

Students With Disabilities

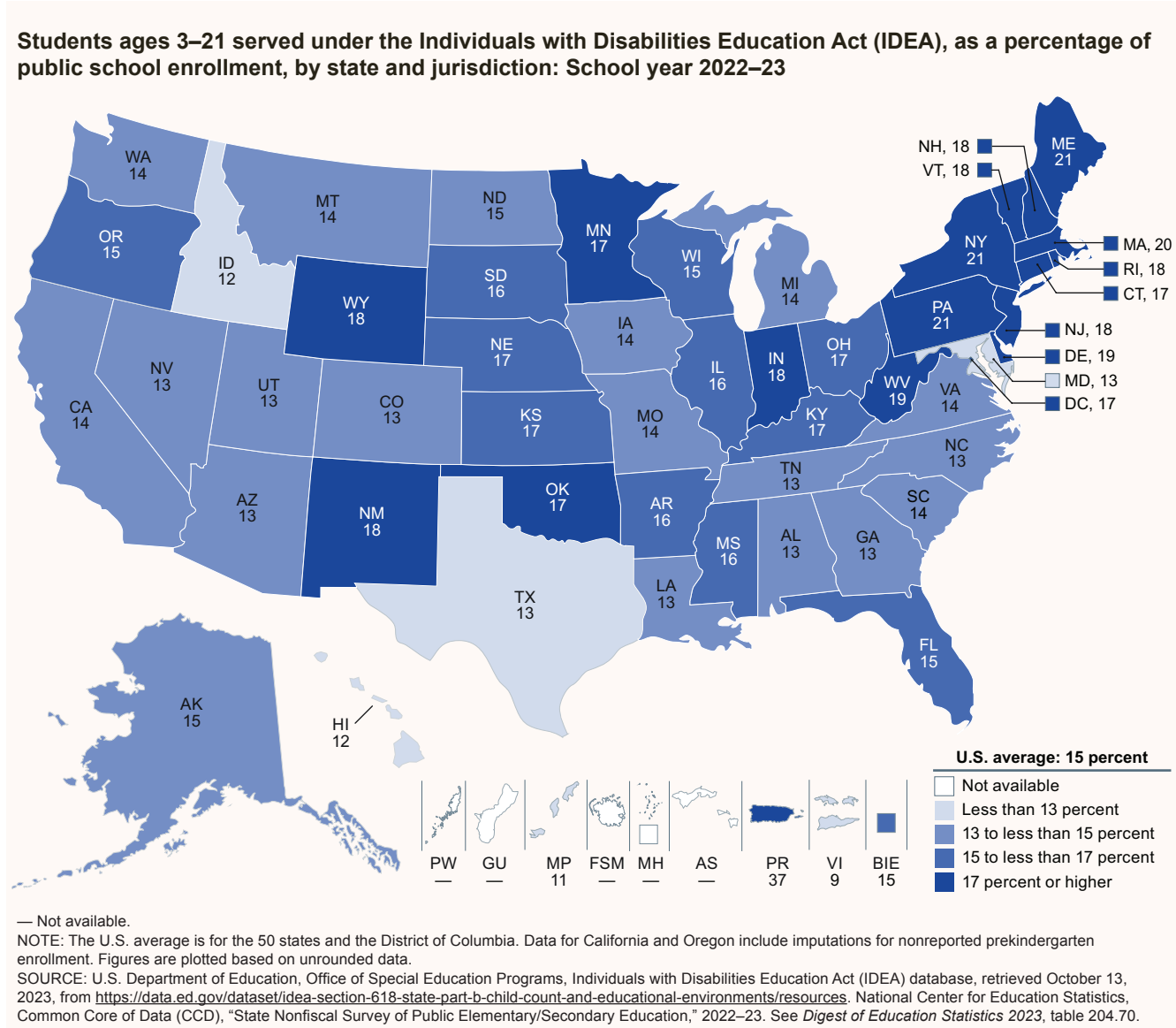
In 2022–23, the number of students ages 3–21 who received special education and/or related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was 7.5 million, or the equivalent of 15 percent of all public school students. Among students receiving special education and/or related services, the most common category of disability was specific learning disabilities (32 percent).

