

At a Crossroads: Special Education

The Inflexibility of Special Education Settings and Recommendations:
An Examination of Efforts to Educate Elementary School Students in the
Least Restrictive Environment



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Overview

1. Study Purpose, Design, and Background
2. Overall Findings
3. Snapshot of Landscape, 2016-2017
4. Data Results
 - Qualitative from School Meeting Observations
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Study Purpose and Design



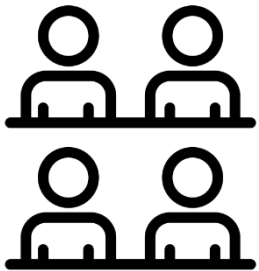
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The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) stipulates that all students with a qualifying disability receive a free appropriate public education in the “least restrictive environment,” which means that a child with a disability should be educated with peers without disabilities to the maximum extent appropriate.



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Qualitative sample: Random sample of 51 elementary schools invited. Observations of Pupil Personnel Team (PPT) & School Implementation Team (SIT) meetings in 6 schools that agreed to participate. Did not observe IEP meetings where staff and parents make final program decisions.



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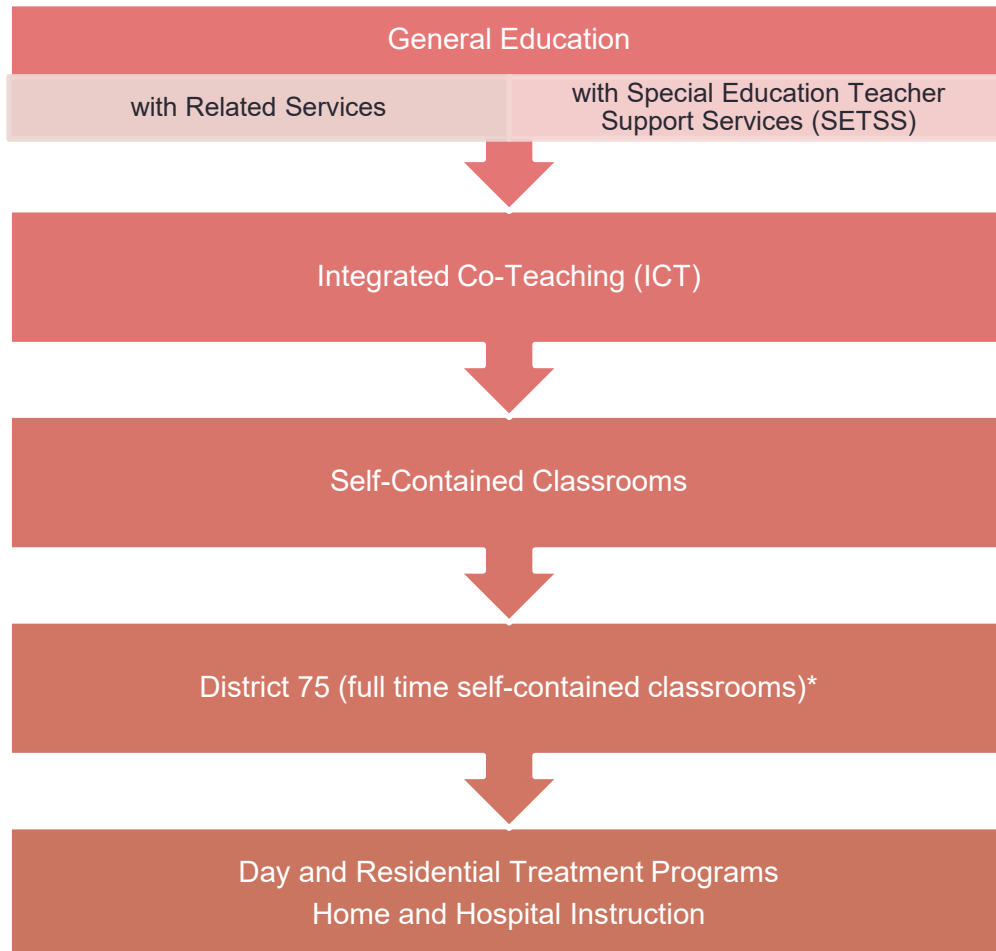
This Independent Budget Office (IBO) study investigates the extent to which NYC Department of Education (DOE) K-5 students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are recommended for *more or less* inclusive settings with their peers without disabilities in the City’s traditional public elementary schools between 2014-2015 – 2018-2019.



