

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 services are an important resource for improving long-term outcomes for children with special needs, such as improving student achievement and graduation rates, increasing participation in post-secondary education, and increasing wages.^{1,2} Revisions to federal educational statutes, signed into law early in 2002, now require 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

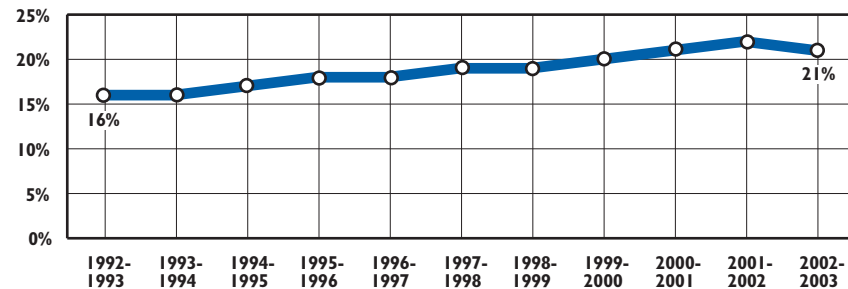
The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that local school districts identify and provide multidisciplinary evaluations for students ages 3 to 21 whom they have reason to believe are students with disabilities. Once found eligible for special education due to disability,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

with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) laying out goals, outlining specific steps for achieving the goals, and providing services for the student based on their individual needs.⁴

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. This is sometimes referred to as inclusion and is meant to raise expectations for student performance, improve opportunities to learn alongside nondisabled peers and improve coordination between regular and special educators.^{5,6}

In Rhode Island, 48% of special education students spend less than 21% of the school day outside the regular classroom, in keeping with national averages (47%). Rhode Island lags behind national inclusion rates for children who may require more assistance: Only 19% of Rhode Island students (compared with 28% nationally) fall into the middle tier of inclusion, i.e. 21-60% of their time outside a regular classroom; 33% of Rhode Island special education students spend more than 60% of their time outside the general classroom or are in separate facilities, compared to 24% nationally.⁷


Special Education Enrollment as a Percentage of All Students, Rhode Island, 1992 to 1993 - 2002 to 2003



Source: Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Office of Special Education, 1992-1993 to 2002-2003 school years.

- ◆ Between the 1992-1993 and 2002-2003 school years, special education enrollment increased from 16% of all students to 21% of all students.⁸
- ◆ Students with learning disabilities and students with speech/language impairments constituted the largest categories of students enrolled in special education throughout the decade, together accounting for more than two-thirds (68%) of special education enrollment in 2002-03.⁹
- ◆ Approximately two-thirds of the increase in special education enrollment in the last decade is accounted for by combined increases in lower incidence disabilities, including health impairments, emotional disturbance, and autism.¹⁰
- ◆ Speech/language impairments accounted for about one-quarter of the increase in special education enrollment over the past decade. Learning disabilities increased slightly over the decade and declined as a proportion of special education enrollment.¹¹

Children Enrolled in Special Education

Table 30.

Children and Youth in Special Education, by Primary Disability, Ages 3-21, Rhode Island, 2002-2003

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	3,272	65	10	20	68	254	147	21	28	613	19%
Bristol-Warren	3,719	60	53	12	24	436	180	38	25	828	22%
Burrillville	2,587	65	17	19	108	176	124	20	14	543	21%
Central Falls	3,695	111	42	6	75	509	121	48	22	934	25%
Charlho	3,680	51	12	16	41	328	232	34	26	740	20%
Coventry	5,645	77	41	6	73	795	146	47	21	1,206	21%
Cranston	10,818	169	45	30	251	1,395	376	93	48	2,407	22%
Cumberland	5,262	137	28	30	307	361	320	43	37	1,263	24%
East Greenwich	2,385	31	6	26	92	121	139	22	11	448	19%
East Providence	6,231	159	57	31	330	514	308	21	41	1,461	23%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	2,132	47	14	13	101	89	138	8	8	418	20%
Foster	365	1	1	0	2	11	41	3	2	61	17%
Foster-Glocester	1,706	14	13	5	13	133	47	0	5	230	13%
Glocester	728	0	7	4	13	44	81	7	7	163	22%
Jamestown	741	6	2	11	35	49	29	5	2	139	19%
Johnston	3,254	74	26	19	171	309	222	31	20	872	27%
Lincoln	3,618	47	25	24	164	286	167	29	20	762	21%
Little Compton	443	3	2	1	6	42	25	1	3	83	19%
Middletown	2,733	47	5	18	84	272	171	3	11	611	22%
Narragansett	1,718	27	3	10	47	155	137	21	10	410	24%
New Shoreham	136	0	1	0	0	9	9	0	0	19	14%
Newport	2,895	84	7	24	28	466	131	27	30	797	28%
North Kingstown	4,342	63	17	10	42	403	195	26	18	774	18%
North Providence	3,381	67	18	13	135	259	148	17	22	679	20%
North Smithfield	1,841	21	8	4	45	161	90	14	13	356	19%
Pawtucket	9,628	242	134	58	175	970	509	146	40	2,274	24%
Portsmouth	2,868	42	7	20	74	181	218	2	15	559	19%
Providence	28,046	523	346	24	200	3,205	958	76	41	5,373	19%
Scituate	1,758	7	3	10	32	99	159	5	5	320	18%
Smithfield	2,670	11	9	14	85	192	175	23	12	521	20%
South Kingstown	4,163	78	20	26	127	376	263	25	28	943	23%
Tiverton	2,184	31	3	8	41	243	157	5	12	500	23%
Warwick	11,800	149	77	45	443	1,183	423	165	82	2,567	22%
West Warwick	3,927	117	24	8	23	441	220	25	26	884	23%
Westerly	3,688	87	10	22	79	245	212	41	16	712	19%
Woonsocket	6,668	215	148	16	365	509	262	84	52	1,651	25%
State Run Schools	1,159	12	0	0	25	111	12	0	82	242	21%
Charter Schools	649	4	0	2	5	31	33	0	5	80	12%
DCYF*	NA	158	1	0	4	24	0	0	2	189	NA
Core Cities	54,859	1,292	701	136	866	6,100	2,201	406	211	11,913	22%
Remainder of State	99,868	1,636	540	467	3,033	9,121	5,079	770	562	21,208	21%
Rhode Island	156,535	3,102	1,242	605	3,933	15,387	7,325	1,176	862	33,632	21%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2002-2003 school year. Office of Special Education, June 30, 2003.

The denominator (number of students) is the "resident average daily membership" as calculated by the RI Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

"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 "emotional disturbance" was called "behaviorally disordered."

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

"State-Run Schools" includes Davies Career and Vocational Technical School, Metropolitan Career Technical Center and Rhode Island School for the Deaf. The Training School is not included. Charter Schools include Blackstone Academy, CVS Highlander, Compass 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. They do 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 *Children with Disabilities Study: Special Education in the Context of School Reform*. (2002). Providence, RI: Commissioned by the Rhode Island General Assembly in July 1999.
- ³ *No State Left Behind: The Challenges and Opportunities of ESEA 2001*. (March 2002). Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.
- ⁴ Martin, E.W. et al. (Spring 1996). *The Legislative and Litigation History of Special Education. Special Education for Students with Disabilities*. Los Altos, CA: Center for the Future of Children, David and Lucille Packard Foundation.

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