LOOSE-LEAF VERSION

Pearson

Introduction to Contemporary Special Education

New Horizons

Second Edition

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To our families:
Jim, Steve, Sarah, and the girls – Emma and Mary
Ken, Kyra, and Kailyn
Vaughn, Ashley, and Callie

And to students with exceptionalities, your families, friends, and the professionals in your lives:
This book has always been for you.

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Preface

Vision of the Book

We are so excited about this second edition of *Introduction to Contemporary Special Education: New Horizons*!

If you are a college student, this introductory course is often the first step toward becoming a highly effective elementary, secondary, or special education teacher or other education professional (e.g., school principal, related service provider). For too many of you, this is the only exposure you will have to information about students with disabilities. Our aim is to set you on the best path possible. We want you to be engaged, independent, and critical learners who continue to seek better ways to improve results for all students throughout the span of your careers.

The content we included in this text reflects our shared vision: that we can provide a truly responsive and effective education to students with special needs. So many people are positively affected by such an education: the student, family members, friends, advocates, future co-workers, and neighbors. However, schooling and educational services can be truly special only when professionals value each child and utilize evidence-based practices with fidelity.

We are very excited about how the content is presented in this edition. Most students currently enrolled in teacher preparation courses are accustomed to learning in a very different way from their predecessors. While the expansion of technology into our daily lives impacts us all, it has particularly influenced those who have grown up during this period of vast technological innovation. Students expect learning to be engaging, interesting, and as interactive as possible. They want to *see* and *hear* the perspectives of individuals with exceptionalities, their family members, and their teachers. They want to see demonstrations of effective practices executed with fidelity. They want content presented in "nuggets" of information with guided opportunities to expand learning that capitalizes on *their* interests. They want text supported with strong visuals and key points highlighted through graphs, diagrams, tables, bullet points, and succinct summaries.

This text was created to meet these demands. It represents our beliefs about what today's "textbooks" should be. These beliefs stem from these experiences: (1) our own college course instruction, (2) our experience authoring seven editions of a traditional textbook, *Introduction to Special Education*, (3) our development of the first edition of *Introduction to Contemporary Special Education: New Horizons* and the unique, technological aspects of writing an e-text, (4) our history of developing interactive Web-based instructional Modules at the IRIS Center, and (5) our experience in providing assistance to hundreds of professors as they design technology-enhanced coursework at IRIS workshops and seminars. These experiences have taught us many things about today's students and the application of technology in postsecondary instruction. This second edition of *Introduction to Contemporary Special Education: New Horizons* integrates these experiences, allowing us to develop an innovative alternative to conventional texts.

Organization of the Book

The book is composed of fifteen chapters. The first four chapters present foundational information about all students, and about those who struggle to reach their academic potential, even when provided with instruction designed for typical learners. In the first chapter, students learn about the progress individuals with disabilities have made, yet come to understand that their full attainment of social justice has yet to be achieved. In Chapters 2 and 3, readers learn key components of effective instruction for all students and how teachers can address the needs of struggling learners and those with other learning considerations (i.e., culturally and linguistically diverse learners). When consistently applied, procedures such as Universal Design for Learning, differentiated instruction, culturally responsive education, and multi-tiered systems of support will prevent many students from incorrectly receiving special education services. We then explain the requirements of legislation (e.g., the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and the need for an individualized education for students with disabilities (Chapter 4).

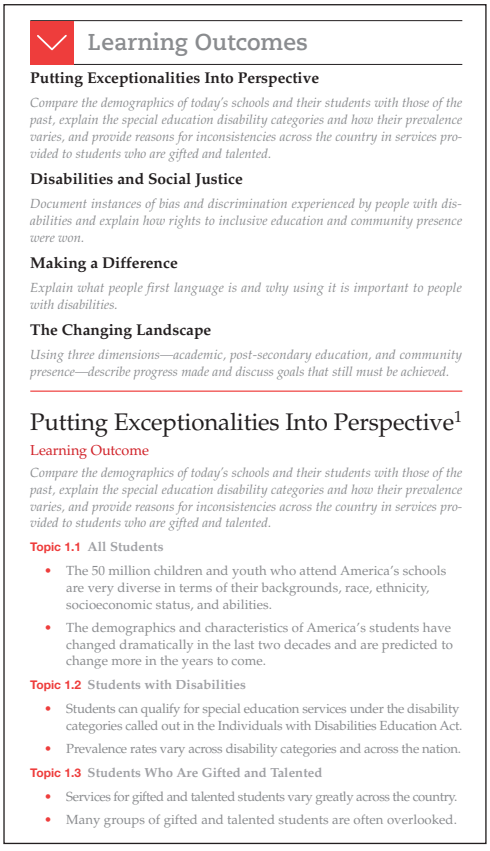
Each of the remaining eleven chapters presents basic information about a specific exceptionality, including giftedness. In these chapters, we describe each special education category, the educational challenges created by these exceptionalities, and evidence-based solutions to address these common challenges. Each chapter follows the same structure and is organized into four key issues that are further divided into two to five topics. References do not break up the reading. Instead, they are available at the end of the book (organized by chapter).

