

Virginia's Special Education Regional Tuition Reimbursement Program (RTRP): Current Status and Issues for Further Study

Delivered to:
Commission on Youth

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Background

- Virginia's Special Education Regional Reimbursement Programs
 - Authorized by Virginia's General Assembly in 1977
 - P.L. 94-142 (Federal Special Education Law)
 - Cruse V. Campbell
 - full tuition for private placements must be at public expense when determined by IEP Team as appropriate placement
- **Purpose:** to provide a mechanism for school divisions to cooperate and share resources to serve children with low incidence disabilities.

Requirements

- LEAs were authorized to form regional programs by meeting the requirements for operating a joint program consistent with:
 - *Board of Education Regulations Governing Jointly Owned and Operated Schools and Jointly Operated Programs* and related *Code of Virginia* provisions.
 - Required that each program be governed by a joint board constituted of a school board member from each participating LEA.
 - Further, one LEA was to serve as the fiscal agent for the program.

Requirements

- The funding for each RTRP was established based on an annual application to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) termed a rate package.
 - Rate package established fees for special education and related services.
 - Each rate package was to include:
 - A proposed budget based on projected revenues and expenses, and a description of the program(s) being offered including the disabilities served.
 - The rate packages were reviewed by an independent financial management/consulting firm to determine appropriateness of rates submitted.

Requirements

- Authorized disability categories under RTRP:
 - Emotional Disabilities
 - Autism
 - Multiple Disabilities
 - Hearing Impaired
 - Deaf/Blindness
 - Traumatic Brain Injury

Purposes of VDOE Study

- Growth in number of students served in regional programs
- Growth in annual appropriation
- Research on best practices in special education
- Growing philosophy of “inclusion”
- Shift in incidence of disability categories
- Movement away from services based on disability category in favor of specific need of the individual child
- Growth in number of students with expensive and/or intense support needs
- Growth in number of school divisions interested in participating in an RTRP

Study Team

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- **Paul J. Raskopf**
 - Special Education Consultant and Retired Director, Office of Data and Finance, Division of Special Education and Student Services, Virginia Department of Education
- **Judy S. Sorrell**
 - Special Education Consultant and Retired Director, Shenandoah Valley Regional Special Education Program
- **John M. Eisenberg**
 - Assistant Superintendent for Special Education and Student Services, Virginia Department of Education
- **Dr. Samantha Hollins**
 - Director of the Office of Special Education Program Improvement, Virginia Department of Education
- **Tracie Coleman**
 - Special Education Budget and Finance Manager, Virginia Department of Education

Methodology

- Study Team Activities:
 - Rate Packages
 - IDEA Child Count
 - Annual School Reports from school divisions
 - Survey of regional directors and local directors in RTRPs
 - On-site visits
 - Stakeholders' meetings
 - The VDOE financial data

Review of Current Model and Data

Regional Programs in Operation

- 11 legally constituted RTRPs
- 57 out of 132 or 43 percent of Local Education Agencies (LEAs) participate with 3 or more students served
- Total of 4,438 students were served in RTRPs 2014
 - Represents 2.7 percent of the 162,960 students with disabilities served statewide

