

## 8. *Assessing Student Performance* by Renée Cameto, Anne-Marie Guzman, and Camille Marder

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Evaluation of student performance is an essential part of the teaching and learning process for all students. For students with disabilities, evaluation enables teachers to determine whether students have mastered material, achieved IEP objectives, and learned at the desired rate. Additionally, student evaluations are important mechanisms for communicating to many stakeholders—including parents, administrators, and students themselves—how students are faring academically.

Grades are a primary method for communicating about academic performance. However, the process of determining grades is not simple. Teachers take many factors into account in grading, including academic performance, participation in classroom learning activities, effort, progress, and attitude and behavior. Grading standards can vary for students at different grade levels, among teachers with different standards and views of grades, and across schools or school districts with different grading policies. These kinds of variations argue for caution in comparing students' grades. However, the important role of grades as a type of evaluation in schools makes a strong case for their inclusion in SEELS.

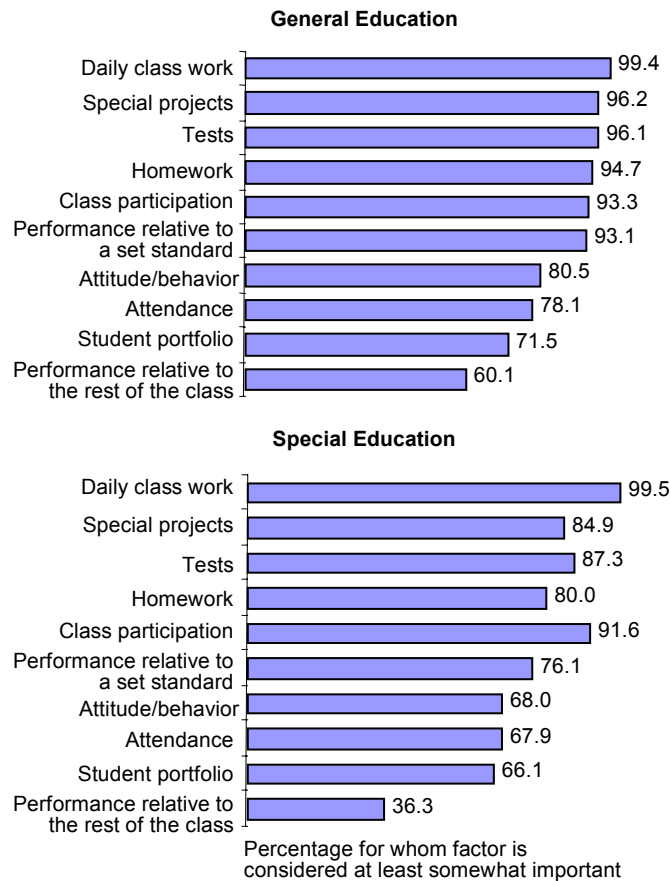
Teachers of students receiving language arts instruction in general education and special education settings were asked to report the importance they place on 10 factors in determining grades or formal progress reports for specific students with disabilities: daily class work, class participation, tests, special projects or activities, homework, performance relative to a standard, attitude and behavior, attendance, student portfolios, and performance relative to the class. Teachers rated these as “very important”, “somewhat important”, or “not important”.

### **Factors Used to Evaluate the Performance of Students with Disabilities in Language Arts Classes**

Elementary and middle school language arts teachers consider a variety of factors to be important in evaluating the performance of students with disabilities (Exhibit 8-1):

- Two-thirds or more of students with disabilities have teachers who rate nine of the 10 factors explored by SEELS as at least somewhat important in evaluating their performance.
- More factors are considered at least somewhat important in evaluating performance of students with disabilities by general education teachers than by special education teachers.
- In both general and special education settings, almost all teachers consider daily classwork to be an important factor in grading students.