Now, here's the part that's important for course instructors to understand. These chapters were written sequentially, with scaffolded content that builds from chapter to chapter, particularly in the topics of early childhood, secondary transition, and assistive technology. For that reason, we highly recommend assigning these chapters *in chronological order*. We know that many instructors like to start the categorical portion of their courses with

intellectual disability (Chapter 9) or autism spectrum disorder (Chapter 8) because so many students have prior knowledge of those two disabilities. Yet, it's exactly that prior knowledge that can serve as a foundation to better understand the characteristics of speech and language impairments (Chapter 5), which most individuals with intellectual disabilities or autism spectrum disorder also exhibit. And because so many students with other exceptionalities also have speech and language impairments, readers will have a consistent knowledge foundation for the remaining chapters. Trust us on this!

Special Features

Every chapter begins with a personal vignette. Some focus on an individual who has made a substantial contribution to advances in social justice or who provides an important message or example about individuals with special needs. Each chapter opener also includes an advance organizer that provides the learning outcomes for the chapter.



Learning Outcomes

Putting Exceptionalities Into Perspective

Compare the demographics of today's schools and their students with those of the past, explain the special education disability categories and how their prevalence varies, and provide reasons for inconsistencies across the country in services provided to students who are gifted and talented.

Disabilities and Social Justice

Document instances of bias and discrimination experienced by people with disabilities and explain how rights to inclusive education and community presence were won.

Making a Difference

Explain what people first language is and why using it is important to people with disabilities.

The Changing Landscape

Using three dimensions—academic, post-secondary education, and community presence—describe progress made and discuss goals that still must be achieved.

Putting Exceptionalities Into Perspective[1]

Learning Outcome

Compare the demographics of today's schools and their students with those of the past, explain the special education disability categories and how their prevalence varies, and provide reasons for inconsistencies across the country in services provided to students who are gifted and talented.

Topic 1.1 All Students

- The 50 million children and youth who attend America's schools are very diverse in terms of their backgrounds, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and abilities.
- The demographics and characteristics of America's students have changed dramatically in the last two decades and are predicted to change more in the years to come.

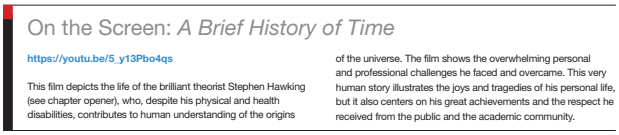
Topic 1.2 Students with Disabilities

- Students can qualify for special education services under the disability categories called out in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Prevalence rates vary across disability categories and across the nation.

Topic 1.3 Students Who Are Gifted and Talented

- Services for gifted and talented students vary greatly across the country.
- Many groups of gifted and talented students are often overlooked.

Several special features are included in most chapters. Charts, graphs, and diagrams illustrate important concepts and facts. *On the Screen* features allow students to assess the portrayals of exceptional individuals reflected in movies and television and to consider the subsequent impact on society's awareness and knowledge. *Tips for Teachers* supply key points that help create more effective learning environments and *A Closer Look at Research-Based Practices* provide instructions on ways to implement evidence-based strategies and techniques. The *Characteristics-Challenges-Solutions* graphics, found in most chapters, identify many typical challenges a disability often presents and provide specific solutions that address those challenges.



On the Screen: *A Brief History of Time*

https://youtu.be/5_y13Pbo4qs

This film depicts the life of the brilliant theorist Stephen Hawking (see chapter opener), who, despite his physical and health disabilities, contributes to human understanding of the origins of the universe. The film shows the overwhelming personal and professional challenges he faced and overcame. This very human story illustrates the joys and tragedies of his personal life, but it also centers on his great achievements and the respect he received from the public and the academic community.

New features take advantage of digital technology to enhance students' learning: embedded video clips demonstrate important methods or key points; interactive widgets provide extra practice with essential concepts (e.g., delineating between accommodations and modifications); *Check Your Understanding* quizzes assess student knowledge and provide further feedback on each chapter's content. Each chapter is peppered with links to additional resources for students or instructors who wish to delve deeper into the content: IRIS Center Modules; statistics from the IDEA Data Center; and relevant resources from reputable organizations. Each chapter concludes with a chapter summary and standards from the Council for Exceptional Children that connect to the content.

