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Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities In the Inner Cities

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Meeting the Needs of Students with Disabilities in the Inner Cities

Anecdotal information suggests that special education programs in inner cities face unique challenges, and differ from nationally representative data on special education students, personnel, and services. Despite a keen interest in exploring issues of inner city needs and services, due to the scarcity of data, OSEP must rely on information collected by the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), the National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students (NLTS), and secondary data sources. This chapter synthesizes information from a variety of those sources to provide a profile of special education in the nation's inner cities. The chapter addresses the following specific questions.

- What are the characteristics and needs of inner city students with disabilities as compared to students with disabilities in suburban and rural areas?
- How do special education services in inner city areas compare to special education in suburban and rural areas?
- How do poverty and race/ethnicity affect the need for and the nature of special education services in inner cities?
- How do outcomes for youth with disabilities in urban areas compare with outcomes for youth in suburban and rural areas?

Special education takes place within a community, a school district, and a school building. It is nested within a broader educational environment, and this educational environment naturally affects the need for special education services and the ability of the system to meet those needs. An example of the conditions in New York City illustrates some of the many challenges faced by inner city schools.

In New York City, poor and minority children are increasing as a percentage of total student growth. The social welfare index for children continues to decline; children are currently about 42 percent worse off than they were in 1974, and their welfare is likely to get even worse in the next five years. Unemployment, poverty, and child abuse are reaching epidemic proportions in New York City....[D]iseases, like AIDS and drug abuse, whose rapid growth are associated with poverty, are increasing at an explosive rate. It is reasonable to conclude that a growing percentage of the educational budget will be needed to service the increasing number of at-risk students. Trend discrepancies in incidence rates of at-risk students and the funding allocated for services indicate that the New York City school system will most likely be unable to provide the necessary services for students in need (Richards, 1992).

Similar trends have been documented in smaller cities, such as Denver, Colorado. In recent years, Denver has seen an increase in infant mortality, youth unemployment, and deaths due to child abuse. In one area, almost half the households live at or below the poverty level, compared to 16 percent of all households in the State. The city's schools serve students from a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds, who may speak one of 89 different languages. Finally, several Denver schools report student turnover of 75 percent in a given academic year (Kozleski et al., 1993). All these factors are common to inner cities and affect the needs of students with disabilities and the ability of schools to meet those needs.

This chapter consists of the three sections summarized below.

- *Number and Characteristics of Students with Disabilities in Inner City Districts* compares and contrasts inner-city students with students in suburban and rural areas in terms of disability, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, and racial/ethnic identity.

- *Factors Associated with the Provision of Special Education to Students with Disabilities in Inner Cities* discusses factors affecting identification and assessment of racial and ethnic minorities and limited English proficient students in the inner city; and factors affecting special education service delivery, including educational placements for students with disabilities, efforts to employ qualified personnel, and efforts to maintain active parent involvement. This section also includes a description of services for students with disabilities in inner-city districts.

- *Outcomes for Youth with Disabilities in Urban Area*s describes outcomes for youth such as dropout rate, postsecondary enrollment, employment, and wages.

In this chapter, the terms "inner city" and "urban" are used differently, with the latter term being more general and including urban fringe areas. Footnotes are used throughout the chapter to inform the reader of the definitional issues specific to various data sets.

NUMBER AND CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN INNER-CITY DISTRICTS

This section compares and contrasts inner-city students with students in suburban and rural areas in terms of disability, socioeconomic status, language proficiency, and racial/ethnic identity, using data from OCR[1], the Common Core of Data Public School Universe File (CCD), and other sources. For these analyses, eight percent of all school districts in the U.S. were

[1] To describe the population of students with disabilities in inner-city school districts, data from the Common Core of Data [CCD] Public School Universe File, used to designate districts as inner-city or non-inner-city, were merged with data from the 1992 Office for Civil Rights Elementary and Secondary School Survey.)

classified as inner-city districts. Although this is a small percentage of all districts, inner-city districts enroll 26 percent of all students, according to OCR district student counts. This reflects the large populations of students in inner-city schools and school districts, compared to those of rural or suburban districts.

DISABILITIES

Table 4.1 shows the percentage of students with disabilities in inner-city and non-inner-city areas by disability based on analysis of OCR[2] and CCD[3] data. The data suggest that inner-city and non-inner-city areas have similar percentages of students with disabilities -- 10.4 percent and 10.8 percent, respectively.

The data also suggest little variation between the two types of areas by type of disability, although non-inner-city areas appear to report slightly higher percentages of students with speech or language impairments (2.7 percent versus 2.1 percent) and a higher percentage of students with specific learning disabilities (5.4 percent versus 5.1) than inner-city areas.

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS

Many people in America's cities live in poverty. Based on the eligibility criteria for the free lunch program, OCR data indicate that 30 percent of all inner-city students live in poverty, compared to 18 percent of students living outside the inner cities. Many of those living in poverty are also members of racial or ethnic minorities. One study of special education students in a poor region of a large urban school system found that 90 percent of the students receive some form of public assistance, 95 percent belong to a minority group, and only 10 to 25 percent live with two parents (Gottlieb et al., 1994).

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[2] The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) Elementary and Secondary School Survey collects data on the characteristics of students enrolled in public schools across the country primarily to monitor compliance with civil rights laws. From one portion of the survey, data from public school districts and the schools within those districts are used to generate State and national estimates of the number of students identified as having speech impairments, visual impairments, specific learning disabilities, mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, other health Impairments, deaf-blindness, and multiple disabilities. Other student characteristics, such as ethnicity, gender, and English language proficiency are also Included in the tile. The 1992 survey Included approximately 4,700 districts representing 43,000 schools (NCES, 1994b).

[3] The Common Core of Data (CCD) survey collects information on elementary and secondary public education in the U.S. Data are collected annually from the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. Outlying Areas. A total of 57 State-level educational agencies report information on staff and students for approximately B5,000 public schools and about 15,400 local educational agencies. Information about revenues and expenditures is also collected at the State level (NCES, 1994a).

