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Education Policy Brief

Special Education Service Delivery in Indiana

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The provision of a comprehensive education to students regardless of ability or disability was assured by the passage of milestone state and federal legislation in the late 1960s and mid-1970s. These laws were established to protect the rights and meet the educational needs of students with disabilities and their families. As a result, disabled individuals ages 3 through 21 have an equal opportunity to participate in activities and services that are available to other students. However, the provision of services to meet the needs of students with disabilities varies in Indiana.

Since 1973, special education planning districts have been used as the mechanism to deliver educational services to students with disabilities in Indiana. School corporations can provide services directly, functioning as their own planning district, or they can develop multi-corporation sharing arrangements. Most school corporations have joined together to form planning districts that are commonly referred to as special education cooperatives, or "co-ops." In 2005, the Center for Evaluation & Education Policy (CEEP) was contracted by the Indiana Department of Education's Division of Exceptional Learners to examine the different governance structures and service delivery models in place in Indiana to determine if any particular model was more efficient than others in driving more dollars to instruction rather than administration, while producing greater achievement results.

As a result of this study (referred to as the Year 1 Study), the report *Special Education Service Delivery in Indiana* was issued on May 31, 2006. The report reviewed national literature and research on special education co-ops, provided a description of the options for administrative organization of special education delivery systems in Indiana, included statistical analyses on special education revenue and expenditures for the 2004-05 school year, and examined student achievement outcomes from the Fall 2004 ISTEP+. Additionally, opinions and perspectives of teachers, specialists, and administrators were collected through focus groups, on-site and phone interviews, and questionnaires. These data were summarized to contribute to the formulation of findings and recommendations issued in the Year 1 Study.

Year 1 Study Findings

The Year 1 Study reported that all planning district models were efficient as evidenced by spending at least 92.5 percent of General Fund dollars on classroom instruction (based on the list of identified expenditure accounts). In addition, there were no statistically significant ISTEP+ achievement differences by governance type after controlling for community-level factors (e.g., family income). However, this study did not consider whether the aggregate level of student performance for the planning districts was satisfactory. Based on a snapshot of data for one school year, no single planning district governance model appeared superior to the other models on an efficiency and effectiveness basis. Furthermore, in speaking with practitioners, a broad level of support was evident for maintaining the governance structure flexibility pro-

vided by current law. Finally, Indiana's current regulatory environment of special education services was deemed to provide sufficient local control to foster creativity and flexibility in meeting student, personnel, corporation, and planning district needs. To ensure that valid inferences and conclusions were drawn from the research, the CEEP Project Team then embarked on an analysis of longitudinal expenditure and performance data.

Year 2 Study Objectives

In the Year 2 Study, data were compiled for the five-year period covering the 2000-01 through the 2004-05 school years. Multi-year revenue, expenditure, and performance data were analyzed to consider whether resources are following and benefiting students to the greatest extent possible. Extensive efforts were expended to disentangle further school corporation expenditure reporting and to identify expenditures on special education programs and services. Finally, an in-depth analysis of achievement outcomes by governance model controlled for community-level factors to identify "high performing" planning districts. Qualitative methods were then used to identify administrative and instructional strategies associated with high performance. The findings of the Year 2 Study are summarized here.

Description of the Special Education Governance Structures in Indiana

Of the options provided under state law, four different governance structures were used by the planning districts to provide educational services to more than 174,000 students with disabilities during the 2004-05 school year, including: (1) 18 school corporations that delivered special education services independently as their own planning district; (2) 37 planning districts that operated under the Joint Service and Supply Act; (3) 12 planning districts that operated under the Interlocal Cooperation Act; and (4) one planning district that operated under the Special Education Cooperatives Act. For purposes of the analyses conducted in this study, data for the Northwest Indiana Special Education Cooperative (the one planning district operating under the Special Education Cooperatives Act) were combined with data for the Interlocal cooperatives due to the similarity of their governance models and service delivery systems.