Check Your Understanding 13.3

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

Additional Resources

Advanced Data and Performance Reporting Aligned to National Standards

Advanced data and performance reporting help instructors quickly identify gaps in student learning and gauge and address individual and classroom performance. Instructors easily see the connection between coursework, concept mastery, and national teaching standards with highly visual views of performance reports. Data and assessments align directly to CEC Standards and support reporting for state and accreditation requirements.

IRIS Center Resources

The IRIS Center at Vanderbilt University (https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu), funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), develops instructional resources for preservice and practicing teachers. The Center works with experts from across the country to create challenge-based interactive modules, case study units, and other resources that provide research-validated information about working

with all students, struggling learners, and those with disabilities. Because we direct the IRIS Center, we are able to write chapter content that dovetails with the information in recommended IRIS Modules, thus enhancing the learning process for readers.

Supplementary Materials

The following resources are available for instructors to download on www.pearsonhighered.com/educators. Instructors search for the book by author or title, select the book, and then click on the "Resources" tab to log in and download textbook supplements.

Test Bank (0-13-451635-4)

The Test Bank includes a robust collection of test items. Some items (lower-level questions) simply ask students to identify or explain concepts and principles they have learned. But many others (higher-level questions) ask students to apply those same concepts and principles to specific classroom situations—that is, to actual student behaviors and teaching strategies.

TestGen® (0-13-451636-2)

TestGen® is a powerful test generator that instructors install on a computer and use in conjunction with the TestGen testbank file for the text. Assessments, including equations, graphs, and scientific notation, may be created for both print or testing online.

TestGen is available exclusively from Pearson Education publishers. Instructors install TestGen on a personal computer (Windows or Macintosh) and create tests for classroom testing and for other specialized delivery options, such as over a local area network or on the Web. A test bank, which is also called a Test Item File (TIF), typically contains a large set of test items, organized by chapter and ready for use in creating a test, based on the associated textbook material.

The tests can be downloaded in the following formats:

TestGen Testbank file - PC
TestGen Testbank file - MAC
TestGen Testbank - Blackboard 9 TIF
TestGen Testbank - Blackboard CE/Vista (WebCT) TIF
Angel Test Bank
D2L Test Bank
Moodle Test Bank
Sakai Test Bank

PowerPoint® Slides (0-13-451640-0)

The PowerPoint slides include key concept summarizations, diagrams, and other graphic aids to enhance learning. They are designed to help students understand, organize, and remember core concepts and theories.

Acknowledgments

We want to take this opportunity to thank some very important people who joined us on this long and challenging journey. First to our families, whose patience and support surpassed what anyone could ever expect. Thank you for your tolerance and for being so understanding of our collective crankiness. To our husbands, Jim, Ken, and Vaughn: We owe you many date nights. To our children, Steve, Kyra, Kailyn, Ashley, and Callie: This text is to honor the five of you. We are ever grateful for your involvement in the development of this text and its various elements. Steve, thank you for your continued involvement in the *On the Screen* features found in the text. Ashley, for your detail-oriented help all along the way, from assisting us with the initial document preparation to creating the PowerPoint supplement, thank you!

We want to express our gratitude to Brenda Knight Trevethan, whose keen eye and artistic talents have left an indelible mark on this edition. Brenda's talents are evident throughout this edition, from the cover to the wonderful *Characteristics-Challenges-Solutions* figures to graphics that support so many segments of text. We thank you for your creativity, problem solving, and willingness to always take on one more task. We also want to give a special thanks to those remarkable individuals who allowed us to share their stories: Sara Solomon, Belinda Butler, Helen Pandey, and Steph Zundel.

We also want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the members of the Pearson Team who contributed their time and expertise to the creation of the print and REVEL versions of this text. We would like to recognize Ann Davis, our long-time editor who worked with us over so many previous texts. Her vision and partnership during the first edition of *New Horizons* and during the initial phase of this edition shaped the end result. We want to thank Kevin Davis for taking the reins from Ann and believing in our ability to contribute to the development of an interactive, digital text that represents today's best publishing technology. We also want to acknowledge Jon Theiss (our Digital Dumbledore) who guided this REVEL product from the beginning. Even though the development "rules" seemed to be in constant flux, he retained a positive tone that kept us going. To Kathy Smith (our printed-page Yoda), we owe a special thank you for ensuring that the print version is appealing and as user-friendly as possible. Kathy's expertise in managing a complicated project with so many discrete elements is evident in the final product. Thanks to the entire Pearson team. Because of your contributions and confidence in this project, we are sure that the unique designs and features of this innovative, interactive text will help make the next generation of teachers and practicing educators more skilled and informed about students who face learning and behavior challenges.

