

Outcomes for Students with Disabilities in L.A. Unified

Disaggregated by Category of
Disability

Independent Analysis Unit
Los Angeles Unified School District

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Tracy Wilkinson Macho, Ph.D.
Glenn Daley, Director

About this Report

In response to a request from the Board of Education of the Los Angeles Unified School District, the Independent Analysis Unit (IAU) is conducting a multi-part study of special education in L.A. Unified. Over a series of reports, the IAU is analyzing special education expenditures, funding, and outcomes for students with disabilities.

The views expressed herein are those of the Independent Analysis Unit and do not necessarily reflect those of the District, the Board of Education, or any individual Board Member.

More information about the IAU, including past studies, can be found at laschoolboard.org/iau. Please direct any questions about this report to glenn.daley@lausd.net.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

During the 2018-2019 school year, the Los Angeles Unified School District (L.A. Unified) enrolled 72,346 students with disabilities in special education in the District's public schools, almost 16% of the District's enrollment. The range of disabilities and severities identified among students with disabilities in the District is wide, spanning 13 categories of disability and a range of educational placements. However, most analyses of student outcomes categorize students as either special education or not, when in fact the needs of special education students—and their achievement challenges—vary widely. This aggregation does a great disservice to these students and our understanding of them, as their talents and needs are incredibly diverse.

This report examines academic and other outcomes of students with disabilities disaggregated by category of disability. These academic and other outcomes include achievement as demonstrated on statewide assessments with and without accommodations, credit completion and progress toward graduation, average grade point average, graduation rates, and rates of chronic absenteeism. This report differs from previous research on students with disabilities in that it presents outcomes for categories of disability within special education, rather than merely for special education students as a single, homogenous group. Several observations emerged from the analysis of these outcomes:

Overall, students with disabilities in L.A. Unified underperform similar students across California on achievement assessments. But not all students with disabilities compare unfavorably to the statewide average. Most of the underperformance is explained by the low scores of students with specific learning disabilities. In 2018-2019, only 12.3% of students with disabilities in L.A. Unified overall met or exceeded standards on the Smarter Balanced assessment Consortium (SBAC) test in English Language Arts (ELA), and 9.3% met or exceeded standards on SBAC Math. This compares with 16.3% of students with disabilities in California meeting or exceeding standards on SBAC ELA, and 12.6% meeting or exceeding standards on SBAC Math. However, students in most categories of disability actually performed higher than the state average. What brings L.A. Unified's average down is the extremely low performance of students with specific learning disabilities. These students make up almost 40% of the SWD population in the District, and yet only 6% of them in 2019 met or exceeded standards on the SBAC ELA test.

Students in most categories of disability complete credits at a rate that would put them on track to graduate, and the graduation rate for students with disabilities has climbed in recent years. However, this rate is still lower than the graduation rate overall in the District. Two groups saw gains, though. They were students with specific learning disabilities and students with emotional disturbance. The most recent data (2018-2019) show that 59.9% of senior students with disabilities graduated with a standard high school diploma, compared to 77.3% of L.A. Unified seniors overall. Furthermore, 32.7% of students with disabilities who left the District at the end of the 2018-2019 school year received a certificate of completion instead of a standard high school diploma. As with achievement data, these results vary by category of disability, showing the importance of disaggregating the data.

Chronic absenteeism for every category of disability exceeds the rate of chronic absenteeism for the larger L.A. Unified population. Over a quarter (26%) of students with disabilities in L.A. Unified were identified as being chronically absent (missing 16 or more days of school per year) in 2017-2018. This is almost 13% higher than their peers without disabilities in the District. While some types of disability may make daily attendance more challenging, this high statistic for every category of disability suggests that many students with disabilities are missing out on not only the general curriculum, but also any special services designed for their benefit at school.

Recommendations

- Start students with disabilities on the diploma track if reasonable, and prepare them for advanced course work if possible, as early in their schooling as is done for students without disabilities.
- Monitor the attendance of students with disabilities more closely and provide support with the intention of increasing attendance rates for students with disabilities.
- Continue to press for additional financial resources to ensure that students with disabilities will receive the support necessary to stay on track for graduation.

KEY TERMS

California Alternate Assessment (CAA): assessments for English Language Arts and Mathematics that are an annual measure of what students know and can do using alternate achievement standards and are designed for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Free, appropriate public education (FAPE): an educational program that is individualized to a specific student, designed to meet that student's unique needs, provides access to the general curriculum, meets the grade-level standards established by the state, and from which the student receives educational benefit.

Individualized Education Program (IEP): a written education plan designed to meet the learning needs of a child with a disability who is receiving special education services.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA): a federal law that makes available a free and appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children.

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC): computer-based adaptive standardized assessments for English Language Arts and Mathematics that allow students to show what they know and are able to do.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Students with disabilities in L.A. Unified have far lower achievement outcomes than students *without* disabilities in the District and in California. This fact may be surprising, but on average, students with disabilities in L.A. Unified also perform less well on standardized assessments than students *with* disabilities across the state (Figure 1).

However, averaging the outcomes of all students with disabilities (SWDs) is misleading. The range of disabilities—and the severities of these disabilities—among students in the District is wide, spanning 13 categories of disability and a variety of educational placements serving diverse educational needs. Many students with disabilities do not underperform on standardized assessments compared to state averages.

Just two categories (specific learning disabilities and other health impairment) perform considerably below the statewide population, and these two categories make up more than half of the students with disabilities in the District.

This report presents outcomes of students with disabilities disaggregated by category of disability. The outcomes reported here include achievement as demonstrated on statewide assessments with and without accommodations, credit completion and progress toward graduation, graduation rates, and attendance.

A. Research Questions

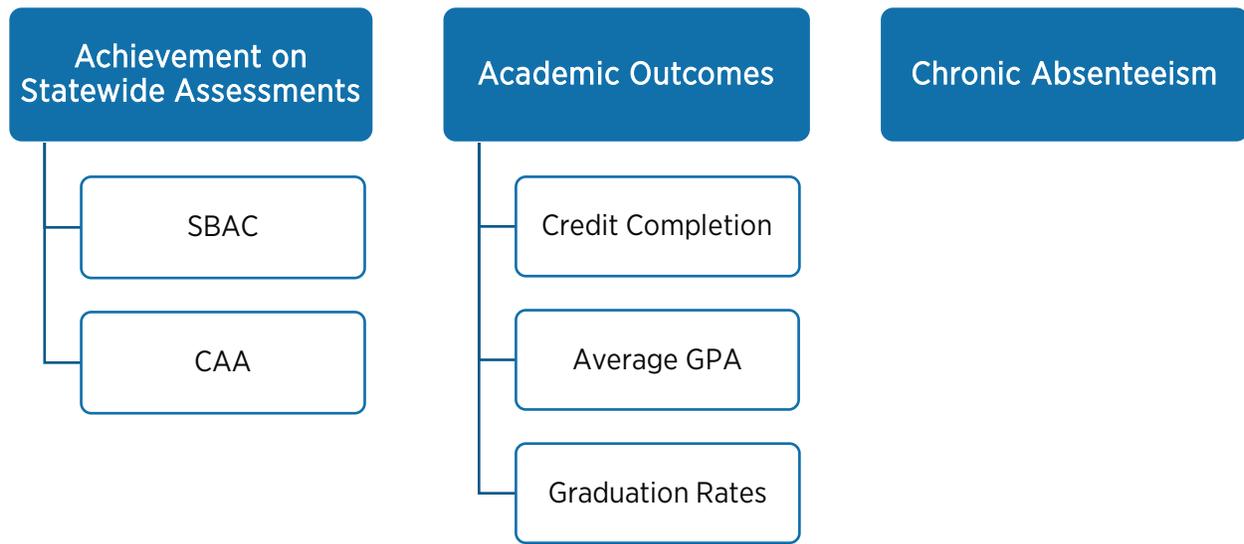
For this report, the IAU utilized data from L.A. Unified's Focus Reporting System to examine these questions:

