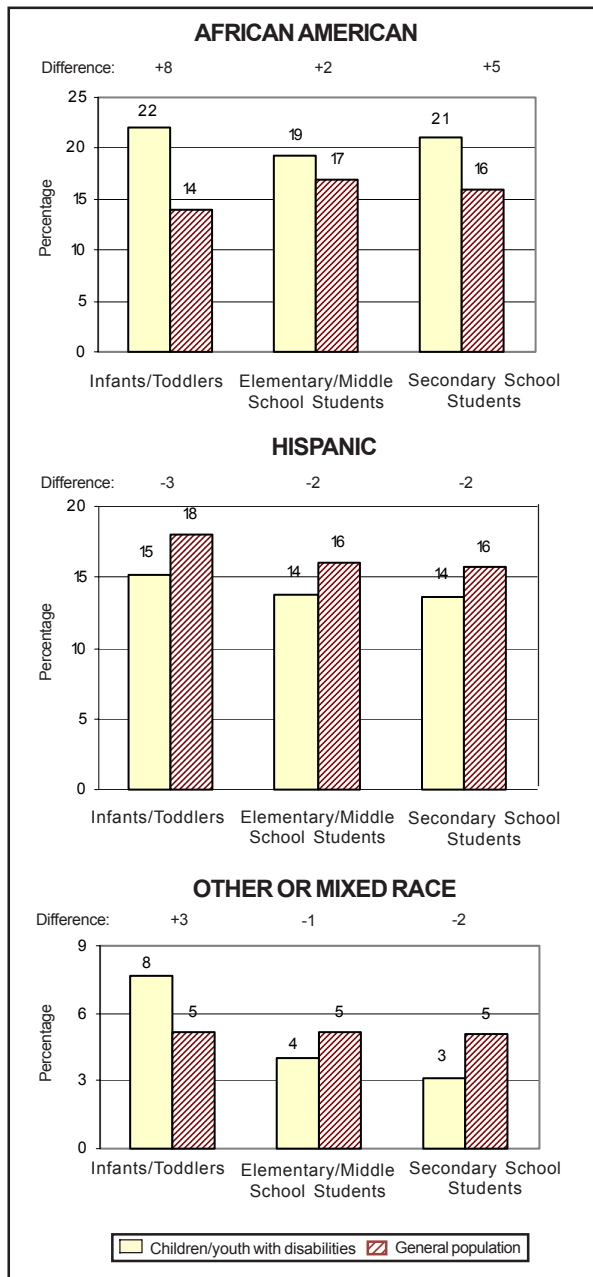


### MINORITIES AMONG CHILDREN AND YOUTH WITH DISABILITIES



The representation of minorities among children and youth with disabilities is receiving considerable public and policy interest. OSEP's program of national longitudinal studies of children and youth with disabilities provides important information on this issue for infants and toddlers and students at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.<sup>1</sup>

#### How do the proportions of minorities among children and youth with disabilities across the age range differ from those in the general population?

At all ages, African Americans are greater proportions of children and youth with disabilities than of children in general. The largest difference is among infants and toddlers (8 percentage points). Among school-age students, the difference is from 2 to 5 percentage points.

Hispanic students appear at a somewhat lower rate among children and youth with disabilities than in the general population—differences are from 2 to 3 percentage points across the age range.

Children of "other" or "mixed" racial/ethnic backgrounds occur somewhat more often among infants and toddlers with disabilities than the general population, by about 3 percentage points; they are smaller proportions of school-age students, by 1 to 2 percentage points.

<sup>1</sup> The National Early Intervention Longitudinal Study (NEILS) includes a nationally representative sample of more than 3,000 children who were ages birth to 30 months and receiving early intervention services in 1998. The Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) has a nationally representative sample of more than 11,000 students who were ages 6 to 12, in at least first grade, and receiving special education in September 1999. The sample for the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) is similar to SEELS, but consists of youth who were ages 13 to 16 in December 2000. The original NLTS provided information on a nationally representative sample of secondary school students with disabilities in 1987.

## Do the proportions of minorities vary for children and youth with different disabilities?

Yes. For example, among elementary and middle school students, those with mental retardation and emotional disturbances are markedly more likely to be African American than are students in other disability categories. The proportion of Hispanic students differs from the general population most noticeably among those with mental retardation. Students with learning disabilities and speech/language impairments have about the same racial/ethnic distribution as students with hearing or orthopedic impairments. Thus, disproportionality appears to be concentrated largely among elementary and middle school students in only a few disability categories.

Disability Category	Percentage Who Are:		
	African American	Hispanic	Other/Mixed
General student population	17	15	5
Students with:			
Learning disabilities	18	16	4
Speech/language impairments	16	12	5
Mental retardation	35	9	3
Emotional disturbances	27	13	3
Hearing impairments	14	16	5
Orthopedic impairments	18	14	3

## How has the representation of minorities among high school youth with disabilities changed over time?

The racial/ethnic distribution of students with disabilities has become more like that of the general population over time. For example, in 1987, 24% of high school students with disabilities were African American, when African Americans were 16% of the general population, a difference of 8 percentage points. By 2001, the gap had closed to about 5 percentage points. The proportion of Hispanics among students with disabilities was lower than in the general population by 2 percentage points at both time periods. Students of “other” or “mixed” racial/ethnic backgrounds were similar percentages in the two populations.

However, these changes did not affect all disability categories equally. The proportion of African-American high school students came closer over time to that in the general population for most disability categories; for example, they were 27% of students with speech impairments in 1987 and 17% in 2001. The one exception was students with mental retardation, among whom African Americans increased from 30% of the population in 1987 to 33% in 2001. The proportion of Hispanic students with disabilities also more closely resembled the general population, with one exception; they were 7% of students with other health impairments in 2001, a decline from 24% in 1987.

