

SLIIDEA

STUDY OF STATE AND LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

Highlights from the 1999-2000 School Year - Year 1 Data Collection

In 1997, Congress made significant changes to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the landmark law that ensured educational equity for children with disabilities. With access to a free public education already guaranteed for 6.1 million children with disabilities, the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA set educators' and policymakers' sights on improving educational outcomes for these students. As part of the 1997 reauthorization, Congress asked the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) to conduct a national and longitudinal assessment examining how well schools, districts, and states were making progress toward a number of goals.

Abt Associates and Westat (the subcontractor for Phase 1) are conducting the assessment for OSEP.¹ The research team collected data for the 1999-2000 school year through a census of states and a nationally representative sample of districts and schools.² In this brief, we use highlights from that data collection to capture the status of implementation on a number of the congressional goals. These results are representative of all states, districts and schools across the country.

I. Increasing Parent Involvement

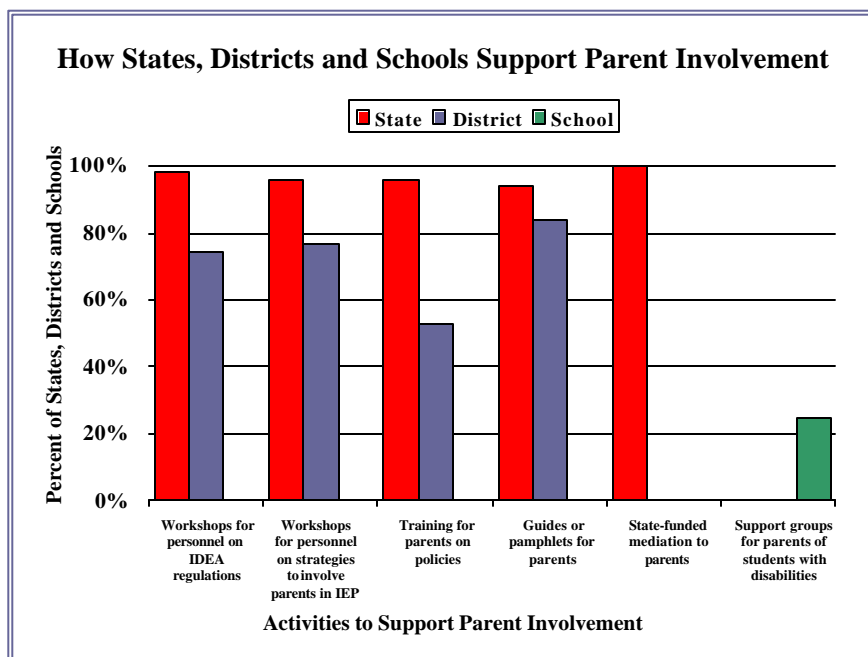
Congress asked how well educators are providing for the participation of parents in the education of their children who have disabilities, as well as how well they resolve disagreements between educators and parents.

Our inquiries of states, schools and districts revealed the following:

Eighty percent of states have policies that support parent involvement in the IEP process. The most common are providing translators and parent advocates at IEP meetings.

Most³ states and districts offer workshops, parent training and informational documents to promote parent involvement. Some schools offer support groups. The chart below provides details.

Many states issue reports on school performance. States issue reports most often through the Internet, and two-thirds require districts to distribute reports to parents.



Sixty-six percent of schools report information to parents about the performance of children with disabilities, but only 24 percent report dropout rates for these students.

Formal disputes occur infrequently in districts. During the 1999-2000 school year, 87 percent of districts reported no mediation cases, 94 percent reported no dispute cases that went to impartial due process hearings, 99 percent reported no dispute cases that went to state administrative review of a hearing decision and 97 percent reported no dispute cases that went to state/federal judicial review of a hearing decision.

Yet, when disputes do occur, supports are in place. All states offer state-funded mediations to parents and have done so for 10 years on average. Most also offer training courses for mediators.

Use of strategies to seek parent input into the IEP process varies. Between 70 percent and 90 percent of schools “often” or “sometimes” seek parent input into the IEP by telephone, written form or through a single point of contact. Less than 40 percent use parent advocates, schedule meetings with a parent to review an IEP draft or send drafts of the IEP to parents prior to the IEP meeting.

