Profile of Students with Disabilities in U.S. Public Schools During the 2020-21 School Year

2020-21 Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC)

U.S. Department of Education
Office for Civil Rights

About the Civil Rights Data Collection

The Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) is a mandatory survey of all public schools and school districts in the 50 states, Washington, D.C., and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. It gathers information about student access to educational programs, activities, staff, and school climate factors from public schools serving students in preschool through 12th grade. For more information about the CRDC or to download the full 2020-21 CRDC public-use data file, please visit https://civilrightsdata.ed.gov.

Educational Services for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities can receive educational services under two Federal laws: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (**Section 504**)[1] and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (**IDEA**).[2] **Section 504** prohibits disability discrimination and ensures that students with disabilities have equal access to educational opportunities, including a free appropriate public education for public school students in grades K-12. In the education context, this law applies to schools that receive Federal financial assistance and is enforced by the U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights. The **IDEA** Part B program ensures that a free appropriate public education is available to all eligible children with disabilities between the ages of 3 through 21 years, who reside in a State, with a few specific exceptions. The IDEA is administered by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

There were a total of 8.4 million students with disabilities enrolled in the nation's public schools during the 2020-21 school year. Students with disabilities accounted for 17% of the overall student enrollment: 14% were served under IDEA and 3% were served only under Section 504.

