

FACTS

from **OSEP's National Longitudinal Studies**

June 2005

Parents' Satisfaction with Their Children's Schooling

The evidence is persuasive and consistent that families play a critical role in nurturing their children's educational growth.¹ Family support for learning is important for all students, but it may be particularly important for children with disabilities. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, amended in 2004, (IDEA) has a long history of supporting parents' collaboration with schools and active participation in decision-making related to their children's education. In addition, IDEA provides parents with special procedural safeguards, such as mediation and due process hearings, if they are not satisfied with their children's education or services. Parents' assessments of their children's schools inform parents' actions and have been associated with differences in levels of family involvement in their children's educational development.²

¹ Henderson, A. T., & Mapp, K. L. (2002). *A new wave of evidence: The impact of school, family, and community connections on student achievement*. Austin, TX: Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.

² Newman, L. (2005). *Family involvement in the educational development of youth with disabilities*. Menlo Park, CA: SRI International.

Newman, L. (2004). A national study of parent involvement in education of youth with disabilities. In D. B. Hiatt-Michael (Ed.), *Promising practices connecting school to families of children with special needs* (pp. 25-39). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

Two of OSEP's national longitudinal studies of children and youth receiving special education—SEELS and NLTS³—provide the first nationally representative information about the satisfaction of parents of students with disabilities with their children's education, services, teachers, and schools, as well as with the efforts by schools to keep them informed of their children's performance. To ascertain parents' opinions about these aspects of their children's schooling, parents in both studies were asked to rate them using a four-point scale that ranges from "very satisfied" to "very dissatisfied."

³ The Special Education Elementary Longitudinal Study (SEELS) has a nationally representative sample of more than 11,000 students who were in at least first grade and receiving special education services in the 1999-2000 school year and were ages 6 through 13 when data first were collected in 2000. The sample for the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2) is similar to that of SEELS but consists of youth who were in at least seventh grade and receiving special education when selected for the study and were ages 13 through 17 when data first were collected in 2001. Information from SEELS and NLTS2 is weighted to represent youth with disabilities nationally as a group, as well as youth in each of the federal special education disability categories. Both studies are being conducted by SRI International for OSEP. See www.seels.net and www.nlts2.org for more information about the studies.

Most parents are satisfied with most measured aspects of their children’s schooling.

When asked about their children’s schools, most parents of students with disabilities report being at least somewhat satisfied (Exhibit 1). Nearly 9 in 10 parents of 6- to 13-year-olds and 8 in 10 parents of 13- to 17-year-olds are somewhat or very satisfied with their children’s schools. Similar percentages report being satisfied with their children’s overall education (90% and 86%) and with their children’s teachers (90% and 86%).

Parents tend to report higher levels of satisfaction with specific aspects of their children’s schooling, such as services received or the schools’ communication efforts, than with their children’s education overall. From 62% to 65% of parents of younger students report being very satisfied with their children’s teachers, special education services, and the amount of information they receive from the schools, compared with 52% to 54% indicating they are very satisfied with their children’s schools or overall education.⁴ Similar to their peers with younger students, parents of secondary-school-age students tend to be more satisfied with their children’s special education services (50% report being very satisfied) and the efforts by schools to keep them informed about children’s behavior and performance (53% very satisfied) than with their children’s schools (37% very satisfied) or overall education (40% very satisfied). Unlike parents of younger students, they are not significantly more likely to be satisfied with their children’s teachers (44% report being “very satisfied”) than they are with their children’s schools or overall education.

Parents of elementary and middle school students consistently report higher levels of satisfaction with all aspects of their children’s schooling than parents of secondary-school-age students. Parents of younger students are 12 to 19 percentage points more likely than parents of older students to report being very satisfied with each aspect of their children’s education. The gap is the widest for satisfaction with teachers; 63% of parents of 6- to 13-year-olds report being very satisfied with their children’s teachers, compared with 44% of parents of 13- to 17-year-olds.

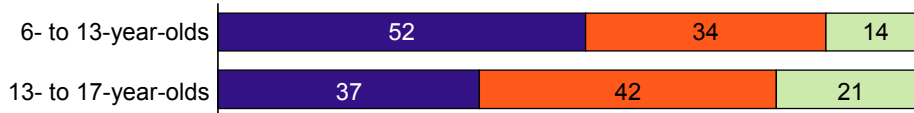
A sizable group give their children’s schooling low marks.

