

Special Education

Since 1975 federal law has mandated that disabled students receive appropriate services. These services made it possible for 55 percent of U.S. special education students who left secondary school to be competitively employed three years later in 1990 and nearly 28 percent of them to live independently (Digest of Education Statistics, 1999). However, their average annual earnings were only \$5,524 in 1990, and the failure to identify and train children with physical and learning problems can create long-term problems for the nation. According to a national report, 40 percent of adjudicated juvenile delinquents have treatable learning disabilities not addressed by the schools (Teaching Kids to Read, 2000). In Tennessee 22 percent of the children adjudicated delinquent whose cases were reviewed during the Children's Program Outcome Review Team project in 1998 had a diagnosed learning disability, down from 27 percent in 1997 (C-PORT, 1998, 1999).

What Works

Focus groups of Tennessee teachers reported the components of successful inclusion programs: support from administrators, teachers and parents; adequate funding; and adequate teacher training, including visiting successful programs.

Twelve percent of Tennessee's students (116,042) received special education services, as defined by the federal government, from Tennessee's schools during school year 1998-99. This was slightly less than the national figure, 12.8 percent for 1998, up from 11 percent of all students in 1990. The 60 percent increase from 1977 (Digest of Educational Statistics, 1999) was in part attributed to a 242 percent increase in the number of children with learning disabilities.

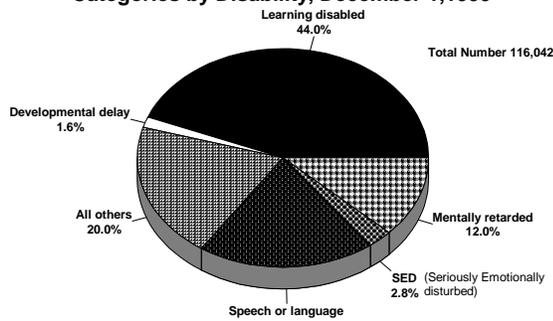
While the average per-pupil expenditures for instruction in 1998-99 have increased by nearly 59 percent from 1991-92, per pupil special education expenditures increased by 64 percent, according to the Tennessee Department of Education.

Federal legislation requires disabled students to be educated in the least restrictive environment possible. Nationally, since 1985, the trend has been to move students with disabilities into regular classrooms or into rooms within regular schools. In 1996, 74 percent of U.S. special education students were served in classrooms with other students, although 40 percent of these students received services in resource rooms.

Children from poor families receive special education services at nearly twice the rate of those who are not poor, according to statistics published by the U.S. Department of Education (DOE).

Percentage of Children and Youth Receiving Special Education

Categories by Disability, December 1, 1999



Source: Tennessee Department of Education, Special Education Services

The poverty rate for people unable to work because of disability (30.2 percent) is nine times that of full-time workers without disabilities (3.3 percent). The rate of participation in the workforce by people with disabilities increased during the 1980s but has leveled off since 1990, according to DOE statistics.

Data reported in the 2000 *KIDS COUNT: State of the Child* differs from the 1999 publication because earlier reports used Tennessee's definition of special education services, which was more inclusive than the federal definition.