Table 4.1 - Estimated Number and Percentage of Students with Disabilities in Inner-City and Non-Inner-City School Districts in the 1992-93 School Year

Disability	Inner-City Number	Inner-City Percent*	Non-Inner-City Number	Non-Inner-City Percent
Specific learning disabilities	554,044	5.1%	1,684,256	5.4%
Speech or language impairments	232,949	2.1	847,552	2.7
Mental retardation	147,819	1.4	403,450	1.3
Serious emotional disturbance	89,342	0.8	205,314	0.7
Multiple impairments	29,625	0.3	45,570	0.2
Hearing impairments	16,209	0.2	36,614	0.1
Orthopedic impairments	13,964	0.1	27,768	0.1
Other health impairments	23,268	0.2	58,041	0.2
Visual impairments	6,135	0.1	15,118	0.1
Autism	7,001	0.1	8,202	0.0
Deaf-blindness	713	0.0	1,115	0.0
Traumatic brain injury	463	0.0	2,661	0.0
All disabilities	1,121,532	10.4	3,335,661	10.8

* Percentage may not equal sum of other rows due to rounding.

Source: The 1992 Office for Civil Rights Elementary and Secondary School Survey and the 1992 Common Core of Data Public School Universe File.

Because socioeconomic status, educational levels, and family structure are related to academic achievement (Laosa; Brown; Carter & Segura; Duran; Henderson; Lambert; NCES; Rosenthal, Baker, & Ginsburg as cited in Hopstock et al., 1986), poverty levels may affect the need for educational services, in general, and special education, in particular.

Data from the NLTS[4], which included a nationally representative sample of secondary school students, indicate that families of students with disabilities in urban areas are more likely to live in poverty than families of students in suburban or rural areas. At the time of the study, 47 percent of urban youth with disabilities lived in households with an annual income of less than $12,000 in 1986 dollars, compared to 34 percent of rural and 19 percent of suburban youth with disabilities (Valdes et al., 1990).

LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

Between 1980 and 1990, the number of limited English proficient school-age children increased by 27 percent, from 1.9 million to 2.4 million (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1980, 1990). The majority of limited English proficient students live in three states -- California, Texas, and New York. In California, 15 percent of all 5- to 17-year-olds are limited English proficient students.

Urban districts in general, and inner-city districts in particular, enroll a greater percentage of limited English proficient students than nonurban schools, and some large urban centers have very high concentrations of limited English proficient students. OCR data suggest that 5 percent of special education students in inner-city districts have limited English proficiency, compared to 1 percent in non-inner-city districts. In addition, NLTS data suggest that 4 percent of secondary school students with disabilities in urban areas speak another language at home, compared to 2 percent in nonurban areas (Valdes et al., 1990).

RACIAL/ETHNIC IDENTITY

Public schools located in inner cities enroll almost twice as many African American and Hispanic students as do non-inner-city schools (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1992). Historically, nonwhite students have been disproportionately represented in special education. Although this issue has received significant attention over the past 25 years, there is evidence that the problem of disproportionate representation continues (Harry, 1992).

Harry (1992) used OCR data to analyze the special education enrollment rate, by race/ethnicity, for the nation as a whole and in selected States. She reports that placement of African American students in special education is generally high relative to their representation in the general student population. Harry found that 16 percent of all students in the nation are African Americans, but they account for 35 percent of the students with educable mental retardation, 27 percent of the students with trainable mental retardation, and 27 percent of the students with serious emotional disturbance[5]. In examining special education placements for Hispanic students, Harry found that in some individual States and in some disability categories, Hispanics are over and underrepresented relative to their proportion of the total population. However, Hispanic students account for 10 percent of all students in the

[4] The NLTS, which began in 1987, was a 5-year national longitudinal study of secondary special education students to determine how they fare in terms of education, employment, and independent living. NLTS involved a nationally representative sample of more than 8,000 secondary age youth with disabilities (NCES, 1994a). NLTS used codes for urban, suburban, and rural districts generated by the U.S. Bureau of the Census. Consequently, the schools classified as urban in this data set may include urban fringe areas as well as inner cities, which makes them different from inner-city schools in OCR/CCD.

[5] Data from OCR on race/ethnicity by disability are collected only for the following disability categories: mental retardation, learning disability, speech impairments, and serious emotional disturbance.

nation and for 5 to 10 percent of those in the four disability categories, indicating no disproportionate representation nationwide.

According to Harry's analysis, Asian students are generally represented in special education at a rate lower than their proportion in the population. Nationwide, Asians account for 3 percent of the student body and 0-2 percent of those in the four disability categories on which OCR collects race/ethnicity data. OCR data suggest that white students are consistently placed in programs for students with learning disabilities at a rate higher than their proportion in the population (Harry, 1992).

NLTS data (in Harry, 1994) are consistent with OCR data in suggesting that African American youth are placed in programs for students with mental retardation and serious emotional disturbance at a rate higher than their proportion in the population. In addition, the NLTS data suggest that disproportionate representation of racial or ethnic minorities occurs not only in the disability categories that require professionals to make judgments about placements, such as mental retardation. Over-representation also occurs in categories in which professionals are supposed to be able to place students, using objective criteria, such as deaf/blindness, visual impairments, orthopedic impairments, and other health impairments. According to Wagner (1995), this suggests that factors other than racial discrimination contribute to the disproportionate representation of particular groups.

As the OCR data in table 4.2 indicate, non-inner-city districts have higher percentages of African American and Hispanic students in some disability categories than inner-city districts. A higher percentage of African American students in non-inner-city districts (2.8 percent) are reported to have mental retardation, compared to inner-city districts (2.0 percent).

Higher percentages of both African American and Hispanic students in non-inner-city areas are reported as having specific learning disabilities compared to students in inner-city districts. However, this disproportion does not hold across disabilities. Despite the fact that a large number of African American and Hispanic students attend inner-city schools and are reportedly overrepresented in special education, data from OCR, as shown in table 4.2, suggest that inner-city and non-inner-city districts enroll virtually the same percentage of students in special education.

