



## WHAT'S NEW FROM SEELS

Spring 2002



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

### Data Collection Update

Three waves or rounds, of data collection activities will be conducted over the 6 years of SEELS. Data collection Wave 1 was recently completed. Currently, SEELS is in Wave 2. Each wave of data collection includes the following activities:

**Parent interviews.** SEELS starts its second wave of parent telephone interviews in April. Parents respond to questions about the experiences of their children and their family life. Interviews are done in either English or Spanish. SEELS heard from nearly 10,000 parents in Wave 1 and hopes the Wave 2 efforts will be even more successful.

**Student assessments.** We learn about students' academic performance and their perception of school and learning in face-to-face assessments/interviews. Professionals are hired and

trained to arrange and conduct assessments of students. If the face-to-face assessment is not appropriate for the student, a person familiar with the student will be asked to complete an alternative assessment about the student's ability to perform daily activities in school and in the community.

More than 750 field assessors are contacting schools and parents to arrange assessments. Many field assessors are returning from Wave 1 to help with the second wave. Their hard work and time commitment are much appreciated.

**Surveys.** Beginning with Wave 2, SEELS has asked principals to select someone at their schools to be a point of contact for the study. These school site study coordinators update SEELS on student participant enrollment, distribute surveys to teachers, and provide transcripts. They also complete the **School Characteristics Survey** on the policies and characteristics of their schools.

This spring, teachers will complete surveys about students in the study. The **Language Arts Teacher Survey** provides information about students' instructional goals, classroom experiences, assessment, accommodations, social adjustment, and educational progress in the language arts classroom. A school staff person who is knowledgeable about the student's school program completes the **School Program Survey**, a questionnaire about the student's placement, program, and progress.

### SEELS welcomes feedback!

Call our toll-free number: 1-800-961-9895

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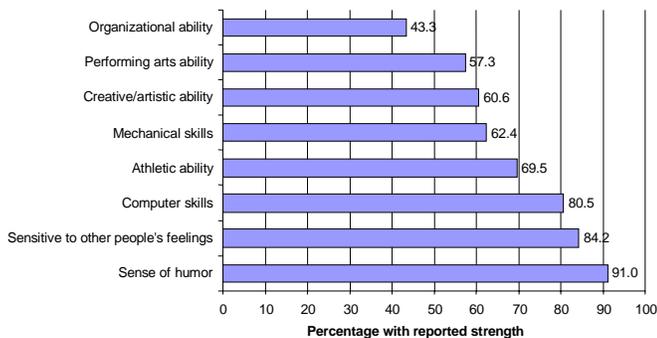
## Study Findings

Below are some study findings obtained from parents' interviews on students' strengths and health. More findings will be made available on the SEELS Web site in the near future. Please visit [www.seel.net](http://www.seel.net) for updates.

Too often, the focus of research findings is on the limitations rather than the capacities of students with disabilities. We expand our understanding of what students can do through analysis of parents' reports of their children's strengths. During the interviews, parents were asked whether their children were strong in: being well organized, performing arts ability (such as music, dance, or theater), creative or artistic ability (like drawing or writing poetry), being sensitive to other people's feelings, mechanical ability (like building or fixing things), computer use, athletic ability, or having a sense of humor.

Figure 1 shows that many parents perceived their children as having aptitude in each of these areas.

**Figure 1 PARENTS' REPORTS OF STRENGTHS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**



The largest proportions of children were reported to be strong in the two areas that are personality traits: having a sense of humor (91%) and being sensitive to others' feelings (84%). However, many children also were reported to have specific abilities, the most prevalent being computer use.

Almost 70% of students were reported to have an aptitude for athletics, and more than 60% were mechanically inclined or had creative/artistic abilities. Performing arts and organizational skills were particular strengths of 57% and 43% of students, according to their parents.

The ability of students to participate in daily activities at school and at home is conditioned in many ways by their general health. Frequent or chronic illness can cause absenteeism from school; the resulting missed exposure to the school curriculum and other learning opportunities can impede, sometimes significantly, student learning and performance. Poor health also can limit activities outside of school, hampering development of social relationships and opportunities to hone personal interests and skills.

To assess the general health of students with disabilities, their parents were asked to rate their health as "excellent," "very good," "good," "fair," or "poor." Figure 2 indicates that almost half of students with disabilities were reported to have excellent health, and almost one-fourth were reported to have very good health. However, about 10% had only fair or poor health. As a group, students with disabilities were somewhat less healthy than their peers without disabilities; 82% of children in the general population who were under 18 years of age in 2001 were reported to have very good or excellent health, compared with 72% of students with disabilities.

**Figure 2 STUDENTS' GENERAL HEALTH, BY DISABILITY**

