

## A Parent's Guide to Protecting Special Education

# IDEA: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

If you're a parent of a child with a disability, you know how important it is for your child to receive the support and services they need to succeed in school. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) ensures that children with disabilities have access to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). There's a growing push to move IDEA oversight away from the U.S. Department of Education, and that could put your child's rights at risk.

### What's at risk?

#### ABOLISHING THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

The current administration is seeking to abolish the Department of Education. Currently the Department:

- Monitors states to ensure they are adhering to the law.
- Provides guidance and support to states, districts, and schools about how best to meet the educational needs of children with disabilities from birth through 21.
- Oversees special education funding.
- Holds states accountable for special education and related services.
- Protects the civil rights of children with disabilities.

By eliminating the Department, it would be up to the states to oversee and enforce IDEA and Section 504.

#### MOVING OVERSIGHT OF IDEA & SECTION 504

Abolishing the U.S. Department of Education would require legislative approval; Congress would need to pass a law through both the House and the Senate. If the administration is successful in abolishing the Department, the oversight of IDEA and Section 504 would become the responsibility of another Department within the federal government (e.g., Health and Human Services, Justice, or Labor). These agencies do not have the decades of experience or expertise needed to enforce IDEA or Section 504 protections.

### Implications for today:

Imagine your child is born with a disability. Their early years involve working with providers, seeking evaluations, and advocating for support. In school, their needs aren't fully met. As they struggle with reading, focus, or social skills, you wonder: What are their rights?

This is where IDEA steps in, guaranteeing your child FAPE in the least restrictive environment (LRE). This means they receive individualized services and accommodations to support their learning alongside non-disabled peers before more restrictive settings (like separate classes or schools) are considered. IDEA guarantees free evaluations to determine special education eligibility, tailored support through an IEP, education alongside peers whenever possible, and your legal right to dispute decisions you believe aren't benefiting your child.

Before IDEA, millions of children with disabilities were excluded from public schools. Many remained home without services or were placed in institutions that provided no education. Others were bused hours away. Families had to fight for their children's right to learn.

Without IDEA, your child would struggle to get the proper support to achieve what you know they're capable of. With it, they have access to specialized instruction, therapies, and tools to help them thrive.

**IDEA is a safeguard ensuring your child's right to learn and succeed.**

Let's take it a step further: too often, discussions about people with disabilities focus on their challenges rather than their strengths. If you have a child with a disability, you already know that individuals with disabilities bring immense value to society and the economy.

Here are a few reasons why *everyone* should care about protecting IDEA:

### All Children Benefit

Specialized teaching strategies developed for children with disabilities have been adopted widely in regular education, helping **all students** who need support with their reading, math, or executive functioning.

Assistive technologies like speech-to-text software, audiobooks, and graphic organizers originally designed for children with disabilities benefit **all learners**.

Classroom strategies such as differentiated instruction and universal design for learning (UDL) create a more respectful, engaging, and effective learning environment for **all students**.

Research shows that children with disabilities being educated alongside their peers improves interpersonal skills and fosters empathy and collaboration among students, better preparing **all children** for real-world interactions.

### Economic Benefits

Investing in special education is a win-win. Every dollar spent not only saves significant costs on public assistance over a person's lifetime but also improves long-term employment outcomes. Special education legislation ensures children can successfully enter the workforce, reducing their dependence on government assistance while simultaneously raising tax revenues.

#### Leading to good bosses...

Studies show that 55% of business owners, 45% of C-level executives, and 32% of senior management identify as neurodivergent. Their success demonstrates how individuals with disabilities drive innovation, leadership, and economic growth.

#### ...and good employees!

Research also reveals that employees with disabilities often excel in efficiency, accuracy, dedication, loyalty, and customer service. Many companies report that hiring individuals with disabilities leads to increased profitability and shareholder value.

Protecting the rights of children with disabilities lifts every student and strengthens our future.