Wagner (1995) suggests that poverty, and not race or ethnicity, is the important factor influencing the disproportionate representation of minority groups in special education. Using NLTS data, Wagner compared the distribution of white, African American, and Hispanic secondary school-age students with that of the general population within each of three income groups.

Table 4.3 shows that after accounting for differences in income, the disproportionate representation of African American students decreases considerably. According to the analysis, the disproportionate representation of African Americans in special education is a function of relatively low income and the disabilities associated with poverty. Only in the lowest income category is the difference in African American representation between students in special education and the general population (44.4 percent and 37.4 percent, respectively) statistically significant. When income is accounted for, disproportionate representation remains in three disability categories -- speech impairments, visual impairments, and mental retardation.

Table 4.2 - Estimated Number and Percentage of Students in Special Education in Inner-City and Non-Inner-City School Districts, by Ethnicity and Disability, 1992-93 School Year

Race and Disability Category	Inner-City		Non-Inner-City		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
White, Non-Hispanic						
Mental retardation	58,772	1.3	269,010	1.1	327,782	1.1
Serious emotional disturbance	40,409	.9	157,934	.7	198,343	5.3
Specific learning disability	241,678	5.2	1,280,875	5.4	1,522,553	5.3
African American, non-Hispanic						
Mental retardation	65,535	2.0	103,947	2.8	169,482	2.5
Serious emotional disturbance	35,433	1.1	34,645	.9	70,078	1.0
Specific learning disability	176,107	5.5	222,730	6.1	398,837	5.8
Hispanic						
Mental retardation	20,339	.8	20,278	.8	40,617	.8
Serious emotional disturbance	12,362	.5	8,043	.3	20,405	.4
Specific learning disability	124,042	5.0	138,289	5.5	262,331	5.3
Total*						
Mental retardation	147,820	1.4	403,451	1.3	551,271	1.3
Serious emotional disturbance	89,342	.8	205,314	.7	294,656	.7
Specific learning disability	554,045	5.1	1,684,257	5.4	2,238,302	5.3
All Students with Disabilities**	1,121,532	10.3	3,335,661	10.6	4,457,193	10.5

* Also includes Asian and American Indian students (not shown).
** Consists of all students with an IEP.

Source: The 1992 Office for Civil Rights Elementary and Secondary School Survey and the 1992 Common Core of Data Public School Universe File.

Table 4.3 - Ethnic Distribution, by Income Category, of Secondary School-Age Students with Disabilities and Those in the General Population

Income Category and Ethnic Distribution	Students with Disabilities*	General Student Population**	Adjusted Population Students with Disabilities***
Lowest Income Category			
Percentage who were:			
African American	39.6	37.4	44.4
Hispanic	10.9	16.9	--
White	47.0	58.6	54.4
Middle Income Category			
Percentage who were:			
African American	21.5	20.5	23.7
Hispanic	9.4	13.8	--
White	66.8	75.5	73.7
Highest Income Category			
Percentage who were:			
African American	10.4	9.2	10.7
Hispanic	2.7	6.8	--
White	83.5	87.5	86.4

* Income categories differ somewhat for the two populations. NLTS categories are: < $12,000, $12,000 to $24,999, and greater than or equal to $25,000. Census categories are: < $10,000, $10,000 to $24,999, and greater than or equal to $25,000. Thus, the highest income category is the most directly comparable. Students in the NLTS "other" ethnic category are not reported here because there are no corresponding figures for them, by income category, in Census data.

** Data are from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1990) Money Income of Households, Families and Persons in the United States, 1988 and 1989. *Current Population Reports*, Consumer Incomes, Series P-60, No. 172. Data are for families with one or more related children between the ages of 6 and 17.

*** Because individuals in the Census category "Hispanic" may be of any race, NLTS ethnic distributions are adjusted in this column to apportion the Hispanic population in each income category among the other categories in proportions equal to their representation in the population.

Source: Wagner, Mary(1995). *The Contributions of Poverty and Ethnic Background to the Participation of Secondary School Students in Special Education*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

This section described the population of students with disabilities in inner cities. Data suggest that inner-city districts serve similar percentages of students in special education as suburban and rural districts, but inner-city districts enroll a larger percentage of students living in poverty, a larger percentage of students with limited English proficiency, and a larger percentage of students from racial/ethnic minority groups. Data from OCR and NLTS confirm that minority students are disproportionately represented in special education, but the data suggest that overrepresentation may, in part, be a function of higher rates of poverty among minorities.

FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH THE PROVISION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN INNER CITIES

The inter-relationships among socioeconomic status, language proficiency, and race and ethnicity in the U.S. make it difficult to determine how any one of them affects students' educational achievement. It is generally recognized that poverty (or at least extreme poverty) may place a child at greater risk of poor school performance. However, the range of performance within socioeconomic levels is fairly large, and considerable overlap in distributions is typical (Reschly, 1982).

Poverty is an underlying condition for many students with disabilities. For example, mild mental retardation is consistently reported to be associated with low socioeconomic status, and race is highly correlated with socioeconomic status (Broman et al.; Drillien et al.; Stein & Susser; Lewis; Birch et al.; Kuschlick & Blunden; Kiely; Bayley; Munro as cited in Yeargin-Allsopp et al., 1995). A recent study (Yeargin Allsopp et al., 1995) suggests that socioeconomic status is related to the prevalence of mild mental retardation and may account for some of the disproportionate representation of African American children in that category. The disproportionate representation of African American children in the mild mental retardation category was reduced by nearly half after controlling for sex, maternal age at delivery, birth order, maternal education, and economic status. The researchers suggest that the remaining disparity might be reduced further if other confounding factors, such as maternal intelligence and housing density, were controlled. The researchers cite previous studies demonstrating that less advantaged African American children who receive early, structured, and intensive social, medical, and educational interventions score higher, on average, on tests of cognitive ability than African American children from similar backgrounds who have not received these interventions (Wasik et al.; Martin et al.; Zigler et al.; Weikart et al. as cited in Yeargin-Allsopp, 1995).

