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## **The Office of Special Education Programs' National Assessment Program**

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This module was published in the *Twenty-Third Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (2001)*, which was distributed in May 2002. It describes current long-term national studies funded by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), U.S. Department of Education. The module has been slightly reformatted to highlight the research targets of each study. Web sites are included. The citation is:

U.S. Department of Education. (2001). The Office of Special Education Programs' national assessment program *Twenty-third annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (pp. IV-33 to IV-38). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

The *Twenty-Third Annual Report* may be downloaded from:

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/Products/OSEP2001AnlRpt/index.html>

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THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS (OSEP) IS UNDERTAKING a comprehensive program of national assessment to provide information on a wide range of issues related to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as amended in 1997, and its effect on States, districts, schools, and children with disabilities and their families. Section 674(b) of IDEA requires OSEP to conduct a national assessment of special education to determine the effectiveness of the Act in achieving its purposes to provide information to the President, Congress, States, local educational agencies (LEAs), and the public on how to implement the Act more effectively, and to provide the President and Congress with information that will be useful in developing legislation to achieve the purposes of the Act more effectively. In addition, the national assessment will provide OSEP with information to use in measuring indicators of program effectiveness as part of the Government Performance

and Results Act (GPRA), in program planning, and in response to information requests from its many constituencies. The national assessment described below includes a set of child-based studies that assess the experiences and outcomes of children with disabilities across the age range. It also includes three studies that focus on States, districts, and schools to address questions of special education policy and program implementation.

## **Child-Based Longitudinal Studies**

### **National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study (NEILS)**

In 1996, OSEP began funding a multi-year study of infants and toddlers and their families who are receiving early intervention services through Part C of IDEA. This study, conducted by SRI International and its subcontractors (the Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, Research Triangle Institute, and the American Institutes for Research) follows a nationally representative sample of 3,338 families and children from the time they enroll in early intervention programs, through their time in these programs, and finally through the transition out of early intervention and into other settings. The study is answering a variety of questions about:

- \* The characteristics of program participants;
- \* The type and level of services they are receiving, and who is providing them;
- \* The outcomes realized by children and families during Part C participation and in the years that follow; and
- \* The association of outcomes with characteristics of the participants and services received.

Data are currently available from this study, which is expected to be completed in 2005. For more information, see: <http://www.sri.com/neils>

### **Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study (PEELS)**

OSEP has commissioned SRI and its subcontractors, Research Triangle Institute and Westat, to design this longitudinal study of children who are ages 3 to 5 and receiving special education services during the first year of the study. PEELS will involve a nationally representative sample of approximately 3,100 children in special education who will be followed into early elementary school. Information will be collected from parents, preschool and elementary school teachers, preschool directors, and school principals regarding children's characteristics, household contexts, school programs and related services, and outcomes in several domains.

\* Indicators from various relevant sources will permit examination of the factors that contribute to positive outcomes, and of these children's growth and change in academic and social domains.

\* The critical transition between preschool and kindergarten will be a particular aspect of the study.

\* The study features direct assessment of children, focusing on early reading development in these crucial formative years.

PEELS is currently in the design phase, with implementation planned to begin in the spring of 2001-2002 school year and continue through 2008. A web site with information on this project is located at: <http://www.sri.com/peels>

### **Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS)**

To begin to fill the information gap on elementary and middle school students in special education, OSEP awarded a contract for the SEELS to SRI International and its subcontractor, Westat, in February 2000. SEELS will include a nationally representative sample of approximately 14,000 students in special education who were age 6 and in first grade through age 12 in the 1999-2000 school year. The students will be followed as they transition from elementary to middle to high school. Key research questions for the study will address:

- \* Characteristics and functional abilities and disabilities of students in special education;
- \* Characteristics of their households;
- \* Characteristics of their schools, school programs, and classroom experiences; and
- \* Aspects of their lives out of school.

