Large-Scale Assessment Practices for Students with Disabilities in Urban States

Martha Thurlow & Sandy Thompson, National Center on Educational Outcomes

For the past 10 years at the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), we have been surveying state directors of special education about the participation of students with disabilities in education reform. Most often, we are asking about their participation in state assessments and accountability systems. We completed our most recent survey in the early months of 2001. While the results of our survey cover all 50 states, we are also able to pull out data to look at them in several ways.

Recently, we looked at the assessment and accountability results for those states defined as the most urban by the U.S. Census Bureau (using the 1990 data, which were the most recent available for our analyses). We also looked at the results for those states defined as the most rural in the United States. The states in these two groups were:

**Urban States**
- Arizona
- California

**Rural States**
- Arkansas
- Kentucky

We looked at assessment participation and performance, accommodations, alternate assessments, reporting, and consequences in these 22 states.

**Assessment Accommodations**

In our survey of all 50 states, we found that more than half of them reported an increase over previous years in the state test participation rates of students with disabilities. From our additional analyses, we find that more of the urban states report an increase than do rural states (see Figure 1). Specifically, nine of the 11 most urban states reported an increase, compared to five of the 11 most rural states. Urban state directors indicated to us that this increase was due to:

- directions given to the field
- increased awareness and compliance with the law
- public awareness of new statewide alternate assessments
- implementation of the alternate

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Over-identification Issues within IDEA and the Need for Reform

Tom Hehir, Senior Policy Advisor

The following is a transcript of the testimony Dr. Hehir presented to the Committee on Education in the Workforce, U.S. Congress, October 4, 2001.

Good morning Mr. Chairman, ranking member Miller, and members of the committee. My name is Dr. Thomas Hehir. I am currently Director of the School Leadership Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education and Lecturer on Education. Prior to coming to Harvard in 1999, I was Director of the Office of Special Education Programs for the U.S. Department of Education from 1993 to 1999 as an appointee of the Clinton Administration. This office has statutory responsibility for implementing the IDEA. Prior to coming to Washington I served in special education leadership positions in Boston from 1978 to 1987 and, more recently, in Chicago where I served as associate superintendent of schools from 1990 to 1992. I began my career as a special education teacher. I have been asked to testify on the issue of overrepresentation of minorities in special education and its connection to fully funding the federal commitment to special education.

Essentially my position on these issues is that they are not directly related and that the failure to meet federal financial commitments to special education may actually be making the very real problem of overrepresentation of minorities, particularly African Americans, worse. I hope my remarks today will help clarify these issues.

Some overrepresentation of minorities in special education may be due to the well-documented link between poverty and disability. The National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS) found some degree of overrepresentation in unambiguous categories of significant disability such as blindness and deafness. This study which included large samples of students in the late 80s and early 90s documented rates of African Americans in these disabilities of a little over 20 percent compared to a 15 percent rate in the general population. The overrepresentation of minorities in these categories of significant disability is likely due to the impact of poverty and inferior access to health care. For instance, poor women are more apt to have low birth weight babies. Poor children are more likely to be exposed to lead or to trauma in their environment. These factors and others associated with poverty can increase the incidence of disability in a population. Therefore, given the fact that African American children are much more likely to be poor than the general population, some overrepresentation should be expected. The link between poverty and disability was dealt with extensively in the Nineteenth Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA (1997) and I would recommend that report to you as a source.
EPRRI Researches Better Accountability Measures

Margaret McLaughlin & Katherine Nagle, Education Policy Reform Research Institute

The Education Policy Reform Research Institute (EPRRI) is a five-year project funded by the Office of Special Education Programs to conduct research on the impact of new educational accountability systems on students with disabilities and special education programs. Our guiding research questions are as follows:

- How are students with disabilities affected by educational accountability reforms?
- What are the criteria to which special education has historically been held accountable?
- What impacts have educational accountability mechanisms had on students with disabilities at the system and individual levels?
- How do broad education policies that incorporate high-stakes accountability include consideration of students with disabilities?
- What changes could be made to better align special education with accountability reform?

EPRRI focuses its research in four states: California, Maryland, New York, and Texas. Two local districts have been selected within each state as research sites:

- California: Long Beach Unified School District and New Haven Unified School District
- Maryland: Montgomery County and Carroll County
- New York: Rochester City School District and North Colonie District

Important components of EPRRI’s research methods include analyses of extant data and interviews with administrators, teachers, and parents within the states.