This section describes factors associated with providing special education services in inner-city districts. First, it examines factors related to identification and assessment. Second, it describes services for students with disabilities in urban areas (including placing students in the least restrictive environment, recruiting and retaining personnel, and maintaining parent involvement) and compares them with services for students in suburban and rural areas.

FACTORS AFFECTING IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT IN INNER CITIES

In inner-city schools and school districts, identification and assessment of students for special education is complicated by the effects of poverty, race/ethnicity, and limited English proficiency. IDEA and its implementing regulations require that the special education assessment process be conducted in a nondiscriminatory fashion. Assessment must be multidisciplinary, and use instruments that do not discriminate on the basis of race or culture [34 CFR §300.530(b) and §300.532].

In practice, lower parent education levels in inner-city areas have specific implications for special education, because a mother's education level is a significant predictor of a child's age at the time special education needs are identified. Children with mothers who have completed college are identified as needing special education two years earlier on average than comparable children whose mothers only completed eighth grade (Palfrey et al., 1987). A study by Peng (1992) suggests that parent education levels are generally lower in the inner city, where 22 percent of parents have not graduated from high school, compared to 8 percent in other urban areas.

FACTORS AFFECTING IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

Despite efforts to ensure objective assessment of student abilities and disabilities, disproportionate representation of minorities in special education continues. At the center of concern over the disproportionate representation of minority students in special education is the role of intelligence tests in identifying students with disabilities. Those who are critical of using IQ tests for this purpose argue that IQ tests are culturally loaded (Cummins, 1984), reflect a stylistic mismatch between students and schools (Hilliard, 1992), are standardized on a sample of American students that does not sufficiently represent minority students and what they know (Kaufman, 1975), and do not inform teaching and learning (Hilliard, 1987). Those defending the use of IQ tests for identifying students with disabilities agree that while they may not measure the learning potential of minority students, they may accurately predict the academic performance of students in a mainstream setting, and consequently have predictive validity (Jenson; Mercer as cited in Hamayan & Damico, 1991).

IQ tests were originally designed to predict school performance (Binet as cited in Cummins, 1984) and continue to carry out this function fairly well (Clarizio as cited in Cummins, 1984). The premise of the IQ test is that previous learning of academically related knowledge and skills is a good predictor of future learning. Intelligence tests attempt to sample from the range of what is assumed to be academically relevant knowledge and skills to which children have generally been exposed.

Because learning takes place within a cultural context, some researchers consider intelligence tests to be culturally loaded (Kaufman as cited in Cummins, 1984). The extent of this cultural loading will tend to vary among different minority groups. This variation depends on the extent to which the socialization and learning experiences of the minority groups differ from the majority's, and the degree of emphasis placed on acculturation to the mainstream majority within different minority groups (Cummins, 1984).

When cultural groups differ with respect to behavioral style, the misunderstanding of cultural behavioral style can lead to errors in estimating a student's (or group's) intellectual potential, abilities, or achievement (Hilliard, 1992). Hilliard describes the situation as a stylistic mismatch between students and schools. The stylistic mismatch is viewed in terms of student deficiency, when perhaps it is the schools that ought to change. Hilliard finds that what in some cases may appear to be deficient functions are merely alternative styles of processing information which have value in certain settings.

Hilliard also argues that the IQ test does not provide sufficient information to inform teaching and learning, and suggests other methods and techniques that might be used to assess students (Hilliard, 1987).

Some educators argue that IQ tests cannot assess the intelligence of minority students because standardization of IQ tests is based on a representative sample of American students. IQ tests, therefore, measure only those skills and knowledge that are regarded as indicators of intelligence in the majority culture. Any of the skills and knowledge that minority children learn that are specific to their culture will not be tested. In other words, for minority children, the IQ test as a measure of previous learning has no construct validity (Kaufman, 1975) because the children's previous learning experiences have not been adequately tested by the instrument (Cummins, 1984).

However, other educators argue that although intelligence tests may not measure the learning potential of minority students, they may accurately predict the academic performance of students in a mainstream environment and therefore have predictive validity (Jenson; Mercer as cited in Hamayan & Damico, 1991). Several studies have shown that the WISC-R scores for Hispanic students are acceptable predictors of ITBS and CAT scores. Those studies did not address the influence of English language proficiency on test reliability and validity (Dean; Oakland as cited in Hamayan & Damico, 1991). The predictive validity concept is further discounted by Travers (in Harry, 1994), who argues that to justify the use of IQ tests because they have predictive value is to assume that the prediction about a child's future performance is a valid reason for removing the child from the mainstream. This clearly conflicts with the IDEA requirement that no single procedure be used as the sole criterion for determining an appropriate educational program for a child.

Critics of intelligence testing and those concerned with disproportionate representation of minorities in special education have argued that multiple criteria should be used to assess students with mild mental retardation, with particular emphasis on assessing adaptive behavior. IDEA defines mental retardation as:

> Significantly sub average general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, which adversely affects a child's educational performance [CFR §300.5(4)].

Educators who advocate using adaptive behavior as part of the assessment process suggest doing so in four or five key dimensions, including independent functioning, social functioning, functional cognitive skills, vocational/occupational skills, and motor/mobility/travel skills (McGrew & Bruininks; Reschly as cited in Reschly & Ward, 1991).

Controversy over the relative weights awarded to intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior during the assessment process continues. Recent research suggests that IQ continues to be emphasized more than adaptive behavior when students are assessed. Zeigler et al. (as cited in Reschly & Ward, 1991) suggest abandoning adaptive behavior measures because they are poorly conceptualized and psychometrically inadequate. Others have suggested that classification for educational purposes should be based entirely on adaptive behavior and achievement (Reschly as cited in Reschly & Ward, 1991).

