

After 50 Years of the IEP, What Should Come Next?

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Abstract: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has significantly enhanced educational access for students with disabilities through Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Despite notable progress, challenges persist, including the burden on families to ensure the fidelity of IEPs, frequent legal disputes, racial and cultural disparities, and other issues impacting service quality. This paper reviews IDEA's evolution, highlighting current issues including the transformation from a guarantee of “de minimis” education to one that paves opportunities for a diploma for students with intellectual disabilities. For the future, we recommend comprehensive changes across logistical, cultural, legal, and legislative dimensions. These include adopting a statewide IEP template, fostering a more inclusive, strength-based educational culture, embracing the support of AI, and enhancing legal frameworks. These strategies are aimed at refining IDEA's implementation to better serve all students with disabilities, improving family and district relationships, and ensuring compliance while driving improved educational outcomes.

Inspired by the landmark *Brown v. The Board of Ed* (1954) Supreme Court decision, the principles from the 14th amendment of equal treatment under the law, and the Civil Rights movement, and powered by families, adults with disabilities, advocates, and legislators, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA; now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act or IDEA) was signed into law on November 29, 1975. The planners of the law recognized from the beginning that special education services—specially designed instruction based on the educational needs of each child—must be individualized, given the great diversity of the children receiving them. Among the provisions of the law focusing on civil rights was that the education program would have measurable goals, and that parents would be members of the team (Crockett & Martin, in press). From this focus came the document known as the Individualized Education Program, or the IEP, now seen as the heart of the federal law. We're aiming to explore both the significant successes and ongoing challenges of implementing IDEA, illustrating its complex legacy in advancing educational equity. Additionally, we will delve into the past, present, and future of IEPs, examining how they continue to evolve and impact the educational landscape for students with disabilities.

THE PAST: Dawn of Educational Opportunity, aka “The Chevy”

While the passage of IDEA marked a transformative shift in the educational landscape, its implementation was not without its challenges. The law did not magically or immediately bring educational equity to all students, nor did it eradicate existing disparities within the disability community. Despite these hurdles, IDEA catalyzed pivotal improvements such as procedural safeguards, enhanced parental involvement, and the emphasis on the least restrictive environment. Through its substantial yet imperfect efforts, IDEA opened doors to new opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Some of the biggest successes and challenges include:

Increased access to education: The primary success of IDEA lies in school enrollment. In 1970 only one in five children with disabilities attended school; in 2023 15% of all school-age children had IEPs. The law has successfully increased access to special education services.

Parental Involvement: IDEA provides for families to join the IEP team, consent to major decisions about their children, and access due process in disagreements with school districts. These provisions empower families as essential partners in education planning, fostering collaboration and respect for family input. This framework ensures children's educational needs are met and enhances families' capacity to advocate for their rights under the law.

Individualized Education Programs (IEP): The requirement for IEPs has allowed for personalized educational plans that are tailored to meet the specific needs of each student with a disability, striving for better educational outcomes.

Early Intervention: IDEA has emphasized the importance of early intervention (between the child's birth and age three) for children with disabilities, which has been shown to improve developmental outcomes and reduce the need for more intensive support later in life. Early intervention was included in IDEA during its reauthorization in 1986 (Public Law 99-457) and is currently designated as Part C. It can minimize the need for special education and related services when children enter school and is a vital resource for the healthy development of infants and toddlers.

Procedural Safeguards: IDEA provides families with procedural safeguards that protect the rights of children with disabilities, including the right to due process, which ensures fair and equitable treatment within the school system. While compliance is an essential component of IDEA, when it becomes the sole focus, it can overshadow the need for a person- and family-centered approach. IDEA should not be reduced to a checklist of legal requirements rather than a framework for increasing current and future outcomes.

Difficulty with implementation: Districts have struggled to implement the provisions of IDEA with fidelity. Common obstacles include a limited understanding of the law, normalization of antiquated practices, insufficient training of teachers and school staff, logistical and scheduling issues, financial restraints, and numerous biases. These factors contribute to inconsistencies in the identification of needs, service offerings, and implementation, which can ultimately affect educational outcomes.