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LASER’s Web Site Builds Minority Research Community

December marked the launch of our new Web site: http://www.coedu.usf.edu/laser. Bookmark us and visit us often as this site will serve as a powerful resource for information and discussion on critical topics in urban special education, such as:

- Successful inclusion practices
- Favorable intervention strategies
- Effective parental participation
- The achievement gap
- Culturally responsive teaching
- Positive behavior supports from a culturally responsive perspective
- High-stakes testing of urban learners

Look for papers, monographs, and other resources on these issues and more in the months ahead. Highlights from our annual Urban Special Education Research Conference, December 5-7, 2001, will soon be posted. Please help us develop this site into a comprehensive resource that narrows the gap between urban special education research and practice by sharing with us any relevant news and events in the field.

For more information, please visit http://www.coedu.usf.edu/laser or email us at laser@tempest.coedu.usf.edu.
ILIA D’s Cadre of Trainers Support IDEA ’97 Implementation

ILIAD (IDEA Local Implementation by Local Administrators) is one of four partnership projects funded by the Office of Special Education Programs to address the information needs of parents, service providers, administrators, and policymakers related to the requirements of IDEA ’97.

The Collaborative
The Collaborative is a primary partner in the ILIA D partnership. During this fourth year of funding, the Collaborative will focus on developing the work of its cadre of trainers. The cadre, directed by Assistant Director Jeri Muoio, include Associate Director Ingrid Draper, and retired school district directors David Yamamoto of Ann Arbor, MI and Betsy Bounds of Tucson, AZ. Members of the Collaborative cadre are prepared to work with schools and school districts on professional development opportunities which address the general topic of access to the curriculum through presentations on change and the change process, co-teaching and collaboration, and differentiated instruction. A school district may choose to have a presentation on one or all of these topics. For more information, please contact Jeri Muoio at (617) 618-2728 or jmuoio@edc.org.

Several other ILIA D partners have developed a cadre of trainers that, together with cadres from the ASPIIRE (The Associations of Service Providers Implementing IDEA Reforms in Education) Partnership, comprise the IDEA National Resource Cadre. Each of the cadres within the ILIA D Partnership has a slightly different focus.

The Council for American Private Education (CAPE)
CAPE is available to share accurate information regarding children with disabilities who are parentally placed in private schools and information on educating children with disabilities in inclusive settings, increasing opportunities for children to access the general curriculum, and making assessment accommodations. Contact Pamela Allen at pamela.allen@prodigy.net or (703) 461-7802 for additional information.

Technology & Media Division of CEC (TAM)
TAM has a cadre that focuses on instructional and assistive technology for children with disabilities. For more information, contact Penny Reed at preed@wi-net.com or (715) 824-6415.

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)
NASSP and NAESP provide training for school level administrators relative to their responsibilities for the implementation of IDEA. NAESP is responsible for the very popular publication, Implementing IDEA: A Guide for Principals. Contact NASSP at http://www.nassp.org or (703) 860-0200; contact NAESP at http://www.naesp.org or (800) 38-NAESP.

The Federation for Children with Special Needs
The focus of expertise of the Federation’s trainers is family involvement and participation in the IEP process. For more information, contact Margaret Marotta Smith at msmith@fcsn.org or (800) 331-0688.

Some additional cadres include, IDEA Early Childhood, The Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders (CCBD), The National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE), and The Council for Administrators of Special Education (CASE).

One of the major goals of the ILIA D partnership is the dissemination of information about IDEA to those working in and affiliated with schools. The cadres are poised and ready to help achieve that goal.

For more information about these and other cadres, please visit the IDEA Practices’ Web site: http://www.idea-practices.org.
Large-Scale Assessment Practices

- assessment option
  - provision of more flexible test accommodations
  - availability of out-of-level testing

Five of the rural state directors told us that their participation rates remained about the same as in previous years. Many of these directors indicated that their states had high participation rates all along, so that an increase was not possible.

**Figure 1. Change in assessment participation rates for urban, rural, and other states**

In our survey of all 50 states, directors from about one-fourth of the states told us that state test performance levels of students with disabilities have increased. From our additional analyses, we find that more urban than rural states (eight urban versus five rural) were able to report assessment performance across years (see Figure 2).

For those urban states with data across years, we see that there is increased performance in two states, stable levels of performance in five states, and a decrease in test performance in one state. The state with decreased performance speculated that significant increases in the participation of students with disabilities who had been excluded in the past may have affected overall performance levels. Another state reported that performance in math and writing had not changed, but reading performance had improved slightly.

For the rural states with data across years, we see that three states reported increases in test performance, two reported that performance levels stayed about the same, and one reported a decrease in performance. In the five rural states not able to compare performance levels across years, some still had not yet disaggregated performance data on students with disabilities.

**Assessment Accommodations**

Assessment accommodations are alterations in the way a test is administered. They are not supposed to change the actual test content or performance standard. Researchers argue that accommodations should raise or “boost” performance of students who need them, and not affect the performance of students who do not need them.

Currently, every state has a policy governing the use of accommodations on large-scale assessments. These policies vary widely across states, with a great range in both the number of students using accommodations and the variety of accommodations selected.

