



## **A 2009 Preliminary Study of the Percentage of Students Who Have Been Identified with Autism and Were Enrolled in California Public Schools During 2007-08**

### **National Context**

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), autism is one of a group of disorders known as autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). These disorders are developmental disabilities that cause substantial impairments in social interaction and communication along with the presence of unusual behaviors and interests. Individuals with ASDs also may have unusual ways of learning, paying attention, and reacting to different sensations. The thinking and learning abilities of people with ASDs can vary – from gifted to severely challenged. An ASD begins before the age of 3 and lasts throughout a person's life.

ASDs occur in all racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups. They are four times more likely to occur in boys than in girls. CDC's Autism and Developmental Disabilities Monitoring (ADDM) Network conducted a study of 8-year-old children in multiple areas of the United States identified with ASD. Data they released in 2007, showed about 1 in 150 children (approximately 0.67% (less than 1%) were identified with ASD (<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/overview.htm>).

### **Study of California Data**

#### *Purpose of the Study*

The purpose of this study was to conduct a preliminary analysis of data that is annually provided by school districts to the California Department of Education related to the number of children in public schools that are identified with autism. The data used for this study was the most current data available in March 2009 – for the school year 2007-2008.

This data provides a snapshot of students who have been identified with autism and were enrolled in California public schools during the 2007-2008 school year. It is not indicative of when the students were identified, only that they have been identified with autism at some point. It is important to note, these are students who have been identified with autism, correctly or incorrectly. It is possible that some of these students may be mis-identified. It is also possible that there are other students enrolled in the California public schools who have autism but have not been identified and are therefore not represented in this data.

#### *Questions to be Answered by the Study*

This study was conducted to answer the following questions:

1. Is the percentage of students who have been identified with autism and were enrolled in California public school during 2007-2008 approximately the same as the percentage found in the national sample?
2. Is the percentage of students who have been identified with autism and were enrolled in California public schools, disaggregated by grade level, approximately the same as the percentage found in the national sample?
3. Is the percentage of students who have been identified with autism and were enrolled in California public schools, when disaggregated by race/ethnicity categories, approximately the same as the percentage found in the national sample?

*Finding #1:*

The percentage of students who have been identified with autism and were enrolled in California public schools during 2007-2008 (0.62%) is approximately the same as the percentage found in the national sample (0.67%).

**Table 1: Number and Percentage of Students Identified with Autism Enrolled in California Public Schools During 2007-2008**

<i>Grade Level(s)</i>	<i>Number of Students Identified with Autism Enrolled in CA Public Schools</i>	<i>Total K-12 Students Enrolled in CA Public Schools</i>	<i>Percent of Students Identified with Autism Enrolled in CA Public Schools</i>	
All K-12	38,391	6,223,029	0.62 %	1 in 161

*Finding #2:*

In disaggregating the number of students who have been identified with autism and were enrolled in California public schools by grade level:

- a) The percentages of those students enrolled in grades 5 and 6 were most similar to the national percentage.
- b) The percentages of those students enrolled in grades 6-12 were lower than the national percentage.
- c) The percentages of those students enrolled in grades K-5 were higher than the national percentage.

**Table 2: Number and Percentage of Students Identified with Autism And Enrolled in California Public Schools During 2007-2008, Disaggregated by Grade Level**

<i>Grade Level(s)</i>	<i>Number of Students Identified with Autism Enrolled by Grade Level</i>	<i>Total Students By Grade Level</i>	<i>Percent of Students Identified with Autism Enrolled By Grade Level</i>	
Kindergarten	3,912	459,349	0.85%	1 in 117
Grade 1	4,152	467,278	0.89%	1 in 113
Grade 2	3,915	463,958	0.84%	1 in 119
Grade 3	3,692	468,327	0.79%	1 in 127
Grade 4	3,466	462,486	0.75%	1 in 133
Grade 5	3,180	465,853	0.68%	1 in 146
Grade 6	2,944	467,719	0.63%	1 in 159
Grade 7	2,728	477,766	0.57%	1 in 175
Grade 8	2,579	484,953	0.53%	1 in 188
Grade 9	2,390	536,867	0.45%	1 in 225
Grade 10	2,013	507,006	0.40%	1 in 252
Grade 11	1,610	487,237	0.33%	1 in 303
Grade 12	1,810	474,230	0.38%	1 in 262
Total	38,391	6,223,029	0.62%	1 in 161

*Finding #3:*

When the number of students who have been identified with autism and were enrolled in California public schools is disaggregated by race/ethnicity:

- a) The percentage of students with autism in four race/ethnicity sub-groups is higher than the national percentage.
- b) The percentage of students with autism in three race/ethnicity sub-groups is lower than the national percentage.
- c) Similar patterns were found when data was disaggregated by county.

**Table 3: Number and Percentage of Students Identified with Autism Enrolled in California Public Schools During 2007-2008, Disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity**

Racial/Ethnic Subgroup	# of Students in Total Population by Racial/Ethnic Subgroups	# of Students Identified with Autism, by Racial/Ethnic Subgroup	# of Students with Autism in Racial/Ethnic Subgroup	Ratio of Students identified with Autism to Their Racial/Ethnic Subgroup
White	1,790,513	20,687	1.2%	White students identified with Autism: 1 in 83
Filipino	167,385	1,802	1.1%	Filipino students identified with Autism: 1 in 91
Asian	516,253	5,112	1.0%	Asian students identified with Autism: 1 in 100
African-American	466,141	3,895	0.8%	African-American students identified with Autism: 1 in 125
<i>National Average</i>			0.7%	<i>1 in 150</i>
Native American	47,543	242	0.5%	Native American students identified with Autism: 1 in 200
Pacific Islander	39,693	188	0.5%	Pacific Islander students identified with Autism: 1 in 200
Hispanic	3,056,616	14,270	0.5%	Hispanic students identified with Autism: 1 in 200

**Further Analysis and Research**

Wexford Institute is currently conducting additional analyses of extended data. Conclusions will have implications for policies, practices, strategies, and further research.

This initial study, along further analyses, is conducted by Wexford Institute staff: Dr. David Ramirez, Dr. Martha Alvarez-Martini, and Kevin Rocap, Senior Researchers; Sheila Cassidy, Executive Director. For additional information, please contact:

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