

CLASS DISCUSSION

**DISABILITY: PREVALENCE RATES OF
INDIVIDUAL DISABILITY CATEGORIES**

ESTIMATED TIME: 30-45 MINUTES

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1) To understand that the number of students receiving special education services varies by disability, and 2) to understand the concepts of high- and low-incidence disabilities.

OVERVIEW

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA '04) identifies fourteen disability categories through which students can qualify for special education services. The names of these disabilities as they appear in federal law are:

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

Rates of identification within these categories vary greatly. Students may find that their assumptions regarding the prevalence of certain disabilities are influenced by their personal experiences (or lack thereof) or by the news media. In this activity, students will examine the national prevalence rates of each disability category using data from the 2006–2007 school year.²

ACTIVITY

1. Pass out the attached worksheet and ask the students to use only their prior knowledge to identify which disabilities are high-incidence and which are low-incidence.
2. Discuss Questions 1 and 2.
3. Ask students to calculate the percentage of all public school students served under each disability category (disability category/ all public school students x 100).
4. Ask students to calculate the percentage of all students with disabilities served under each disability category (disability category/ all disabilities x 100). Discuss Questions 3 and 4.

QUESTIONS/ DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. Compare the number of students receiving services under each disability category. Which disability category is the most prevalent? The least?
2. Which of these categories do you think would be considered high-incidence disabilities and which would be considered low-incidence disabilities?

3. Having calculated the percentages of all schoolchildren with each disability and the percentages of all students with disabilities within each category, have your answers to Question 2 changed? Why or why not?
4. Were you surprised by any of the actual prevalence numbers? Explain.

¹ Terms used by the federal government 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.”

² This is the most recent academic term for which complete data are available, obtained from the Part B data from <http://www.ideadata.org> and the Schools and Staffing Survey from <http://nces.ed.gov>

Number of Students Ages 6–21 Served under IDEA during the 2006–2007 School Year

Disability	Fall 2006	% of all public school students	% of all students with disabilities
Total number of students enrolled U.S. public schools	49,298,945		
Total number of students with disabilities	5,986,644		100.00%
Autism	223,345	0%	4%
Deaf-blindness	1,413		
Developmental delay	83,754		
Emotional disturbance	457,731		
Hearing impairments	71,589		
Mental retardation (intellectual disabilities)	511,041		
Multiple disabilities	132,846		
Orthopedic impairments	61,329		
Other health impairments	595,073		
Specific learning disabilities	2,654,668		
Speech or language impairments	1,144,277		
Traumatic brain injury	23,867		
Visual impairments	25,661		