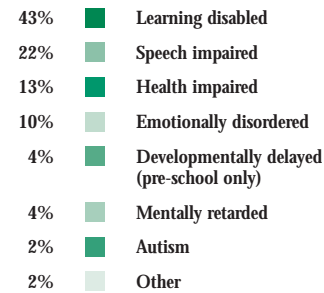
The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that local school districts identify and provide multidisciplinary evaluations for students ages 3 to 21 whom they have reason to believe are students with disabilities. Once found eligible for special education, a student must be provided with an Individualized

Education Program (IEP) laying out goals, outlining specific steps for achieving the goals and providing services for the student based on their individual needs. Services described in the IEP must be provided in the least restrictive environment, i.e. to the extent appropriate, the child should receive special services in a setting that is integrated with other children with and without disabilities.

The percentage of students identified for special education services in Rhode Island has increased substantially over the past twenty years.⁴ In the 2000-2001 school year (the most recent year national data were tabulated), Rhode Island had the highest percentage of public school students identified as disabled and receiving special education services under IDEA in the nation.⁵ Between the 1992-1993 and 2003-2004 school years, special education enrollment increased from 16% to 21% of all enrolled students.⁶

In 2002, the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education called for reform to the national special education system by increasing efforts to identify problems earlier and to provide swift intervention to prevent failure rather than waiting for a child to fail.⁷

Special Education Enrollment by Disability, Rhode Island, 2003-2004



n = 32,925

Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education, 2003-2004 school year.

◆ Students with learning disabilities and students with speech/language impairments accounted for nearly two-thirds (65%) of special education enrollment in 2003-2004.⁸

◆ In 2004, children between the ages of 3 and 8 years old accounted for more than one-quarter of all children enrolled in special education.⁹

Reading Difficulties and Special Education

◆ National data show that almost half of the children in special education are identified as having a learning disability, with 80% of these children receiving services because they have not learned to read.¹⁰

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Table 34.

Children and Youth in Special Education, by Primary Disability, Ages 3-21, Rhode Island, 2003-2004

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS	EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE	MENTALLY RETARDED	AUTISM	HEALTH IMPAIRED	LEARNING DISABLED	SPEECH DISORDER	DEVELOPMENTALLY DELAYED	OTHER	TOTAL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	% STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION
Barrington	3,305	56	8	26	88	214	148	23	25	588	18%
Bristol-Warren	3,576	68	50	26	31	338	169	32	26	740	21%
Burrillville	2,527	69	20	24	126	167	124	19	14	563	22%
Central Falls	3,704	107	41	7	85	541	133	48	18	980	26%
Charlho	3,712	59	15	20	49	271	212	39	22	687	19%
Coventry	5,699	69	35	12	60	782	155	50	23	1,186	21%
Cranston	10,784	185	56	43	306	1,288	390	86	47	2,401	22%
Cumberland	5,088	139	25	36	308	345	315	49	32	1,249	25%
East Greenwich	2,399	31	5	21	91	106	143	14	14	425	18%
East Providence	5,945	190	62	29	330	512	299	29	42	1,493	25%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	2,095	41	15	10	111	104	127	11	9	428	20%
Foster	349	1	1	1	3	12	34	0	2	54	15%
Foster-Glocester	1,685	21	11	7	26	96	52	0	5	218	13%
Glocester	748	1	6	4	12	45	78	9	4	159	21%
Jamestown	548	5	3	14	36	44	22	5	1	130	24%
Johnston	3,165	78	21	21	182	331	189	42	24	888	28%
Lincoln	3,453	53	19	24	168	261	166	30	18	739	21%
Little Compton	313	4	1	1	7	41	29	1	4	88	28%
Middletown	2,607	46	7	17	89	259	158	4	14	594	23%
Narragansett	1,655	17	3	10	46	122	140	19	8	365	22%
New Shoreham	140	0	1	1	0	6	13	0	0	21	15%
Newport	2,738	86	10	23	27	422	106	74	23	771	28%
North Kingstown	4,338	66	19	11	52	409	226	23	27	833	19%
North Providence	3,373	81	25	16	165	203	152	21	22	685	20%
North Smithfield	1,868	20	6	3	44	156	96	13	12	350	19%
Pawtucket	9,518	236	119	57	167	828	402	139	36	1,984	21%
Portsmouth	2,851	44	10	26	85	166	212	3	14	560	20%
Providence	27,399	680	392	27	193	2,910	956	124	41	5,323	19%
Scituate	1,731	8	2	11	33	87	146	11	1	299	17%
Smithfield	2,648	9	11	14	72	157	145	14	13	435	16%
South Kingstown	4,018	72	20	34	149	347	254	32	28	936	23%
Tiverton	2,123	32	5	11	44	232	148	5	15	492	23%
Warwick	11,626	147	72	57	507	976	397	159	73	2,388	21%
West Warwick	3,772	134	27	13	30	437	243	39	29	952	25%
Westerly	3,694	82	11	22	91	237	176	31	18	668	18%
Woonsocket	6,583	219	145	29	373	521	304	87	57	1,735	26%
Charter Schools	922	5	0	2	7	55	54	1	4	128	14%
State Run Schools	1,278	7	0	0	31	114	9	0	82	243	19%
DCYF*	NA	134	1	0	0	10	0	2	0	147	NA
Core Cities	53,714	1,462	734	156	875	5,659	2,144	511	204	11,745	22%
Remainder of State	98,063	1,694	545	552	3,311	8,314	4,915	774	557	20,662	21%
Rhode Island	153,977	3,302	1,280	710	4,224	14,152	7,122	1,288	847	32,925	21%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2003-2004 school year. Office of Special Populations, June 30, 2004.

The denominator (number of students) is the "resident average daily membership" provided by the RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. For regional school districts, state-run schools and independent charter schools, a measure provided by the Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education equivalent to resident average daily membership was used.

"Other" includes deaf and blind, visually impaired or blind, hearing impaired, multi-handicapped, orthopedically impaired and traumatic brain injury. Prior to 2002-2003, the category "emotionally disordered" was called "behaviorally disordered."

Core cities are Central Falls, Newport, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick and Woonsocket.

Independent charter schools reported for this indicator are Beacon Charter School, Blackstone Academy, Compass School, CVS Highlander Charter School, International Charter School, Kingston Hill Academy, and Paul Cuffee Charter School.

"DCYF" refers to children in the care and custody of the Department of Children, Youth and Families, specifically those who are at the Training School or who are in out-of-home placement in residential facilities. This category does not include children in foster care.

Children attending schools out-of-district (e.g. when no appropriate placement exists in the district) are listed under the enrolling district, not the sending district.

References

¹ *Twenty-five years of educating children with disabilities*. (2001). Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum and Center on Education Policy.

^{2,4} *Children with disabilities study: Special education in the context of school reform*. (2002). Providence, RI: Rhode Island Technical Assistance Project.

³ *No state left behind: The challenges and opportunities of ESEA 2001*. (2002). Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

(continued on page 146)