

*25 years of progress: New  
knowledge, better practices,  
and ongoing questions about  
working with children and youth  
with learning differences*

David J. Chard, Ph.D.  
Dean ad interim  
Boston University  
Wheelock College of Education and Human Development

Successful Learning Conference  
2019

25 Years of Successful Learning:  
Looking to the Future



William Cruickshank

1915-1992

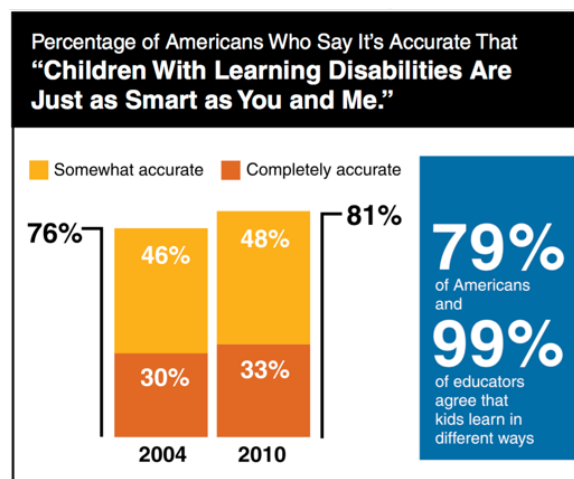


## Progress made, but still work in progress



BU Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

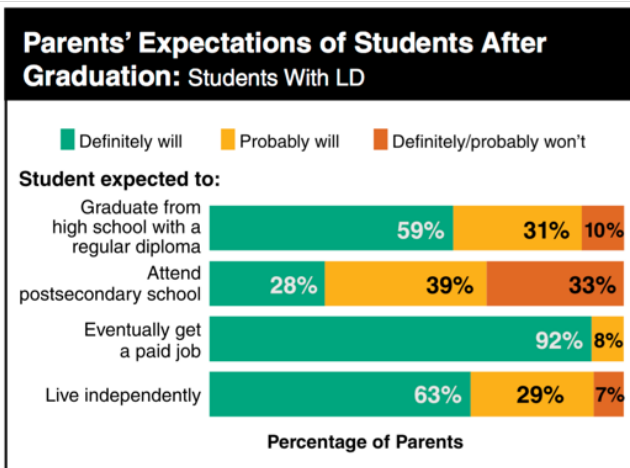
## Improved Public perception



Source: Tremaine Foundation, 2010

BU Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

## Increased Expectations

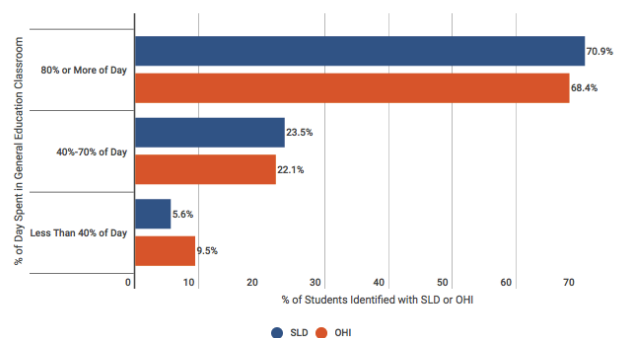


Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, 2003

## Increased Expectations



Inclusion in General Education Classrooms in 2015–2016



Source: State of LD (2017), National Center for Learning Disabilities

## Advances in research

- Research has resulted in:
  - Improvements in identification
  - Standards for identifying research-based practices
  - Documented effective practices in teaching:
    - Academic skills
    - Non-cognitive behaviors
  - Application of research findings across populations