Although the majority of parents of students with disabilities are at least somewhat satisfied with all aspects of their children’s schooling, the percentages who report being dissatisfied are not trivial. Fourteen percent of parents of 6- to 13-year-olds report being somewhat or very dissatisfied with their children’s schools. From 10% to 12% report dissatisfaction with their children’s overall education, teachers, special education services, and the amount of information they receive from the schools. The percentage who report being dissatisfied is higher for parents of older students. Approximately one in five parents of 13- to 17-year-olds report dissatisfaction with their children’s schools in general. Furthermore, 14% report dissatisfaction with the education their children receive and/or their children’s teachers, and 16% report dissatisfaction with the special education services received by their children and the information they receive from the schools about their children’s behavior and/or academic performance.

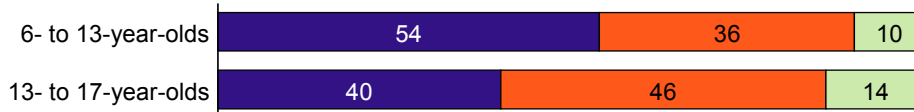
⁴ Only statistically significant differences are mentioned in the text.

**Exhibit 1
PARENTS' SATISFACTION WITH THE SCHOOLING OF THEIR CHILDREN
WITH DISABILITIES, BY STUDENT'S AGE**

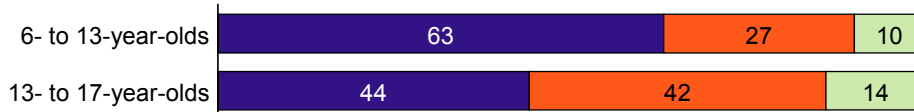
Satisfaction with student's school for:



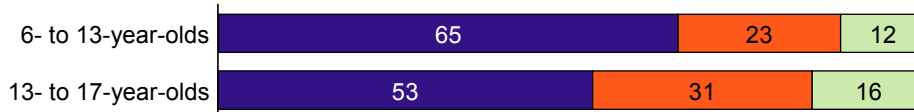
Satisfaction with overall education for:



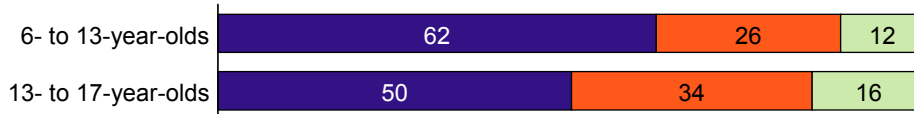
Satisfaction with teachers for:



Satisfaction with amount of information school provides parents about student's behavior and academic performance for:



Satisfaction with special education services received by student for:



Percentage

■ Very satisfied
 ■ Somewhat satisfied
 ■ Somewhat/very dissatisfied

Sources: SEELS Wave 1 parent interviews, 2000 (for ages 6-13); NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews, 2001 (for ages 13-17).

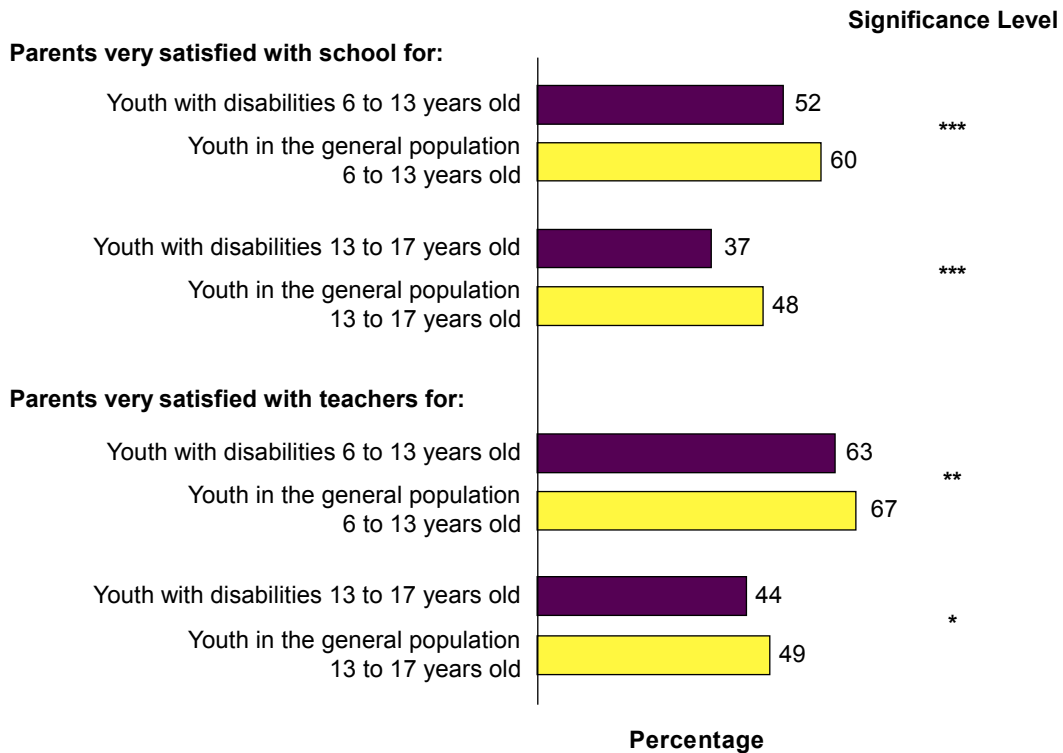
Compared with parents of students with disabilities, parents of students in the general population report higher levels of satisfaction with their children's schooling.