Current Approved RTRPs

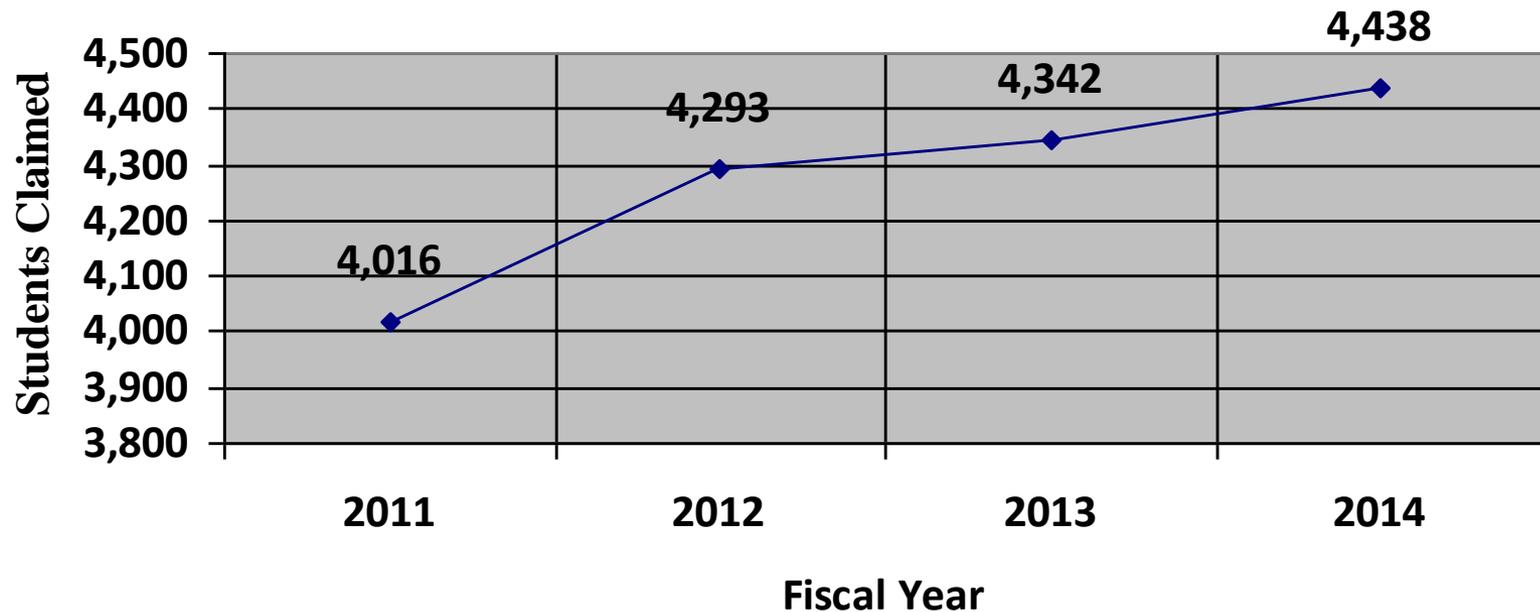
- **Cooperative Centers for Exceptional Students**
 - Carroll County
 - Grayson County
 - Smyth County
 - Washington County
 - Wythe County
 - Bristol City
 - Galax City
- **Middle Peninsula Regional Special Education Centers**
 - Gloucester County
 - Middlesex County
 - West Point (Town)
- **LAUREL Regional Program**
 - Amherst County
 - Appomattox County
 - Bedford County
 - Campbell County
 - Charlotte County
 - Lynchburg City
- **Northwestern Regional Education Program**
 - Frederick County
 - Winchester City
- **New Horizons Regional Education Center**
 - Gloucester County
 - York County
 - Hampton City
 - Newport News City
 - Williamsburg-James City County
 - Poquoson City
- **Piedmont Regional Education Program**
 - Albemarle County
 - Culpeper County
 - Fluvanna County
 - Greene County
 - Louisa County
 - Madison County
 - Nelson County
 - Charlottesville City

Current Approved RTRPs

- **Shenandoah Valley Regional Program**
 - Augusta County
 - Page County
 - Rockingham County
 - Shenandoah County
 - Harrisonburg City
 - Staunton City
- **Southeastern Cooperative Education Program (SECEP)**
 - Isle of Wight County
 - Southampton County
 - Chesapeake City
 - Franklin City
 - Norfolk City
 - Portsmouth City
 - Suffolk City
 - Virginia Beach City
- **Northern Virginia Regional Special Education Program**
 - Prince William County
 - Spotsylvania County
 - Manassas City
 - Manassas Park City
- **Roanoke Valley Regional Program**
 - Botetourt County
 - Craig County
 - Franklin County
 - Roanoke City
 - Salem City
- **Henry County/Martinsville Regional Program**
 - Henry County
 - Martinsville City

Growth in Students Served

Growth in Students Served in RTRPs



Demographics of Students Served

Disability Category	Served in How Many RTRPs	# Served in RTRPs	Statewide Total per Child Count	% of Statewide Child Count Served in RTRPs
Autism	11	2,461	17,030	14.5%
Multiple Disability	10	634	3,356	20%
Emotional Disability	8	951	9,209	10.4%
Hearing Impaired	5	168	1,475	13%
Traumatic Brain Injury	3	<11	392	4%
Deaf-Blind	1	<11	32	2.8%