Few schools initiate an impartial due process hearing (13 percent) or mediation (17 percent) when a parent does not give consent for an initial evaluation. Rather, schools say they usually continue to monitor the child’s progress and provide additional information to parents at a later date.

Schools rarely have a formal policy for providing service to encourage parent participation in IEPs, but many informally offer services. About 40 percent of schools said they “sometimes” provide childcare and transportation services for parents.

Schools say parents of students with disabilities are active participants in their children’s education. Between 70 percent and 85 percent of principals said “all” or “most” parents are active participants in student placement decisions, eligibility determination meetings and discussions about evaluations.

II. Helping Students Make Transitions

Transitions for Young Children

Congress was interested in learning what states, districts and schools were doing to help young children with disabilities make successful transitions from early intervention services to preschool education and from preschool education to elementary school. In addition, Congress wanted to know how states, districts and schools were coordinating services with each other and with preschool services and health and social services. Our inquiries revealed the following:

Ninety-two percent of the states have coordination plans for early intervention services and 94 percent have plans for preschool services.

Many districts coordinate early intervention and preschool services with other agencies. The coordination is more common for preschool than for early intervention services.

Coordination of services with Head Start is the most common for preschool activities. It occurs in 98 percent of the districts.

Most states and districts engage in activities to identify young children at risk of failing. They use the following practices:

- ▶ Three quarters of states and 86 percent of districts screen preschoolers for vision, hearing and other problems.
- ▶ Eighty-five percent of states and most districts disseminate information about screening practices using strategies such as posting signs, sending notes home from school and distributing press releases.

Most districts employ a variety of strategies to aid transitions from early childhood to preschool and from preschool to kindergarten. But preschool to kindergarten strategies are more common than those for early childhood transitions.

Transitions for Youth with Disabilities

Congress also was interested in learning how states, districts and schools were helping students make transitions from school to adult life. In addition, Congress wanted to know how states, districts and schools were coordinating services with each other and with preschool services and health and social services. We found the following:

Eighty-eight percent of the states have written agreements with vocational rehabilitation agencies. About half the states have written transition agreements with employment/training, public mental health and public social service agencies.

Transition agreements are less common at the district level. Sixty-four percent of districts have written transition agreements with public agencies responsible for vocational rehabilitation and 51 percent with agencies responsible for employment and training. Agreements are less common with social service, mental health and private employment or vocational rehabilitation agencies.

Ninety percent of the states and about 66 percent of the districts employ one or more transition coordinators. About half the districts have a transition coordinator at each high school.

Nearly 75 percent of the districts provide training to special education teachers on strategies to help students with secondary transitions and 44 percent offer training to related services staff. Training for general education teachers is less common – about 25 percent offer it.

Most districts offer a range of transition services to students with disabilities. Better than 90 percent of districts offer the following services to students: instruction in filling out job applications and interviewing for jobs; instructions in job searching and counseling about post-secondary education; counseling about support services; job readiness/prevocational training; counseling about financial aid; formal assessment of career skills; and community work experience and exploration.

More than 90 percent of high schools offer a formal assessment of career skills or interests, career counseling, job readiness training, instructions in job searching and other similar services. Between 80 and 90 percent offer community work experience and referrals to potential employers.

More than 80 percent of high schools teach money management, personal hygiene and health and safety. Many also teach such skills as cooking, homemaking, self-advocacy, use of public transportation and other important transition skills.

III. Establishing Accountability Systems

Congress was interested in learning what states, districts and schools were doing to improve the participation and performance of children with disabilities on assessments, as compared with students who have no disabilities. Our findings show that states and districts are using policy tools and allocating resources to establish accountability systems for children with disabilities, although states report more use of these tools than districts. The findings include the following:

Most state required districts to implement statewide assessments. Ninety-six percent of the states report having mandatory assessments for districts.

Between 92 percent and 94 percent of states allow presentation, timing, setting and response accommodations for students with disabilities taking the state tests. Eighty-two percent of states allow for other types of accommodations, the most frequent being those identified as behavioral supports. Districts follow a pattern similar to the states.

