

September 2005



**SEELS**

## **DECLASSIFICATION—STUDENTS WHO LEAVE SPECIAL EDUCATION**

### **A Special Topic Report from the Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study**

**Prepared for:**

Dr. Lisa Holden-Pitt  
Office of Special Education Programs  
U.S. Department of Education

SRI Project P10656

SEELS has been funded with federal funds from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, under contract number ED-00-CO-0017. The content of this publication does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the U.S. Department of Education nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. government.



**SRI International**  
333 Ravenswood Avenue Menlo Park, CA 94025





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# *Declassification—Students Who Leave Special Education*

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## **Introduction**

Special education has sometimes been criticized as “a one-way street” down which “it’s relatively easy to send children ... but they rarely return” (Finn, Rotherham, & Hokanson, 2001, p. 339); however, a number of students with disabilities discontinue their special education programs each year. There are few documented declassification<sup>1</sup> rates for elementary grade students. Walker et al. (1988) reported that 17% of elementary school-age students discontinued receiving special education services 2 years after beginning services. In another study, Carlson & Parshall (1995) reported that declassified students tend to be in upper elementary age ranges (8 to 11), and the majority of these students have speech/language impairments or learning disabilities. On the other hand, Carlson and Parshall reported that at the secondary level students with emotional disturbances are more likely to leave special education than are students with other disabilities. Although declassified students were reported to be generally well adjusted both academically and socially, teachers reported that 1 in 10 declassified students continue to need special education services and that the need is most acute among students with emotional disturbances (Carlson & Parshall, 1996).

In a report from the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), Bielinski and Ysseldyke (2000) further illustrate the changing composition of students receiving special education services from grade to grade. If these fluctuations are not considered, “... it may lead to misinterpretation of the effectiveness of special education services” (Bielinski & Ysseldyke, 2000, p.1).

Further, the NCEO report describes how performance trends and achievement are influenced by factors that are unique to students with disabilities:

One factor is that disability status is dynamic. It is not uncommon for a student to be labeled as having a disability for reporting purposes one year, but not labeled the following year. A classic example is speech/language disability. Prior to fifth grade, this is one of the most commonly used disability categories, but it is a category that is rarely used after fifth grade. Disability classification is often tied to achievement such that low achieving students are more likely to get a disability label. Students are also declassified, but we know relatively little about how declassification is tied to achievement (Bielinski & Ysseldyke, 2000, p.2).

Understanding the implications and ramifications of discontinuing special education services and supports is important for educators, policy-makers, and families of children with disabilities. In this report, data from the Special

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<sup>1</sup> Declassification is defined as no longer receiving special education services according to school staff and/or families

Elementary Education Longitudinal Study (SEELS), sponsored by the Office of Special Education Programs of the U.S. Department of Education, are used to illuminate some issues associated with declassification. SEELS provides vast information on a nationally representative sample of elementary school-age children with disabilities receiving special education services. This report focuses on special education declassification for SEELS students, providing a unique longitudinal perspective to our understanding of this issue.

### **Focus of this report**

This report highlights which students with specific disability classifications, demographic characteristics, personal attributes, and academic factors are most likely to discontinue special education services. It examines the differences in these factors between students who continue to receive special education services and those who exit the system.

Reasons for student declassification also are explored, specifically in regard to students who leave because they no longer need services, and students who leave for circumstantial or personal reasons but may or may not still have a need for services. The report looks at the associations between students' strengths (e.g., persistence, cooperation, organization, sensitivity) and health status and the likelihood of leaving special education services. It also discusses declassification rates in light of students' education experiences, such as early school participation (e.g., early intervention, preschool, Head Start), classroom placements, skills instruction, and schoolwide programs, as well as parents' expectations for future educational attainment.

### **The Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and Declassification**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) as amended by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 are intended “to ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs” [IDEA 2004 proposed changes to the Code of Federal Regulations, U.S. Department of Education, June 10, 2005, Section 300.1(a)].

The “unique needs” of students who qualify for special education and related services vary enormously; consequently the nature, quantity, degree, and duration of these services vary as well. For some students the services they receive in school or the therapeutic supports they may receive from other sources may ameliorate a condition (e.g., articulation) or accommodate an impairment (e.g., mobility and assistive technology) to the point where they no longer need or are eligible for special education services.

As a result, IDEA regulations also include provisions for declassification. For example, a school district is required to reevaluate a student with a disability if there is a question whether the student continues to need special education services. If a school determines that a student is no longer eligible for or no

longer needs special education services, a declassification status is documented on the student's individualized education program (IEP), with recommendations for any services the student might continue to need, such as testing accommodation or other support services.

For the purposes of this report, the term “declassified” or “declassification” is used interchangeably with similar terms such as “discontinued services,” “exited or left special education,” “stopped receiving special education services,” and others. Essentially a “declassified” student is no longer known to be receiving special education services through an IEP.

## **Student Sample**

This special topic report focuses on SEELS students with disabilities who received special education services in elementary school during the 1999-2000 school year, and discontinued those services sometime before spring 2002. Declassification status for this report is determined on the basis of the school staff and/or parent reports; children were identified as declassified if this was indicated by either school staff or their parents.

