

# Measuring Progress in Public & Parental Understanding of Learning Disabilities

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# Table of Contents

Research Design & Methodology ..... iii

I. Americans’ Knowledge About Learning Disabilities ..... 1

    Key Areas Of Improvement Since 1995 ..... 2

    Measures Of Awareness & Understanding ..... 5

    Continuing Area Of Confusion – Even Among People With  
    Personal Experience With Learning Disabilities ..... 8

II. Parents’ Assessments Of Potential Signs Of Learning Disabilities ..... 9

    Assessing Behavior In 3-To-4-Year-Old Children ..... 9

    Assessing Behavior In 5-To-8-Year-Old Children ..... 10

    Many Parents Are Concerned That A Child Of Theirs Might  
    Have Trouble With Learning ..... 11

III. Exploring The Stigma Associated With Learning Disabilities ..... 12

IV. Support For Learning Disabled Children ..... 18

V. Children With Learning Disabilities And The American Education  
    System ..... 23

    New Education Reforms And Standardized Tests ..... 25

VI. American Educators And Children With Learning Disabilities ..... 27

    New Area of Investigation ..... 27

    Measures Of Awareness & Understanding ..... 28

    Assessing Behavior In 3-To-4-Year-Old Children ..... 34

    Assessing Behavior In 5-To-8-Year-Old Children ..... 35

    School Procedures For Working With Learning Disabled  
    Children ..... 36

    New Education Reforms And Standardized Tests ..... 39

    Support For Educators In Working With Learning Disabled  
    Children ..... 41

## Research Design & Methodology

Telephone interviews were conducted with a nationwide cross-section of 1054 adults ages 18 and older, and an over-sample of approximately 650 parents of children under 18 currently living in their household. Utilizing a Random Digit Dialing (RDD) sampling methodology to locate respondents, interviews were conducted April 9<sup>th</sup> through May 10<sup>th</sup>, 2004.

Respondents without children under 18 currently living in their household completed a shorter 15-minute survey. Respondents with children under 18 currently living in their household (or parents) completed a longer 22 minute survey.

Replicating as much as possible the research design used in 1995 and in 1999, the current study (both for parents and other people) followed a “pre-test/post-test” structure. Interviews began with a “blind” discussion of attitudes towards and knowledge about learning disabilities prior to providing respondents with an actual definition of what learning disabilities are. The remaining questions were then answered in light of the definition that had been provided.

The findings in this report based upon the general public sample are projectable to the universe of the adults 18 and older in the United States within a sampling error of +/- 3%. The margin of sampling error is larger on sub-groups. A minimum amount of weighting was applied to bring the sample in line with current census data on age within sex, education, region of the country, and parents vs. non-parents. The weighted sample, then, is representative of the U.S. adult population on these characteristics. Findings in this report based upon the educator sample are weighted to bring the sample in line with current data on region of the country, grade level (for teachers only), and teachers vs. administrators. The weighted sample, then, is representative of teachers and administrators in American schools on those characteristics.

## I. Americans' Knowledge About Learning Disabilities

- **Seven in ten Americans agree that all children learn in different ways**

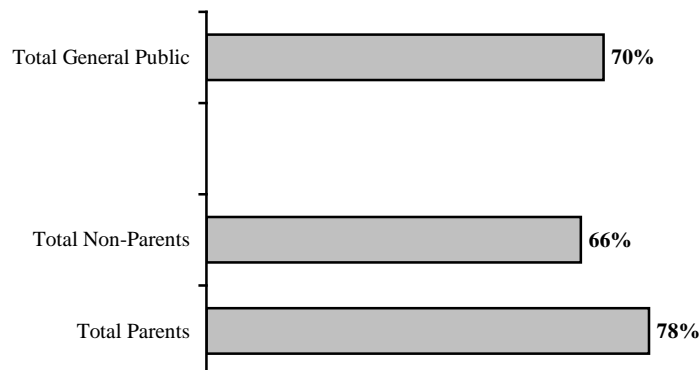
Americans understand that the needs of individual children are unique. Seven in 10 adults (70%) *strongly* agree that all children learn in different ways. Younger Americans, women and parents are particularly likely to believe this.

People 55 or older are less likely than younger adults to agree with this – about six in 10 do (62%) compared with 74% of adults under the age of 55. Women are more likely than men to believe this is true by a 10 point margin (75% vs. 65%, respectively).

Those with a child under 18 years in their household are more likely than those without to believe that all children learn in different ways. While two in three people without a child (66%) agree that this statement is true, 78% of parents<sup>1</sup> agree. Eight in ten parents (82%) with personal experience with a learning disability<sup>2</sup> find this to be true compared to seven in 10 parents without a learning disability connection (72%).

[Q.3] Base: Total

% who strongly agree that “all children learn in different ways”



<sup>1</sup> In this study, the term “parents” refers to those with children under 18 currently living in their household.

<sup>2</sup> They personally have a learning disability, a child of theirs does or someone else close to them does.

### Key Areas Of Improvement Since 1995

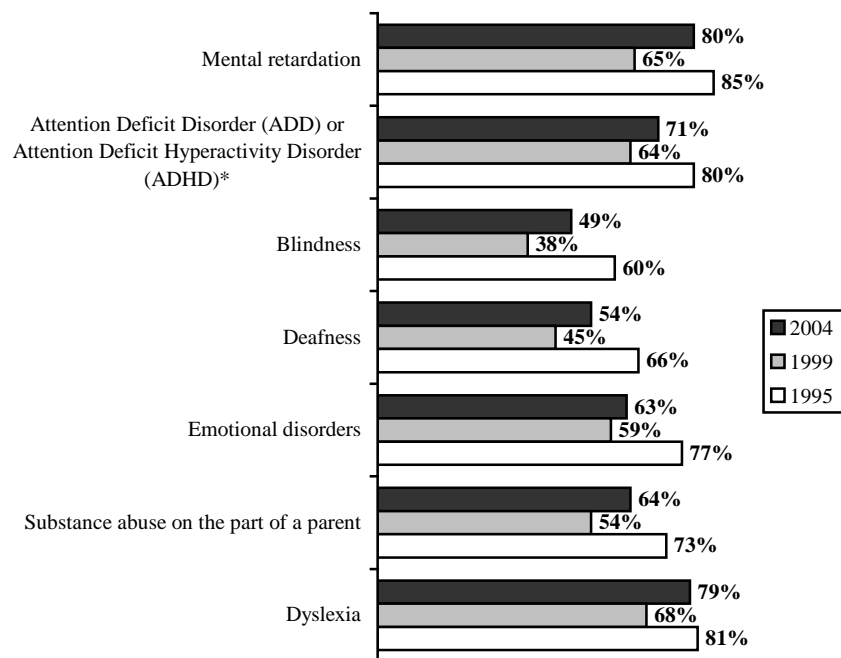
- **The public's understanding of learning disabilities has improved in general since 1995 – although there has been some erosion since 1999.**

Since 1995 the proportion of people who erroneously associate learning disabilities with *physical disabilities* such as deafness (54%) and blindness (49%) has decreased greatly (vs. 66% and 60%, respectively), although today's levels are about 10 points higher than what was seen in 1999.

People are less likely today than in 1995 to mistakenly associate *emotional disorders* (63%) and *Attention Deficit Disorder/Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder* (71%) with learning disabilities. However, eight in 10 people (80%) erroneously link learning disabilities with *mental retardation* (up from 65% in 1999). People 55 or older are more likely than their younger counterparts to link *emotional disorders* with learning disabilities (73% vs. 59% among adults under 55).

[Q.7] Base: Total

% think the following are associated with learning disabilities



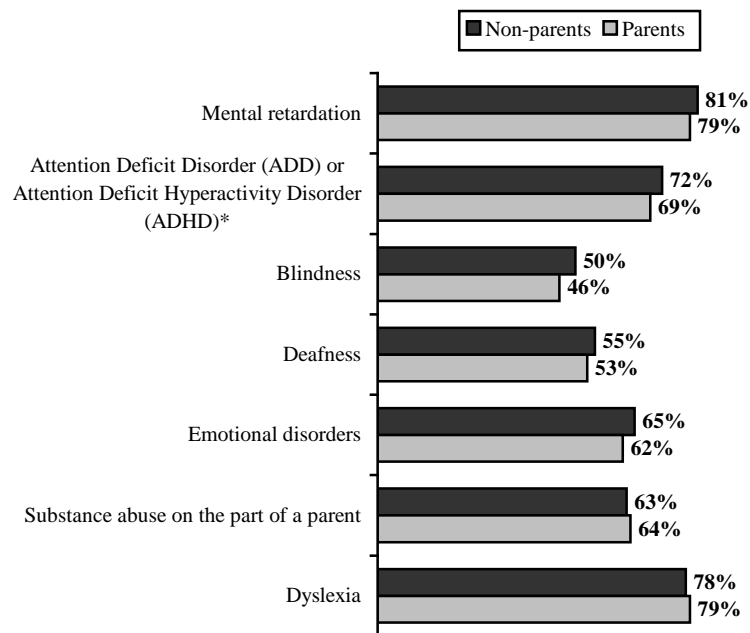
More people today than in 1999 correctly associate *dyslexia* with learning disabilities (79%, vs. 68%, respectively). People with higher education levels (college graduates or higher) are more likely to identify dyslexia as a learning disability (86%) than those with only some college education or less (77%). This is also seen among parents, where nine in 10 college graduates or higher (90%) associate dyslexia with learning disabilities, compared to 75% of those with only some college education or less.

- **Today parents are about as likely as non-parents to not clearly understand the conditions associated with learning disabilities.**

Today, as in 1995, parents and non-parents are similarly likely to mistakenly associate learning disabilities with various physical or mental conditions (such as mental retardation, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, blindness, deafness or emotional disorders). This has changed from 1999 when parents were less likely than other adults to associate learning disabilities with these conditions.

[Q.7] Base: Total

% think the following are associated with learning disabilities



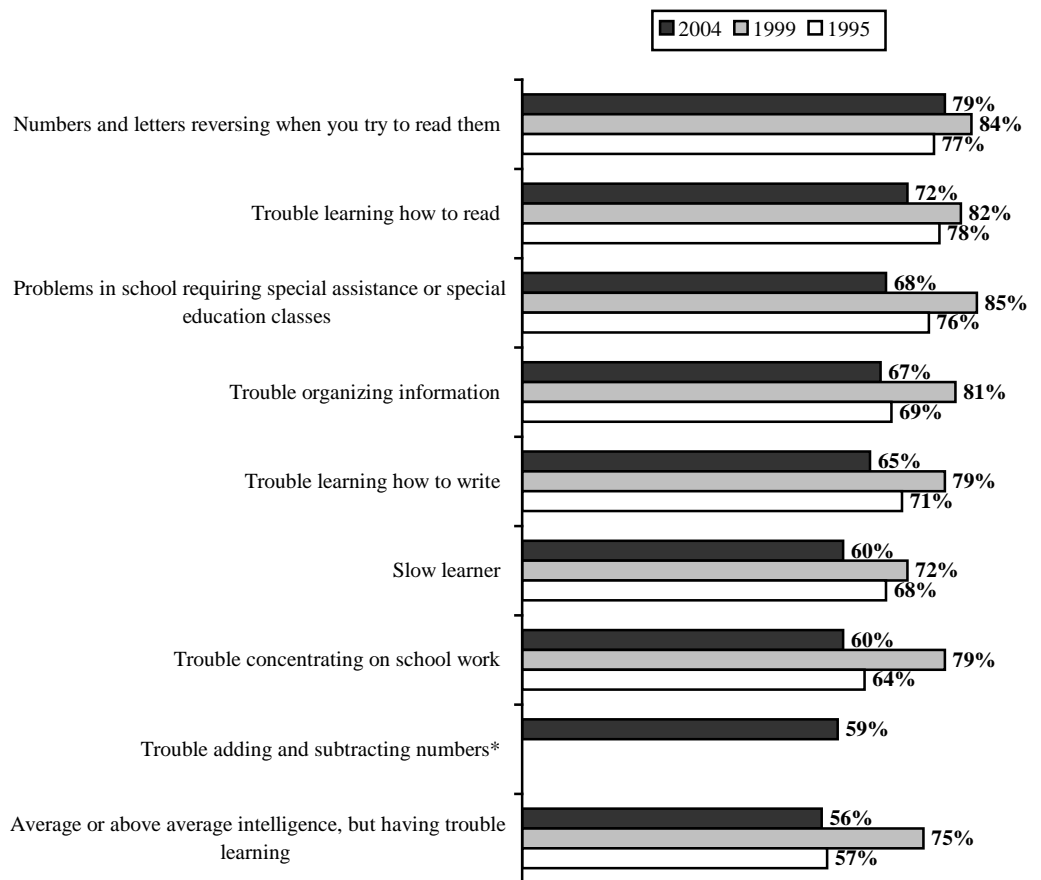
- **People today are less likely than in past years to correctly identify possible indicators of learning disabilities.**