Initial SEELS data were collected during the spring of 2000 and became available in spring 2001. A year of reporting will complete the study in 2004-05. For additional information, see: <http://www.sri.com/seels>

### **National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)**

The implementation contract for NLTS2 was awarded to SRI International and Westat, its subcontractor, in January 2001. The study will involve a large, nationally representative sample of 13,000 students who will be ages 13 to 16 at the outset of the study. Data will be collected on:

- \* Their individual and household characteristics;
- \* Achievement scores on standardized assessments;
- \* Aspects of their schools, school programs, and classroom experiences;
- \* Secondary school performance and outcomes;
- \* Adult services and supports; and
- \* Early adult outcomes in the employment, education, independence, and social domains.

The study will be conducted over a 10-year period, following the oldest cohort of students for nine years, or until age 26. The length of the study will allow us to examine post-school outcomes during the early adult years so that experiences, such as employment after college, can be assessed.

Initial data for this study will be available in spring 2002, with subsequent waves of data collected through 2009. A year of reporting will complete the study in 2010. For additional information, see: <http://www.sri.com.nlts2>

## **Issue-Based Studies**

### **Study of Personnel Needs in Special Education (SPeNSE)**

In February 2000, OSEP contracted with Westat to conduct SPeNSE, a study involving extensive interviews with a national sample of 8,000 school personnel, including regular and special education teachers, speech-language pathologists, preschool special education teachers, and paraprofessionals serving students with disabilities. The study focuses on the adequacy of the workforce, with attempts to explain variations in workforce quantity and quality, based on:

- \* State and district policy;
- \* Working conditions;
- \* Preservice education;
- \* Continuing professional development; and
- \* Indicators of teacher quality, such as: tested ability, teaching credentials, professionalism, demographic representation, and classroom teaching practices.

Data from SPeNSE were available in spring of 2001. The study will conclude with a series of reports and dissemination activities in 2002. Further information is available at: <http://www.spense.org>

### **State and Local Implementation of IDEA (SLIIDEA)**

This study was designed to evaluate the implementation and impact of IDEA. The SLIIDEA study, awarded in April 2000 to Abt Associates and its sub-contractors (Westat and SRI) will provide information annually on the status of the implementation of the law and its effects on policies and practices at the State, district, and school levels, with focus on implementation issues in six cluster areas of IDEA:

- \* Improved student performance, including graduation rates;
- \* Supporting least restrictive environment;
- \* Improved student performance;
- \* Successful transitions for preschool children;
- \* Successful transitions to post-school life;
- \* Positive behavioral supports; and
- \* Positive parent involvement

Repeated large-scale surveys and special topical studies that include case studies and focus groups are planned. Data on State-level policies will be disseminated, starting in fall 2001. Subsequent data collection and analysis will focus on the district and school levels. SLIIDEA will be completed in 2005. Further information is available at: <http://www.abt.sliidea.org>

### **The Special Education Expenditure Project (SEEP)**

Through a contract awarded to the American Institutes for Research in February 1999, this study examines how Federal, State, and local funds are used to support programs and services for students with disabilities, with special attention to the fiscal provisions enacted under the IDEA Amendments of 1997. In addition to determining the total and per-pupil amounts spent on special education and related services throughout the United States, SEEP will collect data in such a way as to increase understanding of the overall patterns of educational dollars to students with disabilities.,

Initial data were available in summer 2001, with information disseminated through OSEP's Center for Educational Finance. The study will conclude in 2004. For additional information, see: <http://csef.air.org>

## **Status of the National Assessment Program**

The majority of studies in the National Assessment Program completed a design phase that included several complex tasks, including sample, selection, instrument, development, and testing, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) clearance of instrumentation, and recruitment of the sample. As a result, most of the studies have just finished their first wave of data collection or are still in the field

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The *Twenty-Third Annual Report* includes modules on results from:

NEILS: (a) Results Experienced by Children and Families Entering Early Intervention; (b) Characteristics of Children and Families Entering Early Intervention; and (c) Services Received by Children and Families Entering Early Intervention.

SEELS: Family Involvement in the Education of Elementary and Middle School Students Receiving Special Education

SPeNSE: Special Education Teacher Recruitment and Hiring (also available on the product list of the Alliance Project)

SLIIDEA: Using Implementation Data to Study State, District, and School Impacts.

<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/Products/OSEP2001AnlRpt/index.html>

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