The report includes a sample of more than 11,000 students who were ages 6 through 12 and receiving special education services in the first or higher grades on September 1, 1999. When their parents were first interviewed in the summer 2000 (Wave 1), students were ages 6 through 13. Information about them was obtained from staff in the students' schools in spring 2001, when students were ages 7 through 14 and in first through ninth grades (or in ungraded programs). Also that year, direct assessments of students' reading and mathematics abilities and interviews were conducted with SEELS students. In spring 2002 when students were ages 8 through 15, a second wave of data collection was conducted, including the second round of parent interviews, school staff questionnaires, and student direct assessments and interviews.

School staff were asked to reply to the following question on the Student's School Program Questionnaire: “Does this student have an IEP for special education services now?” [If no]: “In what school year was this student discontinued from special education?”

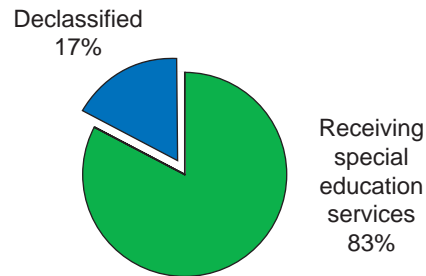
The following was posed to SEELS parents by the Computer-Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) staff: “Our records show that [CHILD] received special education services at the beginning of 1999–2000 school year. Is she/he in special education now?”

For most of the variables examined in this report, students who were declassified as of spring 2002 are compared to their peers who were reported to still be receiving special education services at that time. In some analyses, only declassified students or students in disability categories with high declassification rates are included. Appendix A includes the sample sizes and standard errors associated with each exhibit presented in this report.

## Special Education Status Across Time

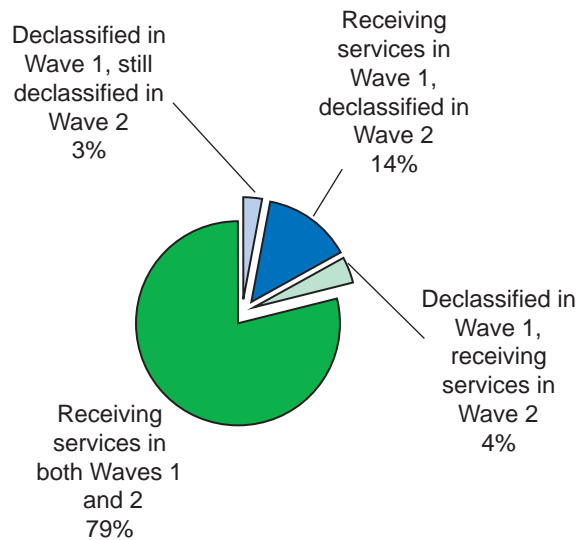
- All students with disabilities represented in SEELS received special education services at some time during the 1999–2000 school year. By the end of that school year, approximately 1 out of every 20 of the students had discontinued special education services. By the end of the 2001–02 school year (Wave 2), the number of students with disabilities who were reported as declassified or no longer receiving special education services had increased to 1 of every 6 students (17%, Exhibit 1a).

**Exhibit 1a**  
**Students with Disabilities, by Special Education Status as of Spring 2002 (Wave 2)**



Sources: SEELS Waves 1 and 2 parent interviews and students' school program questionnaires.

**Exhibit 1b**  
**Special Education Status Over Time**



Sources: SEELS Waves 1 and 2 parent interviews and students' school program questionnaires.

- Upon further disaggregation of these results, it is apparent that the majority of students who were receiving services in 2000 continued to do so in 2002 (79%); about 14% of students who were receiving services in Wave 1 are identified as declassified 2 years later, and about 3% of students who had



been identified as declassified in Wave 1 continued to be reported as declassified (Exhibit 1b).

- A small share of students, approximately 4%, who had been identified as declassified in Wave 1 are reported as receiving services 2 years later. It is important to note that all of these students are identified in Wave 2 with the same disability classification as in Wave 1.

By definition, students are included in SEELS if they were on special education rosters at the start of the study; thus, it is more likely that fewer SEELS students would be declassified in Wave 1 than in Wave 2. Nevertheless the cumulative increase in declassification percentages, especially within some disability categories, mirror results reported in the literature (see Bielinski & Ysseldyke, 2000; Carlson & Parshall, 1996).

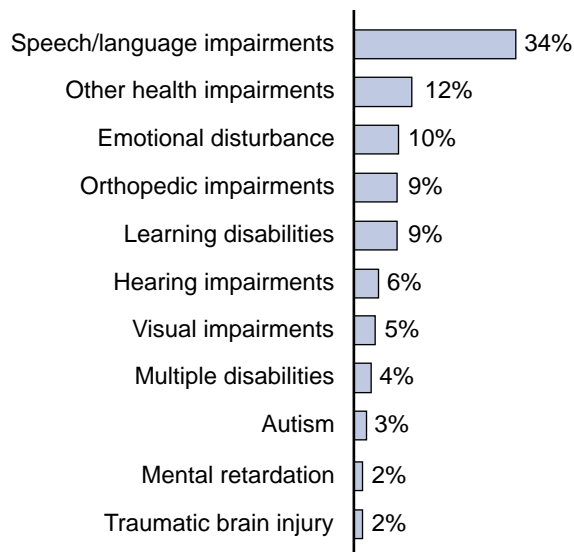
## Who Are the Students Who Leave Special Education?