Rowley's Chevy: In the 1982 *Rowley v Hendrick Hudson School District* decision, the Supreme Court held that IDEA guaranteed students access to a basic floor of opportunity that was "appropriately ambitious" and provided some educational benefit. The law requires that each child receive an education comparable to a "serviceable" Chevrolet, not a luxurious Cadillac (not the language of the law; rather an analogy sometimes used by school districts). As the U.S. Supreme Court explained in *Rowley*, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires a "basic floor of opportunity," not the best possible education. This case was long upheld to provide a minimal educational benefit to students with IEPs and parents were routinely reminded their child was not entitled to the best - "Your child gets a Chevy, not a Cadillac." However, the Supreme Court heard *Endrew v Douglas School District* in 2017, and their decision elevated these standards, requiring that an educational program be appropriately ambitious and aimed at advancing the student's academic and functional progression. The shift from merely accessing education to achieving meaningful progress set a vital higher expectation.

THE PRESENT: *Endrew Era*

In the 2022-23 school year, there were over 7.6 million students ages 3-21 served under IDEA. As the IEP approaches its 50th anniversary, many are taking stock of its impact (Burke, Kauffman, & Wiley, 2024). Early focus on procedural monitoring is slowly being replaced by focus on educational benefit (IRIS, 2019). According to Crockett & Martin (2024) "Contemporary concerns center instead on pedagogical issues and whether students can access the intensive services and supports they need to succeed in school in general education environments" (p. 85).

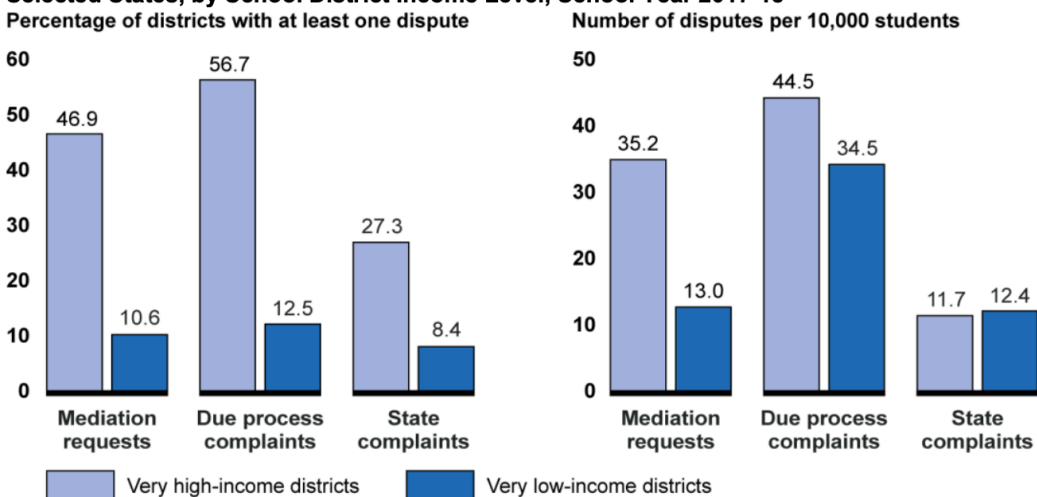
A primary purpose of the annual IEP is to specify the setting in which the student will attend school. The law's requirement that special education services be provided in the "least restrictive environment" has resulted in significant changes in placement for students with IEPs. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2024), 66.7% of students with IEPs spend 80% or more of their day in the general education classroom. While automatic segregation of students with disabilities into special schools and special day classes has slowed as school districts implement inclusive practices, the belief that special education is a place rather than a set of services is slow to change. This is particularly true for students with more significant disabilities (known in California as those with "extensive support needs"), who are much more likely to spend the majority of their school day in settings other than the general education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2024). Special education is unfortunately still frequently viewed as something outside the purview of general education responsibilities (IRIS, 2019). We may be inching closer to a Cadillac than a Chevy, but there are still considerable barriers students and families are facing. Among them:

Quality control rests with the parent: Parent personality, cultural capital, knowledge of the law, and the ability to advocate are some of the major drivers of a successful IEP. Because not all parents have those advantages, the responsibility for ensuring an effective and appropriate

IEP should lie with the school district as the provider of educational services. However, in reality, the quality and effectiveness of an IEP often depend heavily on a parent's ability to navigate complex educational systems and laws. This dynamic places an undue burden on families, potentially exacerbating inequalities among students whose parents may not have the same resources, time, or familiarity with the legal aspects of special education.