Nearly 60 percent of all states now keep track of the use of accommodations during state assessments. It appears that the use of accommodations is either increasing or remaining stable—about half of the states reported an increase in use, and the other half reported stable use. Some directors attributed growth in use to increased awareness and understanding by educators, parents, and students.

In our additional analyses, we find that a greater number of urban than rural states showed an increase in accommodations use (see Figure 3). Of the seven urban states with data, all but one indicated that use had increased. In contrast, of the eight rural states with data, three reported an increase in the use

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The Demography of Special Education

Barbara W. LeRoy, Noel Kulik, & Krim Lacey, Wayne State University

As administrators and teachers in special education, you are probably well aware that children of color are disproportionately represented in your classrooms. In fact, more than half of all students in the “judgmental” disability categories are Native American, African American, or Latino (Artiles & Trent, 1994). Further, the number of African American and Hispanic students being labeled with moderate (trainable) mental retardation has been steadily increasing, as compared to their white peers, since 1986 (Harry, 1995). But, what happens to these children once they enter the special education system? How do they fare in terms of promising practices? Are their outcomes on par with their white peers? Does the student’s race/ethnicity interact with other characteristics (e.g., gender, type of disability, income) to further segregate students of color? In order to answer these and related questions, a research team at the Developmental Disabilities Institute at Wayne State University is undertaking a three-year, Office of Special Education Programs-funded project to examine the demography of special education. In the first year of the study, the team conducted secondary analyses of existing national (National Longitudinal Transition Survey) and state (Michigan) databases to examine placement, services, and outcomes for students of color. In years two and three, the team will be examining practices within selected school districts and piloting targeted interventions. The following are selected findings from our first year of this study.

Placement

Where students are educated impacts their post-school outcomes. The federal special education legislation has consistently recognized this fact by requiring least restrictive environments and inclusion in the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. The growing body of research on inclusive education has documented promising futures for students who are educated with their peers in supportive classrooms (McGregor & Vogelsberg, 1998). Given this recognition of inclusive education as a special education promising practice, our research team examined the influence of student demographic characteristics on inclusive education placement.

We found at both the state and national levels that white students were much more likely than black students to be placed in regular education classrooms. While Hispanic students were placed in inclusive settings at the same rate as white students at the national level, within Michigan, Hispanic students as well as Native American students were more likely to be in restricted settings. Having analyzed the state trend, we wanted to know if there were particular characteristics of local districts that negated demographic bias. We have started to examine this broad area of inquiry by asking—does district wealth make a difference for students of color in special education placement? To answer this question, we examined placement outcomes in two similarly sized, but economically diverse, districts. We found that for these two districts, economics strongly influenced inclusive education
placement overall, with the wealthy district placing a majority of students in inclusive settings. But does bias prevail even in these districts? For the wealthy district, Hispanic students were 3.5 times more likely, and black students were 2.1 times more likely to be in segregated special education programs than their white peers. In the poor district, black students were twice as likely to be in segregated settings than white students.

But is it being a student of color alone that makes the difference in placement decisions? In examining additive effects at the state level, we found that being a girl of color reduced your chances for an inclusive placement. In terms of minority status and type of disability—being a student of color negatively influenced inclusive education placements in relation to all disability categories, except for moderate and severe mental retardation. For those two categories, placement decisions were color-blind. However, less than 4% of all students in these categories were in inclusive settings, period. At the national level, we were also able to examine the impact of family income on placement. When income was added to the model, students of color, with organic disabilities, from low-income families, were least likely to be placed in inclusive settings.

Services
Educational services are intended to ameliorate the unique needs of students with disabilities. The assumption is that without such additional services these students will not benefit from the educational system and will not have outcomes on par with their nondisabled peers. Our research team wondered if student demographic characteristics also influenced the type and number of services they received. At the state level, we found that while no students received a large number of services, students of color, on average, received fewer services across all disability categories than their white peers. In examining disability by race, we found that for students with multiple cognitive and physical disabilities, black students received half as many services as their white peers with the same disability. At the national level, we found that student demographic characteristics influenced services. As a general rule girls receive more services than boys, with the exception of vocational training, in which more boys were involved. White students received more services than minority students and students with higher family incomes received more occupational and vocational services than low-income students. We also found that parents with higher incomes were more than twice as likely to be involved in their children’s schools and educational planning meetings.

