Students with Disabilities in the District of Columbia

Landscape Analysis

Office of the State Superintendent of Education

Table of Contents

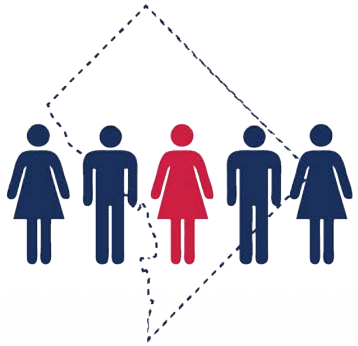
Executive Summary

We can and must do better to support our students with disabilities in the District of Columbia.

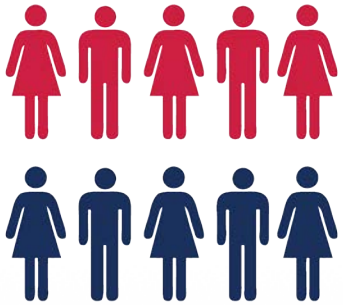
As DC's state education agency, OSSE has committed in our 2019-2023 strategic plan to helping accelerate academic outcomes for students with disabilities.

With this document, we strive to **build a shared understanding** of the District's students with disabilities and **a sense of urgency in better meeting their educational needs as a city.**

We are all responsible for the education of students with disabilities.



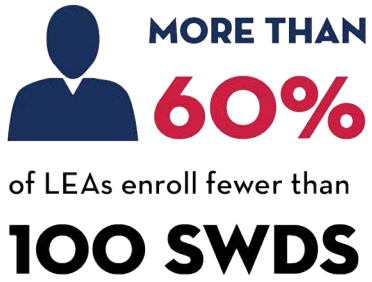
Students with disabilities comprise **nearly 1 out of 5 students in the District.**



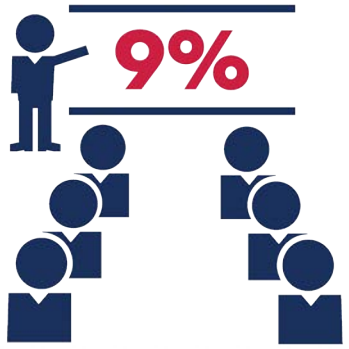
More than half of students with disabilities spend **80 percent of their time in general education classrooms**.

One-third of students with disabilities have a specific learning disability as their primary disability (e.g., dyslexia).

DC's education landscape creates unique challenges and opportunities for serving students with disabilities.



Many of DC's 68 LEAs are small, yet all LEAs that receive federal IDEA funds are legally required to provide a full continuum of services for all students.



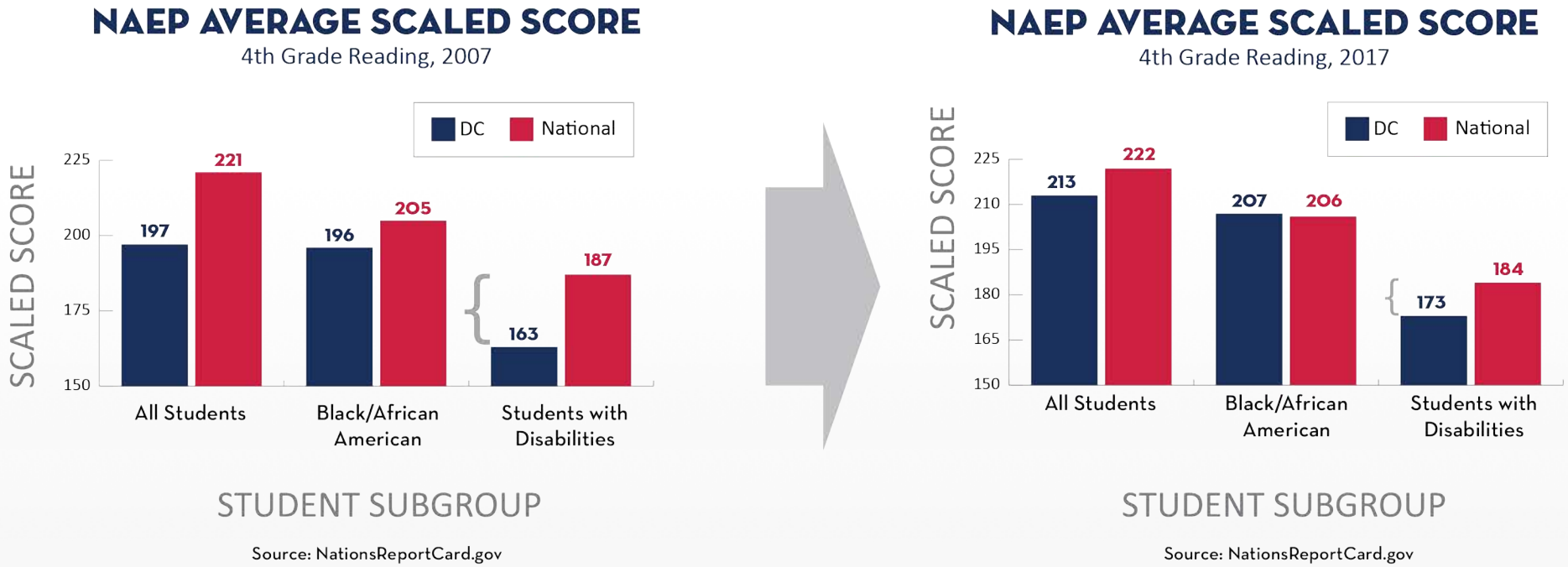
While most DC students with disabilities spend most of their instructional time in a general education setting, **9 percent are served in a separate school – three times the national average**.

Nearly 1 in 4 of the 3,253 students with disabilities who are transported by OSSE to school spend **two hours or more on the bus to school** each day.

Note: With the exception of 4 adult-serving LEAs, all LEAs in the District receive IDEA funds.

Over time, educational outcomes in DC have improved, but significant gaps persist for students with disabilities.

From 2007 to 2017, DC has closed the gap **for Black students on NAEP against the national average**, but outcomes for students with disabilities are still behind their peers.



The achievement gap between students with disabilities and their peers is vast.

Out of a group of 20 students, the number who performed on grade level in 2019 on PARCC, the statewide English Language Arts assessment:

- 9 out of every 20 **students without disabilities**

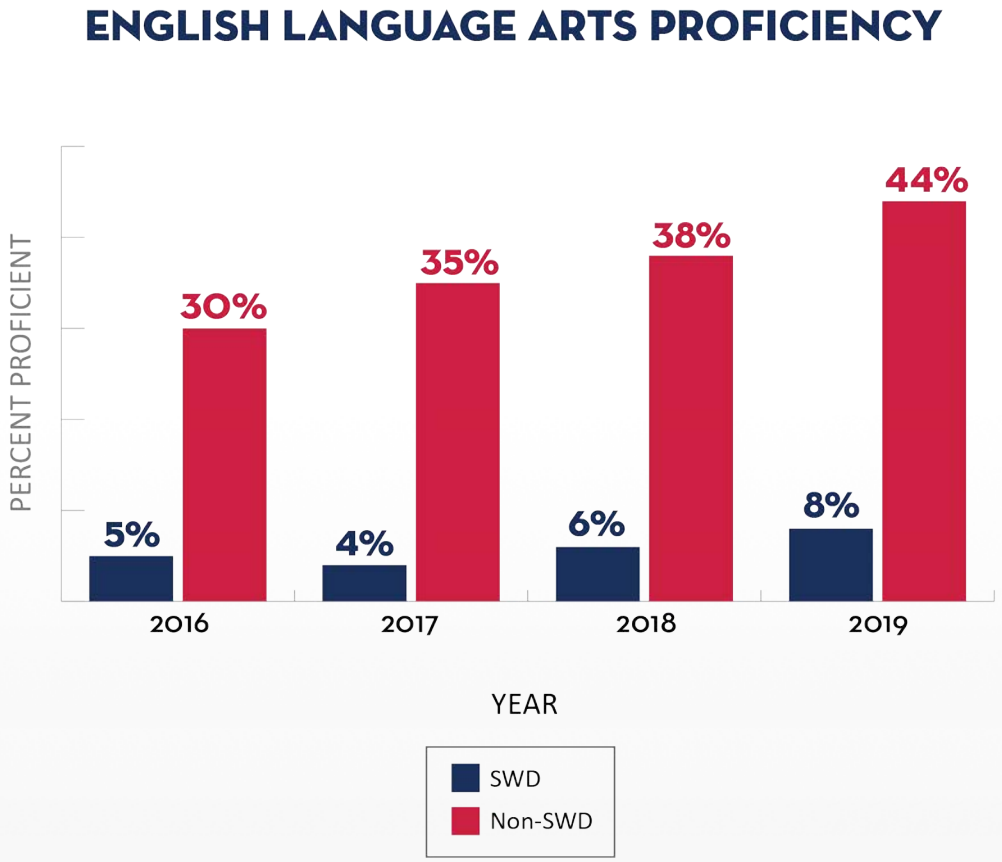
- 2 out of every 20 **students with disabilities**

- 1 out of every 20 students with a primary disability of **Specific Learning Disability**

- 1 out of every 20 **students with disabilities who are at-risk**

And, this achievement gap is growing.

From 2016 to 2019, the percentage of students without disabilities who performed on grade level increased by 14 percentage points, but **students with disabilities increased by only 3 percentage points** on the English language arts (ELA) statewide assessment.



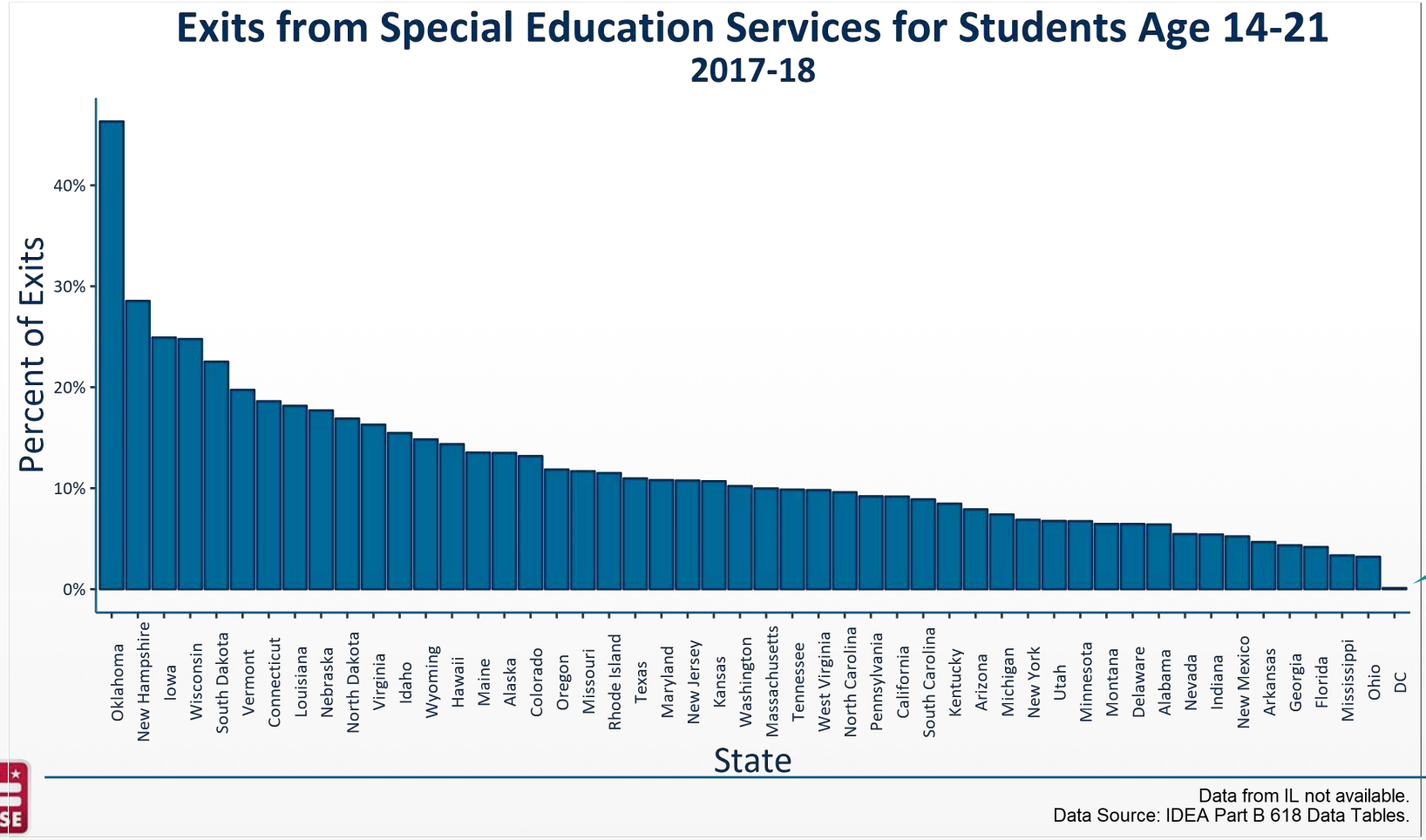
Other indicators also point to the need for a different approach to supports for students with disabilities.

On average, students with more hours of specialized services prescribed have **lower attendance rates.**

Students with disabilities are more than **twice as likely to be disciplined** than their peers who do not have a disability, after controlling for other demographic factors.

More than **1 out of 4 students with disabilities repeats ninth grade**, more than twice the rate of their peers without disabilities.

Unlike in other states, after age 14, few DC students exit special education services to general education.



Data from IL not available.
Data Source: IDEA Part B 618 Data Tables.

Zero percent of DC students aged 14-21 exited special education to general education in 2018, ranking DC **last in the nation.**

Poverty and race are linked to the identification and exit of students with disabilities.

67%

52%

- **Systems-involved youth are identified at much higher rates** than their peers, with 67 percent of youth who attend school in the juvenile justice system and 52 percent of youth who are wards of the state identified as having a disability.

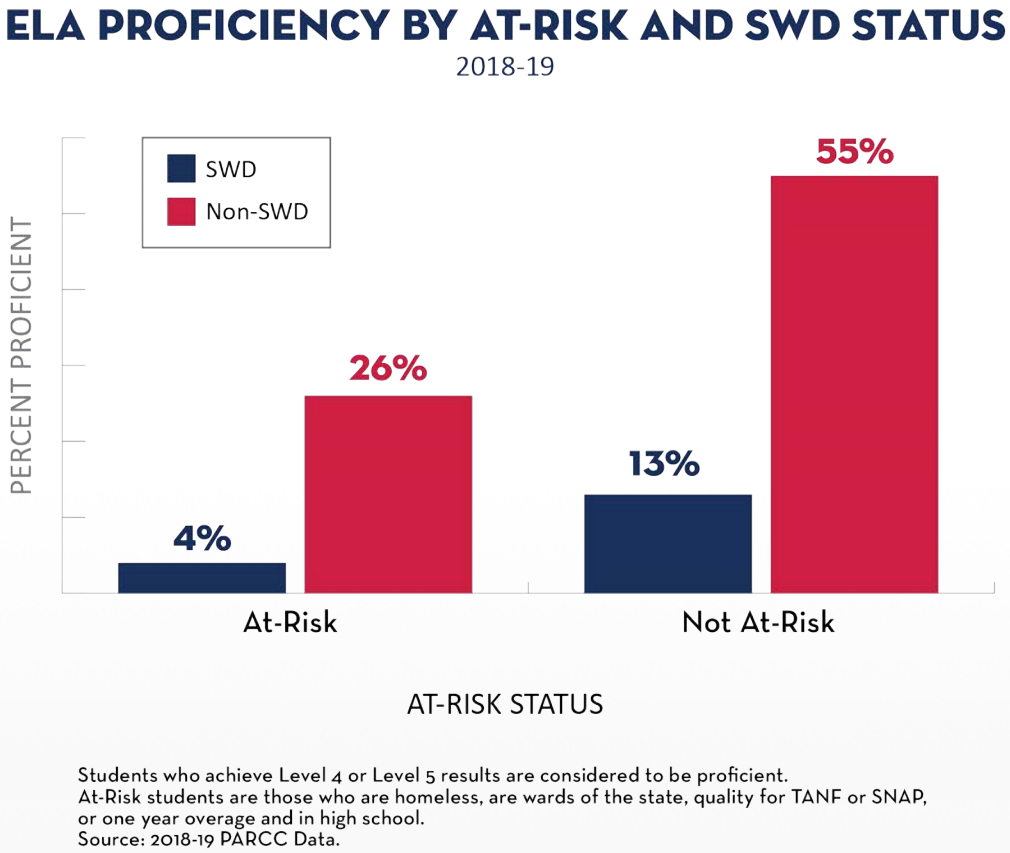
2x

- **1 out of 4 black males** and **1 out of 8 black females** are identified as students with disabilities – twice the rate of their white peers.

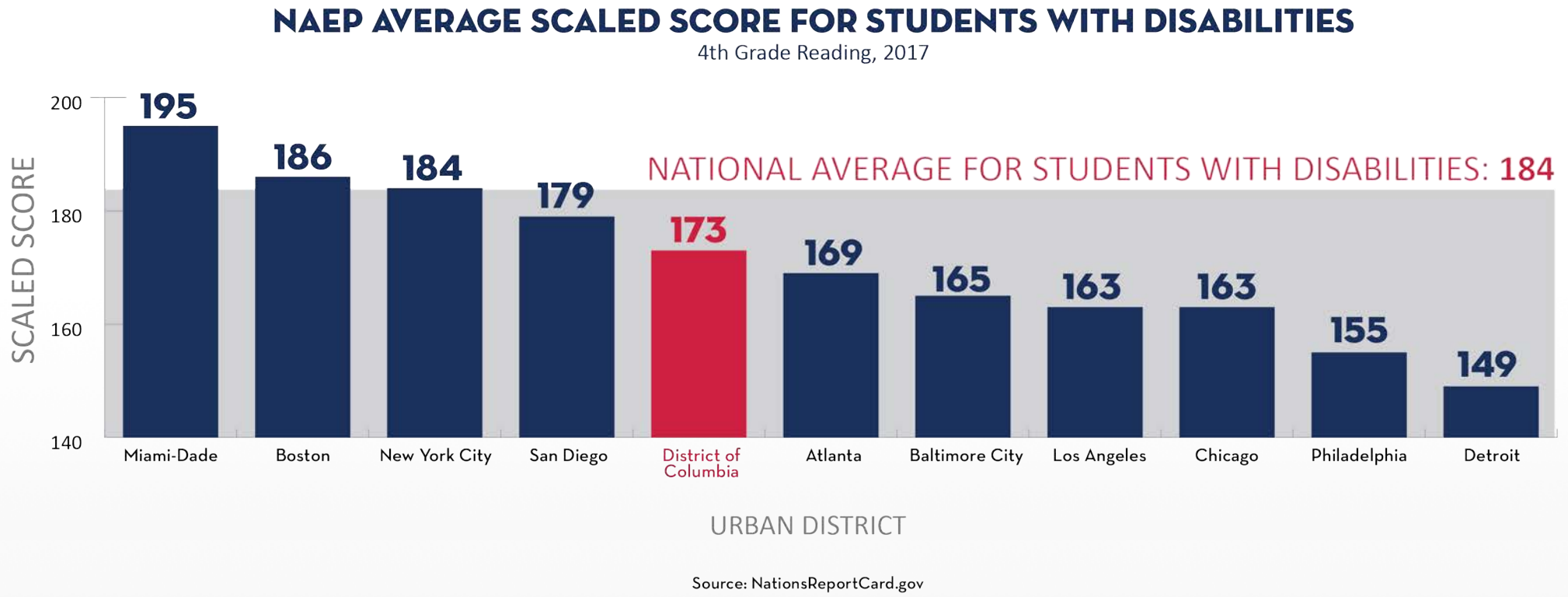
- **Black students are less likely to exit special education services once identified**, even after controlling for other demographic factors.

Poverty is also linked to worse outcomes for students with disabilities.

Only **4 percent of students who are both at-risk and students with disabilities performed on grade level** on the 2019 ELA statewide assessment.



Other urban districts demonstrate that better outcomes for students with disabilities are possible.



Note: District of Columbia is defined here as all public schools, inclusive of public charter schools and DC Public Schools.

Research indicates that nearly all students with disabilities can perform on grade level.

According to the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO), **85 to 90 percent of students with disabilities** can perform at grade level when provided with appropriate services and supports.*

Source: Students with Disabilities in Educational Policy, Practice, and Professional Judgment: What Should We Expect? (NCEO Report #413)

Focus groups and interviews with special education staff and leaders highlighted 8 core barriers to overcome.

- Leadership Across the System
- General Educator Commitment and Training
- Special Education Staff Capacity
- Access to Instructional Resources
- Inadequate Identification Practices
- Trauma & Mental Health Needs
- Parent Engagement & Supports
- Unsupported Transitions

We must address barriers around the capacity and commitment needed to adequately support students.

“‘Are you coming to get your kids?’”

- Special education leader on the attitude of general education teachers

“I have worked with principals who say out loud that ‘we don’t care about SPED.’”

- SWD support staff member on the priorities of school leadership

We must also tackle barriers regarding identification practices and mental health needs.

"Never thought that I would say Texas was ahead, but **I feel like I moved back in time 60 years** [when I came to DC]."

- SWD support staff member on identification practices

"**Schools don't know how to support students who are coming from trauma.** It is easier to identify the behaviors as [a disability] to get them out of the room and get them more [service] hours."

- Special educator on mental health practices

Changing outcomes for students with disabilities will take a coordinated, citywide effort.

OSSE has begun to develop recommendations for tackling barriers and better supporting students with disabilities.

Set high expectations

- Evaluate **SPED credential offerings** against needs for gen ed teachers and school leaders
- Enhance the **IDEA monitoring** framework to account for compliance and performance

Build ecosystem capacity

- Expand opportunities for **coordinated, hands-on trainings** to address the gaps identified
- Provide **additional supports for SWDs who are in foster care**
- Explore a **technical assistance center** to share resources

Share and use actionable data

- Explore **high-impact ways to share SPED data and information** to drive practice and decision-making
- Build a user-friendly **special education data system** that supports decision-making in schools

Maximize OSSE's Impact*

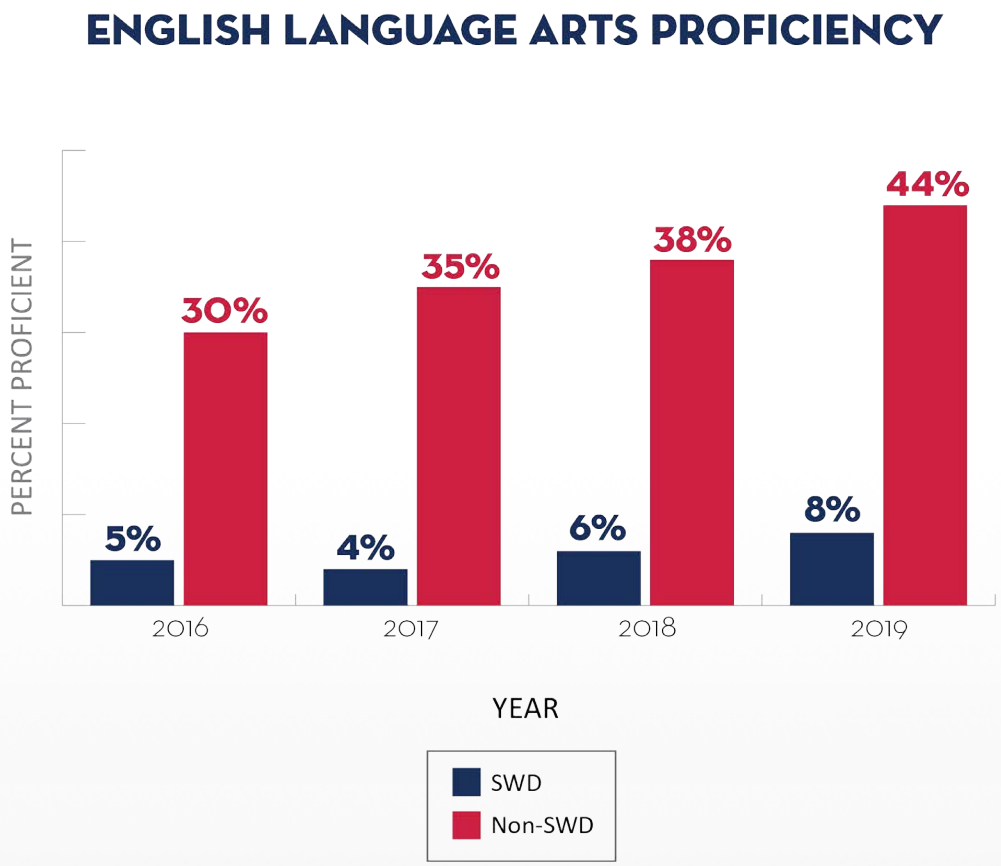
- Strengthen **parent access to information** for making informed decisions
- **Coordinate across sectors** to ensure a high-quality continuum for all students

* Recommendations in this category pertain to activities that are unique to OSSE's role in special education.

Introduction

Why We're Committed

- The **achievement gap** for students with disabilities is **vast and growing**.
- DC has a **fragmented and complex system** for serving students with disabilities.
- There is an **opportunity for OSSE to play a leadership role** through leveraging our own resources internally as well as convening LEAs and partners from across the city to identify opportunities for better meeting student needs.



* Exemplifies the broad achievement gap that exists across all subjects and grades.

Connection to OSSE's Strategic Plan

Elementary and Secondary

6,700 more students

meet or exceed expectations on state assessments while

CLOSING ACHIEVEMENT GAPS

Maximize OSSE's impact through a specific focus on Students with Disabilities

What We Set Out to Do

Learn

- Conduct a **landscape assessment** of special education in the District to help **establish a shared understanding** about the scope and scale of the challenges.

Share

- Share these findings with a broad cross-section of stakeholders to **gather feedback and inform recommendations** for citywide action.

Commit

- **Identify immediate actions and long-term investments for OSSE** to drive.
- Build a **citywide agenda for accelerating outcomes for SWDs** across all LEAs in collaboration with other stakeholders.

Our Methodology for this Landscape Analysis

Data Analysis

- Completed **four rounds of data analysis** across the multiple special education data sets collected by OSSE, looking back as far as two decades.

Stakeholder Input

- Held **focus groups** with special education teachers and leaders across multiple LEAs
- Conducted 11 **interviews** with key stakeholders (see Appendix C)

Supporting Research

- Researched **promising practices** from other state education agencies
- Reviewed potential **leading indicators** for closing the achievement gap

Internal Synthesis

- Provided **ongoing feedback** of analysis and findings
- Identified **key OSSE levers** to support closing the achievement gap for SWDs
- Drafted **initial recommendations** for immediate action and long-term investments

Guiding Principles for Analysis

- The most recent year of available data is included in each analysis.
- Multiple years of data were analyzed, but only the most recent year is included unless a relevant trend emerged through the data over time.
- Only students ages 3-21 were included in the analysis, since individuals in this age range are eligible for special education services under IDEA Part B.*

*As a result, the counts published here may not match the counts published in other files like the DC School Report Card, as those analyses were subject to different limitations.