### *Disability Categories*

The propensity to exit the special education system extends across the disability spectrum, as some students in every disability category are reported to have exited as of Wave 2 (Exhibit 2). However, the proportions of students who leave special education differ significantly among the various disability categories.

- Compared with students in all other disability categories, a substantially larger proportion of students with speech/language impairments departed from special education between 2000 (Wave 1) and 2002 (Wave 2). By the end of the 2001–02 school year (Wave 2), just over one-third (34%) of students with speech/language impairments were no longer receiving special education services.

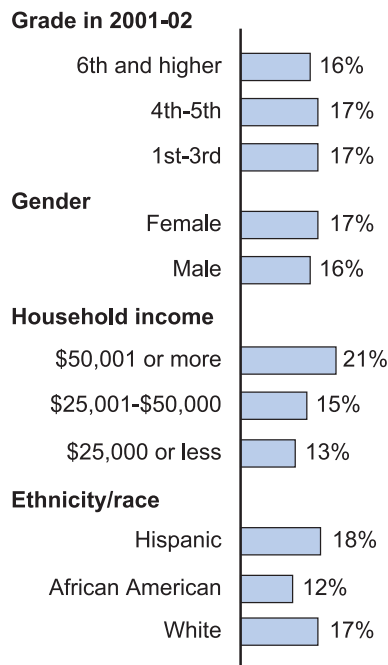
**Exhibit 2**  
**Percentage of Students Declassified from Special Education,  
by Disability Category as of Spring 2002**



Sources: SEELS Waves 1 and 2 parent interviews and students' school program questionnaires; data collected in 2000, 2001, and 2002.

- Over the 2-year period from Wave 1 to Wave 2, the proportions of declassified students with other health impairments, emotional disturbance, learning disabilities, or orthopedic impairments range from 9% to 12%. During this time period, 5% and 6% of students with visual and hearing impairments, respectively, are reported as declassified.
- In contrast to their peers with other disabilities, SEELS shows that few students (2% to 4%) with multiple disabilities, autism, mental retardation, or traumatic brain injury are reported to leave special education before high school. It is likely that the majority of students with the functional, social, and cognitive impairments associated with these disabilities will continue to participate in their schools' special education services through high school.
- Although one-third of SEELS students with disabilities have speech/language impairments (SLI) as their primary disability category (Wagner, Marder, & Blackorby, 2002), this group of students comprises more than two-thirds of the SEELS students who are identified as declassified by Wave 2. Because, among declassified students, those with speech/language impairments are much more prevalent than are exiters from any other primary disability category, any results reported herein for declassified students overall will disproportionately reflect students who were classified with speech/language impairments.

**Exhibit 3**  
**Students Declassified, by Demographic Characteristics**  
**as of Spring 2002 (Wave 2)**



Sources: SEELS Waves 1 and 2 parent interviews and students' school program questionnaires.

## Demographic Groups

In addition to specific disability categories, some demographic characteristics also may be associated with the likelihood of declassification (Exhibit 3).

- Rates of declassification are similar for students across the grades (17% for students in first through third and fourth through fifth grades, and 16% for students in sixth grade and higher). Likewise, boys and girls are equally likely to be declassified (about 17% for each).
- Further, the probability of being declassified does not differ significantly for students with disabilities who differ by race/ethnicity; Wave 2 declassification rates were 17%, 12%, and 18% of white, African American, and Hispanic students with disabilities, respectively.
- Whereas the likelihood of leaving special education services does not appear to be associated with students' grade level, gender, or race/ethnicity, there do appear to be declassification differences among students by income levels. By Wave 2, considerably more students with disabilities living in households with annual incomes greater than \$50,000 are reported declassified (21%) compared with students living in households in the middle- and lowest-income brackets (15% and 13%, respectively).

## Reasons Students with Disabilities Leave Special Education

SEELS asked parents who replied that their sons or daughters are no longer in special education in Wave 2 to identify the reasons (Exhibit 4).<sup>2</sup> The majority of parents name only one declassification reason (88%); however, 10% state two reasons and another 2% identify three reasons.

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### Exhibit 4 Parent-Reported Reasons for Students' Discontinuation of Special Education Services

Percentage reporting discontinuation of service is because:

<b>Student no longer needs special education services</b>	82%
<b>Personal/circumstantial reason</b> ( <i>which may or may not involve service need</i> )	
School does not have program needed	7%
Child is home schooled by parent	3%
Parent does not want child in program	3%
Child does not want to be in program	2%
Child changed schools, and did not request or identify need for special education services	3%

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Source: SEELS Wave 2 parent interview; data collected in 2002.

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<sup>2</sup> Exhibit 4 is limited to Wave 2 parent interviews because of the small numbers of students identified as declassified in Wave 1, with reasons cited by the parent respondents.