KEY FINDINGS

- Overall, students with disabilities in L.A. Unified underperform similar students across California on achievement assessments. But not all District students with disabilities compare unfavorably to the statewide average. Most of the underperformance is explained by the low scores of students with specific learning disabilities in L.A. Unified.
- Students in most categories of disability complete credits at a rate that would put them on track to graduate, and the graduation rate for students with disabilities has climbed in recent years. However, the graduation rate for students with disabilities is lower than the graduation rate overall in the District. Both students with specific learning disabilities and students with emotional disturbance saw recent gains.
- Chronic absenteeism for *every* category of disability exceeds the rate of chronic absenteeism for the larger L.A. Unified population and could be affecting academic outcomes for these students.

1. How does **achievement on statewide assessments** vary between categories of students with disabilities, and how has it changed since 2015-2016? Statewide assessments include:
 - Smarter Balanced Assessments (SBAC) in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math
 - California Alternate Assessments (CAA) in ELA and Math
2. How do **other academic outcomes** vary between categories of students with disabilities? Other academic outcomes include:
 - Credit completion and progress toward graduation
 - Average GPA
 - Graduation rates
 - Changes in graduation rates since 2015-2016
3. How do **rates of chronic absenteeism** vary between categories of students with disabilities?

Academic and Behavioral Outcomes Studied for Students with Disabilities



B. History and Relevant Policy

During the 2017-2018 academic year, roughly 14% of students in public schools in the United States were identified as having a disability and being served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).¹

These students with disabilities fall into one of 13 disability type categories under IDEA: autism, deaf-blindness, developmental delay, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment.² Over three fourths (77%) of special education students in the United States are identified as having just one of four disabilities: specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, other health impairment, and/or autism.³

These disability categories are also the most common in L.A. Unified. The District enrolled 72,346 students in special education in 2018-

2019, which was almost 16% of all students enrolled in the District.⁴ Of the full group of students with disabilities, 39% were diagnosed with specific learning disabilities, 20% with autism, 15% with speech or language impairment, and 12% with other health impairment.

Standardized Assessments and SWDs

Participation in standardized assessments by students with disabilities has increased dramatically compared to just 25 years ago. As recently as the 1990s, most students with disabilities were excluded from state and district-wide assessments.⁵ In 1997, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was reauthorized and included amendments relating to the assessment participation of students with disabilities. This change marked the first time that states were required to include students with disabilities in state and district-wide assessments.⁶

The amendments to IDEA also included provisions requiring that state and local districts report the performance of students with disa-

bilities on these assessments just as they report the performance of students without disabilities.⁷ Additionally, states were required to develop alternate assessments for students with disabilities who were unable to participate in the general admission of state assessments. The 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), known as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, and the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA further clarified these expectations by requiring that alternate assessments be aligned to each state's academic achievement standards, or, if applicable, alternate achievement standards.⁸

A History of Low Expectations

Related to the historically low participation of students with disabilities in assessment systems, is a history of unsupported beliefs about this group of students and low expectations about their abilities.⁹ Congress recognized this prejudice in the preamble to IDEA 1997, stating that, historically, “the implementation of this Act has been impeded by low expectations. Over 20 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access in the general curriculum to the maximum extent possible.”¹⁰

Since IDEA 1997 was enacted, research has continued to show that most students with disabilities, just like their peers without disabilities, are able to perform across all levels of performance on state assessments.¹¹

Likewise, if students with disabilities are held to high expectations, given access to the same general curriculum as their peers, and receive adequate supports, they can succeed in other ways. Researchers have estimated that 85-90% of students with disabilities are

able to meet the same graduation standards as their peers, provided they receive appropriate accommodations, support, instruction, and access to the general curriculum.¹² However, national graduation rates for students with disabilities remain far below those of their peers.

Diploma options. This disparity in graduation rates is related in part to the diploma options available to students with disabilities. The California Education Code permits a local school district to award certificates or documents of achievement or completion to students with disabilities who are not able to meet graduation requirements.¹³ However, recent research found that more special education students graduated with a standard diploma (66%) in states that do not offer a special diploma or certificate as an alternative for students with disabilities, compared to states that do offer such special diplomas (59%).¹⁴ This finding suggests that some of the students receiving special diplomas could have graduated with standard diplomas if they were given the opportunity.

Unclear standards. Though evidence shows that many students with disabilities can achieve at levels comparable to students without disabilities, the question of how well students with disabilities should be expected to perform remains murky. Two Supreme Court cases helped to shape beliefs about educational expectations for students with disabilities. And though each further clarified the obligations of school districts towards their students with disabilities, each fell short of compelling schools to ensure that students with disabilities reach their full potential.

The first, *Board of Education of Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley* (1982)¹⁵, established that school districts should follow the procedures of the law and develop individualized educational programs

(IEPs) that were reasonably calculated to enable the student to receive educational benefits. Further, the court held that since students with disabilities have a wide range of impairment, the definition of what constitutes a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) for each student should be left to school authorities.

More recently, the court modified law regarding special education in *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1* (2017).¹⁶ As in the Rowley case, in *Endrew*, the Supreme Court deferred to school authorities' professional judgment in making decisions for students. However, they raised the bar from where it was set by the Rowley case, and clarified that schools could not simply provide the minimum of education services; they would need to be able to show evidence that "the IEP is reasonably calculated to enable the child to make progress appropriate in light of his circumstances."

These two Supreme Court cases produced two important guidelines for special education. First, students with disabilities have a wide range of needs, and the Court acknowledged this in the decisions of both cases. Second, the Court upheld judicial deference to school authorities to make decisions on how best to meet the needs of a student with disabilities rather than adopting a rule or standard for defining progress in a student with a disability.