However, the majority of people do still accurately relate these behaviors to learning disabilities. Some of the behaviors most likely to be considered indicators of learning disabilities are:

- reversing numbers and letters
- trouble learning how to read
- problems in school requiring special assistance or classes
- trouble organizing information
- trouble learning how to write

[Q.6] Base: Total

% think the following are associated with learning disabilities



\*Note: 1999 and 1995 not available

### Measures Of Awareness & Understanding

- **Three in four Americans say they have at least some familiarity with learning disabilities.**

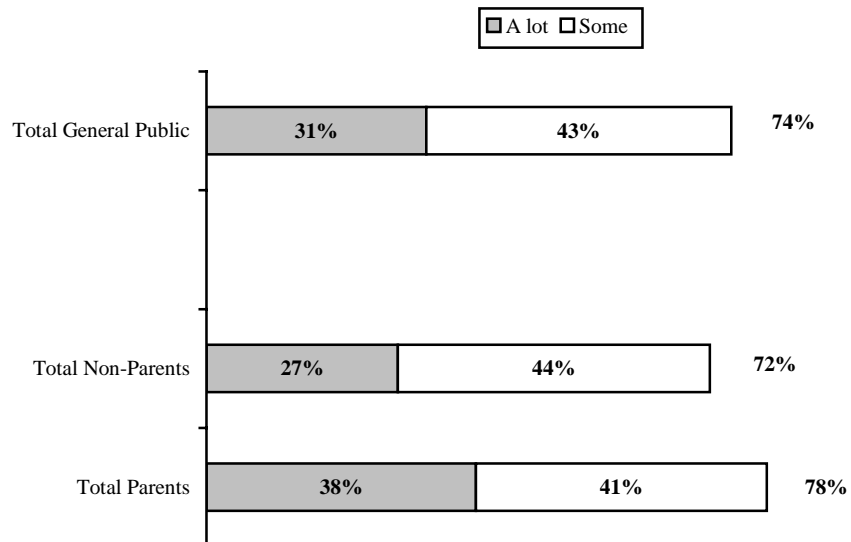
The American public says the subject of learning disabilities is on their radar. As in 1999, three-fourths (74%) say they have heard or read some to a lot about the topic (vs. 75% in 1999). Three in ten (31%) report having heard *a lot* about learning disabilities, while another 43% say they have heard or read *some* information about this issue.

- **Parents are more likely to have familiarity with learning disabilities.**

Nearly eight in 10 parents (78%) say they have heard “some” or “a lot” about learning disabilities, compared to about seven in 10 non-parents (72%). In fact, while nearly four in ten parents (38%) report that they have heard or read *a lot* about the topic, less than 3 in 10 non-parents (27%) say the same.

[Q.4] Base: Total

% say have heard or read a lot/some about learning disabilities



- **Women, in general, report having heard more about learning disabilities than men.**

Eight in 10 women (79%) have heard or read some to a lot about learning disabilities while seven in 10 men say the same (70%).

Women **without children under 18 years old in the household** are much more likely than their male counterparts to say they have heard a lot or some about learning disabilities (78% vs. 64%, respectively). One in three of these women (34%) say they have read *a lot*, compared to only one in five of these men (20%).

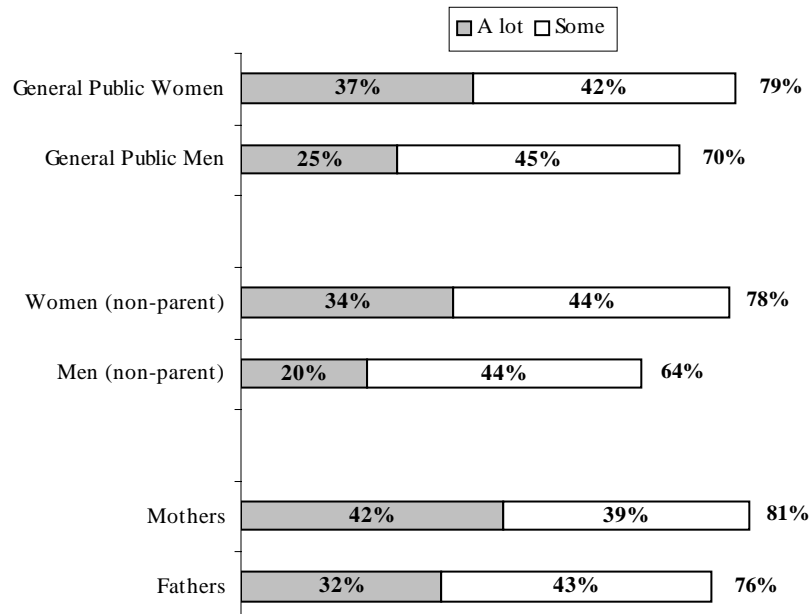
While these gender differences diminish when we look at women and men with children under 18 in their households, mothers are still more likely than fathers to say they have heard or read about learning disabilities.

- **Fathers, however, are much more likely than other men to have familiarity with learning disabilities.**

Three in four fathers (76%) say they have read or heard at least some about learning disabilities (vs. 64% of other men). Specifically, while more than three in 10 fathers (32%) say they have familiarity with the topic, only two in 10 men without children (20%) say the same.

[Q.4] Base: Total

% say have heard or read a lot/some about learning disabilities

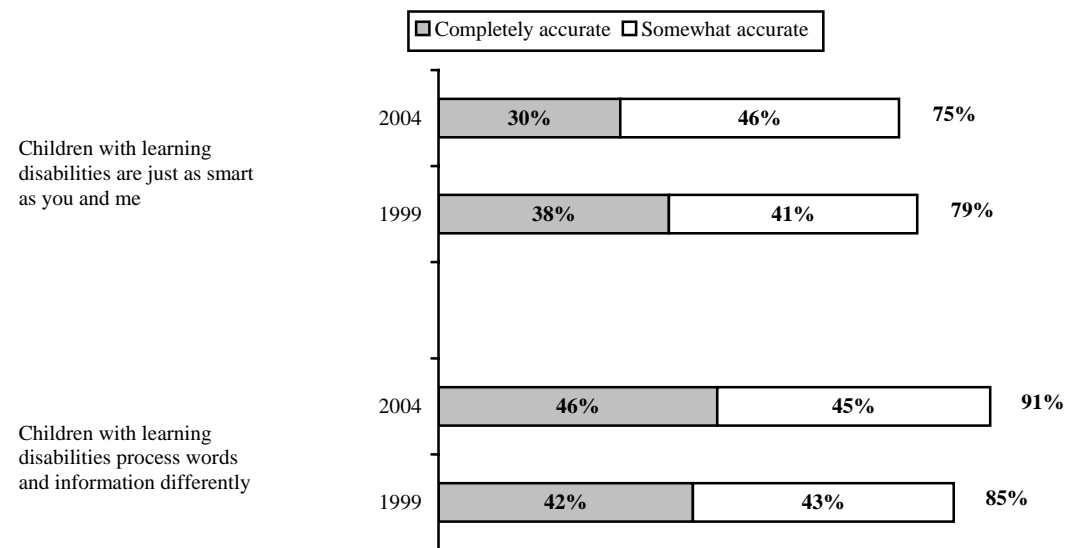


- **Vast majority of public recognizes that children with learning disabilities are “just as smart as you and me” – and that they “process words and information differently.”**

Nine in ten adults (91%) consider the statement “*children with learning disabilities process words and information differently*” to be accurate (vs. 85% in 1999). Among those who feel this way, half believe it is completely accurate (46% of the public) and half say it is somewhat accurate (45% of the public).

[Q.5] Base: Total

% consider following statements completely/somewhat accurate



Three in four people (75%) consider the statement “*children with learning disabilities are just as smart as you and me*” accurate. However, only 30% believe this statement is completely accurate. People 55 years of age or older are less likely than younger adults to say this is at least somewhat accurate (only 66% do, at least 10 points lower than other adults).

Parents of children under 18 are more likely than other adults to say it is *completely* accurate that children with learning disabilities are just as smart (35% vs. 28%, respectively). Mothers specifically tend to feel this way with four in 10 (41%) saying this statement is completely accurate (vs. 29% of fathers).

### *Continuing Area Of Confusion – Even Among People With Personal Experience With Learning Disabilities*

- **Among the public, some confusion still exists about possible indicators of with learning disabilities.**

- Assessment of *hyperactivity* as being a possible indicator of learning disabilities has decreased since 1999, from 69% to 55% (similar to the 58% in 1995 who linked hyperactivity with learning disabilities). However, the majority of Americans still incorrectly make this association. In actuality, hyperactivity is a separate condition that individuals sometimes have in addition to learning disabilities. But hyperactivity is not, by itself, an indicator of learning disabilities.

We see differences in the understanding of hyperactivity and learning disabilities specifically within age and gender groups. Younger people are less likely to incorrectly associate hyperactivity with learning disabilities. While only 44% of adults 18 to 34 believe hyperactivity is sometimes an indication of a learning disability, six in 10 people (60%) 35 years and older feel the same. Within gender groups, men are less likely to link hyperactivity to learning disabilities than women (51% vs. 59%, respectively). This same pattern is seen when looking specifically at fathers and mothers – 47% of men with children incorrectly connect hyperactivity to learning disabilities vs. 58% of their female counterparts.

- **Parents of children under 18 – with some personal experience with learning disabilities – most likely misidentify hyperactivity.**

- A majority of parents (56%) who say they have a personal connection with learning disabilities (either themselves, a child, or someone else they know has a learning disability) believe that hyperactivity is sometimes a sign of a learning disability. This compares to 48% of parents without a learning disability connection.

## II. Parents' Assessments Of Potential Signs Of Learning Disabilities

### *Assessing Behavior In 3-To-4-Year-Old Children*

- **Parents overwhelmingly adopt a “wait and see” attitude when it comes to possibly troubling behavior in children 3-to-4-years-old.**

More than two in three parents believe the following behaviors – all of which could be signs of a serious learning problem in a child 3-to-4 years old – are something a child this age would grow out of:

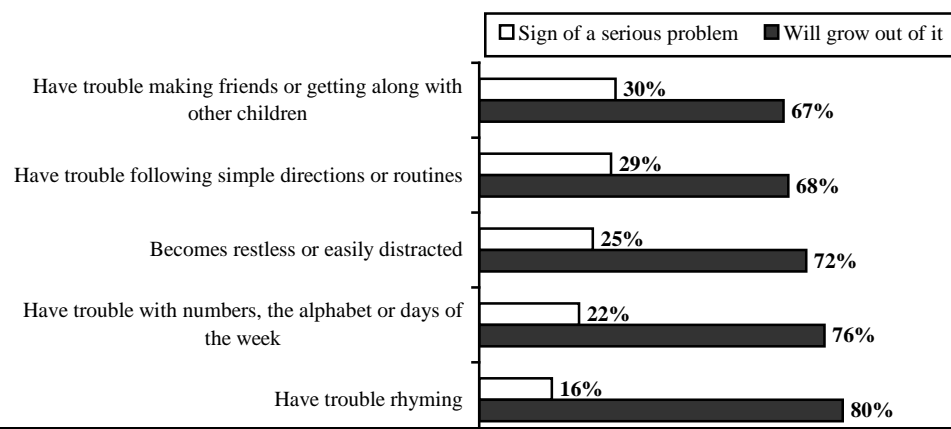
- trouble rhyming (80%)
- trouble with numbers, the alphabet or days of the week (76%)
- restlessness or being easily distracted (72%)

- **Trouble with social skills in 3-to-4-year-old children is most likely to be considered a sign of a serious problem – but only by three in ten parents.**

Three in 10 parents say having trouble making friends or getting along with other children (30%) or having trouble following simple direction or routines (29%) are signs of a serious problem in children 3-to-4-years-old. The majority, however, assume even when it comes to social skills, “this too will pass.”

