



# EVALUATION BRIEF

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## ***Special Education Exits: How many students exited special education services during the past three years?***

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*During the 2009–2010 school year, there were 202,773 students enrolled in the Houston Independent School District (HISD). Approximately, 16,503 HISD students (8 percent) received special education services. The goal of special education is to minimize the impact of the students' disability, while maximizing opportunities for students to fully participate in his/her natural environment. An Admission, Review and Dismissal (ARD) committee makes decisions about a student's eligibility for special education services. The most common reason why students exit special education is that they graduate. Other reasons may be that they drop out, no longer qualify for services and are returned to regular education, or their parents revoke consent for special education. This brief focuses on students with an exit date from special education in 2008, 2009, and 2010.*

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### **Data and Methods**

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Information on students with an exit date from special education was generated using the Chancery Student Information System (SIS) for school years 2008, 2009, and 2010. All data were pulled from Chancery SIS on February 3, 2011. The primary disability categories of these students were retrieved from the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS) for all years. Exit data were also generated using the Special Education Ad Hoc Reporting System (SPEARS) for comparison purposes. The most current year of exit data available on SPEARS was 2009. The data provided on SPEARS was collected from school districts by means of the Public Education Information Management System (PEIMS).

It is important to note that exit data were pulled for only those students with an entry and exit date in special education on Chancery SIS. Specifically, these were students with an exit date during the 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010 school years. Limitations to the special education exit data include missing data and miscoded entry and exit dates. Also, due to data matching limitations, primary disability information was not available for all students who exited special education. Therefore, exit data for students who were served in

special education should be interpreted with caution.

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### **How many students exited special education in 2008, 2009, and 2010?**

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During the 2007–2008 school year, there were 18,232 students served in special education. A total of 504 students (2.8 percent) exited special education during this school year. The number of students served in special education decreased to 16,918 during the 2008–2009 school year, while the number of students who exited decreased to 370 (2.2 percent). The special education enrollment for the 2009–2010 school year was 16,503. The number of students who exited special education was 371 (2.2 percent). Thus, over this three-year period, less than three percent of students had an exit date from special education.

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### **What were the demographic characteristics of students who exited special education?**

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**Table 1** provides the demographic characteristics of HISD students with an exit date from special education during the 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010 school years. In 2009–2010, 46.9 percent of the exited special education students

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Students who Exited Special Education for the 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010 school years

<b><u>Ethnicity</u></b>	<b><u>2007–08</u></b>		<b><u>2008–09</u></b>		<b><u>2009–10</u></b>	
	<b><u>N</u></b>	<b><u>%</u></b>	<b><u>N</u></b>	<b><u>%</u></b>	<b><u>N</u></b>	<b><u>%</u></b>
American Indian	1	0.2	0	0.0	0	0.0
Asian	11	2.2	11	3.0	13	3.5
African American	199	39.5	128	34.6	125	33.7
Hispanic	234	46.4	180	48.6	174	46.9
White	59	11.7	51	13.8	56	15.1
Other		0.0		0.0	3	0.8
<b><u>Economically Disadvantaged</u></b>						
Yes	363	72.0	261	70.5	272	73.3
No	141	28.0	109	29.5	99	26.7
<b><u>Primary Disability</u></b>						
Orthopedic Impairment	3	0.6	4	1.1	2	0.5
Other Health Impairment	22	4.4	22	5.9	18	4.9
Auditory Impairment	2	0.4	6	1.6	2	0.5
Visual Impairment	0	0.0	2	0.5	0	0.0
Deaf-Blind	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Mental Retardation	19	3.8	13	3.5	11	3.0
Emotional Disturbance	24	4.8	12	3.2	16	4.3
Learning Disability	197	39.1	109	29.5	126	34.0
Speech Impairment	150	29.8	142	38.4	122	32.9
Autism	7	1.4	6	1.6	3	0.8
Developmental Delay	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Traumatic Brain Injury	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Noncategorical Early Childhood	1	0.2	1	0.3	3	0.8
Not Available	79	15.7	53	14.3	68	18.3
<b><i>Total Exited</i></b>	<b>504</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b><i>Total Number of Students with Disabilities</i></b>	<b>18,232</b>		<b>16,918</b>		<b>16,503</b>	
<b><i>Percent of Students with an Exit Date</i></b>		<b>2.8</b>		<b>2.2</b>		<b>2.2</b>

were Hispanic, 33.7 percent were African American, and 15.1 percent were White. In comparison to the overall special education population, African American and Hispanic students were under-represented among students who exited special education, while White students were over-represented (see **Appendix**). A review of the previous years show that the percent of African American students who exited special education decreased for each year, while the percent of White students who exited increased.