Ninety-four percent of the states with statewide assessments report their assessment results separately for students with disabilities, and 88 percent of them report the results of students with disabilities both separately and aggregated with other students. Most states issue reports about schools that include information about student participation and performance on achievement tests; yet, only 17 percent provide school reports that include separate scores for students with disabilities.

Fifty-three percent of states require districts to report separate results for students with disabilities on district-wide assessments. States, however, do not follow their own policy guidance when reporting on schools.

Most states and less than half the districts use the same content standards in core subjects for students with disabilities as for all students. And as the chart illustrates, only a small percentage of states

compared with over one-third of the districts have separate, modified or enhanced content standards for students with disabilities.

Fewer states – between 63 percent and 78 percent – have the same performance standards for all students.

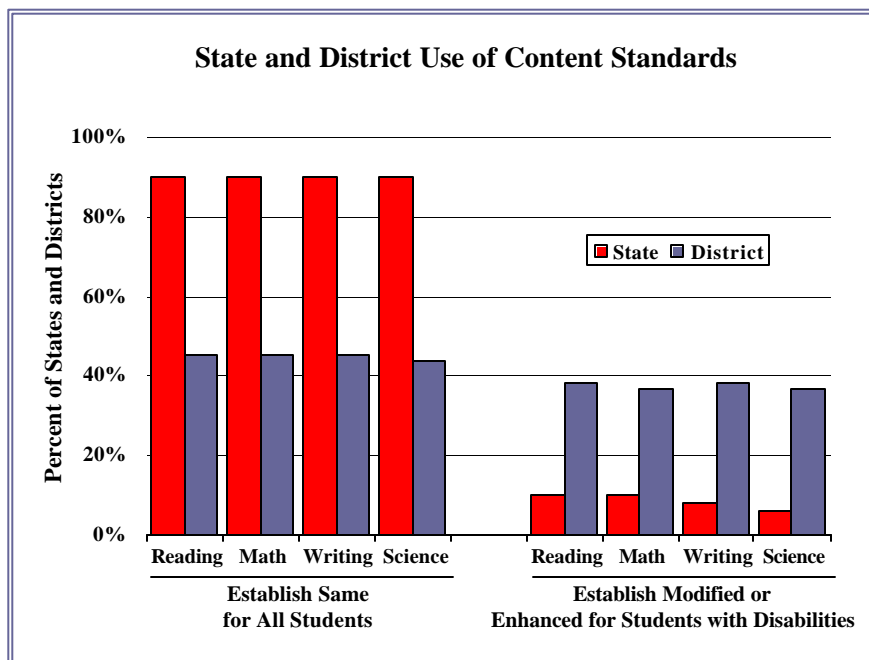
Many states offer assistance, rewards or sanctions to districts or schools based on student performance data. Eighty-four percent offer assistance, either financial, technical, or both. Just over half sanction schools or districts for poor performance and just under half reward them for good performance. Forty percent do both.

About half the districts administer district-wide tests not required by the state. Of the 52 percent of districts that administer such tests, only 38 percent report the results separately for students who have disabilities.

Most districts do not reward or sanction schools based on test results. Of the 9 percent that do use tests for these purposes, most reward rather than sanction.

Many schools provide information to parents about the aggregate performance of students with disabilities on standardized tests. Middle schools are more likely to provide this information than elementary and high schools.

Although most schools are in states with statewide assessments, schools report that students with disabilities are less likely to take the assessments than students without disabilities. Schools report that 7 percent of students with disabilities do not take the assessments, compared with 1 percent of students without disabilities.



¹ Supported under contract no. ED-00-CO-0026.

² Year 1 data were obtained from surveys mailed to 51 states (including the District of Columbia), 959 school districts and 1,869 schools. Response rates were 100 percent, 31 percent, and 40 percent, respectively. Non-response surveys were conducted at both the district and school levels. The district sample was re-weighted based upon data obtained from non-response survey. No evidence of non-response bias was found at the school level.

³ In this report, “most” means 90 percent or more, “many” means 66 percent to 89 percent.