Many questions still exist about expectations for students with disabilities. We still do not know enough about what exactly to expect of students in terms of their progress in school, as well as how to set ambitious, challenging goals for students with disabilities. We do know that students with disabilities have a wide range of educational needs and abilities, and that some students with disabilities cannot be expected to learn the same material

and at the same level as other students with disabilities. However, by lumping all students with disabilities together, as we often do when we look at performance and outcomes of this group, we lower expectations for the entire population of students with disabilities.

2. DATA

For this report, we used L.A. Unified student-level administrative data (Focus) to identify all students classified as having a disability in the following categories: autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disturbance, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities (including all three sub-categories of multiple disabilities, multiple disabilities – hearing, multiple disabilities – orthopedic, and multiple disabilities – visual), orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairment. Students with disabilities in pre-school and transitional kindergarten were excluded from all analyses.

Additionally, for some analyses, the three multiple disabilities sub-categories were combined into one category labeled as multiple disabilities. Student outcome data, such as SBAC test performance, CAA test performance, credits completed, L.A. Unified unweighted GPA, withdrawal reason description, and attendance bands, were aggregated to disability categories using student-level data. Finally, data on student characteristics like grade level and enrollment from student-level administrative data were used in analyses.

Much of the data included in the analyses in this report were collected as part of the Modified Consent Decree (MCD).¹⁷ As part of the MCD, an Independent Monitor tracked the district's progress toward 18 measurable out-

comes for students with disabilities, including graduation rate, achievement on and participation in statewide assessments, and post-secondary transition.¹⁸

Table 1 shows L.A. Unified’s enrollment of students by category of disability from 2016 to 2019. In all four years, the largest category of disability enrolled is students with specific learning disability, and the second largest category enrolled is students with autism. Enrollment of students with specific learning disability has also decreased by four percentage points over the four-year period, while enrollment of students with autism has increased by two percentage points over the same period.

Table 2 compares L.A. Unified’s percentage distribution of students by type of disability in 2018 with the percentage distribution by type of disability nationally and statewide. Of note is the District’s enrollment of students with autism and students with specific learning disability compared with national and statewide distribution of these types of disability. In 2018, L.A. Unified served almost twice as many students with autism (19%) as the national distribution (10%), and four percentage points more than the California distribution (15%). L.A. Unified served about the same percentage of students with specific learning disability (40%) as schools statewide (38%), but slightly more than the percentage nationally (34%).

Table 1. Percent of Students Enrolled in L.A. Unified, by Year and Category of Disability

Type of Disability	2016	2017	2018	2019
Autism	18%	19%	19%	20%
Deaf-Blindness	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Deafness	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Emotional Disturbance	2%	2%	2%	2%
Hearing Impairment	2%	2%	2%	2%
Intellectual Disability	6%	6%	6%	6%
Multiple Disabilities				
Orthopedic Impairment	3%	3%	3%	3%
Other Health Impairment	11%	11%	11%	12%
Specific Learning Disability	43%	42%	40%	39%
Speech or Language Impairment	15%	15%	16%	16%
Traumatic Brain Injury	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%
Visual Impairment	<1%	<1%	<1%	<1%

Note: Excludes SWDs enrolled in fiscally independent charter schools. No data were available for students with multiple disabilities. *Source:* 2019-20 L.A. Unified Superintendent’s Final Budget, District Enrollment Trends.¹⁹

Table 2. Percentage Distribution of Students by Type of Disability: 2018

Type of Disability	US	CA	District
Autism	10%	15%	19%
Deaf-Blindness	<1%	<1%	<1%
Deafness	<1%	<1%	<1%
Emotional Disturbance	5%	3%	2%
Hearing Impairment	1%	1%	2%
Intellectual Disability	6%	6%	6%
Multiple Disabilities	2%	1%	
Orthopedic Impairment	1%	1%	3%
Other Health Impairment	14%	13%	11%
Specific Learning Disability	34%	38%	40%
Speech or Language Impairment	19%	21%	16%
Traumatic Brain Injury	<1%	<1%	<1%
Visual Impairment	<1%	<1%	1%

Note: Excludes SWD enrolled in fiscally independent charter schools. 2018 data were used because it is the most recent national data available. No District data were available for students with multiple disabilities.

Source: 2019-20 L.A. Unified Superintendent’s Final Budget, District Enrollment Trends.²⁰

Categories of Disability from IDEA

In order to qualify for services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), a child must be diagnosed with one (or more) condition(s) that fall(s) into the following categories, and need special education and related services as a result:

- **Autism** – “a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age three, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.”
- **Deaf-blindness** – “concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.”
- **Deafness** – “a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.”
- **Emotional disturbance** – “a condition exhibiting one of more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child’s educational performance: an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors; an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers; inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances; a general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression; a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.”
- **Hearing impairment** – “an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness.”
- **Intellectual disability** – “significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.”
- **Multiple disabilities** – “concomitant disabilities, the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments.”
- **Orthopedic impairment** – “a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.” Includes impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, disease, or from other causes.
- **Other health impairment** – “having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that: is due to chronic or acute health problems; and adversely affects a child’s educational performance.” Includes attention deficit (hyperactivity) disorder, epilepsy, asthma, and diabetes, among other conditions.
- **Specific learning disability** – “a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations. Does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of intellectual disability, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.”
- **Speech or language impairment** – “a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.”
- **Traumatic brain injury** – “an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child’s educational performance.”
- **Visual impairment** – “an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child’s educational performance.” Includes both partial sight and blindness.

Source: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Part B, Subpart A, Section 300.8

3. RESULTS

A. Statewide Assessments

Most students with disabilities in L.A. Unified participate in the Smarter Balanced Assessment System (SBAC) in Grades 3 through 8 and 11th grade as a way of showing what they know and have learned.²¹ Depending on the individual student and his or her educational needs, some use accommodations on SBAC, with the accommodations typically being the same ones used in the classroom and documented in a student’s individualized education program (IEP).

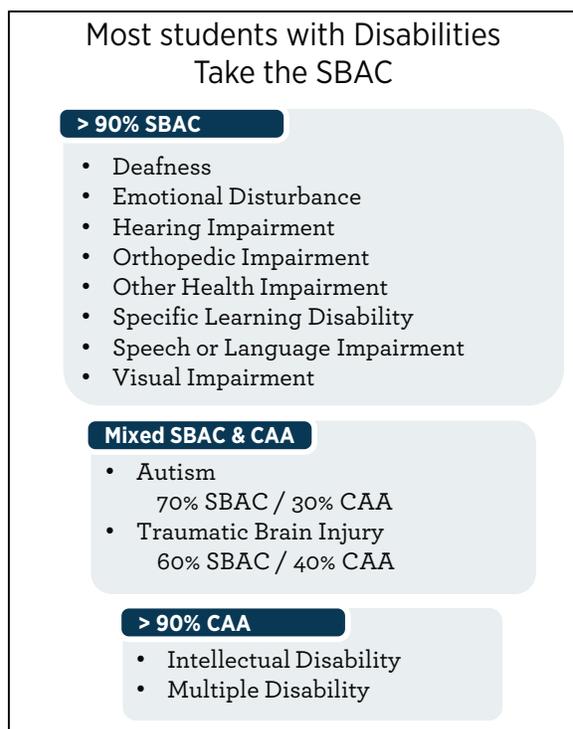
Students with the most significant cognitive disabilities take the California Alternate Assessments (CAA) for English/Language Arts and Math. These assessments use alternate achievement standards to measure what students know and have learned and are administered in Grades 3 through 8 and 11 to students whose IEPs specify participation in the CAAs. The CAAs are computer-based and adaptive and are administered one-on-one to participating students.²²

SBAC has four levels of performance based on students’ grade- and content-specific knowledge and skills, also known as *achievement levels*. These achievement levels are based on students’ scaled scores on each assessment.²³ The four achievement levels are: standard not met (Level 1), standard nearly met (Level 2), standard met (Level 3), and standard exceeded (Level 4). For the purpose of this report, we only report data of students who met or exceeded standards on SBAC.