Finally, we would like to thank the following reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions: Jasmine Begeske, Purdue University; Bonnie Butcher, University of the Cumberlands; Rebecca Cohen, Pima Community College; Veda Jairrels, Clark Atlanta University; and Elizabeth A. Montanaro, Catholic University of America.

We conclude with one final explanation of our enthusiasm for this project. We were able to incorporate our beliefs about *what* is important for the next generation of education professionals to know, *why* they need to be continually curious about ways to improve their instruction and to become excellent consumers of research, and *how* this information should be packaged. We believe that when these synergies are achieved, more students with disabilities will benefit, be college- or career-ready after high school, and achieve their dreams. To be honest, however, it may well be that our excitement lies in the fact that this project's long developmental journey is complete. It took over two years to complete this revision. The product has finally evolved from a set of ideas into being a reality. We hope you are as pleased with the outcome as we are.

DDS, NCT, & KGS

Chapter 1
Thinking About Exceptionalities

Jim Spellman/WireImage/Getty Images

LeDerick Horne is a poet, playwright, inspirational speaker, advocate, entrepreneur, and a person with a disability. In third grade he was identified as having a neurological impairment because he seemed unable to learn to read or spell. Though he struggled in school, he was determined to go to college, graduate, and become a successful writer. Today, not only is he a college graduate, a successful writer, a keynote speaker, a husband, and a father, but also he is a role model to all people with differences. His insights into disabilities, education, and his own life experiences make him a sought-after presenter on the college speaking circuit. He has presented at the White House, the United Nations, Harvard University, and many government meetings. Through his work, Mr. Horne helps us all develop a better perspective about people who learn differently. He teaches us how attitudes evolve and how they are reflected in culture, society, and language. He wisely counsels us that attitudes are changed by people's inspiration and will.

Mr. Horne speaks on behalf of many, and he challenges everyone to dare to dream, reach out, and grab opportunities. He also encourages all persons to insist on the best from themselves, from others, and from society. Such attitudes serve people with disabilities well.

To learn more about Mr. Horne, visit his Website: www.lederick.com

Watch LeDerick Horne as he shares his poem, "Dare to Dream," in this video:

▶ **"Dare to Dream"**

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HbOxNvuwabo

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- Many groups of gifted and talented students are often overlooked.

[1]References for Chapter 1 are found at the end of this text.

Roger Bacon/Reuters/Alamy Stock Photo

The Axis Dance Company performs worldwide with the purpose of changing the face of dance and disability. To learn more about this exciting group of performers, go to their Website: www.axisdance.org

Topic 1.1 All Students

- The 50 million children and youth who attend America's schools are very diverse in terms of their backgrounds, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and abilities.
- The demographics and characteristics of America's students have changed dramatically in the last two decades and are predicted to change more in the years to come.

Who are America's children and where do they receive their education? The vast majority of America's schoolchildren do not have disabilities. Most of them thrive, achieve, and find their places in society as productive adults. Despite these positive outcomes for most, too many others struggle in school because of their life circumstances.

Although this text focuses on children and youth with disabilities, it is important to put them into proper perspective and understand the **demographics** of all of America's youth and their educational situations. Many of us have preconceived notions about America's schoolchildren, often obtained from media headlines, which may not always represent the full picture. It is vital to base educational knowledge and decisions about instructional practices or policies on real data from reliable resources. Sometimes, those data can be surprising, prompting us to reconsider what we thought was fact, to re-examine our own perceptions, and to question our information sources. Let's look at some data that present a picture of all of America's children and the education they receive. As you read along, ask yourself if the information presented aligns with your beliefs.