Enacted in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates the provision of a free and appropriate public school education for eligible students ages 3-21. Eligible students are those identified by a team of professionals as having a disability that adversely affects academic performance and as being in need of special education and/or related services. Data collection activities to monitor compliance with IDEA began in 1976. The number of students ages 3-21 served under IDEA in the United States¹ increased from 6.4 million in school year 2012-13 to 7.5 million in school year 2022-23.^{2,3} Taken as a percentage of total public school enrollment, this equates to an increase from 13 to 15 percent of students. The number of students served as a percentage of total enrollment is based on total public school enrollment in prekindergarten through grade 12. For simplicity, this indicator refers to this percentage as the “percentage of public school students served under IDEA.” However, not all students served under IDEA receive education services in public school environments.

During the coronavirus pandemic, total public school enrollment decreased by 3 percent from fall 2019 to fall 2020, and the fall 2022 enrollment remained lower than it was in fall 2019, before the pandemic (see [Public School Enrollment](#)). Meanwhile, the number of students served under IDEA decreased by 1 percent between 2019-20 and 2020-21 (from 7.3 to 7.2 million students). In 2022-23, the number of students served under IDEA reached an all-time high of 7.5 million, which was 3 percent higher than it was in 2019-20. As a result, the percentage of public school students served under IDEA continued its upward trend each year during the pandemic and was higher in 2022-23 (15 percent) than in 2019-20 (14 percent).

Percentage of Students Served Under IDEA by State and Jurisdiction

FIGURE 1.



In school year 2022-23, across the 50 states and the District of Columbia, the percentage of public school students served under IDEA ranged from 12 to 21 percent. The percentage was

- 21 percent in Pennsylvania, New York, and Maine; and
- 12 percent in Idaho and Hawaii.

In other U.S. jurisdictions in school year 2022-23, the percentage of public school students served under IDEA was

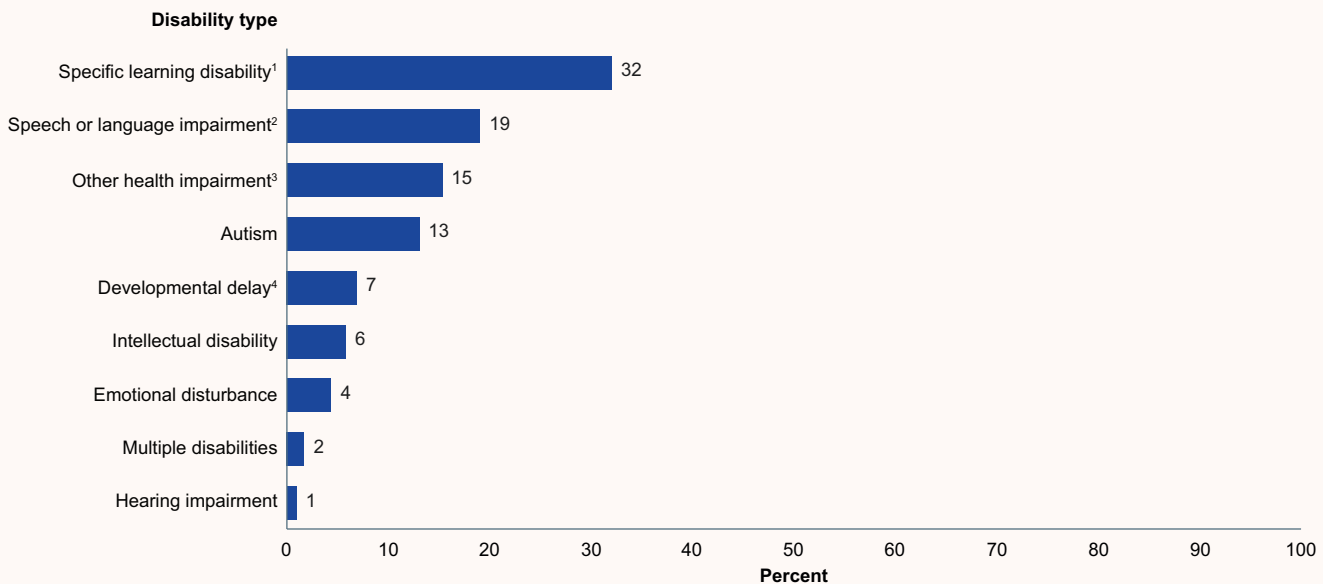
- 37 percent in Puerto Rico;
- 11 percent in the Northern Mariana Islands; and
- 9 percent in the U.S. Virgin Islands.⁴

Additionally, 15 percent of students in Bureau of Indian Education schools were served under IDEA.