The CAAs have three performance-level descriptors (PLDs), Levels 1, 2, and 3. On each CAA, students receive a numerical score based on their understanding of adapted grade-specific subject matter, and threshold scores determine the levels they achieve.

Level 3 is the highest level of performance a student can attain on the CAAs, demonstrating an “understanding of core subject matter in the content area.”²⁴

Since the 2015-2016 school year, L.A. Unified has slightly increased the rate of students with disabilities taking the SBAC and decreased the rate of students with disabilities taking the CAAs in both ELA and Math, for those categories of disabilities with significant numbers of students taking both tests (Table 3). In 2018-2019, the rate of students with disabilities taking the SBAC was 90%, while 10% of students with disabilities participated in the CAAs. Certain categories of disability have shown changes in the rates of students taking the SBAC and CAAs in recent years. The rate of students with Autism taking the SBAC in both ELA and Math has increased 3 percentage points and the rate of Deaf students taking the SBAC in both ELA and Math has increased 2 percentage points over the last 4 years (see Table A2 in Appendix).

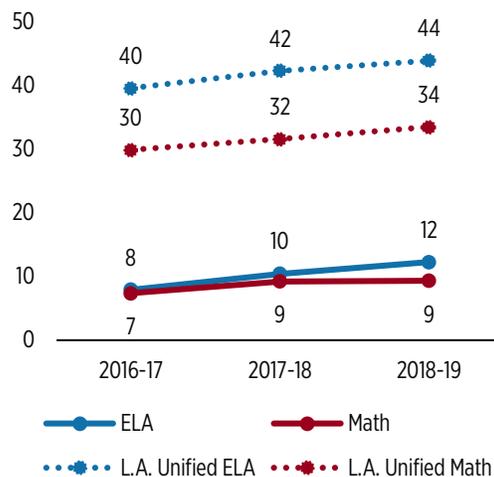


SBAC

Over a four-year period, beginning in 2015-2016 and ending in 2018-2019, the final year for which SBAC data is currently available, the percentage of students with disabilities meeting or exceeding standards on both sections of the SBAC increased steadily but slowly. But it still falls well below the percentage of students in L.A. Unified without disabilities meeting or exceeding standards on both sections of the SBAC (Figure 2).²⁵ These results are consistent with past research, which has shown that students with disabilities consistently perform below average on assessments when compared with peers.^{26,27}

Table 4 shows the percentage of students with disabilities in different categories meeting or exceeding standards on SBAC. There are differences—some of them large—between categories of students with disabilities over the four-year period (Table 4). Notably, only a small percentage of students with **specific learning disabilities** met or exceeded standards. These students' performance has an outsized effect on overall performance of students with disabilities because they make

Figure 2. Percentage of Students with Disabilities Meeting or Exceeding Standards on SBAC



Note: L.A. Unified data accessed through Open Data.
Source: L.A. Unified student-level administrative data (Focus); L.A. Unified Open Data

up nearly 40% of the SWD population (Table 1). In contrast, more than a quarter of students with **hearing and orthopedic impairments** scored in the top two achievement bands on the SBAC, but these groups are small (2% and 3%, respectively). Between 44% and 49% of students without disabilities met

Table 4. SBAC English/Language Arts and Math Performance, 2016-2019 – Percentage of Students with Disabilities Meeting or Exceeding Standards, by Disability Type

Type of Disability	English/Language Arts				Math			
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2016	2017	2018	2019
Autism	13%	14%	17%	21%	13%	14%	16%	16%
Deafness	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Emotional Disturbance	22%	17%	19%	16%	14%	13%	10%	8%
Hearing Impairment	20%	22%	25%	28%	18%	20%	22%	22%
Intellectual Disability	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Multiple Disabilities	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Orthopedic Impairment	22%	21%	27%	26%	11%	16%	15%	16%
Other Health Impairment	9%	9%	11%	13%	7%	7%	9%	8%
Specific Learning Disability	2%	3%	4%	6%	2%	3%	4%	4%
All SWDs	7%	8%	11%	12%	6%	7%	9%	9%
All Non-SWDs		44%	47%	49%		33%	35%	37%
California SWDs	13%	14%	15%	16%	11%	11%	12%	13%

*Fewer than 11 students in category. Note: Data for students with speech or language impairment were not reported. Source: L.A. Unified student-level administrative data (Focus)

or exceeded standards on the ELA test and between 33% and 37% met or exceeded standards on the math test in the years reported here.

Some groups also showed trends in performance over this period: the percentage of students with **autism, hearing impairment, other health impairment, and specific learning disabilities** who met or exceeded standards on the SBAC steadily increased. For ELA, students with **hearing impairments and autism** had increases of 8 percentage

points—the highest improvement of all the categories on this test. For math, students with **orthopedic impairments** had the greatest increase—5 percentage points between 2016 and 2019.

In other categories, however, the trends in achievement are not clear because the numbers of students were too low to report or they fluctuated. Due to the heterogeneous nature of students with disabilities and their learning needs, the tested number of students the small varies widely from year to year.

Table 5. CAA ELA and Math Performance, 2016-2019—Students Attaining Each Performance Level, by Disability Type

Type of Disability	English/Language Arts				Math			
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2016	2017	2018	2019
Autism								
Level 1	51%	53%	54%	53%	64%	69%	65%	68%
Level 2	34%	31%	31%	33%	24%	20%	25%	19%
Level 3	8%	9%	11%	9%	4%	5%	5%	7%
Intellectual Disability								
Level 1	57%	55%	56%	51%	76%	70%	71%	69%
Level 2	31%	32%	28%	34%	17%	21%	21%	21%
Level 3	6%	8%	9%	10%	2%	2%	3%	5%
Multiple Disabilities								
Level 1	74%	73%	70%	69%	80%	79%	77%	77%
Level 2	11%	11%	10%	13%	4%	6%	5%	6%
Level 3	*	*	3%	3%	*	*	*	1%
Other Health Impairment								
Level 1	29%	24%	*	31%	53%	48%	43%	45%
Level 2	59%	48%	41%	41%	35%	34%	31%	24%
Level 3	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Specific Learning Disability								
Level 1	*	*	-	*	50%	*	*	*
Level 2	67%	40%	*	54%	*	57%	48%	58%
Level 3	*	40%	60%	*	*	*	*	*
Traumatic Brain Injury								
Level 1	*	*	*	*	*	*	71%	*
Level 2	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Level 3	-	*	*	*	-	*	*	*
All Students with Disabilities								
Level 1	56%	56%	56%	54%	71%	70%	68%	69%
Level 2	30%	29%	26%	31%	18%	19%	20%	18%
Level 3	6%	8%	9%	9%	3%	3%	4%	5%

Note: Categories of disability that had fewer than 11 students were excluded from this table. *Fewer than 11 students in category.