[Q.8] Base: Parents with child under 18 years old in household

*% if you saw a typical pre-school age child 3 – 4 years-old regularly do any of the following, would tend to think it was either a sign of a serious problem or something the child will grow out of*



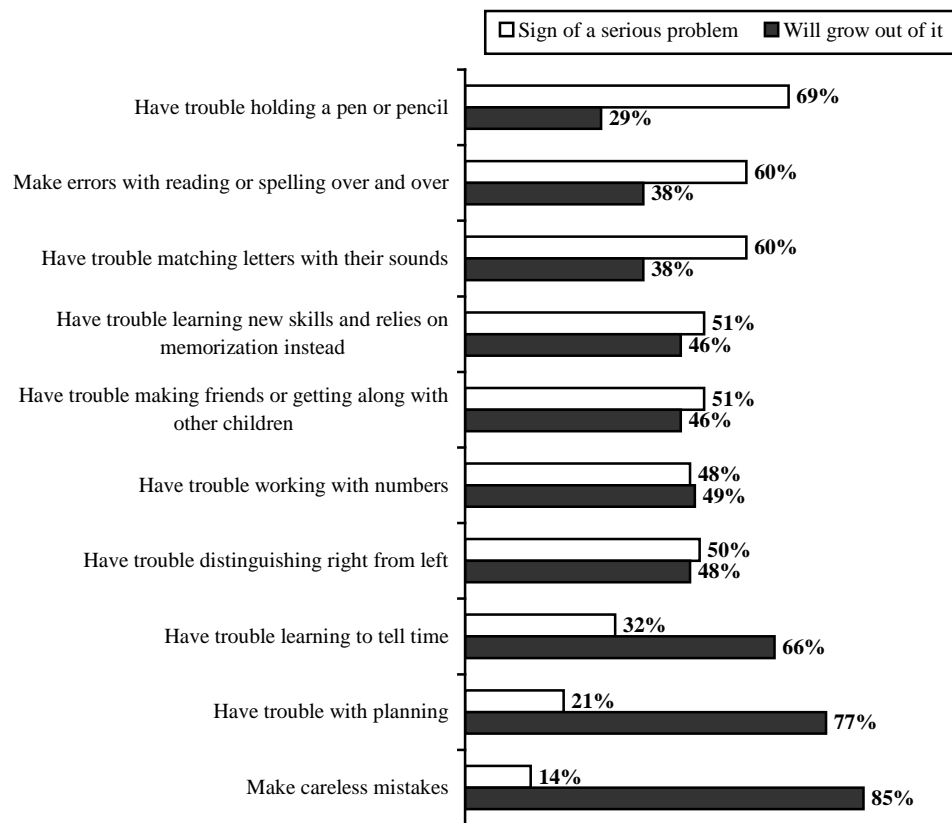
### Assessing Behavior In 5-To-8-Year-Old Children

- **Parents are more likely to view difficulties with reading or writing among 5-to-8-year-old children as signs of a serious problem.**

A majority of parents consider difficulties with reading or writing related tasks – such as trouble holding a pen or pencil (69%), repeated errors with reading or spelling (60%), or trouble matching letters with their sounds (60%) – signs of a serious problem in children 5-to-8. Nearly half consider other academic difficulties such as trouble learning new skills and relying on memorization instead (51%) or trouble with numbers (48%) to also be signs of a problem among children this age.

[Q.9] Base: Parents with child under 18 years old in household

% if you saw a typical 5 – 8 year-old child (that is, a child in kindergarten through 3rd grade) regularly do any of the following, would tend to think it was either a sign of a serious problem or something the child will grow out of



- **Less than half of parents consider difficulty with more personal skills to be signs of a problem among children 5-to-8 years old.**

Only half of all parents (50%) consider it a potential problem for a child this age to have trouble distinguishing right from left. The majority believes *trouble learning to tell time* (66%), *trouble planning* (77%) or *making careless mistakes* (85%) are actually behaviors a 5-to-8-year-old will grow out of it. This may indicate that perhaps parents do not yet understand that if these behaviors persist, there might be a potential problem.

More so than with younger children, parents believe trouble with social skills such as making friends or getting along with other children for 5-to-8 year olds would be considered a potential problem (51%).

- **Mothers are more aware than fathers about what behaviors in children 5-to-8 years old are signs of potential trouble.**

It is interesting to note that mothers are more likely than fathers to believe many of these behaviors in 5-to-8-year-old children are possible signs of trouble:

- Have trouble holding a pen or pencil (74% vs. 63%)
- Have trouble making friends or getting along with other children (56% vs. 45%)
- Have trouble working with numbers (55% vs. 39%)
- Have trouble with planning (25% vs. 15%)

### *Many Parents Are Concerned That A Child Of Theirs Might Have Trouble With Learning*

- **A majority of parents (57%) have considered at one time or another that one of their children might have a serious problem with learning or schoolwork. This is up substantially from five years ago (1999) when 40% said the same.**

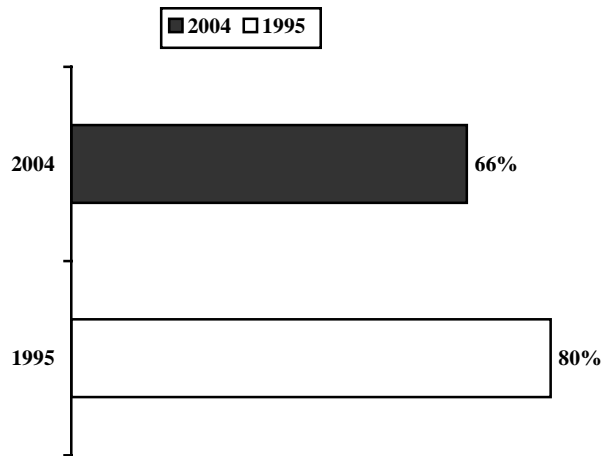
### III. Exploring The Stigma Associated With Learning Disabilities

- **Today fewer people than in 1995 say they would react with “great” concern if they discovered a child of theirs had a learning disability.**

Two in three adults (66%) say they would be greatly concerned if a child or grandchild of theirs was found to have a learning disability. This is down significantly from 1995 when 80% of Americans felt this way.

[Q.10] Base: Total

*% say would react with great concern if a child or grandchild of theirs were found to have learning disabilities*



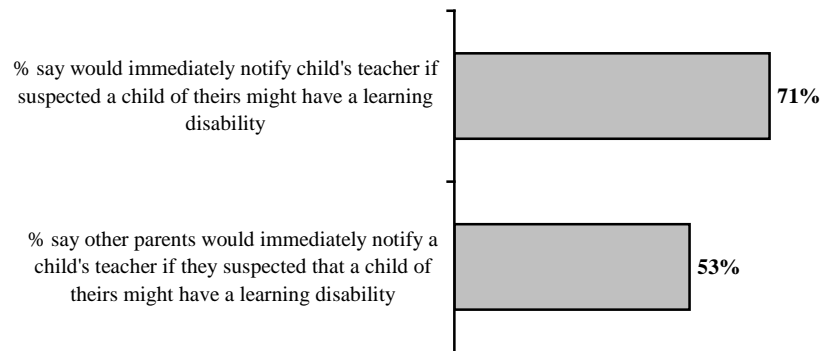
Younger adults are less likely to say they would be greatly concerned if a child close to them had a learning disability. Fifty-seven percent of people 18 to 34 years old say they would be, compared to nearly seven in 10 adults over 35 years (68% among those 35-54 and 73% among those over the age of 55).

- **Most parents say they would immediately notify their child's teacher if they suspected the child of having a learning disability – yet underlying concerns about social stigma still exist.**

As seen in 1999, seven in 10 parents (71%) say they would talk with their child's teacher if concerns existed that their child might have a learning disability. Three in 10 (28%) say they would help the child privately, without involving the child's teacher.

Yet there are still signs of an underlying social stigma associated with admitting that a child has a learning disability. This is suggested by the finding that although seven in 10 parents say they personally would talk with their child's teacher, only five in ten (53%) say other parents would notify a teacher.

[Q.15/16] Base: Parents with child under 18 years old in household



- **Concerns about underlying social stigmas associated with learning disabilities may be more prevalent among fathers than mothers.**

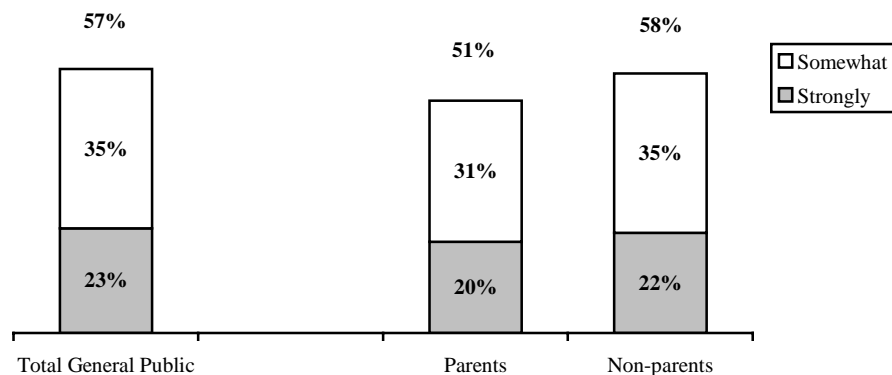
Fathers are more likely than mothers to say they would try to help a child themselves before enlisting the help of others. In fact, one in three (34%) fathers say they would work with their child privately if they suspected the child of having a learning disability. This compares to only 23% of mothers who say the same.

- **Parents are more likely than other people to understand that learning disabilities are not laziness in disguise.**

A majority of Americans (57%) agree that *sometimes what people call learning disabilities are really just the result of laziness and are not disabilities*, more so than in recent years (48% in 1999 and 53% in 1995). Parents, however, are much less inclined than other people to agree with this statement, by a margin of 51% to 58%.

[Q.14b] Base: Total

% who agree (strongly/somewhat) that *sometimes what people call learning disabilities are really just the result of laziness and are not disabilities*



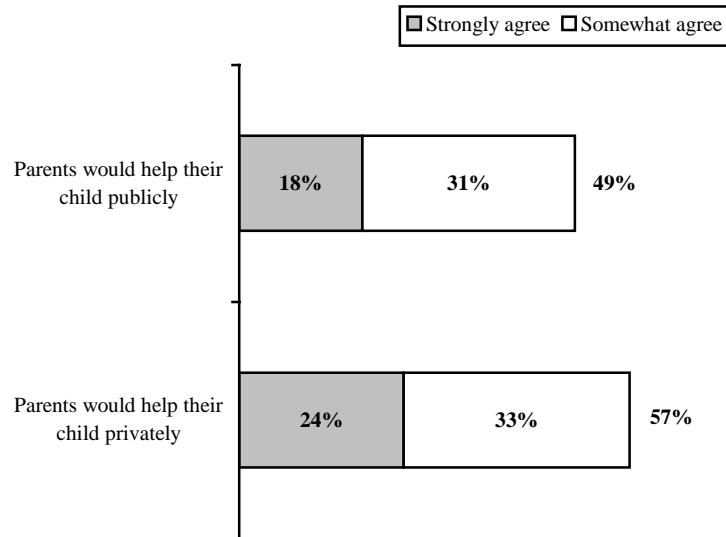
Perhaps because women, in general, and mothers, in particular, tend to have heard more than their male counterparts about leaning disabilities (37% of women in general and 42% of mothers say they have heard or read a lot about learning disabilities, compared to 25% of men in general and 32% of fathers, respectively), women are less likely than men to attribute learning disabilities to laziness. While nearly two in three men (66%) agree that sometimes what people call learning disabilities are really just laziness, only 49% of women believe this. Similarly only four in 10 mothers (42%) agree with this statement compared to six in 10 fathers (62%).

- **Today, parents who would help learning disabled children privately are more prone to say that sometimes what people call learning disabilities are really just a result of laziness.**

Nearly six in 10 parents (57%) who would choose to help a learning disabled child privately agree that sometimes what people consider to be learning disabilities are really results of laziness, compared to five in 10 parents (49%) who would seek help publicly. These findings may suggest that many parents who would choose to help their child privately (rather than admit publicly that their child has a learning disability) may be embarrassed by their child’s struggles and may try to view the learning disability as something that can easily be remedied (“they could do it if they just worked harder”).