High levels of legal discourse: As parents become more educated and empowered, they are increasingly aware of their rights when their children do not receive the services and support to which they are legally entitled. During the 2016-17 school year, among the 6.8 million students ages 3 to 21 served under IDEA Part B, there were 35,142 instances of mediation requests, due process complaints, and state complaints filed across the nation. (U.S. Department of Education, 20??). Notably, these legal actions are far less common in low-income school districts, possibly due to disparities in access to legal resources or knowledge about rights under IDEA. Between 2016 and 2021, the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) spent \$60 million on parents' attorney fees for over 8,000 cases related to due process requests (reference needed). The bulk of these cases involved families of children with autism, with those having specific learning disabilities also representing a significant portion. This elevated level of legal disputes underscores the tension between school districts and families, particularly those who are better resourced, reflecting a broader issue of equity and access within the framework of special education law. We believe that this money should be spent in the classrooms, not in courtrooms.

Percentage of School Districts with Dispute Resolution Activity and Rates of Activity in Five Selected States, by School District Income Level, School Year 2017-18



Source: GAO analysis of dispute data provided by the five states and Department of Education's Common Core of Data. | GAO-20-22

Racial bias in eligibility and offered services: From the time IDEA was passed in 1975, non-white students have often faced misdiagnosis or underdiagnosis due to bias. Additionally, these students frequently do not receive the level or quality of services as their peers, leading to potential disparities in educational outcomes (Harry & Klingner, 2014). For example, Morgan, Farkas and colleagues (2015) found that 74% of White fourth-grade children with reading

difficulties were receiving special education services but that only 44% of Black children and 43% of Hispanic children were receiving them. Education Department statistics for the 2017-18 school year show “Black students with disabilities being served by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act made up about 2.3% of total student enrollment. Yet they received nearly triple that percentage, 6.2%, of one or more in-school suspensions and almost quadruple (8.8%) of one or more out-of-school suspensions.”¹ Data from the fall of 2020 showed Black students were most likely to be identified with an intellectual disability or emotional disturbance.² While 55 percent of White students with disabilities spend more than 80 percent of their school day in a general education classroom, only a third of Black students with disabilities spend that much time in a general education classroom. Hispanic and American Indian students with disabilities are also more likely to be taught in separate classrooms, compared to White students.³

Inequities between English-speaking and non-English-speaking families:

Non-English-speaking families face additional cultural and linguistic barriers, hindering essential communication with teachers and school administration about their child’s needs. This can lead to disempowerment, mistrust, and a feeling of racism against their children.⁴ Representing 12% of students being served under IDEA and 5% of students being served under Section 504 in schools, districts should prioritize training and the creation of “culturally responsive collaborative partnerships with all families”.⁵

Teacher recruitment and retention: Teacher retention in special education is a significant challenge impacting the effectiveness of IDEA's implementation. Approximately 45% of schools reported vacancies in special education roles, underscoring the difficulty in maintaining a stable workforce. Furthermore, 78% of schools indicated challenges in hiring qualified special education staff. These issues not only create gaps in service but also place additional strain on existing staff, potentially compromising the quality of education and support provided to students with disabilities. This persistent problem highlights the need for targeted strategies to improve recruitment, retention, and support for special education professionals.⁶

Is Least Restrictive Environment a myth?: Despite the least restrictive environment (LRE) being a tentpole mandate of IDEA, students are frequently segregated based on their diagnosis, their level of support needs, and/or misconceptions and biases around what district personnel deem appropriate to include in a general education classroom. As a result, students may not have access to the same educational opportunities or standards-based curriculum.