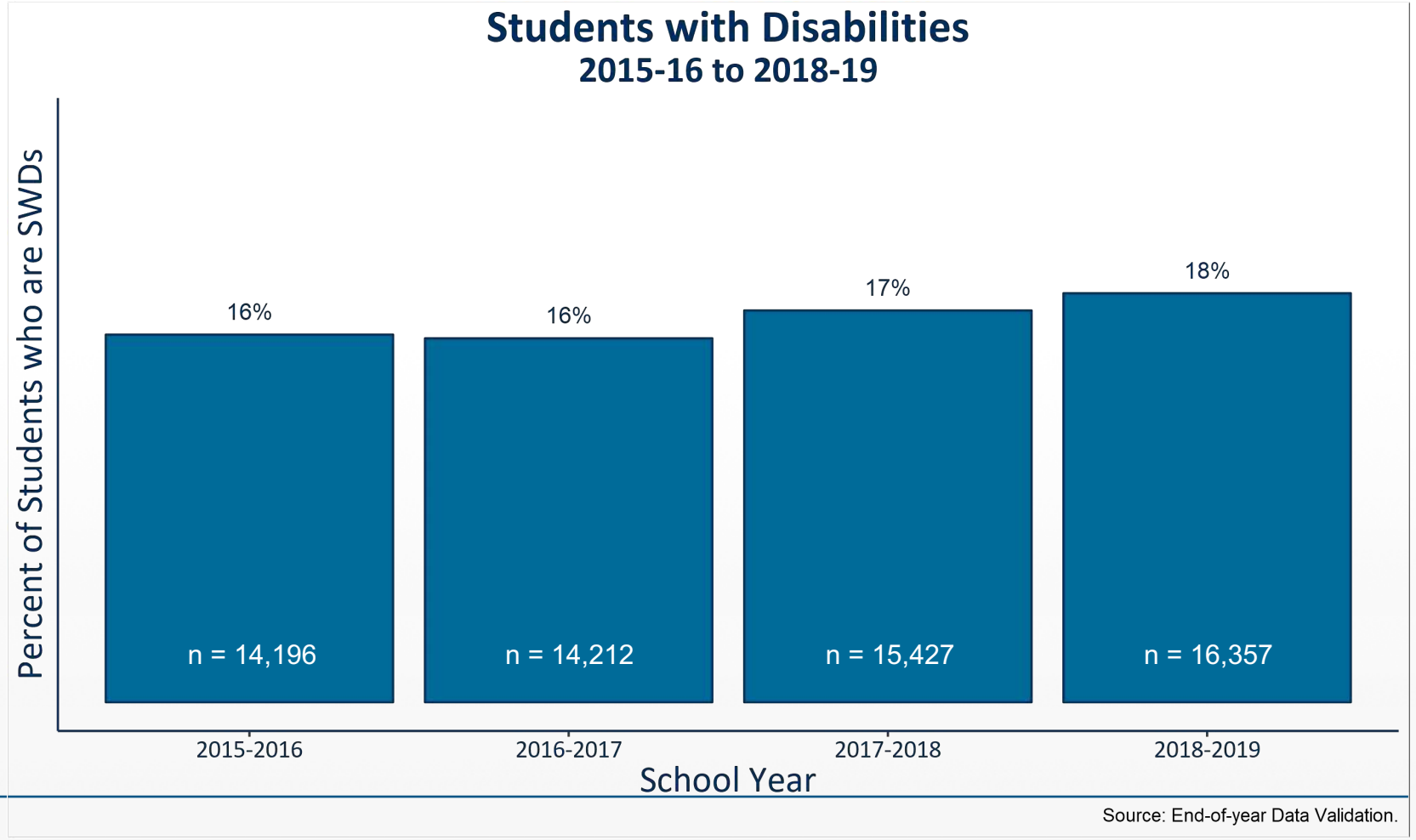
Understanding Our Students with Disabilities

Key Findings

- Students with disabilities (SWDs) comprise **nearly 1 out of 5 students** in the District.
- **Nearly 40% of SWDs are prescribed 8 or fewer hours of special education services per week**. Two-thirds of SWDs are prescribed 16 or fewer hours.
- SWDs **are unevenly distributed across wards:** 22% of students attending school in Ward 7 are SWDs, compared to 10% of students in Wards 2 and 3.
- **One-third of SWDs have a specific learning disability** as their primary disability, a category that covers basic language processing disorders such as dyslexia.
- DC's **distribution across disability types is comparable to national benchmarks**, but the overall rate of students with disabilities is 4 percentage points higher than the national average.

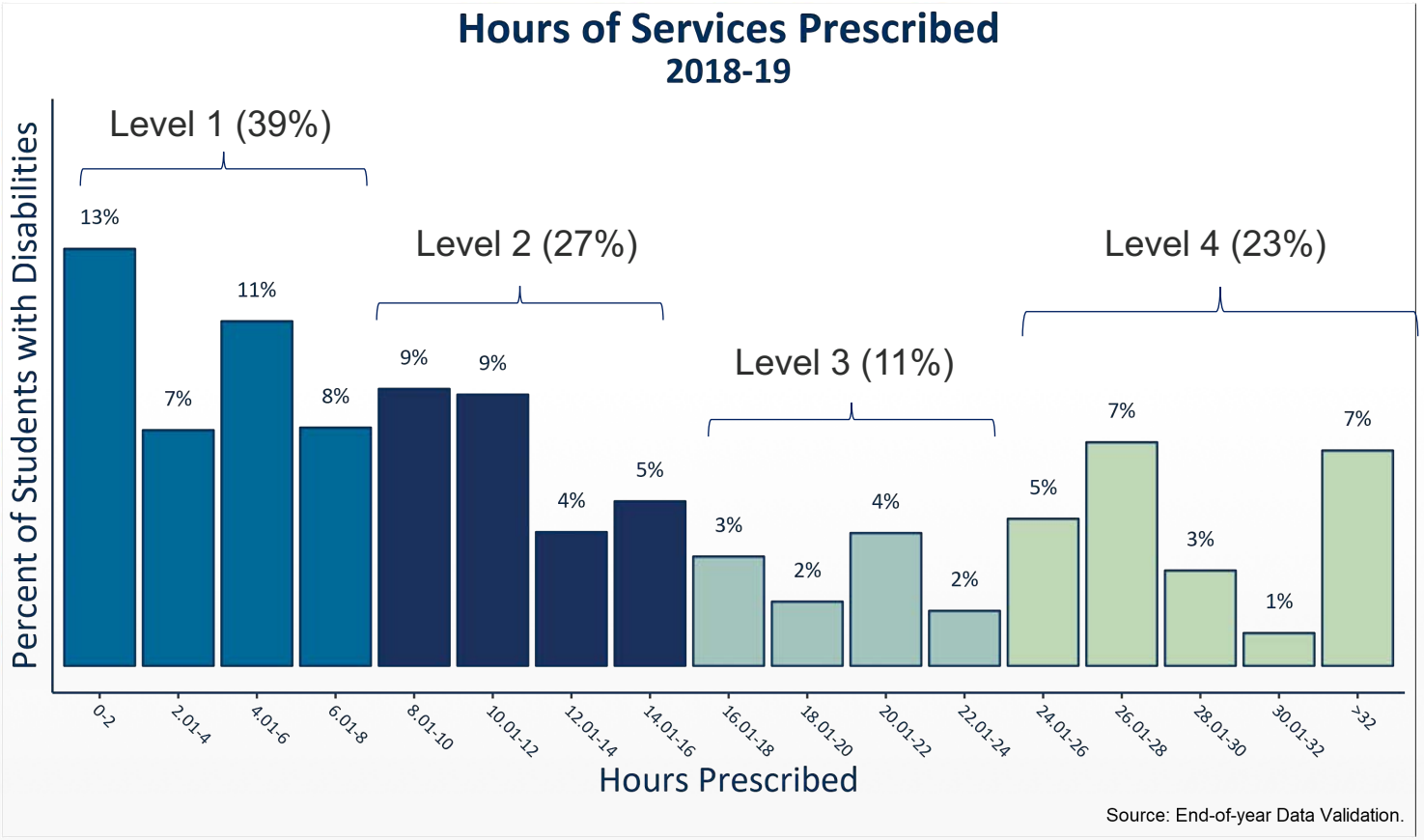
Students with disabilities comprise nearly 1 out of 5 students in the District, 18% in the 2018-19 school year.

- These counts include all students ages 3-21, enrolled for any amount of time in a DC public or public charter school. Therefore, they may be different than counts available in other data sources.

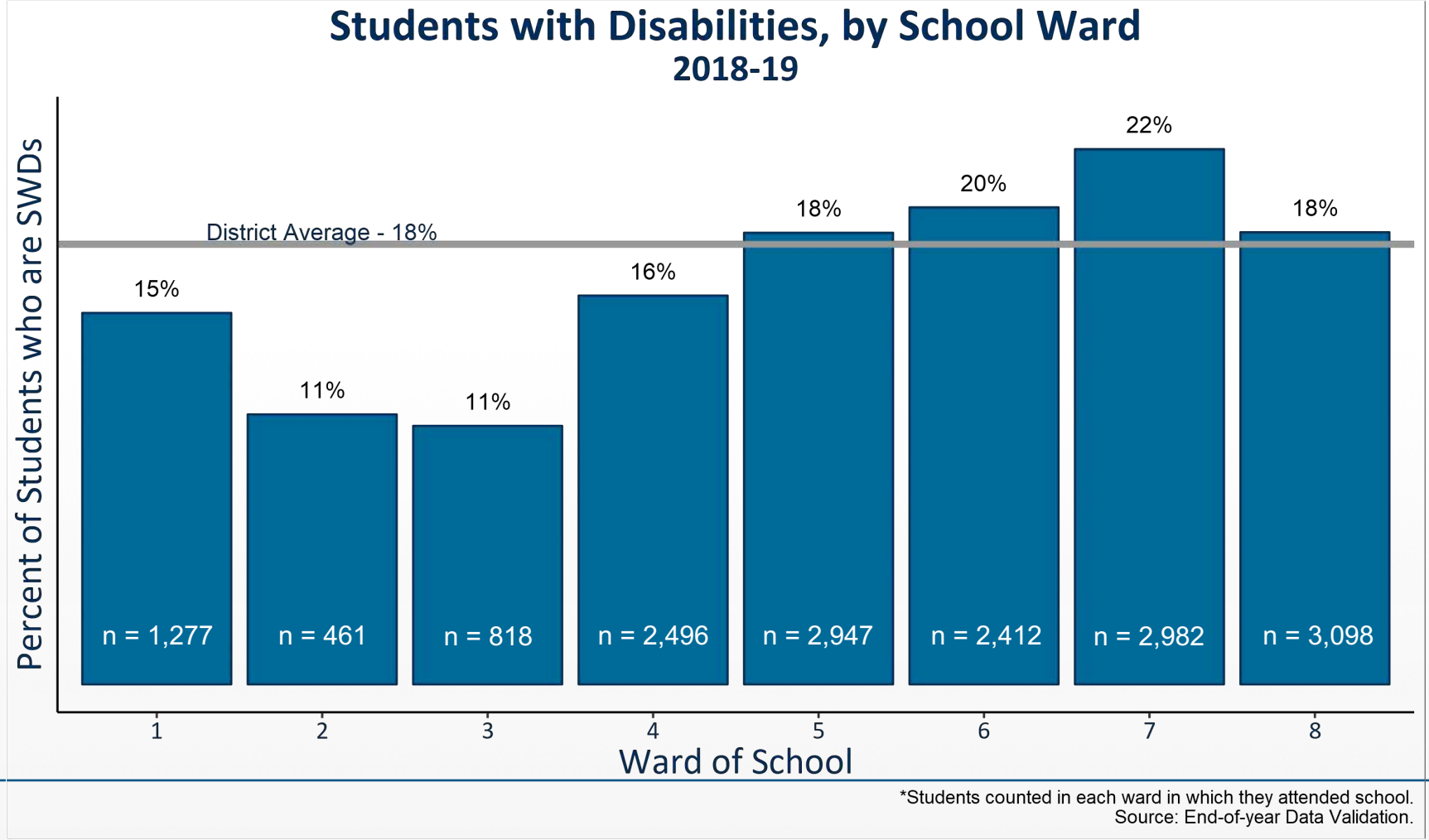


Nearly 40% of students with disabilities are prescribed fewer than 8 hours of services per week.

- In DC, **funding for SWDs is based on the number of hours of specialized services per week prescribed to students**. Funding increases at each level. (See Appendix B: UPSFF funding for more details.)



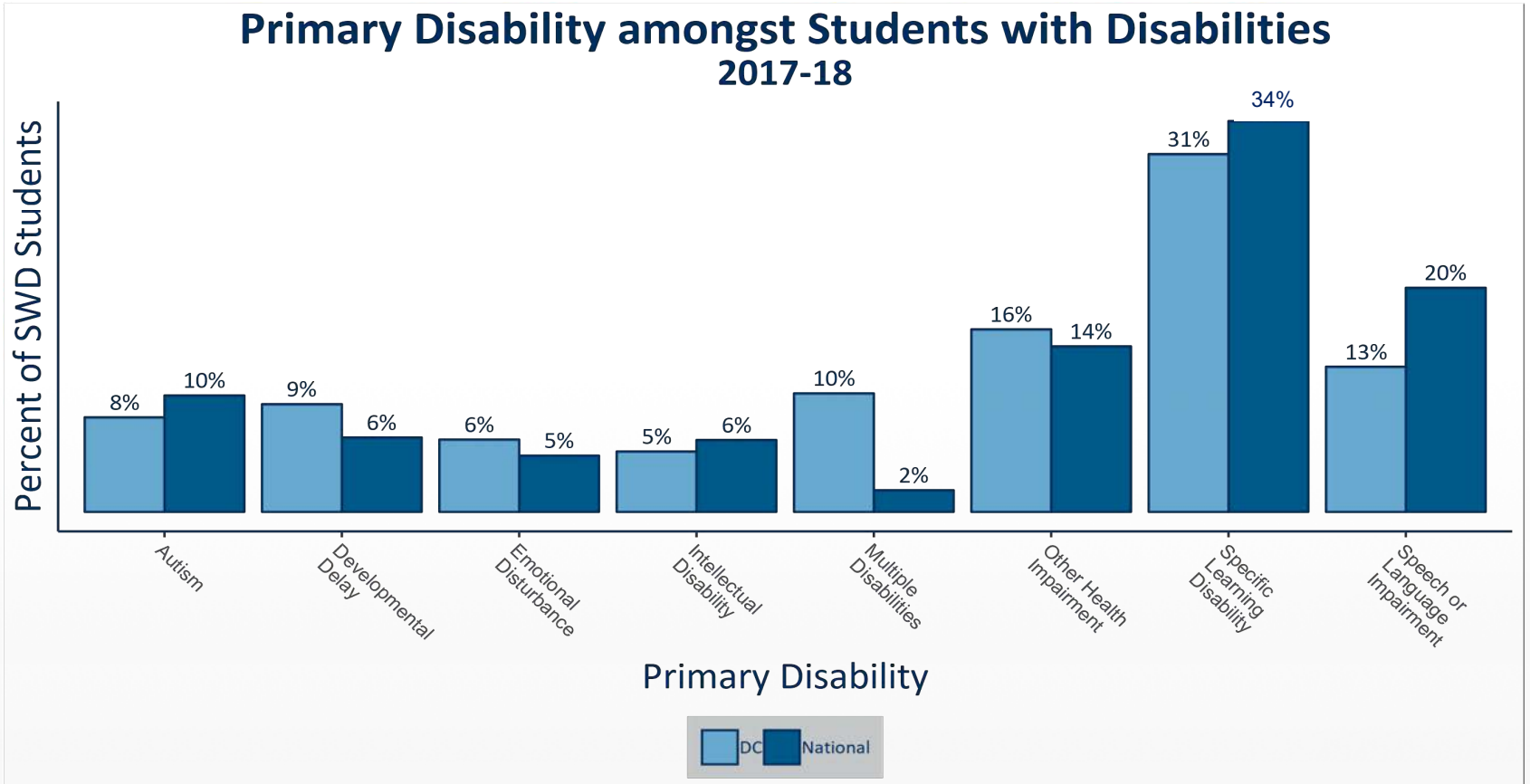
Schools in Ward 7 serve twice the proportion of students with disabilities as schools in wards 2 or 3.



*Students counted in each ward in which they attended school.
Source: End-of-year Data Validation.

One-third of SWDs in DC have a primary disability of Specific Learning Disability.

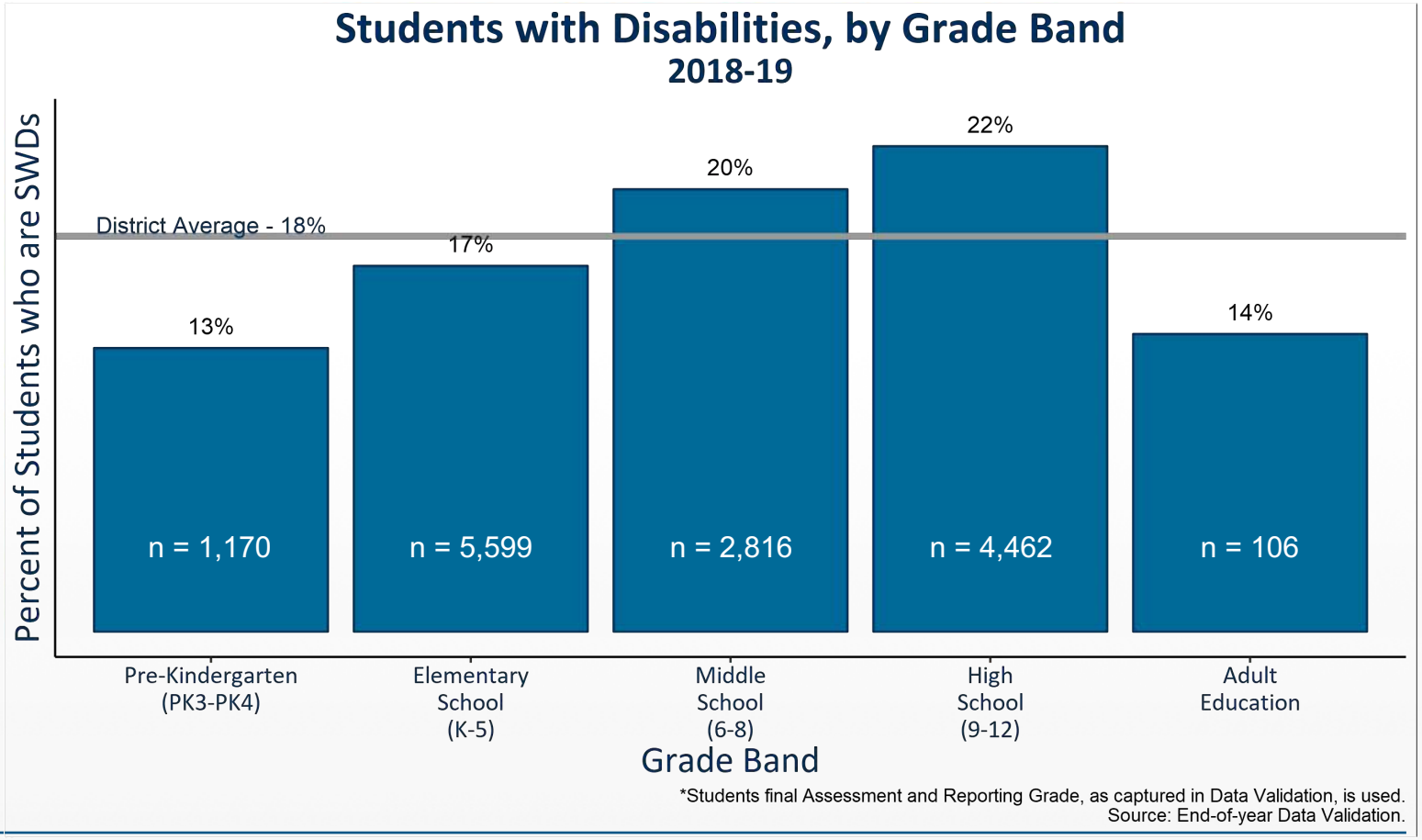
- With the exception of rates for speech or language impairment and multiple disabilities, the **rates across primary disability categories are similar to national averages**.



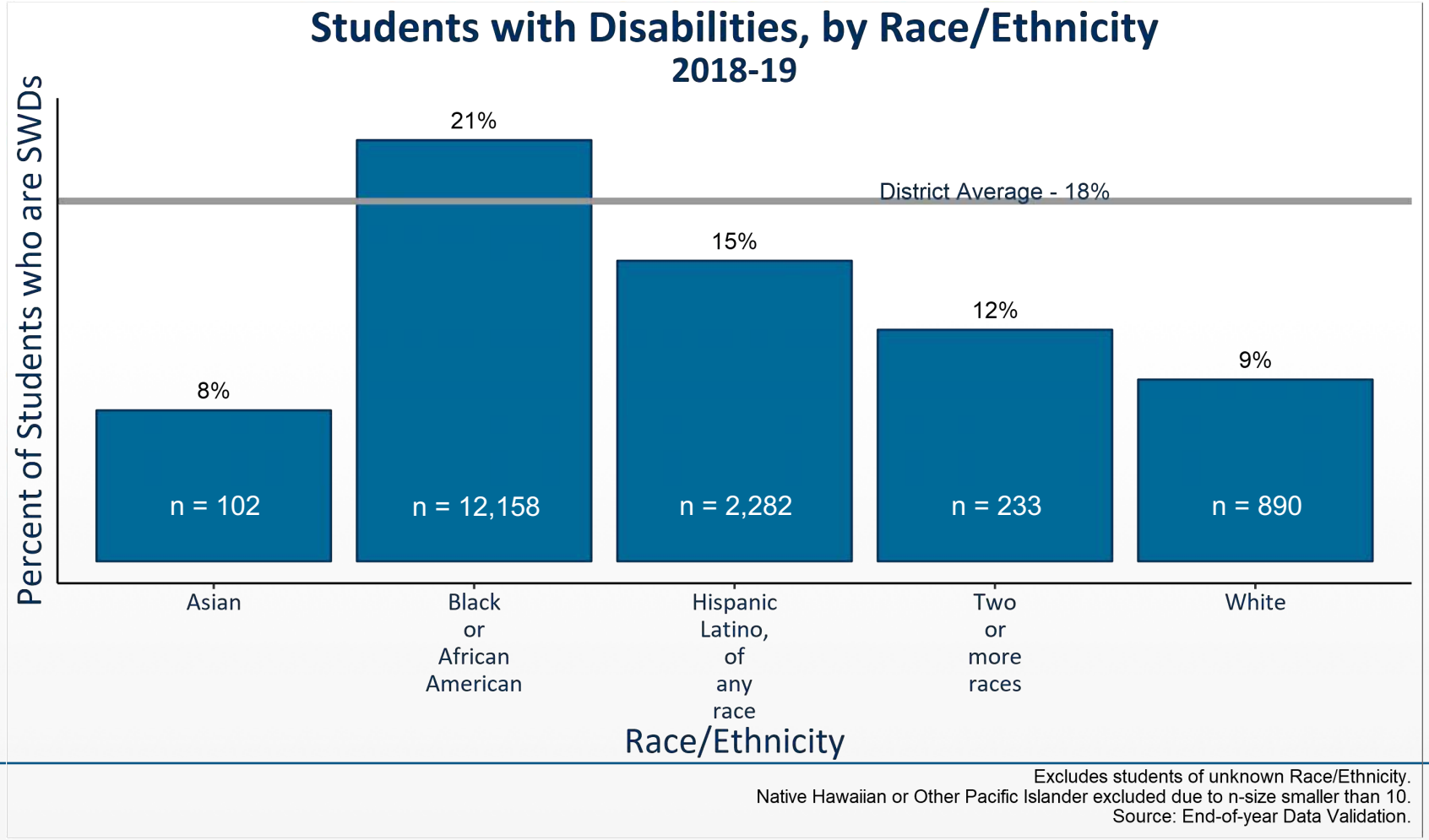
Excludes primary disabilities with fewer than 100 students in DC.
Students with multiple disabilities are captured in each of their primary disability categories.
Source: IDEA Section 618 Data Tables, Department of Education.

Across grade bands, the proportion of students with disabilities is greatest in high school.

- More than 5,000 students with disabilities are served in DC elementary schools and more than 4,000 are served in DC high schools.



Black students are identified as having a disability more often than students of other races.



Excludes students of unknown Race/Ethnicity.
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander excluded due to n-size smaller than 10.
Source: End-of-year Data Validation.

Envisioning What is Possible

Key Findings

- Research indicates that **85-90% of SWDs** can perform at grade level when provided with appropriate services and supports.*
- From 2007 to 2017, **DC students have outpaced national growth on NAEP**, but outcomes for students with disabilities still lag behind their peers.
- **Some urban districts are outperforming the national average** for students with disabilities on NAEP, including Miami-Dade and Boston.
- **Students without disabilities in DC have experienced growth on the statewide assessment that is above the average across all PARCC states** , while the growth of students with disabilities lags behind.

