



**EVANSTON/SKOKIE**  
SCHOOL DISTRICT 65

Every Child, Every Day, Whatever it Takes

**TO: Evanston/Skokie District 65 Board of Education**

**CC: Dr. Heidi Wennstrom & Dr. Phil Ehrhardt, Interim Superintendents**

**FROM: Dr. Romy DeCristofaro, Executive Director of Special Services**

**DATE: May 18, 2020**

**RE: Special Education Trends**

**Objective:**     Information     Discussion     Follow-up     Decision

---

**Background:**

Each year, the State Board of Education asks for a report from school districts concerning special education enrollment. This data is important for special education funding and for monitoring trends in disability identification. The purpose of this report is to provide information regarding current special education enrollment trends, including prevalence of disabilities, educational environments, and learning outcomes by educational environment and race. Implications and recommendations are also provided.

To service children with identified disabilities, District 65 provides a full continuum of special education services from birth through eighth grade. Depending on the identified needs of students documented in their Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), special education services can be provided in educational settings ranging from the general education environment to special education classrooms and special education schools. The below graphic illustrates an example of the educational environments from least restrictive (on the left) to most restrictive (on the right). In District 65 school, students with IEPs may spend time across settings depending on their needs.



**Table 1: Percentage of D65 K-8 Students with IEPs by Educational Environment**

Educational Setting	Percentage of Students with IEPs
80% or more in general education	56.8%
40%-79% in general education	23.8%
Less than 40% in general education	9%
Separate Setting	10.5%

Table 1 shows the percentage of District 65 students with IEPs and how much time these students spend in the general education setting or in a special education setting.

**Table 2: Percentage of Students in Educational Environment Compared to State and Nation**

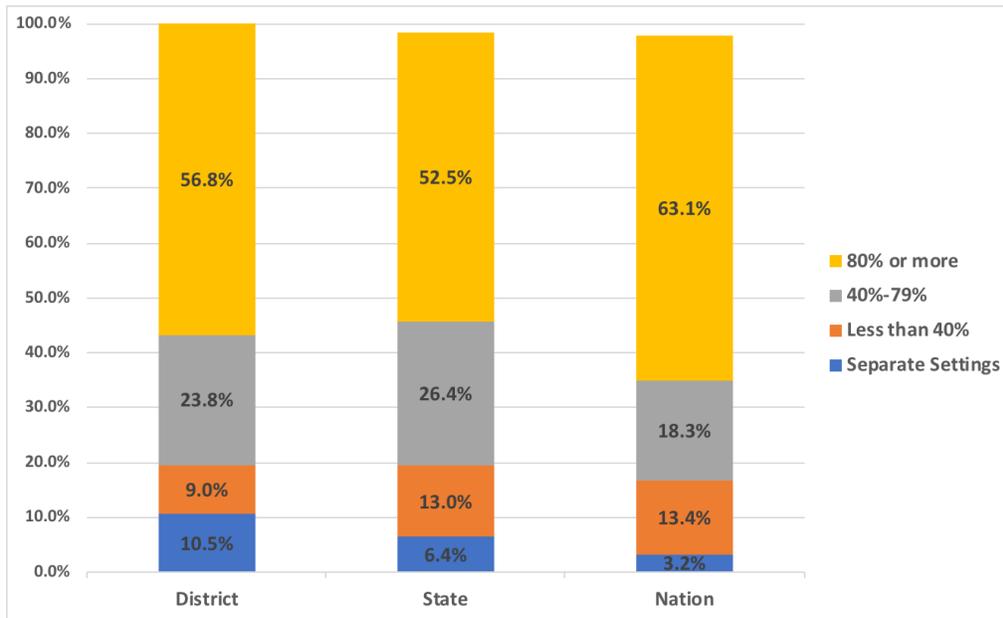


Table 2 provides information about where District 65 students with IEPs spend their time compared to other students across the state and nation. A relative strength of District 65 is the high percentage of students who spend 80% or more of their time engaged in learning in the general educational environment. Notably, District 65 has a higher percentage of students who are educated in separate schools. Most of the District 65 students who attend school in a separate setting (approximately 74%) attend school at Park and Rice.