FACTORS AFFECTING IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF LIMITED-ENGLISH-PROFICIENT STUDENTS

Many of the same factors that affect identification and assessment of minority students for special education affect limited English proficient students. Current research suggests it is very difficult to distinguish between the effect of a disability on a student's achievement and that student's failure to understand the majority language and culture. This difficulty is a serious impediment to accurately assessing the student's disability. Teachers unfamiliar with the effect of language development on student achievement may refer students for special education assessment (Cegelka et al., 1986). Behaviors children normally exhibit while learning a second language--poor comprehension, limited vocabulary, or grammatical errors--may be erroneously interpreted as symptomatic of a learning disability or other disability.

Further complicating the assessment process is the fact that young students rapidly learn the social language of English, but not the academic language of English used in classrooms and on assessments. Therefore, students may appear proficient in English because of their ability to function in social situations when, in fact, they have not developed the language skills necessary for academic success. Typically, among children learning a second language, social language is developed in about 3 years, and school language in about 5 to 7 years (interview with Baca, 1988). Special education assessment personnel must understand the second language acquisition process in order to consider the effects of language on student behavior and learning.

Because language skills can have such a profound effect on assessment results, IDEA requires that "Such materials [tests] or procedures shall be provided and administered in the child's native language...unless it is clearly not feasible to do so..." [Sec. 612 (5) (c)]. However, data show that testing of limited English proficient students is still performed primarily in English (Figueroa; Ortiz; Reuda, Figueroa, Mercado, & Cardoza as cited in Figueroa, 1989).

Efforts to make assessments more functional for limited English proficient students can take several forms: 1) translating psychometric tests into the student's primary language; 2) using an interpreter during assessment; 3) using norm-referenced tests developed in the student's primary language; 4) using a bilingual psychologist (Figueroa, 1989); and 5) using nonverbal intelligence tests. These approaches also have their shortcomings. Some researchers stress the importance of using multiple criteria, as required by IDEA, when assessing limited English proficient students for special education, because any one assessment tool will be inadequate[6].

FACTORS AFFECTING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICE DELIVERY IN INNER CITIES

Once students in inner-city areas are identified as requiring special education services, schools and school districts must provide them with a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The provision of appropriate services rests in part on the districts' ability to obtain an adequate supply of qualified personnel, to select appropriate curriculum and instructional methods, and to maintain active parent involvement. This section describes educational placements for students with disabilities in inner-city school districts, the nature of courses taken and services received by urban students with disabilities, and the efforts of inner-city school districts to employ qualified personnel and maintain active parent involvement.

PROVIDING SERVICES IN THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

IDEA legislation and regulations require that to the maximum extent appropriate students with disabilities must be educated with their nondisabled peers. However, data from OCR suggest that students with disabilities living in inner cities are more likely to be placed in restrictive learning environments. As shown in table 4.4, in inner cities, 41.3 percent of students with disabilities are enrolled in full-time programs that remove students from regular classes for 50 percent or more of the school day, compared to 23.4 percent in non-inner-city areas.

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[6] For a more thorough discussion of special education for limited English proficient students, see the *Fifteenth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 1993*.

Table 4.4 - Estimated Percentage of Students with Disabilities in Full-Time and Part-Time Special Education Placements for Inner-City and Non-Inner City Districts, 1992-93 School Year

Disability	Inner-City		Non-Inner-City	
	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time
Specific learning disabilities	64.3	36.4	81.2	19.0
Speech or language impairments	86.2	13.8	93.9	6.2
Mental retardation	19.9	81.5	39.0	60.9
Serious emotional disturbance	33.0	67.7	57.9	42.1
Multiple impairments	40.0	60.0	32.9	67.2
Hearing impairments	48.2	51.8	71.5	28.5
Orthopedic impairments	43.2	57.1	66.1	33.9
Other health impairments	66.3	33.7	73.4	26.6
Visual impairments	57.4	42.5	81.0	19.0
Autism	18.1	82.0	25.9	74.2
Deaf-blindness	27.6	72.4	49.5	50.5
Traumatic brain injury	40.7	58.9	58.1	42.1
All disabilities	58.7	41.3	76.6	23.4

Source: The 1992 Office for Civil Rights Elementary and Secondary School Survey and the 1992 Common Core of Data Public School Universe File.

NLTS data confirm that urban secondary students with disabilities spend less time in regular education classrooms than students living in nonurban areas. The average percentage of time spent in regular education classes was 41 percent for urban students with disabilities, compared to 56 percent for suburban students, and 59 percent for rural students. A higher percentage of urban students with disabilities are also placed in separate special education schools and classes. In urban areas, 11 percent of students with disabilities attend special schools, compared to 8 percent in suburban and 3 percent in rural areas. Of urban students with disabilities, 16 percent attend regular schools but not regular education classes, compared to 8 percent of suburban and 11 percent of rural students.

SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN URBAN SCHOOLS

Data from the NLTS describe the range of services provided to secondary school-age students with disabilities in urban and nonurban schools. NLTS data indicate that students with disabilities in urban secondary schools spend an average of 57 percent of class time on academic subjects, such as English/language arts, mathematics, science, social science, and

foreign language. This is slightly higher than the percentage for students with disabilities in rural or suburban schools (52 and 51 percent respectively).

Table 4.5 shows that the percentage of students enrolled in each academic course is slightly higher in urban than in nonurban schools, implying a somewhat greater emphasis on academics for students with disabilities in urban schools compared to suburban and rural schools.

As shown in table 4.6, students with disabilities in secondary schools receive a variety of special education and related services in order to meet educational needs stemming from a disability. While urban students with disabilities are more likely to receive job training than any other service (50.6 percent), they are less likely to receive job training than students living in other areas. However, urban secondary school students with disabilities are more likely to receive personal counseling or transportation assistance than their peers living in suburban and rural areas.