**Exhibit 8-1**  
**Factors Used to Evaluate Performance of Students with Disabilities, by Instructional Setting**



- Among students with disabilities whose language arts instruction takes place in general education settings, more than 90% have teachers who consider special projects, tests, homework, class participation, performance relative to a set standard, and daily classwork to be important in grading. Approximately 80% have teachers who consider attitude and behavior and attendance to be important, approximately 70% have teachers who consider student portfolios to be important, and 60% have teachers who consider students' performance relative to the rest of the class to be important.
- Compared with teachers in general education classes, teachers in special education settings give less emphasis in their student evaluations to products (e.g., homework, projects), attendance, and attitude.
- In both settings, performance relative to the rest of the class is the factor least likely to be considered important in determining the grades of students with disabilities.

## Factors Used to Evaluate Student Performance: Disability Category Differences

- Across disability categories, many factors are less likely to be considered important in special education than in general education settings. For example, the likelihood that a teacher considers homework important differs markedly across the two settings for virtually all disability categories. In contrast, the differences between the two settings regarding the importance placed on tests, portfolios, or special projects are much smaller for most categories.
- Across disability categories and instructional settings, no meaningful differences occur in the importance placed on daily class work in determining grades. Teachers of more than 92% of students in all disability categories in both settings rely on this factor for student evaluation. Similarly, more than 90% of students in most disability categories have teachers who consider class participation to be important; the exception is teachers of students with autism, 81% of whom consider class participation important for their evaluation.<sup>1</sup>
- Considerably more variation occurs across disability categories in the importance placed on most evaluation factors by teachers in special education than in general education settings. The widest variation overall concerns the importance placed on performance relative to the rest of the class; the least variation relates to the importance given to attitude and behavior.
- In general education settings, students with mental retardation, autism, traumatic brain injury, or multiple disabilities are among the least likely to have teachers who consider a number of factors as important (Exhibit 8-2).
- In special education settings, students with autism are among the least likely to have teachers who consider all factors, except student portfolios, as important.
- Students with other kinds of disabilities have teachers who appear to tailor the mix of factors considered important in determining their grades. For example, students with learning disabilities have teachers who are very likely to place importance on the students' products, such as special projects, tests, and homework. They are among the least likely to think behavioral factors are important in grading students with learning disabilities.

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<sup>1</sup> Because of their lack of variation, these factors are not presented in Exhibit 8-2.

**Exhibit 8-2**  
**Factors Used to Evaluate Student Performance in Language Arts Classrooms,**  
**by Disability Category and Instructional Setting**

