

IDEA Turns the Big 4-0

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In 1975 the Education for All Handicapped Children Act became a law, and in 2004 it became known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). No matter what the law is titled, it has one purpose: *to insure the right of all children, no matter what their special need, to receive a free and appropriate public education.* Well, the law turned the big 4-0 in November and here are just a few things that have improved (or changed) with time.

In the 1976-77 school years, approximately 3.7 million students were covered under what would become IDEA. Thirty-five percent of those students received speech language assistance, and twenty-one percent were labeled as “specific learning disability.” Well, in 2012-2013, out of the 6.4 million students covered under IDEA, almost 500,000 of them had autism and almost 800,000 had “other health impaired” as their disability.

A congressional report released in 1966 revealed that only about one-third of the 5.5 million students with disabilities were receiving an adequate education. The rest were either excluded from school or simply waiting to “age out” of the system. Thankfully, inclusion has improved. In 2012 only five percent of the students were educated somewhere outside the classroom. Even better news: about 62 percent of students with disabilities were in the general education department for 80 percent or more of their day.

The IDEA has provisions built in that protects that right of the student to a public education. Parents and the rest of the IEP team draft the IEP together, and if there are disagreements over an IEP, it can be resolved through a due process hearing. Most disagreements are resolved without a hearing, while a little of 10 percent go forward and result in a decision.

One of the biggest changes came in 2004 when the IDEA removed the 12 percent cap on the diagnosis of having a disability. The 2004 reauthorization of IDEA allows states to use a method called “response to intervention” or RTI, in which students are first screened for areas of concern and monitored for academic progress.

Finally, the money question: *Where does all the money come from and why doesn't there ever seem to be enough?* In 2015, the federal government contribution to educating students with disabilities amounted to 16%, roughly \$11.5 billion. The remaining funds came from the states and from the school district.

Sourced from: Samuels, Christina A. (2015, November) Decades of Progress, Challenges Under Federal Special Education Law (www.edweek.org)