- Overall, about 8 in 10 students with disabilities who leave special education do so, according to their parents, because they no longer need services, including students who have met their IEP goals; about one-quarter specifically mention the school as the source of this declassification.
- Students with disabilities also leave special education for personal or circumstantial reasons—reasons that may or may not reflect “need.”
- Parents of 7% of declassified students report the school does not have the program their child needs, and 3% have chosen home schooling as an alternative. Some students change schools and may not be identified as needing special education at their new school (3%).
- Students also are declassified because their parents do not want them in their schools’ special education program (3%), or the child does not want to remain in the program (2%).

**Declassification Reasons by Disability**

- The majority of students in disability categories with relatively high declassification rates (e.g., speech/language, hearing, orthopedic or other health impairments, emotional disturbance, or learning disabilities) leave special education because they no longer need special services (Exhibit 5). Declassifications associated with no longer needing special education services are most likely to be identified for students with speech/language impairments (87%), orthopedic impairments (85%), hearing impairments (84%) or learning disabilities (81%).

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**Exhibit 5**  
**Percentages of Parent-Reported *Need-Based* vs.**  
***Personal/Circumstantial* Reasons for Students’ Discontinuation of**  
**Special Education, by Disability Category**

Disability categories for which discontinuation of special education services were most common	Percentage reporting student no longer needs services	Percentage reporting personal/circumstantial reasons ( <i>student may or may not need services</i> )
Speech/language impairments	87%	13%
Other health impairments	65%	35%
Emotional disturbance	74%	26%
Learning disabilities	81%	19%
Hearing impairments	84%	16%
Orthopedic impairments	85%	15%

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Source: SEELS Wave 2 parent interview; data collected in 2002.

- Of declassified students, about three-quarters with emotional disturbances and about two-thirds with other health impairments also are reported by parents to no longer need special services. However, students in these disability categories are more likely than their peers with other disabilities to leave special education because of personal or circumstantial reasons (26% and 35%, respectively). Examples include the school not having a needed program, the parent or student deciding to pull out of the program, or the parent choosing to provide home schooling.

### Attributes of Students with Disabilities Who Are Declassified

School success is associated with a variety of student, family, and school factors. Personal attributes, appropriate behaviors, health status, and social strengths all play important roles in how well students with disabilities cope in school. These types of strengths may be associated with students’ tendencies to be declassified.

#### Behaviors and Strengths

- Persistence, the act of working through a task until finished, is an attribute that is considerably more common among students with disabilities who are declassified (54% vs. 35%, Exhibit 6).

**Exhibit 6**  
**Parent-Reported Attributes of Students with Disabilities,**  
**by Special Education Status**

	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2	Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2	Statistical significance of difference
<b>Percentage of students reported to be:</b>			
Persistent—continues working at something until finished			
Very Often	54%	35%	***
Never	16%	7%	***
Cooperative—cooperates with family without being asked			
Very Often	49%	41%	
Never	4%	6%	
<b>Percentage of students reported to be strong in:</b>			
Computer use	94%	82%	***
Athletic ability	79%	67%	***
Being well organized	55%	42%	**
Being sensitive to others	90%	83%	**
Creative, artistic ability	69%	61%	*
Performing arts ability	63%	53%	*
Mechanical ability	71%	63%	*
Sense of humor	95%	93%	

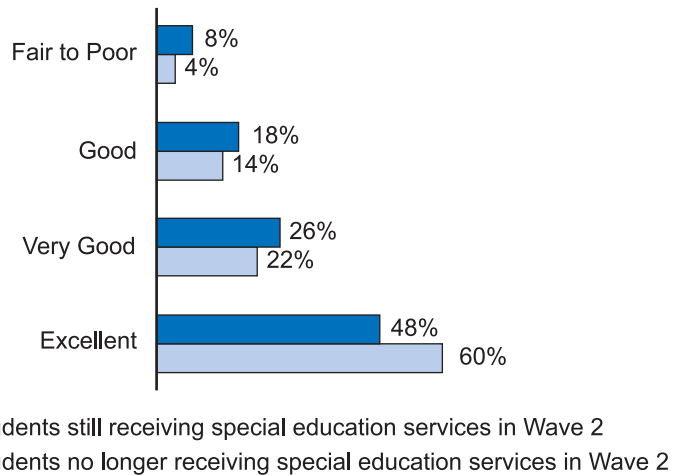
Sources: SEELS Wave 2 parent interviews and students’ school program questionnaires.  
Statistically significant difference in a two-tailed test at the following levels: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01;  
\*\*\*p < .001.

- Conversely, 7% of students who continue to receive services are characterized as never persisting compared to 16% of their declassified peers.
- Cooperative behavior is fairly common among students with disabilities regardless of whether or not they continue to receive services, as 49% and 41%, respectively, are rated as ‘very often’ cooperative.
- Compared to their peers who continue to receive special education services, declassified students with disabilities are substantially more likely to be depicted as ‘strong’ in use of computers (94% vs. 82%) and in athletic ability (79% vs. 67%), and to be characterized as more well organized (55% vs. 42%), and more sensitive to others’ feelings (90% vs. 83%). The declassified students also somewhat more likely to be reported by parents as being strong in creative, artistic, performing arts, and mechanical abilities.

