THE CHILDREN WE SERVE: THE DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR HOUSEHOLDS

Prepared for:
Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education

Prepared by:
Mary Wagner, Camille Marder, and Jose Blackorby, with Denise Cardoso

SRI Project P10656

SEELS has been funded with Federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, under contract number ED-00-CO-0017. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.

SRI International
333 Ravenswood Avenue, Menlo Park, CA 94025
CONTENTS

Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................... v

1. Introduction, by Mary Wagner and Jose Blackorby .................................................... 1
   An Overview of SEELS .............................................................................................. 2
   Focus of This Report ............................................................................................... 5
   Organization of This Report .................................................................................... 6

2. Demographic Characteristics of Elementary and Middle School Students
   Receiving Special Education, by Camille Marder and Mary Wagner ..................... 7
   Students' Primary Disabilities .................................................................................. 7
   Age and Grade Level .............................................................................................. 8
   Gender .................................................................................................................... 10
   Racial/Ethnic Background ...................................................................................... 12
   Language Spoken at Home .................................................................................... 14

3. Characteristics of Students' Households, by Mary Wagner, Camille Marder,
   and Denise Cardoso ............................................................................................... 17
   Household Composition ......................................................................................... 17
      Living Arrangements .......................................................................................... 17
      Marital Status .................................................................................................... 18
      Household Size .................................................................................................. 19
   Prevalence of Disabilities ...................................................................................... 19
   Disability Differences in Household Composition ................................................ 19
   Demographic Differences in Household Composition ........................................... 21
   Parents' Characteristics ......................................................................................... 22
      Parents' Age ....................................................................................................... 22
      Parents' Education ............................................................................................. 23
      Parents' Employment ......................................................................................... 24
   Disability Differences in Parents' Characteristics ................................................. 25
   Demographic Differences in Parents' Characteristics .......................................... 25
   Economic Status .................................................................................................... 28
      Household Income ............................................................................................. 28
      Experience with Benefit Programs .................................................................... 29
         Current Benefit Program Participation ......................................................... 30
         Changes Over Time in TANF and SSI Participation ...................................... 30
      Children's Health Insurance Coverage ............................................................ 31
      Availability of Adequate Transportation and Telephone Service ...................... 33
      Relationship among Economic Status Indicators .............................................. 34
      Disability Differences in Economic Status ...................................................... 35
      Demographic Differences in Economic Status ................................................. 37
4. The Children We Serve, by Mary Wagner and Jose Blackorby

References

Appendix. SEELS Sampling, Data Collection, and Analysis Procedures:
Wave 1 Parent Interview/Survey
SEELS Sample Overview
The SEELS LEA Sample
Defining the Universe of LEAs
Stratification
LEA Sample Size
The SEELS Student Sample
Parent Interview/Survey
Weighting the Wave 1 Parent Data
Sample Weighting
Bias
Estimating Standard Errors
Calculating Significance Levels
Measurement Issues
EXHIBITS

1-1 SEELS Conceptual Framework ................................................................. 3

2-1 Disability Category Distribution of Children Receiving Special Education, Ages 6 to 13 ................................................................. 8
2-2 Students' Age and Grade Level ................................................................. 9
2-3 Students' Age and Grade Level, by Disability Category ......................... 10
2-4 Student Gender, by Disability Category .................................................. 11
2-5 Racial/Ethnic Backgrounds of Students with Disabilities and Students in the General Population ................................................................. 13
2-6 Students' Racial/Ethnic Backgrounds, by Disability Category ................ 14
2-7 Language Most Often Spoken at Home, by Students' Race/Ethnicity ....... 15
2-8 Primary Language Spoken at Home, by Disability Category ................. 16