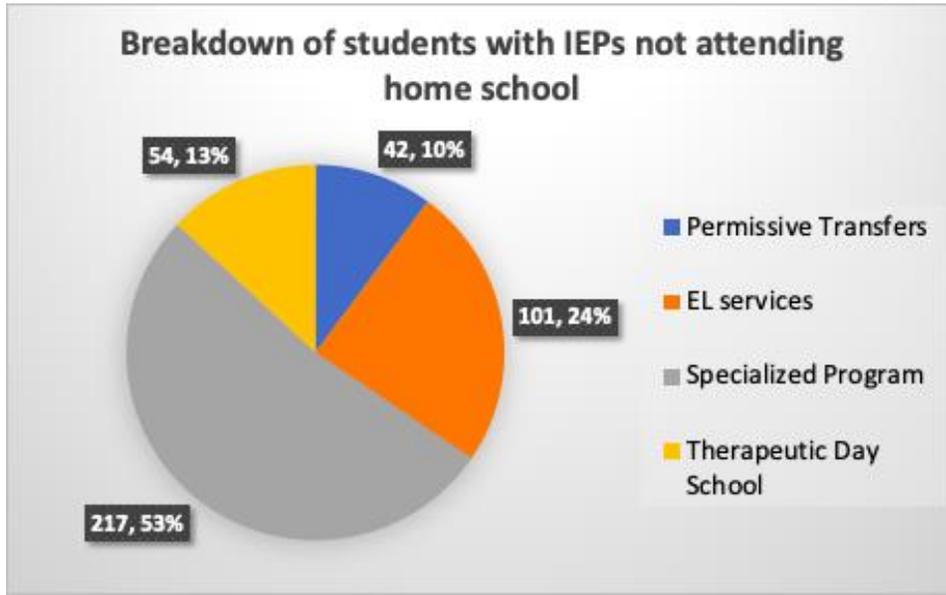
District 65 currently has a variety of specialized programs available for students with disabilities. Table 3 outlines information about the service options currently available in each of our District 65 schools.

**Table 3: Classrooms and Services Currently Available in District 65**

School	Inclusion & Resource	Bilingual Special Services	Self-Contained (cross categorical)	Special School
JEH	X	X	X	
Dawes	X	X	X (k-5)	
Dewey	X	X	X (k-3)	
Kingsley	X			
Lincoln	X		X Communication Development Classroom (k-5)	
Lincolnwood	X		X (3-5)	
Oakton	X	X	X (k-2)	
Orrington	X		X (K-5)	
Walker	X			
Washington	X	X		
Willard	X	X		
Bessie Rhodes	X	X		
King Arts	X		X Options Program (k-8)	
Chute	X	X	X	
Haven	X	X	X	
Nichols	X	X	X Communication Development Classroom (6-8)	
Rice				X
Park				X

There are limitations within our current delivery model, particularly regarding bilingual services and self-contained options across all school sites. These limitations have led to 404 students with IEPs (or 38% of all students with IEPs) attending a school that is not their home school.

**Table 4: Percentage of Students not Attending Home School**



*\* Data from November 2019*

Table 4 provides a breakdown of the reasons students with IEPs do not attend their home school. Fifty-three percent (or 217 students) attend a specialized program such as Rice, Park, the Communication Development Classroom, Options, or a Cross-Categorical classroom. Twenty-Four percent of students with IEPs (101 students) who are also eligible for English Bilingual services (previously known as English Learner or EL services) attend a different school in order to receive these services. Since District 65 allows permissive transfers and has two magnet schools, there are general education students who also do not attend their home school. To compare, 76% of General Education students attend their home school compared to 62% of students with IEPs. The special education department has a goal to create an equitable learning environment for all students with IEPs and to increase access and opportunities in each child's home school, similar to the opportunities available to general education students.

