

Deaf-Blind Perspectives

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A Dangerous Misrepresentation of the Facts

In

The 15th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Vic Baldwin

Director, Teaching Research

Every year the Office of Special Education Programs is required to produce an Annual Report to Congress (U.S. Department of Education, 1993) that summarizes the national statistics on the numbers of children who received special education and related services under IDEA (Part B) and Chapter 1 of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (89-313). In order to generate the information needed for this report, each state director of special education must count and compile specific demographic data on all children his or her state has served within the last year under these two funding authorities. The agreed-upon date at which time this count will officially occur is December 1st of each year.

Each state department of education receives its demographic information from the educational service providers within the state. The demographics mainly consist of age, sex, primary and secondary disability, the type of educational setting, and the exiting status of the older students. Once this information has been received by the state department, it is checked for completeness and eventually forwarded to the U.S. Department of Education where it is compiled into the Annual Report to Congress.

The Annual Report is at least an inch and a half thick and contains over 350 pages. It is full of tables that present the information in hundreds of different ways. For the most part, the tables show the numbers of students across all of the states by age groups, funding authority, educational setting, or type of disability.

The Problem

The reported numbers for the disability category of deaf-blind are grossly in error! The first table in the Annual Report (p. 3) shows that the total number of students served in special education programs has been steadily increasing for the past 15 years, with a 2% to 4% jump in each of the last three years. The second table (p. 4) indicates that there are only 1423 students reported nationally under the disability category of deaf-blindness. This is in serious conflict with the nearly 8500 students that are reported by coordinators of programs for those who are deaf-blind in each of the 50 states and territories. Advancing the problem even further, the Annual Report states on page 9 that the number of children under Part B programs categorized as deaf-blind has decreased by 42% in the last 10 years.

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Discussion

My comments will be directed only at those sections of the Annual Report that deal with the disability category of deaf-blindness. I believe the data presented in the Annual Report are in fact dangerously misrepresentative, and I will attempt to discredit the numbers and suggest alternatives.

The Annual Report does not acknowledge that the Secretary of Education is also mandated to conduct an annual count of persons who are deaf-blind, from birth to age 21. Since 1986 the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs has contracted with Teaching Research to conduct this census. This is carried out by requiring the coordinators of programs for those who are deaf-blind in each of the 50 states and territories to report the number of persons who are deaf-blind whom they have identified. This mandated annual deaf-blind census must coincide with the annual state effort to determine the overall count on December 1st. The deaf-blind census requires considerably more information than the state report and therefore is more complete. At a minimum, the An-