49.2 Million
Overall student enrollment

6.8 Million
Students with disabilities served under IDEA

1.6 Million
Students with disabilities served under Section 504 only

FIGURE 1

Student Enrollment by Disability and Race/Ethnicity

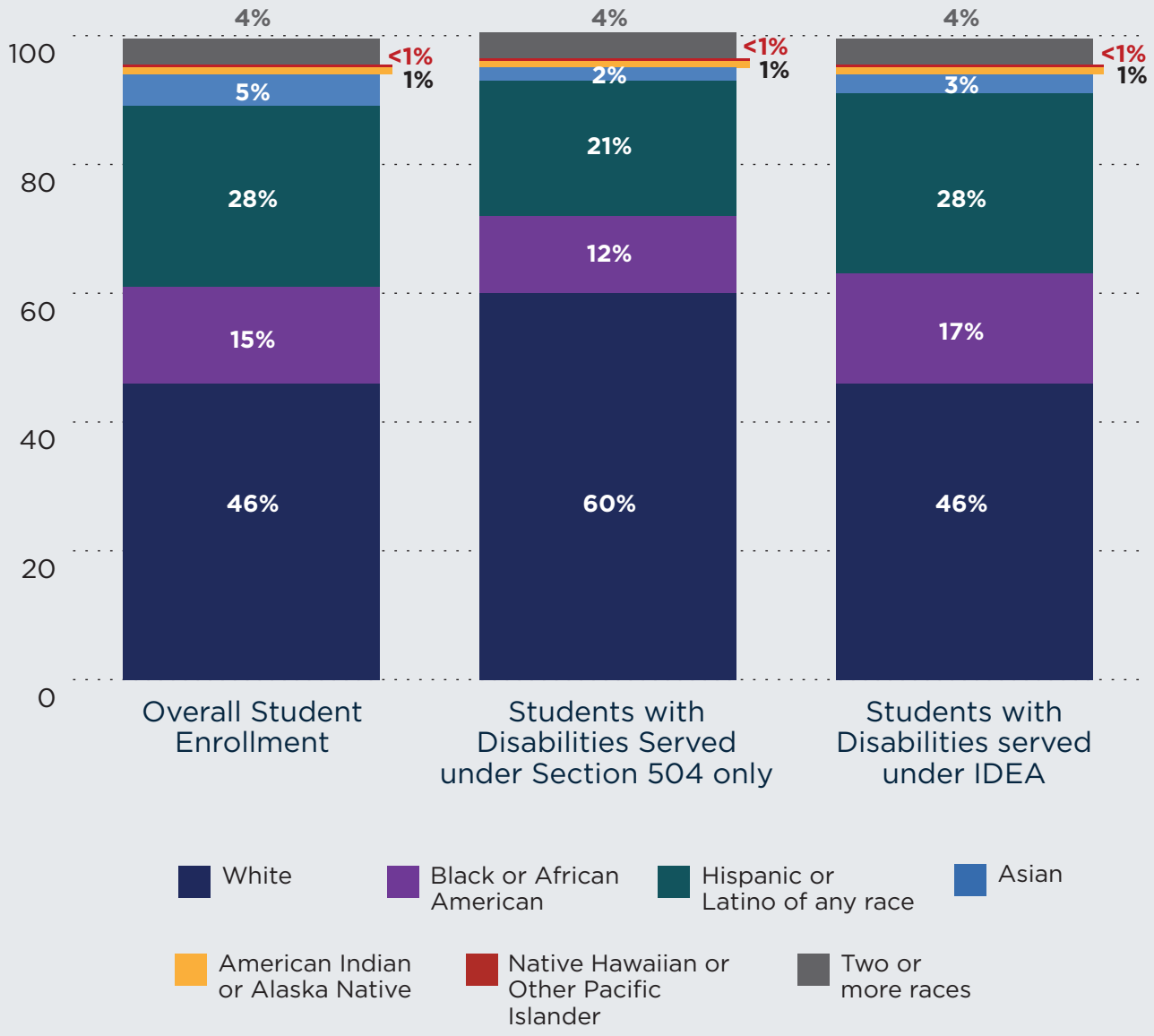
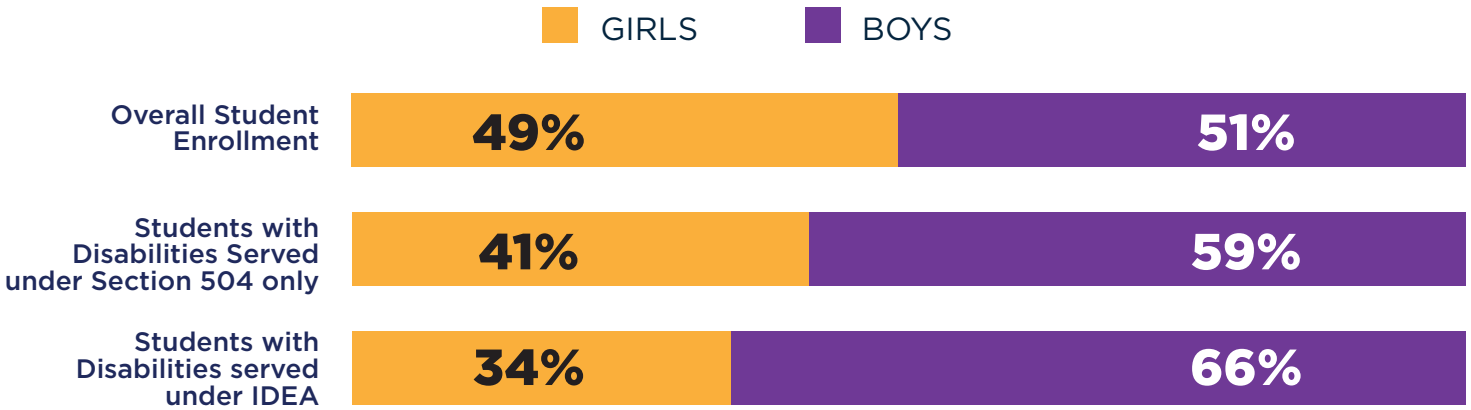


Figure 1 shows that in the 2020-21 school year, White students were overrepresented in the receipt of services under Section 504. White students represented 46% of total student enrollment, but 60% of students with disabilities served only under Section 504.

Black students were overrepresented in the receipt of services under IDEA. Black students represented 15% of total student enrollment, but 17% of students with disabilities who received services under IDEA.