**Health Status**

Exhibit 7 reveals that larger proportions of declassified students than those who continue receiving special education services are described as being in excellent health (60% vs. 48%); whereas students who remain in special education are more likely to be described as being in fair to poor health (8% vs. 4%).

**Exhibit 7  
Parent-Reported General Health of Students with Disabilities,  
by Special Education Status**



Source: SEELS Wave 2 parent interview.

**Education Experiences of Students Who Are Declassified**

**Early School Experiences**

Early intervention for babies and young children with disabilities is intended to improve their long-term outcomes and quality of life. Children who are identified early (before age 3) as needing early intervention services often have more complex or severe developmental delays and impairments than children who are identified later as needing special services (age 6 and older) (Scarborough et al., 2004). These are important distinctions when looking at the relationships

between early school experiences associated with early receipt of special education services and declassification during elementary or middle school years (Exhibit 8).

- When compared with their declassified peers, twice as many students with disabilities who continue special education services were identified as needing special education services before age 3 and received early intervention (32% vs. 16%).
- Similarly, compared to declassified students, a slightly larger proportion of students who have continued to receive special education services through the 2-year reporting period of SEELS to date had disabilities identified before age 6 and special services received during the preschool years (49% vs. 37%).

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**Exhibit 8**  
**Early Education Experiences of Students with Disabilities,**  
**by Special Education Status**

	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2	Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2	Statistical significance of difference
<b>Percentage who :</b>			
Had disability identified before age 3 and received early intervention services	16%	32%	**
Had disability identified before age 6 and received special education services	37%	49%	*
Attended preschool program or nursery school	70%	71%	
Attended Head Start program	22%	27%	

Sources: SEELS Wave 2 parent interviews; SEELS Waves 1 and 2 students' school program questionnaires.

Statistically significant difference in a two-tailed test at the following levels: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01.

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Obtaining a high-quality preschool education has been shown to help children become better learners (Wylie & Mallard, 2004). In a report from a study conducted by the Progressive Policy Institute, Mead (2004) writes, “Children who attend pre-kindergarten programs that prepare them to read and to build cognitive, verbal, and social skills go on to do measurably better in school and life than their peers who do not... These trends are particularly noticeable among disadvantaged children” (p.1). SEELS explores the relationships between preschool and Head Start participation and the tendency to be declassified (Exhibit 8).

- The proportions of students with disabilities who participated in Head Start programs are similar between those who have exited special education (22%) and those still receiving special education services (27%).

- Likewise, students with disabilities who continue or discontinue receiving special education services within the identified two-year period of this report are equally likely to have attended preschool programs or nursery school (70% and 71%). Although research findings generally indicate better school outcomes for children who attend preschool (Wylie & Mallard, 2004; Mead, 2004), this does not appear to affect the tendency to be declassified early, (at least within constraints of this reporting window for SEELS). It is possible that this is because declassification is closely tied to specific disability categories, whereas preschool participation occurs broadly for children in all disability categories.

**Elementary and Middle School Classroom Placements**

Dramatic differences between students with disabilities who continue versus students who discontinue special education services relatively early are illustrated through comparisons of their academic classroom placements (Exhibit 9).

- All students who were declassified through at least Wave 2 of SEELS spent at least part of their school day in general education settings for language arts and math; few received instruction in resource rooms, and none of these students spent time in self-contained classrooms for these two subjects.
- In stark contrast, students who continue special education services are reportedly receiving academic instruction in a variety of settings; for language arts and mathematics, slightly more than half of the students were receiving instruction in general education classrooms, from one-quarter to one-third were in resource rooms, and about one-quarter received instruction in self-contained classrooms.

**Exhibit 9  
Classroom Settings of Students with Disabilities,  
by Special Education Status**

	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2	Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2	Statistical significance of difference
<b>Percentage of students who received:</b>			
<b>Language Arts instruction in:</b>			
General education	100%	57%	***
Resource room	3%	34%	***
Self-contained classroom	0	28%	***
<b>Mathematics instruction in:</b>			
General education	100%	60%	***
Resource room	2%	25%	***
Self-contained classroom	0	25%	***

Source: SEELS Wave 2 students' school program questionnaire.  
<sup>a</sup> Within each subject, the sum of percentages across settings may exceed 100% because of some students who may receive that instruction in multiple settings.  
 Statistically significant difference in a two-tailed test at the following level: \*\*\*p < .001.



These data appear to support the view that students who receive academic instruction in general education classrooms are more likely to be declassified than are their peers who have these courses in self-contained classes or resource rooms. However, it is important to consider the influence of disability classification and functional limitations, as well as other factors related to classroom placement (e.g., least restrictive environment, assistive technology needs, class size, etc.), on students' propensity to leave special education.

**Skills Instruction and Schoolwide Programs**

- Special education status at the 2-year reporting period appears to be unrelated to the type of specialized skills instruction students receive (Exhibit 10). There also seem to be no associations between special education status (early declassification) and student participation in bilingual education or instruction for English language learners, or in the free and reduced price lunch program.