Competency Testing & Graduation
Policymakers and legislators are pushing competency testing as a student’s ticket to a promising future. In Michigan, successful performance on high school competency tests is linked to scholarships and endorsements on a diploma. Therefore, we asked, is competency testing and graduation influenced by student characteristics? In our national sample of special education high school students, we again found demographic biases for race (Hispanic students were 2.4 times less likely), income (students from low income families were 1.4 times less likely) and disability (students with mild disabilities were two times less likely) to participate in competency testing than their peers. As for graduation, students of color in special education had similar rates to white students, with an average graduation rate of 71.4 percent. What did matter for graduation was income (higher) and disability (physical or sensory). Students from higher income families were nearly twice as likely to graduate, as were students with physical or sensory disabilities, as compared to mild (learning disabilities, emotional impairment) disabilities.

Conclusion
Student demography does make a difference. Regardless of our claims to equality of treatment and our professed color, gender, disability, and income neutrality, each of those characteristics influence how we as teachers and administrators value the students who come to our doors. Those characteristics
2002 Harvard Institute on Critical Issues in Urban Special Education

Measuring Student Progress and Program Improvement
July 15-19, 2002

Public schools are being held accountable for improved educational outcomes of students, including those with disabilities. Standards-based reforms, high-stakes testing, a renewed emphasis on early intervention, and special education law itself have reshaped the public education agenda and forced policymakers and educational leaders to change their focus away from inputs and toward results. Collaborative Director and institute co-chair, David Riley, explains that this year’s institute will examine the impact of this shift on students with disabilities in urban schools, and explore the challenges and opportunities for measuring individual student progress while meeting the demands for instructional relevance, program improvement, and large-scale accountability.

For more information, call (617) 496-3572.

Spring ’02 Meeting to be held in Las Vegas, NV

Improving Outcomes for Students with Autism in Urban Schools: Successes and Challenges
April 24-27, 2002

The primary topic for the meeting is “Improving Outcomes for Students with Autism in Urban Schools: Successes and Challenges.” The meeting will start on Wednesday with participants visiting programs for children with autism in the Clark County School District. Dr. Gail McGee of Emory University will be serving as our keynote speaker on Thursday. Dr. McGee was a member of the National Academy of Sciences Committee on Educational Interventions for Children with Autism that last year published its research synthesis on “Educating Children with Autism.” On Saturday, Dr. Steve Kukic, former Utah State Director of Special Education and current chairperson of the National Center on Learning Disabilities’ Committee on Professional Development, will facilitate a day-long discussion of learning disabilities and, more specifically, the pro’s and con’s of changing its current definition.

For more information about this meeting call (617) 618-2105.
Literature with Inclusive Themes: Help Me! Find What Works for the Middle Grades

A free e-learning event @ http://www2.edc.org/literacymatters
March 1-15, 2002

Middle-grades teachers (English language arts, social studies, the arts, and English as a second language), arts coordinators, special education teachers, and Title 1 teachers are all invited to participate in a “happening” titled Literature with Inclusive Themes: Help Me! Find What Works for the Middle Grades. This online professional development event is an easy and fun way for teachers to enter the world of e-learning. It runs March 1-15, 2002 on the Literacy Matters Web site: http://www2.edc.org/literacymatters.

Funded by the Annenberg Foundation, Literacy Matters focuses on what matters most in adolescent literacy development, especially for struggling readers and writers. The Collaborative and the National Institute for Urban School Improvement are proud co-sponsors of this “happening,” which is an exciting follow-up to the celebrations that occurred as part of the National Institute’s National Inclusive Schools Week. Judy Zorfass and Julie Wood, both of Literacy Matters, will facilitate this event. Collaborative members and associates will remember Judy from her engaging presentation at our fall meeting during which she encouraged you and your colleagues to pilot this first-ever Literacy Matters “happening.”

The Help Me! “happening” focuses on choosing literature that conveys an important ideal—creating inclusive communities. Participants will be able to access seven different online activities. These activities will present a common dilemma, recommend literature with inclusive themes, offer teaching suggestions, and raise provocative questions about issues related to building an inclusive community in your schools. Teachers will be encouraged to share ideas, reactions, and reports on new practices. They will learn to make more informed decisions about choosing and integrating literature into their reading and language arts curricula. Though mainly for educators, students also will have opportunities to participate in ways that will help them gain a better understanding of themselves and others.

Watch for further information on the Collaborative’s Web site at http://www.urbancollaborative.org, or contact Julie Wood at jwood@edc.org or Judy Zorfass at jzorfass@edc.org.