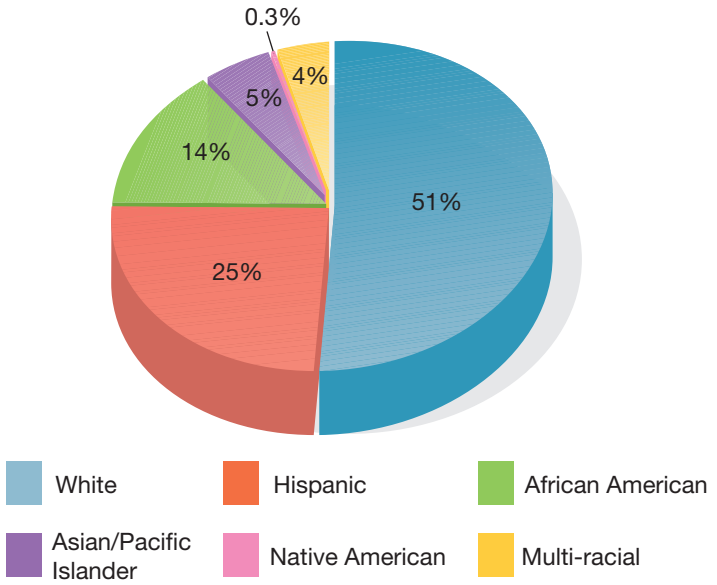
Approximately 50 million children and youth attend U.S. schools. They are diverse in respect to background, race and ethnicity, **socioeconomic status**, abilities to perform well, and type of education provided to them through the educational system. While White children accounted for 63% of the school population in 1997, they now

America's students come from different backgrounds, experiences, and abilities; but they share dreams of success at school and in life.

Photo courtesy of Front Row

make up less than 50% of the overall national school population. The figure illustrates the racial/ethnic composition of schools for the 2014–2015 school year. However, the U.S. Department of Education predicted that for the 2015–2016 school year, the nation's school population will change to a "minority–majority" status.

Demographics of U.S. Public School Students, 2013–2014 School Year



SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education*, 2015, 2016.

Most of America's children receive their education through the public school system. About 50 million schoolchildren attend public elementary or secondary schools; an additional 5 million students attend private schools. Because charter schools are considered public schools, their students are counted with all other public school students. Despite all the attention on charter schools, it may be surprising to learn that in 2014 less than 5% of public school students attend these alternate educational institutions.

The federal government predicts that the overall public school enrollment will increase 7% between 2012 and 2020, which is less than the overall trend seen over the past three decades. Elementary enrollment—pre-kindergarten through eighth grade—increased 30% between 1985 and 2012, while secondary enrollment increased 19%. The most dramatic enrollment increase, 745%, was noted for preschool, participation in which is optional. Two primary reasons for the large increases in preschool enrollment are (1) an overall population increase and (2) a greater preschool participation rate. The participation rate of three- to five-year-olds in preschool increased from 59% in 1990 to 65% in 2013. In what may be a hopeful sign of better school readiness (which leads to later school success), the percentage of children enrolled in full-day, rather than half-day, programs has increased from 39% to 60%.

What kinds of changes have occurred in the public school population? Across the past 40 years, the demographics and life conditions of America's children have changed greatly, mostly due to two groups of youngsters: Latinos/Hispanics[2] and Asians. Since 1997, the number of Hispanic students has doubled and the number of Asian students has increased some 46%. You might be surprised to learn that this growth is due to the number of students born to families in the United States, *not* due to immigration. While rates of immigration vary by state, with Texas, California, and Florida

[2]Across the United States many different terms are preferred when discussing race and ethnicity. In this text we attempt to reach a balance in the use of these terms.

having much higher percentages, almost all children from diverse backgrounds are born in the United States. Although their parents may be immigrants, less than 5% of America's children are themselves immigrants. This fact challenges many people's assumptions about Latino/Latinas in particular, in part because of continual media reports about immigration issues and undocumented workers. In fact, recent research findings challenge other commonly held misperceptions. The majority of U.S.-born Latinos come from English-speaking or bilingual (Spanish- and English-speaking) homes; English proficiency is at an all-time high. While first-generation immigrants do tend to struggle economically, second-generation Latino/Latinas fare much better than their parents did. Although not yet on par with their White peers, Latinos are completing high school, graduating from college, working in a wide range of jobs, and joining the middle class. Education is a priority for these students and their families, and their post-school successes indicate that this focus is paying off.

Why is this information important for you to know? Because it is human nature to make rash judgments about people, often based on stereotypes or on missing, inaccurate, or incomplete information. A teacher might assume that a Latino student in her class comes from a poor family, that he and his parents are immigrants, or that he does not speak English well. Instead, educators must guard against making stereotypical assumptions about any student, every one of whom deserves a high-quality education that challenges them and provides opportunities to excel.

Although the proportion of children born outside the United States is low, at around 5%, a slightly larger percentage (9%) of all students are English language learners (ELLs), also referred to as English learners (ELs)—they do not speak English at home. The percentage of ELLs includes students who speak languages other than Spanish (e.g., Chinese, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Korean, Arabic). As you will learn in Chapter 3, these students are not proficient in English and thus require language supports to benefit from classroom instruction.