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**Exhibit 10**  
**Skills Instruction and Schoolwide Program Participation,**  
**by Special Education Status**

Percentage of students who:	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2	Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2
<b>Received instruction in:</b>		
Life skills	40%	43%
Study skills	42%	50%
Vocational training/industrial arts skills	20%	25%
Social skills	33%	40%
<b>Participated in schoolwide special program:</b>		
Bilingual education; instruction for English language learners	3%	3%
Free or reduced price lunch	41%	38%

Source: SEELS Wave 2 students' school program questionnaire.

**Parent Involvement, Satisfaction, and Expectations**

Parent satisfaction levels, as well as attitudes, relationships, and involvement with schools, have been found to be associated with the social development and academic achievement of children and youth (Hara, 1998). Family involvement is important to outcomes for children with disabilities. A meta-analysis of over 50 studies looking at the effects of parent involvement on academic achievement demonstrates a strong relationship between parental involvement and patterns of high student achievement outcomes (Jeynes, 2004/2005). The analyses also examined specific features of parent involvement that have the greatest influence

on student outcomes. For example, the more subtle attributes of parent expectations appear to have greater effects on student achievement than more demonstrative aspects, such as established family rules and parent participation in school activities (Jeynes, 2004/2005).

**Parent Expectations**

- Parents of 84% of declassified students expect their child definitely will graduate from high school, considerably more than the 59% among parents of students who continue to receive special education services (Exhibit 11).
- Conversely, about 10% of students who still receive services have parents who report their child probably or definitely will not graduate from high school, compared to only 2% of declassified students.

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**Exhibit 11**  
**Parent Expectations, by Special Education Status**

	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2	Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2	Statistical significance of difference
<b>Percentage of students expected to:</b>			
<b>Graduate from high school</b>			
Definitely will	84%	59%	***
Probably or definitely will not	2%	10%	***
<b>Attend postsecondary education after high school</b>			
Definitely will	54%	29%	***
Probably or definitely will not	8%	25%	***

Source: SEELS Wave 2 parent interview.  
Statistically significant difference in a two-tailed test at the following level: \*\*\*p < .001.

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- Postsecondary education experiences are expected by almost twice as many parents of students who discontinue than continue special education services (54% vs. 29% respectively).
- Likewise, parents of 25% of students who still are receiving services expect their children probably or definitely will not attend postsecondary school. In contrast, this low expectation is voiced by parents of 8% of declassified students.

**Parent Satisfaction**

- Regardless of whether students with disabilities continue receiving special education services or not, almost one-third of the parents of students in both groups strongly agree that school meets the individual needs of their child (Exhibit 12).

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**Exhibit 12**  
**Parent Satisfaction, by Special Education Status**

	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2	Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2	Statistical significance of difference
<b>Parent response to statement that “School meets child’s individual needs.”</b>			
Percentage who <i>strongly agree</i>	29%	32%	
Percentage who <i>disagree</i> or <i>strongly disagree</i>	16%	14%	
<b>Parent satisfaction with child’s school</b>			
Percentage who are <i>Very satisfied</i>	45%	37%	*
Percentage who are <i>Somewhat dissatisfied</i> or <i>Very dissatisfied</i>	21%	25%	

Source: SEELS Wave 2 parent interview.  
Statistically significant difference in a two-tailed test at the following level: \*p < .05.

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- On the other hand, parents of declassified students are slightly more likely to report being very satisfied with their child’s school (45%) than parents of students who continue receiving services (37%). This difference for students still receiving special education services is most likely associated with the higher proportions of these students who have more severe disabilities or functional limitations that tend to challenge both schools and families.

## Summary

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There has been a notable decline in the proportions of students with disabilities who continue to receive special education services: almost one-quarter of elementary and middle school-age students who had received special education services in the 1999-2000 school year are no longer receiving them 2 years later. Although students in all disability categories leave special education, there is a considerable difference in the proportions of declassified students with different disabilities.

Students with speech/language impairments represent the most likely disability group to leave special education during the elementary or middle school years. By the end of the 2001-2002 school year, 2 years after selection for this study of special education students, just over one-third of students with speech/language impairments are no longer receiving special education services, a proportion that is 3 to 15 times greater than that for students with other disabilities. This is a significant marker that distinguishes students with

speech/language impairments from their peers in other disability categories. Furthermore, although one-third of SEELS students with disabilities are classified as having speech/language impairments as their primary disability category, these young students comprise more than two-thirds of those who are declassified during the 2-year reporting period. Because of the disproportionately high exit rate among students classified with speech/language impairments, the findings highlighted in this report reflect, to a large degree, factors associated with these students.

A noteworthy proportion of declassifications over the 2 years of the study also occurred for students with learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, or other health, or orthopedic impairments. From 9% to 12% of students in these disability categories discontinued special education services within the 2-year period. In contrast, few students with hearing or visual impairments, mental retardation, autism, traumatic brain injuries, or multiple disabilities left special education; their exit rates were 6% or less.