Students who were identified as economically disadvantaged accounted for 73.3 percent of the population in 2009–2010. The highest percent of students at 34.0 percent had a learning disability, followed by 32.9 percent who had a speech impairment in 2009–2010. The primary disability of 18.3 percent of the students who exited special education was not available. The three-year trend shows that students with an exit date from special education were more likely to be economically disadvantaged, Hispanic, and have a learning disability or speech impairment.

### **How long were students served in special education?**

**Table 2** provides the length of time that exited students were served in special education over the past three academic years. The highest percent of exited students were served in special education for one year or less for all three years, although this percent gradually decreased. Results from aggregating the data reveal that the majority of exited students were served in special education for three years or less from 2008 to 2010. During the 2009–2010 school year, the lowest percent of exited students were served in special education for 5 or more years.

Table 2. Length of Time Served in Special Education for Exited Students

<b><u>Time Spent</u></b>	<b><u>2007–08</u></b>		<b><u>2008–09</u></b>		<b><u>2009–10</u></b>	
	<b><u>N</u></b>	<b><u>%</u></b>	<b><u>N</u></b>	<b><u>%</u></b>	<b><u>N</u></b>	<b><u>%</u></b>
1 year or less	241	48	115	31	103	28
1-2 years	115	23	103	28	69	19
2-3 years	24	5	72	19	75	20
3-4 years	14	3	17	5	55	15
4-5 years	7	1	8	2	18	5
5 + years	20	4	7	2	14	4
Not available	83	16	48	13	37	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>504</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>371</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3. Average Number of Days Served in Special Education for Exited Students by Primary Disability

<b>Primary Disability</b>	<b>2007-08</b>	<b>2008-09</b>	<b>2009-10</b>
	<b>AVG Number of Days in Special Education</b>		
Learning Disability	361	683	842
Speech Impairment	411	535	693
Overall	416	535	712

**Table 3** examines the average number of days exited students were served in special education for the 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010 school years. The two most common primary disabilities of students who exited special education were learning disability and speech impairment. Students with a learning disability were in special education about 149 more days than those with a speech impairment in 2009–2010. The average number of days in special education for students with a learning disability (842 days) was also higher than the overall average (712 days) in 2009–2010. From the 2007–2008 school year to the 2009–2010 school year, the average number of days that exited students were served in special education increased from 416 to 712. This is consistent with the results in Table 2 showing that a larger percentage of students being served two to three years were exited in 2009–2010 compared to 2007–2008.

**Table 4** provides the mean and standard deviation for the number of days served in special education by race/ethnicity for exited students. African American students (n=840), had the highest mean number of days served in special education, followed by Hispanic students (n=761), and then White students (n=638). An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether there was a significant difference in the number of days served in special education between the racial/ethnic groups. The number of days served in special education did not differ significantly across the racial/ethnic groups,  $F(4) = 1.343$ ,  $p = .254$ .

Table 4. Mean Number of Days in Special Education for Exited Students by Race/Ethnicity

<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Asian	13	836	655.1
African Am.	116	840	505.7
Hispanic	148	761	605.4
White	54	638	444.4
<b>ANOVA</b>			
	<b>df</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>P-Value</b>
Between Groups	4	1.343	.254

### **Why did students exit from special education?**

There were numerous reasons why students exited special education. Unfortunately, much of these data were unavailable. **Table 5** shows the number of students who exited by reasons from 2007–2008 to 2009–2010. The most common reason why students exited special education was that they no longer qualified for services and returned to general education. During the 2009–2010 school year, the second most common reason students were exited from special education was “revocation of parental consent for services.” Specifically, parents revoked consent for the continued provision of special education and related services. There was no indication in the data why parents made this decision. The number of students with the reason “graduated” is undercounted in Table 5 based on reason codes in Chancery.

