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High School Graduation Among Students with Disabilities _____

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

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

THE OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS (OSEP) establishes goals, objectives, and performance indicators in accordance with the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) to measure progress in improving results for students with disabilities. One of the objectives included in the U.S. Department of Education's 2001 Annual Plan is that secondary students with disabilities will

receive the support they need to complete high school prepared for postsecondary education or employment (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). The percentages of students with disabilities who graduate from high school with a standard diploma and who drop out of high school are important indicators of progress toward this objective. Accordingly, this module reports graduation and dropout information for students with disabilities for the 1998-99 school year and examines trends in graduation and dropout rates over the past few years. In addition, the module discusses graduation and dropout rates by disability category and by race/ethnicity.

Graduation and Dropout Rates for Students with Disabilities

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2000), high school graduation, completion, and dropout rates may be calculated in a number of different ways. OSEP is particularly interested in the rate at which students with disabilities graduate from high school with a standard diploma.

One method of calculating graduation rates is to divide the number of students aged 14 and older who graduated with a standard diploma by the number of students 14 and older who are known to have left school (i.e., graduated with a standard diploma, received a certificate of completion, reached the maximum age for services, died, or dropped out). This is the formula OSEP uses to establish performance indicators under GPRA.

Graduation rates for students with disabilities age 14 and older have climbed steadily since 1993-94, as illustrated in Table 1. At the same time, the dropout rate among these students has declined.

Table 1. Percentage of Students Age 14 and Older Graduating
With a Standard Diploma, 1993-94 to 1998-99

1993-94	51.9
1994-95	52.4
1995-96	52.6
1996-97	53.5
1997-98	55.4
1998-99	57.4

Note: Graduation rates were calculated by dividing the number of students 14 and older who graduated with a diploma by the number of students 14 and older who graduated with a diploma, received a certificate, reached the maximum age for services, died, and dropped out.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS).

In the original report, this was Figure I-1.

In 1993-94, the dropout rate was 34.5 percent. By 1998-99, the rate had reached a six-year low of 28.9 percent. This rate was somewhat better than OSEP's target dropout rate of 31 percent (U.S. Department of Education, 2000). Dropout rates are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Special Education Dropout Rates, 1993-94 to 1998-99

1993-94	34.5
1994-95	34.1
1995-96	34.1
1996-97	32.7
1997-98	31.0
1998-99	28.9

Note: Graduation rates were calculated by dividing the number of students 14 and older who graduated with a diploma by the number of students 14 and older who graduated with a diploma, received a certificate, reached the maximum age for services, died, and dropped out.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS).

In the original report, this was Figure I-2.

Graduation and Dropout Rates by Disability

Graduation rates for students aged 14 and older with disabilities varied by disability category. Students with visual impairments graduated at the highest rate (75.1 percent), followed by students with traumatic brain injury (70.3 percent) and students with hearing impairments (69.4 percent).

Students in five disability categories graduated at rates lower than the 57.4 percent observed for all students with disabilities. Graduation was least likely among students 14 and older who had mental retardation (41.7 percent) and emotional disturbance (41.9 percent). Table 3 presents graduation rates for students age 14 and older in all 12 disability categories.

Dropout rates for students aged 14 and older also varied by disability category. Dropout rates were lowest for students with autism (9.5 percent), deaf-blindness (11.5 percent), and visual impairments (11.8 percent). The highest dropout rate occurred among students with emotional disturbance; half of the students in that disability category dropped out of school in 1998-99. Dropout rates for the different disability categories are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Number and Percentage of Students Age 14 and Older with Disabilities Graduating With a Standard Diploma or Dropping Out, 1998-99

	<u>Standard Diploma</u>		<u>Dropped Out</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
Specific learning disabilities	100,738	63.3	42,156	27.1
Speech/lang impairments	4,260	64.8	1,644	25.0
Mental retardation	16,086	41.7	9,628	24.9
Emotional disturbance	13,735	41.9	16,583	50.6
Multiple disabilities	2,075	47.0	788	17.8
Hearing impairments	2,610	69.4	533	14.2
Orthopedic impairments	1,830	63.4	421	14.6
Other health impairments	5,706	66.8	1,940	22.7
Visual impairments	1,172	75.1	184	11.8
Autism	418	47.1	84	9.5
Deaf-blindness	52	54.2	11	11.5
Traumatic brain injury	790	70.3	169	15.0
All disabilities	149,472	57.4	75,141	28.9

Note: Graduation rates were calculated by dividing the number of students 14 and older who graduated with a diploma by the number of students 14 and older who graduated with a diploma, received a certificate, reached the maximum age for services, died, and dropped out.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS).

In the original report, this was Table I-1.

Graduation and Dropout Rates by Race/Ethnicity

The *Twenty-Second Annual Report to Congress* (2000) included, for the first time, data on the racial/ethnic composition of the special education population. This section of the module looks at graduation rates by race/ethnicity. Because the race/ethnicity data collection is so new, the data reported here should be interpreted cautiously. Analysis in the next two to three years will present a clearer picture of this variable.

Graduation rates for students with disabilities aged 14 through 21 varied by racial/ethnic group, ranging from 63.4 percent among white students to 43.5 percent among black students. Graduation rates for each racial/ethnic group are reported in Table 4. Dropout rates varied by racial/ethnic group. Asian/Pacific Islander students had the lowest dropout rate, with a figure of 18.8 percent. They were followed by white students, with a dropout rate of 26.9 percent; Hispanic students, with a dropout rate of 32.3 percent; and black students, with a dropout rate of 33.7 percent. The highest dropout rate occurred among American Indian/Alaska Native students, at 44.0 percent.

Table 4. Number and Percentage of Students Age 14 and Older With Disabilities Graduating With a Standard Diploma or Dropping Out, By Race/Ethnicity, 1998-99

	<u>Standard Diploma</u>		<u>Dropped Out</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
American Indian/Alaskan	1,544	47.9	1,420	44.0
Asian/Pacific Islander	2,033	56.6	675	18.8
Black	19,653	43.5	15,251	33.7
Hispanic	13,150	52.9	8,029	32.3
White	100,900	63.4	42,830	26.9

Note: Graduation rates were calculated by dividing the number of students 14 and older who graduated with a diploma by the number of students 14 and older who graduated with a diploma, received a certificate, reached the maximum age for services, died, and dropped out.

New York, North Carolina, Washington, and the District of Columbia have not yet reported 1998-99 exiting data by race/ethnicity and are thus not included in this table.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Data Analysis System (DANS).

In the original report, this was Table I-2.

Summary

Since 1994-94, the high school graduation rate for students with disabilities has steadily increased, while the percentage of students dropping out of school has declined. Graduation and dropout rates varied by disability category, with students with visual impairments, traumatic brain injury, and hearing impairments graduating at the highest rates. Graduation and dropout rates also varied by racial/ethnic group. White students graduated at the highest rate, and Asian/Pacific Islander students had the lowest dropout rate.

References

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