Special education students were approximately 17 percent (based on the federal unduplicated student count) of the total student population statewide in the 2004-05 school year. This figure increased to 19 percent when using the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) additional pupil count data that include counts for secondary conditions, such as communication disorders. A total of 56 percent of special education students in the state of Indiana were served by a Joint Service and Supply cooperative, 25 percent by a Single School Corporation planning district, and 19 percent by an Interlocal or a Special Education Cooperative planning district. On average, approximately 59 percent of special education students statewide were classified as having a mild disability for funding purposes, 30 percent of special education students were grouped in the communication/homebound category, and 12 percent of special education students were classified as having a severe disability during the five-year period of study. Finally, of the three governance structures, the Joint Service and Supply and the Interlocal/Special Education Cooperative planning districts had the highest percentage of their students placed in a regular classroom as the students' least restrictive environment (LRE) (over 52 percent each year between 2000-01 and 2004-05). Single School Corporation planning districts, in general, had the lowest percentage of their students (between 43-48 percent) in regular classrooms during that same timeframe.

General Fund Revenue Trend Analysis for Special Education

Multiple quantitative methods were used in this study to analyze revenue, expenditure, and student achievement data by planning district type. Key findings (see Table 1) from the General Fund revenue

TABLE 1. Average Revenue per K-12 Special Education Pupil from all Sources, Current Dollars

Average / Pupil	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Target Revenue	4,897	4,997	5,149	5,160	5,265
Sp. Ed. Grant	1,929	2,009	2,095	2,115	2,122
Federal Part B	575	715	833	970	1,085
Overall Current $ (K-12)	7,401	7,721	8,077	8,245	8,472
Overall Inf. Adj. $	7,401	7,580	7,804	7,829	7,909

trend analysis for special education (Chapter 3 of the Year 2 Study report) include:

- From 2001 to 2005, the number of children whose disabilities were considered severe increased 26 percent; mild, 11 percent; and communication/homebound, almost 10 percent.
- During the same period, the average daily membership (ADM) for all students increased 2.85 percent, compared to the approximate 12 percent increase for all special education students.
- During this same period, inflation-adjusted target revenue for all regular programs increased about 3.4 percent while inflation-adjusted revenue for all special education programs increased nearly 12.8 percent, due to the increase in number of special education students, and not due to increases in special education funding.
- From Fiscal Year 2001 to 2005, the categorical special education grant funding for children in the severe category was nearly 39 percent; mild, 52 percent; and communication/homebound, 9 percent of the total grant distribution.
- Adjusting for inflation, the categorical special education grant distribution dollars per special education student increased 1.97 percent from Fiscal Year 2001 to 2005, but declined 2.69 percent from 2003 to 2005; this is compared to a 1.78 percent decline for the average regular revenue dollars per special education student from 2003-05.
- Overall, the change in the amount of the inflation-adjusted special education categorical grant distribution per pupil (1.97 percent) increased five times as much from 2001 to 2005 as did the change in regular revenue per pupil (- 0.37 percent).
- The federal pass through dollars for K-12 special education students increased by approximately 85 percent from $575 per pupil in 2001 to $1,063 per pupil in 2005, while federal pass through dollars for special education pre-school pupils declined by about 25 percent.

Special Education Personnel and Compensation Analysis

The primary goal of this component of the study was to calculate the average compensation costs (salary plus estimated benefits) and the respective percentages that are directed to administration, instruction, and direct non-instructional personnel for each of the three planning district models. Key findings (see Table 2) from the special education personnel and compensation analysis (Chapter 4) include:

- The number of full-time equivalent (FTE) administrators increased 12 percent during the 2001-05 interval, from 383 positions to 429 positions. The average compensation per FTE administrator in 2001 was $75,249, rising to $80,489 in 2005. Adjusting for inflation, the average compensation in 2005 was $74,593, a decrease of 0.87 percent from 2001.
- The number of FTE instructional personnel increased 8.8 percent from 6,996 in 2001 to 7,612 in 2005. The average compensation per FTE special education teacher in 2001 was $54,828 and increased to $60,091 in 2005. In inflation adjusted dollars, the average compensation in 2005 was $55,690, an increase of 1.57 percent from 2001.
- The number of FTE direct non-instructional personnel increased 5.1 percent from 1,055 in 2001 to 1,109 in 2005. The average compensation per FTE non-instructional personnel in 2001 was $62,606 and increased to $69,810 in 2005. In inflation adjusted dollars, the 2005 average compensation was $64,698, an increase of 3.34 percent from 2001.
- Very little change was evident in the percentage of compensation for each personnel category across the five-year interval examined in this study. More specifically, in 2001, 6.02 percent of all compensation went to administrators, 80.17 percent went to teachers, and 13.80 percent went to direct services non-instructional personnel. In 2005, these percentages changed to 6.06 for administration, 80.34 percent for teachers, and 13.60 for non-instructional personnel.
- When examining compensation differences by planning district type, SSC planning districts had the largest average FTE administrator compensation of $81,432, but the smallest percentage of all compensation for administration of the three governance models with an average of nearly 4 percent (compared to over 6 percent for JSS planning districts and 8 percent for Interlocals).
- Single School Corporation planning districts also had the largest average FTE teacher compensation for the five-year interval at $56,997, but had the smallest percentage of all compensation for teachers of the three models at an average of 78 percent (compared to 81 percent for JSS planning districts and Interlocals).