[Q.14b] Base: Parents with child under 18 years old in household

*% who agree (strongly/somewhat) that sometimes what people call learning disabilities are really just the result of laziness and are not disabilities*



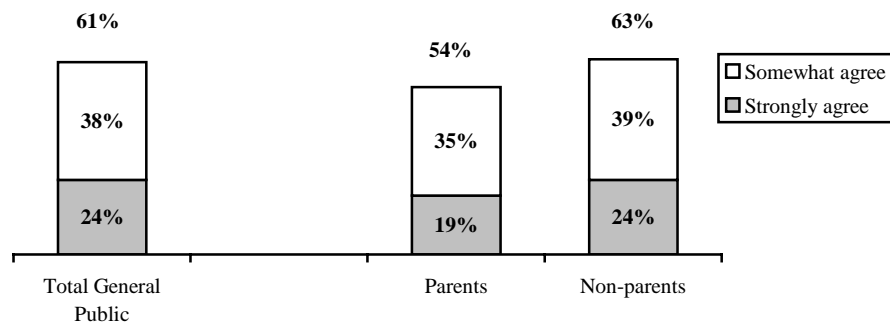
- **Attitudes toward the impact of the home environment on learning disabilities provide clues to some of the underlying stigmas driving how parents react to learning disabilities.**

Six in 10 adults (61%) agree that learning disabilities are often caused by the *home environment* children are raised in, (vs. 56% in 1999 and 64% in 1995).

Since 1995, there has been a 5-point decline in the proportion of parents who attribute learning disabilities to the home environment (54% today vs. 59% in 1995). In contrast, the proportion of other people who hold this view has remained virtually unchanged (63% vs. 66%, respectively). It should be noted, however, that there has been a sharp increase over the past five years in the number of parents who believe the home environment can cause learning disabilities among children (a 10 point gain from 1999 when only 44% of parents felt this way).

[Q.14a] Base: Total

*% who agree (strongly/somewhat) that learning disabilities are often caused by the home environment children are raised in*

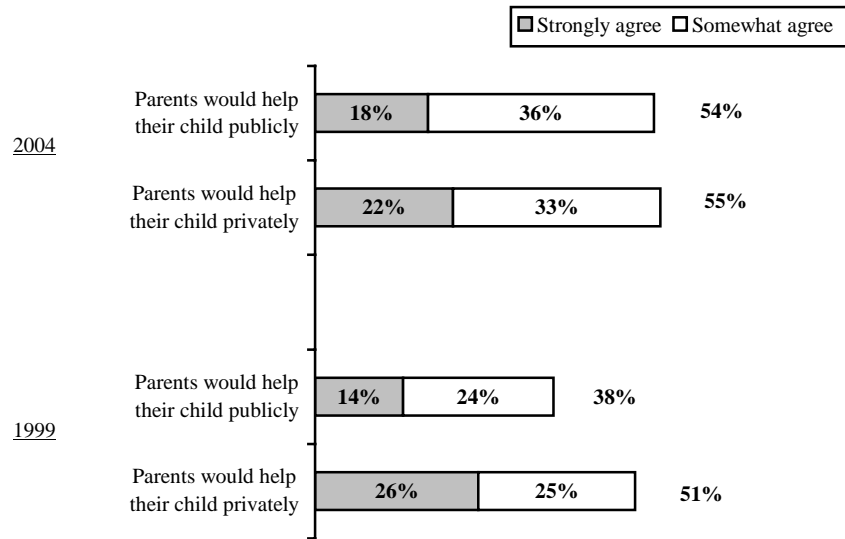


Again, fathers are more likely than mothers to believe learning disabilities are often caused by the home environment children are raised in. In fact, while only 47% of women with children feel this way, the majority of men (63%) do. Findings such – when looked at in conjunction with fathers’ tendency to delay in getting help and their belief that what people call learning disabilities are often results of laziness-- suggest fathers continue to be a key group that needs to be better educated on learning disabilities in general and the ultimate benefits of early diagnosis for children.

- Parents look to themselves as reasons for why their children have learning disabilities.**

In 1999, parents who chose to help a learning disabled child *privately* were more likely than parents who would seek help publicly to believe that learning disabilities are often caused by the home environment. Today both groups are similarly likely to agree with the statement (55% vs. 54%, respectively). This suggests parents may need continuous reminders that they are not to blame for learning disabilities that may exist in their children.

[Q.14a] Base: Parents with child under 18 years old in household  
 % who agree (strongly/somewhat) that learning disabilities are often caused by the home environment children are raised in



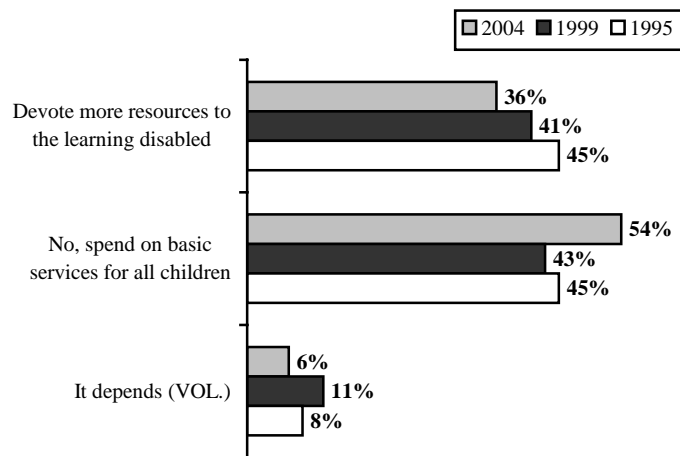
## IV. Support For Learning Disabled Children

- **Today Americans are less likely to feel they should devote additional resources specifically to services for learning disabled children.**

While in the past the American public had been split on whether or not more resources should be devoted to children with learning disabilities, today people feel more strongly that resources should be spread evenly among all children. A majority (54%) of Americans feel this way, compared to 36% who believe more support is needed for learning disabled children.

[Q.12] Base: Total

*% think the following should be done regarding resources for the learning disabled*



Adults who have personal experience with a learning disability<sup>3</sup> are about as likely as those without a learning disability connection to feel that more resources should be devoted to the learning disabled (38% vs. 33%, respectively). This has decreased from 1999 when more than half of adults with a learning disability (56%) or who were parents of a child with a learning disability (52%) felt that more resources should be devoted to helping children with learning disabilities.

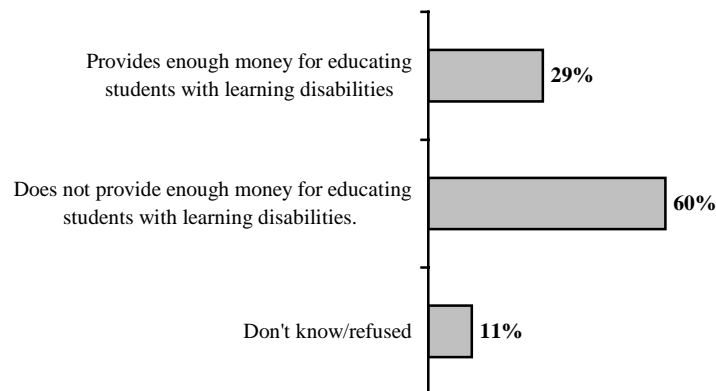
<sup>3</sup> They personally have a learning disability, a child of theirs does or someone else close to them does.

- **However, Americans do believe that the government does not provide enough support for educating children with learning disabilities.**

Thinking specifically about the government and its spending on education, six in 10 adults (60%) feel that not enough money is provided for educating students with learning disabilities. In particular, a majority of parents feel this way (65%) – however those with a learning disability connection are even more concerned. Seven in 10 parents with a learning disability connection (70%) feel the government is not doing enough when it comes to spending on education for children with learning disabilities. This compares to six in 10 parents without any personal experience with a learning disability (58%).

[Q.13] Base: Total

*% think the government does the following for educating students with learning disabilities*



- **Women, in general, are more likely to say the government is not supportive enough of educating children with learning disabilities.**

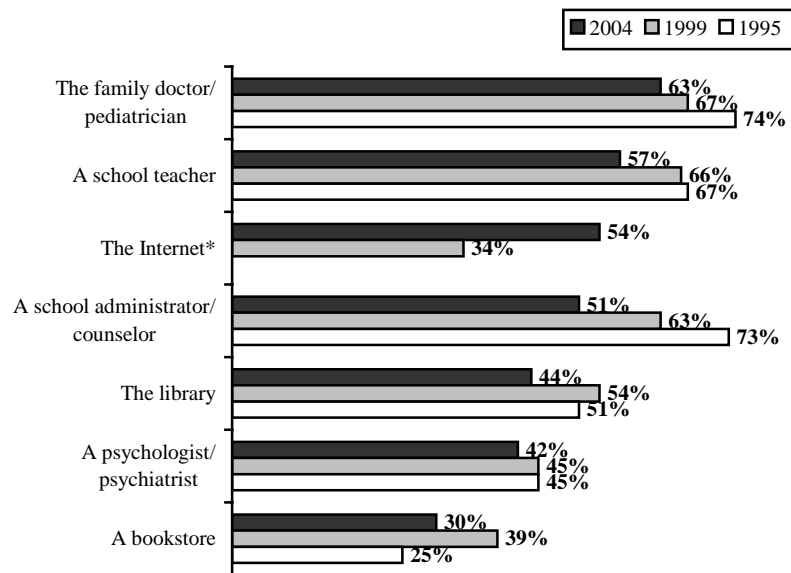
Nearly two-thirds of women (65%) believe the government does not provide sufficient funding for teaching learning disabled children, compared to 56% of men. Women without children are more likely than their male counterparts to feel this way about the government (63% vs. 54%, respectively). Mothers are more likely than fathers to say this (while 59% of fathers believe this about the government, 71% of moms do).

- **Most parents still say they would turn to experts for information about learning disabilities – but the Internet has become a way for them to proactively find information themselves.**

Pediatricians and teachers remain top sources parents would likely to turn to for information about learning disabilities. In fact, a majority of parents (63% and 57%, respectively) say they would very likely look to these experts for the information they sought.

However, while the pediatrician’s position as top source has remained unchanged since 1999, school teachers (and many other potential information sources) have lost considerable ground to the Internet.

[Q.11] Base: Parents with child under 18 years old in household  
 % would very likely look to following sources for information about or assistance with learning disabilities



\*Note: The Internet was not asked in 1995

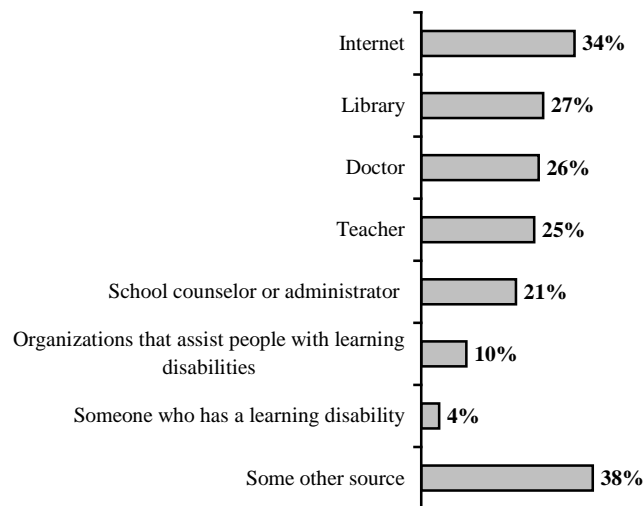
Parents who would choose to help their learning disabled child privately are less inclined than other parents who would deal with the condition openly to turn to school teachers (46% vs. 61%) or school administrators or counselors (45% vs. 54%) for information about learning disabilities. Mothers, in general, are more likely than their male counterparts to say they would very likely turn to any of these sources for information.

- **One in three Americans with an actual need for information on learning disabilities turn to the Internet.**

More than four in 10 adults (43%) say they have had a need for information about learning disabilities. Among parents, this figure climbs to 51% (vs. 37% of adults without children). Mothers in particular are most likely to say they have needed information about learning disabilities – nearly six in 10 (58%) say they have compared to only 43% of fathers.

Among people who have ever had a need for information on this topic, one in three (34%) say they first turned to the Internet for the information they sought, making this the source people are most likely to look to. Other key sources of information include: the library (27%); a doctor (26%); a teacher (25%); a school counselor or administrator (21%); organizations that assist people with learning disabilities (10%); and someone who has a learning disability (4%).

