**ABSTRACT**

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted educational systems for young students, especially students with disabilities (SWD). Delayed enrollment into special education exacerbated problems with virtual service delivery, and postponed Kindergarten entry caused many students to miss out on the early intervention and early education. Problems with virtual service delivery, and disabilities (SWD) resulted in delayed enrollment into special education. SWD from minoritized and economically disadvantaged backgrounds were disproportionately impacted by pandemic-related disruptions.

**METHODS**

**Data Sources**

Mixed method data collection:

1. *State of Indiana Child Count Data 2014-2022*
2. *SIS Data:* Three years of student-level SIS data from a large, diverse school corporation in the state of Indiana. This data is collected and de-identified by INsite (Indiana Student Information to Empower), which is a partnership between a IU’s School of Education and K-12 school districts. INsite uses the Ed-Fi data standard. Student-level data includes demographic information, race, ethnicity, grade level, disability type, disciplinary data, and NWEA math and reading scores (when applicable).
3. *Qualitative Interviews* with teachers and administrators from one school corporation asking: What has been the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student behavior and how have current conditions affected the district's ability to support SWD?

**RESULTS**

**Child Count**

Child Count Data from the State of Indiana Number of preschoolers identified as having a disability dropped significantly between 2019 and 2020. This number is beginning to increase as assessments have resumed.

**Specific Learning Disability**

Number of Students with Specific Learning Disability (SLD) 2019-2021 Elementary SLD numbers in this district dropped dramatically, from 327 to 174 students. This county-level data from a large, diverse school corporation in Indiana SLD is focus here because it is the largest disability category in Indiana.

**DISCUSSION**

Results indicate that students with disabilities were under-identified from March 2020 - currently.

- Significant drop in numbers of preschoolers identified as having any disability
- Fewer elementary students identified with Specific Learning Disability
- These students missed out on 1-2 years of early intervention and special education services to which they would otherwise have been entitled

Underserved students from minoritized and economically disadvantaged backgrounds were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic

- Had difficulty accessing virtual special education services
- Now require additional academic and behavioral supports, including mental health services
- Post-pandemic recovery efforts are especially important for SWD from minoritized and economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Unexpected Findings**

The post-pandemic “rebound” has been much more limited than expected, at least in part due to the unprecedented staffing crisis

- SpEd teacher and specialist shortages mean that schools do not have enough staff with expertise to work with SWD
- The remaining teachers feel burned out
- Students are not getting the support they need

**NEXT STEPS & FURTHER QUESTIONS**

This study will examine IEP enrollment, academic (NWEA), and disciplinary data from the 2021-2022 school year to assess the long-term impacts of pandemic delays in enrollment and disruptions to service delivery for SWD.

Can the current educational system deliver the services that SWD deserve and are entitled to by IDEA?

Are there ways that policymakers, administrators, and educators can address the social, emotional and behavioral concerns we are seeing, especially for students who were disproportionately impacted by the pandemic?