

HANDOUT: IDEA—A brief overview

The federal law that supports special education and related service programming for children and youth with disabilities is called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 1975, the Education of All Handicapped Children Act (Public Law 94-142) was enacted to establish grants to states for the education of children with disabilities. This law has been amended several times and is now referred to as IDEA.

The major purpose of the IDEA is to ensure that all eligible school-aged children and youth with disabilities have available to them a "free appropriate public education" that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living. Furthermore, the law seeks to ensure that the rights of children and youth with disabilities and their parents are protected and to assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities.

Resources

- **The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)** has extensive specialized resources, journals, and newsletters with comprehensive information.
<http://www.cec.sped.org>
- **The Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. (COPAA)** is an independent, nonprofit organization of attorneys, advocates, and parents whose mission is to secure high quality educational services for children with disabilities.
<http://www.copaa.net/index.html>
- **National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE)** connects state agencies, schools, parents, and advocates with training, technical assistance, research, and policy development that seek to improve education for children and youth with disabilities.
<http://www.nasdse.org/index.cfm>
- **The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP)** is the department within the U.S. Department of Education (ED) that provides support to parents and individuals, school districts, and states in the area of special education.
<http://www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html>
- **Wrightslaw** offers accurate, up-to-date information about special education law; advocacy for children with disabilities; and articles, cases, newsletters, and resources about dozens of topics.
<http://www.wrightslaw.com/>