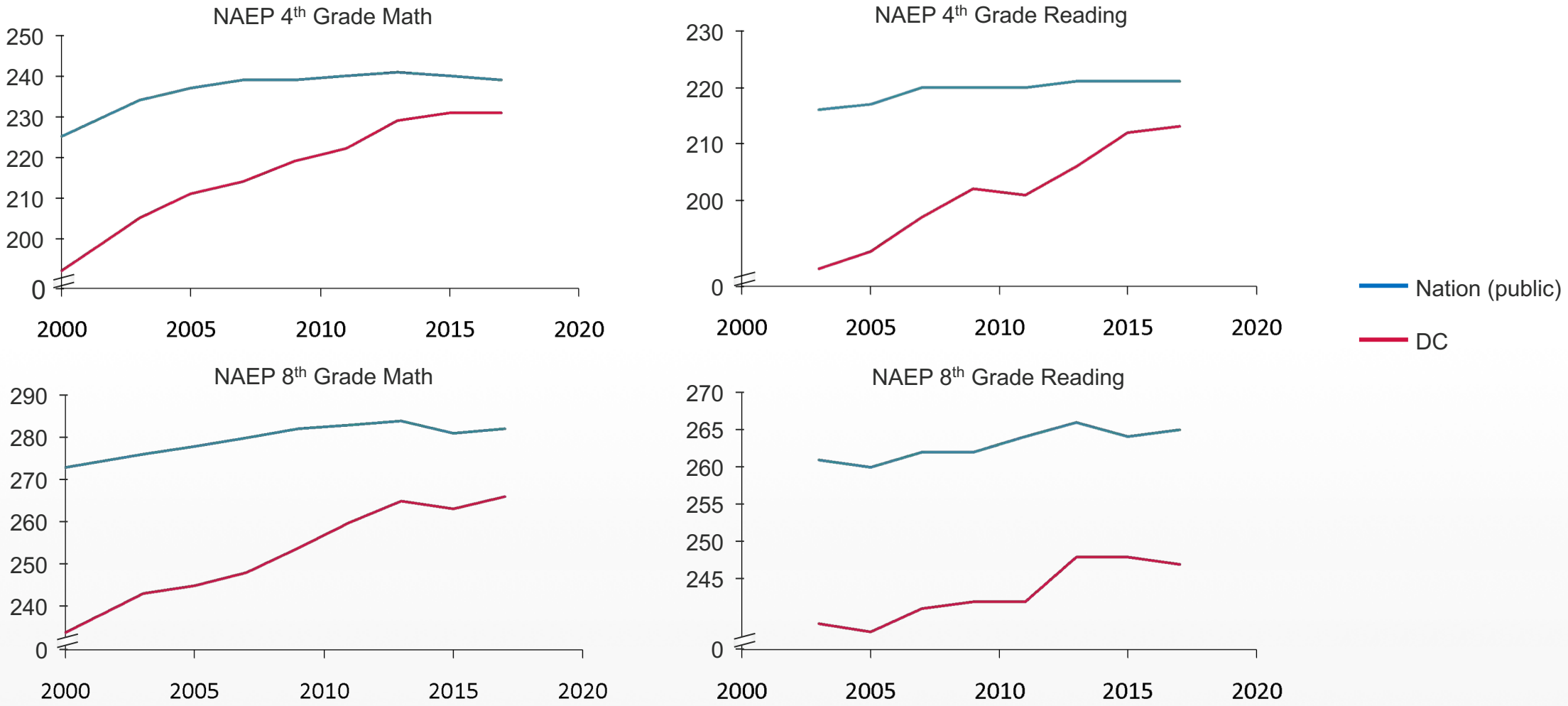
Source: National Center on Educational Outcomes

NCEO estimates that 85-90% of students with disabilities can perform on grade-level

- In order to guide educators and policy makers in standard-setting, the National Center for Educational Outcomes (NCEO) set out to better understand how many students with disabilities could achieve the same academic outcomes as students without disabilities.
- Their research highlighted that all disabilities except for Intellectual Disability require support to address barriers to learning caused by the disability, but that the disability itself does not inherently affect the capacity to learn.
- Their research showed that many students with Intellectual Disability can also achieve on grade level with the appropriate interventions.
- "In other words, 85% to 90% of all students with disabilities can be expected to achieve grade-level achievement **when provided with the best instruction, supports, and accommodations to go around the barriers of their disabilities to the grade-level content expected for all students**."

Source: Students with Disabilities in Educational Policy, Practice, and Professional Judgment: What Should We Expect? (NCEO Report #413)

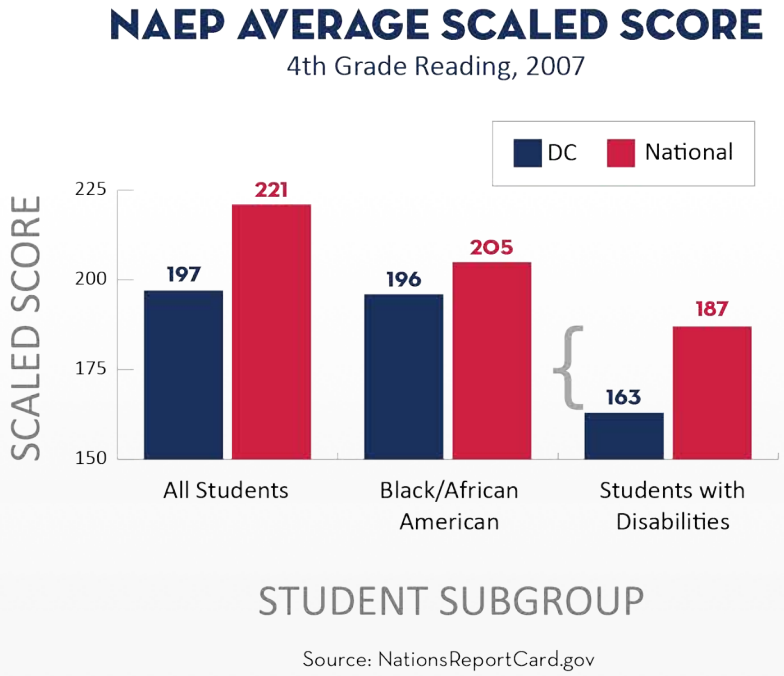
The gains of DC students over the last two decades have outpaced national growth.

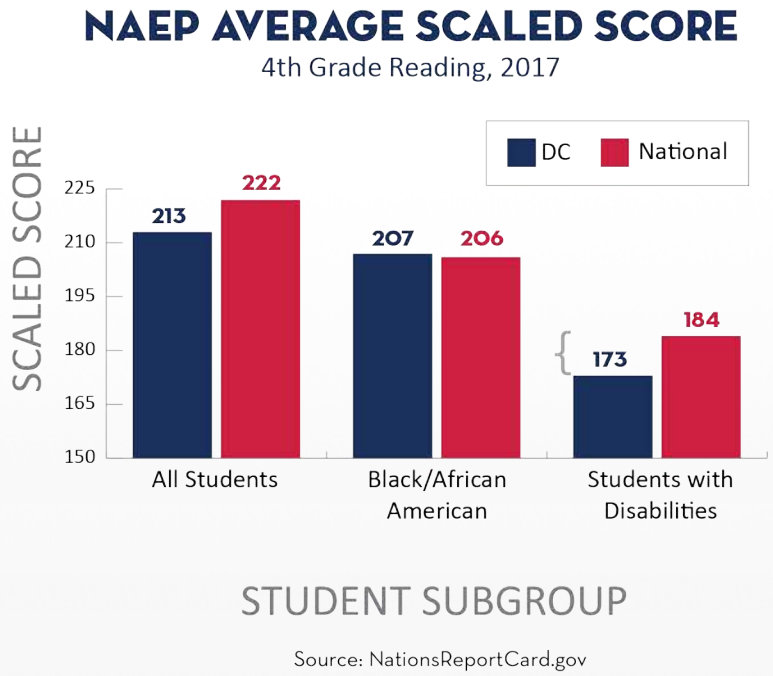


Source: NAEP

Black students in DC now score above the national average score for Black students on NAEP, but significant gaps persist for SWDs.

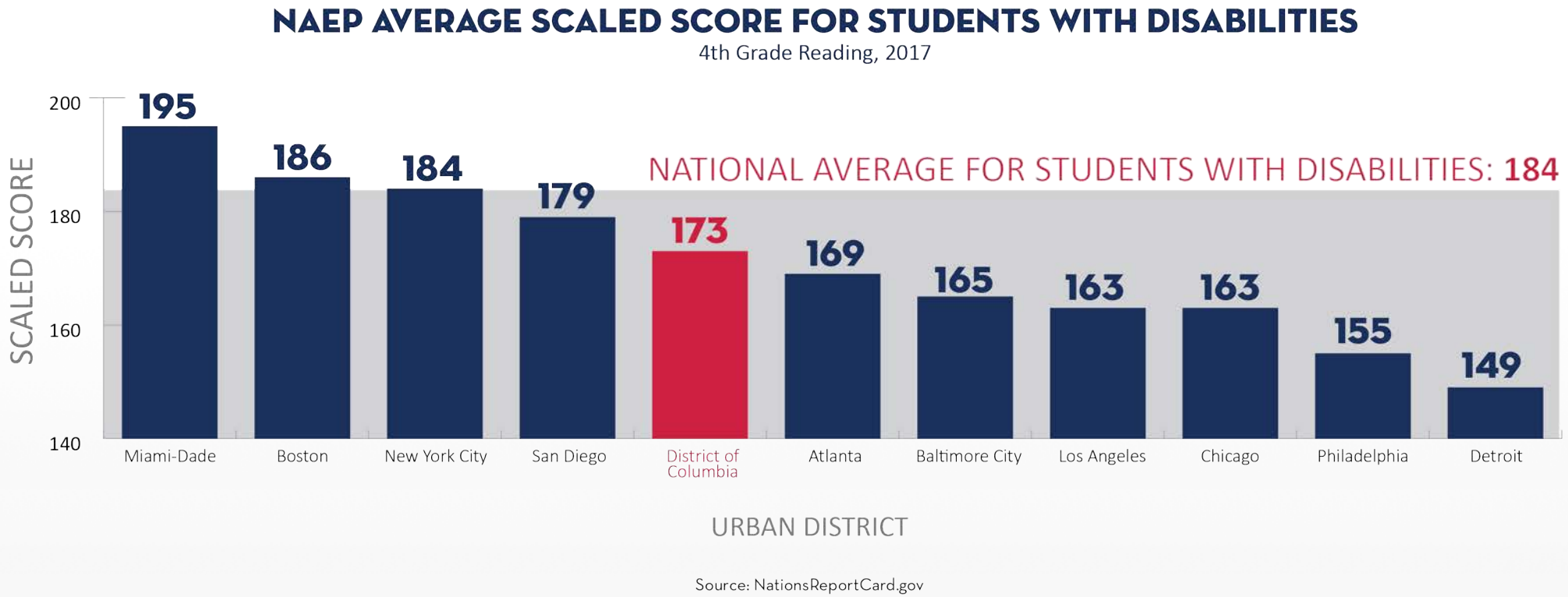
From 2007 to 2017, DC closed the gap **for Black students on NAEP against the national average**, but outcomes for students with disabilities still lag behind their peers.





Source: NAEP

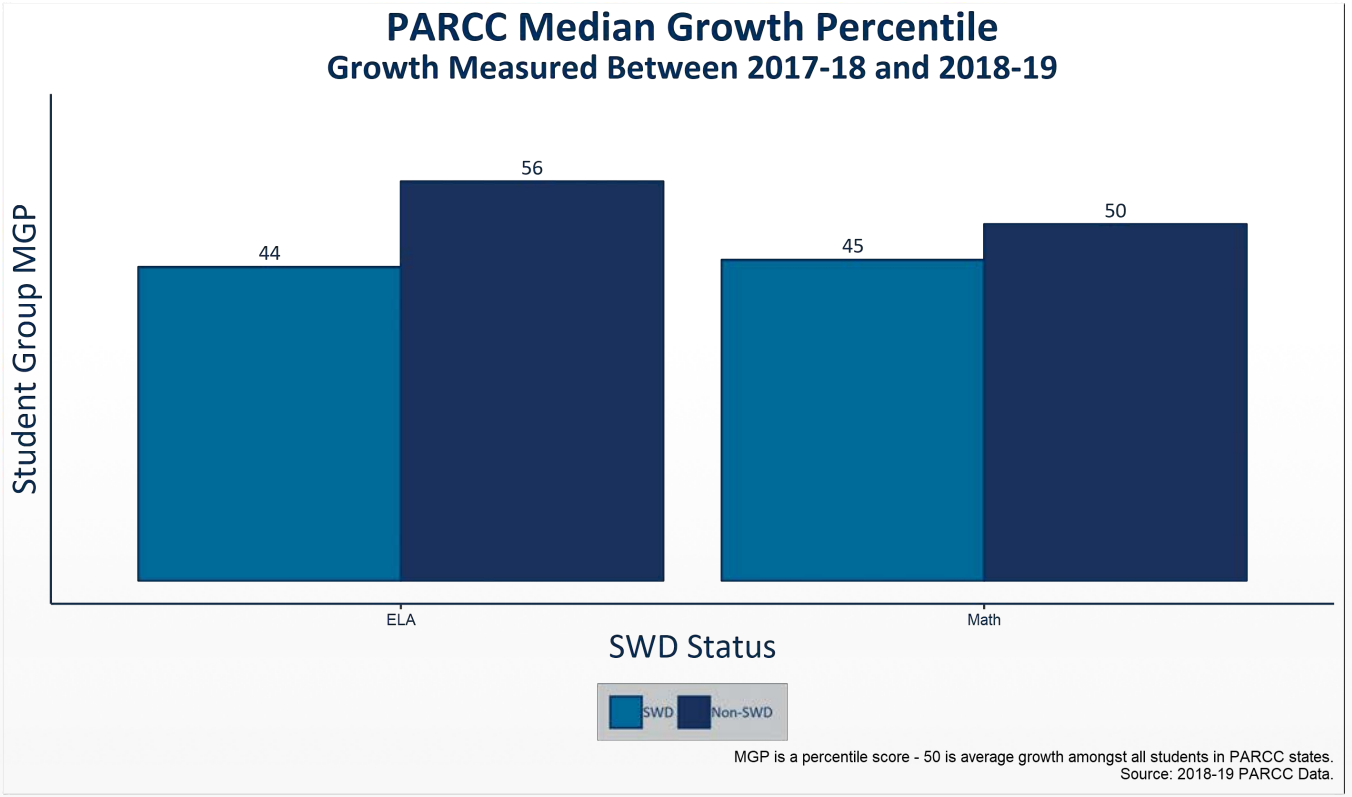
Miami and Boston demonstrate that better outcomes for SWDs in urban settings are possible.



Note: District of Columbia is defined here as all public schools, inclusive of public charter schools and DC Public Schools.
Source: NAEP

Students in DC have demonstrated real growth and remind us that progress is possible.

- In 2019, students without disabilities in DC achieved median PARCC growth above the median growth of all students across PARCC states, demonstrating the strides our learners are making.
- However, students with disabilities demonstrated growth well below the median PARCC growth, highlighting the **need to accelerate progress for our students with disabilities**.



Note: OSSE administers a statewide assessment developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) to students in grades 3-8 and high school in English language arts and math.

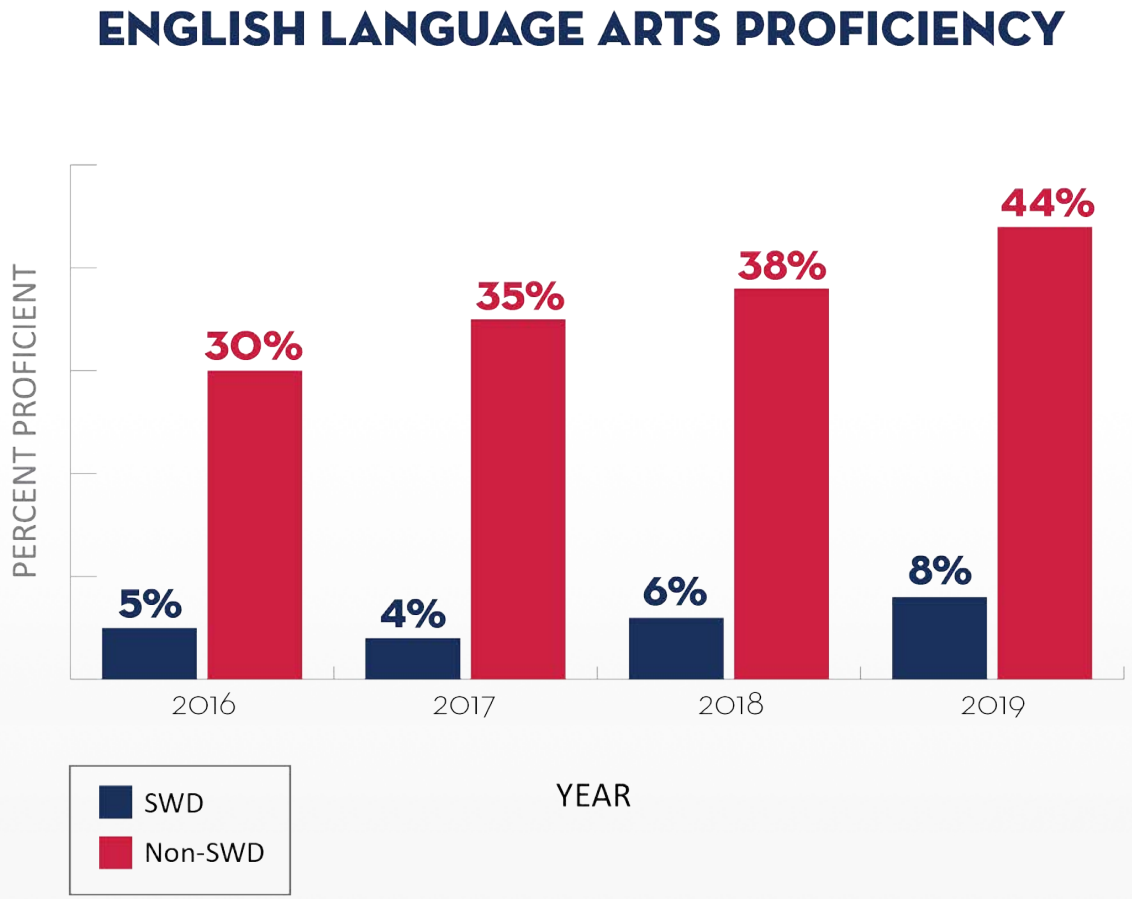
Defining the Challenge

Key Findings

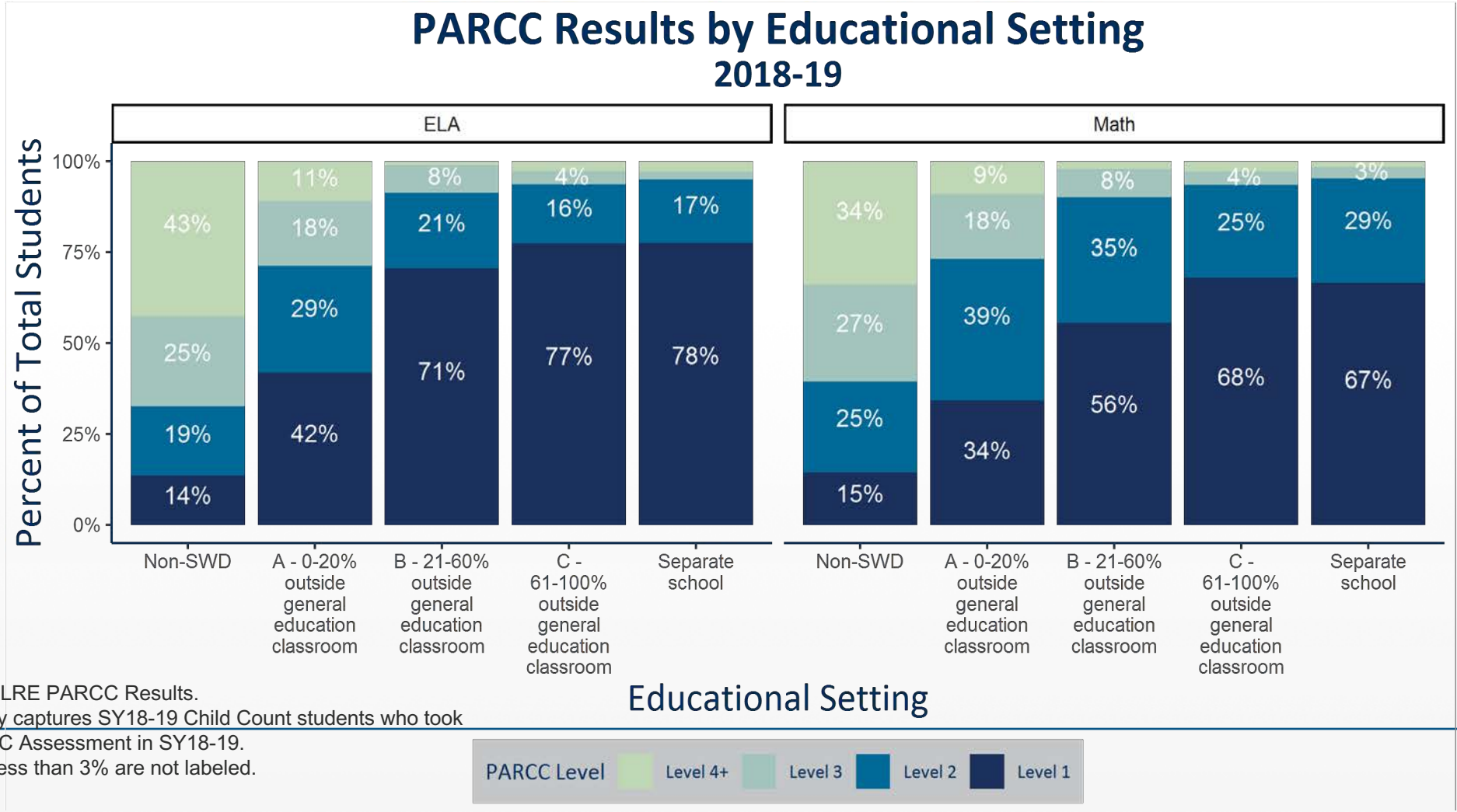
- From 2016 to 2019, the **percentage of students with disabilities who demonstrated proficiency on the ELA statewide assessment increased only 3 points,** while the percentage of students without disabilities increased by 14 points.
- Even students with few hours of services prescribed have **slower growth than their peers** without disabilities.
- Only **4% of SWDs who are also at-risk demonstrated proficiency** on the ELA statewide assessment in 2019.
- SWDs are **more likely to be chronically absent, disciplined, and retained in ninth grade** than their peers.

The achievement gap between students with disabilities and their peers who are not disabled is vast and growing.

- In 2019, students with disabilities were **five times less likely to be proficient** than students without disabilities on the ELA statewide assessment.

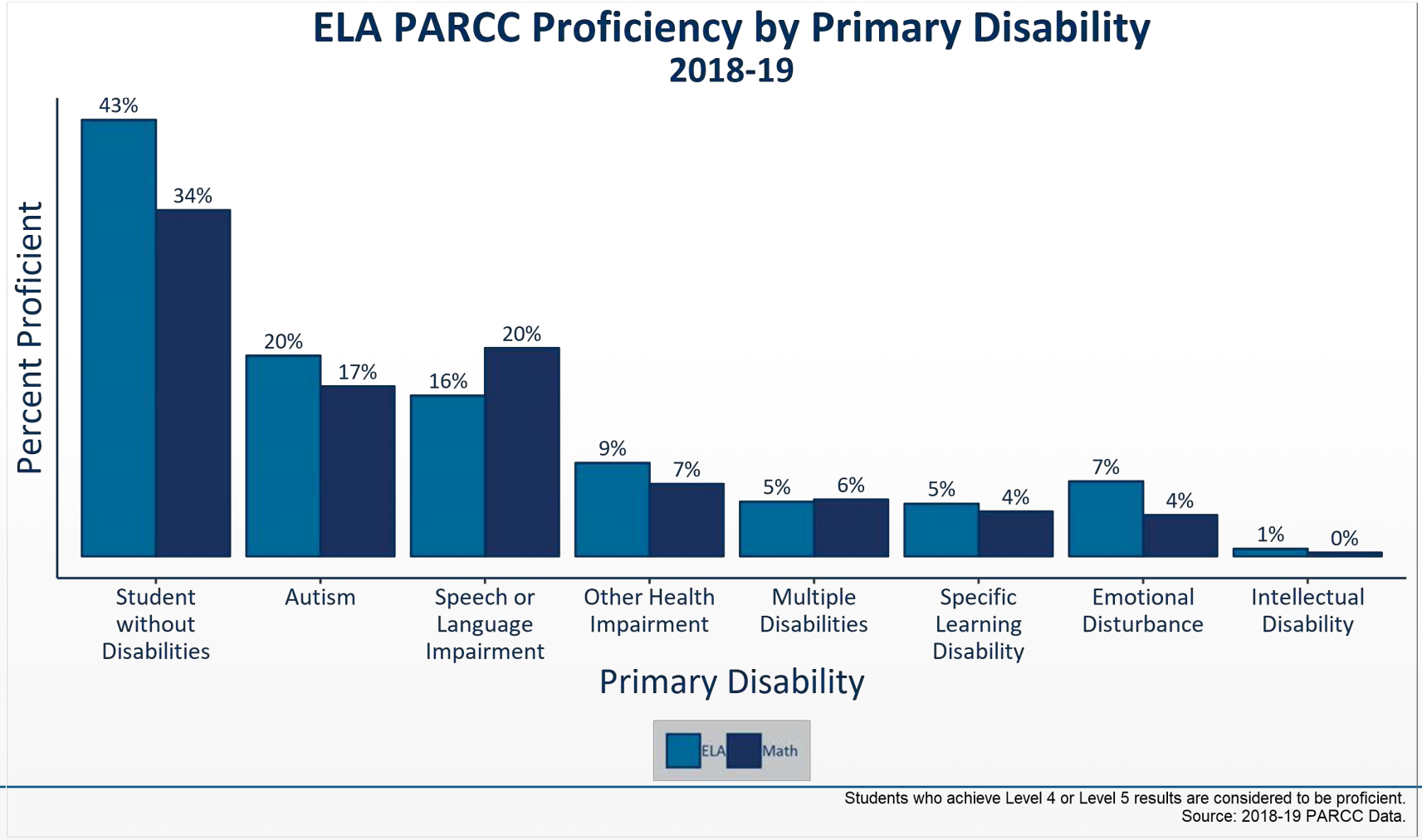


Less than 4% of students in the most restricted settings are proficient on PARCC.