**Table 5: Total Number of Students with Disabilities from 2012-2019**

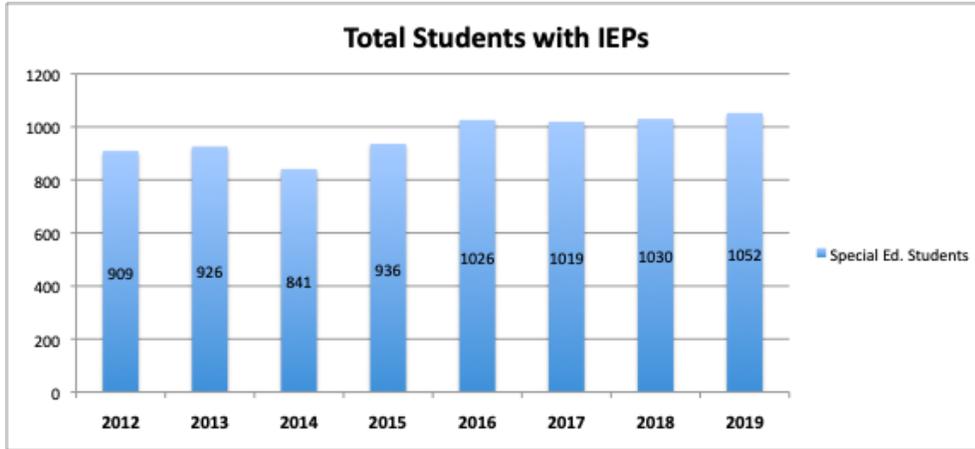


Table 5 provides information about the total number of students with disabilities as documented in the Opening of Schools report going back to 2012. There has been an increase of students with IEPs over the years, concurrent with a slight decrease in overall student enrollment. The current percentage of students with IEPs in District 65 is 14%, which is less than the state average of 16%.

**Table 6: Comparison of Nearby School District’s Percentages of Students with IEPs**

District	2015	2019
State Average	14%	16% (+2)
Evanston/Skokie SD 65	13%	*14% (+1)
Skokie SD 68	15%	16% (+1)
Skokie SD 69	11%	14% (+3)
Skokie SD 73.5	16%	15% (-1)
Wilmette SD 39	12%	17% (+5)
Morton Grove SD 70	13%	14% (+1)

\*D65 percentage is based on current IEP numbers in 2020. Other district and state information is from the Illinois school report card.

Table 6 provides comparative information with other local area districts and shows that the percentage of students with disabilities in District 65 has increased, which is consistent with most other nearby school districts and across the state.

**Table 7: Percentage of Students by Disability Category in District and State**

	AU	D	DD	ED	HI	ID	MD	O	OHI	SLD	TBI	SLI	VI
<b>D65</b>	11.5%	0%	11.6%	9.7%	1%	4.5%	2.2%	0%	14.4%	30.4%	0%	15.5%	0%
<b>State</b>	9%	0%	13%	6%	1%	5%	1%	0%	13%	34%	0%	16%	0%

AU:Autism, D:Deaf, DD:Developmental Delay, ED: Emotional Disability, HI: Hearing Impairment, ID: Intellectual Disability, MD: Multiple Disability, O: Orthopedic Impairment, OHI: Other Health Impairment, SLD: Specific Learning Disability, TBI: Traumatic Brain Injury, SLI: Speech/Language Impairment, VI: Vision Impairment

Table 7 provides the percentage of students in District 65 in each disability category and how it compares to averages across the state. The percentage of disabilities are mostly consistent with state averages. However, worth mentioning is the high percentage of students with Emotional Disabilities in District 65 (9.7%) which is higher than the state average of 6%.

