

## Transitions from early Intervention/ early childhood special education to school-based education for children diagnosed with developmental delay: Oregon Department of Education (ODE) report

---

**Erica Twardzik, MS; Megan MacDonald, PhD**

Oregon department of education (ODE) programs provide individuals with developmental delay support to thrive in their homes and educational settings. The information presented below can be used to inform future policy supporting children diagnosed with developmental delay. Specifically, this research highlights the difficulty children may have in their transition from the early intervention/ early childhood special education programs to school-based programs. By identifying children with developmental delay that have a challenge transitioning we can inform legislators on future policy and practice(s) regarding individuals with developmental delay and their entry into school age programs.



Photo: Viktor Hanacek, *Childrens Wooden Abacus*

The overall objective of this research was to describe enrollment into school aged services for children who received early intervention or early childhood special education services under a primary diagnosis of developmental delay. All children included in this study entered IDEA programs from birth to five years of age and were enrolled in the state of Oregon. To accomplish this objective our team was provided access to the state data collection files to complete a secondary data analysis. All data included in this analysis were collected from 2009 to 2014. Data prior to 2009 was collected using different unique identifiers, thus was not included in this study. Specifically, our team proposed three aims. Each aim is described below with findings from our analysis.

**Aim 1.** To identify the number of children three to five years of age with a primary disability diagnosis of developmental delay in the state of Oregon from 2009 to 2015.

**Findings, Aim 1.** As you can see from Figure 1 below, the proportion of children who have a primary disability diagnosis of DD appears to be slightly increasing over time. With children diagnosed with developmental delay increasing over time it is essential to identify if and how they transition into school based special education programs.