Judy Zorfass describes a new online professional development opportunity for middle grades teachers, inviting Collaborative members and associates to pilot “Literature with Inclusive Themes” in their districts. This free event is open to all educators who are looking to strengthen their school communities through adolescent literature that promotes respect and appreciation of differences.
“First Grub, Then Ethics”

Phil Ferguson, University of Missouri-St. Louis

Perhaps most of you are like me: My thoughts keep being pulled back to the tragic events of September 11 and their ongoing consequences. In totally unrelated contexts, or during the most ordinary of activities, some random phrase or passing occurrence will suddenly evoke for me the awful images of the World Trade Center towers. The more I try and not think about it, the more it seems to simmer on some back burner in my head ready to boil over at any moment. It is an odd connection to make, but as these thoughts keep percolating, my mind keeps jumping to a remembered quotation embroidered into a potholder that I gave my wife a few years ago. I know, I know, giving your spouse a potholder for a present may not seem like the best way to keep that romantic flame burning bright, and I’m not recommending anniversary presents here. This potholder was special, however; a handcrafted piece of craftwork at its most artistic, not really meant to be used. It is the saying on the potholder that really caught my eye, and that I have kept returning to these last few weeks. The saying is from one of Samuel Beckett’s plays: “First grub, then ethics.”

So, what does this have to do with suicide bombers and the senseless deaths of so many people that fateful day? Beyond that, what does all this rambling have to with a column about research in children with disabilities and inclusive urban schools? I’m still working on this, but here’s where I have gotten so far. Beckett’s play is about hunger and science, and like Maslow, he is explicitly about human needs. That hierarchy should remind us that our most insightful reflections and careful conceptualization can be overwhelmed in a second by our most basic humanity. We should feed hungry people first before lecturing them about the ethics of agricultural policy. Sometimes we should just act to alleviate the suffering without the intellectual dithering that academics and others can turn into an art form. Sometimes the rush of life floods in to make the standard “call for further research” seem so secondary. I am not talking here about the noisy calls for “swift justice” or “a war on terrorism,” although I too have felt the anger and outrage that lead to such rhetoric. My comments here relate to my response to the victims more than to our response to those responsible for the terror. There will be time for study and research later. First, what can we do to help?

As I say, my thoughts keep coming back to this quotation and its aptness at seemingly unrelated moments. It happened as I thought about this column, even as I worry that it can easily slide into a mawkish, self-indulgent exercise that illustrates the very type of over-intellectualizing of reality that it purports to disdain. Still, I keep asking myself, a version of the “so what” question that good educational research is always supposed to consider. I am in no way comparing the immensity of suffering and disaster that occurred on September 11 with the situations typically experienced in urban special education. However, at its own level, there is a daily crisis played out in many of our nation’s schools as we fail to meet the needs of children with disabilities and their families. Regardless of how we come down in debates about the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education, there is a level of need out there that should accompany our further discussion. “First grub, then ethics.” First wheelchairs, then theory. First healthcare, then research. First help, then analyze. As we engage in research about how to embed inclusive practices in our larger efforts at whole school reform, we should find ways to keep ourselves grounded in the daily lives of the children and families we are claiming to serve.

There are dangers in going this direction as well. Both parts of the admonition must be continued on page 13
Hundreds of Collaborative District Schools Celebrated National Inclusive Schools Week!

Thousands of teachers, school administrators, students, and families participated in National Inclusive Schools Week, December 3-7, celebrating their efforts to making their schools more inclusive and discussing what else needs to be done to continue to improve their ability to serve the needs of an increasingly diverse student population. The National Institute for Urban School Improvement, who organized the Week, reports that hundreds of schools in Collaborative districts turned out for this celebration, offering these highlights of the Week:

- **Boston Public Schools (BPS)** - Superintendent of BPS Thomas Payzant and Leader of the Unified Student Services Team Pia Durkin shared the Celebration Kit with all elementary principals, encouraging them to use the new ideas and inclusive practices it contains as a way of furthering their good work in ensuring that all students—those with and without disabilities—continue to make progress together.

- **Chicago Public Schools (CPS)** - More than 200 schools in the CPS participated in the Week, integrating their recognition of the Week into their district-wide disability awareness activities throughout October and on Saturday, December 1 at an all-city conference. Teachers and administrative staff created window displays about inclusive practices at the district’s central office and distributed the National Institute’s “Inclusive Schools: Good for Kids, Families, & Communities” bumper stickers, brochures, and handouts to 150 principals attending Principal Academies in October.

- **Fairfax County Public Schools, Virginia** aligned their in-service calendar to coincide with the Week and held several meetings throughout the school district that focused on this topic.

- The National Institute shared this note from the Miami-Dade County Florida Inclusion Network: “Each of the schools in our district (over 350) have received the Celebration Kits and are planning a host of activities which include: social events (teacher to teacher), art activities (banners, murals, slogan contests), student presentations, mentoring programs, photo presentations, video presentations, pa announcements, and integrated academic activities... Districtwide we are hosting a Share Fare, a networking event, which spotlights inclusive practices throughout our district. This event includes resource sharing, mini-presentations by general and exceptional education teacher teams, video displays, giveaways, photo quilt highlighting practices across the district, professional networking, and a time to socialize.”