Percentage for whom factor is considered important in grading in:	Learning Disability	Speech/ Language Impairment	Mental Retardation	Emotional Disturbance	Hearing Impairment	Visual Impairment	Orthopedic Impairment	Other Health Impairment	Autism	Traumatic Brain Injury	Multiple Disabilities
<b>General education</b>											
Special projects	96.5 (1.4)	96.2 (1.2)	93.2 (3.5)	97.5 (1.5)	94.4 (2.2)	97.2 (1.5)	96.1 (1.7)	95.7 (1.9)	90.1 (3.8)	97.8 (2.8)	78.6 (10.8)
Tests	95.5 (1.6)	97.3 (1.0)	85.6 (4.9)	95.2 (2.1)	96.2 (1.8)	97.6 (1.4)	96.3 (1.6)	96.3 (1.8)	92.3 (3.4)	93.6 (4.8)	81.8 (10.1)
Homework	95.3 (1.6)	95.4 (1.3)	83.4 (5.2)	93.1 (2.4)	93.6 (2.3)	96.0 (1.8)	96.2 (1.7)	92.7 (2.5)	85.1 (4.5)	86.2 (6.7)	84.9 (9.2)
Performance relative to a set standard	90.1 (2.3)	96.7 (1.1)	76.9 (5.9)	93.5 (2.4)	92.2 (2.6)	91.6 (2.5)	90.4 (2.6)	88.3 (3.1)	87.8 (4.1)	87.9 (6.3)	84.7 (9.4)
Attitude/behavior	74.8 (3.3)	83.9 (2.3)	81.3 (5.5)	84.5 (3.5)	86.5 (3.3)	83.0 (3.4)	81.0 (3.4)	79.9 (3.8)	81.3 (4.9)	70.4 (8.9)	87.2 (8.6)
Attendance	76.4 (3.2)	79.5 (2.5)	79.9 (5.6)	77.8 (4.0)	84.6 (3.5)	79.5 (3.7)	87.3 (2.9)	73.4 (4.2)	67.5 (5.9)	77.7 (8.1)	83.0 (9.8)
Student portfolio	70.7 (3.5)	72.3 (2.8)	64.1 (6.8)	68.1 (4.6)	71.3 (4.4)	80.9 (3.6)	72.8 (3.9)	70.8 (4.4)	72.9 (5.7)	68.5 (9.2)	86.6 (8.8)
Performance relative to the rest of the class	50.8 (3.8)	68.1 (2.9)	52.3 (7.0)	53.6 (4.8)	60.5 (4.7)	61.1 (4.5)	62.0 (4.2)	55.7 (4.7)	50.6 (6.3)	51.6 (9.7)	57.4 (12.7)
<b>Special education</b>											
Special projects	90.2 (2.2)	88.3 (5.0)	73.8 (2.8)	83.4 (3.0)	81.1 (3.2)	75.2 (6.5)	79.7 (4.1)	82.0 (4.1)	66.2 (3.8)	88.6 (4.8)	74.8 (3.9)
Tests	93.6 (1.9)	88.4 (5.0)	74.4 (2.7)	89.7 (2.4)	90.4 (2.4)	75.1 (6.6)	81.8 (3.9)	88.8 (3.3)	59.1 (3.9)	88.3 (4.9)	68.8 (4.2)
Homework	85.6 (2.7)	88.2 (5.0)	69.4 (2.9)	74.5 (3.5)	84.1 (3.0)	61.9 (7.3)	67.2 (4.7)	76.6 (4.5)	52.9 (4.0)	71.7 (6.8)	64.6 (4.3)
Performance relative to a set standard	78.5 (3.1)	89.2 (4.9)	63.8 (3.0)	79.5 (3.2)	75.5 (3.5)	71.2 (6.8)	69.4 (4.6)	74.5 (4.6)	58.9 (3.9)	72.8 (6.7)	62.4 (4.4)
Attitude/behavior	61.9 (3.7)	74.7 (6.7)	71.3 (2.8)	78.1 (3.3)	73.6 (3.6)	75.1 (6.5)	73.9 (4.4)	69.7 (4.8)	69.2 (3.7)	80.0 (6.1)	81.7 (3.5)
Attendance	67.6 (3.5)	67.3 (7.4)	69.6 (2.9)	73.5 (3.5)	66.6 (3.9)	69.8 (7.0)	61.9 (4.9)	63.6 (5.1)	52.6 (4.0)	66.1 (7.2)	68.6 (4.2)
Student portfolio	66.8 (3.6)	72.1 (7.0)	60.3 (3.1)	64.9 (3.8)	71.8 (3.7)	72.2 (6.8)	66.1 (4.7)	60.6 (5.2)	66.9 (3.8)	72.1 (6.8)	70.2 (4.2)
Performance relative to the rest of the class	41.9 (3.7)	29.8 (7.1)	28.2 (2.8)	37.6 (3.8)	45.7 (4.1)	29.7 (6.9)	26.6 (4.5)	38.8 (5.2)	22.8 (3.4)	32.4 (7.1)	22.6 (3.8)
<b>Sample size</b>											
General education	342	491	97	204	275	303	325	273	195	79	49
Special education	349	83	503	312	418	180	242	220	401	138	316

Standard errors are in parentheses.

- Students with emotional disturbances have teachers who place considerable emphasis on attendance, attitudes, and behaviors, but are less likely than students with many other types of disabilities to have teachers who emphasize student portfolios, for example.