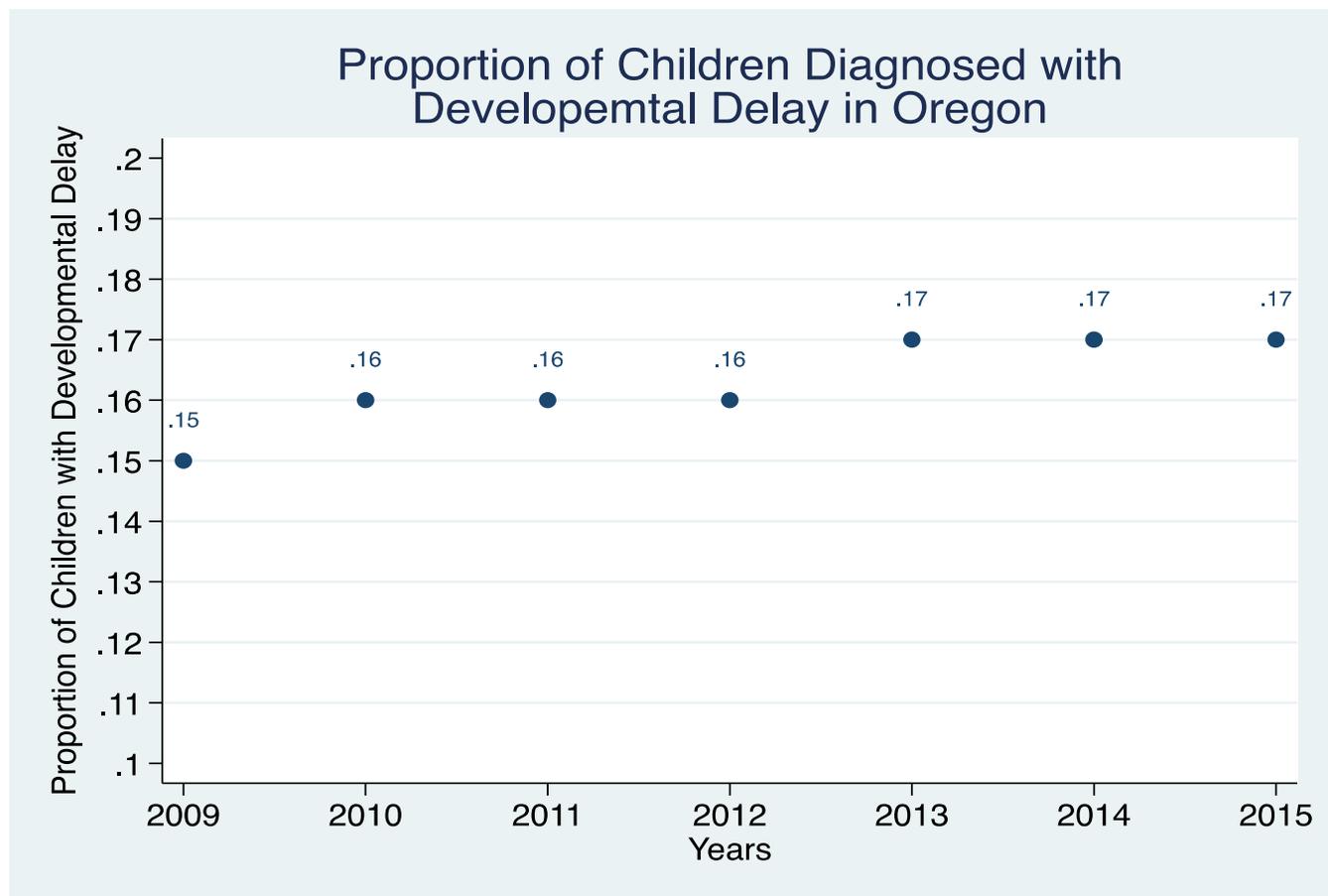


Figure 1. Proportion of children three to five years of age who were enrolled in early intervention/early childhood special education services who were accessing services through a diagnosis of developmental delay within the state of Oregon from 2009 to 2015.

<sup>1</sup>Significant increasing trend from 2009-2015 ( $p < .05$ )

**Aim 2.** To examine the number of children diagnosed with DD from three to five years of age enrolled in school based special education when the child turns five and when the child enrolls in third grade.

**Findings, Aim 2.** As displayed in Figure 2, children who had a primary disability diagnosis of developmental delay during access to early intervention or early childhood special education services but who never changed their primary disability diagnosis over time were excluded from this study. Children who left early intervention or early childhood special education services and then reentered IDEA programs because they received a new diagnosis after the age of five will end up in either Group F or G of Figure 2. We identified children in this group to have a successful transition. Children who end up in Group E are the children that are most concerning. These children had access to services early on (e.g., early intervention/ early childhood special education service), exited because they were too old to access services under their current diagnosis of developmental delay, and then reentered services later on in school. Thus, children in Group E, had a loss of service access during this sensitive time which could have implications on a child's later academic and life success.