Source: L.A. Unified student-level administrative data (Focus)

CAA

On the California Alternative Assessment (CAA) for students with disabilities for whom the SBAC is considered inappropriate even with accommodations, the results are reported in three performance levels, with level 3 reflecting the highest performance. The percentage of students attaining each level over the time increased slightly. Most students taking the CAA in ELA achieved Level 1, meaning that they “demonstrated a limited understanding” of adapted grade level content. In each year of the four-year period, fewer than 10% of students achieved Level 3, meaning that they “demonstrated an understanding” of ELA.

Table 5 shows students attaining each performance level on the CAA by disability type. The categories of **intellectual disability**, **autism**, and **multiple disabilities** had the most

students taking the CAA as reported by district assessment data. The percentage of students with **intellectual disabilities** attaining Level 3 on the ELA portion of the test rose steadily over the four-year period. On the math portion, these students’ performance was steady for 3 years, then jumped by over 2 percentage points in the 2018-2019 school year. In contrast, the percentage of students with **autism** achieving Level 3 on both parts of the test fluctuated over the same period. Most categories had very low numbers of students either taking the CAA or attaining Level 3, so inferences made from their performance data would be weak.

B. Other Academic Outcomes

Credits Completed and Progress toward Graduation

Table 6 is a snapshot of credits toward high school graduation completed by students in

Table 6. Average Credits toward High School Graduation Completed by Disability Category and Grade Level

Disability Category	9 th Grade (credits expected: 25)	10 th Grade (credits expected: 50)	11 th Grade (credits expected: 135)	12 th Grade (credits expected: 185 credits)
Autism	29	96	158	273
Deafness	31	105	173	255
Emotional Disturbance	22	68	114	162
Hearing Impairment	28	97	159	218
Intellectual Disability	32	99	160	312
Multiple Disabilities - Hearing	*	*	*	328
Multiple Disabilities - Orthopedic	29	85	139	273
Multiple Disabilities - Visual	*	*	*	276
Orthopedic Impairment	29	87	160	219
Other Health Impairment	24	80	141	207
Specific Learning Disability	26	87	147	208
Speech or Language Impairment	23	88	157	218
Traumatic Brain Injury	*	*	*	247
Visual Impairment	20	*	141	216

Note: Data on credits completed is current as of January 2020 and represents students enrolled in grades 9-12 during the 2019-20 school year.
Source: L.A. Unified student-level administrative data (Focus)

different disability categories on average at the middle point of the 2019-2020 school year. General and special education courses both count toward the credits displayed, and these numbers do not specify how many of the credits were eligible for the “A-G” requirement for a diploma; they simply identify whether students were earning the necessary number of credits.

Students must complete 50 credits to promote from 9th to 10th grade, an additional 55 each in 10th and 11th grades, and a final 50 credits to graduate in 12th grade, for a total of 210 credits. In the middle of 9th grade, students would be expected to have completed 25 credits, or half of what would be expected for that grade level. A few trends in the data are worth noting.

First, though average credits completed differed between categories of disability, students in most categories had, on average, earned the expected number of credits at the midpoint of their 9th and 10th grade years. By

A Note on Intellectual Disability

In October 2010, President Barack Obama signed into law PL 111-256, also known as Rosa’s Law, which changes references in Federal law from “mental retardation” to “intellectual disability.” Federal laws affected by this change include, but are not limited to, IDEA, ESEA, the Higher Education Act (HEA), and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Rosa’s Law is named for Rosa Marcellino, a Maryland girl with Down syndrome, whose family fought for the change in the law. “Mental retardation” was originally a clinical term associated with a medical diagnosis, but this term and related words have since been used in a pejorative manner to degrade and insult people with intellectual disabilities.

The change in language was implemented gradually over several years as laws and documents were revised, and the terminology had not yet been changed for some cases of data used in the analysis of this report. Students who were classified in this category have been included in “intellectual disability” category.

Source: Public Law 111-256

the middle of 11th grade, students in three categories had met the credit requirements to move to 12th grade, which suggests some of these students have repeated grade levels. By the middle of 12th grade, only one category of students with disabilities—emotional disturbance—was not yet on track to graduate.

Next, several categories of disability, including **intellectual disability**, **multiple disabilities**, and **autism**, show average credit completion of considerably higher than the graduation requirement of 210 in the 12th grade. There were also larger numbers of students in 12th grade in each of these categories when compared with earlier grades. This high number of credits is because IDEA allows students to remain in school and receive special education services through age 21 or until they graduate with a regular diploma.

Many students with **intellectual disabilities**, **autism**, and certain other categories of disability remain in school and receive special education services for longer periods than their peers.²⁸ This report, however, did not entail an analysis of what kinds of credits these students accumulated and whether they were credits that would count toward a high school diploma; students with 160 or more credits are simply identified here as 12th graders.

Next, students with **emotional disturbance** fell behind early in school, completing less than half of the credits (on average) required to promote from 9th grade to 10th grade after the first semester of their freshman year. This trend continued through 10th and 11th grade, and by 12th grade, the average number of credits completed after one semester of 12th grade by students with **emotional disturbance** was barely above the required number of credits to promote from 11th grade to 12th grade. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for many students with **emotional disturbance** to achieve the minimum number of

credits required to graduate by the end of their 4th year in high school, which implies that many students with **emotional disturbance** may fail to complete high school and drop out at higher rates than students in other categories.

Finally, Students with **specific learning disabilities** and **other health impairments**, though they had met the minimum expected credit requirements for the middle of their senior year, had earned fewer credits than other groups, which mirrors the achievement test data for these students.

GPA

The average GPA for all special education high school students in L.A. Unified as of January 2020 was 2.26 (Table 7). Average GPA ranged widely by category of disability. Students with **emotional disturbance** had the lowest average GPA at 1.59, and students with **multiple disabilities—visual** had the highest average GPA of all categories at 3.26. And just as categories differ from each other in

average GPA, students within a category differ from each other; none of these averages should be used to make assumptions about individual students.

