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## Preschoolers Served Under IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires States to have in effect policies and procedures to ensure the provision of a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to all 3- through 5-year-olds with disabilities in order to be eligible for funds under the Preschool Grants Program and other IDEA funds targeted to children ages 3 through 5 with disabilities. States may also, at their discretion, serve 2-year-olds who will turn 3 during the school year. In addition, IDEA requires States to report data regarding their progress in providing special education and related services to preschoolers with disabilities. This module presents State-reported data on preschoolers served under IDEA for the 1999-2000 school year.

### The Number of Preschool Children Served Under Part B of IDEA

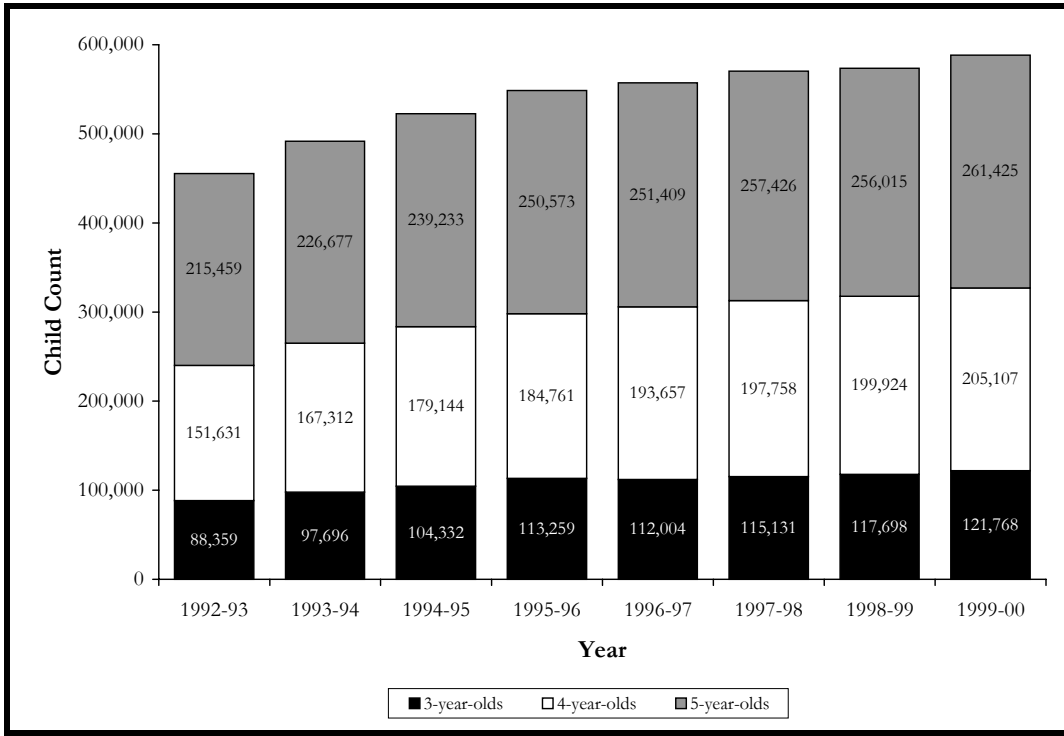
States reported serving 588,300 preschool children with disabilities during the 1999-2000 school year (see table AA1). This number represents approximately 5 percent of all preschoolers who lived in the United States and its Outlying Areas during the year (see table AA8).

Special education enrollment rates continued to vary by State. As in 1998-99, Arkansas, Kentucky, Maine, West Virginia, and Wyoming reported that more than 8 percent of their preschool populations were receiving services. The national average for the percentage of preschoolers receiving services was 5 percent.

At the other end of the continuum, Arizona, California, the District of Columbia, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and Texas reported serving fewer than 4 percent of their preschool-aged children. These data are consistent with the 1998-99 school year, with the addition of Arizona in the group of States serving fewer than 4 percent of their preschoolers. Outlying Areas continued to report serving comparatively fewer preschoolers with disabilities under IDEA. The Virgin Islands reported serving 2.5 percent, American Samoa reported serving 1 percent, Guam 1.6 percent, and the Northern Marianas 1.3 percent of their preschool population (see table AA8).