Types of Disabilities

FIGURE 2.

Among students ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), percentage distribution of selected disability types: School year 2022–23



¹ A specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations.

² Speech or language impairment is defined as a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

³ Other health impairments include having limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems such as a heart condition, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poisoning, leukemia, or diabetes.

⁴ Although federal law does not require that states/entities and local education agencies categorize students according to developmental delay, if this category is required by state law, they are expected to report these students in the developmental delay category.

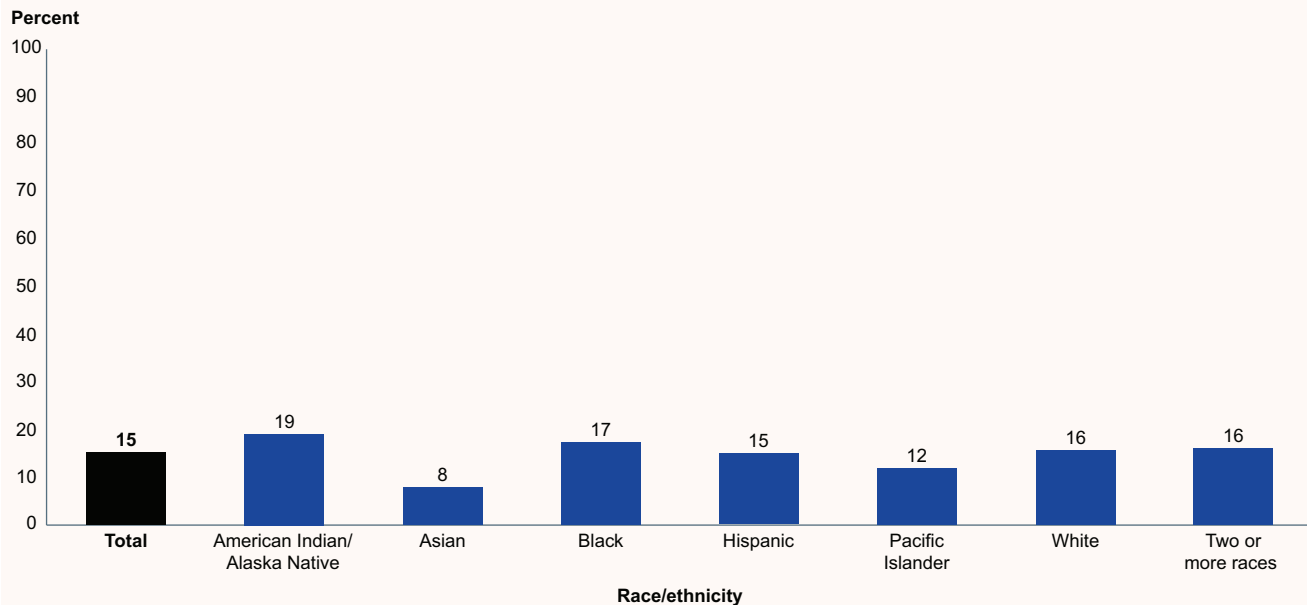
NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia only. Disability type refers to the specific disability for which a child is receiving services under IDEA. Disability types served under IDEA are defined under [Title 34](#). If a child has multiple types of disabilities but is receiving services for only one IDEA-defined disability, then the child is categorized under that specific disability. If a child is receiving services for more than one type of IDEA-defined disability, then the child is categorized under "multiple disabilities." Orthopedic impairment, visual impairment, traumatic brain injury, and deaf-blindness are not shown because they each account for less than 0.5 percent of students served under IDEA. Details do not sum to total because of rounding in the data labels and the exclusion of some categories. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved October 13, 2023, from <https://data.ed.gov/dataset/idea-section-618-data-products>. National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 2022–23. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 204.30.