FIGURE 2

Student Enrollment by Disability and Sex

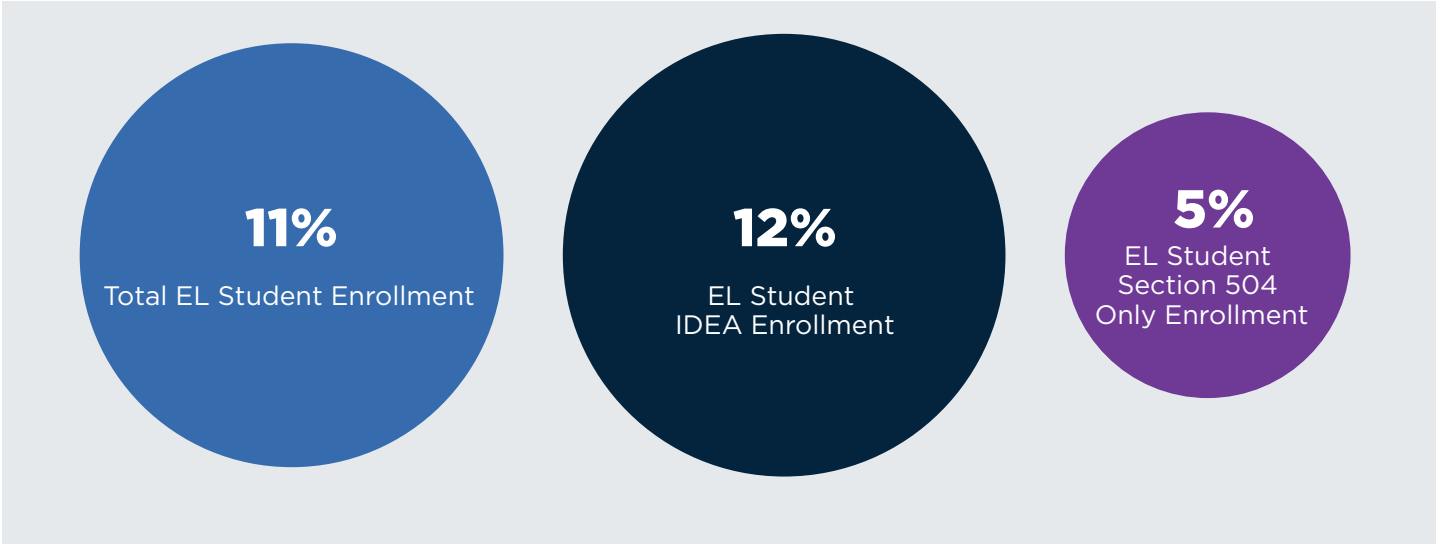


BOYS accounted for the majority of students with disabilities enrolled in the nation's public schools.

FIGURE 3

English Learners with Disabilities

In the 2020-21 school year, 5.2 million English learner (EL) students, 11% of the overall student enrollment, attended the nation's public schools. Twelve percent of students with disabilities served under IDEA and 5% of students with disabilities served only under Section 504 were EL students.



COURSE-TAKING BY STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with Disabilities Served Under IDEA Accounted for

2% of students enrolled in **Advanced Placement Courses**[1]

3% of students enrolled in **Gifted and Talented Programs**[2]

4% of students enrolled in **Dual Enrollment or Dual Credit Programs**[3]

[1] ***Advanced Placement (AP)*** *refers to a program, sponsored by the College Board, through which students may earn college credit and advanced college placement by successfully completing AP courses and standardized AP exams.*

[2] ***Gifted and Talented programs*** *are programs during regular school hours that provide special educational opportunities including accelerated promotion through grades and classes and an enriched curriculum for students who are endowed with a high degree of mental ability or who demonstrate unusual physical coordination, creativity, interest, or talent.*