TABLE 2. Comparison of FTE Salary by Planning District Type, 2001-05[a]

Category	Administration	Direct Services		Five-Year Average
		Non-Instruction	Instruction	
Single School Corp	3.54%	18.83%	77.63%	$155,490,557
Joint Service and Supply	6.49%	12.19%	81.32%	$276,723,031
Interlocals-All Personnel	8.46%	10.18%	81.35%	$91,394,190

[a] Teacher aides and paraprofessionals are not included.

- Single School Corporation planning districts had the largest five-year average FTE non-instruction compensation at $65,214, and also the largest percentage spent on non-instruction at 19 percent. JSS planning districts spent an average of 12 percent and Interlocals spent an average of 10 percent on direct services, non-instruction.

Summary of Special Education Expenditure Comparison by Planning District Type

The analysis extended beyond the reporting of only salary and benefits expenditures, as found in Chapter 4 of the Year 2 Study report, to include all expenditure data associated with the General Fund in accounts for special programs, direct instruction, direct non-instruction, and special education administration for calendar year 2000 through 2004. Key findings include:

- Trend data for special education expenditures in the 12000 account series, over the five-year period, revealed differences in per student expenditures over all three funding categories of disabilities (severe, mild, and communication & homebound) between Single School Corporation planning districts and Joint Service and Supply and Interlocal planning districts.
- Overall, Single School Corporations had greater per pupil expenditures in the 12000 account series than both Joint Service and Supply and Interlocal planning districts. Joint Service and Supply and Single School Corporation planning districts also experienced a slight increase in total per student special education expenditures of 3.65 percent and 2.43 percent, respectively. During the same timeframe, per student expenditures in the Interlocal planning districts decreased by 1.02 percent.
- From 2000 to 2004, expenditures for students with severe disabilities declined for all three governance models: Single School Corporations declined by 7.32 percent, Interlocal planning districts declined by 6.62 percent, and Joint Service and Supply planning districts declined by 4.71 percent.

Certified Staff Expenditures

- Over the five-year period of study, the trend in per pupil expenditures on certified staff indicated greater expenditures per special education student over all three categories of disability (severe, mild, and communication & homebound) in Single School Corporation planning districts and lower expenditures in Joint Service and Supply and Interlocal planning districts.
- For the same period, expenditures for certified staff increased by 2.28 percent to $2,517 in 2004 for Single School Corporation planning districts, while decreasing by 1.20 percent to $1,833 for Joint Service and Supply planning districts and decreasing 6.12 percent to $1,718 for Interlocal planning districts (in 2000 constant dollars).

Non-Certified Staff Expenditures

- A consistent upward trend in per student expenditures for non-certified staff over all three categories of disability (severe, mild, and communication & homebound) was evident in all three special education service delivery models.
- Interlocal planning districts had an 18.55 percent increase (to $524 in 2004) in per pupil expenditures for non-certified staff, while the same expenditure category for Joint Service and Supply increased by 16.73 percent (to $686) and 14.14 percent (to $642) for Single School Corporation planning districts.

Direct Instruction, Direct Non-Instruction, and Administrative Expenditures

Expenditures associated with direct instruction, direct non-instruction, and administration were then compared by planning district type. This analysis included expenditures from the following fund series: 010, 060, 130, 150, 520, 525, and 540. In addition, this analysis extended beyond the 12000 account series to include the accounts in the following series: 11000 (Instruction), 12000 (Special Programs), 13000 (Adult/Continuing Education Programs), 14000 (Summer School Programs), 16000 (Remediation), 21000 (Support Services - Pupils), and 24000 (Support Services - School Administration).