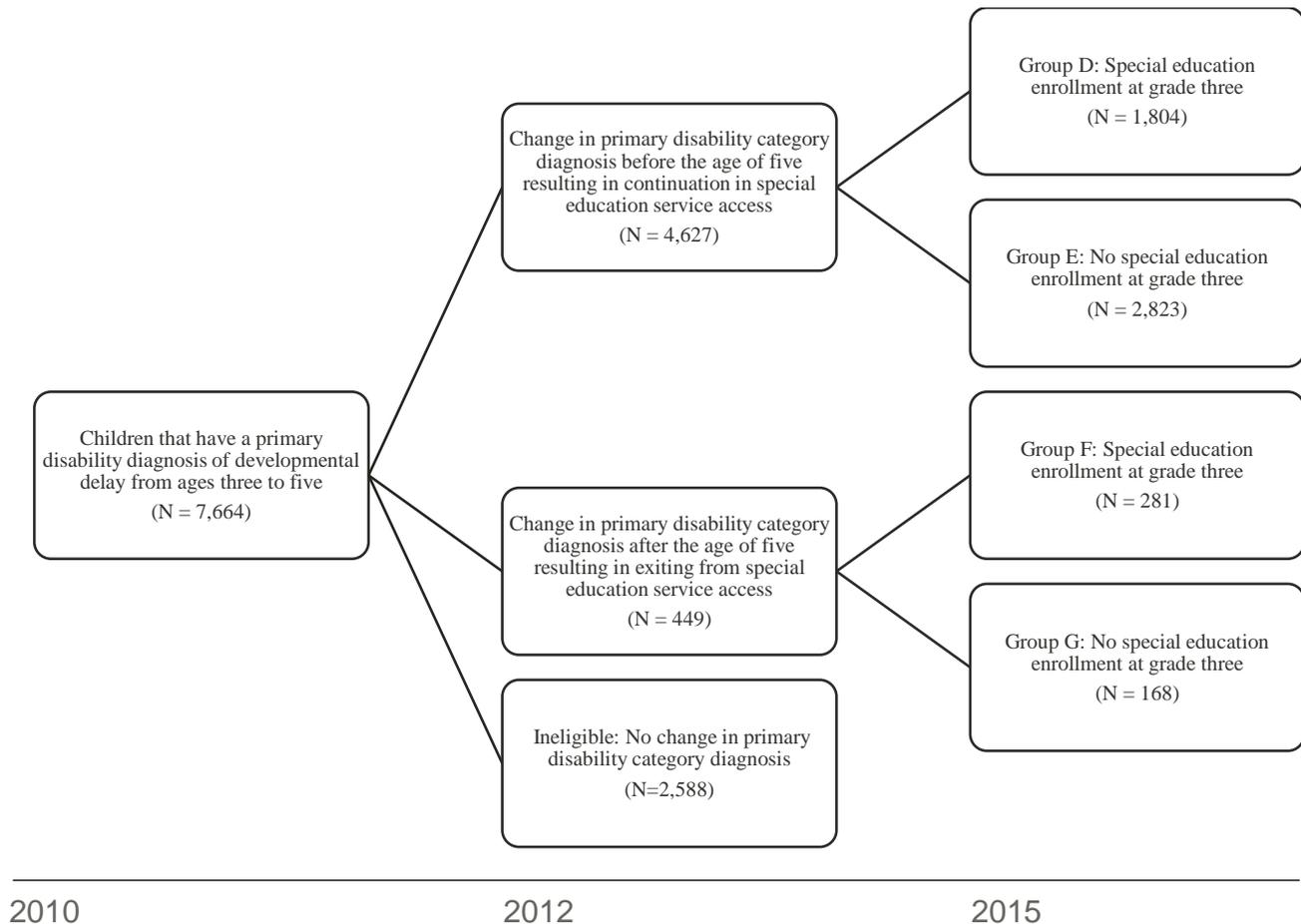


Figure 2. The number of children who had an initial diagnosis of developmental delay and their enrollment into school based special education programs.

**Aim 3.** To describe characteristics of children with a DD diagnosis from ages birth – 5 upon that transitioned into school based programs and children who did not transition into school based programs.

**Findings, Aim 3.** The number of children that had a change in primary disability diagnosis before the age of five was ten times the number of children that had a primary disability diagnosis after the age of five. However, a greater proportion of children that had a change in primary disability diagnosis after the age of five were enrolled in special education in comparison to children that had a change in primary disability diagnosis before the age of five, 62.58% and 38.99% respectfully. The majority of children were initially eligible for early intervention or early childhood special education programs after 36 months of age. Additionally, the majority of children diagnosed with a developmental delay were male. Among those that had a change in primary disability diagnosis before the age of five 38.99% were enrolled in special education at grade three while 61.01% were not enrolled in special education at grade three. Among those that had a change in primary disability diagnosis after the age of five 62.58% were enrolled in special education at grade three while 37.42% were not enrolled in special education at grade three.

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of children within the state of Oregon from 2009 to 2015 that had a primary disability diagnosis of developmental delay from birth to five and had a change in primary disability diagnosis

	Change in disability diagnosis before age five		Change in disability diagnosis after age five		P <sup>a</sup>
	N=4,627	%	N=449	%	
Gender					
Male	3,390	73.27	323	71.94	0.544
Agency					
Program	4,476	96.74	446	99.33	0.002
Regional	151	03.26	3	00.67	
Enrollment Setting					
School	4,623	99.91	448	99.78	0.380
Other	4	00.09	1	00.22	
Eligibility age					
0 – 6 months	180	03.89	12	02.67	0.000
6 – 12 months	216	04.67	11	02.45	
12 – 18 months	238	05.14	16	03.56	
18 – 24 months	411	08.88	21	04.68	
24 – 30 months	641	13.85	40	08.91	
30 – 36 months	746	16.12	68	15.14	
> 36 months	2,195	47.44	281	62.58	
Special Education					
Enrolled	1,804	38.99	281	62.58	0.000
Not enrolled	2,823	61.01	168	37.42	

## Conclusion

The enrollment of children with developmental delay into school based special education programs warrants further investigation. This is especially true for children that are forced to exit special education due to a maximum age of eligibility based on not having a change in diagnosis (e.g., at age 5 years, maintaining their developmental delay diagnosis). Additionally, there should be further investigation on the influence a gap in service access has on later life outcomes, such as enrollment in special education throughout primary school, academic achievement, or adult independence. Federal, state, and local level policies have great influence on individual's opportunity for success. Many states throughout the country have extended eligibility for children with developmental delay to include children up to eight years of age, or for the first year of school based education.

Within the state of Oregon, and in 19 other states across the country, children with DD are only eligible for special education services from three through five years of age, which could make it challenging for children with DD to transition into the school based system. Oregon legislature should consider their eligibility decision and reasons for restricting services to children three to five years of age in children diagnosed with developmental delay. It is important that children who are in need of services are accessing supports to be successful and participate alongside their typically developing peers. However, further research on the lifelong outcomes of children who have been diagnosed with developmental delay is needed. As a next step, it would be valuable to identify the primary disability diagnosis children commonly change into to access school-based services. This would help identify types of screening tools that would be most effective among children with a developmental delay diagnosis.