¹ <https://www.k12dive.com/news/Schools-examine-racial-disparities-in-special-education/688716/>

² <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/44th-arc-for-idea.pdf>

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https://nclد.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2020-NCLD-Disproportionality_Trends-and-Actions-for-Impact_FINAL-1.pdf

⁴ [ED615170.pdf](#)

⁵ <https://education.laverne.edu/accreditation/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2022/11/rossetti-et-al..pdf>

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<https://sites.ed.gov/osers/2023/05/high-standards-innovative-solutions-how-some-states-are-addressing-the-special-educator-shortage-crisis/>

Us vs. Them: All of these challenges can create a negative culture between families and districts, eroding trust and impeding the development of a cooperative and constructive partnership in crafting a truly individualized and supportive education plan for the student. The focus on the student is often truly lost.

Endrew effect: The shift in legal precedents from *Rowley* to the *Endrew* case marked a significant change in expectations set by IDEA. The court decided children with disabilities were entitled to more than “de minimus”. While *Endrew* was an instrumental legal win, we are still unclear if the decision has changed individual legal outcomes or school district practices. Some studies have found very little difference in legal outcomes post-*Endrew* (Connelly et al., 2021), and further research is needed to determine if district approaches and offerings have progressed as a result.

Increase in inclusive efforts in California: Fewer than 60% of students with disabilities are included in general education classrooms across California, but those numbers are slowly rising. There have been proposed bills around inclusive education that have failed, but there continues to be an unrelenting cultural push for educational equity. Statewide efforts like [Supporting Inclusive Practices \(SIP\)](#) are working with districts to raise those numbers even more.

THE FUTURE: Separate is finally not equal?

Like Wehmeyer (2021), we believe that it is time to focus on what students can do, rather than what they can't. This forward-looking perspective emphasizes empowering students and families by recognizing and building upon their strengths. To achieve this, the future of IEPs should incorporate comprehensive reforms across logistical, cultural, legal, and legislative areas.

Quality control: As we discussed above, a significant breakdown in both the IEP process and its effectiveness for the students it aims to support stems from the absence of quality control measures. We seek to establish a robust alternative that is not vulnerable to the knowledge or biases of any individual within the team. Emerging technologies offer promising avenues for implementing such controls, but districts would require mandated software updates to incorporate this technology effectively. Countless artificial intelligence (AI) options offer promising support to teachers and school districts in crafting accurate and effective IEPs. AI-driven tools can potentially assist in analyzing student data, suggesting personalized learning strategies, and ensuring compliance with educational standards and regulations.

State IEP template: Additionally, a statewide committee⁷ has been engaged in discussions regarding a California IEP template that would mandate specific elements of the IEP. We want to highlight a few of the possibilities that could make the biggest impact for family engagement, transparency, and quality control:

⁷ <https://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fo/profile.asp?id=6049>

- **Vision statement** - Every IEP should be rooted in a child’s vision statement. It’s a vision of their future and what you and your child hope to see in that future. “Seeing the IEP process as a series of stops on the way to a meaningful, fulfilling, self-directed life will help the IEP team consider each IEP annual goal and objective as a stepping stone, and each service and support as a guidepost.”⁸ A vision statement anchors the goals and services by the hopes and priorities of an individual and their family.
- **Parent and student concerns** - While schools are legally required to document a parents concerns in the IEP to ensure parental participation⁹, there is not a dedicated space for these concerns. Currently, concerns can be placed in the Present Levels of Performance section, but they are often relegated to the Notes section with other meeting details. As parents are equal team members, their concerns should also have a dedicated section within the IEP document. This will help ensure their input is prominently and clearly represented, reflecting their integral role in the educational planning process.
- **Present levels framework** - The "Present Levels of Performance" section in an IEP should operate like a well-structured sentence diagram, providing a comprehensive framework that ensures all necessary fields are thoroughly and accurately filled in.¹⁰ This framework should guide educators to include detailed assessments of the student’s current academic achievements and functional performance. By standardizing this section with a clear template, schools can guarantee that every IEP includes essential data such as baseline skill levels, strengths, needs, and the impact of the disability on the student's academic and non-academic activities. This structured approach ensures that each IEP is built on a solid foundation of current performance data, which is critical for setting realistic, measurable goals and tracking progress effectively.
- **Baselines** - The "Present Levels of Performance"¹¹ section of an IEP provides a detailed description of a student's current academic and functional abilities. Using this information, clear and precise baselines should be established for each goal in the IEP. These baselines serve as critical benchmarks for progress monitoring, showing the student's starting point relative to each targeted skill. Including a baseline above every goal ensures that all stakeholders understand the specific level from which progress will be measured, enhancing the effectiveness of the IEP in tracking and supporting student development. Currently, districts can determine if they want to include a baseline section of each goal.
- **Short-term objectives** - At present, short-term objectives are mandated only in the IEPs of students who qualify for alternate assessments. However, incorporating these objectives into every IEP could facilitate easier and more transparent progress monitoring. We recommend this inclusion to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of all educational plans, providing a more structured approach to tracking and achieving educational goals for students with disabilities.