Declassified students with disabilities are more likely to live in households that have annual incomes of \$50,000 or more; on the other hand, rates of declassification are similar for students across grade levels, for boys and girls, and for students who differ by race/ethnicity.

Most students who are declassified are reported to no longer need special education services, which includes meeting their IEP goals or being assessed as no longer eligible for services. Some students leave special education because of circumstances (e.g., the school does not have a specific program) or for personal reasons (e.g., parents choose to withdraw their child from the school's special education program, decide to home school, or the student does not want to remain in the program). Students with other health impairments or emotional disturbance are more likely to leave special education services because of these circumstantial or personal reasons than are declassified students with other disabilities.

Behaviors and attributes associated with cognitive and social functioning appear to be stronger for declassified students. For example, declassified students are consistently rated higher than students continuing in special education with respect to persistence, cooperation, being well organized, using computers, sensitivity to others, and creative, performance, and athletic skills. In addition, significantly larger proportions of these students are considered to be in excellent health. These data reflect, in large part, the characteristics of students with speech/language impairments compared to those of students with more severe cognitive or social impairments (e.g., mental retardation, autism, traumatic brain injury) and less likely to be declassified.

The effects of disability classification and corresponding levels of functioning underscore the relationships found between educational experiences and the tendencies to be declassified. Generally, children with more severe disabilities tend to be identified at a younger age and are more likely to receive early intervention services. On the other hand, preschool is an experience shared

by children in all disability categories. Thus, declassification tends to occur far less for children who are served by early intervention, compared to children who do not receive these services, but appears to occur equally for children who do or do not attend preschool. In this regard disability category (and severity) has a stronger influence on the likelihood of receiving early intervention services as well as on the likelihood of remaining in special education; whereas because preschool is an experience shared by children in all disability categories, there is minimal association between preschool and declassification.

Similarly, disability category (and severity) is strongly associated with the type of instructional setting in which students learn language arts and math. Students with mild disabilities are more likely to participate in language arts or math instruction in general education settings (vs. resource rooms or self-contained classrooms), and are more likely to leave special education than students who receive instruction primarily in special education settings.

Relationships among parent expectations and the likelihood of being declassified also are affected by the disability categories disproportionately present in the declassified population. Whereas parents of the majority of declassified students expect their children will definitely graduate from high school, this expectation is voiced for substantially fewer students who remain in special education. Furthermore, parents of 1 in 10 students who remain in special education viewed graduation as probably or definitely not a possibility. . Similarly, almost twice as many parents of declassified students expect their children to definitely attend postsecondary schools, whereas parents of students who remain in special education are three times as likely to expect their children will probably or definitely not have postsecondary education experiences.

IDEA regulations emphasize the wide variation and unique needs of students who qualify for special education and the enormous range in the type, degree, quantity, and duration of related support services. For some students, the school programs and services and therapeutic supports they receive may enable them to catch up with their nondisabled peers or accommodate an impairment (e.g., assistive technology) so that they no longer need or are eligible for special education. Through IDEA provisions that require reassessments, some students leave special education, primarily those students with speech/language impairments and some with learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, or other health or orthopedic impairments. In addition, as a result of reassessments, some students are not necessarily declassified, but instead, are reclassified into other disability categories. Most students with disabilities, however, are not declassified during their elementary and middle school years and continue to receive the range of special education programs and related services.



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**APPENDIX A**  
**Sample Sizes (Ns) and Standard Errors (SEs)**

<b>Exhibit A-1a</b> <b>Students with Disabilities, by Special Education Status as of Spring 2002 (Wave 2)</b>	
N	7,123
SE	(1.1)

<b>Exhibit A-1b</b> <b>Special Education Status Over Time</b>		
	N	SE
	7,123	
Declassified in W1, declassified W2		0.4
Receives services in W1, declassified W2		1.0
Declassified in W1, receiving services W1		0.4
Receiving services in both W1 and W2		1.2

<b>Exhibit A-2</b> <b>Percentage of Students Declassified from Special Education, by Disability Category as of Spring 2002</b>		
	N	SE
Speech/langage impairments	579	2.7
Other health impairments	710	1.8
Emotional disturbance	581	1.8
Learning disabilities	723	1.5
Hearing impairments	751	1.3
Orthopedic impairments	758	1.7
Visual impairments	601	1.5
Multiple disabilities	625	1.2
Autism	899	0.9
Mental retardation	615	1.6
Traumatic brain injury	248	1.7

<b>Exhibit A-3</b> <b>Students Declassified, by Demographic Characteristics</b> <b>as of Spring 2002 (Wave 2)</b>		
	N	SE
<b>Student's grade in 2001-02 school year</b>		
6th and higher	3,703	1.5
4th–5th	2,143	2.0
1st–3rd	1,067	2.9
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	2,376	1.9
Male	4,747	1.3
<b>Household income</b>		
\$50,001 and more	2,749	2.0
\$25,001-\$50,000	2,037	1.9
\$25,000 and less	2,193	1.8
<b>Ethnicity/Race</b>		
Hispanic	872	3.6
African American	1,360	2.3
White	4,638	1.3