3-1 Living Arrangements of Students with Disabilities and Students in the General Population ................................................................. 18
3-2 Size of Households of Students with Disabilities and Students in the General Population ................................................................. 19
3-3 Household Composition, by Disability Category ....................................... 20
3-4 Household Composition, by Students' Race/Ethnicity ........................... 22
3-5 Mother's Age at Child's Birth for Students with Disabilities and Students in the General Population ................................................................. 23
3-6 Education of Parents of Students with Disabilities and Students in the General Population ................................................................. 24
3-7 Employment of Parents of Students with Disabilities and Students in the General Population ................................................................. 250
3-8 Parents' Characteristics, by Disability Category ....................................... 26
3-9 Parents' Characteristics, by Race/Ethnicity ............................................. 27
3-10 Household Income of Students with Disabilities and Students in the General Population ................................................................. 29
3-11 Benefit Program Participation of Households of Students with Disabilities and Those in the General Population ................................................................. 31
3-12 Health Insurance Coverage of Students with Disabilities ..................... 32
3-13 Managed Care among Children with Disabilities .................................... 32
3-14 Parents' Reports of Problems with Health Insurance ............................ 33
3-15 Benefit Program Participation and Household Resources, by Household Income ............................................................. 34
3-16 Household Economic Status, by Disability Category ............................. 36
3-17 Problems with Health Insurance, by Disability Category ....................... 37
3-18 Household Economic Status, by Race/Ethnicity .................................... 37
3-19 Household Composition and Parent Characteristics, by Household Income ................................................................................................. 39
3-20 Racial/Ethnic Distribution of Students with Disabilities and Students in the General Population, by Income Level ................................. 41
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A project as ambitious as SEELS can only be undertaken as a team effort. The authors wish to express their sincere thanks to the many members of the SEELS project team whose names do not appear in this report:

- To Lisa Holden-Pitt, Judith Holt, Louis Danielson, and others in the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education for their collegial support and guidance in many aspects of the study.
- To Kathryn Valdes and Harold Javitz, who provided leadership in constructing the sample for SEELS.
- To Lynn Newman, who guided the collection of the data reported here.
- To Julia Song, whose careful, responsive, competent, and creative computer programming support made this analytic task manageable.
- To Tom Cadwallader, Renee Cameto, Josh Cohen, Nadine Duong, Nicole Garza, Peggy Giacalone, Anita Groethe, Anne-Marie Guzman, Francisca Guzman, Phyl Levine, Claire Middleton, Ethan Miller, Renate Page, Ronald Orpitelli, John Rollin, Barbara Scofield, Soni Sing and other staff who have handled the countless data processing tasks associated with the study.
- To Frances Hernandez and Kristin Mills, whose management abilities have kept us on track, and to Betty Adams, Kemi Biyibi, Marion Collins, Sandra Collins, Joann Geren, and Luis Santos, whose administrative support has been invaluable.
- To our colleagues at Westat for their cooperation as subcontractors in conducting the telephone interviews that generated much of the data reported here.
- To our many other colleagues in the field of special education policy and research, who have provided input into the study design and shared their ideas with us as SEELS has taken shape, for contributing their creative views and expertise to the study.

And especially to the more than 9,000 students whose stories we tell here, and to their parents and guardians who care for them, for their willingness to share with us something of their experiences. Even from the distances imposed by survey research, the challenges they face and the courage and abilities they have in confronting them are clear.
1. INTRODUCTION
By Mary Wagner and Jose Blackorby

"In America, no child should be left behind. Every child should be educated to his or her full potential."
President George W. Bush (2001)

These words articulate the strong commitment of this country to the education of all its children. Although “no child left behind” only recently has become the phrase that encapsulates our national commitment and education agenda, the spirit behind it has been the foundation of federal special education legislation and policy for more than 25 years. Since 1975, when P.L. 94-142, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), was passed, federal legislation and policy have been pivotal in moving children and youth with disabilities into the mainstream of public education so that they are better able to achieve their full potential, the ultimate goal of our education system.

In the years since P.L. 94-142, federal special education legislation has reflected demographic, social, economic, and political changes in our country, as well as lessons learned from serving an increasingly diverse student population. By 1997, EHA had evolved into the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and that year it underwent another significant reshaping in the process of congressional reauthorization. The ensuing IDEA '97 (P.L. 105-17) was an effort to build on the “significant progress” under earlier legislation by:

- “Raising expectations for children with disabilities
- Increasing parental involvement in the education of their children
- Ensuring access to the general education curriculum
- Ensuring that regular education teachers are involved in planning and assessing children’s progress
- Including children with disabilities in assessments, performance goals, and reports to the public
- Supporting quality professional development for all personnel who are involved in educating children with disabilities” (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

IDEA '97 also recognized the importance of having solid information on the experiences and achievements of students with disabilities as a foundation for improving practice and accountability within schools. The legislation authorized the “production of new knowledge” [Sec. 673(b)(1)] through a variety of federal activities, including “producing information on the long-term impact of early intervention and education on results for individuals with disabilities through large-scale longitudinal studies” [Sec. 673(b)(2)(H)].

In carrying out the responsibility for producing new information on long-term impacts of education for students with disabilities, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) of the U.S. Department of Education is implementing a portfolio of longitudinal studies that span the age range of children and youth with disabilities. The Special Education Elementary
(NHES) are more precise because an analysis file was created from the publicly available data to match the age of SEELS students.