Variability by Region

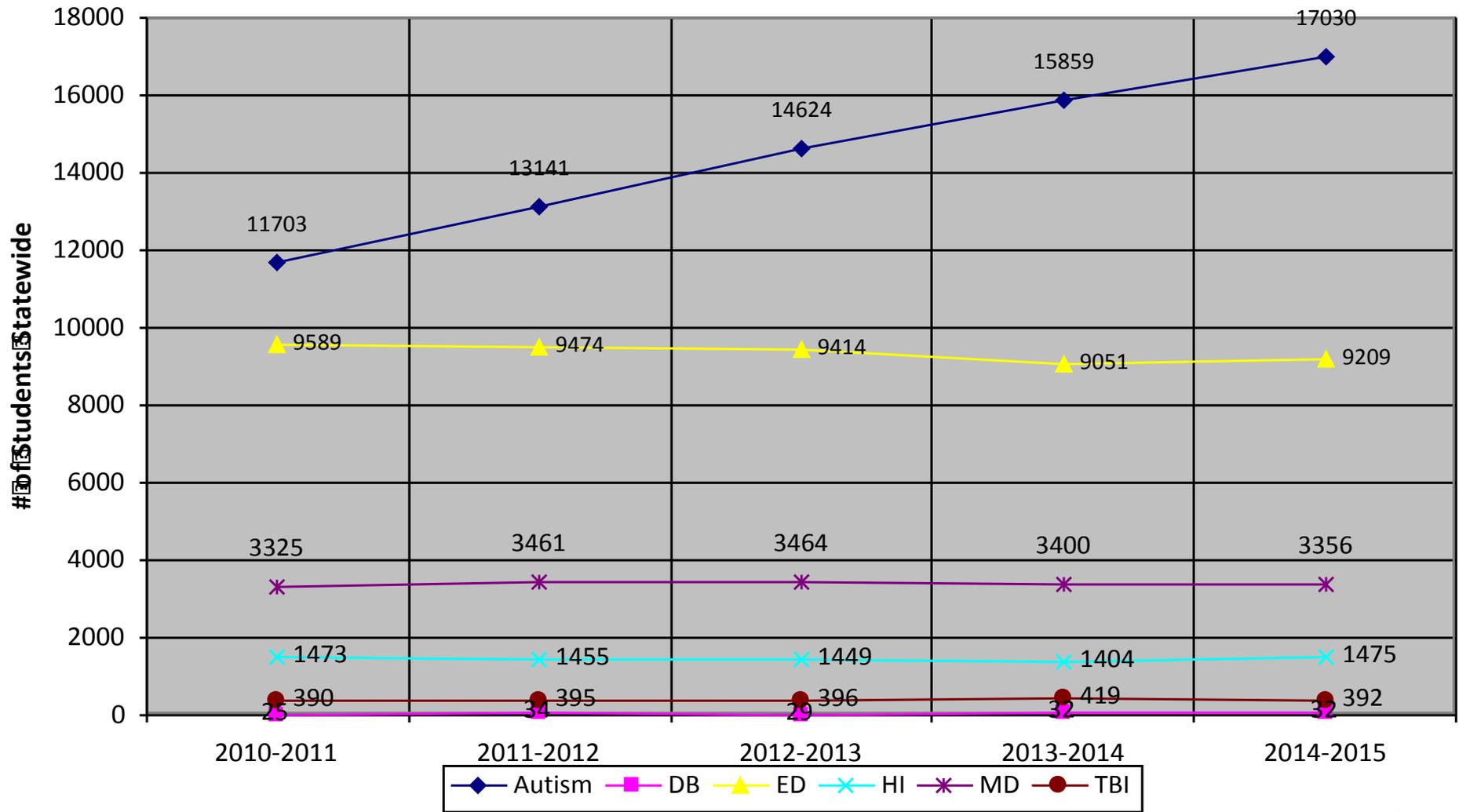
Disability Category Served in RTRP	Disability Category Claimed by Participating LEAs in the Regional Program from Low to High Percentage	
	High	Low
Autism	8 percent CCES	62 percent Northern Virginia
Multiple Disability	29 percent SECEP	78 percent Henry
Emotional Disability	8 percent Roanoke Valley	58 percent Northern Virginia
Hearing Impaired	22 percent PREP	87 percent Shenandoah Valley