⁸ <https://undivided.io/resources/269>

⁹ <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/regs/b/d/300.322>

¹⁰ <https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/module/iep01/cresource/q3/p06/>

¹¹ <https://undivided.io/resources/655>

- **Connections to state standards** - Every goal would be required to have a checkbox and section where it connects with a grade-level standard. This provides a framework and checkpoint to ensure goals are aligned with state standards. By directly tying IEP goals to established standards, educators can better measure student progress against recognized benchmarks, facilitating more targeted interventions and support. This alignment also ensures that the educational objectives are both ambitious and achievable.

Alternate pathway to diploma¹²: Following the *Endrew* decision, the Department of Education has reiterated that children with the most significant cognitive disabilities can have their performance measured against the alternate academic achievement standards which must also be aligned with the State’s grade-level content standards.¹³ This year, California started implementing the Alternate Pathway to Diploma for students who qualify for the alternate assessment, where they can obtain a diploma from high school if they meet the state’s minimum coursework requirements by taking classes that align with the California state standards¹⁴. Students can complete modified coursework as long as it aligns with state standards, incentivizing both general and special education classrooms to implement a standards-based curriculum for all students. Successfully earning this diploma can significantly broaden post-high school employment opportunities for these students, as it does for all students.

Increased graduation rates: Graduation rates are rising for students with disabilities, even though percentages can vary widely from state to state.¹⁵ Unfortunately, statistics are lower for Black, Hispanic, and Native American students with disabilities than they are for White students with disabilities. In one study, approximately 75 percent of Asian and White students with disabilities left high school with a regular diploma, but only around 65 percent of Black, Hispanic, and Native American students with disabilities left high school with a regular diploma in the 2014–2015 school year.¹⁶ The variation in graduation rates among different demographic groups underscores the need for targeted interventions and supports that address these inequities to ensure that all students with disabilities have an equal opportunity to succeed academically and obtain their high school diplomas.

Strength-Based IEPs: Regardless of the logistical updates we undertake, the deeper and more challenging shifts pertain to cultural and mindset changes. It is imperative to steer special education away from a deficit mindset and infuse a strength-based perspective throughout every aspect of the IEP process, including meetings, documentation, and communication. Instead of saying “The child can’t complete this task”, we should ask, “How can we make it

¹² <https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/se/lr/om082523.asp>

¹³ See section 1111(b)(1)(E) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), and Section 200.6(c) of the Department’s regulations for Title I Part A of the ESEA.