Among students who were served under IDEA in school year 2022–23, the disability types⁵ with the largest reported percentages of students were

- specific learning disabilities (32 percent);⁶
- speech or language impairments (19 percent);⁷
- other health impairments (15 percent);⁸ and
- autism (13 percent).

Students with developmental delays,⁹ intellectual disabilities, and emotional disturbances accounted for 7, 6, and 4 percent of students served under IDEA, respectively. Each of the following disability types accounted for 2 percent or less of students served under IDEA: multiple disabilities, hearing impairments, orthopedic impairments, visual impairments, traumatic brain injuries, and deaf-blindness.

Characteristics and Educational Environments of Students**FIGURE 3.****Students ages 3–21 served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), as a percentage of public school enrollment, by race/ethnicity: School year 2022–23**

NOTE: Based on total public school enrollment in prekindergarten through grade 12 by race/ethnicity. Although data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia, data limitations result in inclusion of a small (but unknown) number of students from other jurisdictions. Race categories exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data.

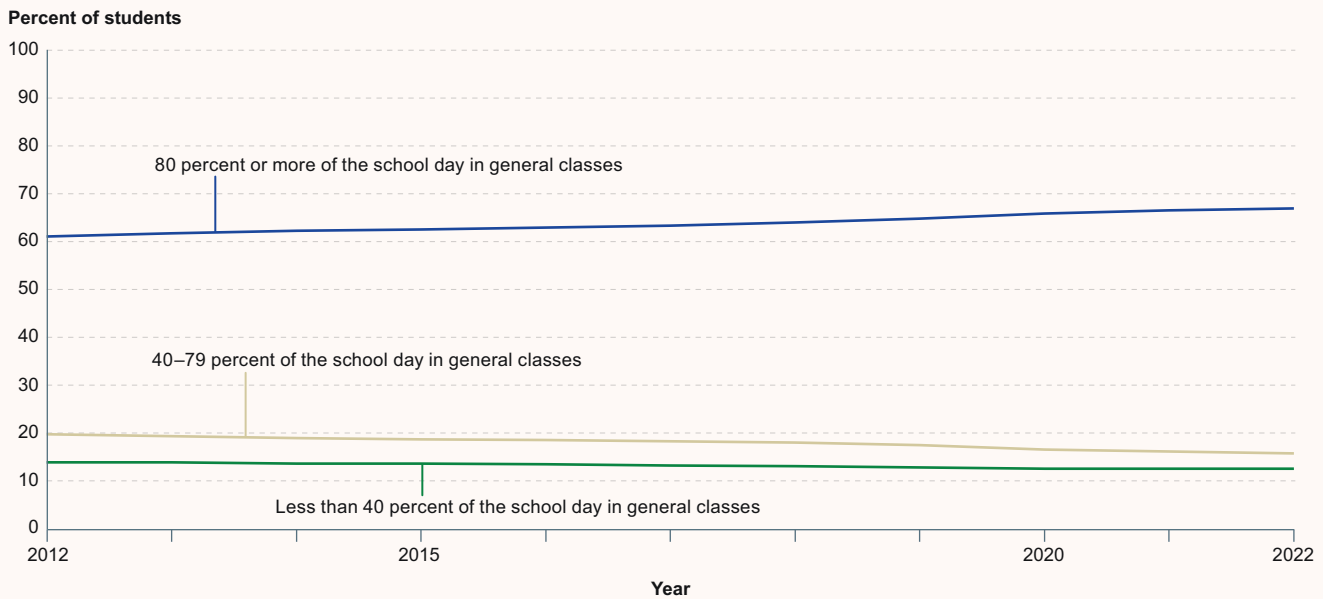
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved December 18, 2023, from <https://data.ed.gov/dataset/idea-section-618-data-products>. National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education," 2022–23. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 204.50.

