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# Report to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee

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*Study of Students with Disabilities in  
NC High Schools*

*Session Law: 2008-107, Section 7.12*  
*HB 2436*

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**301 N. Wilmington Street :: Raleigh, North Carolina 27601-2825**

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## **STUDY OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

**SESSION LAW 2008-107, HOUSE BILL 2436, SECTION 7.12.** The Department of Public Instruction shall analyze the participation of students with disabilities in Learn and Earn Early College High Schools, Redesigned High Schools, the North Carolina Virtual Public School, and North Carolina public high schools that are on block schedules. In conducting its analysis, the Department shall consider enrollment, graduation, and dropout rates for students with disabilities in these different programs. The Department shall report its findings and any recommendations to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee and the Joint Legislative Commission on Dropout Prevention and High School Graduation by March 15, 2009.

### **I. Learn and Earn Early College High Schools**

Learn and Earn early college high schools are innovative high school programs designed to graduate students with both a high school diploma and college credit. The first cohort of thirteen Learn and Earn early college high schools in North Carolina opened in the school year of 2005-2006 and included students with disabilities. By April of 2008, 42 Learn and Earn schools were operating in NC.

#### **Enrollment**

The child count of exceptional children (EC Child Count) taken on April 1, 2008, showed that 37 of the 42 Learn and Earn early college high schools were serving students with disabilities. Of the 4,977 total students enrolled in these high schools, 289 (5.8%) were students with disabilities.

Of the 289 students with disabilities enrolled in the Learn and Earn high schools, 283 (98%) were placed in regular setting (80% or more of the day with nondisabled peers).

There are thirteen categories of disability that are applicable to high school aged students. Students representing ten of these categories were enrolled in the Learn and Earn high schools. These categories are listed below.

Disability Category	Number enrolled
Autism	11
Hearing Impairment	6
Intellectual Disability	4
Orthopedic Impairment	4
Other Health Impairment	88
Serious Emotional Disability	16
Specific Learning Disability	149
Speech or Language Impairment	7
Traumatic Brain Injury	1
Visual Impairment	3

Note: No students in the categories of Deaf-blindness, Deafness, or Multiple Disabilities were enrolled.

Of the 289 students with disabilities enrolled, 93 were female and 196 were male. None of the students with disabilities were also identified as students with Limited English Proficiency. The race/ethnicity breakdown was as follows: Black-34%, Hispanic-3%, Multiracial -8%, White-60%.

#### Graduation

The Exceptional Children Exit Count shows that 30 students with disabilities graduated from Learn and Earn high schools with a regular diploma in 2008. According to The New Schools Project website, in most cases, early college students stay in high school five years to complete college courses. For this reason the four year graduation rate may not be as meaningful as the five year rate. Most of the Learn and Earn high schools are too new to report a complete graduation rate. From data available from six schools, the 2008 four year graduation rate for students with disabilities (based on only 18 students) was 94.4%. The rate for all students in this group of schools was 87.55%.

#### Dropouts

According to the EC Exit Count, two students with disabilities dropped out of Learn and Earn High Schools during the school year 2007- 2008. The 2007-2008 dropout rate for students with disabilities in Learn and Earn high schools was 0.69%. The rate for all students in Learn and Earn high schools was 0.94%.

## II. Redesigned High Schools

Redesigned high schools transform traditional high schools into smaller schools that use academic themes such as health science, international studies, information technology or engineering to connect to the knowledge-based economy into which students will graduate. The first cohort of eleven Redesigned high schools opened in the school year of 2005-2006 and included students with disabilities. By April of 2008, 44 Redesigned high schools were operating in North Carolina.

### Enrollment

The EC Child Count taken on April 1, 2008, showed that 41 of the 44 Redesigned high schools were serving students with disabilities. Of the 8,795 students enrolled in these high schools, 1165 (13.2%) were students with disabilities. The students with disabilities were served in the following educational settings:

Educational Setting	Number of Students
Home/Hospital	27
Separate School *	1
Regular (80% or more of the day with nondisabled peers)	685
Resource (40%-79% of the day with nondisabled peers)	200
Separate (39% or less of the day with nondisabled peers)	252

\* This most likely represents a reporting error.