Topic 1.2 Students With Disabilities

- Students can qualify for special education services under the disability categories called out in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
- Prevalence rates vary across disability categories and across the nation.

Who are students with disabilities? Within the overall population of American schoolchildren, a subset of students have disabilities. Some 8% of all school-age children qualify for and receive special education services. In Chapter 4, you will learn about the national laws that guide states and school systems regarding the services these students are entitled to receive. For now, know that the federal government—through a national law called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA '04, or simply IDEA)—guarantees students with disabilities a free public education that is appropriate to meet their educational needs, referred to as *special education* or *special education services*. In IDEA, the government outlines 13 specific disability categories under which students can qualify for special education services; however, the categories of deafness and hearing impairments are often combined. In addition, the category of developmental delay is a general category for young children (up to the age of nine) whose specific disability may not have yet been identified. The table provides a listing and brief explanation of the terms used to describe the disabilities included in IDEA. Be aware that sometimes the terms used by the federal government do not match those used by parent groups, professional organizations, states, or the public. For example, the federal government uses the term *emotional disturbance,* although most professional organizations and some states use the term *emotional and behavioral disorders.*

IDEA Disability Categories in Order of Prevalence

IDEA Term	Other Terms	Comments
Speech or language impairments	Speech disorders or language disorders; communication disorders	Divides speech impairments (articulation, fluency problems or stuttering, and voice problems) from language impairments
Specific learning disabilities	Learning disabilities (LD)	Includes reading/learning disabilities, mathematics/learning disabilities, unexpected underachievement
Other health impairments	Health impairments; special health care needs	IDEA includes attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in this category, causing overall prevalence to reflect high incidence
Autism	Autism spectrum disorders (ASD)	Affects social interactions and communication with restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior
Intellectual disabilities	Intellectual and developmental disabilities; cognitive disabilities	Ranges from mild to severe, but often occurs with other disabilities
Emotional disturbance	Emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD)	Does not include conduct disorders as a reason for special education services
Orthopedic impairments	Physical impairments (PI); physical disabilities	Includes neuromotor impairments and muscular/skeletal conditions
Deafness; hearing impairments*	Hard of hearing and deaf	Deafness and hearing impairments are listed as separate categories in IDEA, but are often combined for reporting and data purposes
Visual impairments	Visual disabilities; low vision and blind	Includes full range of visual loss
Multiple disabilities	Multiple-severe disabilities; severe disabilities	Does not include all students with more than one disability; varies by state's criterion
Deaf-blindness	Deafblind	Criterion does not require both deafness and blindness
Traumatic brain injury (TBI)		Must be acquired after birth
Developmental delay		Allows for noncategorical or non-specific identification between the ages of 3 to 9

*Deafness and hearing impairments are called out in IDEA as two separate disabilities.

You will learn the definitions and eligibility criteria for special education services for each disability category in the disability-specific chapters later in this text. In general, it is important to know that simply having a disability does not automatically qualify a student for services. For example, a student who has a vision loss and uses glasses does not always require special services. However, if that student's educational performance is negatively affected in a substantial way by the vision loss, even when wearing glasses, then the student is probably eligible for special education services, most likely provided by a vision specialist (i.e., a teacher of students with visual impairments, or TVI).