¹⁴ <https://undivided.io/resources/1243>

¹⁵ <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities>

¹⁶ 41 National Center for Learning Disabilities. (2017). The state of learning disabilities: Understanding the 1 in 5.

possible for the child to complete this task?” Implementing a strength-based approach in assessments, classroom strategies, and IEP meetings can significantly build trust with families and support a whole-child, person-centered approach. “Educators around the world have immense power over how students with disabilities are perceived and taught in schools. This power includes the choices all educators make about the language they use to describe students. As a result, educators in all countries, including the U.S., must continue thinking about how to develop awareness around disability and recognize the abilities and strengths of their students.”(Elder, et al. 2018)

Expansive inclusion: The future of IEPs and special education can only be envisioned by addressing the imperative of adopting best practices in inclusive education for all students. Persistent segregation results in inadequate education, limited socialization, and compromised future prospects.¹⁷ If all students with IEPs are educated with a standards-based curriculum in General Education with appropriate supports, we are reasserting and reimagining how special education services are delivered. Best practices around Universal Design for Learning¹⁸ ensure all students are learning appropriately alongside peers while reappropriating funds spent litigating placement disagreements. However, considerable pushback from districts remains, often rooted in a lack of understanding and/or training around inclusive practices, a history of poorly executed efforts, and implicit biases around disability. We need to educate, train, support, and incentivize districts to set and maintain high expectations when educating students across the spectrum of disabilities and diagnoses.

- **Statewide framework** - We must define inclusion and lay out an intentional framework and playbook for districts around best practices around implementation. There has been some progress with a \$2 million grant to the Sacramento Office of Education for the “development, curation, production, and dissemination of public education resources regarding the value of equity and inclusion for students with disabilities”.¹⁹ Such measures would propel us towards both logistical and cultural transformation, addressing the crucial updates necessary for the functioning of special education.
- **Financial incentives around inclusion** - Unfortunately, financial factors often drive decision-making in education and advocacy. Legislators must consider how they can incentivize inclusive educational practices that are linked to improved outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Prioritizing this issue is essential, as schools continue to receive funding even while employing outdated methods of segregation and providing inequitable educational opportunities. To truly enhance education for students with disabilities, funding structures must be aligned with the principles of inclusion and equity, ensuring that resources are used to support best practices in a public school setting. In addition, recent studies have shown that inclusive placements built around best practices can also cost less money than segregated settings (Jackson, et al., 2022). As numbers

¹⁷ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1540796920943469>

¹⁸ <https://www.cast.org/>

¹⁹ saccoe1time22apptltr1.asp

of students served under IDEA keeps rising,²⁰ we must identify solutions that don't include increased segregation.

Potential of AI: A huge barrier to inclusion is time and strategic planning for teachers. Many learners require adaptations and modifications to classwork, lesson implementation, and output to access the general education curriculum. Many districts employ inclusion facilitators to support teachers with classroom and lesson planning support, while others rely solely on their teachers to implement change. Especially as teachers are starting, it can feel like they are reinventing the wheel with each individual student. While building robust support systems and teams is essential, the emergence of AI is also showing extraordinary ways it can support teachers with lesson planning, modified assignments, automated administrative tasks, data-driven decision-making, and personalized learning paths that align with what the class is doing. These advancements have the potential to enhance educational experiences and outcomes for students with disabilities, encouraging a shift from reactive measures to proactive prevention and early support. The Center for Innovation, Design, and Digital Learning highlights how AI can support teachers and transform the classroom for all learners:²¹

- **Student learning** - When teachers use a UDL approach, AI can evaluate the effectiveness of how each student is learning, and with what. It can “analyze how different students respond to various teaching methods and content delivery styles, aiding the refinement of personalized learning experiences.”
- **Accessibility and inclusivity** - AI can evaluate how accessible and inclusive educational content and practices are, “especially for individuals with disabilities...Evaluation includes analyzing how different students interact with technology and educational materials, ensuring that all students have equitable learning opportunities”.
- **Behavioral evaluation** - Multimodal data includes “physiological data such as eye tracking, galvanic skin response, body temperature, electrodermal activity, heart rate, electrical brain surface activity, and linguistic and prosodic aspects of speech (Molenaar et al., 2023; Sharma & Giannakos, 2020)”. These data allow AI to interpret “cognitive, physiological, and behavioral outcomes from a stimulus. For example, a preservice special education teacher could be working virtually with a student with an emotional disturbance. As the student expresses escalated behavior (e.g., starts yelling and swearing at the preservice teacher), the teacher’s heart rate increases and brain activity changes. Multimodal data allows AI to determine the exact moment when the preservice teacher is no longer learning from the exercise. It also can provide recommendations for future experiences. However, from a neurological stance, the student’s escalation builds internally well before the student acts out (Sapolsky, 2017). Using multimodal data, an AI could identify this change and either warn the pre-service educator or even intervene in

