



## Individuals With Disabilities Education Act

For over 44 years, the U.S. Congress and the U.S. Department of Education have partnered with state and local governments, teachers and other service providers, higher education, researchers, families, and others to ensure the successful implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

IDEA guarantees the civil rights of all children and youth with disabilities and their families, ensuring high-quality, evidence-based practices including individualized specialized services to support children in their development and education and assist them in achieving positive educational and developmental outcomes and results.

# INFORMATIONAL BRIEF

## Background

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

The current version of this landmark legislation, IDEA, includes state formula grant programs for children starting at birth—a national program that supports the provision of high-quality services including professional development, technical assistance and dissemination, family information and media and technology investments.

IDEA has four parts:

- Part A – General Provisions, which includes overall 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.

The core purposes of IDEA, as stated in the Act, are:

- To ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them access to a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living;
- To ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and families of such children are protected;
- To assist states, localities, educational service agencies, and federal agencies to provide for the education of all children 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 that educators and families have the necessary tools to improve educational results for children with disabilities by supporting system 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.

While all involved in implementing and supporting IDEA should be commended, there is a need to build upon these successes and to continue to hold high expectations and pursue improved outcomes for all children and youth with disabilities. This commitment is required for the successful continuing implementation of this essential law.

The continued collaboration of special education and early intervention professionals and other IDEA stakeholders is crucial to ensuring that all children and youth with disabilities have access to the necessary supports and services to achieve their educational outcomes and transition successfully to college and career opportunities.

Key to the achievement of the purposes of IDEA is the continued collaborative efforts of children and youth with disabilities, their families, educators, and policy makers who are instrumental in the ongoing implementation of this landmark legislation.