- Single School Corporations expended the greatest amount per student on direct instruction in 2004 at $5,871, a level 10 percent higher than the average of the three planning district types of $5,333.
- On average for the three planning district models over the five years of the study, the

TABLE 3. Comparison of Total Special Education Expenditures per Special Education Students over Three Planning District Models

Instructional Components	Single School Corporation	Joint Service and Supply	Interlocal	Average
Direct Instruction	85.58%	85.43%	84.36%	85.12%
Direct Non-Instruction	7.20%	7.03%	8.21%	7.48%
Administration	7.21%	7.54%	7.43%	7.40%

greatest proportion of total expenditures per special education student was for direct instruction, 85.12 percent, or $5,342.

- On average, the second greatest proportion of total expenditures per special education student was for direct non-instructional services, 7.48 percent, or $468.
- The smallest percent of total expenditures per special education student was made for administration, 7.40 percent, or $463 (see Table 3).
- Comparing the three planning district models with respect to percent of total expenditures for direct instruction per special education student over the years of this study, Single School Corporations and Joint Service and Supply planning districts both had expenditures greater than the average of 85.12 percent.
- With respect to percent of the total expenditures for direct non-instructional services per special education student, Interlocal planning districts had expenditures greater than the average of 7.48 percent, at 8.21 percent.
- With respect to percent of the total expenditures for administration per special education student over the years of this study, Joint Service and Supply and Interlocal planning districts both had expenditures greater than the average of 7.40 percent, at 7.54 percent and 7.43 percent respectively.

Given that across the three categories of spending (direct instruction, direct non-instruction, and administration) none of the three planning district models were found to consistently spend more or less than the average, these data suggest that the three planning district models investigated have similar proportions of expenditures per special education student for the calendar years 2000-2004.

Effects of Delivery of Special Education Services on Student Performance

The possible influence of community characteristics on the performance of special education students on ISTEP+ at the school corporation level was also analyzed. Multiple regression models were constructed to estimate the strength of the relationship between each of these community characteristics and the percentage of special education students within a corporation who passed ISTEP+. More specifically, data used in this analysis addressed two key questions:

1. Do community characteristics, such as the prevalence of families designated as "poor," influence the performance of special education students on ISTEP+?

2. Does the type of special education governance model influence performance of special education students on ISTEP+?

Key findings from the regression analysis of the effects of community factors and governance model on special education student performance (Chapter 6) included:

- Five community socioeconomic factors were examined for their influence on the variations in ISTEP+ performance among special education students, including: 1) percentage of adults within the school corporation boundary with less than a high school education in 2000; 2) percentage of single-parent families; 3) percentage of families with a dependent child in poverty in 2000; 4) percentage of students eligible for free lunch; and 5) percentage of students with limited proficiency in English.
- Of the variables examined, the single factor that has the largest effect on academic performance of special education students is the educational attainment level of adults in the community. This factor had a consistently negative influence across all years included in the study. The percentage of single-parent families was the second most influential variable and had a negative impact in four of the five years.
- The degree to which the five community socioeconomic factors, when considered in total, influenced variation in ISTEP+ pass rates across the five years ranged from 27 percent in 2002 to 42 percent in 2005.
- No significant differences in performance on the Indiana Standards Tool for Alternate Reporting (ISTAR) were found among planning district types for 2005-06 school year results, but these results may be due to the difficulties of using school-level data with a wide range of students participating in ISTAR within each school.
- When controlling for socioeconomic factors, performance differences are not statistically significant among planning district models on a consistent basis (only two of the five years). Since the JSS model appears to have only some inconsistent and limited effects of higher student achievement in certain grade levels, no definitive conclusion can be drawn from this data set.

Case Studies of High Performing Planning Districts

Special education planning districts were then examined (Chapter 7) based on two aspects of student performance on ISTEP+: (1) how consistently ISTEP+ English/Language Arts and Mathematics passing rates were above the state average; and (2) how consistently actual performance on ISTEP+ English/Language Arts and Mathematics was higher than predicted performance based on a second regression analysis that controlled for community socioeconomic factors including:

- Educational attainment of persons 25 years of age and older
- Single parent families
- Student eligibility for free lunch
- Student eligibility for reduced lunch

This analysis identified the top five high performing planning districts whose special education students most frequently scored above the state average ISTEP+ passing rate for special education students and whose actual student ISTEP+ performance was consistently higher than predicted student performance on ISTEP+. The five high performing planning districts were: Elkhart Community Schools, Elkhart County Special Education Cooperative, Hamilton-Boone-Madison Special Services, Metropolitan School District of Washington Township, and (Rensselaer Area) Cooperative School Services. The Elkhart community Schools and the MSD of Washington Township operate as a Single School Corporation planning district. The other

three planning districts operate as co-ops under the Joint Service and supply Act.