- **School District of Philadelphia’s Hartranft Elementary School** in conjunction with the Institute on Disabilities at Temple University celebrated with a Diversity Carnival on December 4. Students created poems and banners depicting diversity in friendships, families, and life. They also wrote stories, performed dances, signed to songs, and dined on a multicultural feast.

The National Institute would like to hear about your school or district celebrations. Drop them an email at niusi@edc.org and send pictures and press clippings for posting on their Web site to:

Jennifer Quinlan
NIUSI
Education Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel Street
Newton, MA 02458-1060

For more information, please visit [http://www.edc.org/urban](http://www.edc.org/urban)
Large-Scale Assessment Practices

of accommodations and five reported stable accommodation use.

Alternate Assessments
IDEA ’97 now requires all states to have alternate assessments in place—developed, implemented, and data reported. An alternate assessment is a way to measure the performance of students who are unable to participate in general large-scale assessments used by a district or state. Alternate assessments provide a mechanism for students with significant disabilities to be included in the assessment system.

Our survey results from all 50 states tell us that nearly all state alternate assessments assess the same standards as general assessments—either by expanding state standards, linking a set of functional skills back to standards, or assessing standards plus an additional set of functional skills. This is reflected in the alternate assessments for the most urban and most rural states, with all but one rural state having an alternate assessment that assesses the same standards in some way. We have seen the alignment of alternate assessments with standards evolving a great deal, especially over the past three years. Several states that in 1999 indicated they were developing alternate assessments based on a special education curriculum are now making a connection between their alternate assessments and state standards. Several strategies have been used to show progress toward state or local content standards through alternate assessments. Our survey results show us that over half of the 50 states organize the data collected for a student’s alternate assessment into some type of portfolio, while others summarize the results on a checklist or rating scale. Urban states, in general, are relying more on other approaches to collecting alternate assessment data (six states) than are rural states (four states) (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Alternate assessment approaches selected by rural, urban, and other states

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<tr>
<th>Number of States</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Portfolio</td>
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<td>10</td>
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<td>Other</td>
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Reporting
In our survey of all 50 states, directors indicated that the assessment scores of students who take tests in various ways (e.g., with approved or non-approved accommodations, alternate assessments) are only reported sometimes. Almost all states, including most urban and rural states, report students using approved accommodations, but just over half report the scores of students who use non-approved accommodations. The same number of urban and rural states are going to report scores of alternate assessment participants; however, about one-third of both urban and rural states have not yet made a decision about how to report these scores.

Consequences of Inclusive Standards, Assessments, and Accountability
We asked state directors to tell us about the consequences of including students with disabilities in standards, assessments, and accountability systems. They were overwhelmingly positive in their responses. Here are some of the positive consequences identified by urban state special education directors:
- “Teachers of students with disabilities report becoming more involved in local general education initiatives to improve instruction in the standards.”
- “Some students with disabilities report feeling more involved in general education activities.”
- “Parents and special educators support raising the level of expectations for students with disabilities.”
- “Special education students are getting more rigorous curriculum and the standards are effecting change in instruction.”
- Many people expressed that they are pleased that “all means all.”
- “Students are being taught more challenging material based on state standards, since teachers have been given resources to ‘extend’ the standards.”
- “The performance of students with disabilities on some state assessments is improving.”

Nothing new comes without cost, however, and there have been plenty of challenges as students with disabilities are included in standards, assessments, and accountability systems. Here are some of the challenges identified by urban state directors:
- “Some school district administrators are concerned that including scores of students with disabilities will lower their overall district scores, and consequently, their district ratings.”
- “Some schools that have a disproportionate number of students with disabilities attending their school building feel the accountability system that considers the performance of all students enrolled is not fair.”
- “Some people question how students with disabilities can access or reach the state learning standards.”
- “Some teachers have observed a negative effect to the self-esteem of students with disabilities.”

continued on page 13
“First Grub, Then Ethics”

Remembered. It is “grub then ethics” not “grub instead of ethics.” Any call to action can quickly become a kind of reverse snobbery where we wear our anti-intellectualism as a badge of honor. Bashing academics is easy and fun, but a “don’t-just-stand-there, do-something” busyness can be just as pointless and ultimately distracting as the most abstract navel-gazing. Indeed, in a hall of mirrors kind of way, the saying reflects back on itself in an endless reciprocity of action and reflection, that some educational theorists refer to as “praxis.” The ethical thing to do is to not put ethical reflection before response to basic human needs. That is, of course, an ethical reflection. The order is important, but there must be both application and theory, research and practice, ramps and reflection.