### **Factors Used to Evaluate Student Performance: Grade-Level and Demographic Differences**

- In general education language arts classes, the percentage of students with disabilities whose teachers consider their performance relative to their classmates, their attitude and behavior, or their portfolios as important in grading them diminishes with higher grade levels (Exhibit 8-3). The weight teachers place on other factors does not differ significantly.
- In special education language arts classes, the percentage of students whose teachers consider special projects, homework, or performance relative to the class increases with higher grade levels. The weight teachers place on other factors does not differ significantly.
- Several notable differences apply to students in ungraded programs. Their teachers are less likely than those of students at any grade level to use tests or homework in grading and are less likely than teachers of students in middle school to consider special projects as at least somewhat important. On the other hand, they are the most likely to consider students' attitude and behavior in grading.
- In general education settings, attendance is considered important in grading more often for students from lower-income families than for students from higher-income families.
- In general education settings, African-American and Hispanic students are somewhat more likely than white students to have teachers who consider attendance as important in grading. Teachers of Hispanic students are less likely than teachers of white or African-American students to consider homework as important.
- In special education settings, African-American and Hispanic students are more likely than white students to have teachers who consider special projects, homework, student portfolios, and performance relative to the class as important in grading. In addition, African-American students are more likely than white students to have teachers who consider attendance as important.

**Exhibit 8-3**  
**Factors Used to Evaluate Performance of Students with Disabilities in Language Arts Classes,**  
**by Demographic Characteristics and Instructional Setting**

Percentage for whom factor is considered important in grading in:	Grade Level				Household Income			Race/Ethnicity			
	Ungraded	First through Third	Fourth and Fifth	Sixth and Above	\$25,000 or Less	\$25,001 to \$50,000	More than \$50,000	White	African American	Hispanic	Asian/Pacific Islander
<b>General education</b>											
Special projects	--	95.7 (1.5)	96.1 (2.)	96.8 (1.3)	93.0 (2.3)	95.6 (1.8)	97.7 (1.2)	96.4 (.9)	93.9 (2.8)	96.6 (2.4)	98.1 (5.8)
Tests	--	96.3 (1.4)	97.2 (1.2)	94.8 (1.7)	95.7 (1.9)	95.0 (1.9)	96.1 (1.5)	96.1 (.9)	95.8 (2.4)	97.2 (2.1)	85.5 (14.7)
Homework	--	93.0 (1.9)	95.4 (1.5)	95.2 (1.6)	93.5 (2.3)	94.1 (2.1)	95.2 (1.7)	95.2 (1.0)	95.8 (2.4)	81.3 (3.6)	84.7 (15.0)
Class participation	--	85.9 (1.4)	95.0 (1.5)	89.7 (2.3)	93.2 (2.3)	94.0 (2.1)	93.9 (1.9)	93.1 (1.2)	94.2 (2.8)	94.4 (3.0)	97.8 (11.8)
Performance relative to a set standard	--	94.9 (1.6)	94.6 (1.6)	89.4 (2.3)	87.4 (3.1)	94.3 (2.0)	94.2 (1.8)	93.4 (1.2)	90.1 (3.6)	95.4 (2.8)	98.2 (5.5)
Attitude/behavior	--	86.8 (2.5)	82.3 (2.7)	72.7 (3.4)	81.0 (3.6)	77.9 (3.6)	80.7 (3.1)	79.6 (1.9)	80.4 (4.8)	83.7 (4.8)	99.1 (4.2)
Attendance	--	82.2 (2.8)	79.8 (2.8)	72.8 (3.4)	83.2 (3.4)	73.3 (3.8)	73.0 (3.5)	74.9 (2.1)	85.5 (4.2)	85.5 (4.6)	83.8 (15.3)
Student portfolio	--	77.7 (3.0)	69.4 (3.2)	67.2 (3.6)	71.0 (4.2)	72.5 (3.9)	69.2 (3.6)	68.2 (2.2)	77.6 (5.0)	82.6 (4.9)	84.9 (15.1)
Performance relative to the class	--	70.6 (3.3)	59.7 (3.4)	49.3 (3.8)	60.4 (4.5)	54.2 (4.3)	60.5 (3.8)	58.8 (2.3)	60.0 (5.9)	65.2 (6.2)	68.0 (19.4)
<b>Special education</b>											
Special projects	68.8 (5.9)	75.6 (3.8)	85.4 (2.7)	91.1 (2.1)	84.1 (2.9)	85.0 (3.5)	86.0 (3.8)	84.1 (2.0)	94.1 (3.2)	97.5 (4.4)	92.1 (12.0)
Tests	57.5 (6.8)	86.3 (3.1)	90.1 (2.3)	88.4 (2.4)	85.8 (2.7)	87.2 (3.3)	89.2 (3.4)	88.3 (1.8)	87.7 (2.9)	83.6 (5.0)	51.5 (22.8)
Homework	54.3 (6.8)	74.0 (3.9)	81.5 (3.0)	84.7 (2.6)	78.8 (3.2)	79.5 (3.9)	83.3 (4.1)	61.5 (2.7)	73.0 (3.9)	76.3 (5.7)	83.3 (16.5)
Class participation	89.6 (4.2)	88.0 (2.9)	92.8 (2.0)	92.7 (1.9)	94.2 (1.8)	89.2 (3.0)	91.6 (3.0)	89.2 (1.7)	94.4 (2.0)	97.1 (2.2)	98.2 (5.9)
Performance relative to a set standard	64.1 (6.6)	77.4 (3.8)	74.9 (3.3)	76.5 (3.1)	74.0 (3.4)	72.4 (4.4)	78.6 (4.5)	76.4 (2.4)	72.8 (3.9)	79.1 (5.5)	77.6 (18.5)
Attitude/behavior	81.7 (5.3)	68.1 (4.2)	70.0 (3.5)	65.1 (3.5)	69.3 (3.6)	66.5 (4.5)	76.5 (4.6)	66.7 (2.6)	69.9 (4.0)	71.2 (6.0)	87.6 (14.7)
Attendance	65.7 (6.5)	64.5 (4.3)	64.3 (3.7)	71.3 (3.3)	71.1 (3.6)	67.4 (4.6)	61.4 (5.3)	63.1 (2.7)	77.1 (3.7)	72.8 (5.9)	79.5 (18.8)
Student portfolio	63.9 (6.5)	68.9 (4.1)	71.1 (3.5)	61.0 (3.6)	69.0 (3.6)	59.7 (4.8)	64.5 (5.2)	61.5 (2.7)	73.0 (3.9)	76.3 (5.7)	83.3 (16.5)
Performance relative to the class	26.5 (6.0)	25.7 (3.9)	34.3 (3.6)	43.1 (3.7)	40.6 (3.9)	31.8 (4.5)	35.8 (5.2)	30.5 (2.6)	40.8 (4.4)	53.1 (6.7)	52.4 (23.0)
Sample size											
General education	2	848	928	762	537	590	876	1,958	333	252	49
Special education	328	742	904	984	1,014	703	654	1,876	794	423	52