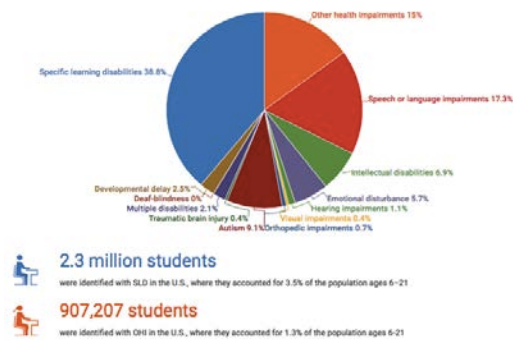


## What are Learning Disabilities?

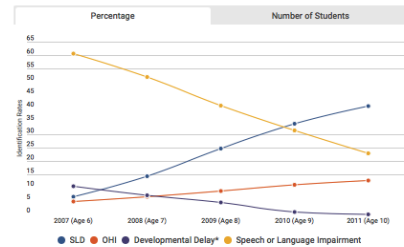
Learning Disabilities refer to a number of disorders which may affect the **acquisition, organization, retention, understanding or use of verbal or nonverbal information**. These disorders **affect learning** in individuals who otherwise demonstrate at least average abilities essential for thinking and/or reasoning. As such, learning disabilities are distinct from global intellectual deficiency. Learning disabilities result from **impairments** in one or more processes related to **perceiving, thinking, remembering or learning**. These include but are not limited to: language processing; phonological processing; visual spatial processing; processing speed; memory and attention; and executive functions (e.g., planning and decision-making).

## Trends in Identification

Disability Categories for Students Receiving Special Education in 2015-2016



Identification Rates of a Grade-School Cohort



- 34.2%** Increase in SLD Identification over 5 years
- 8.0%** Increase in OHI Identification over 5 years
- 10.6%** decrease in Developmental Delay\* Identification over 5 years
- 37.7%** decrease in Speech or Language Impairment Identification over 5 years

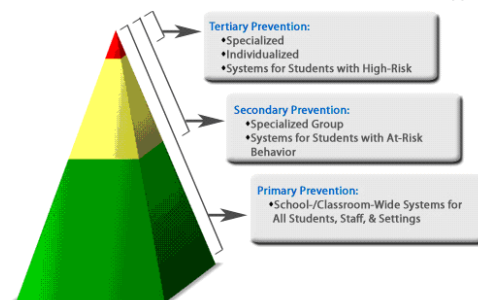
\*This category is only for children age 9 or younger

Source: U.S. Department of Education, IDEA Section 618 Data

## Promise and Limitations of Response-to-Intervention

- Multi-tier models are now used throughout the U.S. (Al-Otaiba, 2014)
- The law offers an option to use RTI to identify students with LD; but decisions remain unstable (Spencer et al., 2014)
- Growing evidence that we can identify students who need Intensive Intervention without “wait-to-fail” (Greulich et al., 2014)
- Evidence regarding intensive and customized intervention is still emerging (Kearns & Fuchs, 2013; Al-Otaiba, 2014).

Continuum of School-Wide Instructional & Positive Behavior Support



## Legal Advocacy Remains Vital

- *Endrew F vs. Douglas County School District*

"an educational program reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child's circumstances, not an education that is just a little bit more than nothing."

## Advances in research

Research has resulted in:

- Improvements in identification
- Standards for identifying research-based practices
- Documented effective practices in teaching:
  - Academic skills
  - Non-cognitive behaviors
- Application of research findings across populations

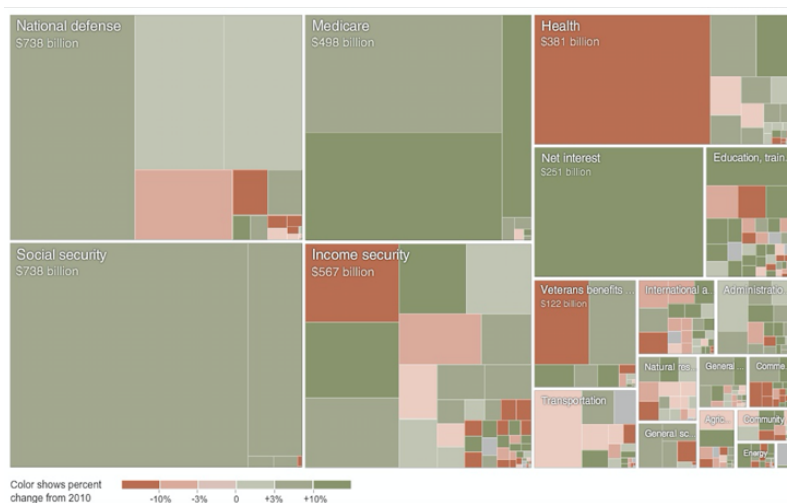


## Obstacles and opportunities



BU Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

## Lack of Commitment to funded research



President's  
Budget  
(2011)