Three categories of disability (**emotional disturbance**, **other health impairment**, and **specific learning disability**) had average GPAs below 2.0, which is consistent with achievement test and credit completion data on these students. A GPA this low will hurt these students’ ability to graduate from high school. It may mean that they have failed one or more courses required for graduation. As a result of not receiving a high school diploma, these students will also have trouble enrolling in colleges or finding employment.

Graduation

In L.A. Unified, students with disabilities have two options for a high school credential. The first option is a standard high school diploma. In order to earn this diploma, a student must complete 210 credits of A-G coursework, among other requirements. The second option is a certificate of completion. For a certificate of completion, a student must have an IEP, and must also complete 210 credits of an alternative course of study as stipulated by the student’s IEP, achieve agreed upon IEP goals and objectives, and/or achieve satisfactory attendance, participation in instruction as stated in the IEP, and complete transition goals and objectives.³⁰ Such a certificate represents an accomplishment, but it is not a diploma.

Students who earn a certificate of completion may continue to attend school and receive special education services. Students who earn standard high school diplomas, however, leave school and are no longer eligible to receive special education services.³¹ However, the difference between a standard diploma

Table 7. Average GPA by Disability Category

Disability Category	Average GPA
Autism	2.94
Deafness	2.76
Emotional Disturbance	1.59
Hearing Impairment	2.39
Intellectual Disability	3.18
Multiple Disabilities – Hearing	3.01
Multiple Disabilities – Orthopedic	3.07
Multiple Disabilities – Visual	3.26
Orthopedic Impairment	2.71
Other Health Impairment	1.82
Specific Learning Disability	1.98
Speech or Language Impairment	2.49
Traumatic Brain Injury	2.70
Visual Impairment	2.71
All Students with Disabilities	2.26

Note: Analysis uses LAUSD unweighted GPA and includes all high school grade levels during the 2019-20 school year.²⁹

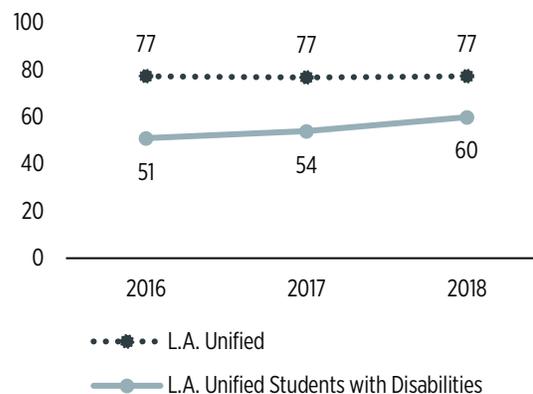
and a certificate of completion can have serious implications for a student's postsecondary options. A certificate can significantly limit a student's access to college and other postsecondary training, as well as access to employment. Most colleges, training programs, and employers require a high school diploma.³² Additionally, earning a high school diploma affects students' economic status for years after high school.³³

As shown in Figure 3, the graduation rate with diplomas for students with disabilities increased almost 9 percentage points over the three-year period. However, the graduation rate with diplomas of all students in L.A. Unified with and without disabilities remained constant over three years, which means that the improvement in graduation rate of students with disabilities has kept the overall graduation rate in the District from declining. Nevertheless, students with disabilities still have a lower rate of graduating with a diploma than do students on average in L.A. Unified.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of senior students with disabilities who received a standard diploma or special education certificate of completion. This percentage fluctuated from year to year. Between 2015-2016 and 2018-2019, the percentage of students earning a standard diploma ranged from 51% and to almost 60%. Similarly, the percentage of students receiving a special education certificate of completion ranged from a low of 24% (in 2017-2018) to a high of 33% (in 2016-2017). There was no upward or downward trend in either category.

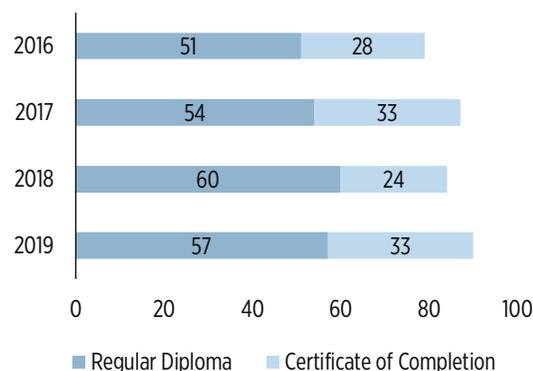
Student-level data (Table 8) show differences in graduation and completion outcomes among the various categories of students with disabilities. The graduation rates vary by disability category in two ways. First, some categories of disability graduated more

Figure 3. Percentage of All Senior Students in L.A. Unified vs. Senior Students with Disabilities Receiving Standard High School Diploma



Note: Only students with disabilities who received a standard high school diploma are included in the sample of graduating students with disabilities. L.A. Unified graduation rate is based on a four-year cohort model.³⁴

Figure 4. Percentage of Senior Students with Disabilities Receiving a Standard Diploma or Special Education Certificate of Completion, 2016-2019



Note: Total does not add up to 100% due to remaining students in cohort who did not graduate, received a high school equivalency diploma, or are continuing on in L.A. Unified's special education program.

Source: L.A. Unified student-level administrative data (Focus)

students with a standard high school diploma, while others had more students receiving a special education certificate of

Table 8. Percentage of Students Receiving Diploma, Certificate, or Other, 2016-2019, by Disability Category

Type of Disability	2016	2017	2018	2019
Autism				
Graduated with Diploma	33%	32%	37%	33%
Certificate of Completion	44%	57%	40%	57%
Deafness				
Graduated with Diploma	89%	*	*	45%
Certificate of Completion	*	79%	*	39%
Emotional Disturbance				
Graduated with Diploma	28%	34%	66%	64%
Certificate of Completion	15%	17%	12%	16%
Hearing Impairment				
Graduated with Diploma	82%	88%	92%	90%
Certificate of Completion	*	*	*	*
Intellectual Disability				
Graduated with Diploma	3%	2%	4%	2%
Certificate of Completion	72%	82%	68%	83%
Multiple Disabilities				
Graduated with Diploma	*	*	*	*
Certificate of Completion	71%	78%	71%	86%
Orthopedic Impairment				
Graduated with Diploma	39%	50%	56%	43%
Certificate of Completion	30%	36%	24%	49%
Other Health Impairment				
Graduated with Diploma	62%	65%	74%	74%
Certificate of Completion	13%	19%	9%	12%
Specific Learning Disability				
Graduated with Diploma	72%	80%	86%	87%
Certificate of Completion	12%	11%	6%	5%
Speech or Language Impairment				
Graduated with Diploma	82%	92%	86%	79%
Certificate of Completion	*	*	*	*
Traumatic Brain Injury				
Graduated with Diploma	*	*	*	*
Certificate of Completion	*	*	*	74%
Visual Impairment				
Graduated with Diploma	95%	54%	88%	86%
Certificate of Completion	*	*	*	*

Note: Totals for categories may not sum to 100% and exclude students who did not graduate, received a high school equivalency diploma, or are continuing on in L.A. Unified's special education program.

