

Children Enrolled in Special Education

DEFINITION

Children enrolled in special education is the number 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 postsecondary education, increasing wages, and reducing disproportionately high rates of single parenthood.^{1,2,3}

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 have disabilities. Once found eligible for special education due to disability, a student must be provided with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) which defines 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 or mainstreaming. Inclusion is meant to raise expectations for student performance, improve opportunities for the child with disabilities to learn alongside nondisabled peers, improve coordination between regular and special educators, and increase the school's accountability for performance.^{5,6}

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.⁷



Learning Disabilities and Reading Problems in the Early Grades

- ◆ Of the 33,058 children receiving special education services in 2001-2002, 48% were receiving services because of learning disabilities.⁸
- ◆ Many of the reading difficulties that result in the identification of children as learning disabled may be prevented through early identification and intervention programs. Frequently reading problems are not identified until the third or fourth grade, just as they become intractable and require more specialized interventions.⁹
- ◆ Prompt intervention may prevent some children from needing costlier special education services later. A recent study of Rhode Island's special education system recommends that the growth in the numbers of children identified as learning disabled can be addressed through high-quality literacy education for all children, coupled with increased capacity for identification and intensive instructional intervention for those children who fall behind in the early grades.¹⁰



Meeting the Needs of Children with Severe Disabilities

- ◆ Children with low-incidence but severe disabilities may require intensive, highly specialized and expensive services to reach their full potential. In Rhode Island, children with the highest educational costs include those with mental retardation, multiple disabilities and autism.¹¹
- ◆ In 2002 the President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education recommended that states be encouraged to allocate special safety net funds that would be available for schools and school districts to help educate children with the most intensive needs.¹²
- ◆ The Commission noted that currently small towns may face disproportionate costs, and that local education agencies with outstanding special education programs or medical facilities often become the centers of high concentrations of children with high-intensity special needs. State-based safety net funding would help distribute these costs across a larger population.¹³

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Table 29.

Children and Youth in Special Education, by Primary Disability, Ages 3-21, Rhode Island, 2001-2002

SCHOOL DISTRICT	TOTAL # OF STUDENTS	BEHAVIORALLY DISORDERED	MENTALLY RETARDED	AUTISM	HEALTH IMPAIRED	LEARNING DISABLED	SPEECH DISORDER	DEVELOPMENTALLY DELAYED	OTHER	TOTAL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	% STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION
Barrington	3,172	58	13	10	48	271	142	24	20	586	18%
Bristol-Warren	3,659	55	53	9	16	477	209	30	16	865	24%
Burrillville	2,630	77	23	14	103	200	98	21	18	554	21%
Central Falls	3,624	95	48	3	75	518	107	49	18	913	25%
Charlton	3,688	45	13	10	41	338	205	24	32	708	19%
Coventry	5,654	76	41	7	73	827	142	55	23	1,244	22%
Cranston	10,625	156	41	24	164	1,466	389	100	47	2,387	22%
Cumberland	5,159	124	34	23	303	339	315	46	42	1,226	24%
East Greenwich	2,328	27	4	21	91	149	115	20	11	438	19%
East Providence	6,270	141	60	24	316	491	336	27	45	1,440	23%
Exeter-W. Greenwich	2,060	53	14	9	107	86	137	7	7	420	20%
Foster	371	0	1	0	3	12	34	1	2	53	14%
Foster-Glocester	1,604	11	10	4	14	154	49	0	4	246	15%
Glocester	752	3	10	5	9	44	77	8	5	161	21%
Jamestown	570	4	2	8	30	56	23	7	2	132	23%
Johnston	3,256	64	26	11	146	337	234	20	18	856	26%
Lincoln	3,625	45	24	21	177	295	137	32	20	751	21%
Little Compton	329	3	1	0	4	42	22	1	3	76	23%
Middletown	2,709	46	6	16	69	282	162	5	5	591	22%
Narragansett	1,686	26	1	8	54	189	128	10	9	425	25%
New Shoreham	133	1	0	0	0	14	11	1	0	27	20%
Newport	2,868	92	10	17	30	473	94	36	34	786	27%
North Kingstown	4,182	63	18	10	31	382	223	27	22	776	19%
North Providence	3,328	86	17	11	119	314	174	43	21	785	24%
North Smithfield	1,807	21	8	3	48	161	85	10	11	347	19%
Pawtucket	9,463	245	134	55	163	1,002	472	146	40	2,257	24%
Portsmouth	2,801	37	6	20	70	177	191	2	19	522	19%
Providence	27,222	481	332	31	70	3,253	890	63	58	5,178	19%
Scituate	1,720	7	4	8	34	92	148	8	6	307	18%
Smithfield	2,624	10	9	5	68	200	157	15	11	475	18%
South Kingstown	4,144	73	22	21	114	360	232	19	27	868	21%
Tiverton	2,129	23	5	7	42	233	138	9	9	466	22%
Warwick	11,662	177	81	34	384	1,321	362	248	69	2,676	23%
West Warwick	3,622	117	18	7	19	444	208	28	25	866	24%
Westerly	3,639	88	9	25	83	290	214	27	16	752	21%
Woonsocket	6,476	218	144	17	314	544	279	66	49	1,631	25%
State Run Schools	1,003	9	0	0	18	102	13	0	82	224	22%
Charter Schools	323	0	0	2	1	11	28	1	0	43	13%
Core Cities	53,275	1,248	686	130	671	6,234	2,050	388	224	11,631	22%
Remainder of State	98,316	1,600	556	368	2,761	9,599	4,889	847	540	21,160	22%
Rhode Island	152,917	2,857	1,242	500	3,451	15,946	6,980	1,236	846	33,058	22%

Source of Data for Table/Methodology

Rhode Island Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2000-2001 school year. Office of Special Education, June 30, 2002. 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.

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

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

References

¹ Terman, et al. (Spring 1996). "Special Education for Students with Disabilities: Analysis and Recommendations" in *Special Education for Students with Disabilities*. Los Altos, CA: Center for the Future of Children, David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

² *Twenty-five Years of Educating Children with Disabilities* (2001). Washington, DC: American Youth Policy Forum and Center on Education Policy.

^{3,8,10,11,12} *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.

⁴ Martin, E.W. et al. "The Legislative and Litigation History of Special Education" in *Special Education for Students with Disabilities* (Spring 1996). Los Altos, CA: Center for the Future of Children, David and Lucile Packard Foundation.

⁵ "Quality of Education Environments" (1999) in *The Condition of Education*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

⁶ "Quality of Education Environments" (2001) in *The Condition of Education*. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

⁷ *No State Left Behind: The Challenges and Opportunities of ESEA 2001* (March 2002). Denver, CO: Education Commission of the States.

⁸ Rhode Island Department of Education, 2002.

¹³ *A New Era: Revitalizing Special Education for Children and Their Families* (July 1, 2002). Washington, DC: President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education.