

TESTIMONY PROVIDED TO: Child Poverty Council  
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TOPIC Special Education and Poverty

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There is an intersection between special education and poverty, and it is at that intersection--where students have both an IEP and are living in poverty—that we find many of our students with the greatest needs.

To better understand the characteristics of these students and their challenges, we present a general outline of the population, and an example of outcomes—based on Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC) scores—for those students who both have an IEP and are in poverty, in comparison with their non-IEP and more economically advantaged peers. We then present programs that serve these students, and the specific populations they target.

We measure disability status by having an active IEP, poverty by eligibility for Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL), and outcomes by the percentage of student scoring in the lowest proficiency category (1) on the SBAC.

#### **IN SUMMARY**

- Outcomes for students who are FRL or have an IEP are poorer than those of their non FRL (NFRL), non-IEP peers, but outcomes are poorest for those students who are both FRL and have an IEP.

This is a population that is of particular concern. While it is not possible to establish a causal connection between special education and poverty, there is an interaction between disability and poverty which results in poorer outcomes for students who are both FRL and have an IEP than for those students with either an IEP or who are FRL, and markedly poorer outcomes than for students who neither have an IEP nor FRL.

#### **Total Student Enrollment Characteristics:**

Total population 97169 (in this data set).

36.5% Free and Reduced Lunch (FRL)

14.5% have an active IEP (this includes only those with a valid IEP, not the 64 students who are eligible for an IEP but do not have an active IEP)

8.6% have both an IEP and are FRL

- A higher percentage of students with an IEP than those who do not have an IEP are also FRL
  - 58.86% of students with an IEP are in poverty, while 32.7% of students without an IEP are FRL
- A higher percentage of FRL students than NFRL have an IEP.
  - 23.43% of FRL students have an IEP while 9.4% of students who are NFRL have an IEP
- Some disability categories have a higher percentage of FRL students than others
- Students designated as Emotionally Disabled (ED) are of particular concern since this population has been steadily increasing, and a somewhat larger percentage of Emotionally Disabled students than other disability categories are FRL.

## Population Characteristics by Disability

- 69.9% of the 2016 students with ED are FRL, and they compose 14.22% of the IEP population, 5.69% of FRL pop, but only 3.27% of the NFRL population and 2.1% of all students.
- 58.5% of 2296 students designated as Other Health Impaired (students with Attention Deficit Disorders are included in this category) are FRL, and they compose 16.19% of the IEP population, 6.48% of the FRL pop, but only 3.72% of the NFRL population and 2.4% of all students.
- 53.9% of 3972 students with Specific Learning Disability are FRL, and they compose 28.01% of the IEP population, 11.20% of the FRL population, but only 6.44% of the NFRL population and 4.1% of all students.
- 63.7% of 1164 students with Speech or language disabilities are FRL, and they compose 8.21% of the IEP population, 3.28% of the FRL population, but only 1.89% of the NFRL population and 1.2% of all students.

## OUTCOMES

- FRL alone appears to be less associated with poor outcomes than IEP status alone.
- The combination of both IEP and FRL has a stronger association with poor outcomes than either category alone.
- There is a greater discrepancy between students who are neither FRL nor have an IEP and those who are both FRL and on an IEP than those in most other comparison groups.

## Grade 4 Student Characteristics and SBAC Proficiency Scores Compared

- The characteristics of the students who took the Grade 4 SBAC are quite similar to those of the total population:
  - 42.4% are FRL
  - 14.9% are IEP
  - 9.8% are FRLIEP
- Percentages of students scoring 1 on the SBAC in three subcategories, IEP, poverty (FRL), and IEP and FRL are markedly higher than those of their No-IEP, NFRL, and No-IEP and NFRL peers.
  - Math
    - **IEP** 52.75%,
    - **No IEP** 11.15% (difference 41.60 percentage points)
  - Reading
    - **IEP** 67.16% IEP,
    - **No IEP** 18.10% (difference 49.07 percentage points)
  - Math
    - **FRL** 27.6%
    - **NFRL** 9.75% (difference 17.85 percentage points)
  - Reading
    - **FRL** 38.5%
    - **NFRL** 15.69% (difference 22.81 percentage points)

- Math
  - **IEP + FRL** 59.72%
  - **No IEP + NFRL** 12.77% (difference 46.95 percentage points)
- Reading
  - **IEP + FRL** 73.95%
  - **No IEP + NFRL** 20.14% (difference 53.82 percentage points)

### **PROGRAMS AND POPULATIONS SERVED**

- Federally funded IDEA supports students with disabilities. Title I supports students in poverty.
- Title 16 and EQS require that every Vermont school has a tiered system of supports to meet the needs of all students including those that are FRL or with disabilities.
- PBiS, as a whole school support system, serves all students, including those who are FRL or with disabilities. PBiS is the behavior component of a tiered system of supports.
- Initiatives targeted toward students who have suffered trauma are being explored and implemented by both state agencies and schools. Poverty is considered a trauma, so FRL students specifically will be served by these programs.