By race/ethnicity, the percentage of public school students served under IDEA in school year 2022-23 was

- highest for American Indian/Alaska Native (19 percent) and Black (17 percent) students; and
- lowest for Pacific Islander (12 percent) and Asian (8 percent) students.

For most racial/ethnic groups, specific learning disabilities and speech or language impairments were the two most common types of disabilities. For Hispanic, American Indian/Alaska Native, and Pacific Islander students, specific learning disabilities and speech or language impairments together accounted for more than 50 percent of those served under IDEA. In contrast, although these two disabilities accounted for 40 percent of Asian students served under IDEA, the most common disability for Asian students was autism (31 percent). The percentage of students from other racial/ethnic backgrounds served under IDEA for autism ranged from 8 to 14 percent.

Data on type of disability by sex were available only for school-age students.¹⁰ Therefore, findings by sex are presented for school-age students only, rather than all students ages 3-21. As a percentage of K-12 students enrolled in public schools in school year 2022-23, more male students (18 percent) than female students (10 percent) were served under IDEA. In addition, the percentage distribution of school-age students served under IDEA for various types of disabilities differed by sex. For example, the percentage of students served under IDEA for specific learning disabilities was higher for female students (42 percent) than for male students (30 percent), while the percentage served under IDEA for autism was higher for male students (16 percent) than for female students (7 percent).

FIGURE 4.**Among school-age students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), percentage who spent various amounts of time during the school day in general classes in regular schools: Fall 2012 through fall 2022**

NOTE: Data are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia only. Totals include imputations for states for which data were unavailable. Prior to 2019, "school-age children" included in this figure were students ages 6 to 21. Due to changes in reporting requirements in the fall 2019 data collection, the number of school-age students served may include some 5-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten. Starting in the fall 2020 data collection, school-age children include 6- to 21-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten. Students in other school environments (separate schools for students with disabilities, separate residential facilities, parentally placed in regular private schools, homebound or hospital placement, and correctional facilities) are excluded from this figure. Figures are plotted based on unrounded data. SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database, retrieved October 16, 2023, from <https://data.ed.gov/dataset/idea-section-618-data-products-state-level-data-files>. See *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, table 204.60.

Educational environment data are also available for school-age students served under IDEA. Of the school-age students served under IDEA in fall 2022,

- 95 percent were enrolled in regular schools;
- 2 percent were enrolled in separate schools (public or private) for students with disabilities;
- 2 percent were parentally placed in regular private schools;¹¹ and
- a combined 1 percent were homebound or in hospitals, in separate residential facilities (public or private), or in correctional facilities.

Students served under IDEA who attended regular schools spent different percentages of time during the school day in general classes, and these percentages changed over time. Between fall 2012 and fall 2022,¹² among all school-age students served under IDEA, the percentage who were in regular schools and spent various amounts of time in general classes changed as follows:

- The percentage who spent 80 percent or more of their time in general classes increased from 61 to 67 percent.
- The percentage who spent 40 to 79 percent of their time in general classes decreased from 20 to 16 percent.
- The percentage who spent less than 40 percent of their time in general classes decreased from 14 to 13 percent.

In fall 2022, more than two-thirds of students served under IDEA with the following disabilities spent 80 percent or more of their time during the school day in general classes:

- speech or language impairments (89 percent)
- specific learning disabilities (76 percent)
- other health impairments (71 percent)
- visual impairments (70 percent)
- developmental delays (69 percent)

Less than one-third of students with the following disabilities spent 80 percent or more of their time during the school day in general classes:

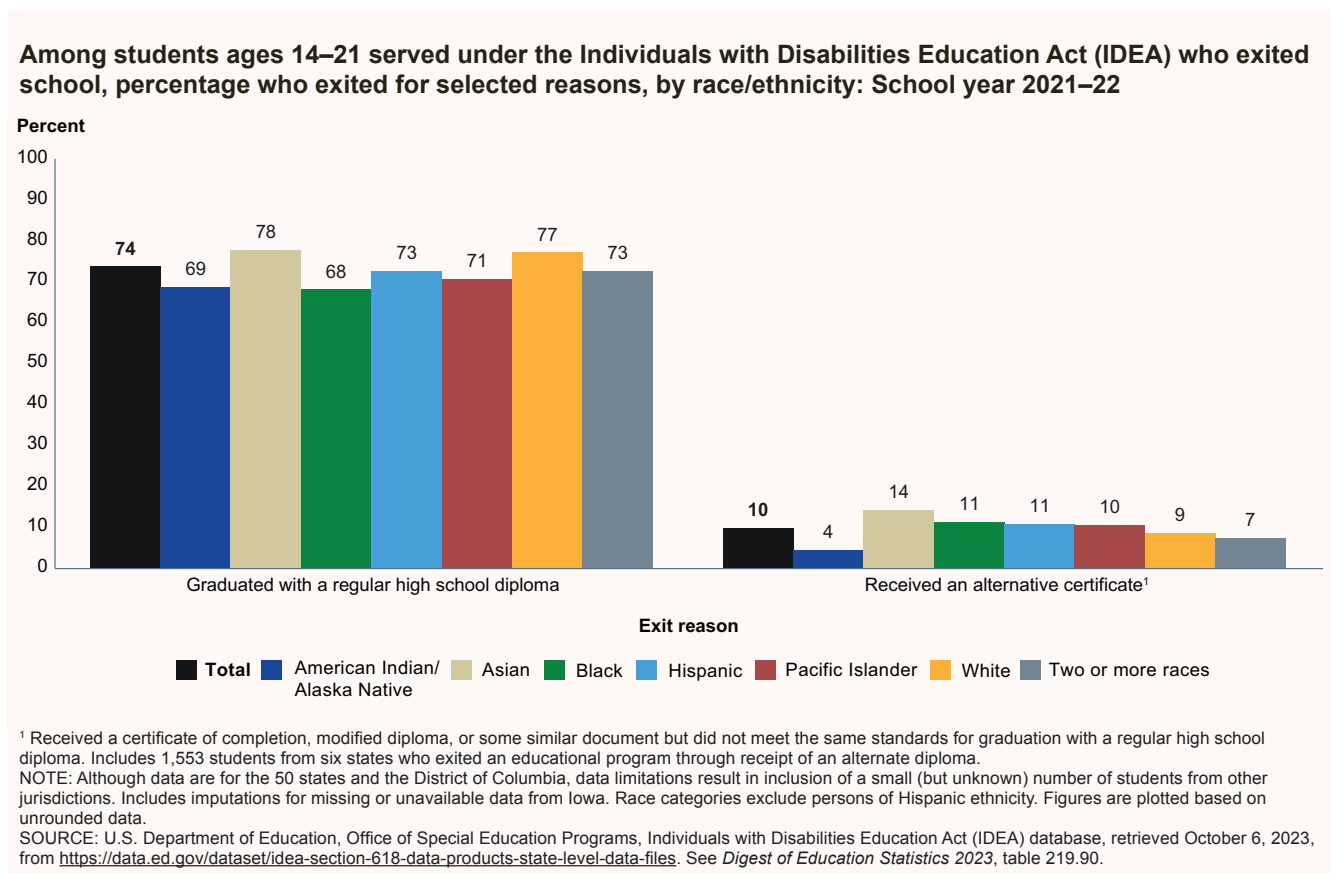
- deaf-blindness (31 percent)
- intellectual disabilities (21 percent)
- multiple disabilities (16 percent)

School Exiting

Data are also available for students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school¹³ during school year 2021-22. Approximately 464,000 students ages 14-21 served under IDEA exited school. Of these students,

- 74 percent graduated with a regular high school diploma;
- 15 percent “dropped out”;¹⁴
- 10 percent received an alternative certificate;¹⁵
- 1 percent reached the maximum age¹⁶ to receive special education and/or related services; and
- less than one-half of 1 percent died.

FIGURE 5.



Among students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school in school year 2021-22, the percentages who exited for various reasons differed by race/ethnicity. The percentage of exiting students who graduated with a regular high school diploma was highest for Asian students (78 percent) and lowest for Black students (68 percent). The percentage of exiting students who received an alternative certificate was highest for Asian students (14 percent) and lowest for American Indian/Alaska Native students (4 percent). The percentage of exiting students who “dropped out” was highest for American Indian/Alaska Native students (26 percent) and lowest for Asian students (6 percent).