[Q.25a] Base: Adults who have ever had a need for information about learning disabilities  
% first turned to this source for the information they needed



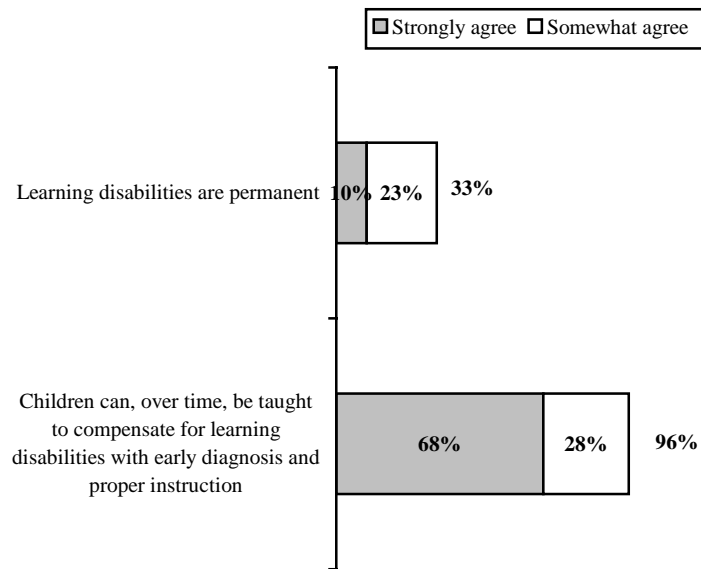
Parents who have ever had a need for information are much more likely than non-parents to have turned to an expert for the information they wanted. In fact, parents are twice as likely as those without children to look to doctors for this information (35% vs. 16%, respectively). Similarly, while one in three parents (32%) have gone to a teacher for information on learning disabilities, only 21% of non-parents have.

- **Few parents believe that learning disabilities are permanent, but most feel that children can learn to compensate for their disability with proper instruction.**

Only one-third of all parents (33%) agree that learning disabilities are permanent for people who have them. However, nearly all parents (96%) say that, with early diagnosis and proper instruction, children can be taught skills to compensate for their disability. In fact, two in three (68%) *strongly* agree that early diagnosis and proper instruction can be the key to helping children work with their disability (up from 60% in 1999).

[Q.14d/e] Base: Parents with child under 18 years old in household

*% who strongly agree with the following statements about people with learning disabilities*



## V. Children With Learning Disabilities And The American Education System

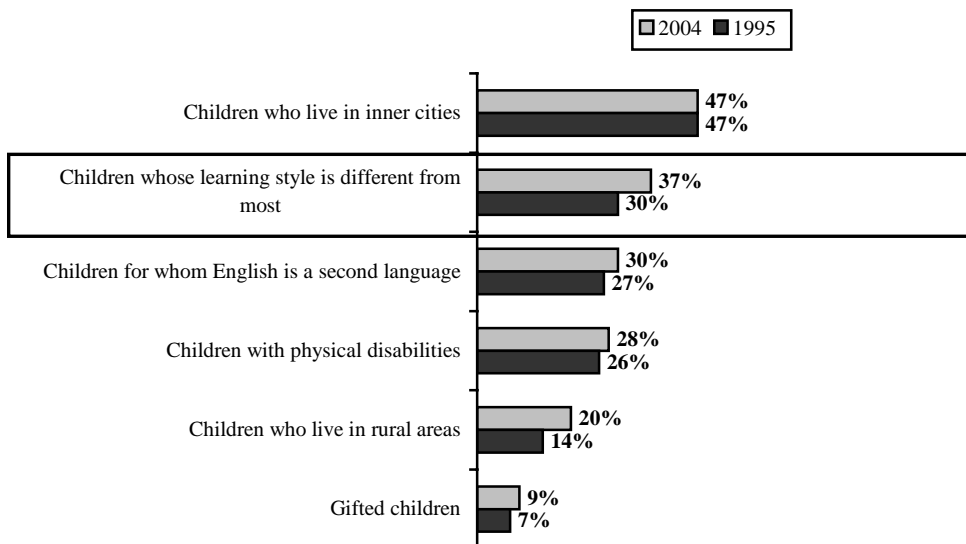
- **More people today than in 1995 believe that children with a different learning style receive a worse education than most children.**

Nearly half of adults (48%) believe that public schools are set up in a way to give some students a better education than others – down slightly from 1995 when 54% felt this way.

When looking at specific groups of children, more people today than ten years ago feel that children with a learning style different from others receive a worse education than most other students (37% vs. 30%, respectively) – coming in second behind only children in inner cities.

[Q.2] Base: Total

*% who feel this group receives a worse education than most children*



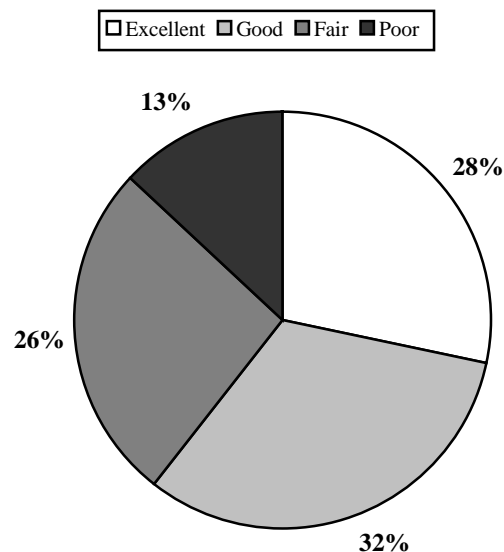
Parents with a learning disability connection are more likely to believe that children with a different learning style receive a worse education than other children. In fact, 46% believe this, compared to 35% of parents without any experience with learning disabilities.

- **Despite a general concern about the education of children with learning disabilities, parents of learning disabled children say their children are treated like everyone else**

Two in three parents (66%) who have a child with learning disabilities say that their child is treated equally to other children in school. Furthermore, a majority (60%) describes their child's education in positive terms – nearly three in 10 (28%) say it is “excellent” while another three in 10 (32%) describe the education as “good.” Only 13% consider their child's education to be “poor.”

[Q.23a] Base: Parents who have a child with a learning disability

*% who feel this way about their child's education*



- **Most parents with a learning disabled child believe their child's school is prepared to deal with the needs of children with learning disabilities.**

Three in four (75%) parents who have a child with a learning disability say that their child's school is very or somewhat prepared to deal with the needs of children with learning disabilities. However, only 31% consider their child's school “very” prepared.

### *New Education Reforms And Standardized Tests*

- **When it comes to standardized exams, most people do not agree that all children should be given the same test in the same way.**

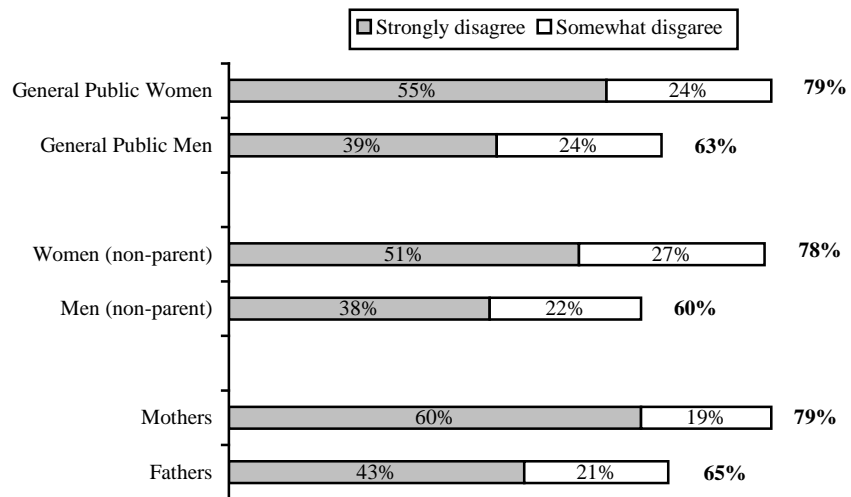
Few people agree that all children should be tested in the same way. Instead, seven in 10 (71%) Americans disagree – with nearly half of the public (47%) disagreeing strongly.

- **The majority of women strongly agree that students should not all be given the same test under uniform conditions.**

More than half of women in general (55%) say they disagree with the statement that all students should be given the same standardized tests in the same way, regardless of whether or not the child has a learning disability. Women are much more likely than men to believe this – only 39% of men say the same. The difference between the two genders is consistent regardless of having a child or not. Five in 10 women without children (51%) and six in 10 mothers (60%) say they disagree that all students should be given the same tests. By comparison only about four in ten men disagree that all children should be given the same test, regardless of being learning disabled (38% among men without children and 43% of fathers).

[Q.18a] Base: Total

*% who disagree “all students should be given the same standardized tests in the same way, regardless of whether they are learning disabled or not”*



- **A majority of people believe that enforced standardized testing will be hurtful for students with learning disabilities**

More than half of the public (55%) believes that standardized tests will be harmful for children who have learning disabilities. Again, differences are seen between men and women on this topic – six in 10 women in general and mothers in particular (60% and 59%, respectively) say standardized testing is harmful compared to five in ten of their male counterparts (50% of men in general and 51% of fathers).

Parents who have experience with learning disabilities are 1.5 times more likely than other parents to say the standardized testing will be very hurtful for learning disabled children (21% vs. 14%, respectively). Nearly six in 10 parents (58%) with a learning disability connection consider the tests hurtful while five in 10 (51%) parents without a connection feel the same.

Two-thirds of Americans (67%) believe that the emphasis on having students pass a standardized test is giving educators no choice but to teach based on the material covered in the exam...and not necessarily teach on the broader educational needs of the students.

- **Two in three Americans agree that standardized tests are fair for children with learning disabilities if modifications in the test environment are allowed**

Two-thirds (67%) of all people say that, if children with learning disabilities are given more time or a quiet environment, it is fair to give them the same standardized test as other students.

Among parents with a learning disability connection (either they themselves have a learning disability, their child does or someone else close to them does), four in 10 (39%) strongly agree with this. Parents without a connection are less likely to feel as strongly (only 30% strongly agree).

## VI. American Educators And Children With Learning Disabilities

### *New Area of Investigation*

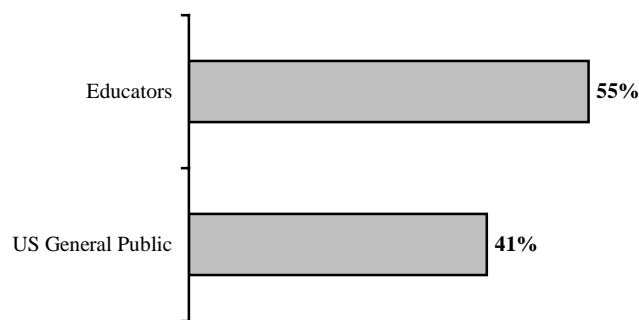
- **Unlike the American public, a majority of educators<sup>4</sup> believe that U.S. public schools offer all children an equal education.**

More than half of school educators (55%) believe that public schools are set up in a way to offer all children an equal education – making educators much more likely than the American public to believe this. Only 35% of American adults believe that public schools offer all children an equal education.

When thinking specifically of children with a learning style different from others, educators are again more likely than Americans in general to believe this group receives an education on par with other students. 55% of educators say children with a different learning style get the same education as other children, while only four in ten (41%) adults in general say this.

[Q.2<sup>5</sup>] Base: Total

*% who feel children whose learning style is different from most receive about the same education as most children*



<sup>4</sup> In this study, the term “educators” refers to teachers of grades pre-school through sixth grade and school administrators (principals or vice-principals, school board members/presidents, school psychologist or some other school administrator) for a school that includes grades pre-school through sixth grade.

<sup>5</sup> Question numbers associated with charts in this section of the report coincide with question numbers on the Educator questionnaire.

