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# Each and Every Child

Quick news for Parents, Teachers and Students

An e-newsletter by the Iowa Department of Education's Bureau of Student and Family Support Services

## A fact, a request and a challenge

Multiple Choice

When it comes to the gap in reading proficiency between students with and without disabilities, Iowa ranks nationally:

- A. Near the top
- B. In the middle of the pack
- C. At the bottom

If you answered "C", you would be right. According to results from the National Assessment for Education Process, the state of Iowa's education gap – the difference between academic proficiencies attained by able-bodied versus disabled students – is one of the highest in the country. In at least one assessment, it shows Iowa dead last.

Now take a deep breath. It is not time for the blame game. It's a time for discovery – and solutions.

"I have some ideas why the gap is as it is, and some of my colleagues in schools and AEAs have given me their ideas," said Martin Ikeda, the state's director of special education for school-aged children. "But they are just theories, and we need more ideas for us to consider when studying the gap. We also need input from the field, those who work with special education students every day. They undoubtedly will be able to shed some light as to what's going on."

To that end, the Iowa Department of Education will be putting out a survey in late February. All recipients of this newsletter will be receiving an email simply titled: Iowa Department of Education Survey.

Results from the qualitative study will be in future Each and Every Child editions.

"We need to work together to make a difference in the lives of people with disabilities," Ikeda said. "It's important to me that we start thinking about every child in the state making a year's worth of growth in a year's period of time. And if that doesn't happen, we need to be confident that everyone is taking an evidence-based approach to try to counteract it. We know many students with disabilities need to make more than a year's worth of growth if they are going to be successful, and we need a better understanding as to whether the supports we put in place for the children are strong enough to make that difference.

"I urge everyone to take the Department's survey that will come out in late February. Together, we really can make a difference for our children."

## Is there really an education 'gap'?

The achievement gap for students with disabilities in Iowa, specifically with respect to reading and math

scores, is real. According to results of the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) in 2009 and 2011, Iowa has one of the largest achievement gaps for students with disabilities in the nation. In 2009 Iowa had the largest achievement gap for students with disabilities in 4th grade reading and 8th grade math. In 2011 Iowa moved to 49th out of 51 states in 4th grade reading and 46th out of 51 states in 8th grade math.

What is the achievement gap?

When we talk about the achievement gap for students with disabilities in Iowa, we are talking about the discrepancy between the achievement levels for students with disabilities and students without disabilities. The achievement gap is typically thought of and measured in terms of reading and math proficiency on standardized tests, but may also refer to other educational outcomes, such as graduation and dropout rates, rates of disciplinary action, or rates of postsecondary employment and higher education attendance.

Shouldn't we expect an achievement gap?

No. Special education services are designed to allow students to be successful in the general curriculum. Students with disabilities are given accommodations, as appropriate, on standardized tests to make test materials accessible to them. Students with the most significant disabilities are given the alternate assessment.

Only 1-2% of all students with disabilities have a disability that would prevent them from being able to demonstrate knowledge on the regular assessment, with or without some accommodations.

Between 98 and 99 percent should be able to read a grade-level passage and accurately pick an answer or write a response to simple questions about the passage. Assessment results in Iowa show that our students are not being successful at this level, both verbally and in writing.

## Mythology

**Myth:** Special Education students can't go to college.

**Fact:** Many special education students go on to college. IDEA of 2004 specifically requires that students be prepared for independent living and further education to the extent possible. While the IEP ends upon graduation from high school most colleges and universities have student support services for students with disabilities. These services could include note taking, tape recording lectures and many others.