

1.0 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

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MGT of America, Inc., is pleased to submit this final report for the New York State Education Department's (NYSED) *Longitudinal Study of Preschool Special Education*. This study was commissioned to assist the state's commitment to:

...assure that all students achieve high standards through access to the general education curriculum and to educating all students in the least restrictive environment, including educating preschool students in developmentally appropriate activities and with their nondisabled, age-appropriate peers.

The goal of the study was to examine the impact of preschool special education programs and services on school-age progress for students with disabilities and to make recommendations for their improvement. MGT's report is organized as follows:

- an overview of the evaluation questions and goals for the longitudinal study;
- a description of the study methodology and the study sample;
- a discussion of the student characteristics and the special education services provided to preschool children with disabilities participating in the study;
- a summary of data collected from preschool providers and parents of preschool children with disabilities participating in the study; and
- a comparison of various developmental outcomes between students with disabilities in kindergarten through third grade who had received preschool special education and those students with disabilities who did not receive preschool special education.

1.1 Overview of the Preschool Special Education Longitudinal Study

Purpose and Duration of the Study

The primary purpose of the study was to determine the long-term effects of preschool special education programs and services on the educational achievement, emotional well-being, social adjustment, and placement of school-aged students through grade 4 who received special education programs and services during their preschool years. The study began in September of the 2000–2001 school year and followed four cohorts of children through the 2005–2006 school year. Preschoolers with disabilities participating in the study were identified during the first year. Students with disabilities who had not received preschool special education services entered the study gradually from kindergarten through third grade once they were classified and began receiving special education services.

Goals, Objectives, and Study Questions

The longitudinal study used a mixed-method design and comprehensive approach to data collection and analysis that combined qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The original goals, objectives, and related study questions are summarized in **Exhibit 1-1**. As the study progressed, it was deemed necessary to modify some of these, as discussed immediately following the exhibit.

EXHIBIT 1-1 KEY GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND RELATED STUDY QUESTIONS

GOAL I. Understand the nature of placement recommendations for students with disabilities in grades K-4 who received preschool special education services.

- **Determine the rate of placement in general education.** To what extent are preschool students with disabilities who received preschool special education programs and services placed in general education classes upon entry into kindergarten or school-age programs?
- **Determine the effect of preschool type (general vs. separate settings) on placement in general education.** What are the differences in the rate of placement in general education settings in elementary school between students who received preschool special education in settings with nondisabled peers versus those students who received preschool special education in separate settings?

GOAL II. Understand the scope and intensity of special education service recommendations for students with disabilities who received preschool special education services.

- **Determine the effect of preschool type (general vs. separate setting) on intensity of services.** To what extent do students with disabilities who received preschool special education programs and services in a setting with nondisabled peers receive a lower intensity of services (i.e., placement from full-day to half-day special class or placement from half-day to resource room or consultant teacher services) upon entry to kindergarten or school-age programs compared with students who received preschool special education programs and services in separate settings?

EXHIBIT 1-1 (Continued)
KEY GOALS, OBJECTIVES, AND RELATED STUDY QUESTIONS

GOAL III. Distinguish differences in the achievement, emotional well-being, and social adjustment of elementary students with disabilities who received preschool special education programs and services in two different types of settings:

1. with nondisabled peers; versus
2. those in separate settings with only disabled peers.

Goal III also involves distinguishing differences in the above-mentioned outcome variables factors for elementary students with disabilities:

1. who received preschool special education programs and services; versus
 2. those who did not receive special education programs and services until elementary school.
- **Determine effect of preschool type (general vs. separate) on reading, math, and behavioral assessment scores.** What are the differences in the achievement, emotional well-being, and social adjustment of elementary school students with disabilities on statewide/districtwide standardized measurements of reading and math and behavioral assessments between students who received preschool special education programs and services in a setting with nondisabled peers and those who received preschool special education programs and services in a separate site?
 - **Determine effect of preschool special education on reading, math, and behavioral assessment scores.** What are the differences in the achievement, emotional well-being, and social adjustment of elementary school students with disabilities on statewide/districtwide standardized measurements of reading and math and behavioral assessments between those students who did and did not receive special education programs and services during their preschool years?

GOAL IV. Assess the satisfaction among parents of children with disabilities who received preschool special education programs and services.

- **Determine effect of preschool type (general vs. separate) on parent satisfaction.** What are the differences in satisfaction among the parents of children who received preschool services with and without their nondisabled peers?