BU Wheelock College of Education & Human Development



# Public perception

## Parents

### Myths About Learning and Attention Issues

MYTH	FACT
 <p>48% of parents believe: Children can grow out of learning disabilities</p>	<p>Learning and attention issues are lifelong conditions involving differences in brain structure and function. Symptoms may change over time, and the right support helps address weaknesses. But age doesn't make these issues "go away."</p>
 <p>78% of parents believe: Any child can do well in school if he or she tries hard enough</p>	<p>When it comes to learning and attention issues, trying harder is not the answer. Children with these issues need targeted interventions and accommodations to help them work on or work around their weaknesses.</p>
 <p>18% of parents believe: Children with learning disabilities are less intelligent than other children</p>	<p>Children with learning and attention issues are as smart as their typically developing peers, and many have average or above-average intelligence. There are many children who are gifted and have learning disabilities. Many schools refer to these children as "twice-exceptional."</p>



# Public perception

## Educators



of classroom teachers and other educators believe sometimes what people call a learning or attention issue is really just laziness



of classroom teachers say they are somewhat or not very confident in recommending that a child be evaluated for special education for learning issues



of classroom teachers in elementary school say a significant challenge they face is lack of resources needed to provide instruction, related services and support to children with learning and attention issues



of classroom teachers say they are somewhat or not too confident in their ability to implement IEP/504 plans

Source: Survey commissioned by Understood.org and conducted by GFK in September 2014. The survey polled 300 classroom teachers (evenly represented across Pre-K/elementary, middle and high school) and 100 other kinds of educators including school psychologists, special education teachers, reading specialists, speech-language pathologists, occupational therapists, school nurses, guidance counselors, principals and vice principals.

## Healthcare Professionals



of healthcare professionals say they are somewhat or not too confident about recommending evaluations for learning issues



of physicians say they almost always ask about symptoms of learning and attention issues



of healthcare professionals say they feel confident about identifying attention issues

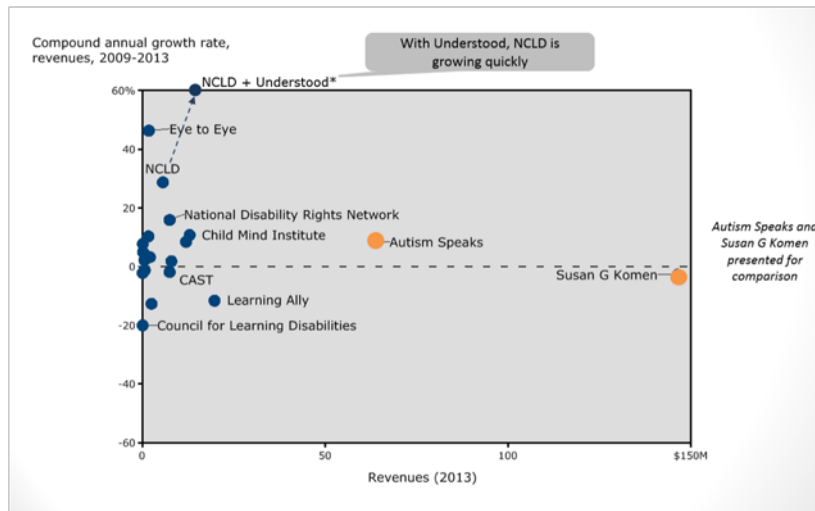


Doctors who recommend having a child evaluated for learning and attention issues say parents follow their recommendation only 54% of the time

Source: Survey commissioned by Understood.org and conducted by GFK in September 2014. The survey polled 300 healthcare professionals comprising physicians (pediatricians, general and family practice as well as internal medicine) and nurse practitioners. All respondents worked with children ages 3-18 and had some experience working with children with learning or attention issues.



## Diminished Community Identity



BU Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

## Inadequate Number of Teachers

Reasons for the shortages:

- Poor work conditions
- Few incentives
- Fewer qualified faculty
- Limited supply of teachers willing to work in certain communities
- Credentialing barriers
- Inconsistent professional preparation



BU Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

## Inadequate Professional Preparation

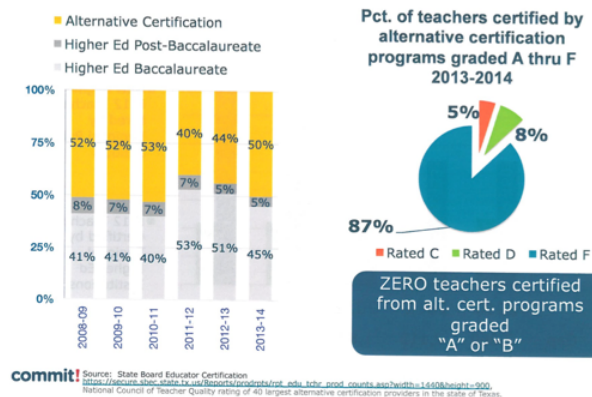
### Extent of the shortages:

- 49 US States report shortage of special education teachers and related service personnel
- Special education teachers leave at nearly twice the rate of general education teachers.
- 51% of school districts and 90% of high poverty school districts report difficult recruiting special education teachers
- Ratio of SWD to special education teachers is higher than ratio of all students to general education teachers

Source: IDEA, U.S. ED, Digest of Education Statistics (2018)

## Inadequate Professional Preparation

### Statewide Teaching Gap Currently Filled Primarily Via Alt. Certification Providers Reflecting Significant Quality Issues



## Improving Teacher Preparation



- Establish consistent, practice-based curriculum
- Focus on core set of practices (e.g., HLPs for students with learning and attention issues)
- Create standard expectations for induction with assessment prior to certification
- Develop standards for ongoing professional development

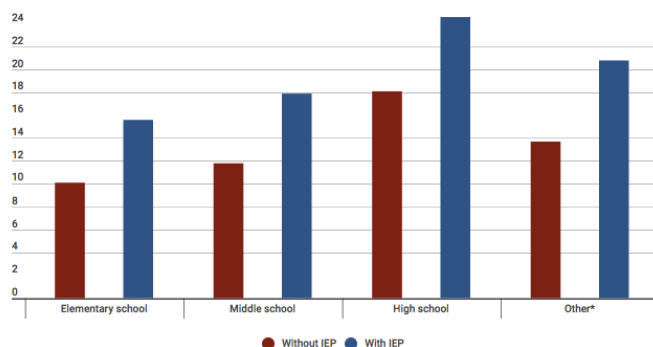
BU Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

## Why our work remains important: The Consequences

Students with specific learning disabilities (SLD) are  
**31%**  
 more likely than students without disabilities to experience high levels of being bullied.

Students with other health impairments (OHI)—many of whom have ADHD—are  
**43%**  
 more likely than students without disabilities to experience high levels of being bullied.<sup>3</sup>

% of Students Who Were Chronically Absent in 2013–2014  
 Absenteeism rates were higher among students with IEPs at every grade level



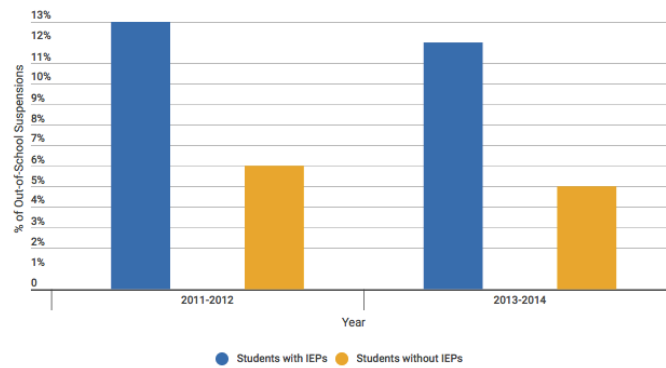
Source: U.S. Department of Education, *Chronic Absenteeism in the Nation's Schools* (2016)

Source: State of LD (2017)

BU Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

## Disproportionate Impact

% of Students Who Received One or More Out-of-School Suspensions

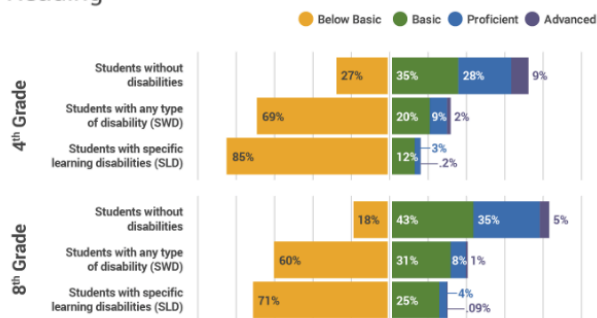


Sources: U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, 2013-2014 Civil Rights Data Collection: A First Look (2016) and Civil Rights Data Collection Data Snapshot: School Discipline (2014)