Source: L.A. Unified student-level administrative data (Focus)

completion. Students with **hearing impairment, specific learning disability, and speech or language impairment** had some of the highest rates of graduation with a standard diploma in 2018-2019. In contrast, students with **autism, intellectual disability, and multiple disabilities** had higher rates of students leaving school with a certificate of completion in 2018-2019.

Next, some categories of disability saw changes in their graduation rates over the four-year period between 2015-2016 and 2018-2019. In the category of **specific learning disability**, the graduation rate increased steadily with an increase of almost 15 percentage points over four years. Some categories saw large changes over the four-year period. In 2016, only 28% of students with **emotional disturbance** graduated with a standard diploma, and 57% of students in the same category received neither a diploma nor a certificate. Four years later, 64% percent of students with **emotional disturbance** earned a high school diploma, and 20% of students in the same category left school without a diploma or certificate. It is beyond the scope of this report to make causal inferences about such a large change in outcomes, but the improvement is worth highlighting.

C. Chronic Absenteeism

Chronically absent students have a 91% or lower attendance rate, which means they miss approximately 16 or more days of school per year. Though students with disabilities had a much higher rate of chronic absenteeism than the full L.A. Unified student population over the years of this analysis, the growth in the rate of chronic absenteeism in the population of students with disabilities was consistent with the growth of chronic absenteeism in the full L.A. Unified student population over the same period. Prior national research has revealed several reasons

Table 9. Rates of Chronic Absenteeism, 2016-2018, by Disability Category

Type of Disability	2016	2017	2018
Autism	24%	25%	26%
Deafness	28%	27%	27%
Emotional Disturbance	53%	57%	57%
Hearing Impairment	21%	21%	21%
Intellectual Disability	36%	38%	37%
Multiple Disabilities - Hearing	56%	60%	55%
Multiple Disabilities - Orthopedic	66%	64%	66%
Multiple Disabilities - Visual	50%	53%	62%
Orthopedic Impairment	41%	45%	45%
Other Health Impairment	25%	27%	28%
Specific Learning Disability	20%	22%	22%
Speech or Language Impairment	20%	20%	21%
Traumatic Brain Injury	39%	39%	53%
Visual Impairment	25%	27%	22%
All Students with Disabilities		25%	26%
All Students without Disabilities		14%	13%
All L.A. Unified		15%	15%

Note: for the purpose of this analysis, attendance was separated into 3 bands – proficient (96% attendance or higher), basic (92-95% attendance), and chronic (less than 91% attendance). Data for the 2018-2019 school year have not been included in this table due to inconsistencies in data.³⁶

why students with disabilities sometimes have higher rates of chronic absenteeism than their peers without disabilities. These reasons include health problems, transportation challenges, and inappropriate instruction or educational placements that result in a student not wanting to go to school.³⁵

Rates of chronic absenteeism from 2015-2016 through 2017-2018 by category of disability are presented in Table 9. These rates vary considerably by disability category, but every category of disability had a higher rate than the full student population over the last three years.

Students with **multiple disabilities, emotional disturbance, and traumatic brain injuries** had the highest rates, and students

with **speech or language impairment, hearing impairment, and specific learning disability** had the lowest rates of chronic absenteeism. This distribution is consistent with research in other districts showing that students with emotional disturbance, orthopedic impairment, traumatic brain injury, and multiple disabilities, have higher rates of absenteeism than other categories of disability.³⁷

Students who are chronically absent are more likely to fall behind by third grade, fail classes in middle school, be suspended from school, and drop out of high school.³⁸ Furthermore, students with IEPs that provide for special services and supports at the school site cannot access those services and supports unless they attend school.

4. KEY FINDINGS

This report reveals several areas in which outcomes for students with disabilities in L.A. Unified vary between categories of disability.

Overall, students with disabilities in LA. Unified have lower scores on achievement assessments, compared to similar students across California. But not all students with disabilities compare unfavorably to the statewide average. Most of the underperformance is explained by the low scores of students with specific learning disabilities, who make up the largest group of students with disabilities in the District.

Despite some improvement over the last few years, the percentage of students with disabilities overall in L.A. Unified meeting or exceeding standards on both SBAC ELA and Math is much lower than the percentage of students with disabilities in California meeting or exceeding standards. Disaggregating the data by category of disability reveals that, though most students with disabilities in the

District outperform the state average, students in two categories—specific learning disabilities and other health impairment—perform considerably below the statewide population. Students in these two categories of disability make up more than half of the students with disabilities in the District, so having lower performance among such a large group of students influences the performance of the overall group of students with disabilities.

Students in most categories of disability complete credits at a rate that would put them on track to graduate, and the graduation rate for students with disabilities has climbed in recent years. However, the graduation rate for students with disabilities is lower than the graduation rate overall in the District. Both students with specific learning disabilities and students with emotional disturbance saw recent gains.

Overall, graduation rates for students with disabilities have increased over the last few years, though they still lag the overall District rate. In 2018 and 2019, about 60% of the students with disabilities who graduated received standard diplomas, as opposed to certificates of completion. Students with specific learning disabilities, and speech or language impairment had the highest levels of graduation rates, and students with specific learning disabilities saw steady progress over the four-year period of this study. The biggest success story, though, was students with emotional disturbance, whose graduation rate increased 15 percentage points over four years.

Since there are several conditions that a student must satisfy in order to graduate from a high school in L.A. Unified, there could be many reasons why graduation rates for students with disabilities are lower than the rates of the larger student population. One

reason apparent in this report is the slow accumulation of high school credits toward the required 210, even without considering the A-G eligibility of those credits.

Chronic absenteeism for every category of disability exceeds the rate of chronic absenteeism for the larger L.A. Unified population and could be affecting academic outcomes for these students.

Any student who does not attend school regularly is at risk of falling behind. Research shows that students who were chronically absent in Kindergarten and first grade were less likely to perform at or above grade level on third grade ELA assessments, compared to students who attended regularly.³⁹ With most students with disabilities already lagging their peers on assessments, less exposure to academic content due to lower rates of attendance makes it difficult, if not impossible to catch up to peers. For example, students with emotional disturbance have some of the highest rates of chronic absenteeism. They also have the lowest average GPA and number of credits completed of any category of disability. Though we cannot definitively link chronic absenteeism to academic performance in this case, student who are behind academically as a result of a disability are unlikely to make up that deficit, and as a result, earn a standard diploma, if they have low attendance.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are steps toward ensuring students with disabilities are not just receiving special education services, but are also getting the same access to educational outcomes as their peers.

Start students with disabilities on the diploma track if reasonable, and prepare them for advanced course work if possible, as

early in their schooling as is done for students without disabilities.

