

students over the past 20 years. Thus, while this group accounted for nearly two thirds of the new admissions in 1982, it was less than half of the new enrollments in 2002.

These results are surprising considering the increasing enrollment in special education. ND's special education enrollment has risen 34% while new admissions into ND special education have decreased 25%. Obviously the increases have not come from more students entering the special education system. Instead, the data in Figure 3 suggest that those who are enrolled stay in special education.

The pattern of age groups of students served in special education in ND has shifted. In 1982 nearly 60% of the children served in special education were in the 6–11 year old age group, with about 30% in the 12–17 year old age group, and the remaining in the 3–6 and the 18–21 year old age groups. However, the 2002 data show that over 40% are now in the 12–17 year old group, and about 40% in the 6–11 year old group. Thus the average age of the students served in special education has shifted upward, meaning that our average student is now quite a bit older than in 1982.

These two patterns, decreased new admissions and increasing ages of students, suggest that the increase in special education population in ND comes from students who are identified at a later age, and then stay in special education for longer periods of time. Combined with the data in our fourth technical report (Askvig & Fifield, 2005), where we determined that most of the increase in student population came from students with mild disabilities, we are suggesting that these older students are also likely students who require less intense, and probably less complex sets of services. Our current data are insufficient to support this completely, and further study would be needed. We recommend continued monitoring of these patterns as they can have a tremendous impact on service delivery issues, as well as personnel preparation.

References

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Technical Report #5 **North Dakota Special Education Enrollment: New Admissions and Age of Students Receiving Services**

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North Dakota Student Population Study
*A review of data on the trends in special education
student enrollment in North Dakota*

In Technical Report #1, we described ND's special education enrollment trends from 1982 through 2002 (Askvig & Fifield, 2004). The data show that ND had a steady enrollment pattern which mirrored the national trends over the 20 year period. In fact, ND's percent of school aged children enrolled in special education (12.55%) was nearly identical to the national percentage of 12.3%.

Among the many factors contributing to increased special education enrollment, first time admissions has the most immediate and direct impact. This technical report examines the impact of new admissions on ND's annual special education student population. Further, we examine the age of those children served in special education for a better understanding of the population.

Data Sources

North Dakota collects data from all participating special education service units on an annual basis. These data are compiled and presented in ND's Special Education Annual Reports. We examined the data presented in these reports from 1982 – 2002. These annual reports typically present data on student enrollment by age, by disability category and by first time enrollments.

ND Special Education Enrollment

Figure 1 presents the overall ND special education enrollment trend from 1982 through 2002. As described in Technical Report #1, the data show a steady increase in the numbers of students served in special education. From 1982 – 2002, the increase was approximately 34%. This increase occurred during a time when the overall ND school enrollment numbers dropped by approximately 24%. In our Technical Report #4, we found that most of the increase in ND special education student population came from four disability categories; speech language, emotional disturbance, other health impairment, and learning disabilities (Askvig & Fifield, 2005).

First time Enrollment in Special Education

ND collects data on first time enrollments in special education through a May child count process. Near the end of the school year, educators report on the number of students who entered special education for the first time that school year. Special education units collect data on the number of new enrollees by age and disability groups and submit those data to ND DPI. Figure 2 shows the 20 year trend of first time enrollments in special education. Separate lines are shown for the overall numbers as well as for numbers for each of four federally specified age groups.

