

Some Data to Consider in Pursuing School Improvement Policy and Practice

When policy makers state that school improvement should be data driven, it is important to put the matter into broad context. Using recent U.S. Census Bureau data, the discussion needs to begin with population data about children in the U.S., data on the number of schools, and considerations about differences in students' motivation and capabilities for learning what is being taught.

Here are some examples of relevant data:

How many children are there in the U.S.?

- >Of the 315 million that make up the U.S. population, about 25% (78 million) are children under 17-years of age and about half of these are classified as belonging to a minority population.
- >Nearly 22% of all children (16 million) in the U.S. live in families with incomes below the federal poverty level (i.e., below \$23,021 a year for a family of four). Available data indicates that, on average, families need about twice that to cover basic expenses and that if that figure is used 45% of children live in low-income families.

How many schools are there?

- >about 98,000 public schools
- >about 34,000 private schools
- >about 5,000 public charter schools

How many school districts?

- >about 14,000

How many of the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population are in the schools?

- >over 55 million in K-12 (about 49.4 million in Public, 6.0 million in Private)
- >about 1,433,116 in charter schools

How engaged are students in school?

(reported as liking school, being interested in school and working hard in school)

>only about 56% of 6- to 11-year-olds are reported as being highly engaged

>only 52% of 12- to 17-year-olds are reported as being highly engaged

How many speak a language other than English at home?

>11.2 million of 5- to 17-year olds (8 million of these speak Spanish at home)

How many are reported to have a disability?

>about 6 million (of the 55 million in K-12)

Note: The proportion of school-age children labeled as having a Learning Disability (LD) rose from 1.8% in 1976 to 5.2% in 2001. Currently 2.4 million students are diagnosed with LD and receive special education services in schools, representing 40% of all students receiving special education

For comparison, only about

>22% are diagnosed as having a *Speech and Language Impairment*

>11% labeled as *Other Health Impaired* (includes ADHD)

>7% diagnosed as having an *Intellectual Impairment*

>6% diagnosed as having an *Emotional Disturbance*

Sources:

Addy, S. & Wight, V. (2012). *Basic Facts About Low-income Children, 2010: Children Under Age 18*. http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1049.pdf

National Center for Education Statistics. <http://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=84>

U.S. Census Bureau. <http://www.census.gov/#>

Note: For more information on the national Center for Mental Health in Schools at UCLA and its many resources, go to the website at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu> The center at UCLA is co-directed by Howard Adelman and Linda Taylor and operates under the auspices of the School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA 90095-1563 Phone: (310) 825-3634. Email: smhp@ucla.edu .

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