Preparing students with disabilities to receive a standard high school diploma as opposed to a certificate of completion should be the rule rather than the exception. We know that this is not reasonable for every student with a disability in L.A. Unified, but it should be reasonable for more than are currently receiving a certificate instead of a diploma. As noted earlier in this report, previous research has suggested that 85-90% of students with disabilities can meet the same graduation standards as students without disabilities. Students with disabilities are often identified as being on the certificate track in middle school, and due to lowered expectations, are never given a fair chance to be successful.⁴⁰ In 2018-2019, over 30% of students with disabilities who left L.A. Unified received a certificate of completion, which may harm their prospects for future education and employment. Numbers are high for certificates. We need to set higher expectations for students with disabilities because many of them are capable of much more.

Monitor the attendance of students with disabilities closely and provide support with the intention of increasing attendance rates for students with disabilities.

For some students with disabilities, lower levels of attendance are unavoidable due to medical conditions. However, for most, attendance rates should be higher than they are. Current rates of attendance should be investigated further to determine the reasons for higher rates of chronic absenteeism among students with disabilities, as well as for certain categories of disability that have the highest rates of chronic absenteeism. Once root causes for chronic absenteeism are determined, we recommend developing actionable steps for improving attendance for

students with disabilities as part of the District's Attendance Improvement Plan.

Continue to press for additional financial resources to ensure that students with disabilities will receive the support necessary to stay on track for graduation.

As noted earlier in this report, students with disabilities graduate from high school at lower rates than the general population of students in L.A. Unified, have lower average GPAs, and in some cases, struggle to complete enough credits to stay on track for graduation. Though graduation rates for students with disabilities are on an upward trend, the goal and expectation should be for these rates to be closer to those of students without disabilities. Achieving this goal will require interventions and additional support from teachers, administrators, and other staff involved in the education of students with disabilities and is especially needed for students in certain categories of disability who tend to be, on average, further behind academically. However, the district is severely lacking the funding to provide the resources and training necessary to achieve this goal⁴¹. The state and federal governments must provide adequate funding to ensure that students with disabilities are properly served, and to provide the opportunity to achieve at the same levels of their peers without disabilities.

6. FUTURE RESEARCH

The results presented in this report provide ample opportunities for further research on students with disabilities in L.A. Unified. As noted in the preface, the Independent Analysis Unit is studying costs associated with student outcomes, including costs of service and dispute resolution for various categories of disability.

Additionally, as noted in the recommendations section, we see the need for further investigation into chronic absenteeism in students with disabilities. The rate of chronic absences in every category of disability exceeds the rate of chronic absenteeism in L.A. Unified, and in order to effect change, we need to know more about why this is happening.

Finally, more research on the academic performance of students with disabilities who are participating in inclusion is needed, as well as data on students moving up a level on the SBAC (from "standard not met" to "standard nearly met," for example). Further investigation in these areas would tell us more about growth of students with disabilities.

7. CONCLUSION

As evidenced by the findings presented in this report, there are so many differences in the outcomes of students with disabilities. These findings confirm the importance of studying these differences in students with disabilities, particularly by category of disability. Every student with a disability is different, and has diverse talents and educational needs, underscoring the importance of studying each individual student.

NOTES

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³ U.S. Department of Education. (May 2019). The Condition of Education – Children and Youth with Disabilities. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp

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⁵ Thurlow, M.L., and Quenemoen, R.F. (May 2019). Revisiting expectations for students with disabilities (NCEO Brief #17). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

⁶ Zhang, D., Katsiyannis, A., & Kortering, L. (2007). Performance on exit exams by students with disabilities: A four-year analysis. *Career Development for Exceptional Individuals*, 30, 48-57.

⁷ IDEA 1997, Section 612(a)(17)(B)

⁸ Quenemoen, R. (2008). *A brief history of alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards* (Synthesis Report 68). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

⁹ Ibid Thurlow & Quenemoen May 2019 Brief

¹⁰ IDEA 1997 Preamble

¹¹ Quenemoen, R. F., & Thurlow, M. L. (2019). *Students with disabilities in educational policy, practice, and professional judgment: What should we expect?* (NCEO Report 413). Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota, National Center on Educational Outcomes.

¹² Achieve. (2016). *Diplomas that matter: Ensuring equity of opportunity for students with disabilities*. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from https://www.achieve.org/files/Achieve_NCEO_111616.pdf

¹³ California Department of Education. (December 2019). High School Graduation Frequently Asked Questions. Retrieved from

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ci/gs/hs/hsgfaq.asp>

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Board of Education of Hendrick Hudson Central School District v. Rowley, 458 U.S. 176 (1982).

¹⁶ Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District RE-1, 137 Supreme Court 988 (2017).

¹⁷ As of December 31, 2019, L.A. Unified is no longer being monitored under the Modified Consent Decree (MCD) put in place as a result of a 1993 class action lawsuit alleging that the District was in violation of the requirements of IDEA. In August 2019, the United States District Court determined, upon recommendation by the Independent Monitor, that all outcomes had been achieved and L.A. Unified was in compliance with applicable federal special education laws and regulations, thus concluding and terminating the MCD. When the MCD ended, the Independent Monitor released a final report, which included 17 recommendations for L.A. Unified's future compliance with federal laws and sustained progress toward outcomes for students with disabilities in the District.

¹⁸ Office of the Independent Monitor. (December 2019). The Office of the Independent Monitor's Final Report Concluding the Modified Consent Decree: Successes, Challenges, and Lessons Learned. Retrieved from http://oimla.com/pdf/20191212/Finalreport_Final_12_11_19.pdf

¹⁹ Retrieved from , retrieved from https://achieve.lausd.net/cms/lib/CA01000043/Centricity/Domain/123/19_2019-20%20District%20Enrollment%20Trends%2005-17-19%20combined%20rev.pdf

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²⁸ Butrymowicz, S., & Mader, J. (November 2017). Almost all students with disabilities are capable of graduating on time. Here's why they're not. The Hechinger Report. Retrieved from <https://hechingerreport.org/high-schools-fail-provide-legally-required-education-students-disabilities/>

²⁹ Source: L.A. Unified student-level administrative data (Focus), <https://achieve.lausd.net/focus>

³⁰ Los Angeles Unified School District. (n.d.). Special Education: Completing High School. Retrieved from <https://achieve.lausd.net/Page/3547> on January 23, 2020.

³¹ Section 300.102(a)(3)(i) of Title 34 of the Code of Federal Regulations.

³² Johnson, D.R., Thurlow, M.L., Stout, K.E., and Mavis, A. (2007). Cross-state study of high-stakes testing practices and diploma options. *Journal of Special Education Leadership* 20(2), 53-65.

³³ For individuals ages 25 and older, the median usual weekly earnings for high school graduates in the United States was \$747, while individuals without a diploma had median usual weekly earnings of \$596, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics. (n.d.). Labor force statistics from the Current Population Survey. Retrieved February 3, 2020, from <https://www.bls.gov/cps/home.htm>

³⁴ Source: L.A. Unified student-level administrative data (Focus), <https://achieve.lausd.net/focus>; L.A. Unified Open Data, <https://my.lausd.net/opendata/dashboard>

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