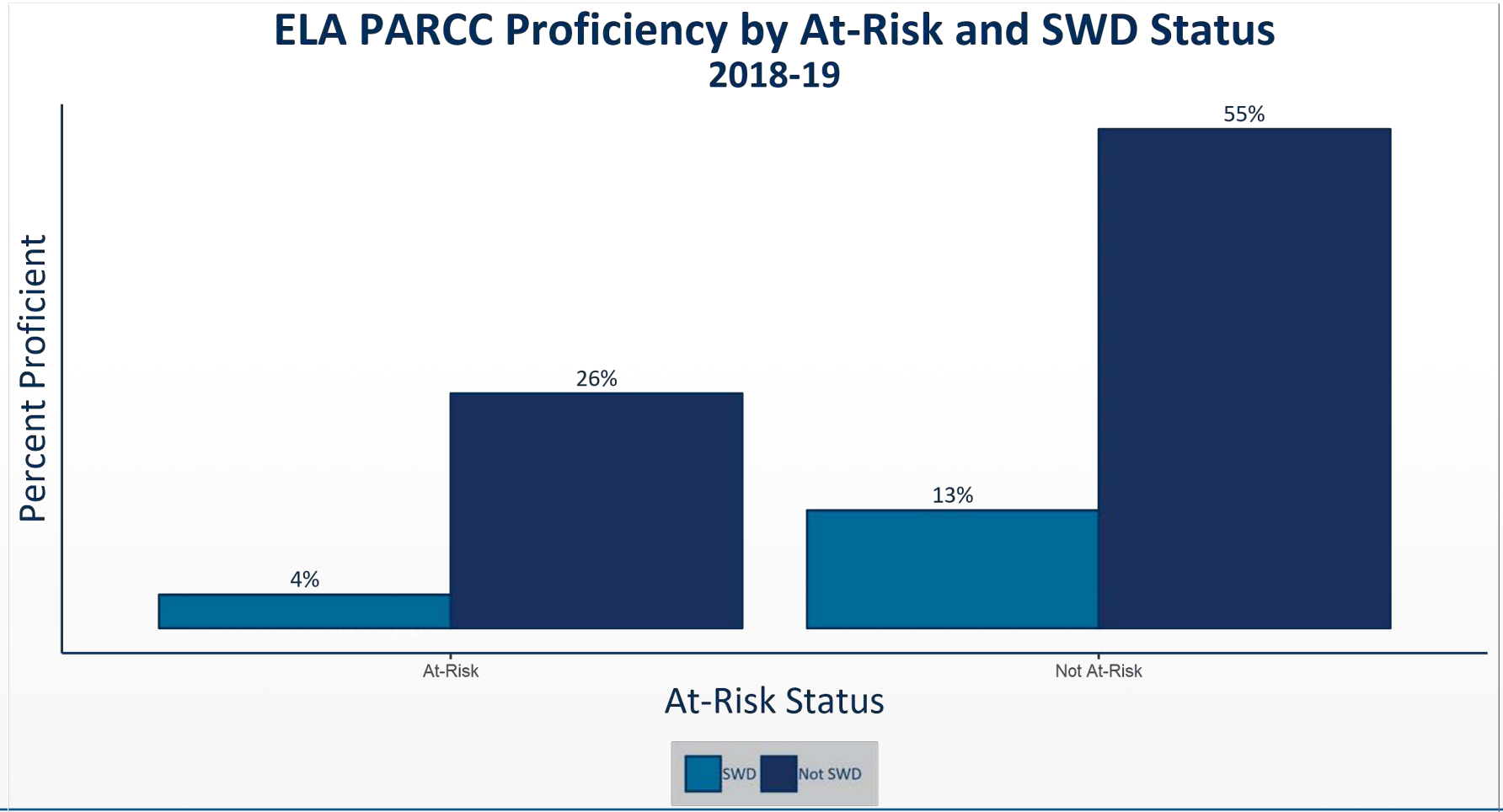
*SY18-19 LRE PARCC Results.
Graph only captures SY18-19 Child Count students who took the PARCC Assessment in SY18-19.
**Values less than 3% are not labeled.

There is variation in performance by disability type, but all groups perform lower than students without disabilities.



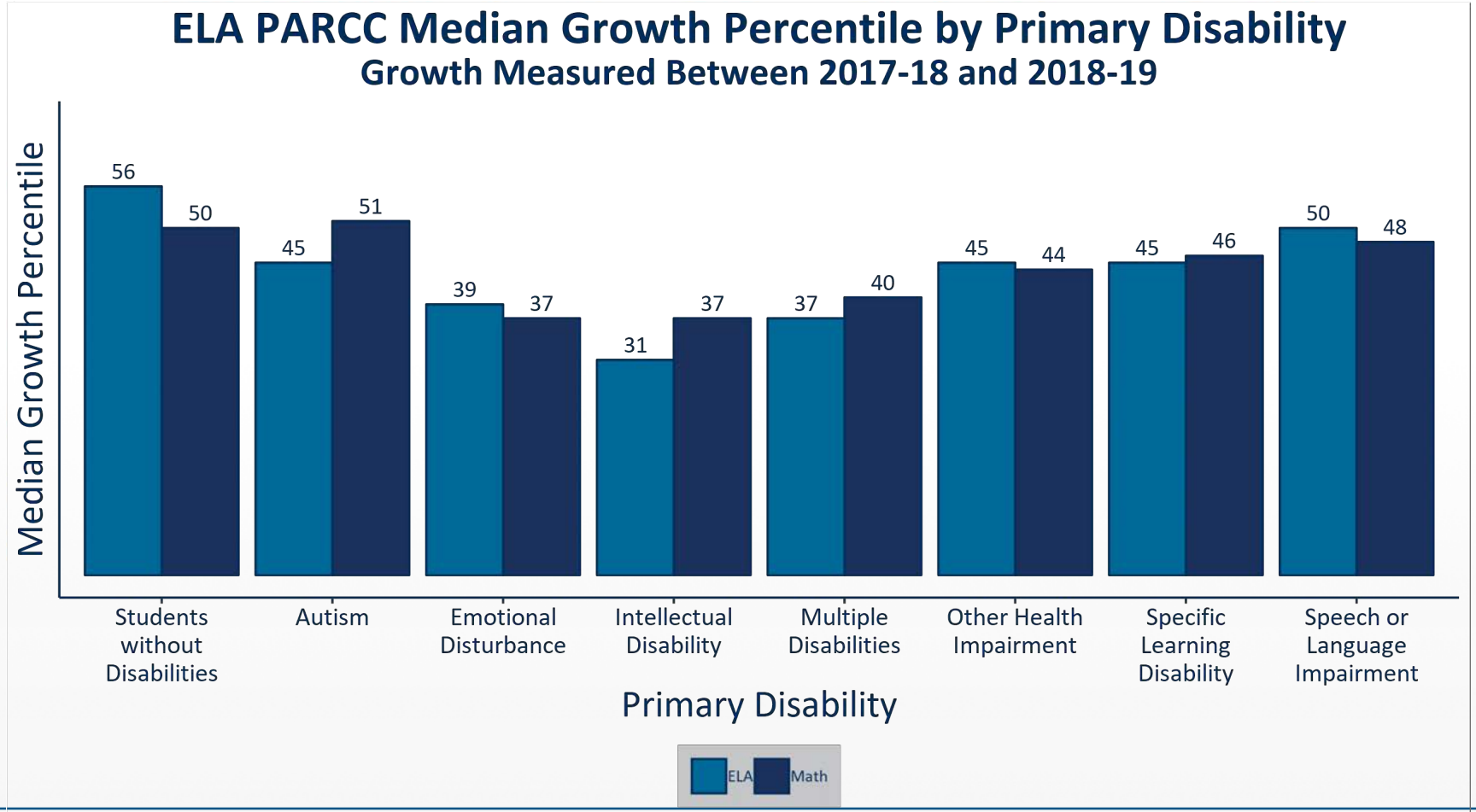
Students who achieve Level 4 or Level 5 results are considered to be proficient.
Source: 2018-19 PARCC Data.

Of the 4,262 SWDs who are also at-risk and took the ELA assessment, only 4%, or 158 in total, demonstrate proficiency.



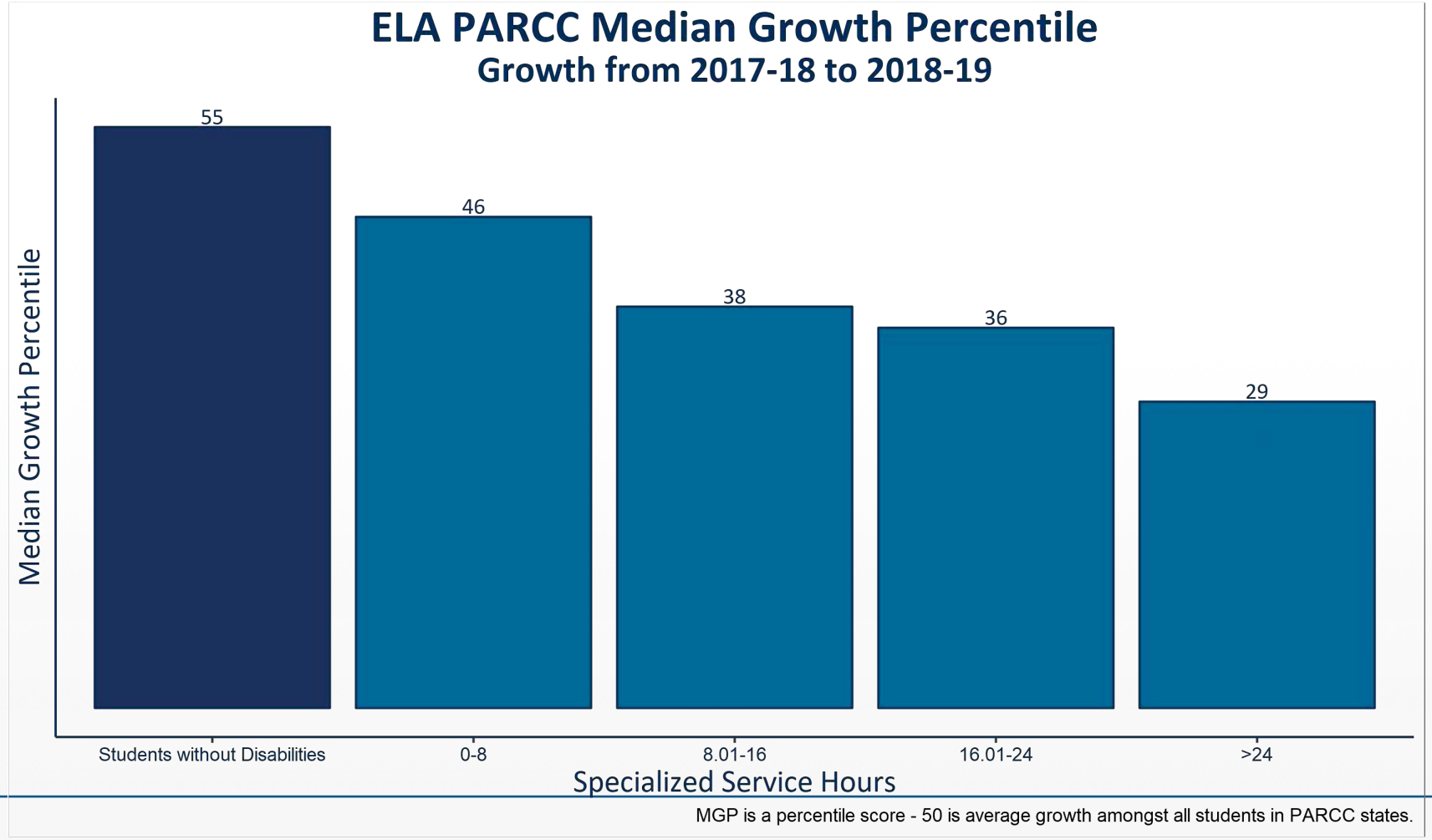
Students who achieve Level 4 or Level 5 results are considered to be proficient.
At-Risk students are those who are homeless, are wards of the state, qualify for TANF or SNAP, or are one year overage and in high school.
Source: 2018-19 PARCC Data.

Students with the primary disability of emotional disturbance have among the lowest growth.



MGP is a percentile score - 50 is average growth amongst all students in PARCC states.
Source: 2018-19 PARCC Data.

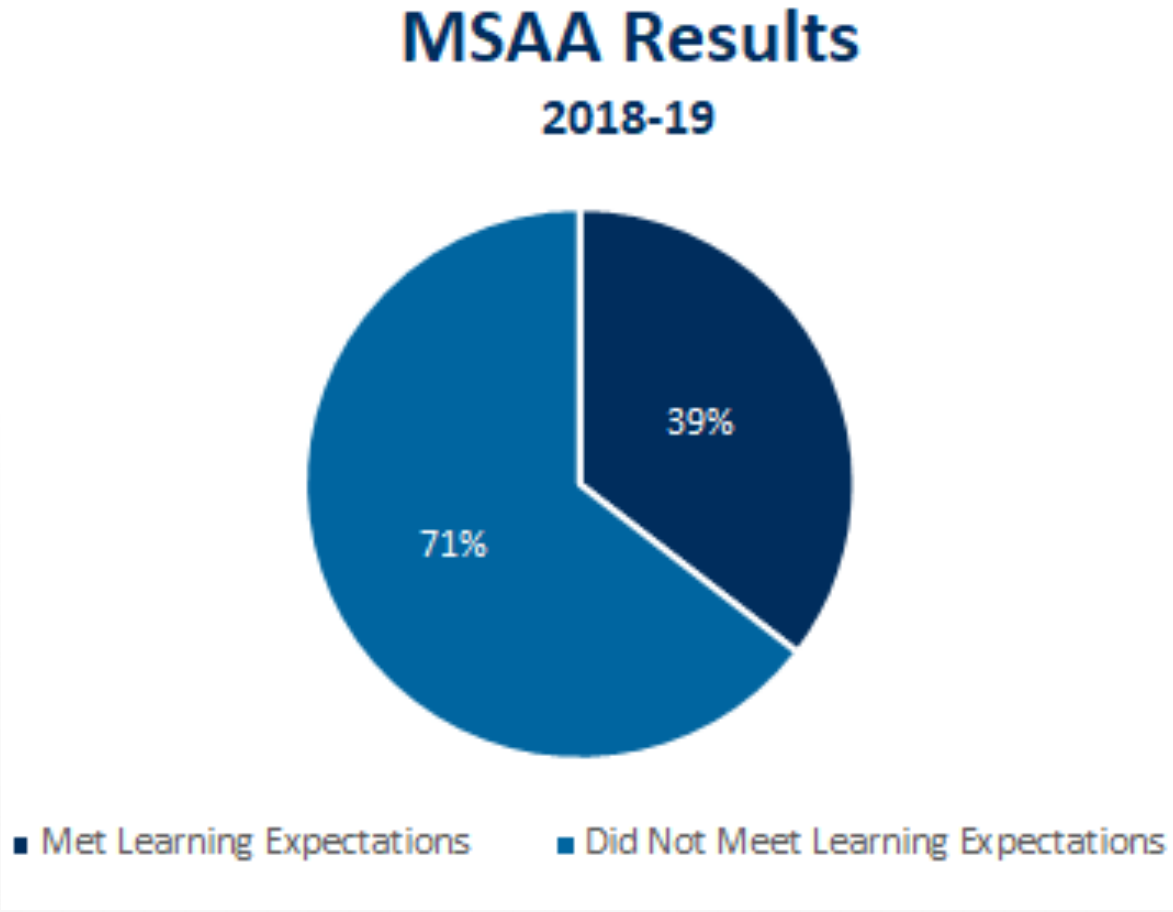
Students with disabilities, even those with few hours of services prescribed, have slower growth than their peers.



MGP is a percentile score - 50 is average growth amongst all students in PARCC states.

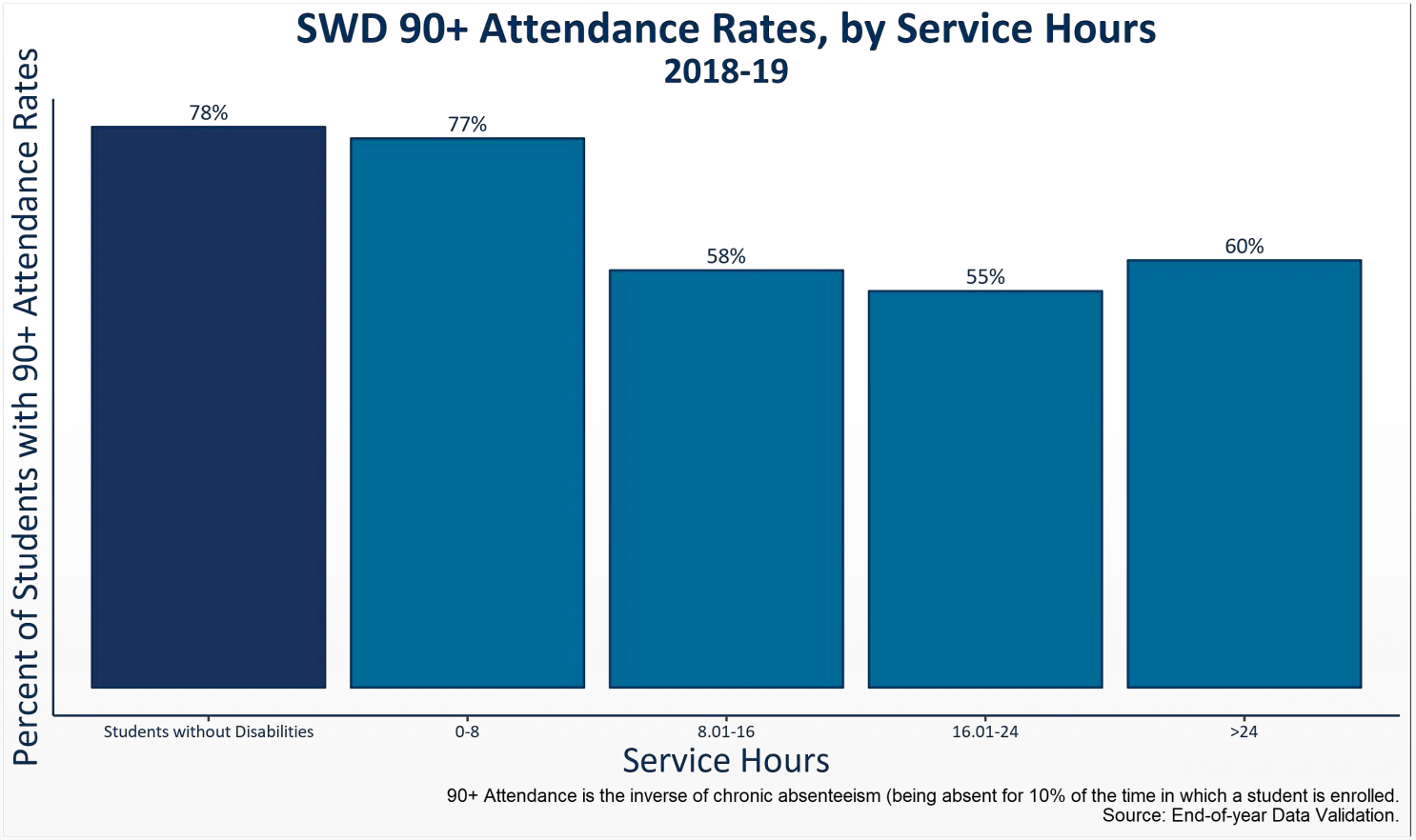
Each year, about 1% of eligible assessment takers in DC take an alternate assessment.

- The Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) is given to students with severe cognitive impairments who are unable to participate in the PARCC assessment as a result of their disability. MSAA assess their progress toward individual learning goals.
- In 2019, 521 students took the MSAA, and 39% of those students met learning expectations on the assessment.



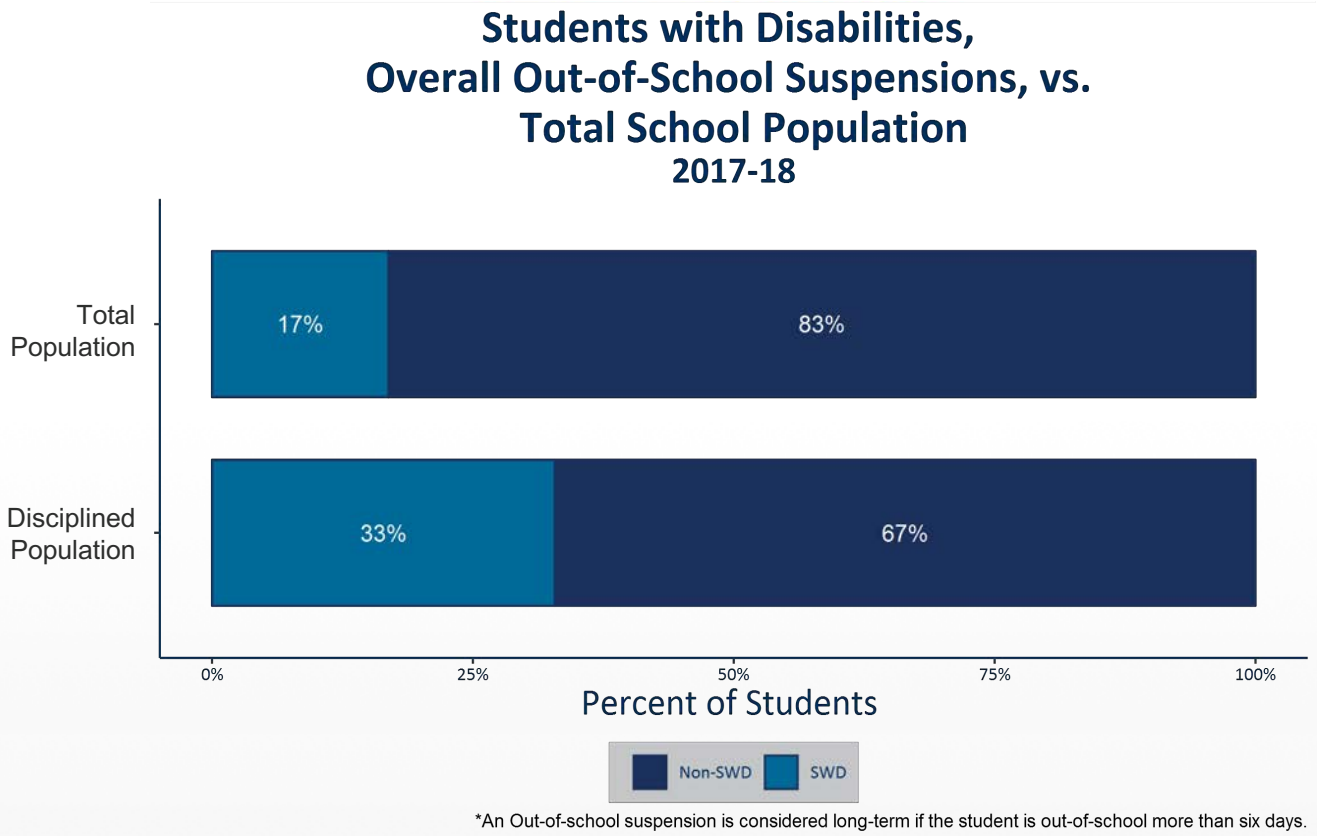
Students with more service hours prescribed are more likely to be chronically absent.

- As part of OSSE's accountability system, OSSE measures how many students attend school for at least 90% of the days in which they are enrolled. This is the inverse of chronic absenteeism.

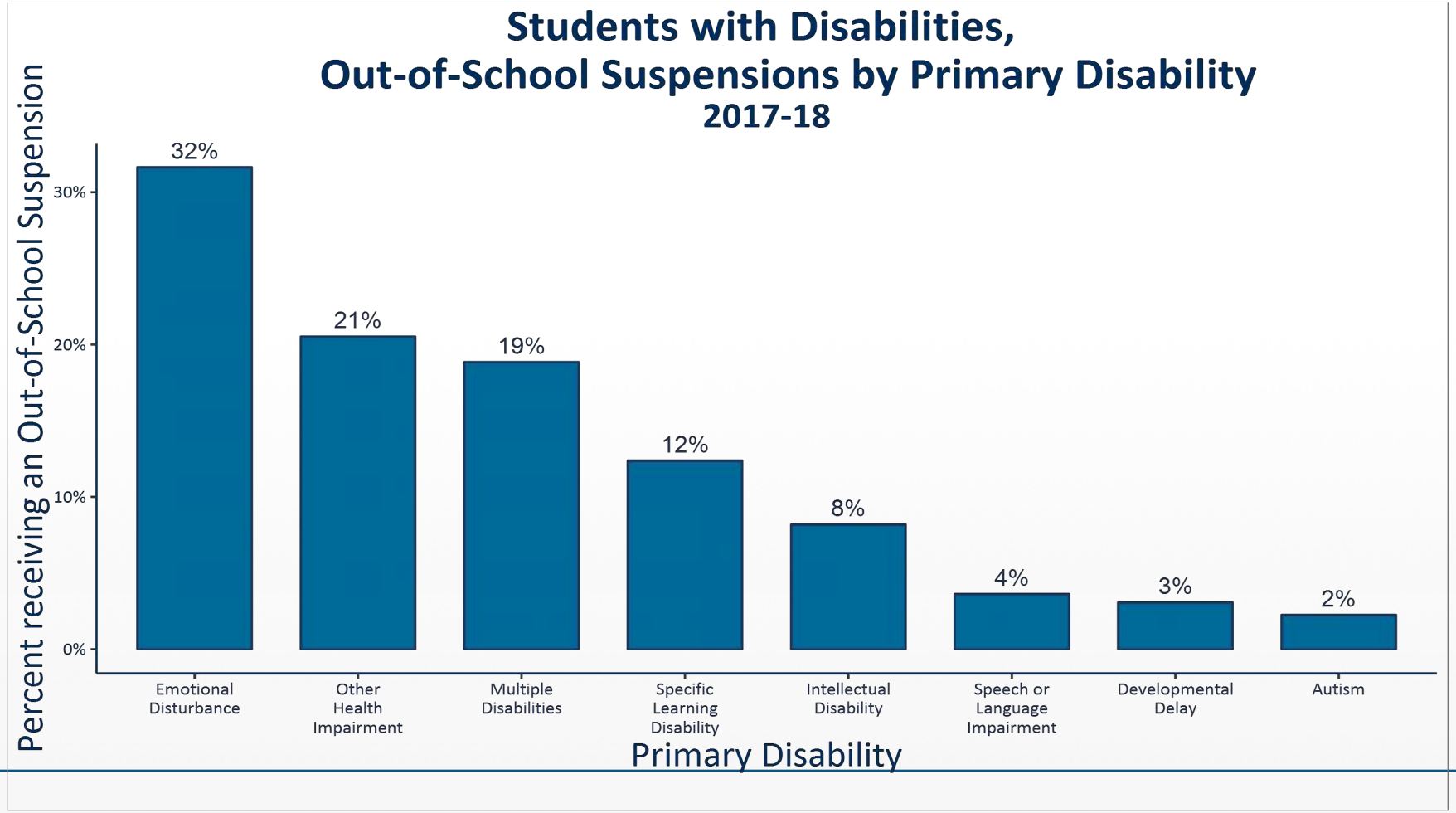


Students with disabilities are significantly more likely to be disciplined than their peers.