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Quantitative sample: Sample of 48,000 K-5 students in school districts 1-32 with IEPs, using data from the Special Education Student Information System (SESIS) system: reflects recommendations, not actual programs or services delivered.

Background: Continuum of Program and Services and Least Restrictive Environment



- The **Related Services** (RS) category includes students who are participating in the general education setting and only receiving special education services such as speech/language, occupational or physical therapy, or counseling.
- Students with **Special Education Teacher Support Services** (SETSS) receive specially designed direct instruction and/or supplementary instruction delivered by a special education teacher through individual and/or group instruction (with a maximum size of eight) either within or outside the classroom.
- **Integrated Co-Teaching** (ICT) classes consist of one general education certified teacher and one special education certified teacher, providing a lower student-to-teacher ratio. In New York City, the DOE recommends that approximately 60 percent of an ICT class be general education and 40 percent special education with a maximum of 12 students with an IEP.
- Students in **Self-Contained classrooms** receive instruction with their peers with IEPs, often with a paraprofessional assisting (with a student-to-teacher-to-paraprofessional ratio of 12:1:1). There are also self-contained classrooms with a student-to-teacher ratio of 12:1 at the elementary and middle school level.

Overall Findings

Qualitative

- Schools observed regularly convened teams to discuss students identified as struggling. While teams discussed a myriad of issues, behavioral concerns dominated the discussions.
- Staff were more likely to discuss existing availability of special education programming and expressed school-based constraints in considering alternatives.
- While each school team could point to at least one case of recommending a less restrictive environment, limitation of time with peers without disabilities was generally not a concern that staff weighed either primarily or heavily.
- School teams were not confident that sufficient supports could be provided to students in less restrictive settings, especially for those with behavioral challenges.

Quantitative

- When IBO tracked K-5 students' recommendations for two years (2014-2015 – 2016-2017), and subsequently over four years (2014-2015 – 2018-2019), there was not much change for most frequent programming.
 - About 76% in the sample were recommended the same two years later, and about 63% were recommended the same four years later and even after changing schools.
- Recommended changes into and out of self-contained classrooms were associated with school and student level factors.
 - The factor most positively associated with a new recommendation into a self-contained classroom was the availability of the self-contained classroom at the grade level the student was entering.
 - Availability of a self-contained classroom in the grade that students were entering was also negatively associated with a recommended move out of a self-contained classroom.

Snapshot of Elementary School Students 2016-2017

		All Students	Students with IEPs	IEP Rate
Race/Ethnicity	White	58,958	9,192	15.6%
	Asian	65,647	5,286	8.1%
	Black	75,300	14,988	19.9%
	Hispanic	152,030	32,731	21.5%
	Other	8,485	1,110	13.1%
Gender	Female	175,931	21,131	12.0%
	Male	184,489	42,176	22.9%
English Language Learner Status	Non-English Language Learner	289,446	49,093	17.0%
	English Language Learner	70,974	14,214	20.0%
Neighborhood Poverty Designation	Student Not from Low-Income Neighborhood	269,311	44,032	16.3%
	Student from Low-Income Neighborhood	84,491	18,030	21.3%
Housing Status	Not Temporary Housing	318,353	55,314	17.4%
	Temporary Housing	42,067	7,993	19.0%
Borough of School Enrollment	Manhattan	38,656	7,219	18.7%
	Bronx	82,039	15,941	19.4%
	Brooklyn	109,260	18,444	16.9%
	Queens	104,413	15,539	14.9%
	Staten Island	26,052	6,164	23.7%
Total		360,420	63,307	17.6%

While Nearly 43 Percent of K-5 Students with IEPs in 2016-2017 Were Most Frequently Recommended for an Integrated Co-Teaching Classroom Setting, Those With Classifications Often Associated with Behavioral Challenges Were More Likely to be Recommended for Self-Contained Settings

Classification	N	Most Frequent Setting Recommendation				Total
		Related Services Only	Special Education Teacher Support Services	Integrated Co-Teaching	Self-Contained	
Speech or Language Impairment	30,673	19.9%	9.0%	43.5%	27.6%	100.0%
Learning Disability	19,714	5.9%	20.1%	45.0%	28.9%	100.0%
Other Health Impairment	6,258	21.9%	10.6%	43.2%	24.4%	100.0%
Autism	3,031	8.1%	1.7%	39.1%	51.0%	100.0%
Emotional Disturbance	1,904	17.8%	5.8%	26.2%	50.3%	100.0%
Intellectual Disability	665	4.5%	0.8%	5.4%	89.3%	100.0%
All Other Classifications	972	29.0%	6.5%	30.5%	34.1%	100.0%
All Classifications	63,217	15.1%	12.0%	42.6%	30.3%	100.0%

SOURCE: IBO analysis of DOE data, school year 2016-2017

NOTE: Elementary school students in districts 1-32 only. Analysis excludes 90 students whose most frequent setting was adaptive physical education. Analysis does not break out differences for students classified with Autism in specialized ICT programs (NEST programs, a group of specialized programs).