[3] ***Dual Enrollment or Dual Credit Programs*** *provide opportunities for high school students to take college-level courses offered by colleges, and earn concurrent credit toward a high school diploma and a college degree while still in high school.*

Enrollment Rates for Students with Disabilities Served Under IDEA and for non-IDEA Students in Public High School Mathematics, Science and Computer Science Courses

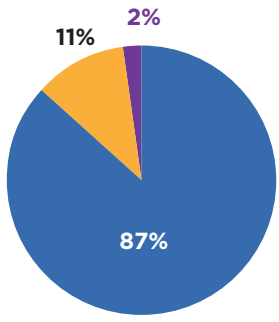
Almost 2.3 million students with disabilities served under IDEA (13%) were enrolled in public high schools. The enrollment rates of public high school students with disabilities served under IDEA in mathematics, science, and computer science courses were lower than the enrollment rates for non-IDEA public high school students, except for Algebra I.

		Enrollment Rate of Students with Disabilities (IDEA)	Enrollment Rate of Non-IDEA Students
Mathematics	Algebra I	23%	18%
	Geometry	19%	22%
	Algebra II	13%	20%
	Advanced Mathematics	7%	18%
	Calculus	2%	9%
Science	Biology	24%	27%
	Chemistry	11%	20%
	Physics	10%	14%
Technology	Computer Science	7%	9%

SCHOOL CLIMATE FOR & DISCIPLINE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

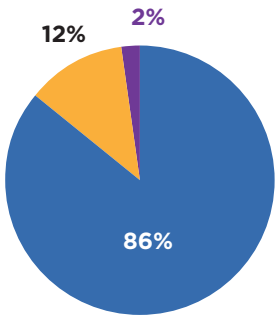
Students with Disabilities Reported as Harassed or Bullied

Forty-five percent of students reported as being harassed or bullied were served under IDEA, and 5% were served only under Section 504.



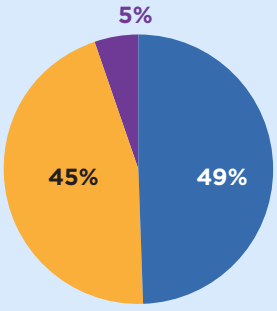
14,900
Number of Students Reported as Harassed or Bullied