**Table 8: Percentage of Students by Disability Category and Educational Setting**

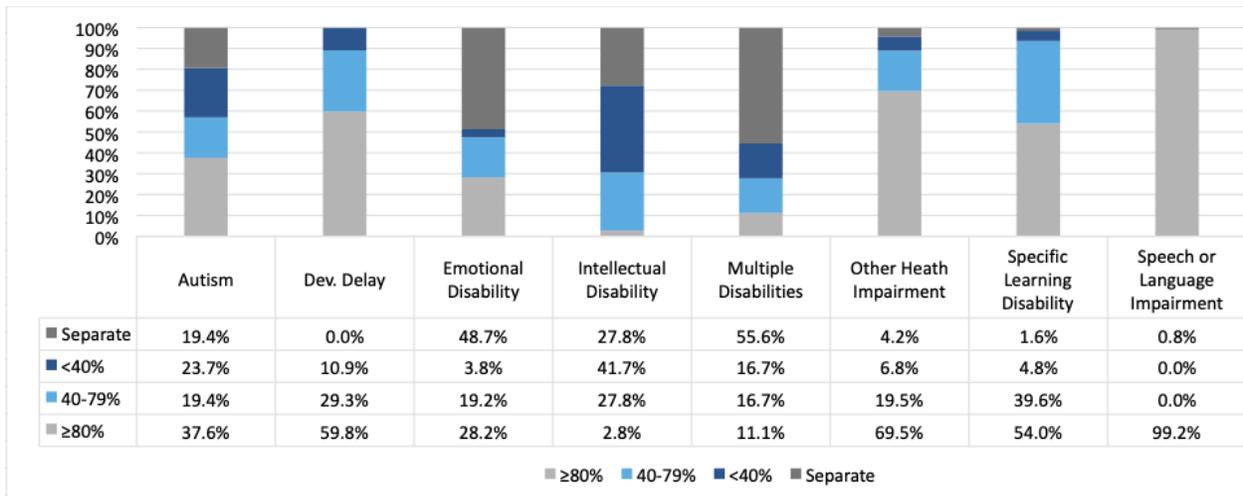


Table 8 provides an analysis of our most prevalent disabilities and shows the percentage of students in each disability category and the amount of time these students spend in the general education setting or in a separate setting. Students with Speech and Language Impairments, Specific Learning Disabilities, Other Health Impairments and Developmental Delays are spending the majority of their day learning alongside their general education peers. However, students with Emotional Disabilities and Multiple Disabilities are more likely to be educated in separate settings.

**Table 9: Percentage of Students by Race and Educational Setting**

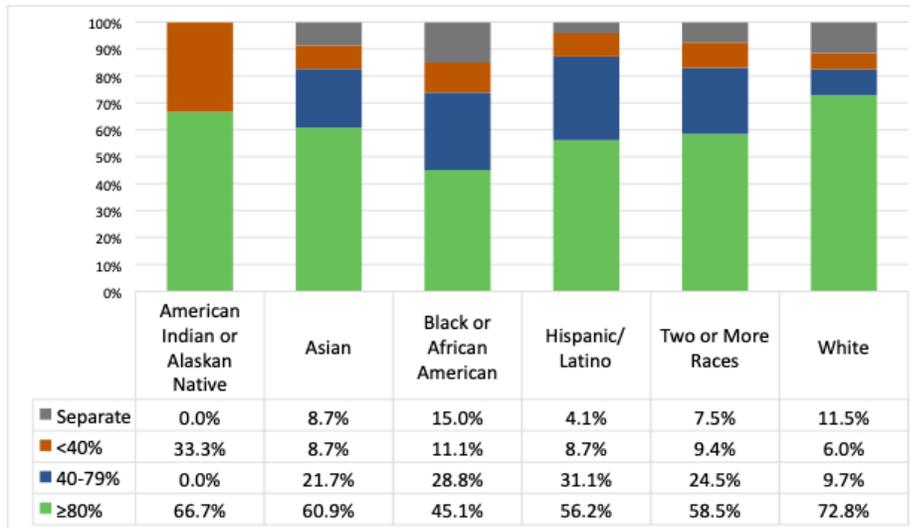


Table 9 breaks down access and participation in the general education setting by Race. Green represents the percentage of students who are in general education 80% of the time or more. Dark gray represents students who are being educated in a separate setting. White students with disabilities have the highest rates of inclusion and access to Tier 1 instruction (72%) in the general education setting, while Black students with IEPs have the least amount of access to the general education environment at only 45.1% followed by Latinx students at 56.2%. Our current special education system has created conditions that segregate many of our Black and Latinx students from the general education environment.