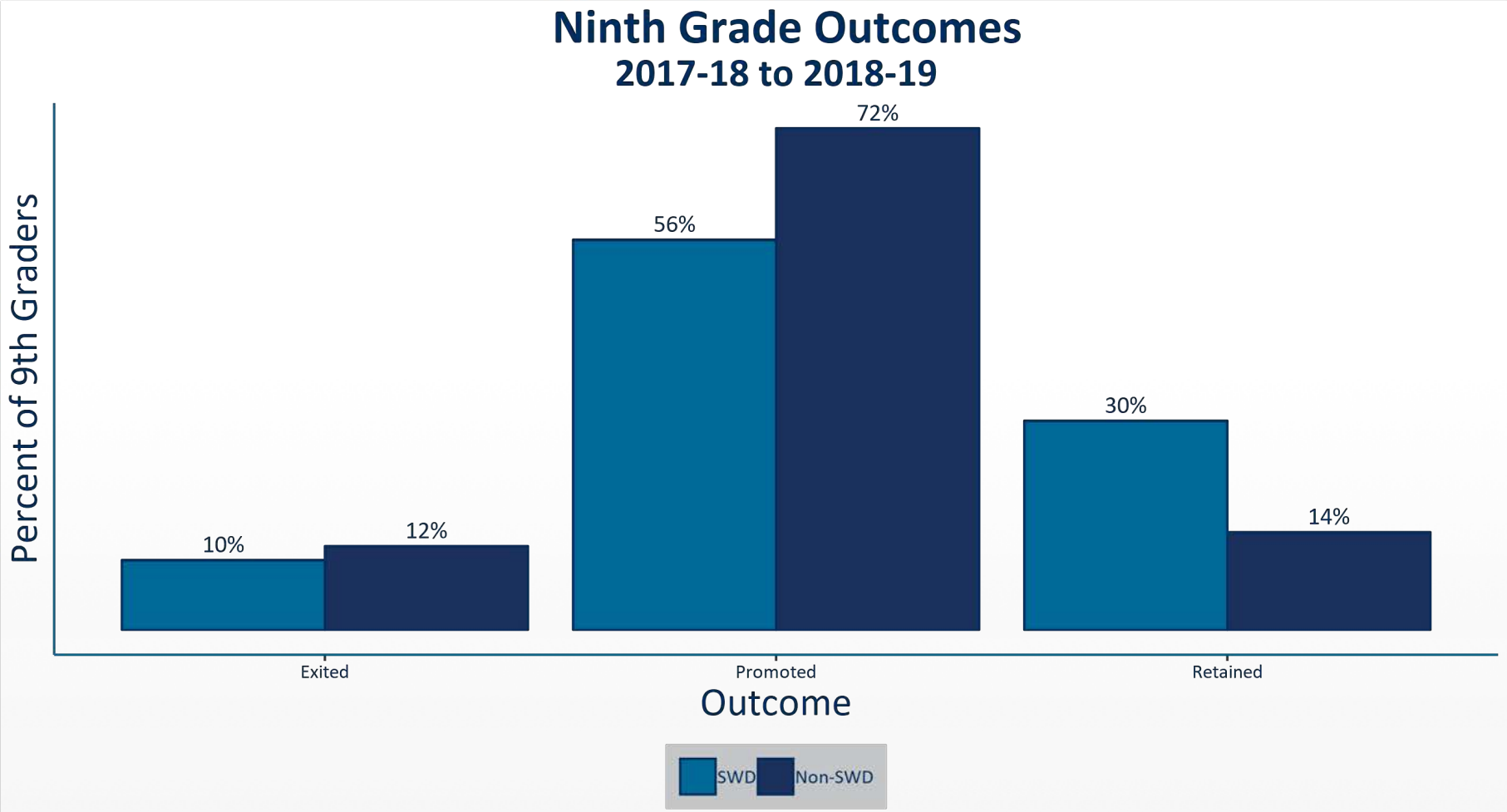
- **SWDs made up 33% of all disciplined students in the District,** but only 17% of the student population in 2017-18.
- After controlling for other demographic factors, **SWDs are more than twice as likely** to be disciplined as those who are not SWDs.
- In 2017-18, **Black SWDs were 3 times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension** for a duration between 1 and 10 days than were SWDs who were not Black; and 2.5 times more likely to receive any form of disciplinary action overall.



Students with Emotional Disturbance are suspended at significantly higher rates than students with other disabilities.



Students with disabilities are retained in ninth grade at twice the rate of their peers.



Does not sum to 100, because it does not include students who switched to a non-diploma track.
Analysis compares student grade in 2017-18 to student grade in 2018-19 for all students who were 9th graders in 2017-18.
Data Source: End-of-Year Data Validation

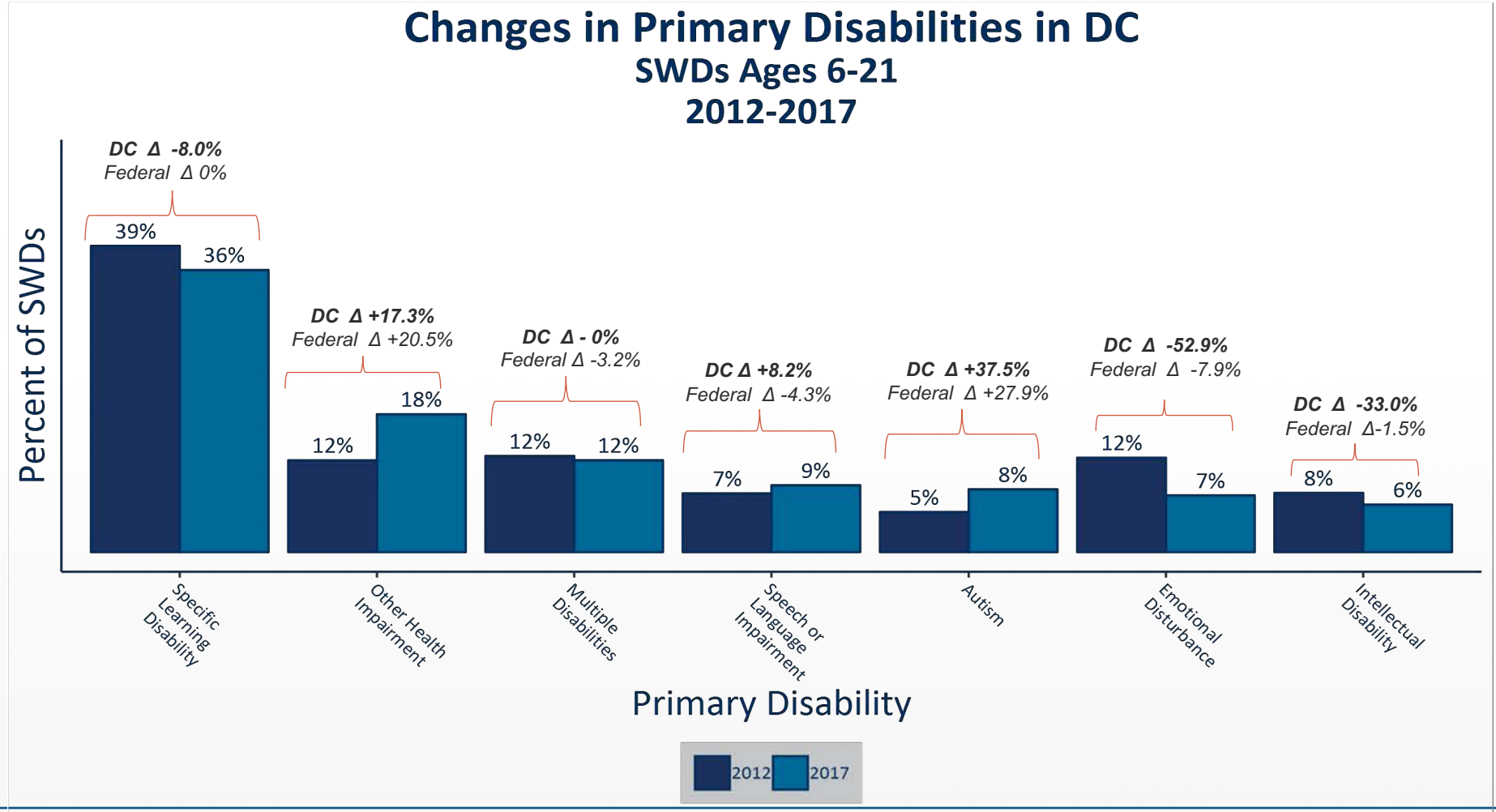
Examining Who Enters and Exits

Key Findings

- DC has experienced a **50% decline in the percent of students identified with emotional disturbance from 2012 to 2017**, while the percent of students identified with autism during this timeframe significantly increased.
- **Once identified, the vast majority of students with disabilities never exit** or return to general education.
- Poverty and race are linked to the identification and exit of students with disabilities, including the fact that **Black students are less likely to exit SWD status once identified**, even after controlling for other demographic factors.
- The likelihood of exiting to general education is greater for students who are identified early; **30% of students identified by age 6 exited to general education**.
- In 2018, **0% of students in DC ages 14-21 exited to general education**, ranking us **last in the nation**.

DC's identification of Emotional Disturbance has declined more dramatically than the national average, over 5 years.

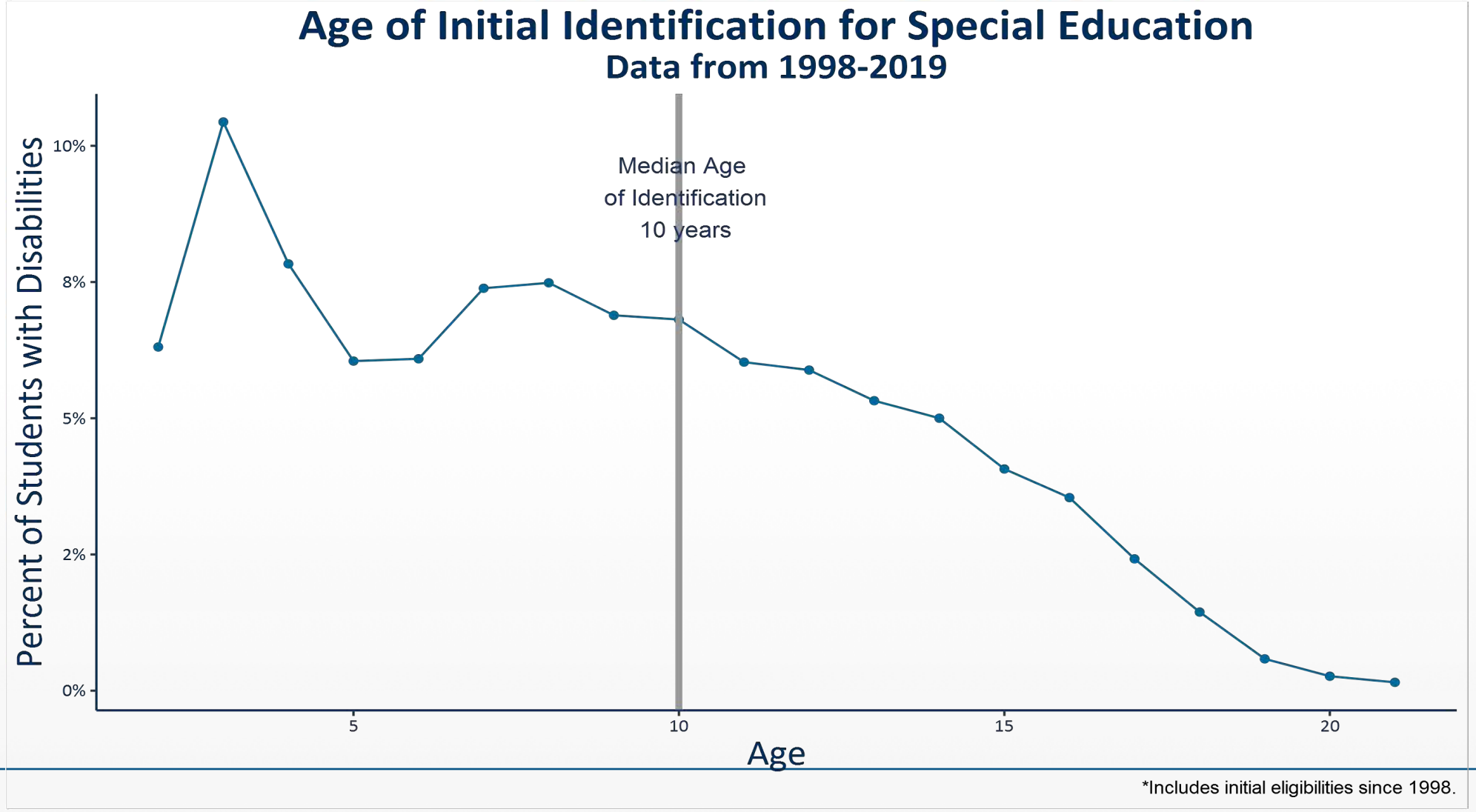
- Deltas indicate national and DC change in rate of primary disability category between 2012 and 2017.



Source: IDEA State Level Data Files

Data Source: IDEA State Level Data Files

Half of all students with disabilities in the District are identified after age 10.

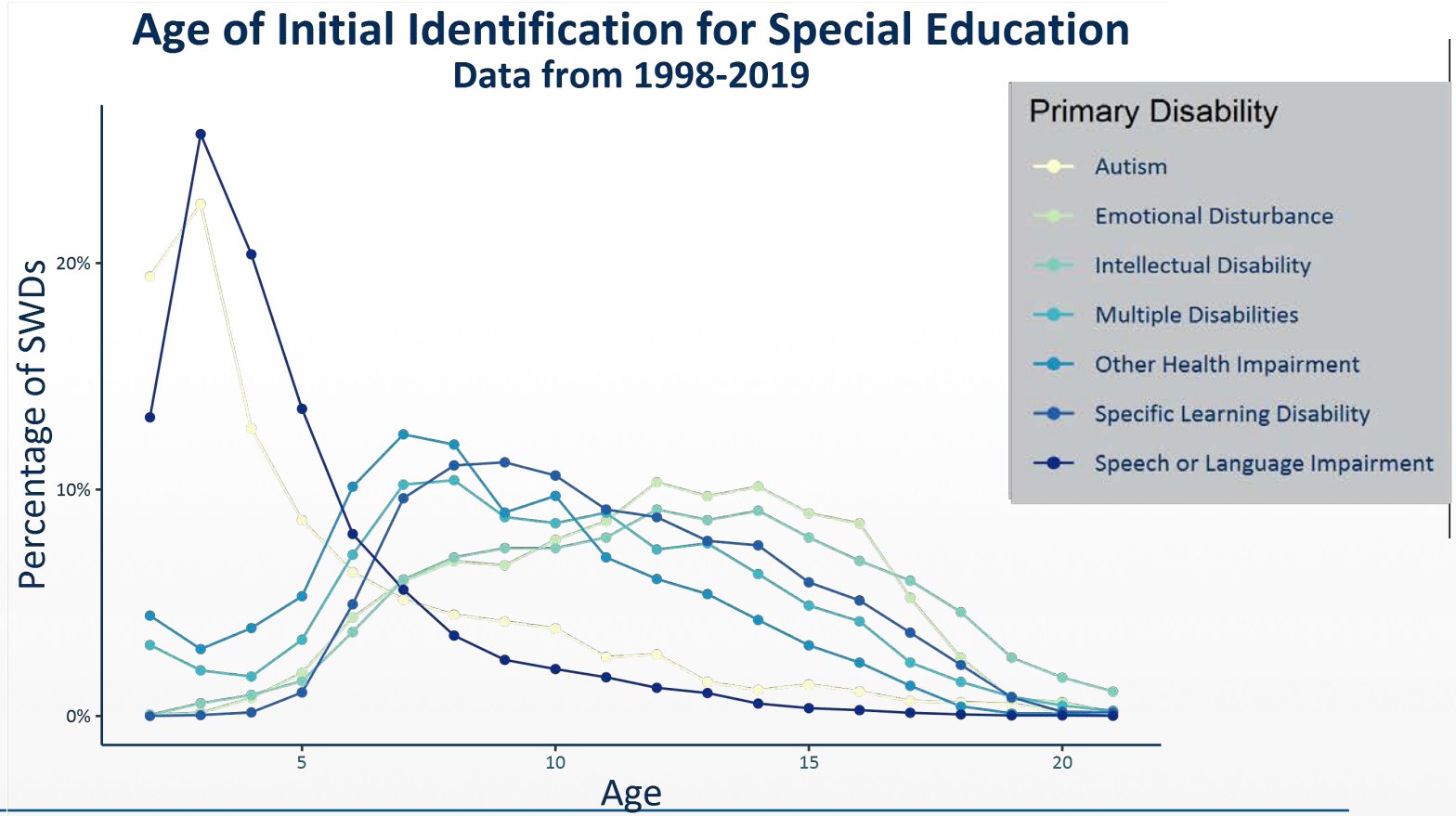


*Includes initial eligibilities since 1998.

Emotional Disturbance and Intellectual Disability are, on average, identified at a later age than are other primary disabilities.

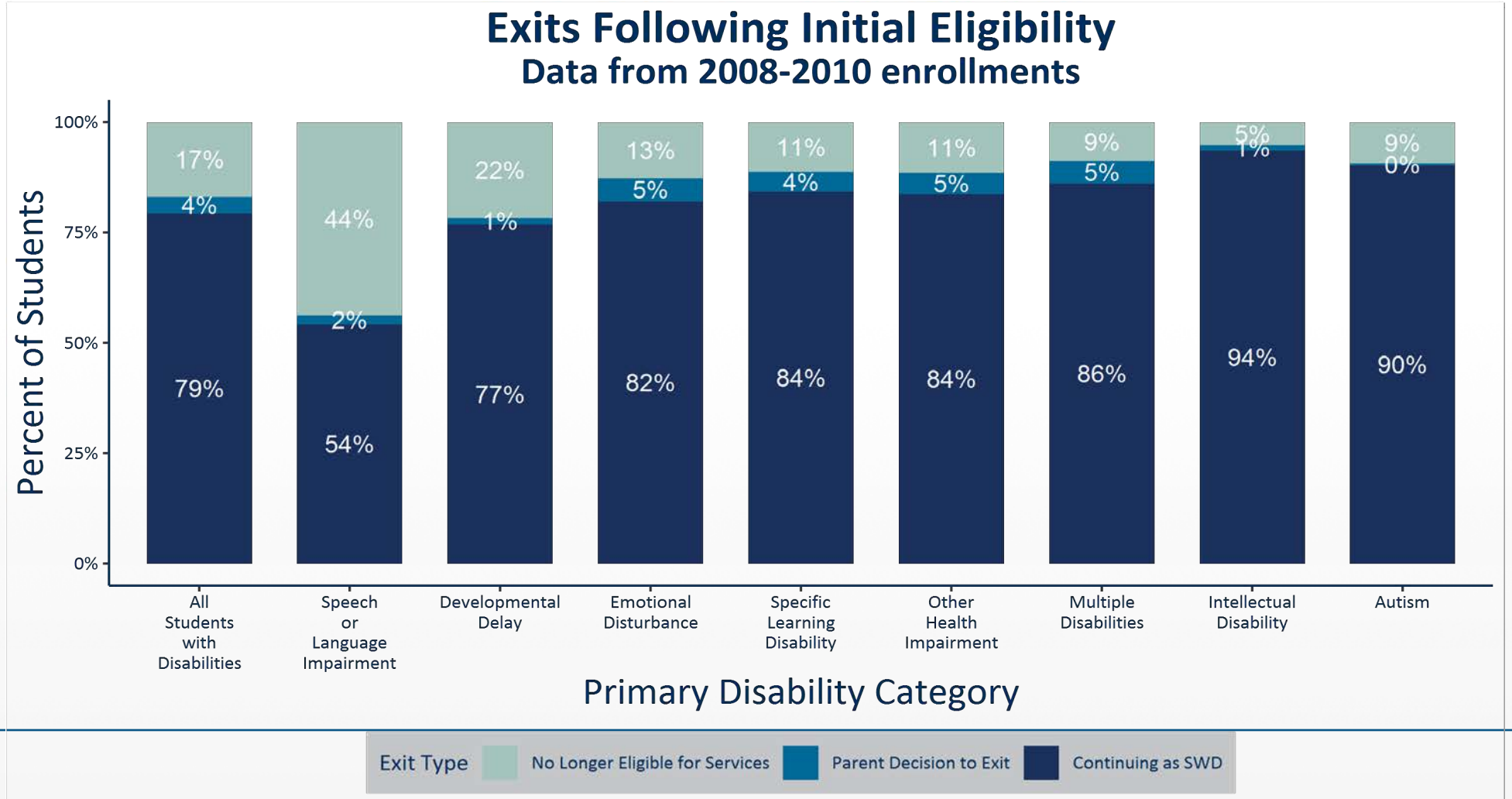
Three waves of identification appear in the data (median age of identification):

- Autism (3 years) and Speech or Language Impairment (3.5 years) identifications generally occur prior to kindergarten.
- Other Health Impairment (8 years), Specific Learning Disability (9 years), and Multiple Disabilities (10 years) identifications generally occur after a child would be expected to read.
- Intellectual Disability (12.5 years) and Emotional Disturbance (13.5 years) identifications generally occur later in middle school or early high school.



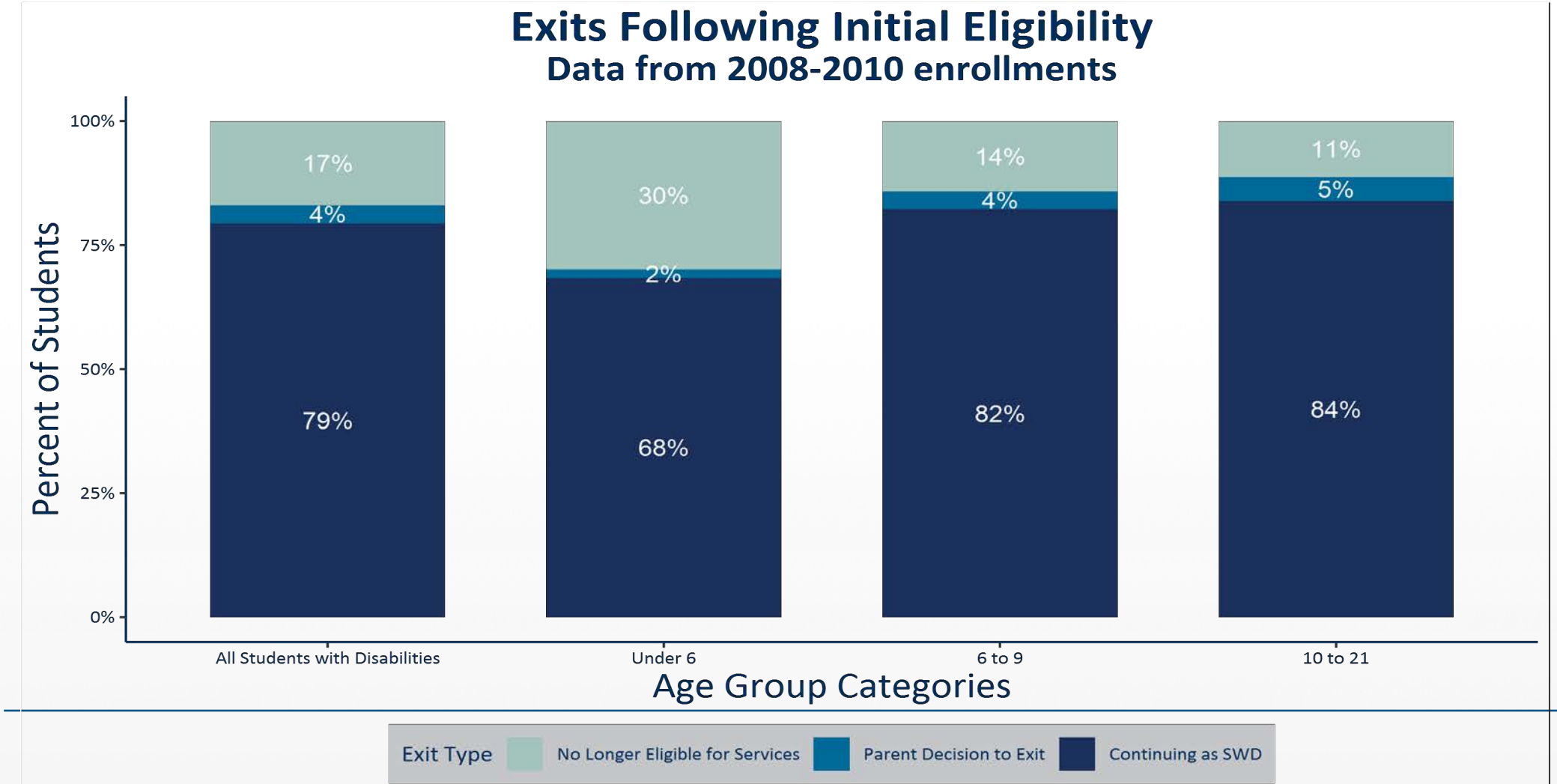
Includes students who've had an initial eligibility in DC since 1998.
**Primary Disability Categories with n-size <200 not displayed.
***Developmental Delay not displayed; Students can only have Developmental Delay until age 7.

Only 17% of all student with disabilities exit to general education.



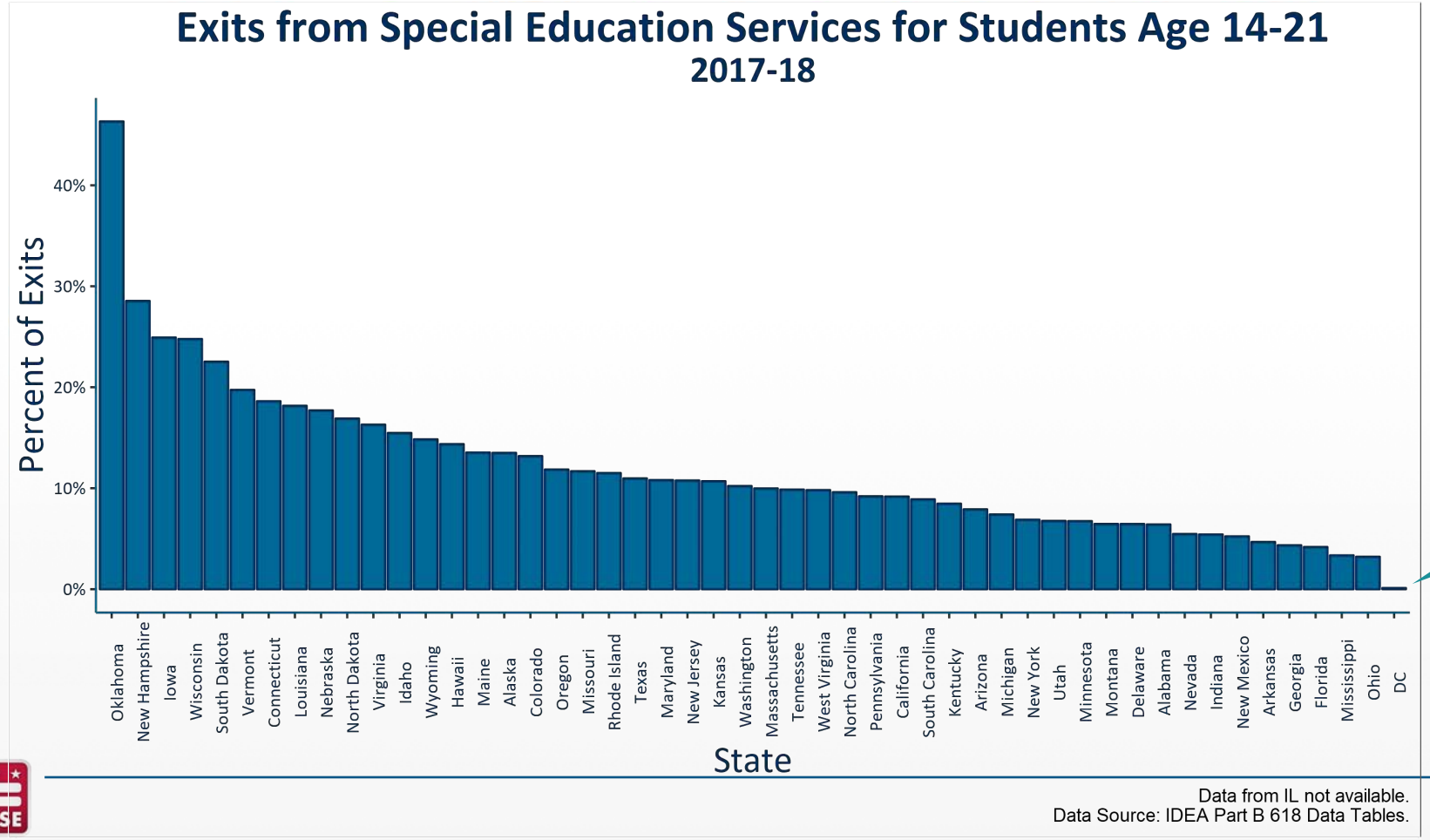
*Includes all students, who had an initial eligibility in DC between 2008-2010.
** Primary Disability Categories with n-size <200 not displayed

Students identified for services before age 6 are more likely to exit special education than students identified later.



