

Teacher effectiveness for students with and without disabilities

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Summary: Research has often focused on how teachers and educators can best instruct and accommodate students with disabilities. However, are the methods used to teach students with disabilities effective and inclusive for all students?

FULL STORY

Research has often focused on how teachers and educators can best instruct and accommodate students with disabilities. However, are the methods used to teach students with disabilities effective and inclusive for all students? Michigan State University researchers are some of the first to answer that question.

Faculty and doctoral students from across MSU, including from the College of Social Science and the College of Education, offer some of the first findings on differentiating the effectiveness of instruction for students with and without disabilities.

Their study suggests that to help schools make decisions that are best for student outcomes, policymakers may want to consider teacher quality measures that look separately at these student groups.

Published in the journal *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, this research presents a major breakthrough in understanding how to best measure achievement for both students with and without disabilities.

"Most students with disabilities spend most of their school day in general education classrooms, but many teachers indicate they receive insufficient training and preparedness to educate these students," said Scott Imberman, study author and professor in the Department of Economics in the College of Social Science and the College of Education. "We thought that through the use of statistical measures of teacher quality, we could identify which teachers are more effective teachers with these students and how much general education teachers' ability to instruct these students varies."

It's important that students with disabilities have access to high-quality teachers, and not all teachers receive the necessary training and skills to support those students. They also can struggle more with certain subjects, such as math. Student success outcomes are also often determined by how the entire class performs rather than how individual students perform.

When it comes to evaluating the success of all students, numerical measures known as value-added measures, or VAM, are typically used. However, these measures often do not distinguish between evaluating students with and without disabilities.

The MSU research team created a study using data from the Los Angeles Unified School District due to the large number of enrollees and students with disabilities. They created two specific value-added measures -- one for evaluating the effectiveness for teachers instructing students with disabilities and the other for students without disabilities.

They found that some of the best-performing teachers for students without disabilities have lower value-added scores for students with disabilities. Similarly, they noted that top-performing teachers for students with disabilities have lower value-added scores for students without disabilities. This means that some students who may appear to be matched with a high-quality teacher could actually be better off with other teachers.

The bigger inequity, according to Imberman, is that although "some general education teachers do have specialized skills that make them more effective for students with disabilities, our case study in Los Angeles suggested disabled students are typically not matched to these teachers."

While the results do not identify how to better match teachers with students with disabilities, they do raise the point to schools and policymakers to explore how both groups of students and, especially those with disabilities, can have better academic gains. It is also necessary that educators, especially those who have been teaching longer, receive the appropriate training to support students with disabilities.

"We hope that our methods can be used in the future to help school officials better match students with disabilities to the teachers who are best equipped to instruct them and better assess which teachers might need additional training in educating disabled students," Imberman said.

In addition to Imberman, the research team included Katharine Strunk, dean of the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education; Nathan Jones, associate professor in the Special Education program at Boston University Wheelock College of Education and Human Development; W. Jesse Wood, senior analyst at Abt Associates; Neil Filosa, doctoral student in the MSU Department of Economics; and Ijun Lai, researcher with Mathematica.

Story Source:

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Journal Reference:

1. W. Jesse Wood, Ijun Lai, Neil R. Filosa, Scott A. Imberman, Nathan D. Jones, Katharine O. Strunk. **Are Effective Teachers for Students With Disabilities Effective Teachers for All?** *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 2023; DOI: [10.3102/01623737231214555](https://doi.org/10.3102/01623737231214555)
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