Parents of students with disabilities tend to be less satisfied with their children's schooling than their peers in the general population. The difference is most apparent for those who report being very satisfied with their children's schools. Parents of similar-age students in the general

population are 8 percentage points more likely than parents of 6- to 13-year-olds with disabilities, and 11 percentage points more likely than parents of 13- to 17-year-olds with disabilities, to report that they are very satisfied with their children's schools (Exhibit 2).⁵

⁵ Calculated for 6- to 13-year-olds and 13- to 17-year-olds using data from the National Household Education Survey, 1999.

Exhibit 2
SATISFACTION WITH SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS AMONG PARENTS OF STUDENTS WITH
DISABILITIES AND PARENTS OF STUDENTS IN THE GENERAL POPULATION



Sources: SEELS Wave 1 parent interviews, 2000 (for youth with disabilities ages 6-13); NLTS2 Wave 1 parent interviews, 2001 (for youth with disabilities ages 13-17); National Household Education Survey, 1999 (for 6- to 13-year-olds and 13- to 17-year-olds in the general population).

Statistically significant difference in a two-tailed test at the following levels: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Similarly, parents of youth in the general population are more likely to say they are very satisfied with their children’s teachers. Sixty three percent of younger and 44% of older students with disabilities have parents who report being very satisfied with their children’s teachers, somewhat lower than the 67% and 49% reported by parents of similar-age students in the general population, respectively.

Across disability categories, parents of students with visual, hearing, or speech impairments tend to report higher levels of satisfaction with most aspects of their children’s schooling.

Parents’ satisfaction with their children’s schooling differs somewhat by student’s disability category (Exhibit 3). The highest levels of satisfaction with most aspects of students’ schooling tend to be expressed by parents of students with visual, hearing, or speech impairments, followed by parents of students with mental retardation. Parents of

Exhibit 3
PARENTS' SATISFACTION WITH SCHOOLING, BY DISABILITY CATEGORY

	Learning Disability	Speech/ Language Impairment	Mental Retardation	Emotional Disturbance	Hearing Impairment	Visual Impairment	Orthopedic Impairment	Other Health Impairment	Autism	Traumatic Brain Injury	Multiple Disabilities	Deaf-Blindness
Percentage of parents very or somewhat satisfied with:												
Student's school												
6- to 13-year-olds	84	90	86	78	86	88	88	80	83	81	81	75
13- to 17-year-olds	80	85	85	71	83	85	80	73	79	73	82	87
Student's overall education												
6- to 13-year-olds	88	94	88	84	92	92	91	91	87	84	88	88
13- to 17-year-olds	86	90	90	81	91	93	88	83	87	83	87	88
Student's teachers												
6- to 13-year-olds	87	93	90	85	91	93	91	87	87	88	90	82
13- to 17-year-olds	86	88	88	82	90	90	86	81	86	84	88	88
Amount of information school provides about student's behavior and academic performance												
6- to 13-year-olds	86	92	91	84	89	91	91	83	86	88	90	84
13- to 17-year-olds	84	83	90	79	88	88	83	76	82	85	88	88
Student's special education services												
6- to 13-year-olds	87	91	88	80	89	90	89	84	83	83	84	91
13- to 17-year-olds	85	86	87	78	88	87	84	77	79	79	85	84

Sources: SEELS Wave 1 parent interviews, 2000 (for ages 6-13); NLT2 Wave 1 parent interviews, 2001 (for ages 13-17).

students in these disability categories consistently are among those most likely to report being very or somewhat satisfied with their children's overall education, teachers, services, and the efforts by schools to keep them informed about their children's behavior and performance.

Parents of students with emotional disturbances consistently convey the greatest levels of dissatisfaction.