### Measures Of Awareness & Understanding

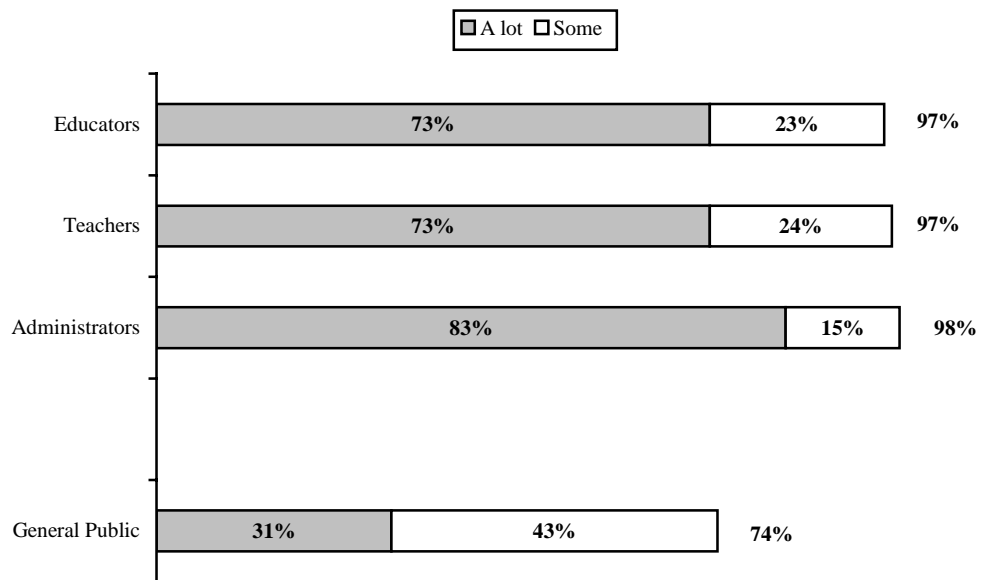
- **Most educators say they have at least some familiarity with learning disabilities.**

Educators say that their own education and training has given them information about learning disabilities. 97% say they have heard or read some to a lot about the topic (compared to 74% of the national public) with nearly three in four (73%) saying they have heard or read *a lot*.

School administrators are more likely than teachers to say they have a lot of familiarity with the topic. More than eight in 10 administrators (83%) say they have read or heard “a lot” about learning disabilities while just over seven in 10 teachers (73%) say they have as much familiarity.

[Q.4] Base: Total

% say have heard or read a lot/some about learning disabilities during training and education



- On many levels educators are as likely as Americans in general to not clearly understand what is or is not associated with learning disabilities.**

Nine in 10 educators (90%) correctly associate *dyslexia* with learning disabilities compared to eight in 10 adults in general (79%).

Other conditions are less clear-cut for educators. Educators are about as likely as the public to erroneously attribute learning disabilities to blindness (45% vs. 49%, respectively) and although a smaller proportion of educators make a connection between learning disabilities and deafness, a sizeable minority (46%) still associate the two conditions (vs. 54% of the American public).

Educators are about as likely as Americans in general to mistakenly associate *emotional disorders* (67% vs. 63%, respectively) and *attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder* (72% vs. 71%, respectively) with learning disabilities. While only 64% of adults in general believe that learning disabilities may be associated with substance abuse on the part of a parent, seven in 10 educators (70%) say the two are linked. Educators are only slightly less likely than the population to erroneously link learning disabilities with *mental retardation* (75% compared to 80%).

[Q.6] Base: Total

% think the following are associated with learning disabilities

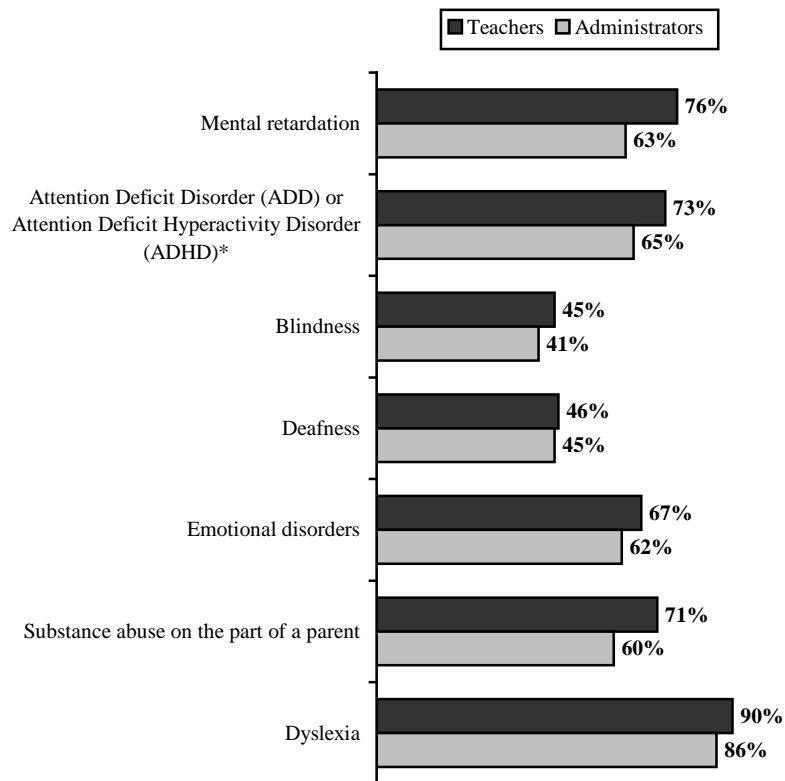


- **Teachers tend to be more likely than school administrators to incorrectly associate certain conditions with learning disabilities.**

Teachers, in particular, are more likely than school administrators to erroneously associate certain conditions with learning disabilities. For example, nearly three in four teachers make a link between learning disabilities and mental retardation (76%) or attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (73%). By comparison, 63% of administrators make the same erroneous link to mental retardation and 65% associate the condition with attention deficit disorder/attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Similarly, while seven in 10 teachers (71%) believe that parental substance abuse can be associated with a learning disability in a child, only six in 10 administrators (60%) agree.

[Q.6] Base: Total

*% think the following are associated with learning disabilities*



- **On nearly all measures, educators are much more likely than the public to correctly identify possible indicators of learning disabilities.**

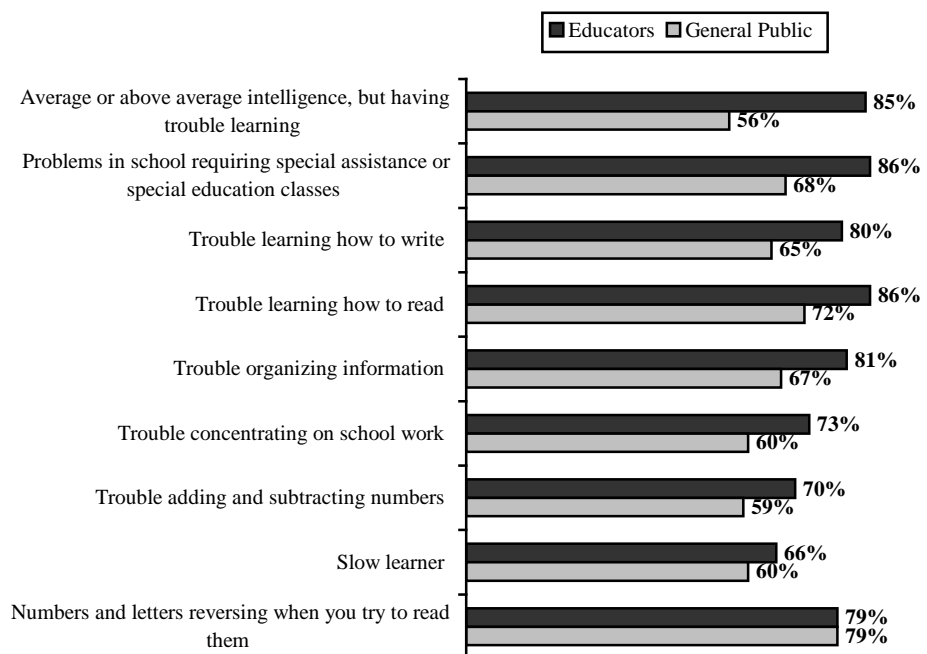
School educators are cognizant of behaviors that may be indicators of a learning disability in a child – more so than the American public. In particular:

- 86% of educators say having trouble learning how to read is a sign of potential problem, compared to 72% of adults in general;
- Eight in 10 (80%) educators say trouble learning how to write may be a sign of a learning disability while 65% of adults say this;
- Most educators (85%) understand that having average or above average intelligence but trouble with learning is a possible indicator of a learning disability while just over half (56%) of the public understand this.

Teachers are generally about as likely as school administrators to make these associations with learning disabilities in children

[Q.5] Base: Total

*% think the following are associated with learning disabilities*



- **Among educators some confusion still exists about possible indicators of learning disabilities.**

Nearly two in three educators (65%) incorrectly associate *hyperactivity* with learning disabilities – making this group more likely than Americans in general (55%) to make the link. As mentioned earlier, hyperactivity is a condition that individuals sometimes have *in addition* to learning disabilities – but is not itself an indicator of learning disabilities.

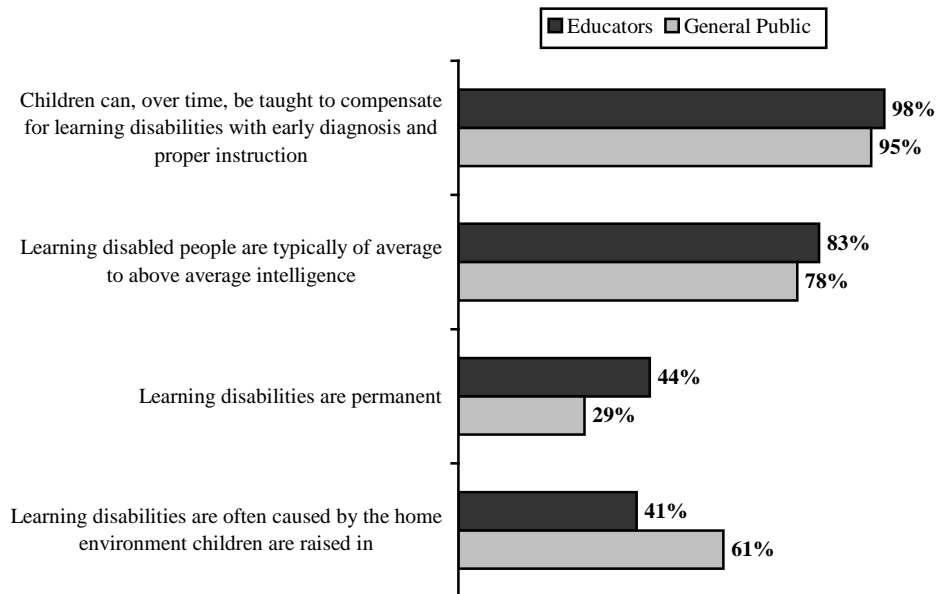
- **Educators may have difficulty spotting signs associated with learning disabilities – but they understand the condition better than the American public**

In general educators seem more aware of the truths about learning disabilities than the public. For example educators are 1.5 times more likely to agree that learning disabilities are permanent. While 29% of adults in general agree with this, 44% of educators do. It should be noted, however, that school administrators are much more likely than teachers to feel learning disabilities are permanent – 53% vs. 43% of teachers.

Similarly, while six in 10 Americans (61%) incorrectly believe that learning disabilities are often caused by the home environment children are raised in (perhaps spurring stigmas associated with learning disabilities), only four in 10 educators (41%) say the same. Here teachers and school administrators are about as likely to agree (41% and 37%, respectively).

[Q.19] Base: Total

*% who agree with the following statements about learning disabilities*



### Assessing Behavior In 3-To-4-Year-Old Children

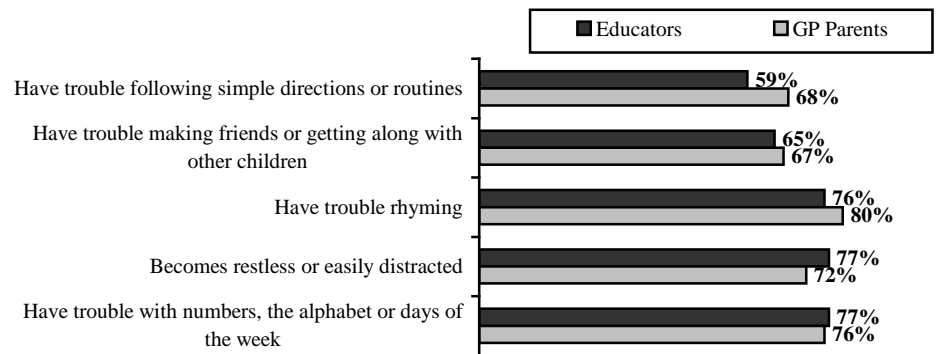
- **When it comes to possibly troubling behavior in children 3-to-4-years-old, educators are nearly as likely as parents in general to adopt a “wait and see” attitude**

As with parents in general, more than three in four educators believe having trouble rhyming (76%) and having trouble with numbers, the alphabet or days of the week (77%) – both of which could be signs of a serious learning problem in a child 3-to-4 years old – are something a child at this age would grow out of. Both groups are similarly likely to say restlessness or becoming easily distracted is something a child this age would grow out of (77% vs. 72%, respectively) and similar proportions of educators (65%) and parents (67%) feel the same in regards to having trouble making friends or getting along with other children.