**Table 10: Risk Ratio by Race and Disability**

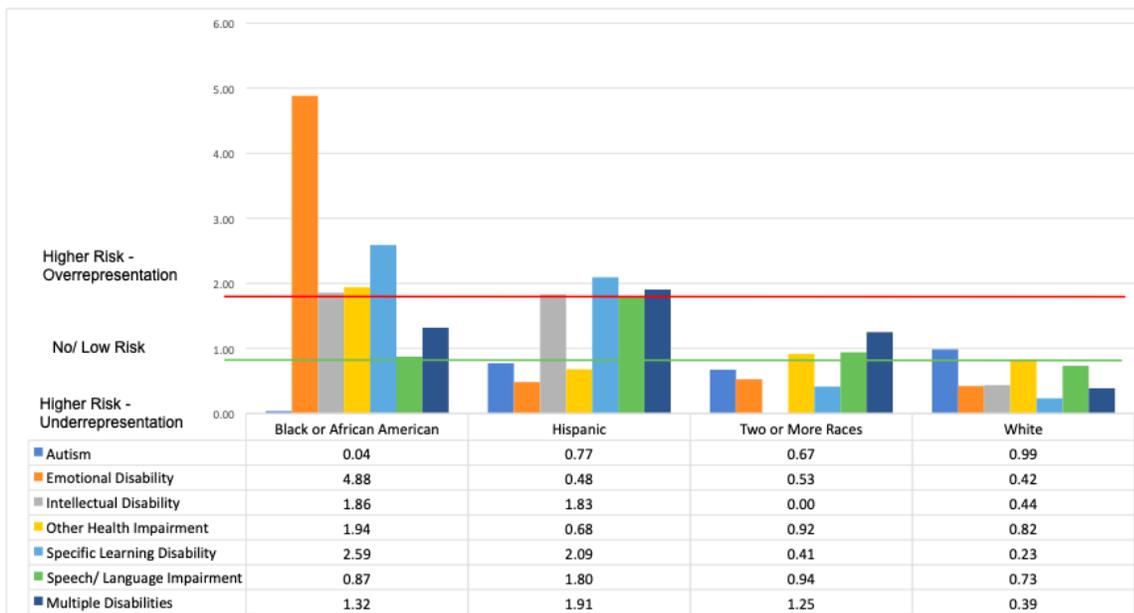


Table 10 provides information about students by race who are at risk of being overidentified for having a disability. Calculating the risk ratio is one of the most useful, informative, and proactive methods used to identify disproportionality. The risk ratio compares one racial group's risk of receiving special education and related services to that of all other students. The risk looks at the overall enrollment data for each racial group along with the number of students from that group who were identified for a specified category, and calculates the likelihood that a student from that racial group would be found in that particular category. A risk ratio greater than 2.0 of a racial/ethnic group indicates a risk of overrepresentation, while a risk ratio less than 1.0 indicates underrepresentation. Based on the risk ratio calculation, District 65's Black students are at a significantly greater risk of being overidentified for special education and our Latinx students are also at a greater risk.

District 65 has been cited by the State of Illinois the last 3 years specifically for the disproportionate identification of Black students as having Emotional Disabilities. While D65 has been engaging in equity work over the last few years, the overidentification of black students has continued to increase. When districts have higher numbers of students within a racial group enrolled in special education than by statistical standards, it signals the possibility that some students may not be truly disabled and may have been incorrectly identified. Research highlights significant consequences to this including the prevention of these students reaching their potential; the perpetuation of negative and harmful stereotypes; lowered expectations of staff, parents and students; and the prevention of schools in recognizing the need to make adjustments to their curriculum and instructional methods in order to reach all students.

The disproportionate representation of children by race is among the most critical and enduring problems in the field of special education. Students from certain racial/ethnic groups, particularly Black or African American students, have historically been disproportionately identified as in need of special education and placed in more restrictive settings.

Disproportionate outcomes produce inequitable learning opportunities for students. While special education services can provide access to additional education opportunities, they can also serve to stigmatize and further marginalize children.