Table 4.5 - Courses Taken by Students with Disabilities in Urban, Rural, and Suburban Schools During their Most Recent Year in Secondary School

Academic Courses Taken	Urban	Rural	Suburban
Percentage taking English/language arts classes	93.3 (1.6)	90.6 (1.5)	89.6 (1.7)
Percentage taking mathematics classes	78.2 (2.6)	72.2 (2.3)	74.1 (2.4)
Percentage taking science classes	55.8 (3.2)	55.0 (2.6)	54.3 (2.7)
Percentage taking other academic classes	76.1 (2.7)	70.2 (2.4)	69.5 (2.5)
Percentage taking nonacademic classes	84.0 (2.3)	86.1 (1.8)	88.7 (1.7)
Percentage taking non-subject-specific	9.8 (1.9)	8.1 (1.4)	10.3 (1.7)

Standard errors are in parentheses. Note: Academic courses include English/language arts, mathematics, science, social science, and a foreign language. Other courses are considered nonacademic. Data are for students ages 13-21.

Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study, SRI International.

Table 4.6 - Services Received by Youth with Disabilities in Urban, Rural, and Suburban Schools During Their Most Recent Year in Secondary School

Services Received	Urban	Rural	Suburban
Job training	50.6 (2.9)	53.5 (2.6)	61.3 (2.6)
Occupational therapy/life skills training	25.1 (2.5)	28.3 (2.3)	27.9 (2.4)
Speech/language therapy	21.2 (2.4)	17.5 (2.0)	20.3 (2.1)
Personal counseling/therapy	23.1 (2.5)	14.6 (1.8)	14.8 (1.9)
A tutor, reader, or interpreter	17.1 (2.2)	14.1 (1.8)	15.1 (1.9)
Help with transportation because of disability	13.5 (2.0)	7.8 (1.4)	11.2 (1.7)
Physical therapy/mobility training	6.3 (1.4)	6.5 (1.3)	3.5 (1.0)

Standard errors are in parentheses.
Note: Data are for students ages 13-21. Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study, SRI International.

RECRUITING AND RETAINING QUALIFIED PERSONNEL

Recruiting and retaining qualified teachers and related service providers is critical to meeting students' educational needs. Although special education teachers are in short supply in many places, the shortages are particularly severe in inner-city areas. Thirty-eight percent of all public schools had teaching vacancies in special education in 199091, ranging from 35 percent in rural communities to 42 percent in inner cities. Public school administrators said that vacancies in special education were among the most difficult to fill, with 26 percent of schools finding them very difficult or impossible to fill. Furthermore, administrators in schools with populations composed of 20 percent or more minority students, which are likely to be urban, were more likely than those in public schools with smaller minority enrollments to find it very difficult or impossible to fill their vacancies (NCES, 1993). In general, inner-city schools seem to have greater difficulty recruiting teachers than schools in other areas.

Schools have also failed to attract a sufficiently diverse workforce. Several authors recommend that schools increase the number of minority teachers they employ (Ornstein & Levine, 1989; Boyer, 1988). Several studies cite a mismatch between the racial composition of the current teaching force, which is predominately white (86 percent) and female (68 percent), and the current school population, which is 29 percent nonwhite (Grant & Secada, 1990). Over the past 20 years, the proportion of African American college graduates entering teaching has declined to a level lower than that of whites. High turnover in urban districts, where many of the older, more experienced African American teachers are concentrated, will necessitate hiring from a pool of new teachers that is increasingly white (Murnane et al., 1991).

The National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) surveyed special education directors in eight States regarding special education in urban areas (Ahearn, 1995). The directors identified personnel issues such as recruitment, retention, and staff development as their most critical concerns in urban special education. When asked for a single recommendation for improving special education in urban areas, directors recommended enhanced teacher preparation, inservice programs, and mandated staff development. Another NASDSE study examined the issues behind teacher job satisfaction in urban schools. The report highlighted the need for improved communication and exchange of information between administrators and teachers, and increased opportunities for teacher decision making and collaboration (NASDSE, 1995).

MAINTAINING ACTIVE PARENT INVOLVEMENT

Parental involvement in the education of their children improves the well-being of families, enhances parenting skills, and improves educational results for children. As such, IDEA requires parental participation in identification and assessment processes. Parents must be provided with information, to ensure that they understand the special education placement proceedings and decisions. While all parents of children with disabilities may face some barriers to parental involvement, inner-city parents of children with disabilities may face obstacles to involvement in their child's education due to limited English proficiency, cultural factors, or the effects of poverty. For example, many parents of limited English proficient students do not speak English fluently and may not understand technical terms used during special educational assessments and individualized education plan (IEP) meetings. Some parents have feelings of inadequacy when speaking to special education or school personnel, partly due to their inability to speak English (Santos & Santos, 1984).

IDEA requires that local educational agencies (LEAs) provide written prior notice in the parent's native language in matters related to identification, evaluation, and placement of students with disabilities. In addition, an interpreter must be provided at all meetings if the parents cannot communicate in English. Parental consent forms must describe evaluations, tests, records, or other reports used to make educational decisions.

Ortiz and Yates (1983) suggest that lack of parental involvement may occur not because of a lack of interest on the part of parents, but due to conflicting values or limited opportunities for participation. For example, parents with lower socioeconomic status may have priorities that take precedence over their child's education, such as providing adequate housing, nutrition, and health care. While parents may wish to participate in IEP meetings, school conferences, and so forth, work schedules or difficulties with child care or transportation may make such participation difficult (Ortiz & Yates, 1983).

Parents' involvement in education, familiarity with normal child development, and perceptions of disability may affect the rate at which parents report childhood disability or pursue special education services, and complicate attempts to understand the relationships among race/ethnicity, income, and disability. Furthermore, while there are several sources of data available for analyzing these relationships, they do not provide altogether consistent results. In part, this may be attributed to differences in the ages of children and youth targeted by the two sources described here, 1) the Current Population Survey (CPS)[7], which includes families of children ages 5 through 17, and 2) the National Household Education Survey

[7] The October supplement of the CPS is a nationally representative survey of U.S. households in which parents are asked whether the children in the family ages 5 to 17 ever had a physical, mental, or other health condition that adversely affected their ability to learn. These data are based on parental reports of disability and, consequently, do not necessarily correspond with special education enrollment figures, since an impairment noted by parents may be insufficient to warrant eligibility for special education services under State and Federal criteria.