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[https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities#:~:text=As%20a%20result%2C%20the%20percentage.%E2%80%9320%20\(14%20percent\)](https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg/students-with-disabilities#:~:text=As%20a%20result%2C%20the%20percentage.%E2%80%9320%20(14%20percent))

²¹ https://ciddl.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/InclusiveIntelligence_a11y_navadded.pdf

adjusting the situation to avoid outward behavioral escalation (Standen et al., 2020)". As with all practices, there need to be serious ethical conversations about how data is used.

- **Real-time translation for IEP documents and meetings:** Artificial intelligence can be leveraged to provide real-time translation services during IEP meetings and in the preparation of IEP documents. This capability is crucial for non-English-speaking families, ensuring they fully understand and participate in the discussion about their child's educational needs and services. By removing language barriers, AI-enhanced translation promotes inclusivity, equity, and transparency in the IEP process. A long-standing issue persists with districts failing to meet translation deadlines and not fully translating documents, which hinders families from fully understanding and making informed decisions about what they are reading or agreeing to.²²

Legal victories: As we've established, legal precedents have played a critical role in shaping the enforcement and interpretation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), progressively refining the educational landscape for students with disabilities. Another recent ruling in *Perez v. Sturgis* (2023)²³ potentially bolsters the implementation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) by expanding Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) protections. This decision underscores the legal obligations of educational institutions to accommodate students with disabilities, reinforcing the foundational principles of IDEA. By clarifying and strengthening the scope of ADA protections, the ruling could lead to more rigorous enforcement of existing standards and practices surrounding IEPs. Schools may now face increased accountability for providing the necessary accommodations and services, thereby improving educational access and equity. As we move forward, it will be crucial to monitor the evolving legal landscape for new precedents that could further refine and enhance the successful implementation of IDEA, ensuring that it continues to effectively meet the changing needs of students with disabilities (Yell & Bradley, 2024)

Reauthorization of IDEA: Some advocates support opening conversations about the reauthorization of IDEA in hopes of moving towards increased federal funding and/or changing up the state funding allocation model.²⁴ However, many more expressed hesitation, citing concerns about the heated political climate that could lead to the dilution of hard-won protections and benefits. There is a fear that in the process of modernizing and streamlining the law, critical elements that currently ensure the rights and educational access for students with disabilities might be compromised. This hesitation can be rooted in the desire to maintain the integrity of IDEA's original commitments to inclusion, equity, and individualized support, while also recognizing the need for the law to evolve in response to changing educational landscapes and new understandings of disability rights.

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<https://edsources.org/2023/immigrant-parents-report-faulty-slow-translation-of-special-education-documents/700531>

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<https://www.law.com/newyorklawjournal/2023/06/22/a-new-development-in-the-law-of-special-education/?sreturn=20240321165708>

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<https://www.brookings.edu/articles/more-money-is-not-enough-the-case-for-reconsidering-federal-special-education-funding-formulas/>

IDEA changed the trajectory for children with disabilities, but we must dig in, refine, and focus on targeted measures that improve the present and future of these students. The responsibility of ensuring program fidelity must be shifted away from parents, addressing the bias and burden that such responsibility often entails. It is essential to devise solutions that foster an equitable and inclusive implementation, one that transcends subjective biases. Looking forward, the focus must shift towards enhancing the functionality and impact of IEPs through comprehensive reforms around quality control and cultural reform. By aligning these elements with the capabilities and potential of students with disabilities, and embracing tools such as AI for support, the future of IEPs holds the promise of more effective educational solutions. We must firmly and finally establish that separate does not mean equal. We must create a purposeful, inclusive educational landscape where all students can learn and thrive together.

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