Standard errors are in parentheses.

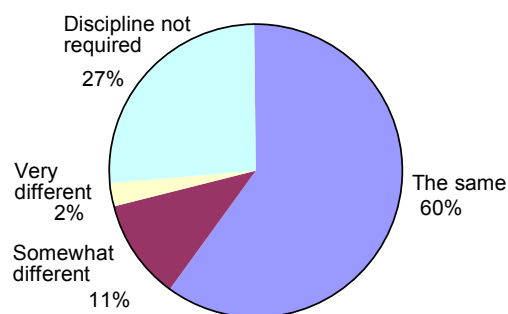
## Discipline of Students with Disabilities in General Education Settings

Although evaluating student progress with regard to academics or IEP goals is essential, it also is important that the classroom environment be conducive to learning; maintaining discipline in the classroom is crucial to establishing a healthy learning environment. The topic of discipline was given considerable attention in the 1997 reauthorization of IDEA and is a general source of public concern. Issues related to discipline and students with disabilities are complicated because disciplinary actions must consider whether infractions reflect a student’s disability and must reflect the obligation to provide education to students with disabilities under IDEA.

SEELS explored the discipline policies applied by general education language arts teachers to their students with disabilities. Teachers were asked to determine whether their students with disabilities were receiving the same discipline, somewhat different discipline, or very different discipline than other students in class, or whether no discipline was required for the students with disabilities in their classes.

- The majority of students with disabilities in general education classes are disciplined in ways comparable to other students in their classes (Exhibit 8-4); 13% of students have discipline policies that are somewhat or very different from those for other students.
- Almost 30% of students with disabilities in general education classes do not require discipline at all.

