

IDEA

On November 29, 1975, President Gerald R. Ford signed the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142), paving the way for improved outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) was a proud leader of the advocacy effort—alongside many families, individuals with disabilities, and organizations—to secure passage of this landmark legislation, which marked a pivotal shift in how our nation perceived individuals with disabilities.

AS STATED IN IDEA, THE CORE PURPOSES OF THIS LEGISLATION ARE:

- To ensure all eligible children with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE)—special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living;
- To ensure the rights of children with disabilities and their families are protected;
- To assist states, localities, educational service agencies, and federal agencies to provide for the education of all individuals with disabilities;
- To assist states in the implementation of a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families;
- To ensure educators and families have the necessary tools to improve educational results for children with disabilities by supporting systemic improvement activities; coordinated research and personnel preparation; coordinated technical assistance, dissemination, and support; and technology development and media services; and
- To assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities.

As required by IDEA, special education and early intervention services are collaboratively developed by teams of parents, families, educators, and other service providers. Some meet in homes, and others meet in schools. All of them have an interest in supporting students with disabilities and ensuring that infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities receive an appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.

The law, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), was most recently reauthorized in 2004. It includes state formula grant programs for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities, along with national programs that support and train personnel and provide technical assistance to schools and families to deliver evidence-based special education services in early childhood centers and schools across the country. Through the appropriations process, Congress provides funding for IDEA to the U.S. Department of Education, which then issues grants to state education agencies.

IDEA HAS FOUR PARTS:

- Part A** – General Provisions, the general provisions of the Act, including Findings, Purposes, and Definitions;
- Part B** – Assistance for Education of All Children with Disabilities, which includes (among other things) Authorization, Use of Funds, State and Local Eligibility, Evaluation, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Procedural Safeguards, Monitoring, and Preschool Grants
- Part C** – Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities, which includes (among other things) Findings, Definitions, Eligibility, Requirements for Statewide System, Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs), State Application and Assurances, Use of Funds, Procedural Safeguards, and Authorization; and
- Part D** – National Activities to Improve Education of Children with Disabilities, which includes State Personnel Development Grants; Personnel Preparation, Technical Assistance, Model Demonstration Projects and Dissemination of Information; Supports to Improve Results for Children with Disabilities; and General Provisions.

As we build upon the successes of the past and improve services for the future, the continued collaborative efforts of families, early intervention providers, and school teams will be imperative. This year marks the 50th Anniversary of IDEA and it is a moment to reflect on the progress that has been made while reaffirming our commitment to high expectations, evidence-based approaches, and well-funded programs. These are essential to changing the trajectory for children and youth with disabilities across the country. From birth to college and career, IDEA provides pathways toward better outcomes.

IDEA FAST FACTS

- ▶ Each year, the Department of Education issues a report to Congress on the number of children served in special education and early intervention programs across the country. The most recent version is available at <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/2023-individuals-with-disabilities-education-act-annual-report-to-congress>.
- ▶ In 2022, the most recent year for which there are data, there were more than 7.6 million children ages 3 through 21 served under IDEA Part B across the United States, including the District of Columbia, Bureau of Indian Education schools, Puerto Rico, the four outlying areas, and the three freely associated states. (Annual IDEA Section 618 data submitted by states to the U.S. Department of Education):
 - The number of preschool students ages 3-5 increased by 13.6% (535,392 children served);
 - The number of school-age students ages 5 (in kindergarten) to 21 increased by 3%, surpassing 7 million for the first time (7,095,053 children and youth served);
 - 75.4% of students with disabilities ages 14–21 exited high school with a regular diploma.
- ▶ In 2022, there were 441,515 infants and toddlers ages birth through age 2 served under Part C, an increase of 8.7% (Annual IDEA Section 618 data submitted by states to the U.S. Department of Education).
- ▶ In 2022, the most prevalent disability category of students ages 5 through 21 served under Part B was specific learning disability (34.2 percent), followed by speech or language impairment (18 percent), other health impairment (16.5 percent), autism (12.9 percent), intellectual disability (6 percent), and emotional disturbance (4.6 percent). (Annual IDEA Section 618 data submitted by states to the U.S. Department of Education).