



UNDERSTANDING IDEA: YOUR CHILD'S RIGHTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION



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A Family Fact Sheet

The **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** is a federal law that protects the rights of children with disabilities. IDEA helps make sure children receive the support and services they need to learn and succeed in school.

IDEA includes **6 important principles** that guide special education services.

1. Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)

Every child who qualifies for special education has the right to:

- Attend public school at no cost to families
- Receive services that meet their individual needs
- Learn through special education, general education, and related services

Parents are important members of the team that helps decide what services are appropriate for their child.

2. Appropriate Evaluation

Schools must complete evaluations to determine:

- If a child qualifies for special education services –
- What supports and services the child may need

Evaluations:

- Use information from parents, teachers, observations, and testing
- Must look at all areas of concern
- Must be fair and given in the child's language or communication style whenever possible

3. Individualized Education Program (IEP)

An IEP is a written plan that describes:

- The child's strengths and needs
- Educational goals
- Services and supports the school will provide

4. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Children with disabilities should learn with their peers as much as possible.

Schools must provide supports and services to help students participate in general education settings whenever appropriate.

5. Parent and Student Participation

Families have the right to:

- Attend meetings
- Share concerns and ideas
- Help make decisions about their child's education

Students may also participate in planning, especially as they get older.

6. Procedural Safeguards

Procedural safeguards protect the rights of children and families.

These protections include:

- Written notice before changes are made
- Parent consent for evaluations and services
- Access to school records
- Options to resolve disagreements

Important to Know: "Child Find"

Schools must identify and evaluate children who may have disabilities, even before they start school. Parents who suspect a disability should notify the school so a 504 plan or evaluation can begin; under Child Find and IDEA, they also have the right to an Independent Educational Evaluation (IEE) at the school's expense in certain cases.