



IDEA FACT SHEET #1

NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED BY IDEA

IDEA THEN AND NOW

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that students with a disability are provided with Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and helps fund schools to develop and implement a program of special education tailored to the student's needs. IDEA was last reauthorized in 2004. This series of fact sheets documents key changes in the program nationally and by state to assist in understanding needs for full funding and modernization of the law.



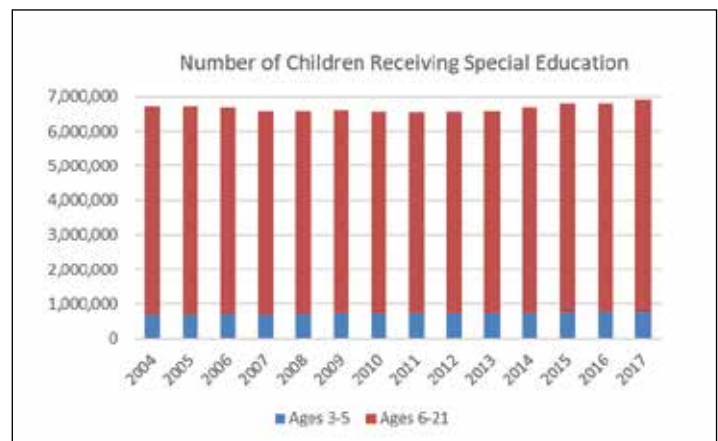
IDEA supports the identification of students with disabilities and the specialized education and related services provided to them. Federal grants are made to states to assist school districts in delivering the special education programs for these children. Part B of IDEA supports services for children ages 3-5 and 6-21—the preschool and school-age populations. Part C of IDEA supports services for infants and toddlers, but is not the primary focus of this Fact Sheet series.

Close to 7 Million Children Nationally are Served by IDEA Each Year

In 2017, the most recent year for which data are available, a total of approximately 6.9 million children nationally received special education services under Part B of the IDEA. In 2004, the year IDEA was last reauthorized, the number was about 6.7 million. Since dipping to 6.5 million in 2011, the number of children served has grown by more than 368,000 to its present levels. (See Figure 1.) In 2015,

students receiving special education services made up 13 percent of all public school students, according to the U.S. Department of Education.

The vast majority (89 percent) of children receiving special education services are school-age, or ages 6-21.



Data Source: U.S. Department of Education. Includes the 50 states, District of Columbia, and, starting in 2009, Outlying Areas and Freely Associated States.



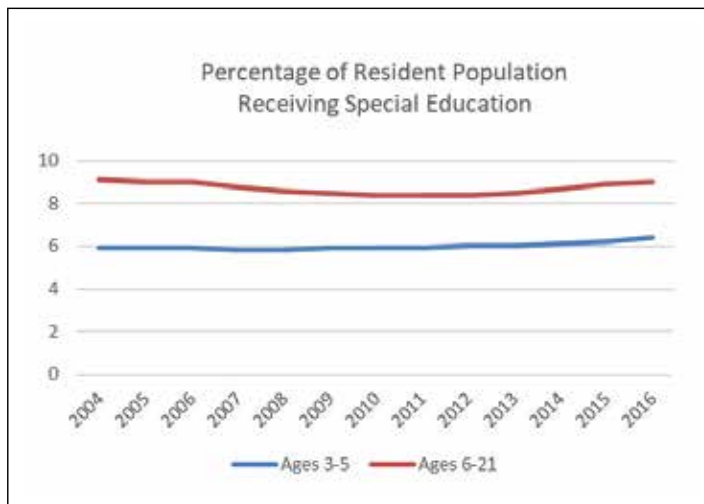
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(Of these, 18-21 year-olds make up about 5 percent of the special education population.) The remaining 11 percent—approximately 774,000 in 2017—are ages 3-5, or preschool- and Kindergarten-age.

Preschool-age children are a faster-growing share of special education students than are school-age children

Between 2004 and 2016, the number of pre-school age children grew faster than the number of school-age children receiving special education services. As a proportion of the resident population, preschool-age children (those ages 3-5) served by IDEA grew from 5.9 percent to 6.4 percent. The proportion of 6-21 year-olds receiving services was about 9 percent. The share dipped from 9.1 percent in 2004 to 8.4 percent in 2011 before returning to 9.0 percent in 2016. (See Figure 2.) The faster growth for preschool-age children suggests that schools will need to serve increasing numbers of school-age children in special education as these children age and if the preschool growth trend continues.



Data Source: U.S. Department of Education. Includes the 50 states, District of Columbia, and, starting in 2009, Outlying Areas and Freely Associated States.

What are the Numbers for My State?

The table below shows the number of students receiving special education services by state in 2017, as well as the share of 3-5 year olds (pre-school and Kindergarten age) and 6-21 year olds (school age). Use this table to see how your state compares to the national averages.