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Data Results: Qualitative School Sample and Team Meeting Observations

School Sample

Elementary School (K-5)	Borough	% IEP Strata	School Size Range
School 1	Brooklyn	High IEP	Under 500
School 2	Staten Island	High IEP	600-900
School 3	Bronx	Medium IEP	Above 900
School 4	Manhattan	Low IEP	600-900
School 5	Staten Island	Medium IEP	600-900
School 6	Bronx	Medium IEP	Above 900

Observations of 32 Pupil Personnel Team (PPT) and School Implementation Team (SIT) meetings in 6 schools over 6 months

Analysis Focal Areas

- What kinds of student struggles/concerns did school teams discuss?
- What interventions (and results) did school teams reference prior to a referral for a special education evaluation?
- How did school teams discuss monitoring and assessing the progress of their students with IEPs in special education programming?
- Whether and to what extent did school teams address/consider student's access to their least restrictive environment in the discussions?

School	Number of Meetings Observed	Number of Students Discussed	Initial Reason for Discussion
School 1	6	22 students	Academic-8 Behavior-9 Related Services only – 3 Setting appropriateness-2
School 2	5 (only 4 discussed students)	18 students	Academic- 13 Behavior –2 Related Services only- 2 Setting appropriateness-1
School 3	6 (only 3 discussed students)	6 students	Academic 3 Related Services only - 1 Setting appropriateness – 1 Socio-emotional – 1
School 4	5	18 students	Academic 12 Behavior – 2 Related Services only-3 Socio-emotional-1
School 5	5 (only 2 discussed students)	12 students	Academic 8 Related Services only – 3 Setting appropriateness -1
School 6	5	23 students	Academic – 6 Behavior-7 Related Services only-1 Setting appropriateness_-5 Socio-emotional – 4
Total	<u>32 meetings total</u> 25 meetings where individual students were discussed	99 students	Academic -50 Behavior-20 Related Services-13 Setting Appropriateness-10 Socio-emotional-6

Findings from School Team Discussions

Pupil Personnel Teams (PPT)

- Tremendous variation in meeting discussions
 - No protocol provided by Central Office
 - 2/6 schools followed a structured discussion protocol
- General education teachers largely absent in the meetings
 - 2/6 schools invited general education teachers
- Little attention on interventions in discussions
 - 1/6 schools referenced interventions attempted through Response to Intervention model
 - Special education non-instructional staff discussed concerns that interventions were not happening consistently in general education classrooms and could increase referrals

School Implementation Teams (SIT)

- Direction/protocol provided from Central Office focused some meetings on reviewing IEPs for measurable goals
- Discussions largely focused on existing programming availability
- School teams did not express confidence in the efficacy of supports that could be provided to students with behavioral challenges in more general education and more inclusive settings
- School teams largely did not debate the least restrictive environment mandate, or primarily or heavily weigh lack of access to the general education curriculum or access to peers without disabilities.

DATA RESULTS: QUANTITATIVE CITYWIDE TRACKING

Over 80% of Students Recommended for Integrated Co-Teaching or Self-Contained Classrooms in 2014-2015 Were Recommended the Same (Most Frequent) Setting Two Years Later (2016-2017)

Most Frequent Setting Recommendation, 2014-2015	Most Frequent Setting Recommendation, 2016-2017				
	General Education Classroom		Integrated Co-Teaching Classroom	Self-Contained Classroom	Total
	Related Services Only	Special Education Teacher Support			
Related Services Only in General Education Classroom	65.7%	12.4%	17.3%	4.7%	100.0%
Special Education Teacher Support Services in General Education Classroom	6.6%	55.6%	30.0%	7.7%	100.0%
Integrated Co-Teaching Classroom	4.7%	3.7%	80.7%	10.9%	100.0%
Self-Contained Classroom	4.2%	1.1%	11.7%	83.0%	100.0%

SOURCE: IBO analysis of DOE data, school years 2014-2015 through 2016-2017
 NOTE: Students with IEPs attending DOE schools for all three years. Excludes two students missing data on most frequent setting.
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Logistic Regression Models

- Of 75,000 observations of students with IEPs who were not previously recommended a self-contained classroom, just over 6 percent were subsequently recommended a self-contained classroom in the following year.
- Of 33,000 observations of students recommended self-contained classrooms, 11 percent were subsequently recommended a classroom other than self-contained in the following year.