There are thirteen categories of disability that are applicable to high school aged students. Students representing 11 of these categories were enrolled in the Redesigned high schools. These categories are listed below.

Disability Category	Number enrolled
Autism	24
Hearing Impairment	15
Intellectual Disability	286
Multiple Disabilities	13
Orthopedic Impairment	1
Other Health Impairment	193
Serious Emotional Disability	57
Specific Learning Disability	557
Speech or Language Impairment	9
Traumatic Brain Injury	5
Visual Impairment	5

Note: No students in the categories of Deaf-blindness or Deafness were enrolled.

Of the 1165 students with disabilities enrolled, 400 were female and 765 were male. Twenty-five of the students with disabilities were also identified as students with Limited English Proficiency. The race/ethnicity breakdown is as follows: American Indian - 6%, Black - 50%, White - 38%, with the remaining 6% divided among Asian, Hispanic, and Multiracial.

#### Graduation

The EC Exit Count shows that 114 students with disabilities graduated from Redesigned high schools with regular diplomas in 2008. The 2008 four year cohort graduation rate for students with disabilities in Redesigned high schools, based on reports from 24 schools, was 69.9%. The rate for all students in this group of schools was 67.9%.

#### Dropouts

According to the EC Exit Count, 78 students with disabilities dropped out of Redesigned high schools in 2008. The 2007-2008 dropout rate for students with disabilities in Redesigned high schools was 6.70%. The rate for all students in Redesigned high schools was 5.63%.

### III. North Carolina Virtual Public School

The North Carolina Virtual Public School (NCVPS) offers an online educational opportunity for students across the state to take courses that currently are unavailable at their local high school. These courses may be AP courses that the local school does not offer or a course needed for graduation that is not offered in a particular semester. The Virtual Public School also can provide a home bound or hospital bound student access to a particular course that the student needs to complete to stay on schedule to graduate.

#### Enrollment

Enrollment data for the North Carolina Virtual Public School is recorded by course offering. Because a student may be enrolled in more than one course during a semester, the student enrollment for the semester is a duplicate count.

In the spring of 2008, the total course enrollment in NCVPS was 4365. Of this number 132 courses (3.02%) were being accessed by students with disabilities. When

enrollment data from the spring of 2008 were matched with EC Child Count Data from April 2008, 73 individual students were identified.

The students with disabilities were served in the following educational settings:

<b>Educational Setting</b>	<b>Number of Students</b>
Regular ( 80% or more of day with nondisabled peers)	57
Resource ( 40%-79% of day with nondisabled peers)	10
Separate ( 39% or less of day with nondisabled peers)	1
Hospital/Homebound	5

The 73 students enrolled in NCVPS in the spring of 2008 represented seven disability categories. These categories are listed below:

<b>Disability Category</b>	<b>Number Enrolled</b>
Autism	3
Intellectual Disability	2
Other Health Impairment	19
Hearing Impairment	1
Specific Learning Disability	36
Serious Emotional Disability	11
Visual Impairment	1

Of the 73 students with disabilities enrolled, 25 were female and 48 were male. The race/ethnicity breakdown is as follows: Black-23%, White- 71% with the remaining 6% divided among American Indian, Hispanic and Multiracial.

#### Graduation

A cohort graduation rate has not been calculated for NCVPS; however, the EC Exit count does show that 13 students with disabilities who were enrolled in courses through the NCVPS graduated in 2007-2008.

## Dropouts

According to the EC Exit Count, 3 students with disabilities who were enrolled for courses in the NCVPS dropped out during 2007-2008. The dropout rate for students with disabilities in NCVPS was 4.11%. The data collected for all students in NCVPS does not support a calculation of the dropout rate.

## IV. NC Public High Schools with Block Schedules

The data on scheduling that is routinely collected by NCDPI does not indicate whether the schedule of a student is a traditional or a block schedule. However, a 1997 study conducted by Accountability Services Division reported that about 65% of NC high schools used block schedules indicating that block scheduling had become firmly established in North Carolina by the latter part of the 1990s.