<b>Exhibit A-4</b> <b>Parent-Reported Reasons for Students' Discontinuation</b> <b>of Special Education Services</b>		
	N	SE
<b>Percentage reporting discontinuation of service is because:</b>	453	
<b>Declassified students no longer need services:</b>		
No longer needs special education or services		3.4
<b>Other reason (may or may not need services):</b>		
School does not have program needed		2.4
Child is home schooled by parent		1.7
Parent does not want child in program		1.7
Child does not want to be in program		1.3
Child changed schools, did not request special services, nor identified as needing special services		1.6

<b>Exhibit A-5</b>		
<b>Percentages of Parent-Reported <i>Need-Based</i> vs. <i>Personal/Circumstantial</i> Reasons for Students' Discontinuation of Special Education, by Disability Category</b>		
Disability categories for which discontinuation of special education were most common	Percentage reporting:	
	Student no longer needs services or Personal/circumstantial reasons <i>(student may or may not need services)</i>	
	N	SE
Speech/language impairments	84	4.9
Other health impairments	76	8.4
Emotional disturbance	50	8.6
Learning disabilities	50	7.5
Hearing impairments	50	8.2
Orthopedic impairments	61	7.0

<b>Exhibit A-6</b>				
<b>Parent-Reported Attributes of Students with Disabilities, by Special Education Status</b>				
Percentage of students reported to be:	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2		Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2	
	N	SE	N	SE
Persistent—continues working at something until finished	599		6,378	
Very Often		3.9		2.0
Never		2.0		1.2
Cooperative—cooperates with family without being asked	599		6,373	
Very Often		3.9		1.6
Never		1.5		0.7
<b>Percentage of students reported to be strong in:</b>				
Computer use	587	1.9	6,282	1.2
Athletic ability	593	3.2	6,354	1.5
Being well organized	597	3.9	6,358	1.6
Being sensitive to others	597	2.4	6,329	1.2
Creative, artistic ability	595	3.6	6,381	1.5
Performing arts ability	594	3.8	6,344	1.6
Mechanical ability	591	3.5	6,330	1.5
Sense of humor	598	1.7	6,399	0.8

<b>Exhibit A-7 Parent-Reported General Health of Students with Disabilities, by Special Education Status</b>				
<b>Percentage of students:</b>	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2		Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2	
	N	SE	N	SE
With health status reported as	605		6,491	
Excellent		3.8		1.6
Very Good		3.2		1.4
Good		2.7		1.2
Fair to Poor		1.6		0.9

<b>Exhibit A-8 Early Education Experiences of Students with Disabilities, by Special Education Status</b>				
<b>Percentage who:</b>	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2		Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2	
	N	SE	N	SE
Had disability identified before age 3 and received early intervention services	236	5.1	3,782	2.3
Had disability identified before age 6 and received special education services	338	5.3	4,597	2.1
Attended preschool program or nursery school	527	3.8	5,868	1.5
Attended Head Start program	514	3.4	5,668	1.5

<b>Exhibit A-9 Classroom Settings of Students With Disabilities, by Special Education Status</b>				
<b>Percentage of students who received:</b>	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2		Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2	
	N	SE	N	SE
<b>Language Arts instruction in:</b>	112		3,531	
General education setting		0.4		2.1
Resource room		2.7		2.0
Self-contained classroom		0.4		1.9
<b>Mathematics instruction in:</b>	113		3,465	
General education setting		0.7		2.1
Resource room		2.5		1.8
Self-contained classroom		0.4		1.8

**Exhibit A-10**  
**Skills Instruction and Schoolwide Program Participation,**  
**by Special Education Status**

Percentage of students who:	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2		Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2	
	N	SE	N	SE
<b>Received instruction in:</b>	116		3,586	
Life skills		7.6		2.1
Study skills		7.7		2.1
Vocational training/industrial arts skills		6.3		1.8
Social skills		7.4		2.0
<b>Participated in schoolwide special program:</b>	92		3,200	
Bilingual education; instruction for English language learners		3.1		0.7
Free or reduced price lunch		8.5		2.2

**Exhibit A-11**  
**Parent Expectations, by Special Education Status**

Percentage of students expected to:	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2		Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2	
	N	SE	N	SE
<b>Graduate from high school</b>	596		6,360	
Definitely will		2.8		1.6
Probably or definitely will not		0.9		0.9
<b>Attend postsecondary education after high school</b>	595		6,348	
Definitely will		3.9		1.4
Probably or definitely will not		2.1		1.4

**Exhibit A-12**  
**Parent Satisfaction, by Special Education Status**

	Students no longer receiving special education services in Wave 2		Students still receiving special education services in Wave 2	
	N	SE	N	SE
<b>Percentage response to statement that "School meets child's individual needs."</b>	564		6,359	
<i>Strongly agree</i>		3.6		1.5
<i>Disagree or Strongly disagree</i>		2.9		1.1
<b>Parent satisfaction with child's school</b>	568		6,398	
Percentage who are <i>Very satisfied</i>		3.9		1.5
Percentage who are <i>Somewhat dissatisfied or Very dissatisfied</i>		3.2		1.4