On one measure, however, teachers and administrators are more aware of a potential sign of trouble among children than parents. When asked about children 3-4 years old having trouble following simple directions or routines, 36% of educators say they would consider this a sign of some serious problem. By comparison, only 29% of parents say the same.

[Q.7] Base: Educators; Parents with child under 18 years old in household

*% if saw a typical pre-school age child 3 – 4 years-old regularly do any of the following, would tend to think it was something the child will grow out of*



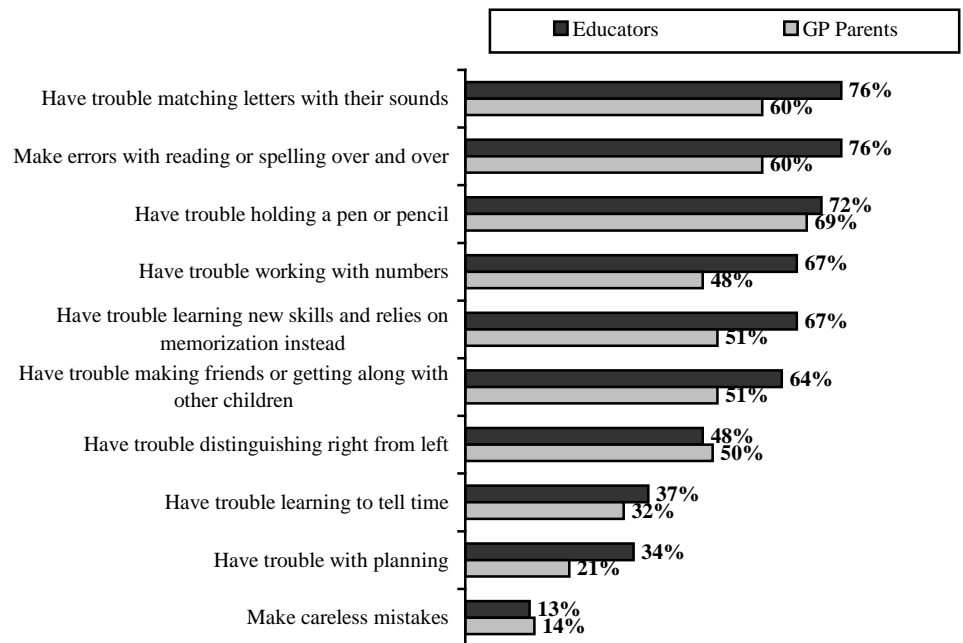
On most measures, teachers and administrators are similarly likely to believe these are potential signs of trouble among 3-4 year olds. The one exception is having trouble rhyming where teachers (19%) are less likely than administrators (26%) to consider this a problem.

### Assessing Behavior In 5-To-8-Year-Old Children

- **Educators are much more aware of potential signs of trouble among 5-to-8-year-olds**

Educators are more likely to view academic difficulties as signs of potential problems in children age 5 to 8. Three in four educators (76%) consider academic difficulties such as trouble matching letters with their sounds or repeated errors with reading or spelling signs of a serious problem in children this age. Nearly seven in 10 (72%) say it is a sign of a problem if a child has difficulty holding a pen or pencil while 67% consider having trouble working with numbers or with learning new skills to be potential warning signs.

[Q.8] Base: Educators; Parents with child under 18 years old in household  
 % if saw a typical 5 – 8 year-old child (that is, a child in kindergarten through 3rd grade) regularly do these, would tend to think it was a sign of a serious problem



When it comes to behaviors that are less academic in nature, educators, like parents in general, are not as likely to be concerned. Only 48% of educators consider it a potential problem for a child this age to have trouble distinguishing right from left. The majority believes *trouble learning to tell time* (60%), *trouble planning* (62%) or *making careless mistakes* (86%) are actually behaviors a 5 to 8 year old will grow out of it.

### *School Procedures For Working With Learning Disabled Children*

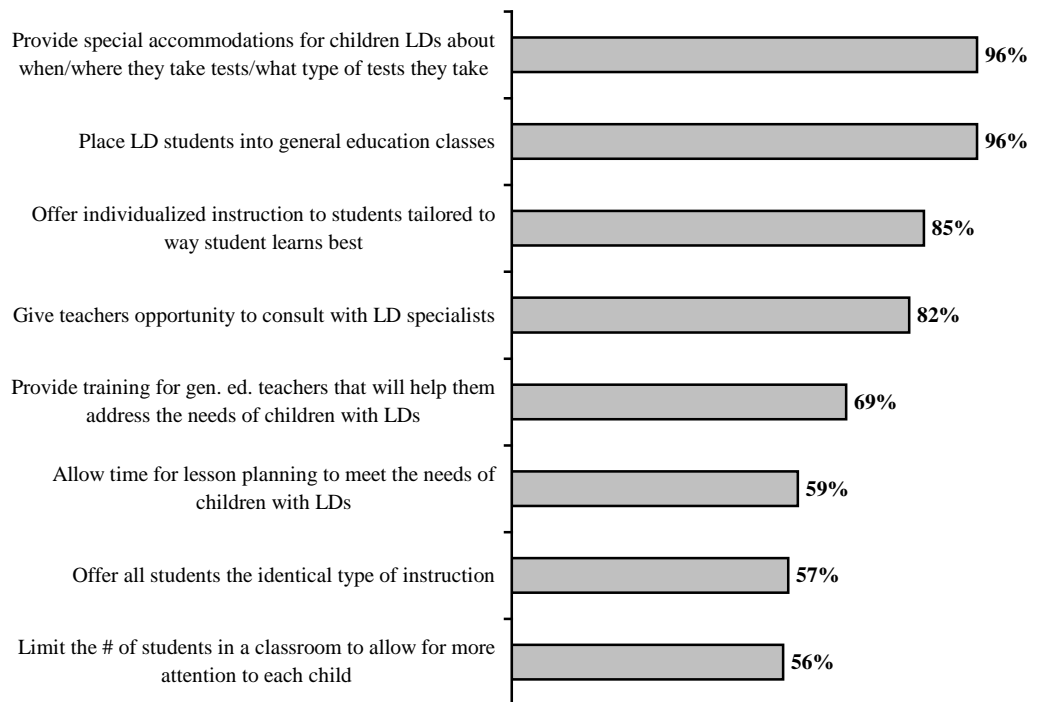
- **Most educators say their schools have procedures in place to address the needs of children with learning disabilities**

Most educators (94%) say they currently work with children who have learning disabilities. Nearly all (99%) are familiar with the term “IEP” (Individualized Education Program). Most say their school or school district has procedures in place to address the needs of learning disabled children (96% among teachers and 99% among administrators). Some of the procedures educators are more likely to be aware of in their school/school district are:

- Providing special accommodations for children with learning disabilities about when or where they take tests or what type of tests they take (96%)
- Offering individualized instruction to students tailored to the way students learn best (85%)
- Giving teachers the opportunity to consult with learning disability specialists (82%)

[Q.12b] Base: Total

*% say they are definitely aware that their school/school district does this*



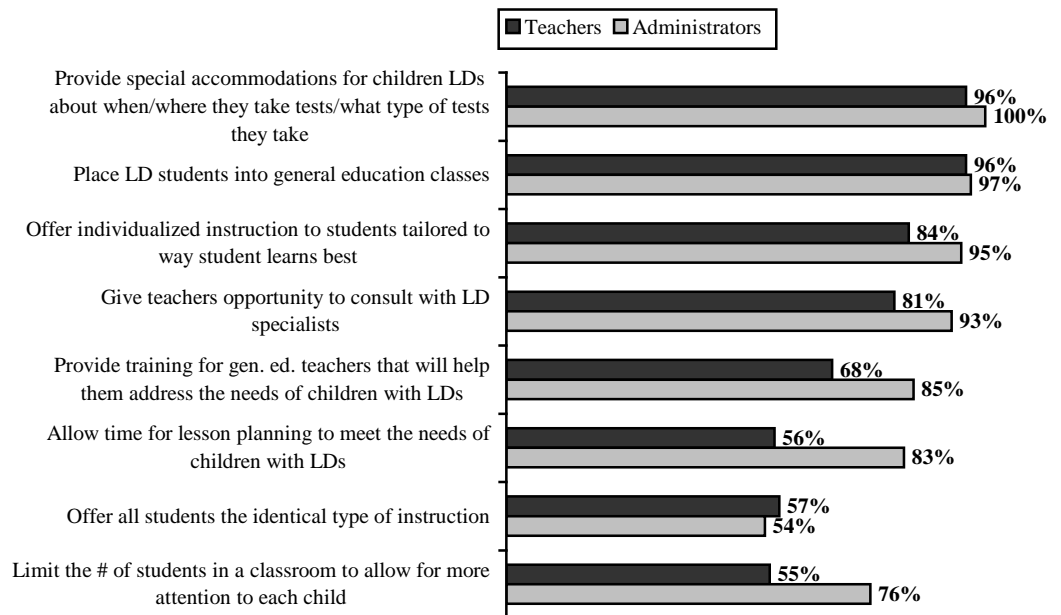
- Teachers and administrators have somewhat different perceptions of the procedures used to help learning disabled children**

While most educators say their school or school district has procedures in place to address the needs of learning disabled children, teachers and administrators have different opinions on what those procedures are.

Specifically, nearly six in seven administrators believe their school district provides training for teachers to help them address the needs of children with learning disabilities (85%) and allows time for lesson planning to meet the needs of these children (83%). Teachers think differently. Only 56% say their school provides enough time for lesson planning and 68% are aware that their school provides training to work with learning disabled children. About eight in ten teachers (81%) say their school gives them opportunities to consult with learning disability specialists. In contrast, more than nine in 10 administrators (93%) say their district provides the opportunity. Seventy-six percent of administrators say the number of students in a classroom is limited so teachers will have sufficient time to devote to individual students. Only 55% of teachers say the same.

[Q.12b] Base: Total

*% say they are definitely aware that their school/school district does this*

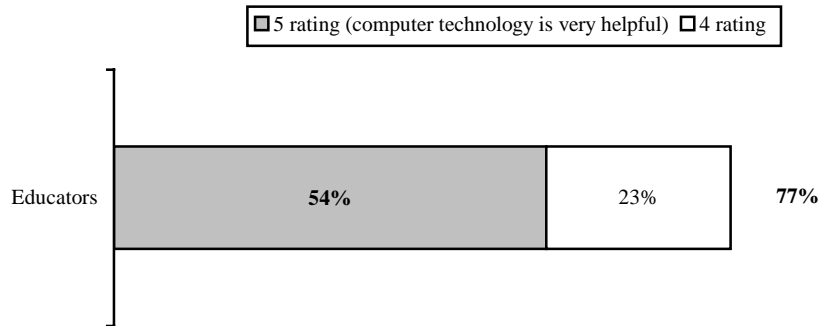


- **Educators believe that computer technology can be helpful in teaching children with learning disabilities**

More than three in four educators (77%) believe computer technology could be in helpful in their school/school district’s efforts to assist children who have learning disabilities. A majority – 54% – believes computers can be “very” helpful.

[Q.15] Base: Total

*% who, when asked to rate the helpfulness of computer technology in their school/school district’s ability to assist children with learning disabilities, give computer technology a 4/5 top rating*



### *New Education Reforms And Standardized Tests*

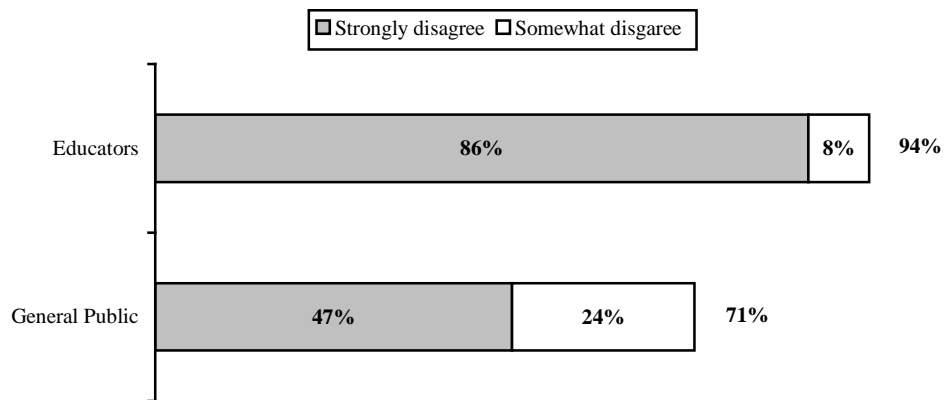
- **When it comes to standardized exams, educators feel much more strongly than the American public that all children should not be given the same test in the same way.**

Nearly all educators (94%) disagree with the idea of giving all students the same standardized test in the same way, regardless of whether or not they are disabled. Most (86%) strongly disagree with this notion. By comparison, fewer than half of the American public (47%) strongly disagrees.