(NHES)[8], which includes families of children age 3 through grade 2. Differences in the wording of interview questions may also account for conflicting results.

Ficke (1995) analyzed the CPS data by income and race/ethnicity. The data indicate that 5.6 percent of white parents reported that their children had a disability, compared to 4.6 percent of African American families and 2.7 percent of Hispanic families. Reports of disability diminish as income increases, and rates by race/ethnicity become more similar in the higher income ranges. For families with annual incomes less than $10,000, white and African American families reported similar rates of disability (8.7 and 8.3 percent, respectively), while Hispanic families reported far lower disability rates (3.3 percent). For families with annual incomes from $10,000 to $25,000, 6.7 percent of white families reported that their children had a disability compared to 3.5 percent of African American families and 2.1 percent of Hispanic families. At the $25,000 to $40,000 income level, white families reported disability rates of 5.2 percent, while African American and Hispanic families reported rates of 2.1 and 2.2 percent, respectively. For families with incomes of more than $40,000, reports of disability are more similar: 4.9 percent for whites, 3.4 percent for African Americans, and 3.8 percent for Hispanics.

Ficke (1995) also analyzed NHES data by race/ethnicity and income level. Overall, white and African American parents reported prevalence rates of 12.4 and 12.1 percent, respectively, while Hispanics reported a prevalence rate of 14.4 percent. When the data are analyzed by income, they show, as did the CPS data, that prevalence rates decrease as the income level increases, and differences by race/ ethnicity also diminish as income increases. Compared to the CPS data, the NHES reports relatively higher rates of disability among Hispanic families.

Table 4.7 shows parent reports of disability from the CPS by disability category. When the CPS data are analyzed by disability, they suggest that differences in parent reports of disability prevalence apply not only to so-called judgmental categories, such as learning disability, mental retardation, and emotional disturbance, but also to so-called objective categories, such as hearing impairments, visual impairments, and other health impairments. Data from the NHES confirm this finding (Ficke, 1995).

In working to enhance parental involvement in special education, educators must be sensitive to what may be different perspectives on disability within racial/ethnic groups and income groups. Given the importance of early identification of disabilities and parental involvement in their children's education, it is crucial to inform parents about normal child development, disability, and their role in the education of their children.

[8] The NHES uses an interview technique similar to that of the CPS to collect information from U.S. families on the status of their children age 3 through grade 2. Parents are asked whether their child has any of the following conditions: mental retardation, serious emotional disturbance, learning disability, or vision, orthopedic, or other health impairments.

Table 4.7 - Parental Reports of Disability Status of Children by Race and Hispanic Origin: 1992

Current Population Survey: Ages 5 to 17	White Non-Hispanic		Black Non-Hispanic		Hispanic*	
	Number	Percent Distribution	Number	Percent Distribution	Number	Percent Distribution
Learning disability	3,606,564	11.1	635,115	8.6	304,928	5.7
Mental retardation	1,568,023	4.8	305,832	4.2	111,043	2.1
Speech impairment	235,296	0.7	58,957	0.8	29,857	0.6
Serious emotional disturbance	912,231	2.8	185,312	2.5	61,615	1.2
Deafness	328,719	1.0	71,376	1.0	35,280	0.7
Other hearing impairment	130,082	0.4	34,867	0.5	12,934	0.2
Blindness	449,921	1.4	64,312	0.9	38,486	0.7
Other visual impairment	87,743	0.3	26,302	0.4	7,376	0.1
Orthopedic impairment	654,257	2.0	114,751	1.6	68,986	1.3
Other health impairment	676,905	2.1	141,830	1.9	62,291	1.2
Total	1,818,532	5.6	341,534	4.6	139,378	2.6

Current Population Survey: Ages 5 to 17	Other Races		Totals Across Races	
	Number	Percent Distribution	Number	Percent Distribution
Learning disability	105,592	5.2	4,651,740	9.9
Mental retardation	38,619	1.9	2,023,046	4.3

Table continues on next page.

Table 4.7 continued

Current Population Survey: Ages 5 to 17	Other Races		Totals Across Races	
	Number	Percent Distribution	Number	Percent Distribution
Speech impairment	7,631	0.4	331,270	0.7
Serious emotional disturbance	27,387	1.4	1,186,074	2.5
Deafness	6,894	0.3	441,798	0.9
Other hearing impairment	3,117	0.2	180,529	0.4
Blindness	15,898	0.8	568,146	1.2
Other visual impairment	157	0.0	121,107	0.3
Orthopedic impairment	14,082	0.7	851,605	1.8
Other health impairment	15,143	0.7	450,899	1.0
Total	72,612	3.6	2,371,585	5.0

* Hispanics can be of any race in these data.

Source: Current Population Survey, 1992 Supplement on School Enrollment.

OUTCOMES FOR YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES IN URBAN AREAS

In many regards, the transition from secondary school to postsecondary roles appears more difficult for youth with disabilities in urban areas compared to youth in suburban and rural areas. NLTS data indicate that urban youth with disabilities are less likely to graduate from high school, less likely to enroll in postsecondary education, and less likely to be employed in the years immediately after high school. This section compares and contrasts outcomes for youth with disabilities in urban, suburban, and rural areas using data from the NLTS.