Students Served

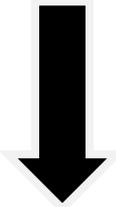
- In the participating divisions of the 11 RTRPs:
 - 31 percent of the students with a reimbursable disability are served in RTRPs
 - 69 percent of students with corresponding disability categories are served but not claimed for tuition reimbursement
- Within the 57 LEAs that participate in an RTRP:
 - 25 percent of students with autism are claimed
 - 46 percent of students with multiple disabilities are claimed
 - 24 percent of students with emotional disabilities are claimed
 - 44 percent of students with hearing impairments are claimed

*These percentages are representative of proportionate population data and will not equal 100 percent

Statewide Trend of Specific Disability Categories Eligible to be Served in Regional Programs



Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Continuum of Options:

Level	Setting
<p style="text-align: center;">Least Restrictive</p> <div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="text-align: center;">Most Restrictive</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular school building: regular classroom with accommodations and/or support services
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular school building: regular classroom with itinerant services or resource room services (pull-out)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular school building: full-time self-contained special education class
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Full-time self-contained class in a separate public facility
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Private day school
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Home based
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public or private residential program

Setting: Placement in LRE

Within the 11 RTRPS

- 75 percent of the students claimed for tuition reimbursement are served in a regular building
- 25 percent of the students claimed for tuition reimbursement are served in a separate building
- Statewide average over time is consistent

Financial Analysis

- From all funding sources (local, state, federal):
 - Students served in regional programs generated an average per-pupil amount of **\$29,097**
 - Students not served in regional programs generated an average per-pupil amount of **\$13,497**
- From state-only funds:
 - Students served in regional programs generated an average per-pupil amount of **\$17,392**
 - Students not served in regional programs generated an average per-pupil amount of **\$3,014**

Financial Analysis

Year	Amount	Amount of Increase
2010-2011	\$64,436,343	
2011-2012	\$70,208,260	\$5,771,917
2012-2013	\$74,168,478	\$3,960,218
2013-2014	\$77,040,276	\$2,871,798
2014-2015	\$80,792,037	\$3,751,761
		Total: \$16,355,694

Average growth of \$4.1 million per year for the five-year period

Findings

1. The number of students claimed and the overall cost for supporting Regional Tuition Reimbursement Programs has increased annually. The number of students with autism is primarily driving this increase as well as the number of students who need more intensive special education and related services.
2. Submission of the current Tuition Reimbursement Rate Package has evolved so that the information submitted is inconsistent across the RTRPs.

Findings

3. Use of RTRP funds may have “drifted” from the original intent of supporting special education instructional costs for students with low incidence disabilities. Examples include:
 - LEAs have claimed capital expenditures that are not direct instructional costs.
 - Salaries of local administrators, other than regional program staff, are partially supported through RTRP funds.

4. A large majority of students (75 percent) claimed for tuition reimbursements are served in regular schools and not in separate special education centers.

Findings

5. LEAs that do not participate in RTRPs receive significantly less state financial support than those in RTRPs for serving the same disability groups.
 - More non-participating LEAs are viewing participation in a RTRP as increasing their capacity to provide intense support in the least restrictive environment.

6. Placement options available through RTRPs are viewed as part of the continuum of services required by IDEA. Further, staff members in RTRPs reported that many of the students served in the regional programs would be candidates for private day placements without the option of the regional services.

Findings

7. Special Education administrators in LEAs not participating in RTRPs indicated that accessing regional funds would greatly enhance capacity to provide professional development and to “cost-share” difficult-to-staff positions such as Board Certified Behavior Analysts and mental health providers.
8. Some students with reimbursable disabilities appear to be claimed for reimbursement for the purpose of generating additional support (i.e., these students are served in their respective home schools with no evidence of additional regional services).

Issues for Further Study

1. The VDOE should modify the current rate package requirements and submission process.

Issues for Further Study

2. The VDOE should examine the concept of replacing categorical disability groups (e.g., emotional disabilities) with “students with disabilities who have expensive and/or intense support needs” for future funding.

Issues for Further Study

3. The VDOE should examine ways to provide equitable financial support for all LEAs in serving students with disabilities who have expensive and/or intense support needs.
 - In any proposed new model, VDOE should do a thorough analysis of the potential impact to state and local budgets, staffing requirements, and federal and state special education regulations.

Issues for Further Study

4. The VDOE should explore with LEAs the development of a system to track and report the outcomes of students claimed for Regional Tuition Reimbursement Programs in order to ensure high quality service delivery.