**Table 6** presents reasons for special education exits by ethnicity in 2009 as coded in SPEARS. The number of students who exited special education because they graduated was 717 (48.2 percent), much higher than reported in Chancery SIS as an exit reason. African American students made up the largest percent of graduates (45.9 percent) and dropouts (51.1 percent) compared to Hispanic or White students.

The Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) compiles exit data of students ages 14 through 21 with disabilities

Table 5. Reasons Students Exited Special Education in 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010

<b>Reasons</b>	<b>2007-2008</b>	<b>2008-2009</b>	<b>2009-2010</b>
	<b>N</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>N</b>
Did Not Qualify	161	152	139
Graduated	44	42	29
Withdrew	16	1	19
ARD Out of Date	19	7	8
Revocation of Parental Consent for Services	0	4	34
Other	3	6	3
Unavailable	261	158	139
Total	504	370	371

Source: Chancery SIS

Table 6. Reasons for Special Education Exits by Ethnicity in 2009

Race/Ethnicity	Graduate		Dropout		Other Exit		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Asian	9	1.3	*		*		16	1.1
African Am.	329	45.9	145	51.1	208	42.7	682	45.8
Hispanic	314	43.8	127	44.7	237	48.7	678	45.6
White	65	9.1	9	3.2	38	7.8	112	7.5
Total	717	100.0	284	100.0	487	100.0	1,488	100.0

\*Fewer than five

Source: Special Education Ad Hoc Reporting System (SPEARS), 2009

each year. The latest figures from OSEP in 2008 show that the most common reason U.S. students exited special education was that they graduated (34.4 percent). Other reasons why U.S. students exited special education were that they dropped out (14.3 percent) or transferred to regular education (8.2 percent). Alignment of HISD special education exit data and OSEP exit data could not be achieved due to missing HISD data.

### Conclusion

The data regarding students exiting from special education is incomplete. Reliable data would provide valuable information that can be used to monitor students exiting the special education program. Accurate records on the number of students who exit special education services should be maintained. Chancery SIS could provide a drop down list of exit reasons, rather than an open-ended comment field. OSEP utilizes eight exit categories which include “graduated with diploma,” “received a certificate,” “reached maximum age,” “transferred to regular education,” “moved, known to be continuing,” “died,” and “dropped out.” A similar list could be incorporated in Chancery SIS.

### References

U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) database. *Number of students ages 14 through 21 with disabilities served under IDEA, Part B, who exited school, by exit reason and state: Fall 2007-08*. Retrieved from <https://www.idea.data.org/PartBData.asp>

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## APPENDIX

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Students Served in Special Education for the 2007–2008, 2008–2009, and 2009–2010 school years

	<u>2007–08</u>		<u>2008–09</u>		<u>2009–10</u>	
	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>%</u>
<b><u>Ethnicity</u></b>						
American Indian	6	0.0	4	0.0	16	0.1
Asian	230	1.3	227	1.3	206	1.2
African American	7,200	39.5	6,532	38.6	6,187	37.5
Hispanic	9,333	51.2	8,829	52.2	8,777	53.2
White	1,463	8.0	1,326	7.8	1,317	8.0
<b><u>Economically Disadvantaged</u></b>						
Yes	14,848	81.4	14,151	83.6	13,827	80.5
No	3,384	18.6	2,767	16.4	3,216	19.5
<b><u>Primary Disability</u></b>						
Orthopedic Impairment	278	1.5	238	1.4	260	1.6
Other Health Impairment	1,423	7.8	1,430	8.5	1,462	8.9
Auditory Impairment	405	2.2	387	2.3	374	2.3
Visual Impairment	142	0.8	142	0.8	137	0.8
Deaf-Blind	1	0.0	0	0.0	3	0.0
Mental Retardation	1,903	10.4	1,894	11.2	1,915	11.6
Emotional Disturbance	1,107	6.1	966	5.7	861	5.2
Learning Disability	9,425	51.7	8,683	51.3	8,423	51.0
Speech Impairment	2,681	14.7	2,204	13.0	1,962	11.9
Autism	748	4.1	859	5.1	956	5.8
Developmental Delay	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Traumatic Brain Injury	20	0.1	19	0.1	21	0.1
Noncategorical Early Childhood	99	0.5	96	0.6	129	0.8
Total	18,232	100.0	16,918	100.0	16,503	100.0