Source: Created by MGT of America, Inc., 2000.

Although it was assumed at the beginning of the study that statewide/districtwide standardized achievement measures of reading and mathematics would be available for all students when they reached the third and fourth grades, these data were unavailable prior to the conclusion of the study. Fortunately, however, MGT was able to use other

nationally normed assessments to measure student progress in reading and mathematics. These included the Teacher-Child Rating Scale (T-CRS) and the Work Sampling system (WSS). These are described in Chapter 5 on page 5-2.

1.2 Context of the Evaluation

Historically, two pieces of federal legislation have provided the operational framework for state special education programs, service legislation and initiatives established by states: (1) the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1990, 1997 and 2004, and (2) Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. IDEA requires that each public agency ensures that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum and receive special education programs and services in the least restrictive environment, consistent with their Individualized Education Program (IEP). This means that placement of students with disabilities in special classes, separate schools or other removal from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disabilities is such that even with the use of supplementary aids and services, education cannot be satisfactorily achieved.

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requires that a recipient of federal funds educate, or provide for the education of, each student with disabilities together with peers who are not disabled to the maximum extent appropriate to the individual's needs. Federal fund recipients (i.e., school districts) are required to place a child with disabilities in the general educational population unless it can be determined that education in this environment cannot be achieved satisfactorily with the use of supplementary aids and services.

Both of these statutes and subsequent litigation (i.e., *Greer v. Rome City School District* [11th Circuit Court, 1992]; *Sacramento City Unified School District v. Holland* [9th Circuit Court, 1994]; *Oberti v. Board of Education of the Borough of Clementon School District* [3rd Circuit Court, 1993]) necessitate that a significant effort be made to place students with disabilities with their nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible. School districts, through the Committees on Preschool Special Education (CPSEs) and Committees on Special Education (CSEs), must ensure that students with disabilities are educated in the least restrictive environment. Prior to recommending the provision of special education services in a setting that includes only preschool children with disabilities, the CPSE must first consider providing special education services in a setting where age-appropriate peers without disabilities are typically found. NYSED is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of the IDEA are implemented.

A search of the research literature did not identify any other comparable studies. At the inception of the study in 2000, there were no comprehensive or national data available on special education students' academic gains, graduation rates, preparation for postsecondary schooling, work, or involvement in community living. Two years after New York's commitment to examine the long-term effect of preschool special education on its students with disabilities, a national study of preschool special education programs (Pre-Elementary Education Longitudinal Study or PEELS)¹ was initiated in the fall of 2003. This study was expected to continue through 2009.

¹ <http://www.sri.com/policy/cehs/dispolicy/peels.html>.

The research-based practices promoted by federal legislation were developed in the 1980s, when a growing body of research documented the benefits of educating students with disabilities with their nondisabled peers in a general education setting. It was found that students with disabilities served in an inclusive setting were more likely to achieve high standards of learning and social-emotional proficiency (Kavale and Glass, 1982²; Madden and Slavin, 1983³; Weiner, 1985⁴; Carlberg and Kavale, 1980⁵; Baker, Wang, and Walberg, 1994-95⁶; Murray-Seegert, 1989⁷; and Bogdan and Taylor, 1989⁸). An extensive review of research from the 1970s to the present reported by Odom, Vitztum, Wolery, Liber, Sandall, Hanson, Beckman, Schwartz, and Horn (2004)⁹ concluded the following:

- Inclusive programs exist within different organizational contexts and follow different service delivery models.
- Key administrators' interpretation of policy and support appear to have the largest effect on the implementation and maintenance of inclusive programs.
- The quality of the early childhood programs and services in inclusive settings appears to be comparable to that of segregated special education programs and community-based programs for typically developing children.
- A range of instructional techniques and curricula have produced positive behavioral and developmental outcomes for children.
- Children with disabilities engage in a range of community activities outside the preschool classroom, although they may do so less frequently than typically developing children.
- Children with mild disabilities are more likely to be placed in inclusive settings than children with more severe disabilities. However, children with severe disabilities may benefit from inclusive placement.

² Kavale, K.A., & Glass, G.V. (1982). The Efficacy of Special Education Interventions and Practices: A Compendium of Meta-Analysis Findings. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 1-14.

³ Madden, Nancy A., & Slavin, Robert E. (1983). Mainstreaming Students with Mild Handicaps: Academic and Social Outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, Vol. 53, No. 4, 519-569.

⁴ Weiner, B. (1985). An Attributional Theory of Achievement Motivation and Emotion. *Psychological Review*, 92, 548-573.