*Includes all students, who had an initial eligibility in DC between 2008-2010.

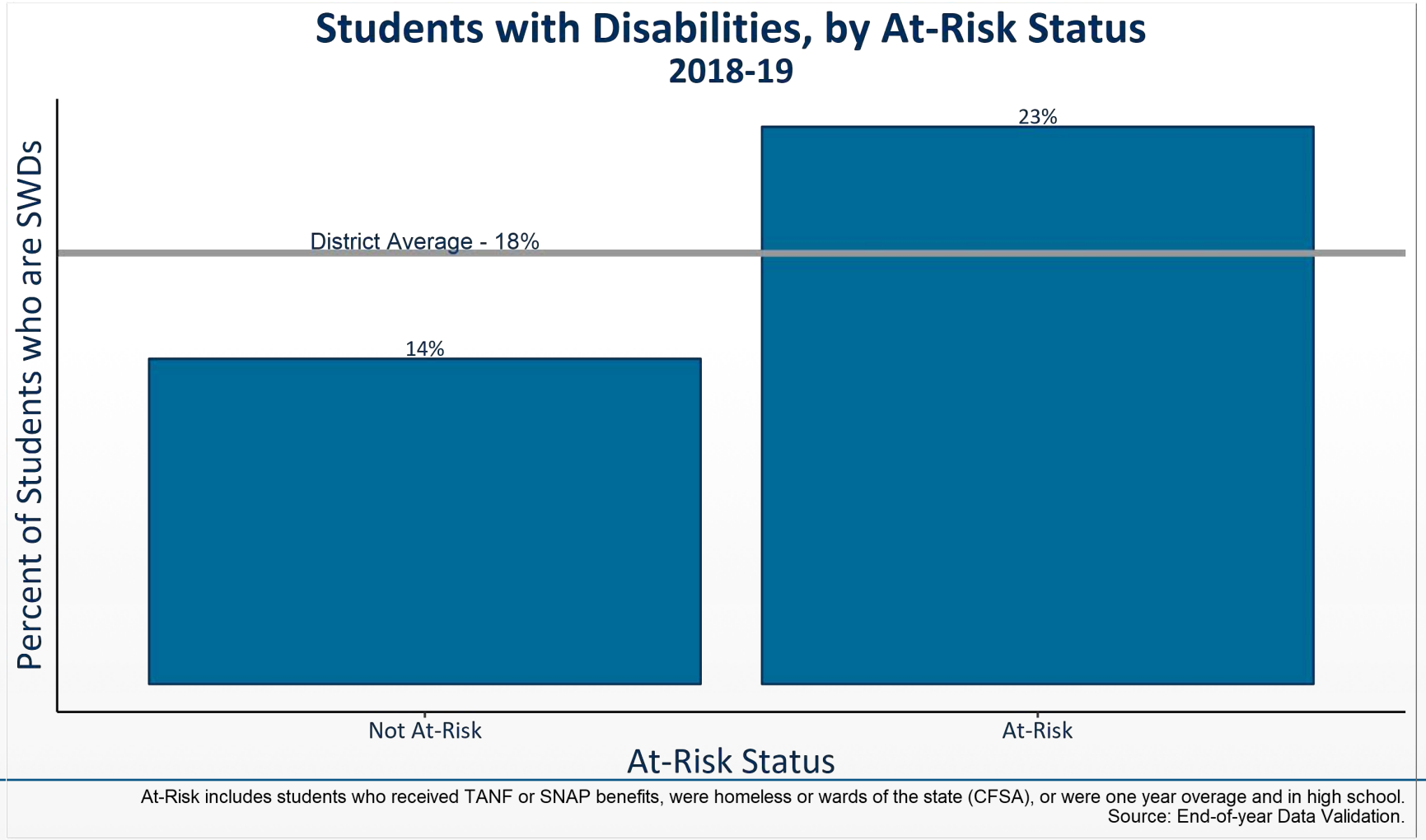
Unlike in other states, after age 14, few DC students exit special education and return to general education.



Zero percent of DC students aged 14-21 exited special education to general education in 2018, ranking DC **last in the nation.**

Data from IL not available.
Data Source: IDEA Part B 618 Data Tables.

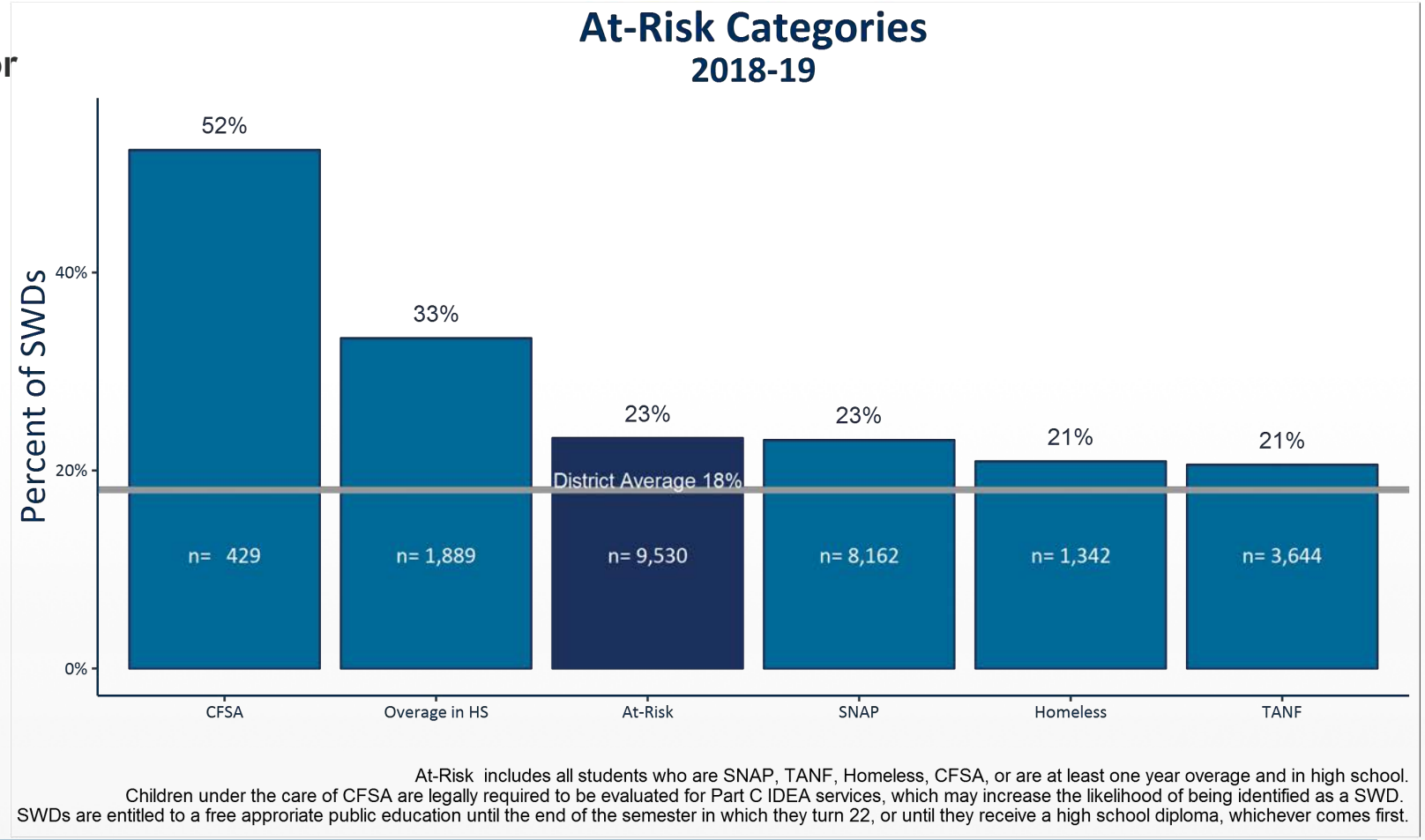
Students who are at-risk are identified as students with disabilities at higher rates than students who are not at-risk.



At-Risk includes students who received TANF or SNAP benefits, were homeless or wards of the state (CFSA), or were one year overage and in high school.
Source: End-of-year Data Validation.

Students with different reasons for being considered at-risk are identified as SWDs at different rates.

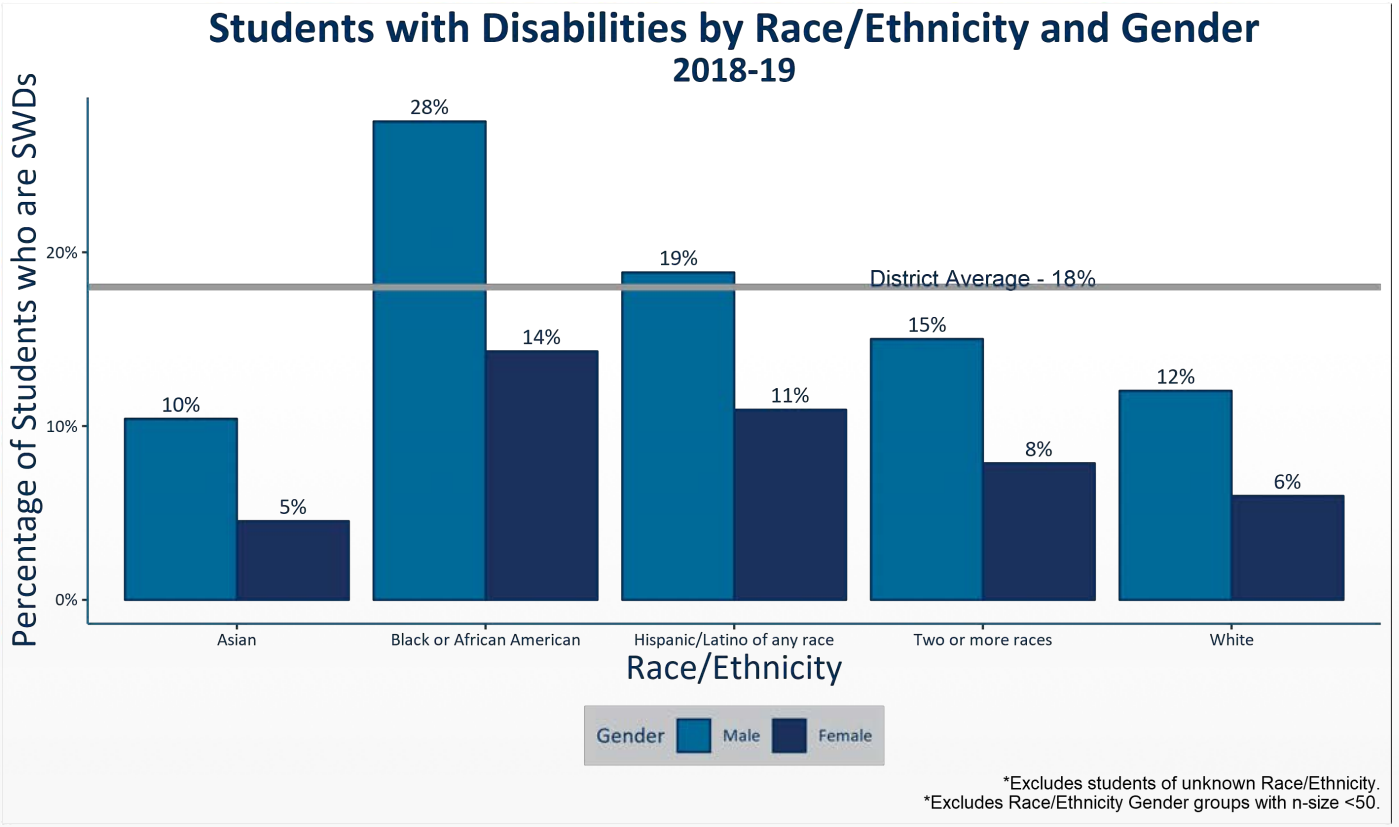
- Students who are **homeless or are recipients of TANF** (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) **or SNAP** (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program) are identified as SWDs at rates **similar to all students.**
- By contrast, students who are under the care of **Child & Family Services Agency (CFSA) or are overage** are **identified as students with disabilities at higher rates.**



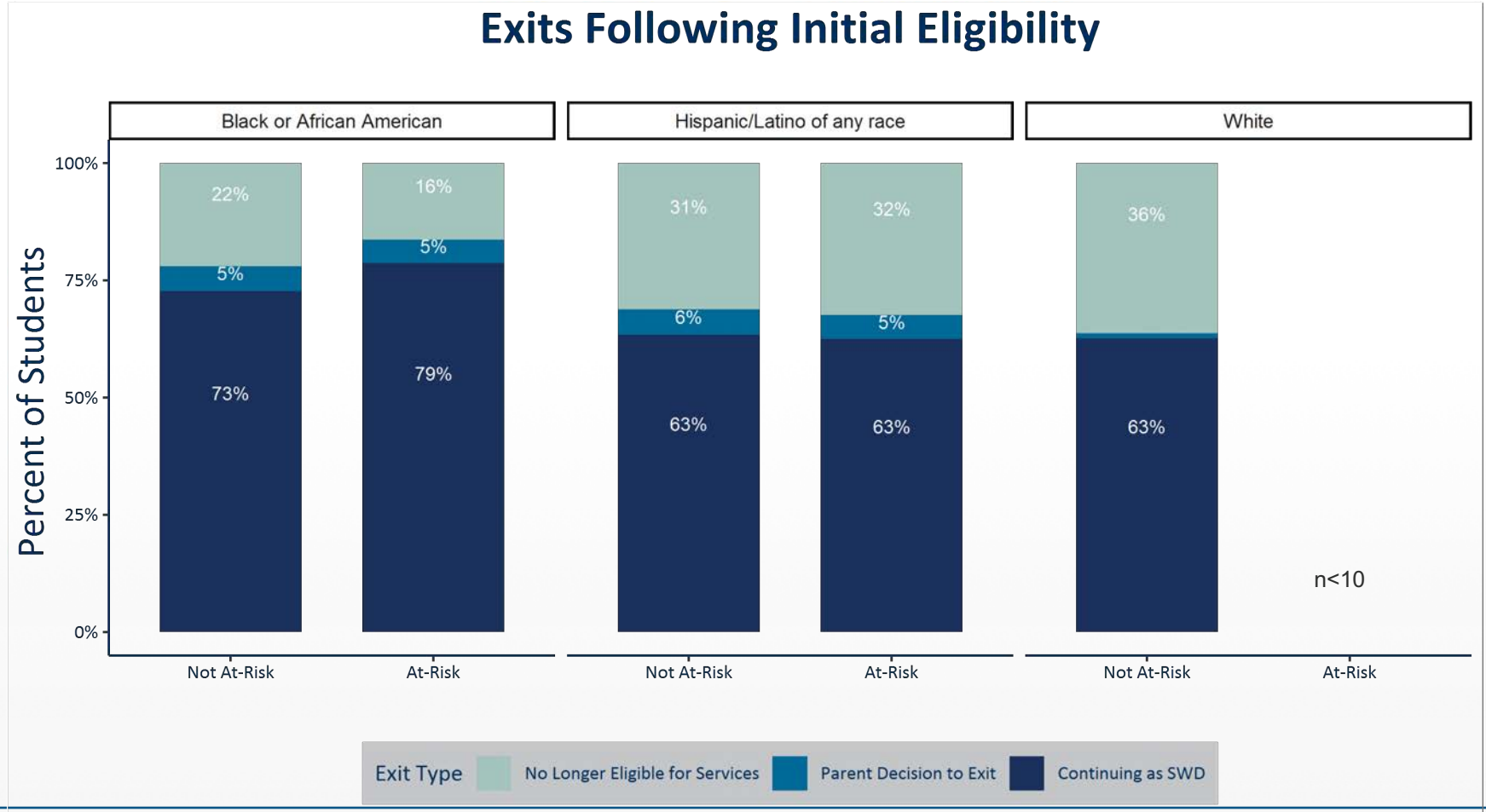
At-Risk includes all students who are SNAP, TANF, Homeless, CFSA, or are at least one year overage and in high school.
Children under the care of CFSA are legally required to be evaluated for Part C IDEA services, which may increase the likelihood of being identified as a SWD.
SWDs are entitled to a free approriate public education until the end of the semester in which they turn 22, or until they receive a high school diploma, whichever comes first.

Males and students of color are more likely to be identified as students with disabilities.

- More than **1 in 4 Black males and 1 in 8 Black females are identified as a SWD.**
- **Black males** are **identified as SWD at more than twice the rate** of White males and nearly **five times the rate** of White females.



Black students are the most likely to remain identified as students with disabilities, even among students with similar indicators of disadvantage.



*Overage students excluded from At-Risk category.
**Includes all students who had an initial eligibility in DC between 2008-2010

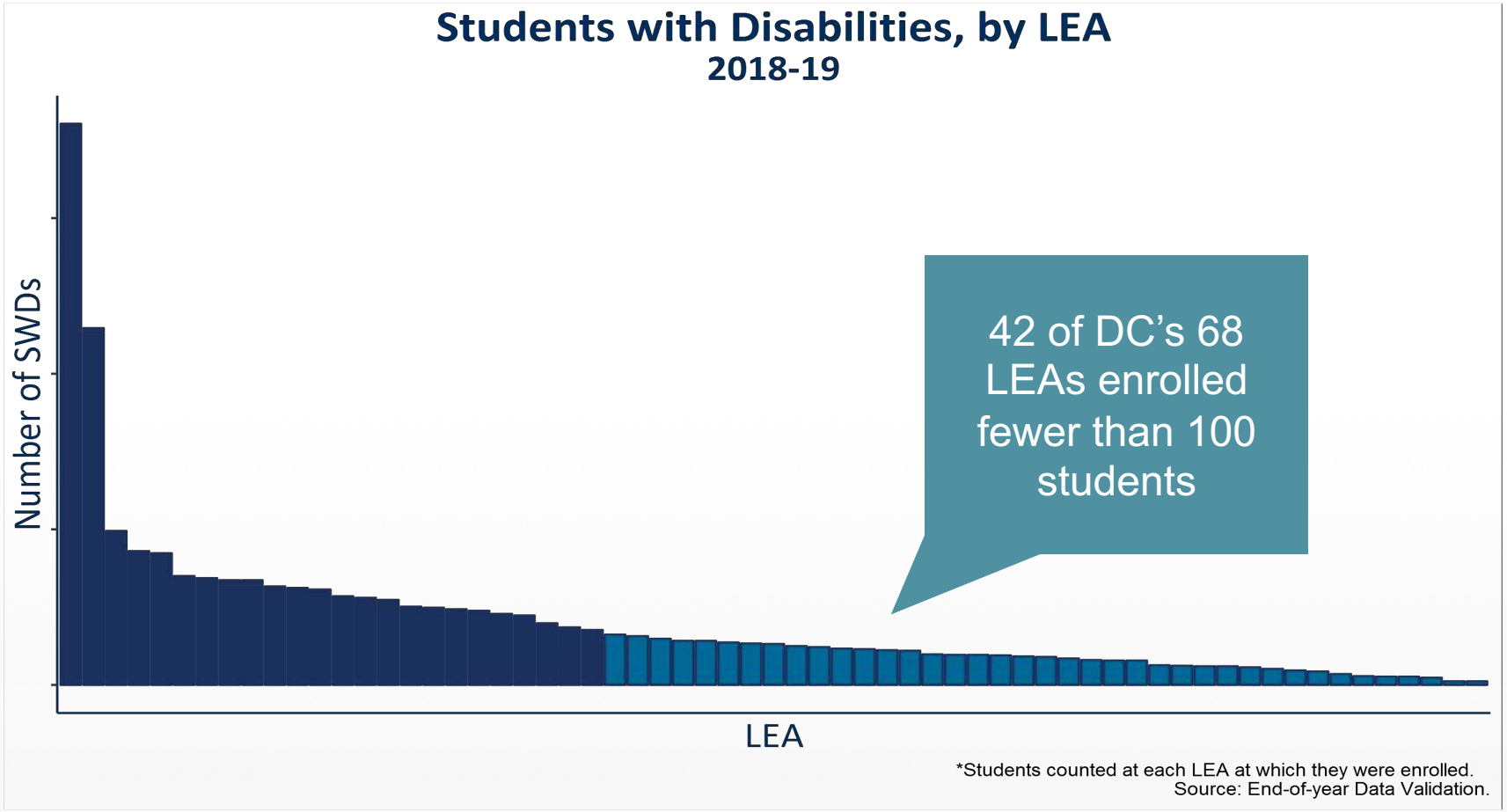
Evaluating Access & Choice for SWDs in DC's Unique Landscape

Key Findings

- Many of DC's LEAs are small, and **more than 60% of LEAs enroll fewer than 100 students with disabilities**, yet all LEAs are legally required to provide a full continuum of services for all students.
- Most SWDs spend the majority of their instruction time in the general education setting, but **9% are served in a separate school – 3 times the national average**.
- The **majority of students with disabilities in wards 7 and 8 attend school in their home ward**, and one quarter of them are transported by OSSE to school.
- Nearly 1 in 4 of the 3,253 students with disabilities who are transported by OSSE to school spend **two hours or more on the bus to and from school** each day.

62% of LEAs enrolled fewer than 100 students with disabilities in 2018-19.

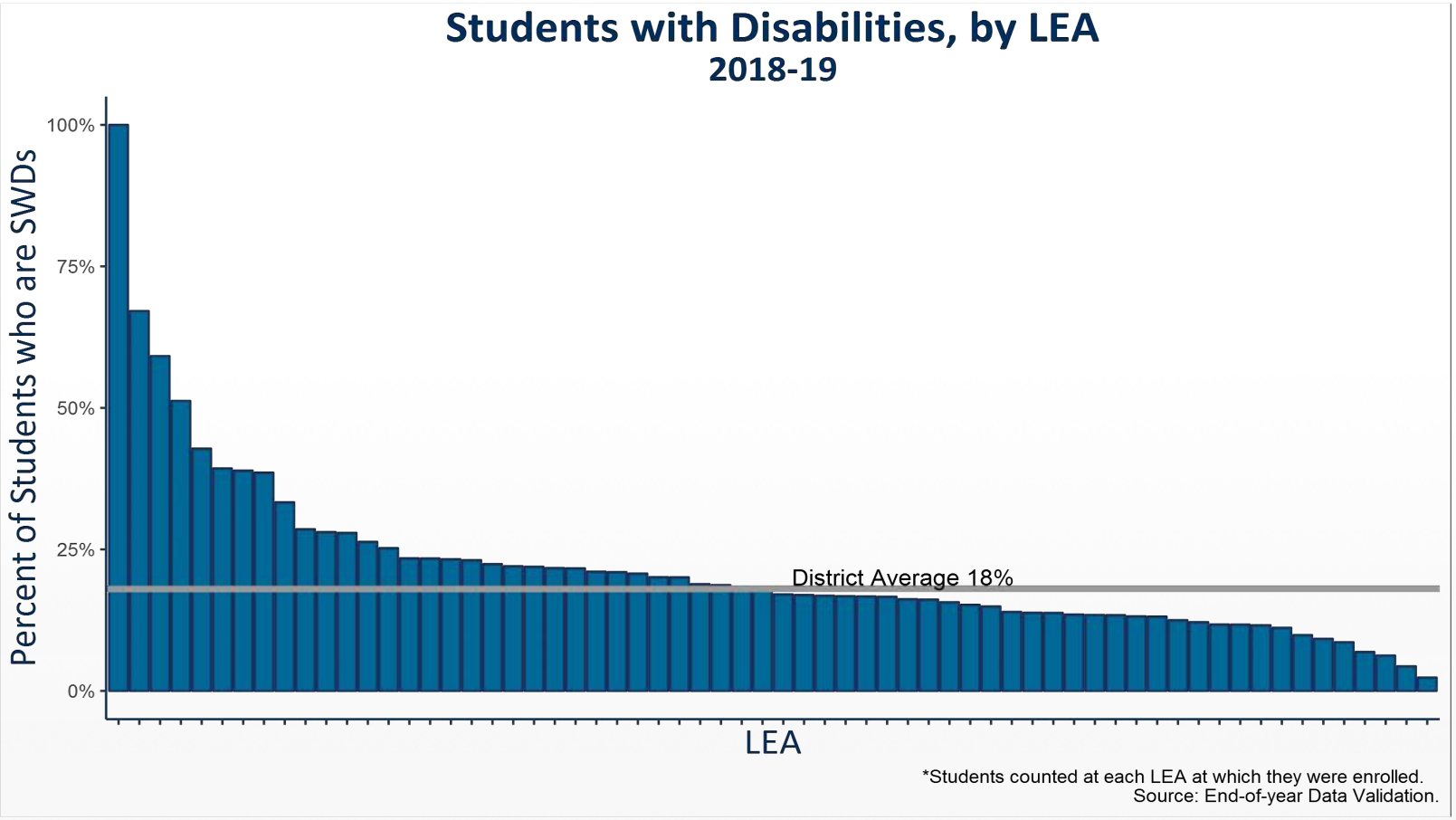
- In 2018-19, DCPS (including St. Coletta PCS) served 9,885 SWDs.
- Public charter LEAs varied widely in the rate and number of SWDs served.