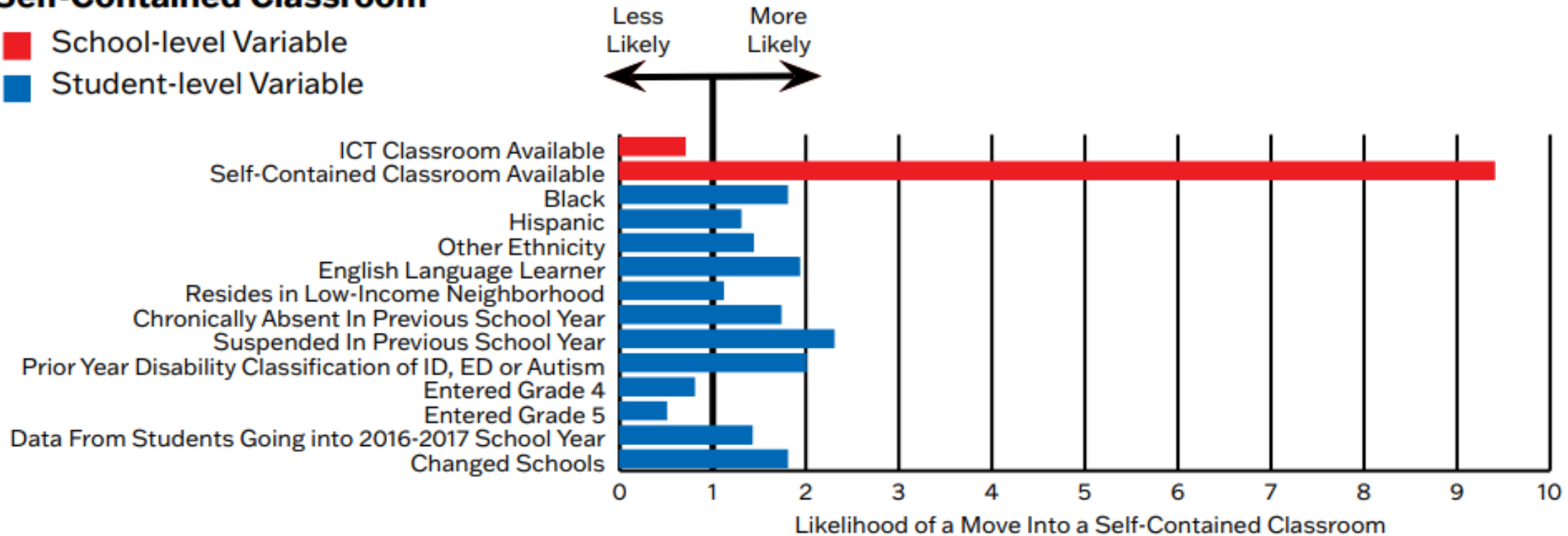
Variables

- ICT Classroom Availability at the next grade level
- Self-Contained Classroom Availability at the next grade level
- Race/Ethnicity, English Language Learner status, residence in low-income neighborhood
- Chronic Absenteeism and Suspension rate
- Prior Year Disability Classification
- Changing Schools

Availability of a Self-Contained Classroom Was the Single Largest Factor Associated with a Student Moving Into the Classroom—Larger than Student-Level Factors

Odds of School and Student Level Variables Associated with Students Recommended a Move Into Self-Contained Classroom