Focus group interviews were conducted with staff in four of the planning districts. For the fifth planning district, a telephone interview was conducted with the district director and written responses were obtained from staff members. These discussions revealed several common features among the five planning districts. For example, all of the planning districts described themselves as decentralized organizations that value collaborative, localized decision making, most often at the school building level. Each also indicated a belief in serving students with disabilities through a partnership between special education and general education personnel and in providing service in the general education classroom in the school of legal settlement. Planning district personnel also indicated that efficiency is not measured on a balance sheet, but is the ability to meet the unique needs of each student with a disability. Special education personnel from the planning districts noted the importance of feeling like valued members of the general education staff and the importance of support from the local corporation administration and planning district administration.

Year 2 Study Conclusions

- Total target revenue dollars as well as special education categorical dollars have increased between 2000 and 2005 due to a greater number of students enrolled in public schools, especially the number of special education students. However, when adjusting for inflation, the per pupil funding amount for all Hoosier students decreased by 0.37 percent and the inflation-adjusted special education categorical funds per special education student increased by 1.97 percent.

- When including a more exhaustive list of expenditure accounts as well as federal funding in the Year 2 Study, all planning district types spent at least 84 percent of all General Fund expenditures on direct instruction, about 7.5 percent on average on direct non-instructional services, and about 7.4 percent on average on administrative expenses.

- Given that across the three categories of spending (direct instruction, direct non-instruction, and administration) none of the three planning district models were found to spend consistently more or less than the average, these data suggest that the three planning district models investigated have similar proportions of expenditures per special education student for the calendar years 2000-2004.

- ISTEP+ pass rates were the highest in the Joint Service and Supply planning districts, but when controlling for socioeconomic factors, performance differences are not statistically significant between planning district models on a consistent basis (just two of the five years). Since the JSS model appears to have only some inconsistent and limited effects of higher student achievement in certain grade levels compared to the other governance structures, no definitive conclusion can be drawn from this data set.

- These conclusions lead the authors to suggest the current governance structure flexibility that is provided locally should be maintained. ISTEP+ performance data and expenditure analysis do not provide sufficient evidence to move toward a uniform planning district model in Indiana. Based on a five-year analysis, the evidence supports the findings in the Year 1 Study that no single planning district governance model was superior to the other models on an efficiency and effectiveness basis.

- The study also affirms through the qualitative data that Indiana's current regulatory environment of special education services provides sufficient local control to foster creativity and flexibility in meeting student, personnel, corporation, and planning district needs.

Recommendations for Further Study

The Center for Evaluation & Education Policy (CEEP) in collaboration with the IDOE Division of Exceptional Learners will extend its research concerning special education service delivery in Indiana. Ongoing research, while controlling for community factors, will identify high performing planning districts by exceptionality area. High performing planning districts in each exceptionality area will be studied to identify effective teaching methods, administrator leadership traits, and supportive planning district service delivery features. These high performers will be compared to the high performing planning districts identified in the Year 2 Study (which used aggregate student achievement data for all special education students). Expenditure patterns for the high performing planning districts will be analyzed to determine whether these planning districts spend more or less than other planning districts on direct instruction, direct non-instructional services, and administrative costs.

New research will also categorize all special education planning districts that are not a single school corporation planning district as either a centralized or decentralized co-op model. An analysis will then be conducted to determine the percentage of expenditures for direct instruction, direct non-instructional services, and administration for centralized and decentralized co-ops. The question as to whether one of these co-op delivery systems is more efficient than the other will be addressed.

Finally, the CEEP Project Team will provide technical assistance to DEL in formulating new forecasting algorithms and programs to accurately project special education student enrollment statewide. The current system projects two-year counts for each school corporation by the three funding categories (severe, mild, communication/homebound). An algorithm was previously developed and the CODA project created the program to run data through the algorithm. The new algorithm will accommodate both increasing and declining enrollment projections for special education students in each funding category.

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WEB RESOURCES

To download a complete copy of the **Special Education Service Delivery in Indiana: Year 2 Study**, go to:
http://www.ceep.indiana.edu/projects/PDF/Special_Ed_Report_Final.pdf

or:

http://doe.state.in.us/exceptional/speced/pdf/2007-04-12-SpecialEdReport.pdf

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