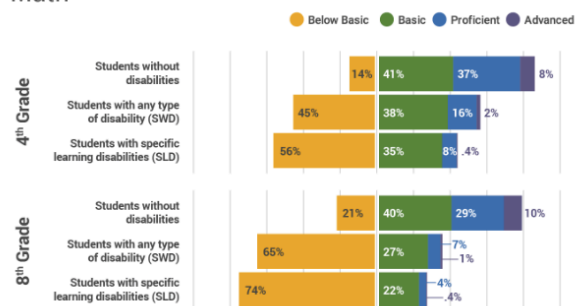
## The Consequences

### 2013 NAEP Scores

#### Reading



#### Math



## Early Reading Issues and Later Challenges

McLaughlin et al. (2014) found that participants with RD at age 7 were:

- 74% less likely to have attained a high level of education by their late 30s and early 40s
- 56% less likely to have attained a high level of income by midlife (>\$60,000)

When controlling for family educational and economic background and demographic variables.

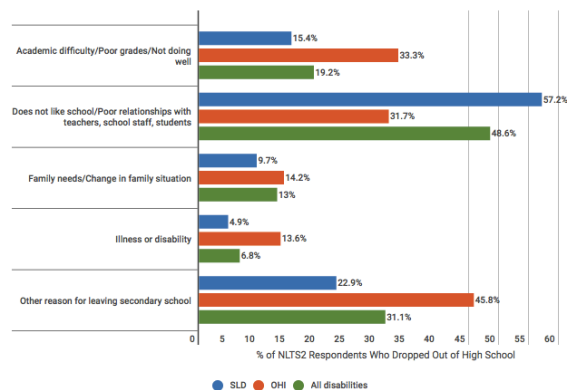
- Impacts of RD in early childhood continue to be felt in midlife.

## The Consequences

**18%**  
of students with SLD dropped out in  
2013–2014, compared to 6.5% of all  
students

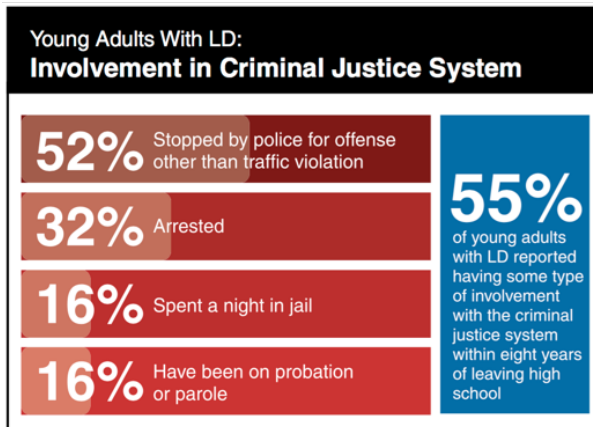
**205**  
Average number of students with SLD  
that year who dropped out each  
school day nationwide

Reasons Students With IEPs Gave for Dropping Out of High School



Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, Wave 5 (2009)

## The Consequences



Source: National Longitudinal Transition Study-2, 2011

## Additional Issues to Consider

- Personalized Learning
- Charter Schools
- ESSA Related Policy Changes
- Pay for Success Initiatives
- Development versus Education

## Call to Action



- Continue to do high quality research
- Expand advocacy efforts
- Innovate in teacher education
- Recruit and support teachers
- Re-energize our professional community

## Select References

- McLaughlin, M. J., Speirs, K. E., & Shenassa, E.D. (2014). Reading disability and adult attained education and income: Evidence from a 30-year longitudinal study of a population-based sample. *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 47*(4), 374–386.
- Kearns, D.M., & Fuchs, D. (2013). Does Cognitively Focused Instruction Improve the Academic Performance of Low-Achieving Students? *Exceptional Children, 79*(3), 263-290.
- Al-Otaiba, S., Wagner, R. K., & Miller, B. (2014). "Waiting to Fail" redux: Understanding inadequate response to intervention. *Learning Disability Quarterly, 37*(3), 129–133.
- National Center for Learning Disabilities (2017). *State of LD*. NCLD: Washington, DC.
- Institute for Education Sciences. *What Works Clearinghouse*. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>
- Scanlon, D. (2013). Specific Learning Disability and its newest definition: Which is comprehensive? and Which is insufficient? *Journal of Learning Disabilities, 46*(1) 26–33.