Examining the number of children served by discrete age groups suggests that States continued to make progress in identifying younger children and providing services. States reported serving more children within each age group, and the percentage of 3-year-olds receiving services continued to increase at a faster rate than the

Figure II-2  
Preschoolers Receiving Services Under Part B 1992-93 – 1999-2000



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

percentage of 4- and 5-year-olds (see table AA9). Of the total number of preschoolers receiving services in the 1999-2000 school year, 20.7 percent (121,768) were 3 years old, 34.9 percent (205,107) were 4 years old, and 44.4 percent (261,425) were 5 years old. Compared with 1998-99, States served 3.5 percent more 3-year-olds, 2.6 percent more 4-year-olds, and 2.1 percent more 5-year-olds. That States continue each year to serve more 3-year-olds reflects their efforts to identify children with disabilities early and to ease the transition process for eligible children and families who move from Part C to Part B. Figure II-2 shows the number of 3-year-olds, 4-year-olds, and 5-year-olds receiving services under Part B from 1992-93 to 1999-2000.

Overall, States reported that they continued to serve more preschoolers with disabilities under Part B of IDEA in 1999-2000 than in the previous year. Only 12 of the 57 States and Outlying Areas reported a decrease in the number of preschoolers served, and all of those declines were less than 1 percent. The rate of change also increased this year. In 1999-2000, the number of preschoolers served rose 2.5 percent, compared with a 0.6 percent increase between 1997-98 and 1998-99. The

increase in the number of preschoolers reported as receiving services was particularly notable given the 1.2 percent decrease in the general preschool population during the same period.<sup>1</sup>

## Race/Ethnicity of Preschoolers Served Under IDEA

The 1999-2000 school year was the second year that States were required to report data on the race/ethnicity of children receiving special education and related services. This section of the module compares the racial/ethnic distribution of preschoolers in special education to that of the general preschool population. The section also compares 1999-2000 race/ethnicity data with those reported for 1998-99. Comparisons should be interpreted cautiously, however, as 2 years of data are insufficient to reveal trends, and States may be new to data collection procedures for race/ethnicity.

State-reported data for 1999-2000 indicate that 67.3 percent of preschoolers who received services under IDEA were white (non-Hispanic), 15.7 percent were black (non-Hispanic), 13.7 percent were Hispanic, 2.1 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 1.2 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native (see table AA13). U.S. Census Bureau population estimates indicate that 61.8 percent of children ages 3 through 5 were white (non-Hispanic), 13.7 percent were black (non-Hispanic), 19.3 percent were Hispanic, 4.3 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander, and 0.9 percent were American Indian/Alaska Native. Although these percentages are roughly comparable, they do suggest underrepresentation of Hispanic children and overrepresentation of white children in the Part B preschool population. To a lesser extent, black children appeared to be overrepresented, and Asian/Pacific Islander children appeared to be underrepresented. Table II-7 shows the differences between race/ethnicity representation in the Part B and general preschool populations for 1999-2000.

The racial distribution of preschool children served under IDEA was generally comparable between 1998-99 and 1999-2000. There were slight differences in the race/ethnicity categories of white (non-Hispanic) and Hispanic. From 1998-99 to 1999-2000, the proportion of Hispanic preschoolers served grew by 1.7 percent, and the proportion of white preschoolers served declined by 1.6 percent.

The racial distribution of preschoolers served under IDEA varied by State. Four States—Alaska, Arizona, New Mexico, and Oklahoma—reported serving 40 percent

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<sup>1</sup> Population data are based on July 1999 estimates by the U.S. Census Bureau.

**Table II-7**  
**Comparison of Race/Ethnicity Representation in the Part B and General**  
**Preschool Populations for 1999-2000**

	Percentage in Part B Population, Ages 3-5	Percentage in General Population, Ages 3-5	Difference
White	67.3	61.8	+5.5
Black	15.7	13.7	+2.0
Hispanic	13.7	19.3	-5.6
Asian/Pacific Islander	2.1	4.3	-2.2
American Indian/Alaska Native	1.2	0.9	+0.3

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

of the total number of American Indian/Alaska Native preschoolers served in 1999-2000. California and Hawaii served 42 percent of the total number of Asian/Pacific Islander preschoolers, and California and Texas served 47 percent of the total number of Hispanic preschoolers.

## Summary

State-reported data for 1999-2000 show a continued increase in the number of preschool children served under Part B of IDEA, although States continue to vary in the percentage of population served. In this second year of race/ethnicity data collection, comparisons of preschoolers receiving services with the racial/ethnic distribution of the general population suggest that white (non-Hispanic) children were served in numbers that exceeded their representation in the general population. To a lesser extent, this was also true for black preschoolers. In contrast, Hispanic children appeared to be underrepresented in the preschool population. Asian/Pacific Islander children also appeared to be slightly underrepresented among preschoolers receiving special education and related services.