⁵ Carlberg, Conrad, & Kavale, Kenneth. (1980). The Efficacy of Special versus Regular Class Placement for Exceptional Children: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Special Education*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 295-309.

⁶ Baker, E., Wang, M., & Walberg, H. (1994-95). The Effects of Inclusion in Learning. *Educational Leadership*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 33-34.

⁷ Murray-Seegert, Carola (1989). *Nasty Girls, Thugs, and Humans Like Us: Social Relations Between Severely Disabled and Nondisabled Students in High School*. Baltimore: Brookes.

⁸ Bogdan, Robert, & Taylor, Steven J. (1989). Relationships with Severely Disabled People: The Social Construction of Humanness. *Social Problems*, Vol. 36, No. 2, 135-148.

⁹ Odom, Samuel L., et al. (2004). Preschool Inclusion in the United States: A Review of Research from an Ecological Systems Perspective. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 17-49.

- Children with disabilities in inclusive settings exhibit more mature or positive behaviors when placed with their typically developing peers. Developmental and academic outcomes appear to be related to the type of curriculum employed.
- Typically developing children in inclusive settings appear to gain a greater understanding of disability and a greater sensitivity to individual differences among others.
- Because children with disabilities engage in social interaction with their peers less often than typically developing children, a range of intervention techniques have been developed to foster positive interactions and relationships.
- Teachers generally indicate that they have a positive attitude about the inclusion of children with disabilities in their classrooms, but they feel more comfortable with children with mild disabilities than with children with severe disabilities. Teachers tend to interact more with children with disabilities than they do with non-disabled peers.
- Family members generally express positive attitudes about inclusion, and their positive attitudes increase over time. However, families also voice concerns about preschool inclusion.

Odom et al. (2004) concluded that despite a great deal of information about instructional procedures and some information about developmental effects, policy makers, service providers, and family members still questioned whether services could be provided in an inclusive setting at a sufficient level of intensity and quality to produce positive outcomes for children and express concerns about the cost of these services. They recommended that future research in preschool inclusion return to the question of outcomes for children with and without disabilities and their relationship to the quality of services provided and the costs of those services.

1.3 Overview of Preschool Special Education in New York State

Prior to 1989, New York State provided special education programs and services to children with disabilities, from birth through five years of age, through the Family Court Order Program. This program did not ensure these children a free appropriate public education consistent with IDEA. Section 4410 of the Education Law was enacted in 1989, transferring responsibility for the provision of special education services to eligible preschool children with disabilities from the Family Court to the school districts.

NYSED has assumed responsibility for ensuring that eligible three- and four-year-old students with disabilities are provided a free appropriate public education that meets their individual needs in the least restrictive environment. NYSED's goals—to provide students with disabilities access to general education curricula and increased opportunities to learn with their peers who are not disabled—provide the context for the current study.

During the course of this study, New York State has faced many complex challenges in implementing goals related to high-quality programs and services for preschool students with disabilities. Historically, the majority of preschool special education programs and services have been delivered by a network of private providers across the state. Additionally, access to integrated programs varies significantly from district to district based on local availability of viable placement alternatives. To compound the issue, the state's preschool special education program has grown significantly from approximately 18,000 preschool children with disabilities served in 1989, to 54,961 children served in 1999–2000 when the current study began. Since 1996, legislation has resulted in statutory provisions to support integrated programs and enhance service options for preschool students with disabilities. For example:

- CPSEs may request alternative evaluations for students in an approved program operated by the same agency that conducted the initial evaluation.
- A preschool special education continuum of services from less to more restrictive settings was established to increase placement options.
- A regional ceiling on the maximum allowable state reimbursement was set.
- A three-year moratorium on the approval of a self-contained program was put in place, unless justification of critical need was provided.
- Regulations of the Commissioner require a reapproval review in order to determine that a program provides quality services in a necessary and cost effective manner and in the LRE.
- Program providers were required to provide business plans containing strategies to redirect resources and encourage placements in natural environments.
- NYSED developed clinical practice guidelines for appropriate evaluations and provision of services(s).

In January 1996, the Board of Regents also put forth the following goals to further support reform of the state's preschool special education program:

- Establish systemwide goals to dramatically increase the provision of services in integrated settings.
- Increase the number of students who receive related services provided in natural environments.
- Focus the amount of services per child to the level of specific need and, therefore, reduce the overall cost of services per child.
- Reduce the cost of transportation.

