

## CLASS DISCUSSION

**DISABILITY: CHANGES IN THE NUMBER OF STUDENTS SERVED UNDER IDEA OVER TIME****ESTIMATED TIME: 30-45 MINUTES**

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1) To understand that the number of identified students vary by disability, 2) to describe the different prevalence rates of students with disabilities assigned to various special education categories, and 3) to identify the factors that influence changes in prevalence rates.

## OVERVIEW

Though the percentage of students with disabilities as part of the overall student population has fluctuated somewhat, it has nevertheless tended to remain within the 10–11% range. As the overall numbers of students with disabilities has increased, so, too, has the number of students in America. IDEA '04 enumerates fourteen special education categories through which individualized services and supports can be provided<sup>1</sup>:

Autism	Deaf-blindness	Deafness
Emotional disturbance	Hearing impairment	Mental retardation <sup>1</sup>
Multiple disabilities	Orthopedic impairment	Other health impairment
Specific learning disability	Speech or language impairment	Traumatic brain injury
Visual impairment	Developmental delay	

Participation rates in these individual categories have not remained stable. Some categories have shown decreases in the number of students served, while others have shown increases. In this activity, students will examine the changes over time, and also discuss factors that influence those changes.

## ACTIVITY

1. Pass out the attached worksheet and instruct your students to calculate the changes in schoolchildren with disabilities served in the ten-year span between the 1992–1993 (Column A) and the 2002–2003 (Column B) school years. The calculation formula is  $(B-A/A) \times 100$ . Students can work individually, in pairs, or in small groups. If time is of concern, instructors can assign a few disability categories to each person/pair/team, and then students share their answers with the rest of the class.
2. Students then calculate the changes in those served during the five-year span between the 2002–2003 (Column B) and the 2007–2008 (Column D) school years. The calculation formula is  $(D-B/B) \times 100$ .

## QUESTIONS/ DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. How do changes in disability populations compare to those in the overall student population?
2. Which disability categories have shown the largest increases during the ten-year span between 1992 and 2002?

3. Why do you think these categories experienced such large changes in enrollment?
4. Which of these categories continued to show large increases in enrollment over the past five years?
5. Which categories have shown decreases in enrollment over the past five years?
6. Why do you think these decreases have occurred?

**Number of Students Ages 6 –21 Served under IDEA during the 1992–1993, 2002–2003,  
and 2007–2008 School Years**

Disability <sup>1</sup>	Fall 1992  (A)	Fall 2002  (B)	% change over 10 years  (C) (B-A/A) x 100	Fall 2007  (D)	% change over 5 years  (E) (D-B/B) x 100
Total number of students enrolled U.S. public schools	42,823,312	48,183,086	13%	49,610,000	3%
Total number of students with disabilities	4,442,283	5,893,038		5,912,586	
Specific learning disabilities	2,328,183	2,839,311		2,563,665	
Speech or language impairments	988,572	1,103,091		1,137,934	
Mental retardation (intellectual disabilities)	483,710	580,375		487,854	
Emotional disturbance	368,028	480,187		438,867	
Multiple disabilities	85,916	130,443		131,347	
Hearing impairments	43,607	71,112		71,332	
Orthopedic impairments	46,443	73,617		60,010	
Other health impairments	63,876	390,295		625,187	
Visual impairments	18,099	25,520		25,855	
Autism	12,222	118,092		256,863	
Traumatic brain injury	2,891	21,384		23,805	
Deaf-blindness	736	1,536		1,310	
Developmental delay	----	58,075		88,557	

<sup>1</sup>The federal terms do not always match those preferred by education professionals and those with disabilities. For example, “mental retardation” is now referred to as “intellectual disability” or “cognitive disability.”