- School-level Variable
- Student-level Variable



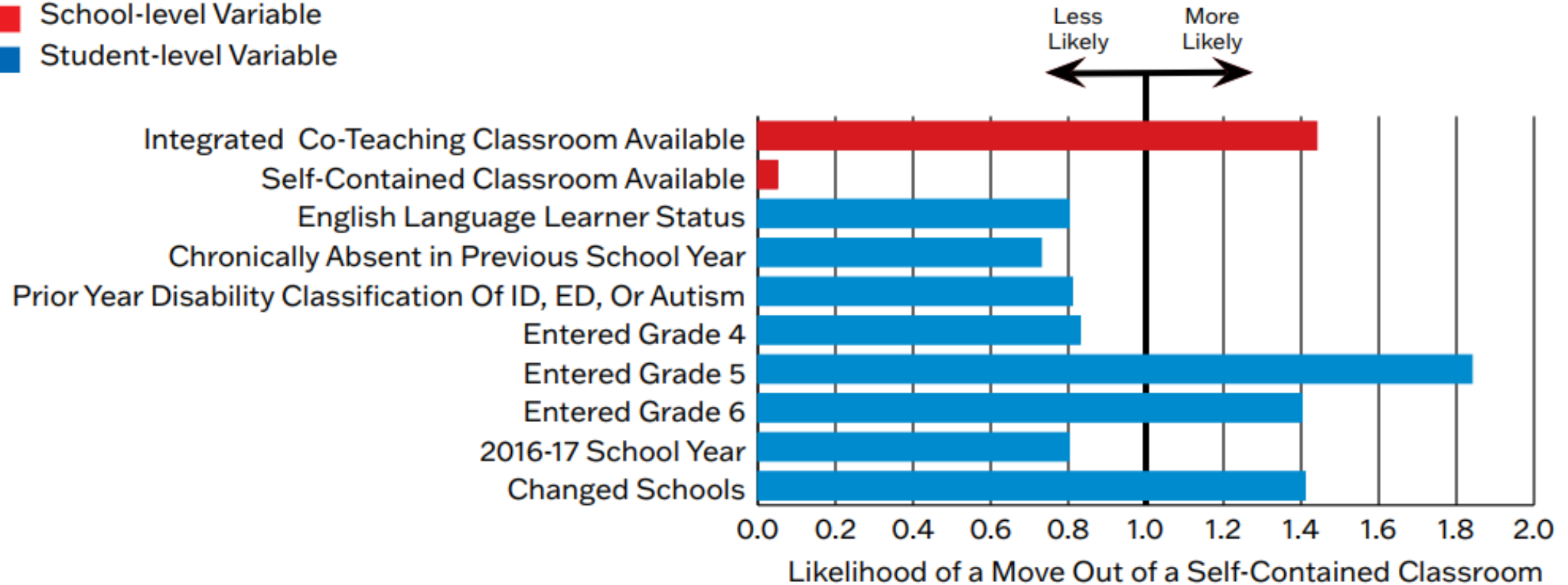
SOURCE: Only results that are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level are shown. Orange bars denote school-level variables while blue bars denote student-level variables.

NOTE: IBO analysis of DOE data, school years 2014-2015 through 2016-2017.

Availability of an Integrated Co-Teaching Classroom and Changing Schools Were Significantly Associated with a Student Moving out of a Self-Contained Classroom

Odds of School and Student Level Variables Associated With Students Recommended a Move Out of Self-Contained Classroom

- School-level Variable
- Student-level Variable



SOURCE: Only results that are statistically significant at the 95 percent confidence level are shown. Orange bars denote school-level variables while blue bars denote student-level variables.

NOTE: IBO analysis of DOE data, school years 2014-2015 through 2016-2017.

Just Over 60% of Students Recommended for Self-Contained Classrooms in 2014-2015 Who Changed Schools by 2018-2019 Were Recommended the Same Setting

Most Frequent Setting Recommendation, 2014-2015	Most Frequent Setting Recommendation, 2018-2019				
	General Education Classroom		Integrated Co-Teaching Classroom	Self-Contained Classroom	Total
	Related Services Only	Special Education Teacher Support			
Related Services Only in General Education Classroom	40%	14%	39%	7%	100%
Special Education Teacher Support Services in General Education Classroom	5%	32%	53%	9%	100%
Integrated Co-Teaching Classroom	4%	5%	78%	13%	100%
Self-Contained Classroom	5%	2%	32%	61%	100%

SOURCE: IBO analysis of DOE data, school years 2014-2015 through 2018-2019

NOTE: Students with IEPs attending DOE schools for all three years.

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Looking to the Future

- What kinds of interventions are happening in general education and ICT classrooms?
- How can schools be supported to provide pre-referral interventions, including Response to Intervention?
- How can PPT/SIT be structured to support discussions on specific interventions attempted in the least restrictive environment?
- How can the continuum be more accessible/flexible for all students with IEPs?

Thank You

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