- Assist center-based programs to redirect their programs and resources to enable them to diversify their programs and phase out their commitment to maintain large segregated facilities.
- Restructure the programmatic and fiscal responsibilities for the program to guarantee a more integrated approach to the roles of the various state and local government agencies, recognizing that the State has primary funding responsibility.

Consistent with the legislation and goals of the Board of Regents, the reform initiatives have increased the provision of special education services in integrated settings and improved cost-effectiveness. NYSED has furnished support to local initiatives in the development of business plans; expansion of Special Education Itinerant Teacher (SEIT) services; provision of staff development and training opportunities for parents, school CPSE members, and day care providers; and establishment of a data collection and verification system that provides additional program evaluation information, such as the type of setting and intensity of services.

In 1994–1995, 73.4 percent of identified preschool students with disabilities received special education programs and services in nonintegrated settings (i.e., a special education setting, hospital, or separate school). Although 1997–1998 data indicated that progress had been made in decreasing this percentage, statewide averages do not reflect regional and school district–level differences. For example, one-third of all preschool students with disabilities in the State were being served in New York City, yet New York City reported the smallest percentage of preschool students served in integrated settings (24.1%). Similarly, Buffalo had the second lowest rate in serving preschool students with disabilities in integrated settings (29.7%). Conversely, Syracuse served 96 percent of its preschool students with disabilities in integrated settings during the 1996–1997 and 1997–1998 school years.

By 1999–2000, 55.5 percent of identified preschool students with disabilities were receiving special education programs and services in integrated settings. In New York City, preschoolers served in integrated settings increased to 40.1 percent in 1999–2000, but was still the lowest rate statewide. Similarly, the percentage of preschool students with disabilities served in integrated settings in Buffalo also increased in 1999–2000 (50.3%), but remained the second lowest rate statewide. Syracuse, which has historically used an inclusive model for serving preschool students with disabilities, increased the percentage of preschool students with disabilities served in integrated settings to 99.8 percent in 1999–2000.

In addition, the data reported by NYSED indicated that very few students with disabilities were returning to full-time general education. In 1997–1998, only 3 percent of preschool students with disabilities were declassified while still age-eligible for preschool special education services. During the same period, just 10 percent of the remaining preschool students with disabilities were declassified as part of their transition plan to school-age programs. By 1999–2000, the percentage of preschool students with disabilities who were declassified while still age-eligible for preschool special education services had increased slightly to 4.6 percent and 11.2 percent of the remaining preschoolers with disabilities who were declassified upon their transition plan to school-age programs.

NYSED continues to make progress in reaching its targeted goals for preschool student access to integrated programs¹⁰, the factors contributing to future success are complex. Variations in program placements and intensity of services are influenced by location as well as individual program values and philosophies for service delivery.

1.4 Organization of the Report

Chapter 2.0 of this report describes the study methodology.

Chapter 3.0 focuses on Goal II: *Understand the scope and intensity of special education service recommendations for students with disabilities who received preschool special education services.* The chapter describes the children with disabilities in the study who received special education as preschoolers.

Chapter 4.0 addresses Goal IV: *Assess the satisfaction among parents of children with disabilities who received preschool special education programs and services.*

Chapter 5.0 addresses Goals I and III. These relate to the study population as they reached school age from kindergarten through third grade. First, the chapter addresses Goal 1: *Understand the nature of placement recommendations for students with disabilities in grades K-3 who received preschool special education services.* Next, the chapter responds to Goal III: *Distinguish differences in the achievement, emotional well-being, and social adjustment of elementary students with disabilities who received preschool special education programs and services with nondisabled peers and in separate settings.*

Following the narrative in the chapters are several appendices.

Appendix A contains the original work plan devised for the study.

Appendix B includes the data collection manual sent to districts yearly throughout the study. It also includes the needs assessment form sent to districts to collect data not originally reported.

Appendix C is an in-depth explanation of the regression model used for analyses of the data.

Appendix D contains a sample third grade teacher packet sent to districts including the three developmental instruments (Part A, T-CRS, and the WSS).

Appendix E contains MAGI's Parent Satisfaction Study final report including the instruments used during the parent survey and parent focus group.

¹⁰ The State Performance Plan updated January 2007 and the Annual Performance Report of February 2007 indicates that as of 2005-06, the rate of integration for preschool special education students has increased to 63.0%. Wide differences are still evident across the spectrum of Need/Resource (N/RC) categories of school districts. (see N/RC definition on page ii).