Source: OSSE

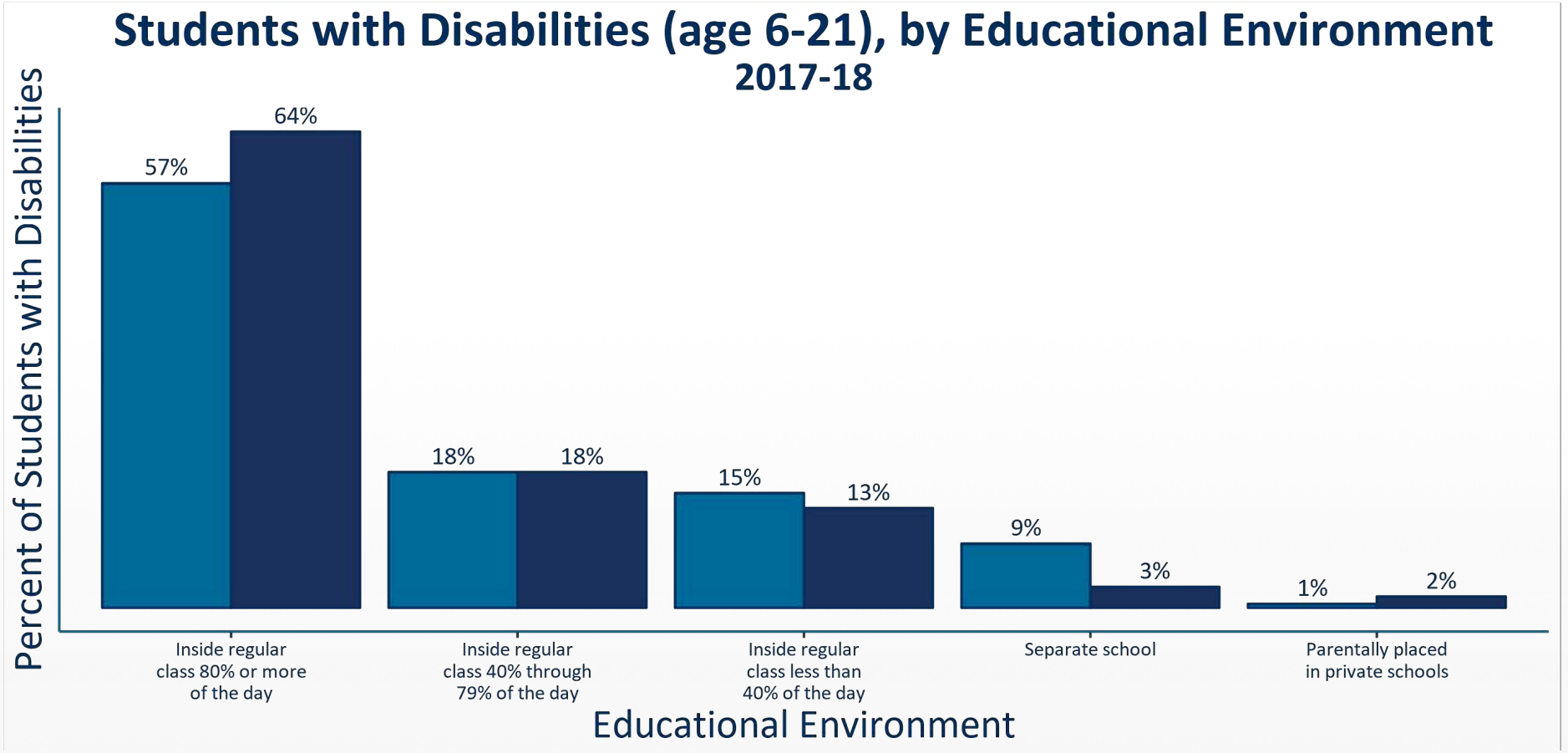
Thirteen LEAs have student populations that are over 25% students with disabilities.

- In 2018-19, eight of 68 LEAs served a student population with fewer than 10% students with disabilities.
- Four adult LEAs do not receive IDEA funds and are, therefore, not required to provide services for students with disabilities.



Note: St. Coletta PCS is an LEA which exclusively serves students with disabilities; therefore, 100% of their students are students with disabilities.

Students with disabilities in DC are placed in a separate school at three times the national rate.



Note: 2017-18 data is used here because the national rates were not yet available for 2018-19 at the time this analysis was completed.

DC National

Does not sum to 100 because it does not include students in correctional faciliites, homebound/hospital, or residential faciliites, all of which are <1% in DC and nationally.
Data Source: IDEA Part B 618 Data Tables.

Students with Emotional Disturbance, Intellectual Disability or Multiple Disabilities are the most likely to attend a separate school.

Primary Disability	Percent of Students with Disabilities (age 3-21) by educational environment 2018-19			
	Inside regular class 80% or more of the day	Inside regular class 40% through 79% of the day	Inside regular class less than 40% of the day	Separate School
All Disabilities	**55.8%**	**17.8%**	**17.8%**	**8.2%**
Autism	25.0%	11.2%	47.0%	16.2%
Developmental Delay	49.3%	11.6%	37.0%	n<25
Emotional Disturbance	39.6%	16.3%	24.6%	18.2%
Intellectual Disability	7.9%	21.6%	47.7%	22.5%
Multiple Disabilities	37.7%	19.7%	20.6%	21.1%
Other Health Impairment	63.9%	17.3%	12.8%	5.8%
Specific Learning Disability	70.1%	22.5%	6.1%	1.3%
Speech or Language Impairment	91.6%	6.4%	n<25	n<25

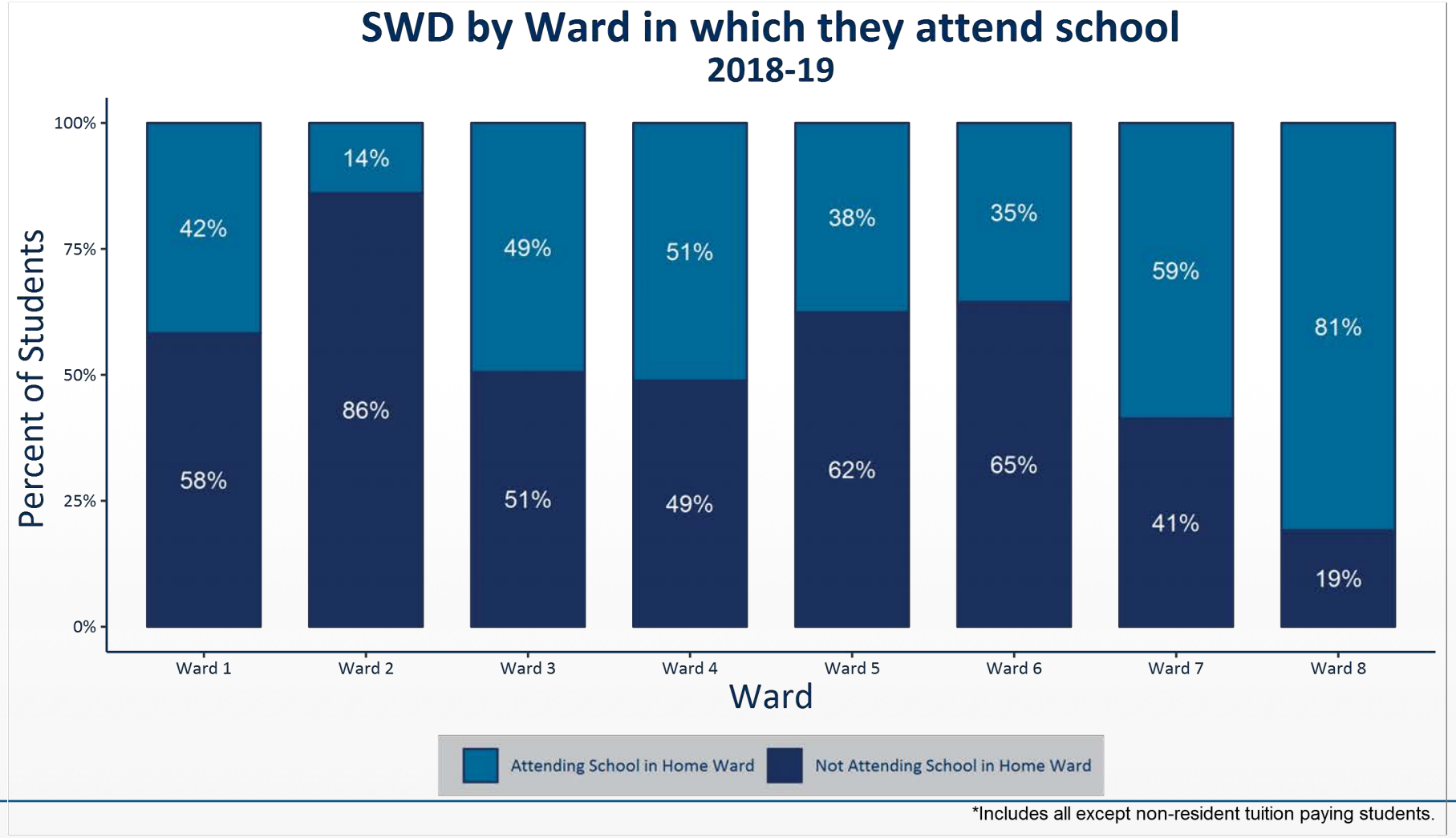
Note: This chart excludes Homebound/Hospital; Residential Facility; and Correctional Facility, which collectively comprise less than 1% of settings in DC. Services received in Early Childhood Environments are also excluded from this analysis. Primary disability categories with n<200 are not displayed.

More than half of students with Autism and Intellectual Disability are prescribed 24 hours of service or more per week.

Primary Disability	Percent of Students with Disabilities (age 3-21) by hours of service prescribed per week 2018-19			
	0-8 Hours of Services/Week	9-16 Hours of Services/Week	17-24 Hours of Services/Week	24 or More Hours of Services/Week
All Disabilities	**38.2%**	**27.1%**	**10.5%**	**24.2%**
Autism	14.6%	12.3%	13.3%	59.9%
Developmental Delay	57.4%	13.6%	4.9%	24.0%
Emotional Disturbance	20.3%	22.6%	13.8%	43.3%
Intellectual Disability	3.5%	12.2%	21.9%	62.5%
Multiple Disabilities	16.3%	23.0%	15.9%	44.8%
Other Health Impairment	36.3%	32.4%	11.6%	19.7%
Specific Learning Disability	37.7%	42.4%	12.7%	7.3%
Speech or Language Impairment	86.4%	9.2%	2.9%	1.6%

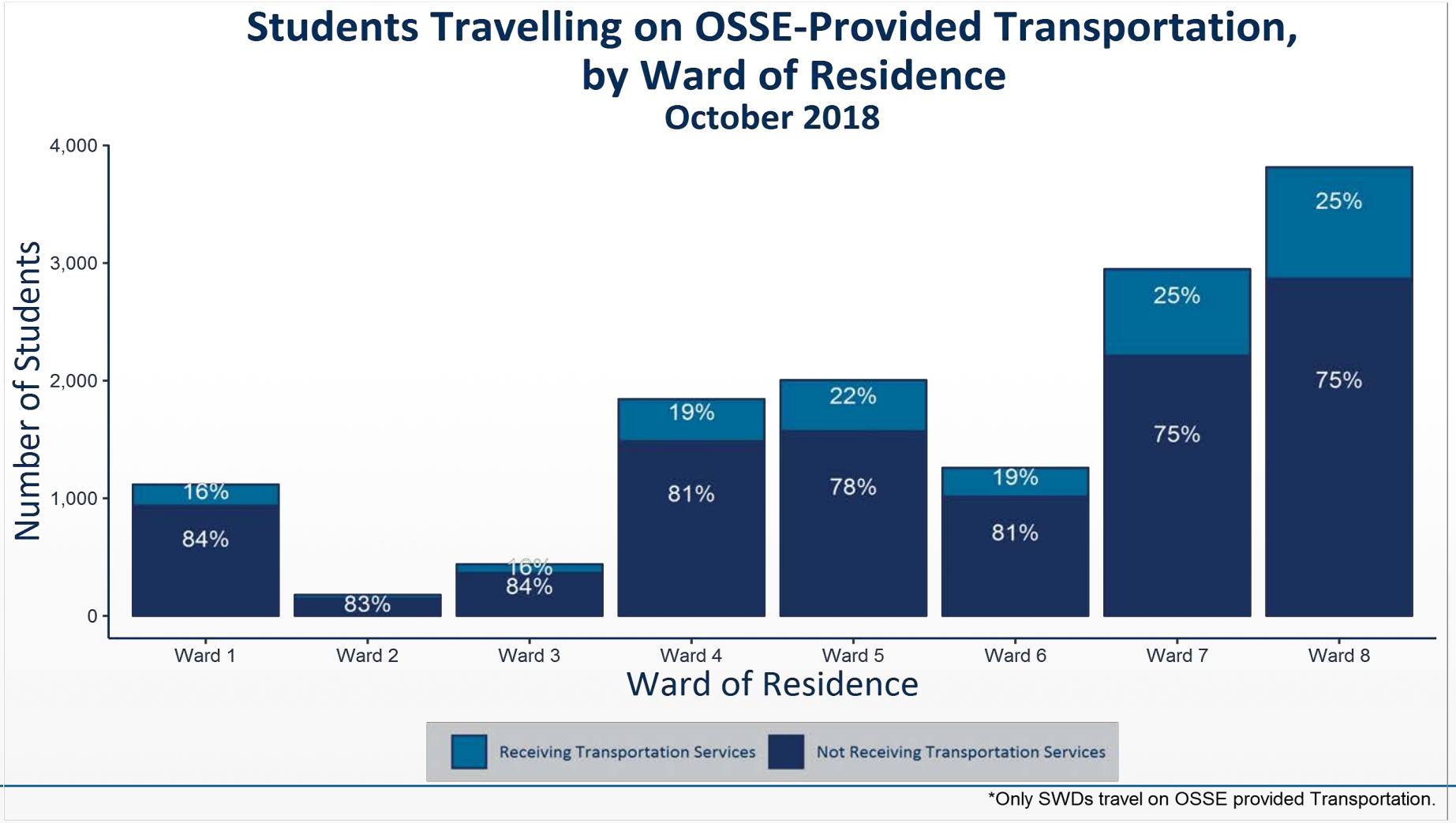
Note: Primary disability categories with n<200 are not displayed. Hours of prescribed service are used to determine per pupil funding levels for students with disabilities within DC's uniform per student funding formula (UPSFF). See Appendix B for a breakdown of the funding levels.

Most students with disabilities in wards 7 and 8 attend school in their home ward.



*Includes all except non-resident tuition paying students.

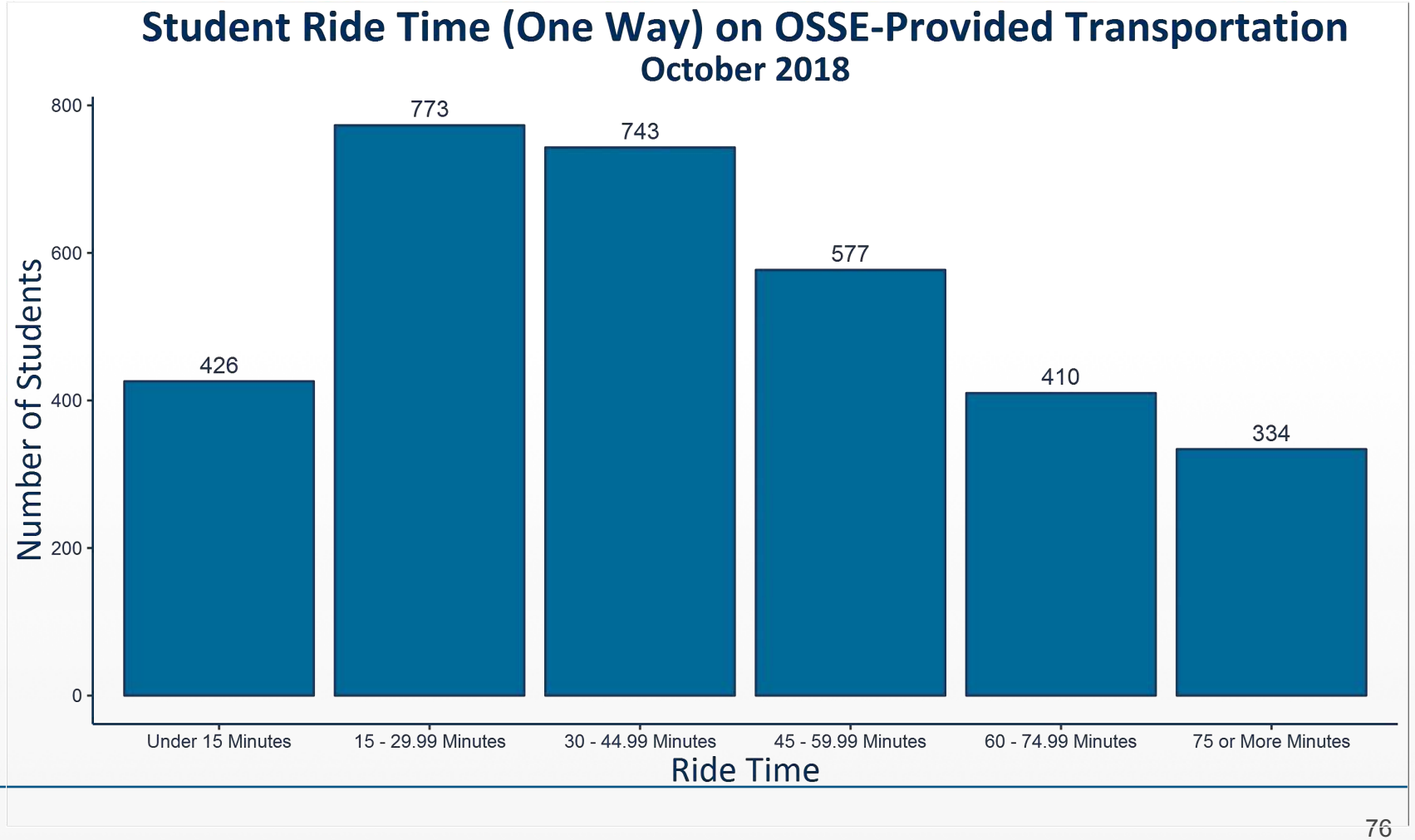
1 in 4 students with disabilities living in ward 7 or 8 travel to school on OSSE-provided transportation.



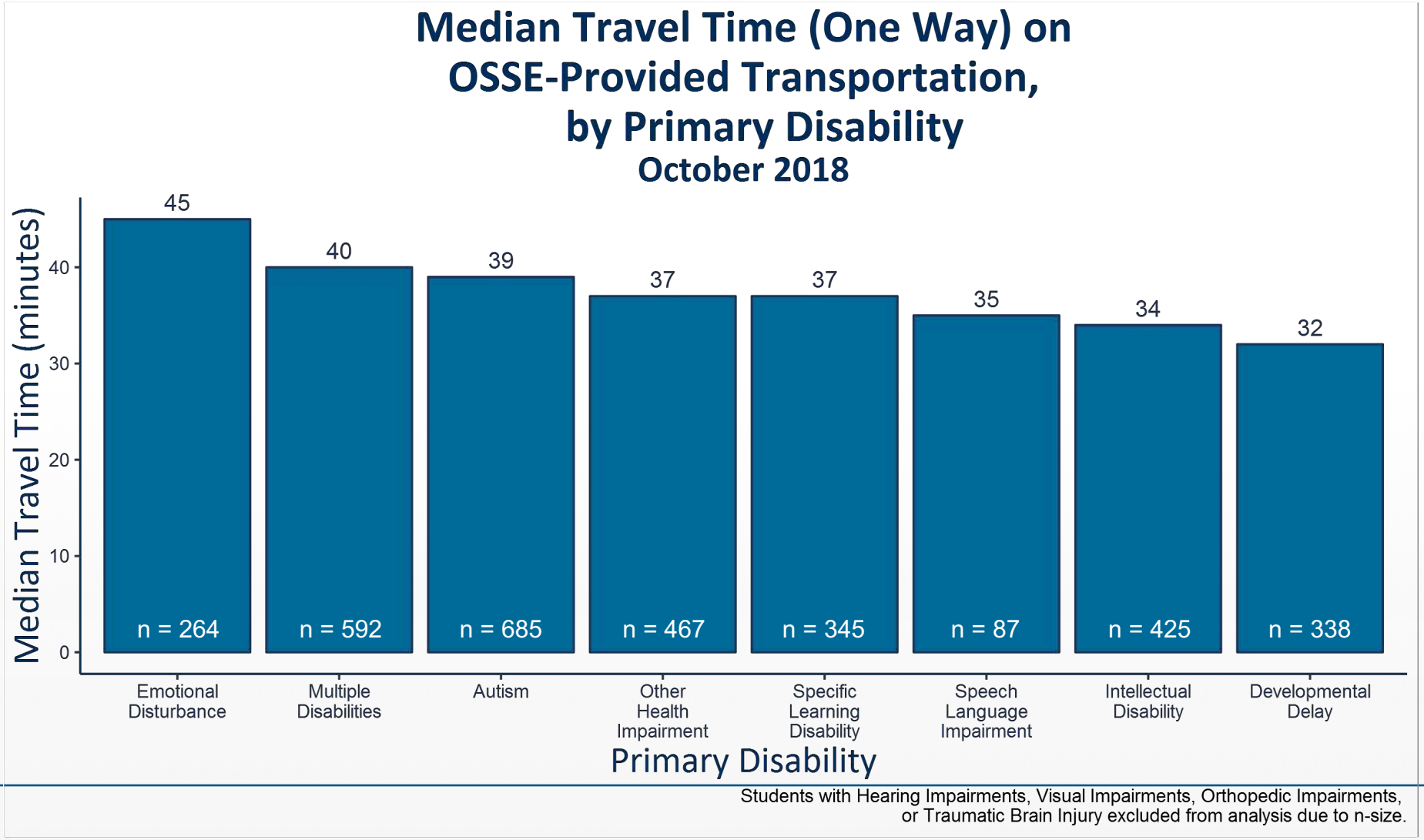
*Only SWDs travel on OSSE provided Transportation.

More than 700 DC students spend more than one hour on the bus each way every school day.

- Students who spend one hour on the bus each way and attend school for 180 days spend a total of **15 days on the school bus over the course of a school year**.

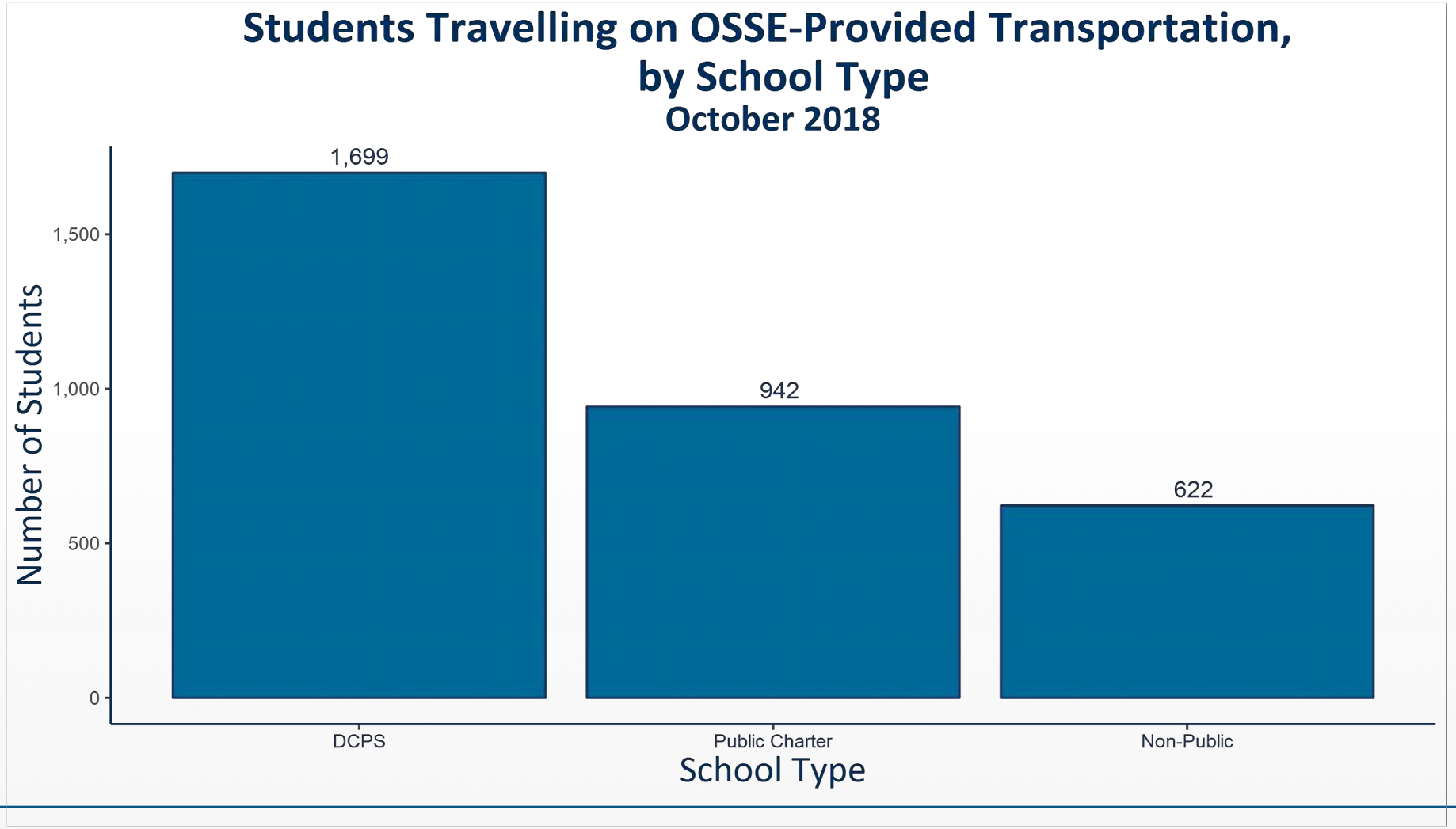


Students with Emotional Disturbance have the longest median ride time to school.