**Table 11: Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Race Compared to Total Student Enrollment**

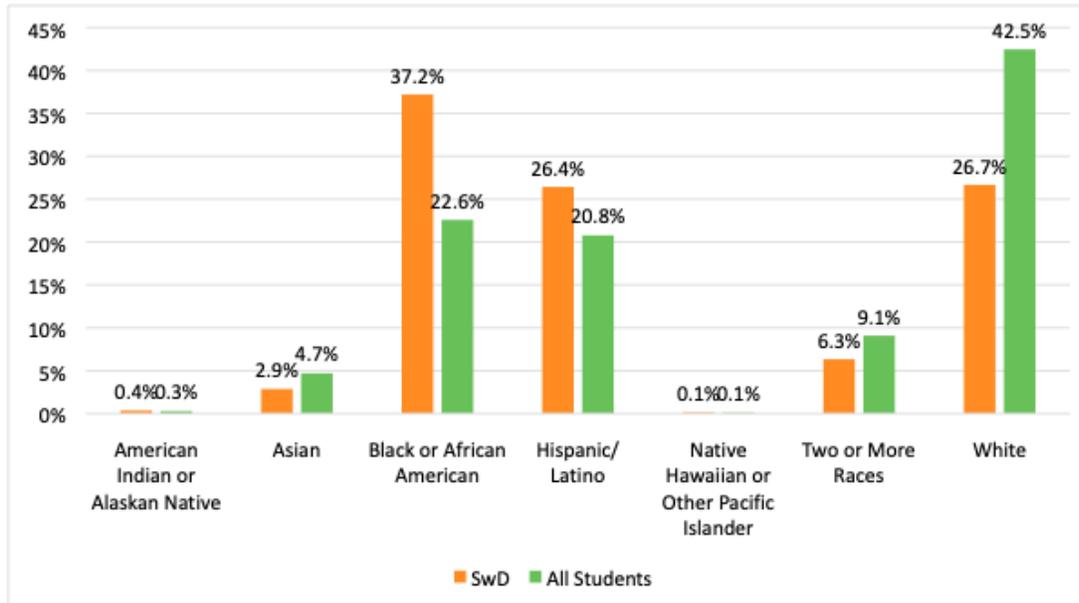
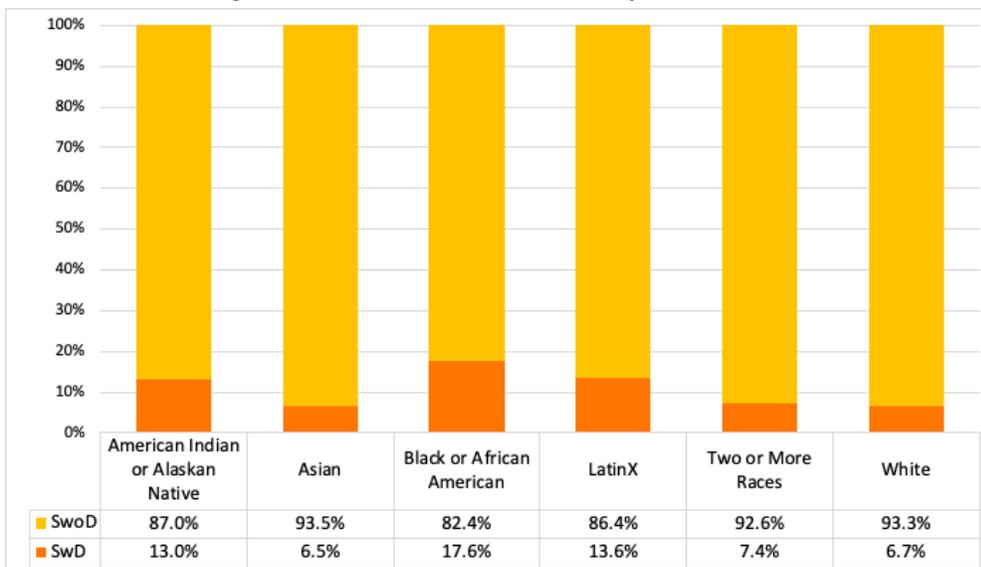


Table 11 compares the overall student enrollment percentages by race (green bar) compared to the percentage of students within a specific race who are identified as having a disability (orange bar). While White students make up 42.5% of the total student population, they only represent 26.7% of all students with IEPs. Contrast that with Black students, who make up 22.6% of the student population, yet make up 37.2% of students with IEPs. Our Black and Latinx students are the only two racial groups where the percentage of students with IEPs exceeds the total percentage of students.

