

## CLASS DISCUSSION

**DISABILITY: STATE-BY-STATE DIFFERENCES IN THE PREVALENCE RATES OF INDIVIDUAL DISABILITY CATEGORIES****ESTIMATED TIME: 30–45 MINUTES**

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1) To understand that identification rates for individual disability categories vary widely by state, 2) to understand that this variability is, in part, dependent upon the state's definition of each disability.

## OVERVIEW

There are fourteen disability categories identified in IDEA '04 through which students can qualify for special education services:

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	

Interestingly, the percentages of the overall student population who receive services under each disability category vary greatly from state to state. In this activity, students will examine the prevalence rates of each disability category using data from the 2006–2007 school year<sup>2</sup>.

## ACTIVITY

Put your students into small groups and ask them to access **Table 1–16 (Students ages 6 through 17 served under IDEA, Part B, as a percentage of population, by disability category and state: Fall 2007)** from [https://www.ideadata.org/arc\\_toc9.asp#partbCC](https://www.ideadata.org/arc_toc9.asp#partbCC), or pass out copies of the table. Have students:

1. Pick a disability category, and compare its prevalence across states and across geographic regions (e.g., Southwest, Northeast). Make sure to note the average across all fifty states and the District of Columbia (at the bottom of the table).
2. Choose several states and compare the prevalence of all disabilities across those states.
3. Search several states' Web sites to locate and analyze the definitions of the disabilities that they use to qualify students for services.

## QUESTIONS/ DISCUSSION TOPICS

1. What do you notice when you compare prevalence rates across states? Across regions?
2. Use the attached chart to document the variability across disability categories. Which category has the greatest variability among the states? The least?
3. Why do you think there is such variability?

4. What did you find when you compared several states' disability definitions?
5. How might the differences in definitions impact the identification—and subsequent prevalence—rates?

<sup>1</sup> 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.”

<sup>2</sup> This is the most recent academic term for which complete data are available, obtained from the Part B data from <http://www.ideadata.org>

**Highest and lowest percentages, by state, of the IDEA disability categories:  
2006–2007 school year**

Disability <sup>1</sup>	Highest Percentage	State	Lowest Percentage	State	Range
Total number of students with disabilities	15.66%	New Jersey	8.60%	Idaho	7.06%
Specific learning disabilities					
Speech or language impairments					
Mental retardation (intellectual disabilities)					
Emotional disturbance					
Multiple disabilities					
Hearing impairments					
Orthopedic impairments					
Other health impairments					
Visual impairments					
Autism					
Traumatic brain injury					
Deaf-blindness					
Developmental delay					