For students with disabilities, how do high school outcomes vary by disability category?

A recent study* of Utah students with disabilities revealed that, while they were less likely to graduate and more likely to drop out compared to their general education classmates, their high school outcomes varied considerably by disability category. As a group, they were also more likely to change schools and to be over-age in grade 12—two risk factors for not graduating. These factors also varied by disability category.

**STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

**UTAH STUDENTS**

**GRADES 6–12, 2010/11**

(N = 201,465)

- General education students: 88%
- Students with disabilities: 12%

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific learning disability</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other health impairment</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual disability</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech or language impairment</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional disturbance</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple disabilities</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of students with disabilities were classified with a specific learning disability.

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) identifies 13 specific disability categories. This visual summary reports only those categories that accounted for more than 1% of Utah’s grades 6–12 students with disabilities. For categories and their definitions, see p. 4 of the study report.

**4-YEAR HIGH SCHOOL OUTCOMES**

For the 41,496 students expected to graduate in 2011, students with disabilities dropped out at higher rates and graduated at lower rates than their general education classmates. Students who neither dropped out nor graduated were retained in school or earned an alternative certificate.

**DROP OUT RATES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Dropout Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General education students</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech or language impairment</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific learning disability</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other health impairment</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional disturbance</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual disability</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple disabilities</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students classified with emotional disturbance had the highest dropout rate.

**GRADUATION RATES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disability Category</th>
<th>Graduation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General education students</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>59%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific learning disability</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other health impairment</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autism</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional disturbance</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual disability</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple disabilities</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students classified with intellectual disability or multiple disabilities had the poorest graduation outcomes.

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Students with disabilities were more likely to be over-age in grade 12, which is a risk factor for not graduating—though, under IDEA, some students with disabilities may remain in high school until age 22.

The percentages of over-age students varied by disability category.

Over-age students with disabilities:
- 83% Multiple disabilities
- 81% Intellectual disability
- 64% Autism
- 46% Other health impairment
- 43% Speech or language impairment
- 43% Emotional disturbance
- 34% Specific learning disability

Over-age general education students:
- 14% Students with disabilities

Students classified with emotional disturbance had the highest school mobility rate.

Annual school mobility:
- General education students: 8%
- Students with disabilities: 12%
- Emotional disturbance: 27%
- Other health impairment: 13%
- Specific learning disability: 12%
- Intellectual disability: 9%
- Autism: 9%
- Speech or language impairment: 7%
- Multiple disabilities: 6%

Compared to their general education classmates, Utah students with disabilities in grades 6-12 changed schools at higher rates, which is a risk factor for not graduating.