SECONDARY SCHOOL COMPLETION

Youth with disabilities in urban areas were less likely than their peers in suburban and rural areas to graduate from high school, and were more likely to drop out of school. As shown in table 4.8, 50.8 percent of youth with disabilities in urban areas graduated from high school, compared to 66.9 percent of youth in suburban areas and 60.8 percent of youth in rural areas. The relatively low rate of graduation for urban youth corresponds with a higher dropout rate; 36.6 percent compared to 24.6 percent for suburban youth and 31.4 percent for rural youth. Research consistently shows that high school graduation is an important predictor of postsecondary success for youth with disabilities (Edgar, 1987; Hasazi, Gordon, & Roe, 1985; Porter, 1982; Wagner, Black or by, Cameto, & Newman, 1993; Zigmond & Thornton, 1985). As such, the fact that urban youth are less likely to complete high school is a legitimate concern.

Table 4.8 - Secondary School Completion for Youth with Disabilities, by Community Type

	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Graduated	50.8 (4.3)	66.9 (3.6)	60.8 (3.5)
Dropped out	36.6 (4.2)	24.6 (3.3)	31.4 (3.4)
Suspended/ Expelled	5.5 (2.0)	3.4 (1.4)	3.0 (1.2)
Reached Maximum age	7.1 (2.2)	5.1 (1.7)	4.9 (1.6)

Note: Standard errors are in parenthesis.

Source: Valdes, K. A., Williamson, C. L., & Wagner, M. (1990). *The National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students. Statistical Almanac, Volume 1.* Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Given the relatively high dropout rate for urban youth with disabilities, it is not surprising that few enrolled in postsecondary education or training. Analysis of NLTS data (Valdes, 1990) shows that of those urban youth with disabilities who were out of secondary school for up to two years, 14 percent reported having taken any postsecondary course in the past year. The figure for suburban youth was slightly higher (17 percent). The figure for rural youth was lower than for urban or suburban youth (12 percent).

Urban youth with disabilities were also less likely than suburban or rural youth to have been employed in the past year (50 percent for urban youth, 68 percent for suburban, and 65 percent for rural youth). Some of these youth were still enrolled in secondary school (56 percent) which accounts, in part, for the relatively low rates of employment.

Employed youth in urban areas earned slightly higher wages, on average, than youth in suburban or rural areas. The mean wage for employed youth in urban areas was $4.10 per hour, compared to $4.00 per hour for youth in suburban areas and $3.60 per hour for youth in rural areas.

Table 4.9 shows the types of jobs youth with disabilities held in the years immediately after leaving school. A sizeable percentage of youth in urban, suburban, and rural area were employed in manual labor and restaurant work. Youth in rural areas were more likely than those in urban areas to work in lawn care or agriculture. The percentage of youth in urban areas employed in a skilled trade was quite low (6.4 percent).

Overall, youth with disabilities in urban areas appear to have some difficulty in adjusting to postsecondary roles. Their relatively low high school graduation rates leave them ill-prepared for many employment opportunities. As a result, their earnings potential is severely limited. While this was also typical of many suburban and rural youth with disabilities, data on urban youth with disabilities suggest particularly difficult postschool adjustments.

Table 4.9 - Percentage of Youth with Disabilities Employed in Various Types of Jobs, by Community Type

	Urban	Suburban	Rural
Lawn care or odd jobs	9.8 (3.3)	12.0 (2.8)	17.4 (3.1)
Waiter/Waitress, Busboy, Cook	20.8 (4.5)	16.8 (3.2)	13.0 (2.8)
Babysitting/Child Care	11.7 (3.6)	8.8 (2.4)	7.5 (2.2)
Farm /Agricultural	0.1 (0.3)	4.2 (1.7)	16.8 (3.1)
Factory Work	3.1 (1.9)	5.7 (2.0)	4.5 (1.7)
Skilled Trade	6.4 (2.7)	11.8 (2.8)	12.6 (2.7)
Other Manual Labor	30.8 (5.1)	33.2 (4.0)	27.5 (3.7)
Sales, Store Clerk, Cashier	2.9 (1.9)	6.2 (2.1)	4.1 (1.6)
Office/Clerical	4.9 (2.4)	2.7 (1.4)	2.2 (1.2)
Hospital Work/Health Care	1.4 (1.3)	0.1 (0.3)	1.6 (1.0)
Other	15.3 (4.0)	9.0 (2.4)	8.7 (2.3)

Note: Standard errors are in parenthesis.

Source: Valdes, K. A., Williamson, C. L., & Wagner, M. (1990). *The National Longitudinal Transition Study of Special Education Students. Statistical Almanac, Volume 1.* Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Analysis of available data results in a complex picture of students with disabilities in inner cities. The interrelationships among urbanicity, race/ethnicity, and socioeconomic status and their impact on placement in special education are difficult to untangle.

Several findings from the data analyses are clear, however. Students in inner cities are identified as eligible for special education at approximately the same rate as non-inner-city students. A larger percentage of families living in the inner cities live in poverty, and this pattern applies to families of students with disabilities as well. Furthermore, public schools in the inner cities enroll large percentages of students from racial and ethnic minority groups. Less clear are the relative influences of poverty and race/ethnicity on the disproportionate representation of racial and ethnic minorities in special education. Disability rates reported by parents differ by income and race, and also differ from disability rates reported by schools and school districts. Why this occurs is not clear.

Data on special education services for secondary students with disabilities in inner cities and other areas indicate similar course-taking and service patterns, with some exceptions. Fewer secondary students with disabilities in inner cities are enrolled in vocational education classes compared to students in rural and suburban areas. Data also suggest that students with disabilities in inner cities are more likely than students in non-inner-city districts to be placed in more restrictive learning environments.

Data from the NLTS suggest that urban youth with disabilities have a particularly difficult time adjusting to postsecondary roles. High dropout rates, low levels of enrollment in postsecondary education, and high rates of unemployment are indicative of the problems experienced by many of these youth.

In response to perceived needs, OSEP recently established a priority to train scholars in historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and other minority institutions (OMIs) to conduct research in special education and urban issues. This will help focus attention on a much-needed area of study. OSEP also uses its compliance monitoring to ensure that all students with disabilities, including those in inner cities, are receiving a free appropriate public education as guaranteed under IDEA. OSEP is committed to working with States and local education agencies continuously to improve programs and meet the changing needs of inner-city students.

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