



WHAT'S NEW FROM SEELS

Fall 2001



Welcome to the first update on the progress and findings of SEELS, the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study! Regular updates will keep you informed about SEELS activities and results.

SEELS is funded by the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education and is part of the national assessment of the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA 97). It is a 6-year study that is following a nationally representative sample of students who were ages 6 to 12 and receiving special education in 1999. SEELS is studying the academic performance, school experiences, family life, social adjustment, and personal growth of students as they move from elementary to middle and middle to high school.

Data Collection Update

Many parents, teachers, school administrators, and field assessors have taken part in the first wave of data collection. Two more waves are planned, in the 2001-02 and 2003-04 school years. Data collection activities include:

Parent interviews and surveys.

Parents complete a telephone interview or written questionnaire about the experiences of their children and their family life. Interviews and surveys are done in English or Spanish. In Wave 1, SEELS staff interviewed 8,756 parents and received 1,083 family questionnaires. The participation of parents is greatly appreciated! As a "thank you," SEELS awarded a personal computer and ten \$100 gift certificates to randomly selected parents of SEELS students.

Recipients came from the following cities: Akron, OH; Ft. Worth, TX; Inkom, ID; Lava Hot Springs, ID; Lincoln, NE (two winners); Oakland, CA (two winners); Portsmouth, OH; and Woodbury, MN.

Student assessments. Students' academic performance and their perceptions of school and learning are measured in face-to-face assessments. In Wave 1, professionals were hired and trained to conduct assessments of students, generally at school. If the direct assessment was not appropriate for a student, the teacher most familiar with the student was asked to rate the student's ability to conduct daily activities in school and in the community.

With the hard work and commitment of 23 assessment coordinators, 613 field assessors, and 429 alternate assessors, SEELS has assessed approximately 4,400 students. This national assessment effort of students with disabilities was the first of its kind.

Language arts teacher survey. Teachers who provide language arts instruction to SEELS students complete a questionnaire about the students' instructional goals and experiences, assessments, accommodations, and social adjustment and educational progress in the classroom.

School program survey. School staff who know students' school programs best complete a questionnaire about the students' placements, programs, and progress.

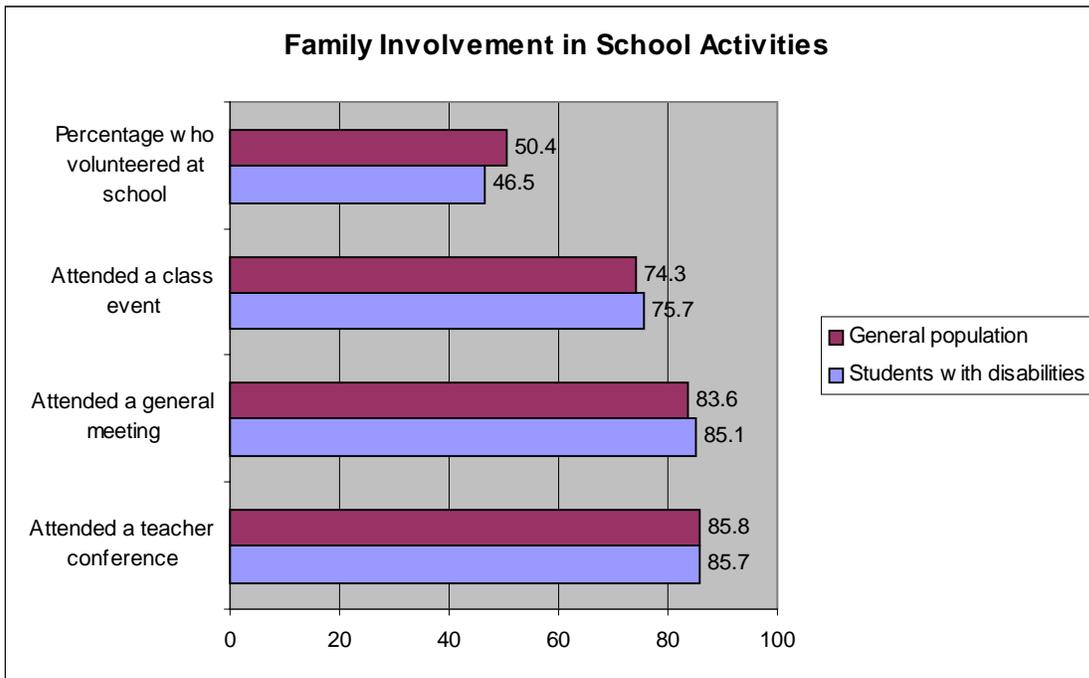
School characteristics survey. Principals provide information on the policies and characteristics of their schools.

In Wave 1, SEELS surveyed staff in more than 4,400 schools. We greatly appreciate their time and effort in completing questionnaires, despite the many demands on their time. Later in the fall, recipients will be randomly selected to win “thank-you” gifts: three computers and twenty-five \$100 gift certificates.

Early Findings

Analysis of the information collected has just begun, and reports will begin to be available in winter 2001. Early findings will describe students with disabilities and their households and the activities they participate in during their nonschool hours. All reports will be available at www.seels.net.

Early results from parent interviews and surveys provide information on important dimensions of family involvement with schools (see graph below). Parents are very active in their children’s schools; about 85% of students had a parent attend a parent-teacher conference or general school meeting. About 75% of students had a family member attend a student-centered school event, such as a play. Although volunteering at school represents a significant investment of parental time, almost half of students with disabilities had a family member who had done so. SEELS data suggest that 90% of parents were involved in at least one of these activities and 37% were involved in all four. Their level of involvement was very similar to that of families of students in the general population.



Please visit www.seels.net for more findings as they become available.

SEELS welcomes feedback!

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