Across disability categories, parents of students with emotional disturbances express the lowest levels of satisfaction with most aspects of their children's schooling. These families report their greatest dissatisfaction with the schools overall.

Twenty-two percent of families of 6- to 13-year-old students with emotional disturbances and 29% of families of older students with emotional disturbances report being somewhat or very dissatisfied with their children's schools. From 15% to 22% of families of students with emotional disturbances report being dissatisfied with other aspects of their children's education, including their children's overall education, teachers, special education services, and the communication efforts of their children's schools. Parents of youth with other health impairments, traumatic brain injuries, or autism also report high rates of dissatisfaction with their children's education, teachers, and schools.

Parents' satisfaction varies by some student demographic characteristics, particularly for parents of younger students.

Parents' satisfaction with their children's schooling differs by racial/ethnic category for 6- to 13-year-old students. Parents of younger African-American students with disabilities are less likely to report being satisfied with their children's schools, overall education, and teachers than parents of white or Hispanic students. When asked about their satisfaction with their children's schools, 44% of parents of 6- to 13-year-old African-American students with disabilities are very satisfied, compared with 54% of parents of white and Hispanic students. This group also is less satisfied with their children's overall schooling; 48% of parents of young African-American students report being very satisfied, compared with 55% of parents of white students and 59% of parents of Hispanic students. Parents of 6- to 13-year-old African-American students also are more dissatisfied with their children's teachers than parents of white students; 7% report being very dissatisfied, compared with 3% of parents of white students. In contrast, parents' satisfaction does not differ by student race/ethnicity for parents of 13- to 17-year-olds with disabilities.

Parents' satisfaction with most aspects of their children's schooling does not differ by household income, with two exceptions. Parents of 6- to 13-year-old students from middle- and lower-income families are less satisfied with their children's schools than wealthier peers; 16% of families with incomes of \$25,000 or less and 17% of those with household incomes between \$25,000 and \$50,000 are dissatisfied with their children's schools, compared with 10% of families with incomes of more than \$50,000. In addition, parents of older students from higher- and middle-income families are

more likely to report being dissatisfied with the efforts of schools to keep them informed about the behavior and performance of their children; 19% of families with household incomes of more than \$50,000 and 18% of those with incomes between \$25,000 and \$50,000 are dissatisfied with the communication efforts of their children's schools, compared with 12% of families with incomes of \$25,000 or less.

Parents' satisfaction with their children's education does not differ by student gender.

Despite varying levels of dissatisfaction, few families participate in formal dispute resolution.

Families of students with disabilities have the option of entering mediation and/or due process hearings if they are not satisfied with decisions the school makes concerning their children's identification for special education, evaluation, educational placement, or the provision of a free and appropriate public education, as guaranteed by law. Mediation is a voluntary "dispute settlement process in which a qualified and impartial third person (called a mediator) tries to negotiate a solution or compromise to the dispute."⁶ A due process hearing "involves an impartial third party—called a hearing officer—who hears the evidence and issues a decision based upon that evidence and the requirements of the IDEA...The decision is considered final, unless one of the parties involved in the hearing appeals the decision to the SEA [State Education Agency]."⁷

⁶ NICHCY. (2000). *Questions and answers about IDEA*, p. 20.

<http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/newsdig/nd21.pdf>

⁷ NICHCY. (2000). *Questions and answers about IDEA*, pp. 21-22.

<http://www.nichcy.org/pubs/newsdig/nd21.pdf>

Eleven percent of families of 13- to 17-year-olds⁸ have been through mediation, and 5% have been through a due process hearing at some time in their children's school careers. More than half of those who participated in a due process hearing or mediation reported receiving the services they requested for their children as an outcome of the proceeding.

Conclusion: Overall, parents have positive attitudes about their children's school experiences.

NLTS2 and SEELS offer an opportunity to examine parents' perceptions of their children's special education services and of the schools and teachers who provide those services. From this national perspective, a clear majority of parents offer positive reviews of their children's experiences while in school. These findings are consistent with those from other studies that show parents of students with disabilities as generally satisfied with the education and services their children receive.⁹



⁸ Parents of 6- to 13-year-olds were not asked about participation in mediation or due process hearings.

⁹ Gordon, S. M., & Miller, H. (2003). *Parents as active team members: Where does accountability for a child's special education rest?* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago.

Green, S. K., & Shinn, M. R. (1994). Parent attitudes about special education and reintegration. What is the role of student outcomes? *Exceptional Children*, 61(3), 269-281.

Johnson, J., & Duffett, A. (2002). *When it's your own child: A report on special education from the families who use it*. New York: Public Agenda.

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