## Enrollment

In order to ascertain the current use of block scheduling and the participation of students with disabilities in block scheduling, a survey of LEA Directors of Exceptional Children was conducted in November 2008. Almost half of the LEAs responded. The respondents were a broad representation of the eight regions of the state and included rural, urban, large, and small districts.

The results of the survey of EC Directors indicated that 99% of high schools use some form of block schedule at this time and that virtually all students with disabilities are participating in block scheduling.

## Graduation and Dropout Rates

Because of the prevalence of block scheduling throughout the state and the inclusion of students with disabilities in block schedules, there is no difference between the graduation rate and dropout rate of students with disabilities in block schedules and the graduation rate and dropout rate of students in the state as a whole.

## Possible Impacts

In an effort to obtain a better understanding of the possible impacts of block scheduling on students with disabilities, the EC directors were asked also for their opinions about the advantages and disadvantages of the schedules and their opinions on the impact of block scheduling on graduation and dropout rates.



Survey respondents cited the following advantages of block scheduling for students with disabilities:

- Students are required to focus on only four courses allowing them time to concentrate their efforts.
- Students have less transition among multiple classes and have more direct instruction time.
- Students have more opportunities to earn course credits, including retaking courses if necessary and taking more electives.
- Students have more time for relevant instructional practices, such as hands-on projects and more time for OCS job activities.
- Students with disabilities have more time for interaction with nondisabled students.

Survey respondents cited the following disadvantages of block scheduling for students with disabilities:

- The effects of weak teaching strategies and ineffective classroom management are magnified by the longer class period.
- The class period may be too long for students, especially those with attention deficits.
- The volume of course content and required pacing does not allow for processing time required by some students with disabilities. Also the content and pacing makes it difficult for a student who is absent from school to make up assignments and/or prepare for tests.
- Students lose content and skills when sequential courses are not taught in consecutive semesters and when End of Course tests are not administered immediately.
- Scheduling of support services is difficult.
- The change from Middle School without block schedules to High School 9<sup>th</sup> grade with block schedules may be extremely difficult for students who are already challenged by the transition.

Most survey respondents did not attribute block scheduling with any impact on the graduation rate of students with disabilities. Some did think it had an effect, and that group was evenly divided between positive and negative.

More than half of the respondents expressed an opinion that block scheduling causes an increase in dropouts among SWD. Specific reasons that were mentioned include:

- Absences cause students to fall too far behind.
- Poor use of class time causes behavior problems and suspension.
- Students are frustrated.
- Students feel overloaded.

Survey respondents were asked to describe the challenges that block scheduling presents to Special Education staff. The overwhelming response was the difficulty in scheduling services to meet the needs of the students.

Services for students with disabilities include in-class support for students in general education classes, direct instruction for remediation, small group instruction for the development of study skills and case management which includes assuring implementation of specific provisions in the student's Individualized Education Program. Time to meet the needs of individual students and time for collaboration between special education and general education colleagues is an ongoing challenge.

## V. Summary of students with disabilities in the four types of high schools

Type of school	Enrollment	4 yr. graduation rate	Dropout rate
Learn and Earn Early College HS	5.8%	94.4%	0.69%
Redesigned HS	13.2%	69.9%	5.63%
NC Virtual Public School	3.02%	NA	4.11%
Block schedule	NA	NA	NA

### Notes:

Enrollment figures for all students in Learn and Earn early college high schools and Redesigned high schools come from 8<sup>th</sup> month membership data.

Dropout rates for students with disabilities in the Learn and Earn early college high schools, Redesigned high schools and North Carolina Virtual Public School were calculated by dividing the number of EC dropouts by the number of students with disabilities reported on April 1, 2008.

Dropout rates for all students in Learn and Earn early college high schools and Redesigned high schools were calculated by dividing the number of dropouts by the number of students in membership for month 8 of the 2007-2008 school year. This is not exactly the same method of calculation used for the official NC dropout report, but is more useful for comparison to the rates for students with disabilities.