**Table 12: Percentage of Students with Disabilities by Race with and without Disabilities**

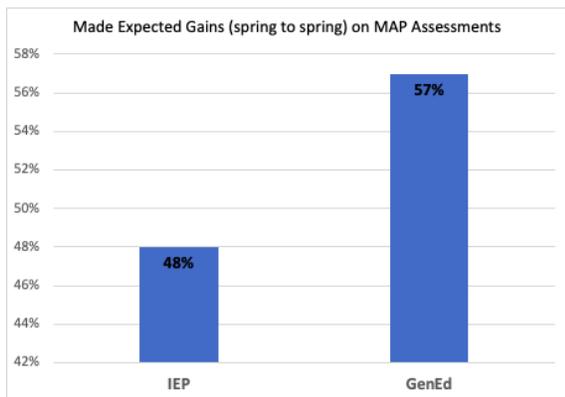


SwoD = Students without Disabilities

SwD = Students with Disabilities

In Table 12, yellow represents students without disabilities and orange represents students identified with disabilities. Looking across racial groups, the overall percentage of Black and Latinx students identified as having a disability is significantly higher when compared to White and Asian students.

**Table 13**



**Table 14**

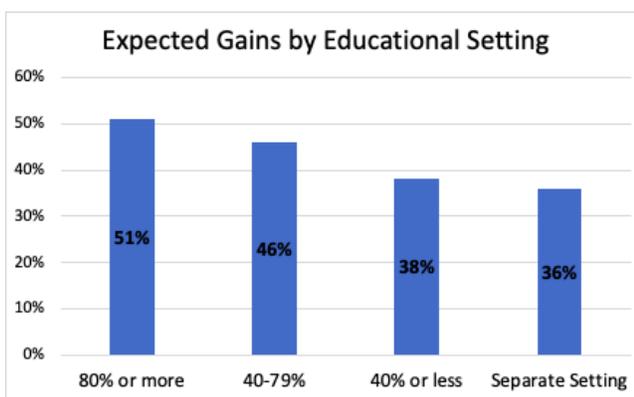


Table 13 compares the learning outcomes on MAP assessments for students with IEPs and general education students. Recognizing that MAP scores are one assessment that may not paint a complete picture, the information gleaned from this data should not be ignored. Based on the premise that all children can learn with the right instructional supports, expected gains and growth were considered rather than looking at attainment. Spring to spring MAP data from 2018-2019 shows that 48% of students with IEPs made expected gains compared to 57% of their general education peers. One might expect students with IEPs, who have access to additional interventions and specialized instruction to be making greater gains, but that is not the case.

Table 14 provides data on students with IEPs who made expected gains broken down by the educational environment the student accesses. There was a clear correlation showing that the more time students spent in general education, the more likely they were to make their expected gains on the MAP assessments. The less time and access to Tier 1 instruction, the less likely these were to meet their expected gains on MAP. This data supports a recent large-scale longitudinal study coming out of Indiana University which also found that students with disabilities who spend most or all of their time in an inclusive setting performed significantly better in math and reading when compared with special education students who spend most of their time in a special education setting.