Those closer to students while test taking, the teachers, are much more likely than school administrators to not agree with giving all students the same test. Three in four administrators (74%) say they strongly disagree with testing all students the same way with the same exam compared to 87% of teachers.

[Q.20a] Base: Total

*% who disagree (strongly or somewhat) with the statement “all students should be given the same standardized tests in the same way, regardless of whether they are learning disabled or not”*



Eight in 10 educators (78%) believe that schools should be able to determine which students have the skills to take standardized tests.

- **Educators believe enforced standardized testing will be hurtful to students with learning disabilities**

A majority of educators (84%) say standardized tests will be harmful for children who have learning disabilities (1.5 times more than the American public at 55%). Among educators who feel this way, at least half (43% of all educators) believe the exams will be “very” hurtful. Again, differences are seen between teachers and administrators on this topic – 84% of teachers say the exams will be harmful compared to 76% of administrators.

Compared to the American public, educators are much more likely to say the emphasis on having students pass standardized tests is giving educators no choice but to teach based on the material covered in exams...and not necessarily teach on the broader educational needs of the students (78% vs. 67%, respectively) Teachers are again more likely than school administrators to believe this– eight in 10 teachers agree (80%) compared to six in 10 administrators (61%). One in two teachers (50%) strongly believe this to be true.

- **Compared to school educators, the American public more strongly agrees that standardized tests are fair for children with learning disabilities if modifications in the test environment are allowed**

Two-thirds of Americans (67%) say that, if children with learning disabilities are given more time or a quiet environment, it is fair to give them the same standardized test as other students. Only 57% of educators feel this way.

### *Support For Educators In Working With Learning Disabled Children*

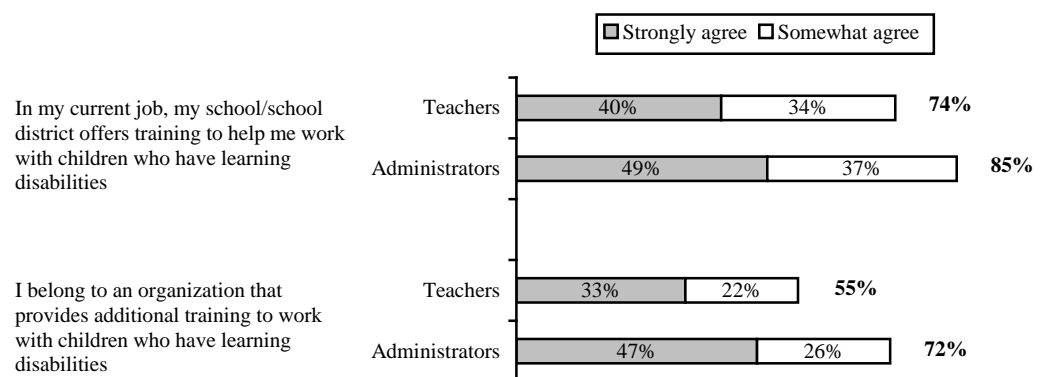
- **Teachers are less likely than school administrators to say they currently have opportunities to receive training to work with students who have learning disabilities**

The majority of educators, six in 10 (60%), say they received some kind of formal training to help them work with learning disabled children prior to starting their careers. Specifically, 59% of teachers say this while 62% of school administrators admit to formal training.

However, when asked about opportunities that exist today, teachers are less likely than school administrators to say they have such exposure. While 85% of school administrators say their school/school district offers them training to work with children who have learning disabilities, only 74% of teachers agree to this. Furthermore, only 55% of teachers belong to an organization (such as a union or some other professional group) that might provide additional training to work with this group of students. By comparison, 72% of school administrators belong to such a group.

[Q.9b/c] Base: Total

*% who agree with these statements*



Nearly one in three teachers (32%) say they are not aware that their school provides training for general education teachers to help them work with students with learning disabilities. Only 14% of school administrators say the same.

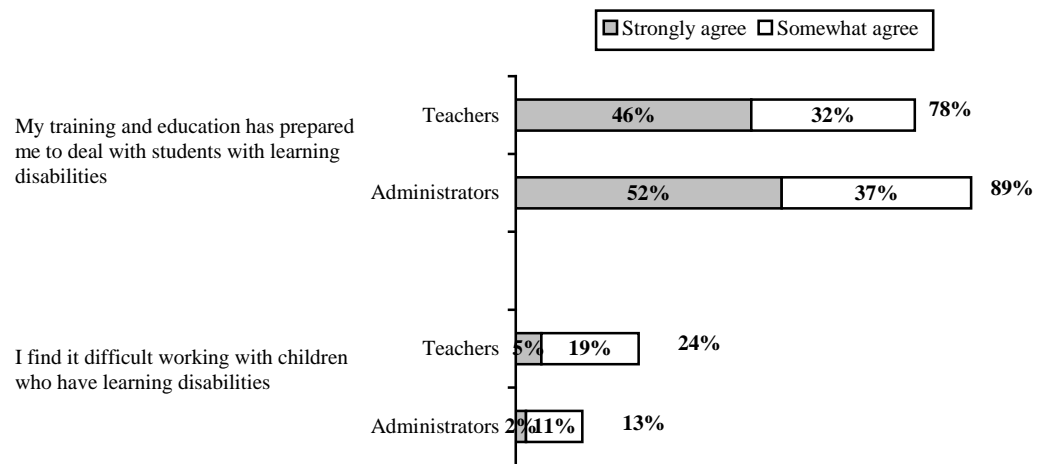
- **Teachers tend to be more likely than administrators to say they have difficulty working with learning disabled children**

Fewer than eight in 10 teachers (78%) agree that their training and education has prepared them to deal with students with learning disabilities, compared to nine in 10 administrators (89%).

Furthermore, teachers are nearly twice as likely as school administrators to agree that they find it difficult working with children who have learning disabilities. In fact, one in four teachers (24%) say it is hard for them to work with student population. By comparison, one in eight administrators (13%) agree they have difficulty working with these students.

[Q.9f/j] Base: Total

% who agree with these statements



Nearly half of teachers (49%) consider not being sufficiently prepared to teach children with learning disabilities a major challenge that all educators face when working with this group of students. Only 36% of school administrators consider a lack of training a major challenge.

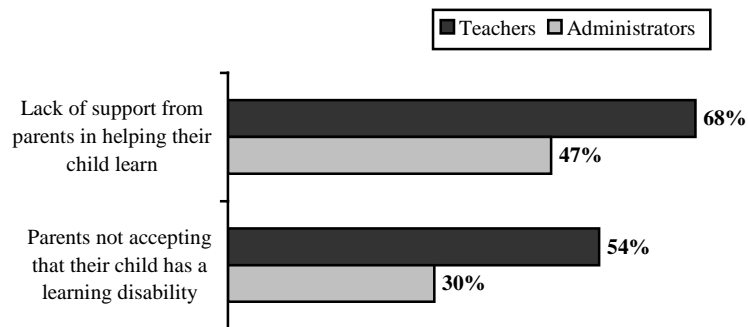
- **Many educators feel they do not get the parental support that is needed to help children with learning disabilities**

Most educators (66%) consider a lack of support from parents in helping their child learn to be a major challenge facing schools working with learning disabled children. At least half (52%) also believe a major challenge educators manage is working with parents who are not accepting that their child has a learning disability.

Specifically, teachers are more likely than school administrators to feel both of these are major challenges. In fact, fewer than half of school administrators (47%) consider a lack of parental support a problem facing educators while 68% of teachers do. Similarly, while a majority of teachers (54%) believe a major challenge schools deal with are parents who refuse to accept their child has a learning disability, only three in 10 administrators (30%) feel the same way.

[Q.11a/e] Base: Total

*% who feel this is a major challenge for educators working with children who have learning disabilities*

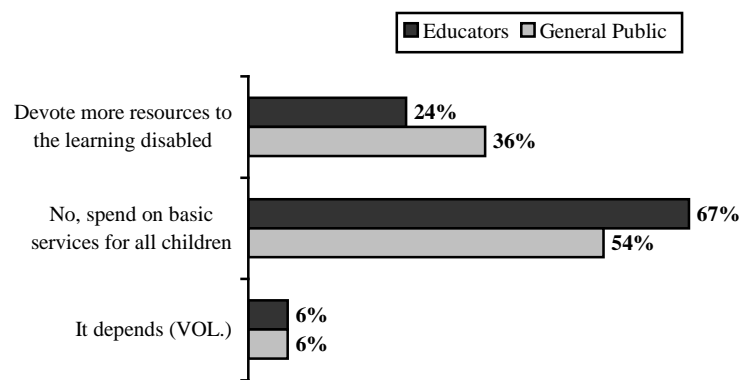


- **Educators believe that current educational resources should be distributed evenly to all students – but that the government should provide more for those with learning disabilities**

Most educators (67%) say that available resources for education should be spent on providing basic services to all children. In fact, when thinking of resources for children with learning disabilities, the American public is 1.5 times more likely than educators to say more resources should be devoted specifically to helping this group (36% vs. 24%, respectively).

[Q.16] Base: Total

*% think the following should be done regarding resources for the learning disabled*



However, when asked about challenges all educators face when working with children who have learning disabilities, nearly six in 10 educators (62%) consider not having enough money to sufficiently meet the needs of these children a “major” challenge. Thinking about the government and its spending on education, more than seven in 10 educators (72%) feel not enough money is provided for educating students with learning disabilities. This compares to only six in 10 Americans in general (60%). In particular, school administrators are more likely than teachers to feel the government is not providing enough support for this group of students (80% vs. 71%, respectively).

Three in four educators (76%) agree “in the real world, the quality of education provided to children with learning disabilities is often affected more by the need for schools to control costs than it is by the needs of the children with learning disabilities.”

- **Despite feelings of not receiving adequate support, educators feel prepared to meet the needs of children with learning disabilities**

Nine in 10 educators (90%) believe that their school/school district does a good job of working with students who have learning disabilities. Most (85%) feel confident when teaching children who have learning disabilities and nearly all (97%) agree they know of different teaching methods that can be used when working with children who have learning disabilities. About seven in 10 (68%) strongly agree that they are familiar with different teaching techniques.

Again, there are differences between teachers and administrators in their perception of how well prepared schools are to meet the needs of learning disabled children. While six in 10 teachers (60%) strongly agree their school does a good job of working with this group of students, more than seven in 10 administrators (72%) agree strongly. When it comes to actually working with these children, teachers are more likely than administrators to feel confident teaching children who have learning disabilities (86% vs. 79%, respectively) – although teachers perceive or report fewer current opportunities for training,

- **Educators with an actual need for information on learning disabilities look within the school system for their answers**

Educators are twice as likely as people in general to say they have ever had a need for information about learning disabilities (87% vs. 43%, respectively). More specifically, 86% of teachers and 94% of school administrators have had a need for information on the topic as part of their job.

Among educators who have ever had a need for information on this topic, four in 10 (41%) say they first turned to another teacher for the information they sought. Administrators, however, are less likely to go to this source for information (only 32% do compared to 42% of teachers). Teachers are also more likely than school administrators to look to administrators for assistance (21% vs. 14%, respectively). School administrators, on the other hand, consider organizations that assist people with learning disabilities more so than teachers. In fact, one in four administrators (25%) say they turned to such an organization for this information while only 14% of teachers do.

The Internet, a primary source of information on learning disabilities for the American public, has less influence on educators by a 2:1 margin. While one in three people (34%) say they turn to the Internet for information on learning disabilities only one in six educators (17%) do the same.

[Q.14a] Base: Educators who have ever had a need for information about learning disabilities as part of their job

*% first turned to this source for the information they needed*