On the Basis of Sex



10,700
Number of Students Reported as Harassed or Bullied

On the Basis of Race



3,400
Number of Students Reported as Harassed or Bullied

On the Basis of Disability

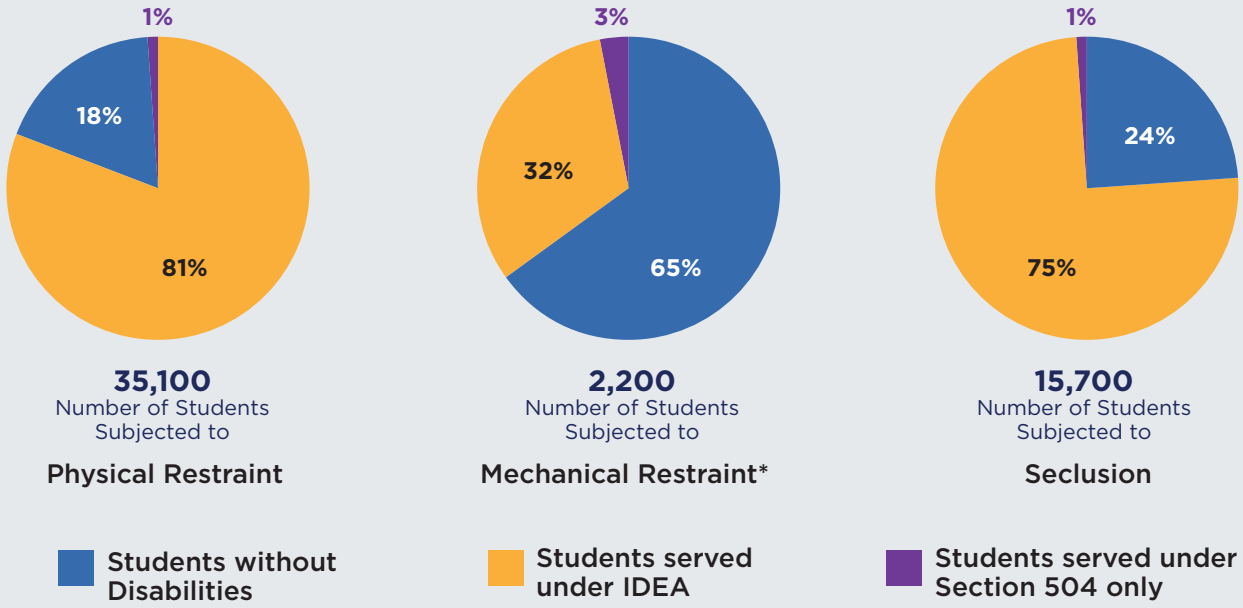
Students without Disabilities

Students served under IDEA

Students served under Section 504 only

Students with Disabilities Subjected to Restraint or Seclusion

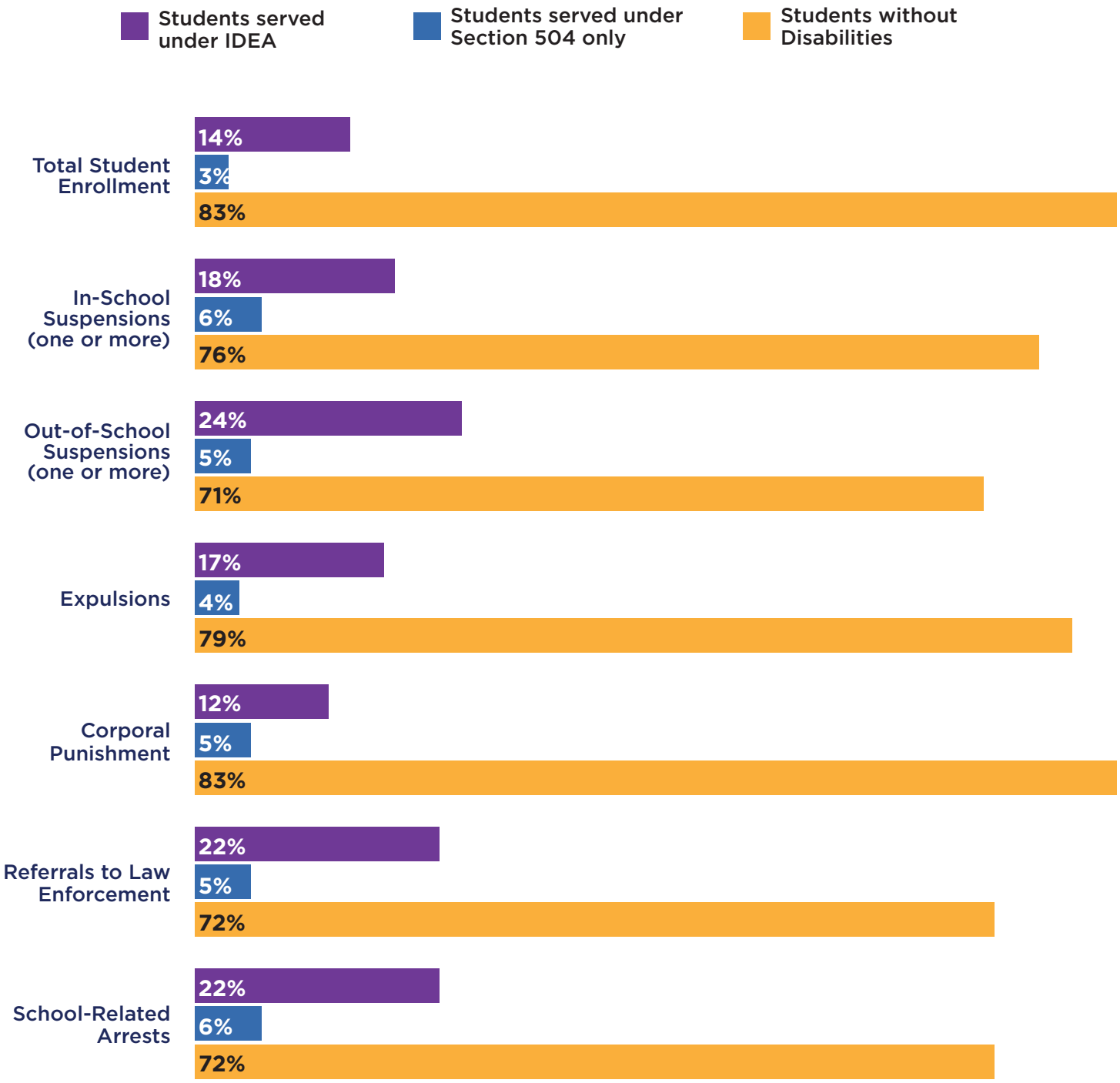
Although students served under IDEA comprised 14% of the overall student enrollment, they accounted for 81% of students who were subjected to physical restraint, 32% of students subjected to mechanical restraint, and 75% of students subjected to seclusion.



