

Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf

Toward a Child-Centered IEP Driven System of Education for Students with Disabilities: Principles for the Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA)

Re-establish the IEP as the driving force in the reauthorization.

The passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975 was a landmark for children with disabilities. Fundamental to the entire law was the notion of the Individualized Educational Program (IEP) as the driving force to provide children with disabilities educational opportunities equal to their non-disabled peers and to prepare children with disabilities for employment and independent living. The IEP was the heart and soul of the law. Its focus centered on the child and it is precisely that renewed focus which CEASD advocates in this concept paper.

A child centered IEP driven approach to IDEA means there is no “one size fits all” FAPE in the LRE.

When the provision of special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is child-centered the IEP becomes the roadmap for the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). Children with disabilities comprise a diverse population of learners with unique and specialized learning needs. The IEP not only describes these unique learners and their varied needs but also determines the services and supports necessary to meet those needs. When focus is on the child and the IEP is designed to meet that child’s needs it becomes clear that there is no “one size fits all” FAPE in the LRE.

Achieving positive educational outcomes requires a focus on what takes place not where it takes place.

In the 35 years that have ensued since the passage of IDEA, the educational landscape has changed significantly. Whereas prior to the law the majority of students with disabilities were denied access to an appropriate education, currently the vast majority are served in publicly supported education. Educational outcomes serve as the primary catalyst for these students. The lack of access, during the early educational years, to fundamental knowledge and skills and to specialized professionals, results in serious life-long educational and occupational challenges for far too many students. Thus the changes that CEASD proposes will reaffirm the emphasis on the child’s IEP as a vehicle for determining the needed educational environments more conducive to maximizing the development of the whole child and the achievement of educational

outcomes.

Special factors must be “provided” not simply “considered” in both Part B and Part C of the IDEA reauthorization.

Special factors must be strengthened in the law for students with disabilities. This can be accomplished by shifting the language in the law from being “considered” by the IEP team to ensuring that they are “provided.”

CEASD supports extending the “special factors” to the Individualized Family Service Plan development for infants and toddlers served in Part C of IDEA. The IFSP, like the IEP, should be developed based on the unique needs of the child and family and be the determinant for the services provided and the natural environment.

In conclusion, CEASD believes that these proposed changes represent a “back to the future” approach. The framers of P.L. 94-142 intended that the child’s individual needs and goals be the driving force behind special education services for all children with disabilities. CEASD is calling for a return to these fundamental values and approaches for all children with disabilities.

This document outlines the fundamental concepts driving CEASD’s request for changes in IDEA when it is reauthorized, how these concepts apply to all children with disabilities and their families, and more specifically, how these concepts are important for meaningful educational outcomes for these students. These overarching, global principles are as follows:

1. The reauthorization of IDEA should restore the IEP as the centerpiece of IDEA.
2. The development of the IEP should be driven by the child’s needs and strengths.
3. The IEP should be developed by a team including appropriately trained and qualified professionals in the child’s disability area and focused on the unique needs of the child.
4. The IEP should ensure access to the general curriculum leading to positive educational outcomes for all students.
5. All children must have access to the full continuum of placements based on their individual needs and goals without predetermined preference to a particular setting.
6. Thus, to ensure identified educational outcomes, the LRE and the natural environment will be IEP and IFSP bound and determined.

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