Finally, self-advocates and others in the disability movement have taught us over the last few decades, that disability is not synonymous with suffering. Pity is the last thing that children with disabilities and their families need. One sixth of the world’s population is viewed as disabled, and many of that group suffer needlessly. However, the disability is usually the occasion and not the cause of the suffering. In many of the same ways that gender, race, sexual orientation, and other categories of human difference are the socially imposed location of injustice, inequity, neglect, and abuse in our schools, so do children with disability suffer from the limitations of misplaced pity and cultural stereotypes that invade so much of our professional response to how and where these children learn. “First grub, then ethics.” First children, then labels. First justice, then placement.

And, of course, all of this needs more research.

Large-Scale Assessment Practices

Students with disabilities who were not able to respond to many questions on the state assessment.”

• “Parents are concerned that their children won’t graduate.”

• “Some administrators are not abiding by the requirements regarding accommodations and modifications because of the time/paperwork required. It’s hard to set up so many testing circumstances.”

Summary
The shift to standards-based reform is challenging for all states, urban and rural. Development of inclusive assessment systems to measure progress toward standards is part of that challenge. Overall, state data show a trend toward more inclusive participation and improved performance on state assessments for students with disabilities. Differences between urban and rural states may relate to relatively high and low total student populations, with more students with disabilities in large urban districts than there are students in some rural states, and large administrative organizations in urban states and districts at the state and district levels. Even so, improvement can only occur if there is clear state and district policy level commitment to gather and report performance data for all students.

More information about the National Center on Educational Outcomes may be found at http://www.coled.umn.edu/NCEO.

Demography of Special Education

Values influence our decisions on a daily basis. No matter how subtle our bias may be, it affects how we perceive the worthiness of ability of students to benefit from particular placements, services, and activities that can lead to promising adult outcomes. Students of color are being referred and found eligible for special education at rates that are both disproportional to the rates for their white peers and to their own presence in general education. However, once they arrive at the special education door, they face a new set of negative expectations. Teachers seem to have limited expectations for the worth and ability of these students. Is it any wonder that families give up and that few students remain in school long enough to graduate? The stigma of a special education label is already a deep and overwhelming burden. When the stigma of a special education label is confounded by limited opportunities even to excel within that service system, the futures for minority young people are bleak.

References


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Over-identification Issues within IDEA & the Need for Reform

of further guidance in this area. However, excepting a link between poverty and disability, the overrepresentation of minority students in some more ambiguous categories of disability significantly exceeds what would be predicted by the impact of poverty. For instance, some studies have shown that the number of African American students labeled mildly mentally retarded approaches 40% of the population with this designation. That means that African American students are more than twice as likely than majority children to receive this label. Added to this is that once these children are identified they are more likely to be placed in separate settings than the overall special education population. This issue is explored more extensively in the Eighteenth Annual Report to Congress (1996) which deals specifically with issues concerning implementation of IDEA in urban settings. The issue is serious and thus warrants the attention of this committee.

Actually this committee, under the leadership of Mr. Goodling and with strong bipartisan support, took significant action on this issue when it reauthorized IDEA in 1997. IDEA was amended in significant ways to address this issue. First, states are required to collect racial data and to intervene where overrepresentation is identified. Further, in order to alleviate the low expectations associated with many special education programs, all students with disabilities are required to have appropriate access to the general curriculum and to participate in local and state accountability systems. Finally, Congress added important new enforcement mechanisms to assist the Department of Education in its efforts to implement these new provisions.

Some might argue that these changes have not worked and that further “reform” is needed. It should be noted, however, that the implementing regulations for the 1997 amendments did not take effect until 1999. I am sure that the members of this committee would recognize that the American education system does not change that rapidly.

Some have argued that Congress should not meet its fiscal commitments until these problems are resolved. I strongly disagree with that view for the following reasons. First, there is no federal fiscal incentive to over-identify students. Congress eliminated this incentive in the 1997 reauthorization by switching the funding formula to a census and poverty basis. Thus, school districts do not receive additional money for identifying additional children. The Clinton Administration specifically proposed this amendment as a means of addressing the overrepresentation issue. Further, Congress eliminated an incentive to placing children in separate environments by requiring states to have “placement neutral” funding formulas for IDEA. States, therefore, can no longer employ funding mechanisms that promote separate placement of students with disabilities as many did prior to 1997.

The failure to provide adequate federal funding for special education may actually be exacerbating the problem of overrepresentation. A number of researchers have identified the lack of early reading and behavioral interventions as a contributing factor to this problem. Dr. Reid Lyon, an advisor to President Bush, along with several eminent colleagues, has written an excellent article, “Rethinking Learning Disabilities,” that calls for greatly expanded efforts to address reading failure in the early grades. Implementation of the recommendations contained in this piece could decrease the number of minority students placed in special education and I recommend this article to the committee for further guidance in this area. Ironically, the lack of funding for special education means that many of the districts that have the greatest need to implement these innovations, those with large populations of poor and minority students, will not have the resources to do so. Their resources are currently stretched due to existing special education obligations.

There are several actions the committee could take to address this issue.