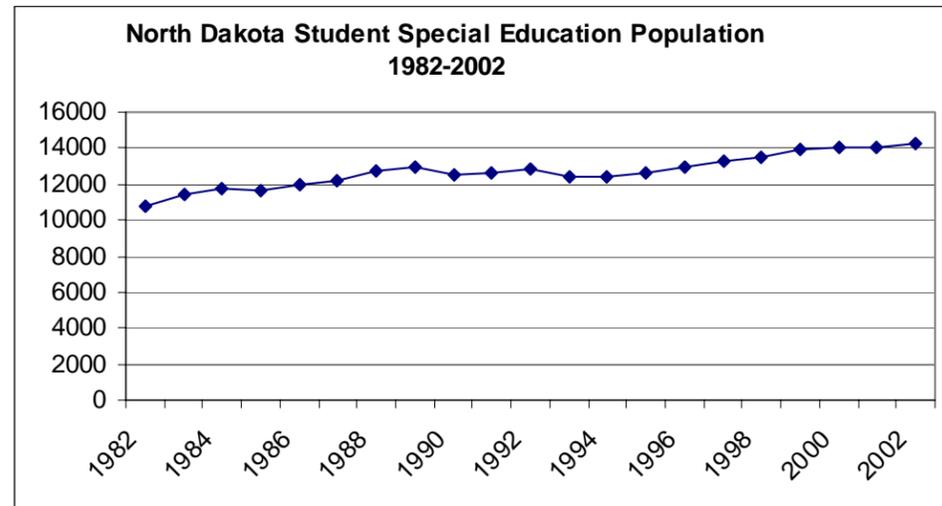


Figure 1. ND Special Education Student Population

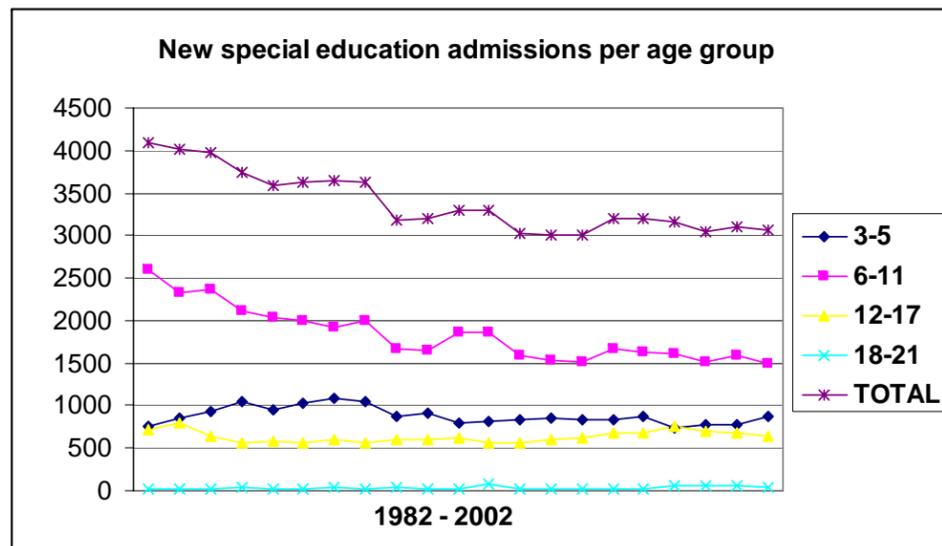


Figure 2. Trends in first time special education admissions.

These data show that the overall number (top line on graph) of new admissions to special education at ND schools has dropped from 4,089 in 1982 to 3,061 in 2002. This is a decrease of 1,038 (or 25.1%) students. Table 1 shows a comparison at 1982, 1992 and 2002 of the number and percent of population for the new admissions.

Table 1. New admission numbers and percents at 10 year intervals by age group

Age Group	1982 Number	1982 Percent	1992 Number	1992 Percent	2002 Number	2002 Percent
3-5	749	18.3%	793	24.0%	874	28.6%
6-11	2,594	63.4%	1,858	56.3%	1,500	49.0%
12-17	721	17.6%	627	19.0%	643	21.0%
18-21	25	0.6%	24	0.7%	44	1.4%

Age of Enrolled Special Education Students

We were also interested in the ages of students who were enrolled in special education. The ND DPI reports not only show the numbers of students by disability category, but also the numbers of students by specific age groups. Figure 3 shows the data from 1982 through 2002.

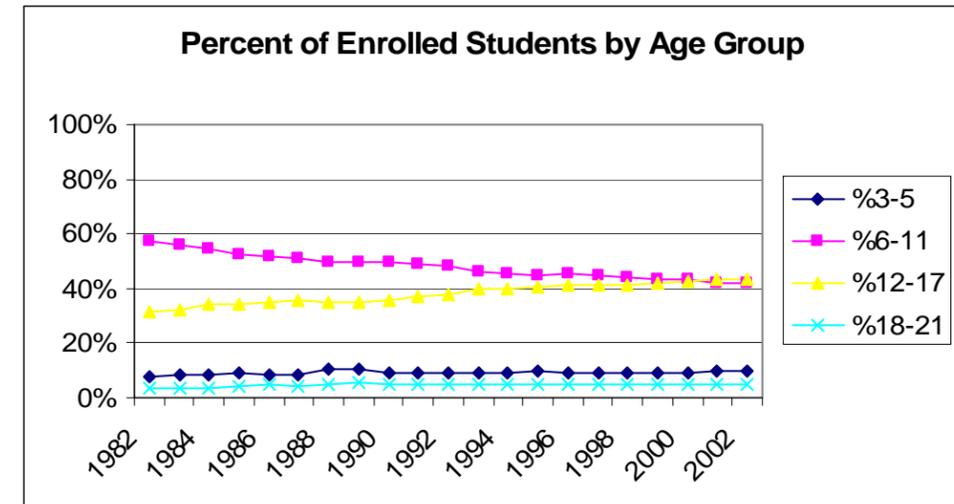


Figure 3. Trends in student enrollment by age group from 1982 – 2002.

These data show a tremendous shift in the age of students enrolled in special education over the past 20 years. In 1982, approximately 60% of the students in special education were in the 6 – 11 age group, with about 30% in the 12 – 17 age group, and the remaining 10% in the 3 – 5 and the 18 – 21 age groups. In 2002 the data show that over 43% of the students are now in the 12 – 17 age group, about 40% in the 6 – 11 age group, and the remainder in the 3 – 5 and the 18 – 21 age groups.

Conclusions and Discussion

The data on both new admissions and ages of students enrolled in services paints an interesting picture of ND's special education student population. First, the numbers indicate a significant (25%) decrease in new enrollments over the past 20 years. The greatest decreases occurred from 1982 until the early to mid 1990s. The pattern has stabilized some since then. Second, the first admission trends across age groups show that the decline is largely in the 6 – 11 year old age group. While the other age groups have remained generally stable, this 6 – 11 year old age group has decreased by nearly 1,200