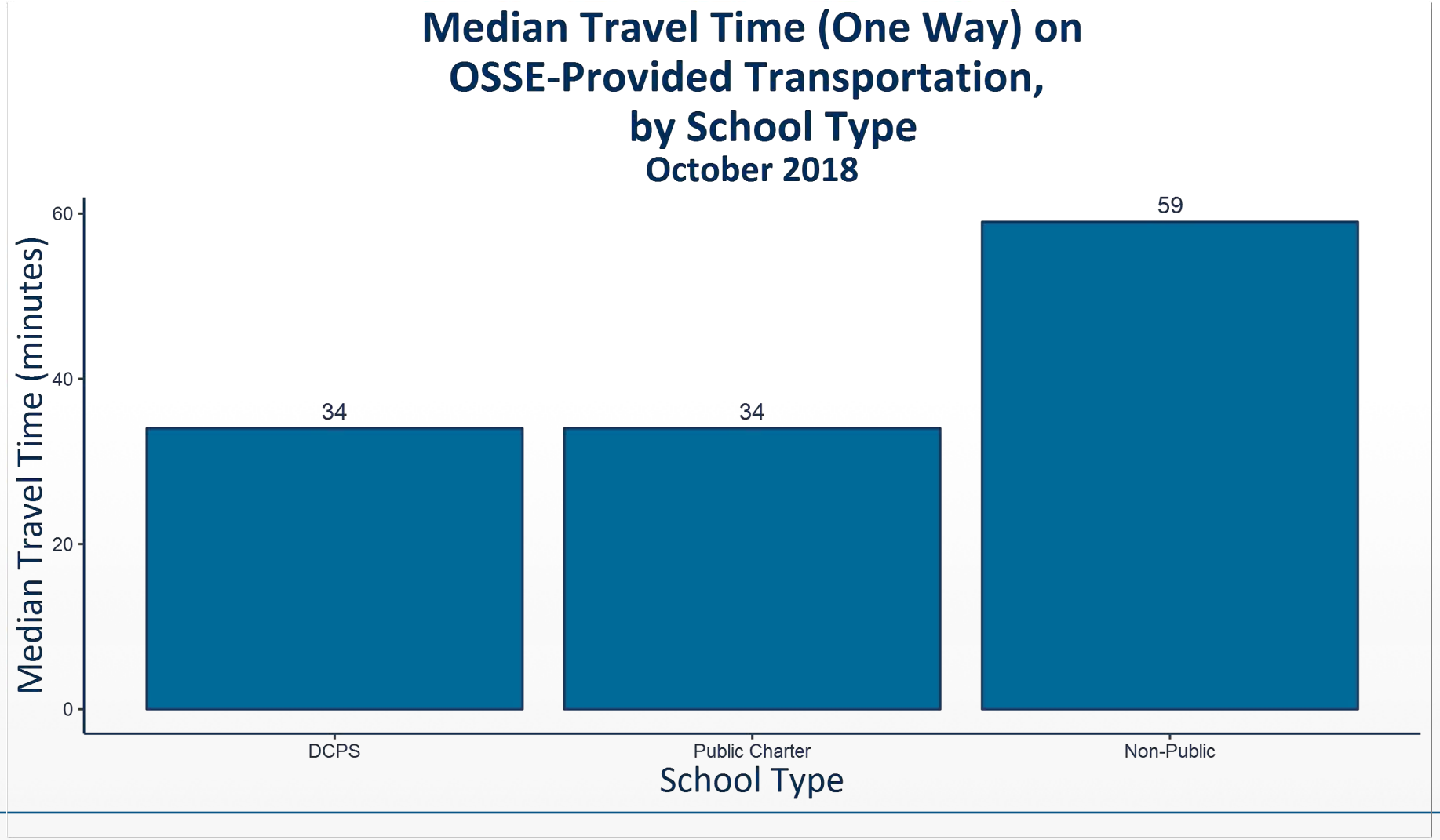


Students with Hearing Impairments, Visual Impairments, Orthopedic Impairments, or Traumatic Brain Injury excluded from analysis due to n-size.

The majority of students who receive transportation services are transported to a DCPS school.



The median ride time is one hour each way for students transported to non-public schools.



Identifying Key Barriers to Educating Students with Disabilities

Key Findings

OSSE conducted **three focus groups and multiple interviews** with key stakeholders from across the District of Columbia, and the following barriers to adequately educating students with disabilities were consistently identified:

- Leadership Across the System
- General Educator Commitment and Training
- Special Education Staff Capacity
- Access to Instructional Resources
- Inadequate Identification Practices
- Trauma & Mental Health Needs
- Parent Engagement & Supports
- Unsupported Transitions

School Leadership

Major themes from focus groups and interviews

Mindset & Priorities

School leaders who do not focus on an inclusive culture communicate low expectations for SWDs

"One **key barrier [for SWDs] is the building leadership for an inclusive culture**. School leaders need to be transparent about the positive outcomes for inclusive cultures. They need to show people how they are working on school climate in the building."

"I have worked with **principals who say out loud that 'we don't care about SPED.'** It's not uncommon for leaders to think SPED is not that important because it's a 'tiny percentage of the population.' How can we make that small fraction important [to them]? That's what's ethical."

"**If a school leader isn't invested** in the abilities of SWDs, they just **conclude SWDs are the 'bad' students**."

Expertise

School leaders often lack expertise, training, and/or background in special education

"School leaders have complete autonomy. If they have a background in SPED or believe in an inclusive culture, they are more ready to be receptive."

"There aren't enough leaders who know the strategies, hold people accountable, and model; **too often, we find leaders that are not experts in SPED**. They may have content expertise, but it's almost never SPED."

LEA & City Leadership

Major themes from focus groups and interviews

Core Values & High Expectations

A pervasive narrative exists that SWDs cannot achieve positive outcomes

"[We can **shift] the narrative around who these kids are** and what they can accomplish."

"One of the challenges is that **people automatically believe that SWDs cannot be included**."

"There is a disconnect between diagnosed disabilities and 'normal' expectations for students, so SWDs are called out in class for behavior that is characteristic of their diagnosis."

"[We need to work] across the District to clarify expectations for IEP quality and instructional strategies."

Citywide Collaboration

Collaboration between agencies is important but not consistently or effectively coordinated

"**Everyone is doing overlapping work**. An entity to make sure the collaborations are happening would be great."

"We all need to do better at working together. **[We are not] at the level of coordination and collaboration that we need** in this city."

"It would be cool to see exemplar schools who are completely inclusive. Teachers should be able to collaborate across LEAs. I'd like a learning walk across the city to look at different types of schools."

General Education Commitment & Training

Major themes from focus groups and interviews

Training

General education teachers often lack the skills required to serve SWDs well

"Some of the barriers are the **skillsets of classroom teachers to differentiate** and provide high-level grade-level content with the appropriate support."

"Teachers who have come out of professional training programs, university prep or alternative routes - **no one is preparing general education teachers to teach diverse learners**."

"Our SPED population keeps growing. It's very high, yet we keep losing SPED positions and pushing kids into general ed. **There have been no additional trainings for gen education teachers**."

Lack of Ownership

General education teachers often believe that SWDs are the responsibility of special education staff

"Many [special educators] will say that their general education peers are a barrier."

"Some general education teachers don't think it's their job to implement the IEP."

"'Are you coming to get your kids?'"

Special Education Staff Capacity

Major themes from focus groups and interviews

Preparation

Leaders, in particular, shared concerns about the quality of preparation for special education teachers

"**Anyone can show up and be a SPED teacher in DC**. We see crazy resumes with no knowledge or experience teaching the most vulnerable population."

"It's incredibly hard to find qualified special educators."

"What happens is the **[SWDs] who need the most get the least talented people**. How can we get OSSE to make it clear that you need the best teachers with the kids with the greatest need?"

Service Hours

High caseloads make delivery of prescribed service hours a consistent challenge

"When you break [the service hours] down, **you have to technically see kids for 10 hours a day, which is literally impossible**."

"**SPED teachers are maxed out**. You cannot be as innovative and collaborative with general education teachers because the services need to get done."

"**We're in survival mode**, trying to keep kids safe and chairs on the floor."

Special Education Staff Capacity

Major themes from focus groups and interviews

Burnout

Job demands often overburden SPED staff

"**I see the burnout**. [It requires] a lot of work to ensure that [SPED staff] feel valued. It's a really tough position that we work in. **High case loads, mid-year transfers, lack of family involvement**… [we] have to show a lot of compassion for teachers. [SPED staff] possess compassion but they also need it."

"**Paraprofessionals and behavior techs are paid minimally and receive very little training** and PD and yet they have a lot of responsibility … we aren't maximizing those positions to support students."

Turnover

High rate of turnover causes strain on staff and inconsistent services for students

"**SPED teachers are the most likely to leave**. [There is a] huge retention issue that has to do with the overwhelming requirements of those jobs: teaching, case management, paperwork, secondary transition. This leads to burnout on an LEA-by-LEA basis."

"**We have a lot of staff movement**. I was sitting with a SPED coordinator who has been with three charters, nonpublic and DCPS. She does a great job and she's not that old … [this is] not like other school systems where people are there the whole time."

Special Education Staff Capacity

Major themes from focus groups and interviews

Lack of Collaboration

Limited staff collaboration impacts the quality of instruction and services

"[We need to] **provide planning time for general and special education teachers** so they know how to implement accommodations."

"You can't co-plan [as a SPED teacher] if you serve three or four grades."

"We haven't had a lot of training. [Our] weakest staff are SPED teachers. That is a big challenge for inclusion. **If you aren't a very good SPED teacher, the classroom teacher doesn't want to work with you."**

Access to Actionable Data

Documentation is labor-intensive and the resulting data is challenging to use in the classroom

"**Data is invaluable when it comes to IEP and placement decisions**. Teachers who have a million things on their plate have to track specific things for one child. Some teachers are great at it and some teachers aren't."

"**Data systems are so complicated and time-intensive**. These are people who are doing IEPs and meeting with parents – they are already busy."

"**Data is not organized for teachers in a way that would be meaningful."**

Access to Instructional Resources
Major themes from focus groups and interviews

High-Quality Resources in Short Supply

Lack of appropriate resources drains staff capacity and results in inconsistent instruction for SWDs

"**We need more curriculum**, so we don't have to share with general education teachers."

"We need everything. **We are low on everything … adults … pencils …"**

"**We need reading interventions**. Students don't get access to reading interventions because they have access to special education teachers."

"**Improving reading skills [requires] reading interventions**. Behavior has to be coordinated and consistent in a different way."

Trauma & Mental Health Needs

Major themes from focus groups and interviews

Pervasive Trauma

The experience of trauma is all too common for our students

"Violence has been normalized. **Trauma has been normalized**."

"We see a lot of trauma with a lot of our kids."

Lack of Support

Students with trauma and/or mental health challenges often do not receive the individualized supports they need

"My prime advocacy is for more mental health supports. **Certain kids with trauma need a lot more**. I hope that can continue to increase to support schools like ours."

"Trauma-based instruction and intervention we need more of. Trauma-based interventions and therapy that is available in the community or managed by the school after school. That way kids can show up to school and be present."

"Entire school staff but especially SWD staff [need] to be **trauma-certified**."

Inadequate Identification Practices
Major themes from focus groups and interviews

Training and Protocols

Lack of consistent identification protocols may result in misdiagnosis and overrepresentation

"**Some students come to us misdiagnosed**. Some high school students haven't been tested since elementary school."

"A lot of these kids are misdiagnosed; there's a **huge lack of clarity on how kids are diagnosed**. Never thought that I would say Texas was ahead, but I feel like I moved back in time 60 years [when I came to DC]."

Identification of Emotional Disturbance

Difficult for school staff to differentiate between and address emotional disturbance, behavior issues, and trauma

"There's a **general misunderstanding by staff and by parents** of what is a manifestation and what is poor behavior."

"Schools don't know how to support students who are coming from trauma. It is **easier to identify the behaviors as a way to get them out of the room** and get them more hours."

"Emotional and behavioral programs have **historically been used as containment for students**. There is a lack of access to inclusive settings for those students."

"Students with emotional disturbance are the biggest challenge. In DC, we **send a huge number of those students to private placements**, but what are we doing to provide those students a great experience here?"

Parent & Family Engagement

Major themes from focus groups and interviews

Demands on Parents & Families

Parents and families have limited resources to navigate a complicated and frustrating system

"I've seen parents that are active, have the capacity to ask key questions, and who are connected to different organizations, but parents without [that capacity] are at a loss."

"**Parents need a central repository for information**. All of the agencies work separately and not together."

Transportation and Logistics

Schools struggle to build strong relationships with parents and families

"If I have a good relationship with that parent, that makes that case a lot easier."

"Outside of the classroom, **a lot of barriers come down to our ability to connect with families**. [Students are] bused so their families live far away. A lot of families are battling homelessness, and substance abuse; there are a lot of factors that are working against them."

"**Distance makes it difficult for parents to be engaged**. Historically students from further away have fewer parents at IEP meetings. As much as we try, parents are sometimes unavailable or unwilling."

Unsupported Transitions

Major themes from focus groups and interviews

Disruptions in Services

Transfers between schools and LEAs are a consistent challenge for both school staff and SWDs

"**Anything less than an IEP is not being transferred if students switch schools**, which has to be frustrating for schools. I know it's frustrating for parents."

"I would [like to] hire a transition specialist who works on that all the time and coordinates with outside agencies."

Difficult Transitions to Independent Living

SWDs are often underprepared for life after high school

"As we look toward persistence in graduation, entry level careers and beyond, **we are really struggling to make kids successful** in these areas due to [staff] time constraints."

"**SWDs are not adequately prepared with the knowledge and skills they need** to be successful after high school."

"Guidance departments are overloaded. **The guidance team also turns this work over to the SPED staff** with the assumption that they are taking care of that caseload with those students."

"Kids [who] need career tech education find that it **doesn't fit with their schedule**."

"For the kids on IEP certificates, we need a system. When are they exiting? Are they staying at their school? Are they engaging with adult education providers? This is one of our most needy groups."

Learning from Other States

Key Findings

A review of the research on how other state are taking action to accelerate outcomes for students with disabilities reveals the following trends in their strategies:

- Data-Driven Decision Making
- Public Engagement & Vision-Setting
- Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS)
- Professional Development & Instructional Resources
- Results-Driven Monitoring & Accountability

Protocols for Data-Driven Decision-Making

State	Florida
Key Levers	Data-Driven Decision-Making; Professional Development & Instructional Resources; Public Engagement & Vision-Setting
Barrier Addressed	Special Education Capacity
Description	Beginning in the 2012-13 school year, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) instituted its "Moving Your Numbers" campaign to improve graduation rates for students with disabilities across the state. To do so, the SEA adopted the Moving Your Numbers framework to introduce a structured protocol for making data based-decisions at the school, LEA, and SEA level. To support use of the framework, FDOE took a multi-pronged approach to build data literacy across LEAs; strategies employed included providing a multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) to LEAs, a continuum of professional learning opportunities, a menu of evidence-based practices, and an early warning system to help schools identify students who were at risk of not graduating.
Evidence of Impact	Florida saw significant gap closure in academic outcomes and graduation rates following this campaign. The gap for eighth grade students with and without disabilities on the NAEP reading assessment decreased 10 points over a decade and the gap in graduation rates decreased 7 points over four years.

Technical Assistance Center

State	Pennsylvania
Key Levers	Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS); Professional Development & Instructional Resources
Barriers Addressed	Access to Instructional Resources; General Education Mindset & Approach; Special Education Staff Capacity
Description	The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) provides intensive technical assistance and support to charter schools, traditional public schools, and LEAs via the PA Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN). Comprised of three regional centers that use an MTSS to support improved instruction for students with disabilities, PaTTAN builds local capacity by providing assistive technologies for students, in-person and online professional development for educators, instructional materials, school improvement resources, and a variety of other tools to enhance each school's or district's ability to meet the needs of its students with disabilities.
Evidence of Impact	As outlined by the Center on Innovation & Improvement's "Framework for an Effective Statewide System of Support," PDE's PaTTAN improves the state's ability to serve SWDs on the local level by providing incentives, capacity, and opportunity to help improve performance.

Communications Campaign

State	Georgia
Key Lever	Public Engagement & Vision-Setting
Barriers Addressed	Leadership Across the System; Parent & Family Engagement
Description	Georgia leveraged its federally mandated State Systemic Improvement Plan (SSIP) to create a public engagement campaign. In addition to public-facing communications (e.g., websites, fliers, etc.) that highlighted the initiatives, Georgia branded its work "Student Success: Imagine the Possibilities" and provided stakeholders with opportunities to be informed and engaged. Since the inception of "Student Success: Imagine the Possibilities" in 2016, the SEA has actively incorporated stakeholder feedback into the implementation of the SSIP through active two-way engagement with the State Advisory Panel for Special Education (SAP), solicitation of feedback from the Student Success Stakeholder Group, and events with district-level staff.
Evidence of Impact	Per GaDOE's Year III Report, this commitment to external input has led to improvements in school climate for target schools, reductions in absences and suspensions for target students, increased pass rates in academic coursework, and gains in student achievement and growth on assessment measures.

Results-Based IDEA Monitoring Framework

State	Indiana
Key Levers	Professional Development & Instructional Resources; Results-Driven Monitoring & Accountability
Barriers Addressed	Leadership Across the System; Inadequate Identification Practices; General Education Mindset & Approach; Unsupported Transitions
Description	The Office of Special Education in the Indiana Department of Education (IDE) developed a structured "results driven accountability and differentiated support" (RDA) system to assess the extent to which LEAs in the state adhere to IDEA in providing special education services to students with disabilities. The RDA system uses metrics in three domains to calculate a determination score that establishes the level and type of supports (e.g., evaluation, policy, strategy, etc.) an LEA will receive from the SEA in improving outcomes: • Results (50%) includes academic growth, assessment performance, high school graduation, and student exclusion; • Compliance (30%) encompasses disproportionate identification, IEP quality, student exclusion, postsecondary transition, and timely evaluation; and • Data (20%) utilizes information from five annual LEA reports.
Evidence of Impact	None yet publicly available.

Initial Recommendations & Next Steps

Key Findings

- OSSE oversees an **extensive set of resources, programs, and policies to support students with disabilities** across the district.
- We have **identified the core levers within our locus of control** that we can tweak or transform to help accelerate outcomes for students with disabilities.
- Using the framework of our strategic plan pillars, we have **begun drafting recommendations for what actions we can take** in the short- and long-term.
- Yet we know this **must be a collective effort to succeed**, so we are **taking these findings to a broad set of stakeholders** to gather feedback, inform recommendations for OSSE, and ultimately develop a citywide agenda for the systemic changes needed to improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

OSSE provides supports and resources for students with disabilities across a wide range of areas.

1,906 children from birth to age three and their families received supports in SY17-18 through OSSE's DC early intervention program, Strong Start

OSSE's buses transport **3,253** SWDs to **230** different schools every day (approximately **60** nonpublic schools)

OSSE distributed roughly **$20 million** in IDEA funding in SY18-19; **94%** of LEAs received IDEA funding

Over **4,500 users** currently access OSSE's Special Education Data System (SEDS)

OSSE currently has **16** special education compliance policies in effect

OSSE fielded **333** due process hearing requests and **118** change in placement requests in FY2018

The DC School Report Card has over **50,000** unique users; performance of SWDs is **10% of the STAR rating** for schools and LEAs

OSSE can use the following levers to help accelerate academic outcomes for students with disabilities.

Set high expectations

- Vision for special education in the District
- Regulations, policy, & guidance
- Monitoring
- Teacher Licensure
- Educator Prep Accreditation

Build ecosystem capacity

- Instructional & behavioral supports for teachers and leaders
- Secondary transition and career and technical education supports
- Competitive and formula grants
- Channels for parent engagement

Share and use actionable data

- Accountability system
- Data sharing tools for parents
- Data sharing applications for LEAs & non-publics
- Local & federal reporting
- Data systems (Strong Start, SEDS, TOTE)

Maximize OSSE's Impact*

- Strong Start program for 0-3 year olds
- Transportation for eligible students
- Nonpublic placement process
- Dispute resolution & state complaints

*Levers in this category pertain to activities that are unique to OSSE's role in special education.

OSSE has begun to develop recommendations for tackling barriers and better supporting students with disabilities.

Set high expectations

- Evaluate **SPED credential offerings** against needs for gen ed teachers and school leaders
- Enhance the **IDEA monitoring** framework to account for compliance and performance

Build ecosystem capacity

- Expand opportunities for **coordinated, hands-on trainings** to address the gaps identified
- Provide **additional supports for SWDs who are in foster care**
- Explore a **technical assistance center** to share resources

Share and use actionable data

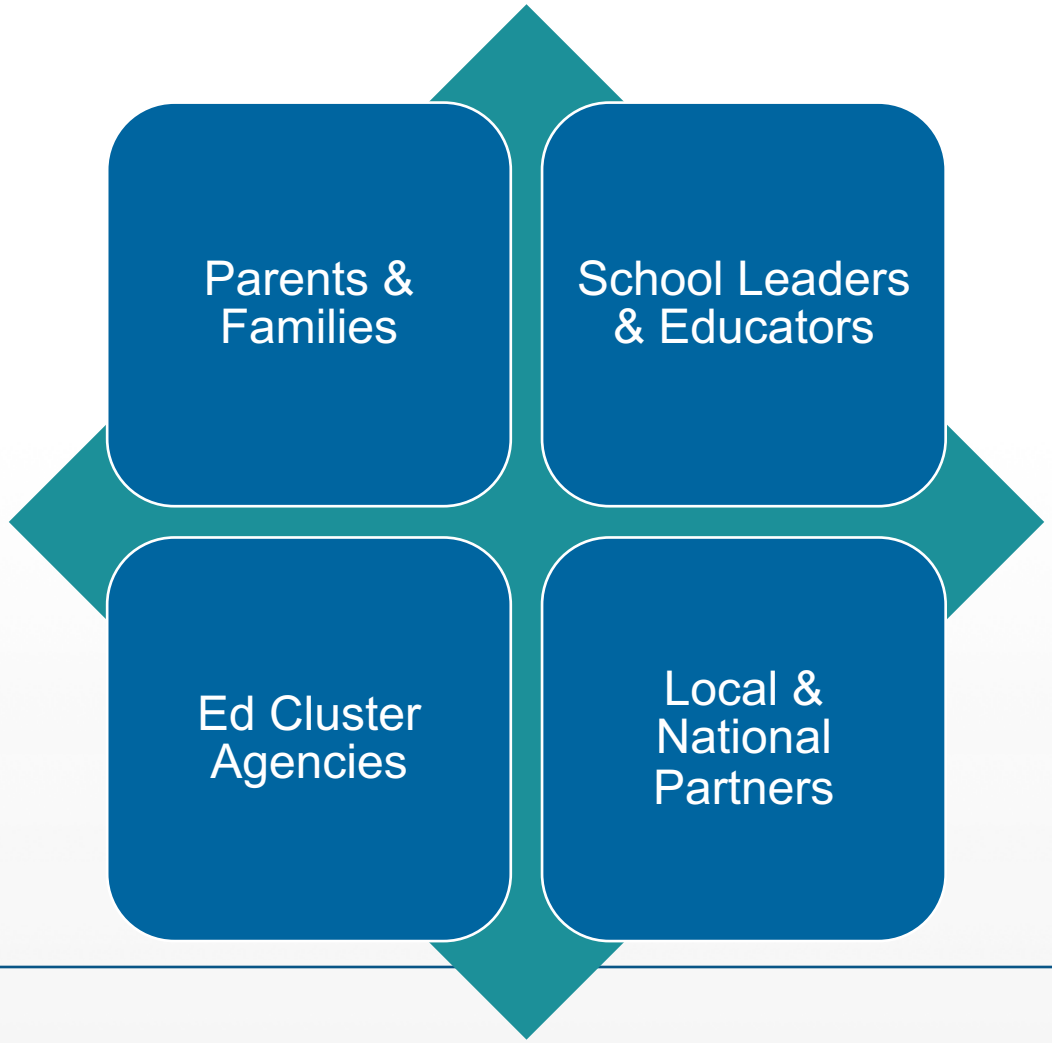
- Explore **high-impact ways to share SPED data and information** to drive practice and decision-making
- Build a user-friendly **special education data system** that supports decision-making in schools

Maximize OSSE's Impact*

- Strengthen **parent access to information** for making informed decisions
- **Coordinate across sectors** to ensure a high-quality continuum for all students

* Recommendations in this category pertain to activities that are unique to OSSE's role in special education.

Next we will share these findings with a broad set of stakeholders for feedback and to develop a citywide agenda for accelerating academic outcomes for students with disabilities.



Appendix A: Federal Definitions for Primary Disabilities

Appendix A: Federal Definitions for Primary Disabilities

- All definitions from IDEA Part B, Subpart A, Section 300.8. Please note that the District has different eligibility criteria, which can be found in OSSE's IDEA Part B Initial Evaluation / Reevaluation Policy.
- In order to meet the definition of an SWD and be eligible for special education and related services, a child's education must be "adversely affected" by the disability.
- **Autism** means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- **Deaf-blindness** means concomitant hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

Appendix A: Federal Definitions for Primary Disabilities

- **Deafness** means a hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

- **Developmental Delays**, for children ages 3 through 9, means a child –

  (1) Who is experiencing developmental delays, as defined by the state and as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments and procedures, in one or more of the following areas: physical development, cognitive development, communication development, social or emotional development, or adaptive development; and

  (2) Who, by reason thereof, needs special education and related services.

Appendix A: Federal Definitions for Primary Disabilities

- **Emotional Disturbance** means a condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance:

  (A) An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors.

  (B) An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers.

  (C) Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances.

  (D) A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression.

  (E) A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems.

Appendix A: Federal Definitions for Primary Disabilities

- **Hearing Impairment** means an impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness in this section.
- **Intellectual Disability** means significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- **Multiple Disabilities** means concomitant impairments (such as intellectual disability-blindness or intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments.

Appendix A: Federal Definitions for Primary Disabilities

- **Orthopedic Impairment** means a severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).

- **Other Health Impairment (OHI)** means having limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that:

    (i) Is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome; and

    (ii) Adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Appendix A: Federal Definitions for Primary Disabilities

- **Specific Learning Disability** means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.
- **Speech or Language Impairment** means a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- **Traumatic Brain Injury** means an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
- **Visual Impairment,** including blindness, means an impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.

Appendix B: Uniform Per Student Funding Formula for Students with Disabilities

Appendix B: UPSFF Funding for SWDs

Level/ Program	Definition	Weighting	Per Pupil Supplemental Allocation FY 2019
Level 1: Special Education	Eight hours or less per week of specialized services	0.97	$10,338
Level 2: Special Education	More than 8 hours and less than or equal to 16 hours per school week of specialized services	1.20	$12,790
Level 3: Special Education	More than 16 hours and less than or equal to 24 hours per school week of specialized services	1.97	$20,996
Level 4: Special Education	More than 24 hours per week of specialized services which may include instruction in a self-contained (dedicated) special education school other than residential placement	3.49	$37,196
Special Education Compliance	Weighting provided in addition to special education level add-on weightings on a per-student basis for Special Education compliance.	0.099	$1,055
Attorney's Fees Supplement	Weighting provided in addition to special education level add-on weightings on a per-student basis for attorney's fees.	0.089	$949

Appendix C: Focus Groups & Interviews

Appendix C: Interviews

OSSE conducted three focus groups with:

- General Education Teachers
- Special Education Teachers & Support Staff
- Special Education Leaders

OSSE conducted one-on-one interviews with teachers, school social workers, compliance officers, school leaders, and experts. Special thanks to the following experts whose interviews informed this work:

- Julie Camerata, SPED Co-op, SAPSE
- Dan Davis, Chief Student Advocate
- Serena Hayes, DC Ombudsman
- Leila Peterson, SchoolTalk
- Molly Whalen, DCASE

Appendix D: MSAA Definition

MSAA Definition & Eligibility

- From the MSAA Test Administration Manual: "The Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) is a comprehensive assessment system, designed to promote increasing higher academic outcomes for students with significant cognitive disabilities, in preparation for a broader array of post-secondary outcomes. The MSAA is designed to assess students with significant cognitive disabilities and measures academic content that is aligned to and derived from each participating state's content standards.

- In order to take the MSAA in place of the PARCC, a student must:
  - Have a significant cognitive disability
  - Be learning content linked to (derived from) the State's Content Standards
  - Require extensive direct individualized instruction and substantial supports to achieve measurable gains in the grade and age-appropriate curriculum