1) Increase access to health services for poor women and children. Though some overrepresentation may be explained by poverty and lack of access to health care, this does not mean we should accept this situation. A country as wealthy as our’s can afford to provide adequate health care for pregnant women and children. Failure to do so will increase the number of children that have disabilities.

2) Support early intervention programs. High quality preschool programs and early intervention for students experiencing difficulty with reading and behavior have been shown to decrease the number of children inappropriately referred to special education. These programs have also been shown to benefit children who have disabilities.

3) Support increasing discretionary programs of research and technical assistance under IDEA. States and local school districts need assistance in implementing the types of innovations that can alleviate this problem. The discretionary programs authorized under IDEA are designed to
EPRRI Update

and local school districts about their experiences in implementing new accountability provisions with students with disabilities. EPRRI researchers have conducted initial site visits to each of the four core states and interviewed a variety of special education agencies’ (SEA) staff.

Policy Symposia
EPRRI has conducted three policy symposia. The first one, held in February last year included representatives from all four core study states who helped to refine our guiding research questions. The second policy symposium, held in May 2001 in conjunction with the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), addressed the increasingly important issue of how to create useful and valid indicators as key elements of accountability systems. The most recent symposium in October concerned how diploma options for students with disabilities may be affected by increased graduation requirements and performance standards.

Products
Over the course of the project, EPRRI will produce a significant number of products, including topical reviews that examine the research and current policies and practices within the core study states, the following of which will soon be available:

- Creating Performance Goals and Indicators in Special Education
- Exit Documents and Students with Disabilities
- Reporting on the State Assessment Performance of Students with Disabilities

We’ve also produced two issues briefs:

- State Level Awareness of the Participation and Performance of Students with Disabilities on District Assessments
- Exit Documents and Students with Disabilities: Legal Issues

Proceedings from each policy symposia, topical reviews, issues briefs, and other products will be published on our Web site: http://www.eprri.org.

Future Plans
In this our second year of funding, EPRRI will conduct site visits to selected local education agencies in each of the four core study states. We also plan to release several policy updates, issue briefs, and topical reviews, in addition to holding additional policy symposia. Areas to be covered include:

- Strategies for public reporting of the performance of students with disabilities
- Changes in state teacher certification requirements as a result of new accountability mechanisms
- Accountability issues for youth with disabilities in the juvenile justice system

For more information, please visit EPRRI’s Web site: http://www.eprri.org.

Over-identification Issues within IDEA

assist educators and parents in their efforts to improve implementation. Though these programs are effective, they are relatively poorly funded and should be expanded to support innovation.

4) Support improved monitoring and enforcement of IDEA.
Though there are powerful monitoring and enforcement mechanisms in IDEA, they are not self implementing. They require an active federal presence. The history of federal enforcement of IDEA has been relatively weak. One reason for this is the relative small size of the federal workforce devoted to this issue, about 50 people. Though I believe a significantly larger workforce is justified in this area, the more important factor is the willingness of both administrations and Congress to support strong federal enforcement. When I was at OSEP, members of Congress from the states involved in enforcement actions immediately opposed several enforcement actions brought by the Department of Education. Given the fact that IDEA now addresses the issue of overrepresentation, this committee should seek a significantly enhanced federal monitoring and enforcement role and support the Department in doing its job.

5) Fully fund IDEA.
Welcome New Member Districts

The Collaborative currently links 80 school districts from 24 U. S. states plus the U. S. Virgin Islands. Six new member districts joined the Collaborative since August 2001. Please join us in welcoming:

- Omaha Public Schools, NE
- Granite School District (Salt Lake City), UT
- Phoenix Union High School District, AZ
- Alexandria City Public Schools, VA
- Seattle School District, WA
- Virgin Islands Department of Education

For contact information pertaining to each member district, please visit our Web site at http://www.urbancollaborative.org/members/dist.html

New Collaborative Staff

Inae Hwang joined the Collaborative as our new administrative assistant, helping us with our administrative and conference planning needs. Originally from Buffalo, New York, Inae is a 2001 graduate of Simmons College. She looks forward to getting to know members and associates as she takes on the organization of our spring meeting in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Telephone Seminar

Friday, March 29, 2002
12:00 noon - 2:00 p.m. EST

Rethinking Learning Disabilities

With Presenter/Discussion Leader: G. Reid Lyon, Ph.D.

Dr. Lyon, noted leader of learning disability research for more than 25 years, will speak with participants about the relationship between reading disabilities and learning disabilities, the role both special education and general education play in the prevention and remediation of reading disabilities, and the importance of early intervention.

Site Registration Fee - $195

To Register:
Call 1-800-775-7654 or visit www.urbancollaborative.org.
Seminar Code: USE6804-0

Several people can participate together at one site!