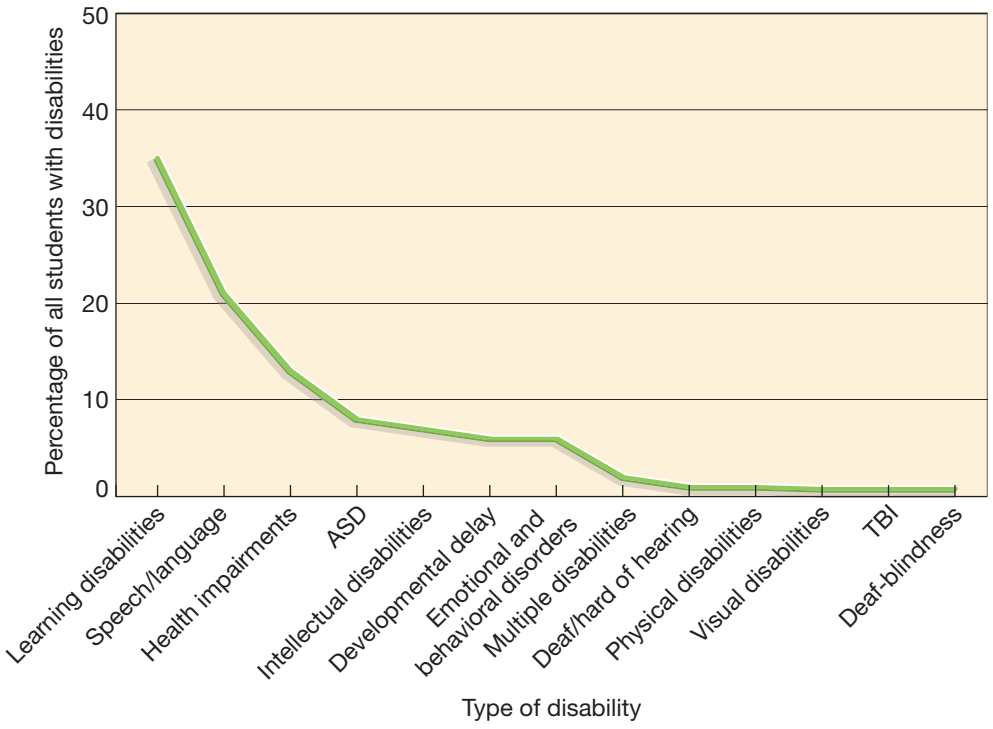
How common are disabilities among public schoolchildren? Every year since IDEA was first passed in 1975, the federal government has collected data from each state about students who receive special education services. These data, summarized in the *Annual Reports to Congress*, capture all types of information, including age, disability category, and race/ethnicity. Having such national data collected from every state, every year, has several advantages.

First, the data help us to determine the number or **prevalence** of students who receive special services. The most recent data reported in the *Annual Report to Congress* indicate that roughly 8% of America's public schoolchildren between the ages of 6 and 21[3] receive special education services. This prevalence rate has decreased slightly across time—in 2004, 9% of all public school students ages 6 to 21 received special education services. In addition to identifying the overall prevalence rates of students who receive special services, these data reveal the national and state prevalence rates for each disability category. Overall trends for disabilities across time show interesting changes. Here are some specifics. For many years, learning disabilities represented over half of all school-age disabilities. Although the learning disabilities category has the highest rate, its prevalence has been declining over recent years, in part because of new early intervening techniques and the implementation of research-based practices (some of which you will learn about in Chapters 2 and 6). In contrast, the prevalence

[3]Students with disabilities are eligible for special education services through age 21, due to the extended length of time it may take them to prepare for post-school options.

of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) has been increasing dramatically, due to both the increasing occurrence and the application of a broader definition than was used historically, which allows more children to qualify. Some conditions like physical disabilities and traumatic brain injury (TBI) have increased incidence rates, but improved medical treatment procedures have kept the need for a special education response consistently low across time. The graph shows the proportion or percentage of students identified within each disability category who receive special education services, while the box titled *Prevalence Rate vs. Severity* introduces issues for consideration. For more about the prevalence of students with disabilities, visit http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp.

Order of Disabilities by Prevalence



SOURCE: Data from U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, *The Condition of Education, Children and Youth with Disabilities, 2016*, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp Data Analysis

Prevalence Rate vs. Severity

Many people incorrectly assume that a disability with a high prevalence rate, often referred to as a **high-incidence disability**, is milder, or less severe, than one that occurs less frequently (a **low-incidence disability**). This perception is not accurate. Every type of disability can manifest with a range of characteristics, from mild to severe. Also, considering prevalence data alone fails to take other key considerations into account. One consideration is that many students have co-existing disabilities; for example, it is possible for a student who is blind to also have a speech impairment. Yet, that student would be counted in only one disability category—the one viewed as his or her primary disability—which would not be reflected in state or national prevalence data. Another point is that specific data within some disability categories are not immediately obvious. For example, most health impairments, such as sickle cell anemia, epilepsy, and cancer, are rare among children. More frequently occurring conditions like asthma, while responsible for a high rate of absenteeism, do not usually require special education services and are *not* part of the health impairments category. However, the health impairments disability category also includes students with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, which is more common and makes the prevalence rate of this category exceptionally high and could give the initial impression that a larger proportion of U.S. schoolchildren are dealing with significant illnesses.