Among students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school in school year 2021-22, the percentages who exited for various reasons also differed by type of disability. The percentage of exiting students who graduated with a regular high school diploma was highest for students with hearing impairments (84 percent) and lowest for students with multiple disabilities (40 percent). The percentage of exiting students who received an alternative certificate was highest for students with multiple disabilities (39 percent) and lowest for students with specific learning disabilities (5 percent). The percentage of exiting students who “dropped out” was highest for students with emotional disturbances (30 percent) and lowest for students with autism (7 percent).

Endnotes:

¹ Data throughout this indicator represent the 50 states and the District of Columbia unless otherwise noted.

² Totals presented in this indicator include imputations for states for which data were unavailable. See reference tables in the *Digest of Education Statistics* for more information.

³ For general technical notes related to data analysis, data interpretation, rounding, and other considerations, please refer to the *Reader’s Guide*.

⁴ Data were not available for American Samoa, Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Marshall Islands, and Palau.

⁵ Disability type refers to the specific disability for which a child is receiving services under IDEA. If a child has multiple types of disabilities but is receiving services under IDEA for only one type of disability, then the child is categorized under that specific disability. If a child is receiving services for more than one type of IDEA-defined disability, then the child is categorized under “multiple disabilities.”

⁶ A specific learning disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or using spoken or written language that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. Please see [Title 34](#) for more information.

⁷ Speech or language impairment is defined as a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment that adversely affects a child’s educational performance. Please see [Title 34](#) for more information.

⁸ Other health impairments include having limited strength, vitality, or alertness due to chronic or acute health problems such as a heart condition, tuberculosis, rheumatic fever, nephritis, asthma, sickle cell anemia, hemophilia, epilepsy, lead poisoning, leukemia, or diabetes. Please see [Title 34](#) for more information.

⁹ Although federal law does not require that states/entities and local education agencies categorize students according to developmental delay, if this category is required by state law, they are expected to report these students in the developmental delay category.

¹⁰ Starting in the school year 2020-21 data collection, school-age students include 6- to 21-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten.

¹¹ Refers to students who are enrolled by their parents or guardians in regular private schools and have their basic education paid for through private resources but receive special education and/or related services at public expense.

¹² For fall 2012 through fall 2018, school-age students include students ages 6-21. Due to changes in reporting requirements in the fall 2019 data collection, the number of school-age students served may include some 5-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten in that year. Starting in the fall 2020 data collection, school-age students include 6- to 21-year-olds and 5-year-olds enrolled in kindergarten.

¹³ School year 2021-22 data for students ages 14-21 served under IDEA who exited school are for the 50 states and the District of Columbia as well as a small (but unknown) number of students from other jurisdictions. Data from prior years included data for students from Bureau of Indian Education schools, American Samoa, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico, the Republic of Palau, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

¹⁴ “Dropped out” is defined as students who were enrolled at some point in the reporting year, were not enrolled at the end of the reporting year, and did not exit for any of the other reasons described.

¹⁵ Refers to students who received a certificate of completion, modified diploma, or some similar document but did not meet the same standards for graduation with a regular high school diploma. For school year 2021-22, the number of students who received an alternative certificate includes 1,553 students from six states who exited an educational program through receipt of an alternate diploma.

¹⁶ Each state determines its maximum age for receiving special education and/or related services. At the time these data were collected, the maximum age across states generally ranged from 20 to 22 years old.

Reference tables: *Digest of Education Statistics 2023*, tables [203.10](#), [203.50](#), [204.30](#), [204.50](#), [204.60](#), [204.70](#), and [219.90](#)

Related indicators and resources: [Disability Rates and Employment Status by Educational Attainment](#) [*The Condition of Education 2017 Spotlight*]; [English Learners in Public Schools](#); [Students With Disabilities](#) [*Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups*]

Glossary: [Disabilities, children with](#); [Enrollment](#); [High school completer](#); [High school diploma](#); [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#); [Private school](#); [Public school or institution](#); [Racial/ethnic group](#); [Regular school](#)