THE PRESCHOOL-AGE SPECIAL EDUCATION POPULATION IS GROWING FASTER COMPARED TO THE SCHOOL-AGE POPULATION

Number of special education students and percent ages 3-5 and 6-21 by state, 2017

State	Number of Special Education Students AGES 3-21	Percent of Special Education Students AGES 3-5	Percent of Special Education Students AGES 6-21
Alabama	90,319	8.7%	91.3%
Alaska	19,148	12.7%	87.3%
American Samoa	636	5.8%	94.2%
Arizona	140,702	11.7%	88.3%
Arkansas	72,835	18.8%	81.2%
Bureau of Indian Education	6,285	4.0%	96.0%
California	767,562	10.9%	89.1%



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Number of special education students and percent ages 3-5 and 6-21 by state, 2017 (continued)

State	Number of Special Education Students AGES 3-21	Percent of Special Education Students AGES 3-5	Percent of Special Education Students AGES 6-21
Colorado	102,240	14.0%	86.0%
Connecticut	79,758	11.4%	88.6%
Delaware	23,196	11.3%	88.7%
District of Columbia	13,399	13.4%	86.6%
Federated States of Micronesia	1,851	6.3%	93.7%
Florida	389,626	10.2%	89.8%
Georgia	214,267	8.8%	91.2%
Guam	2,015	8.3%	91.7%
Hawaii	19,276	12.8%	87.2%
Idaho	32,908	11.3%	88.7%
Illinois	295,066	12.6%	87.4%
Indiana	176,104	10.6%	89.4%
Iowa	65,935	10.6%	89.4%
Kansas	73,729	16.0%	84.0%
Kentucky	104,270	17.3%	82.7%
Louisiana	84,473	11.7%	88.3%
Maine	3,384	*	*
Maryland	108,491	13.2%	86.8%
Massachusetts	173,762	10.4%	89.6%
Michigan	198,751	10.9%	89.1%
Minnesota	118,800	*	*
Mississippi	69,197	12.1%	87.9%
Missouri	131,114	14.0%	86.0%
Montana	18,803	8.8%	91.2%
Nebraska	50,415	12.3%	87.7%
Nevada	60,123	14.9%	85.1%
New Hampshire	29,233	12.0%	88.0%
New Jersey	238,178	8.3%	91.7%
New Mexico	52,838	8.4%	91.6%
New York	522,221	13.8%	86.2%
North Carolina	200,905	9.9%	90.1%
North Dakota	15,153	14.4%	85.6%
Northern Marianas	956	12.1%	87.9%
Ohio	266,670	9.5%	90.5%
Oklahoma	112,080	8.7%	91.3%
Oregon	87,156	13.0%	87.0%
Pennsylvania	320,817	11.3%	88.7%
Puerto Rico	105,827	11.7%	88.3%

*Data missing



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Number of special education students and percent ages 3-5 and 6-21 by state, 2017 (continued)

State	Number of Special Education Students AGES 3-21	Percent of Special Education Students AGES 3-5	Percent of Special Education Students AGES 6-21
Republic of Palau	74	4.1%	95.9%
Republic of the Marshall Islands	606	4.1%	95.9%
Rhode Island	23,748	13.3%	86.7%
South Carolina	104,698	9.1%	90.9%
South Dakota	21,190	13.9%	86.1%
Tennessee	129,319	10.8%	89.2%
Texas	498,588	10.0%	90.0%
Utah	84,196	12.7%	87.3%
Vermont	2,005	*	*
Virgin Islands	1,105	11.4%	88.6%
Virginia	172,370	10.6%	89.4%
Washington	143,498	11.4%	88.6%
West Virginia	46,810	11.1%	88.9%
Wisconsin	*	*	*
Wyoming	15,551	22.0%	78.0%
U.S., Outlying Areas, and Freely Associated States	6,904,232	11.2%	88.8%

*Data missing
Data Source: U.S. Department of Education.

POLICY AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS FOR SCHOOL BOARDS

Know Your Child Counts and Trends.

Official counts of students receiving special education services are usually taken and reported to the state in the fall of each school year. The state may also take counts at one or more other times during the year. Your district's special education data manager should have these data.

Look at the number of special education students in your district and how the population is changing. Is your district following national trends, including faster growth in preschool age children receiving services, or are you seeing a different trend? Do the numbers make sense based on overall demographic changes in your district? Are there anomalies that require further investigation? For example, declines over time in the number of children identified for special education in

Texas, while total student enrollment grew, led to findings of inappropriate limitations on the number of children receiving special education in that state's schools. On the other hand, your district may be experiencing increasing numbers of special education students because it offers unique services, such as a program for students with autism, that are attracting families with special education needs into the district.

Use This Information for Planning.

Consider the implications of your special education student trends for your district. Do you have adequate services in place to meet the projected needs? Where in the district are the special education students located and how will they be served in the least restrictive environment? How will you obtain the needed

staffing, given national shortages in special education personnel? Is there a need to develop or reconfigure programs to achieve better outcomes or avoid costly out-of-district placements? What are anticipated costs and how will they be met?

If—like the national trend—the share of young children receiving services in your district is growing faster than the share of older children, you may need to plan for serving increasing numbers of special education students over time as these children make their way through the school system. In particular, is there a need to expand your district's early intervention services to better prepare incoming children with disabilities for later success? How can early intervention programs be strengthened to achieve this outcome?