**Table 15: Mean MAP Scores by Race**

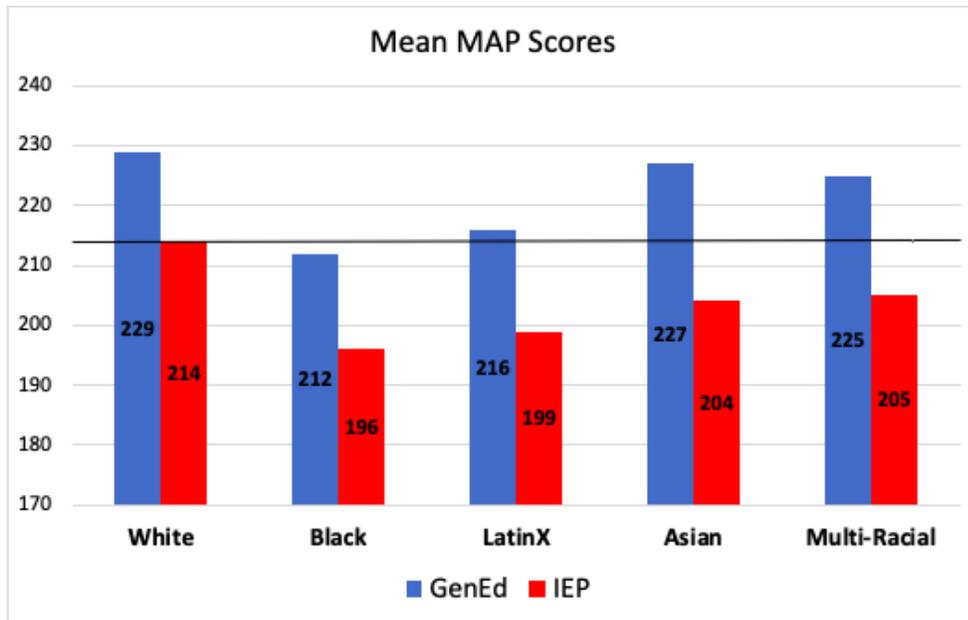


Table 15 provides information about student’s performance on the MAP assessment broken down by IEP status and Race. The overall mean MAP scores of students with IEPs (in Red) compared to general education peers (in Blue), show that White students with disabilities are outperforming Black students in general education. This concerning information has implications for the need to focus on the instructional strategies and support provided to Black and Latinx students in general education.

### **Recommendations and Next Steps**

District 65 is taking steps to gather additional information and evaluate our student, educator and family needs in order to inform planning for the 2020-2021 school year and beyond.

The District has partnered with WestEd consulting group to support the evaluation of current programmatic, organizational and financial functions within the District. The goal of this collaboration is to develop a sustainable plan and path for moving forward that will promote effective, equitable and efficient use of resources to better support our students and educators. Focus groups that include general educators, special educators, para educators, administrators and families have or will occur.

To support the District’s work toward a racially equitable learning environment and address barriers leading to the overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in special education and the underrepresentation of those groups in general education, Deborah McKnight from Pacific Education Group will lead members of Cabinet, DELT, Special Educational Administration and the

Multilingual Department Leadership through a 2-day Special Education and ELL Racial Equity Leadership Development Training. She will be conducting an Equity Walk with a focus on Special Education and Emergent Bilingual support to document promising equity practices and identify areas for growth. Information gleaned will support planning for future professional learning opportunities.

Additionally, the District will expand programming to support K-5 students at Dewey, Oakton and Lincolnwood so that students do not have to leave their school in the middle of their elementary education. The special services teams will work collaboratively with building leaders and educators to find ways to support all students in their home schools, rather than sending students to other district classrooms and programs, except for in rare circumstances. The Communication Development Classrooms and Options classrooms, Park and Rice will remain as District programs and schools. Criteria for entering any of these specialized programs will be developed in tandem with educators.

With the goal of increasing access to Tier 1 standards aligned instruction for all students with IEPs, particularly our Black and Latinx students, guidance and training for effective implementation and support for Co-Teaching teams will be developed. Finally, processes meant to provide support for students in general education, and disrupt moving toward special education referrals prematurely are being created. Reflection tools with a focus on culturally relevant practices, building relationships and supportive classroom communities will be shared with building based problem-solving teams. Additional criteria and processes will be developed to try and reduce the impact of implicit bias and remove subjectivity when considering eligibility for an Emotional Disability. Meanwhile, professional learning and coaching to support trauma informed instruction and restorative practices will continue.

### **Summary**

In sum, there are limitations within District 65's special education service delivery model that have led to high percentages of students not attending their home school, and decreased access to the general education environment for Black and Latinx students with IEPs. Learning outcomes for students with IEPs, particularly Black and Latinx students are deeply concerning and will require significant changes to existing practices and service delivery models. The District is taking steps to plan for action that will prioritize inclusive practices, high expectations and standards-aligned instruction for all learners.