A second advantage to national data collection is that policy makers can detect state-by-state differences in prevalence. An analysis of the percentage of the school population between the ages of 6 and 21 who receive special education services shows some surprising variations. For example, roughly 6% of all schoolchildren receive special education services in Idaho and Hawaii. However, the rates in those states are much lower than in Massachusetts and New Jersey, where approximately 11% of all schoolchildren receive these services. It is unclear why these discrepancies exist. Also puzzling are the categorical differences between states. For example, Iowa reports that slightly more than 60% of its students who receive special education services have learning disabilities, while Kentucky's learning disability percentage, at 18%, is much lower. Comparable inconsistencies exist in almost every special education category. One potential reason for such variability in identification rates across states rests with procedural differences. For example, in one state, students with language disorders may have a greater likelihood to be assigned to the learning disabilities category, but in another state they may be assigned to the category of speech/language impairments. In addition, some states use broader definitions for certain disabilities, while those of others are more restrictive. Indeed, such national variability, whereby a student could be identified with a disability in one state but—if her parents re-locate—not in another, challenges how we think about disability status.

Third, the data help us to identify whether some groups might be over-identified as having a disability or might be over-represented in specific categories. You will learn about the disproportionate representation of students from different racial/ethnic groups in Chapter 3; for now, know that significant attention for the past two decades has focused on reducing the over-identification of students from diverse backgrounds, particularly in the **intellectual disabilities** and emotional and behavioral disorders categories. That work is paying off. Proportionally, fewer Black and Latino students are being misidentified as having disabilities, which in turn is reflected in a reduction in the overall prevalence rate.

Topic 1.3 Students Who Are Gifted and Talented

- Services for gifted and talented students vary greatly across the country.
- Many groups of gifted and talented students are often overlooked.

Who are children with academic gifts and exceptional creative talents? The federal government does not collect data on giftedness because these students, unlike those with disabilities, are not guaranteed special education services. There is no federal requirement for states to offer special services to these students; therefore, no reporting requirements are in place. That is why giftedness, creativity, and talents are not included in the figure in Topic 1.2. Experts estimate, however, that 3% to 5% of all students across the nation need some type of special educational programming because of their high levels of intelligence, creativity, or extraordinary talents.

Although students with special gifts and talents are often thought of as being exceptional and requiring unique services, decisions regarding the types of education programs available for them rest at the state, rather than the federal, level. In many states, students who qualify are provided with special education services similar to those for students with disabilities. However, these services are delivered without the federal legal requirements or the extra funding provisions guaranteed to states and school districts by the federal government. In other states and school districts, students with special gifts and talents do not receive any special accommodations, services, or supports.

Why do many students who are gifted and talented need special attention during their school years? While popular belief holds that students who are gifted and talented

do not need special attention to achieve their potential, the facts tell a different story. Some experts hypothesize that half of all gifted students underperform in school, not living up to their talents or potential. And, those whose unique talents are evident early on often find themselves bored with the general education curriculum. Even though they are highly intelligent, scoring in the top 3% to 5% of all children, or show remarkable levels of other talents, they often flounder or don't achieve to the levels expected. They find themselves in what are now being called **excellence gaps**. Such gaps occur when schools focus on low-achieving students, trying to close the "**achievement gap**" or raise the academic performance of students who attend poor, underperforming schools. This approach can result in ignoring the needs of gifted students. Another group of gifted students who typically do not receive the attention they require comprises gifted students with disabilities. Without special differentiation, enrichment, or acceleration programs that challenge their unique abilities, they, too, often underachieve. More information about their special circumstances is found in the box *Something to Think About: Twice Exceptional*.

Sadly, gifted underachievers report that they find little value in their school experiences and many drop out. Some estimates indicate that up to one-fourth of all high school dropouts are gifted students. The results are tragic for the individuals involved and their families. The missed potential and societal contributions can only be imagined: the solution to climate change, a vaccine that prevents cancer, an exquisite song, a striking mural, innovative water management techniques for drought-stricken areas, or something so far beyond present understanding that we cannot even imagine it.

Something to Think About: Twice Exceptional

Many gifted and talented students fail to receive any specialized educational services because they are never identified as having special gifts or talents. Some individuals, like LeDerick Horne (from this chapter's opener), are **twice-exceptional**—they are gifted or have special talents and also have a disability. However, the disability often masks the giftedness, which causes them to be overlooked for gifted referrals, making twice-exceptional students an under-represented group in gifted education. Other under-represented gifted students are those from diverse ethnic and racial groups and those who attend poor schools where advanced opportunities are not readily available.

Check Your Understanding 1.1

Click here to gauge your understanding of the concepts in this section.

Disabilities and Social Justice

Learning Outcome

Document instances of bias and discrimination experienced by people with disabilities and explain how rights to inclusive education and community presence were won.

Topic 1.4 Issues of Social Justice

- Across time, and even today, there are many examples of how people with disabilities have been poorly treated and faced considerable bias and discrimination.
- Such biases and changing attitudes can be traced through film.