**Exhibit 8-4**  
**Discipline Practices for Students with Disabilities**  
**in General Education Language Arts Classes,**  
**Compared with Other Students in Class**



### Discipline Practices: Disability Category Differences

Teachers generally apply comparable disciplinary policies in the classroom across disability categories, with a few exceptions (Exhibit 8-5).

**Exhibit 8-5**  
**Discipline Practices for Students with Disabilities in General Education Language Arts Classes, by Disability Category**

Percentage whose discipline is:	Learning Disability	Speech/ Language Impairment	Mental Retardation	Emotional Disturbance	Hearing Impairment	Visual Impairment	Orthopedic Impairment	Other Health Impairment	Autism	Traumatic Brain Injury	Multiple Disabilities
	Similar to others	56.4 (3.8)	64.6 (3.0)	56.5 (6.9)	41.0 (4.8)	55.7 (4.8)	61.6 (4.4)	51.6 (4.4)	60.8 (4.7)	32.3 (5.9)	40.7 (9.7)
Somewhat different	12.1 (2.5)	6.8 (1.6)	15.4 (5.0)	43.0 (4.8)	7.3 (2.5)	7.9 (2.5)	9.6 (2.6)	14.2 (3.4)	40.7 (6.2)	13.8 (6.8)	31.7 (12.4)
Very different	2.9 (1.3)	1.1 (0.7)	2.9 (2.3)	6.9 (2.5)	0.7 (0.8)	1.4 (1.1)	2.2 (1.3)	4.9 (2.1)	14.3 (4.4)	5.7 (4.6)	5.4 (6.0)
Not required	28.5 (3.5)	27.5 (2.8)	25.3 (6.0)	9.1 (2.8)	36.3 (4.6)	29.1 (4.1)	36.6 (4.2)	20.1 (3.9)	12.7 (4.2)	39.8 (9.6)	25.5 (11.6)
Sample size	335	485	98	201	274	300	324	265	195	77	49

Standard errors are in parentheses.

- Students with emotional disturbances, autism, traumatic brain injuries, or multiple disabilities are the most likely to be disciplined differently from other students in general education language arts classrooms; only 32% to 41% of these students are disciplined in the same way as other students.
- Students with speech impairments, visual impairments, and other health impairments are the most likely to be treated comparably to other students in the general education language arts classroom. Nevertheless, approximately 40% of these students are disciplined differently from other students in their classrooms.
- Students with hearing impairment, orthopedic impairment, or traumatic brain injury are the least likely of all students with disabilities to require any discipline at all.

**Discipline Practices: Grade-Level and Demographic Differences**

- Discipline practices do not vary for students with disabilities who differ in regard to grade level, household income, or racial/ethnic background.
- However, boys are more likely than girls to require discipline in general education language arts classrooms (77% vs. 65%). For students who require discipline, there is no difference between boys and girls with respect to being treated like other students in the classroom.



## Summary

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Teachers of students with disabilities consider a variety of factors to be important in determining students' grades, including factors related to student products (e.g., homework, tests) and processes (e.g., participation in class). However, teachers of students with disabilities in general education classes generally consider a wider variety of factors to be important than do teachers in special education language arts settings. The kinds of factors considered important in evaluating students also differ, with special education teachers placing less emphasis on projects, tests, homework, attitude, or attendance.

General education teachers of students with disabilities in the upper grades are less likely to consider several factors to be important in evaluating students' performance. In contrast, in special education settings, teachers are more likely to emphasize several factors in the upper grade levels. Several differences are noted for students who differ in other demographic characteristics, but no strong patterns emerge.

Teachers report that almost one-third of students with disabilities in general education classes do not need to be disciplined. However, when discipline is required, in most cases, teachers tend to use the same forms of discipline that they use with other students. Students with autism or emotional disturbances—disabilities that fundamentally involve behavioral and social adjustment issues—as well as students with traumatic brain injuries or multiple disabilities, are the most likely to be subject to different disciplinary practices than other students in their general education language arts classes.