**The number of students subjected to mechanical restraint may include counts of students who were handcuffed by law enforcement, but no arrest was made.*

Students with Disabilities Subjected to Disciplinary Actions

Students with disabilities were overrepresented in discipline actions when compared to their total student enrollment in public schools. These students represented 17% of K-12 student enrollment, but 24% of students who received one or more in-school suspensions, 29% of students who received one or more out-of-school suspensions, 21% of students who received expulsions, 27% of students who received a referral to law enforcement, and 28% of students who received a school-related arrest.



[1] Under Section 504, a person has a disability if they: (1) have a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits a major life activity; (2) have a record of such an impairment; or (3) are regarded as having such an impairment. 29 U.S.C. § 705(9)(B), (20)(B); 34 C.F.R. § 104.3(j). Students with disabilities who are eligible for special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are covered by both Section 504 and IDEA. Students with disabilities who are not IDEA-eligible but who are covered by Section 504 are sometimes referred to as "504-only" students; these students are referred to above as students served only under Section 504.

[2] To be eligible for special education and related services under IDEA Part B, a child must be evaluated and determined to be a child who has a disability and who requires special education and related services. 20 U.S.C. § 1414 (a)-(c); 34 C.F.R. §§ 300.301-300.311. Implementation of an Individualized Education Program (IEP) developed in accordance with IDEA is one means of meeting the Section 504 free appropriate public education requirement. 34 C.F.R. § 104.33 (b)(2).

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2020-21 Civil Rights Data Collection, released November 2023, available at https://civilrightsdata.ed.gov.

The data presented in this report is from the 2020-21 CRDC privacy-protected, public-use data file, released November 2023.

The calculated counts and percentages in this report may differ from those by other offices within the U.S. Department of Education (ED) due to differences in methodology, data sources, and survey population (or universe of schools and school districts that submit data). For additional information about the differences between the CRDC and other ED data, please see, *Building Bridges: Increasing the Power of the CRDC Through Data Linking With an ID Crosswalk*.

OCR cautions readers and data users to consider the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on students and on educational conditions when comparing the 2020-21 CRDC to CRDCs from previous years.

The percentages listed are rounded to the nearest whole number. Counts of 1,000,000 or greater are rounded to the nearest hundred thousand. Counts of 1,000 or greater are rounded to the nearest hundred. Counts of less than 1,000 are rounded to the nearest ten.

This analysis excludes schools for which OCR determined potentially erroneous data had been reported. For more information on the 2020-21 CRDC data quality efforts, review the User's Manual available at https://civilrightsdata.ed.gov.

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