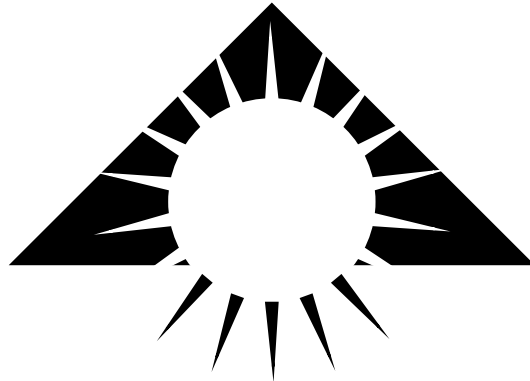


Family Impact Policy Seminar  
The Center for Research on Children in the U.S. (CROCUS),  
Georgetown University  
and  
The Georgetown University Center for Child Development



**FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICIES AND  
STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS:  
Challenges and Opportunities for Children in the District**

April 8, 2003

**Background Briefing Report**

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# FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICIES AND STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: Challenges and Opportunities for Children in the District

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<p><b>The panel features the following speakers:</b></p> <p><b>Anne Gay</b>, Assistant Superintendent of the Division of Special Education, DCPS</p> <p><b>Megan Blamble, JD.</b> Family Advocacy Clinic Graduate Fellow at the Georgetown University Law Center</p> <p><b>Michelle Hawkins.</b> Parent Coordinator for Family Support Project at the Lt. Joseph P. Kennedy Institute</p> <p><b>Toby Long, PhD, PT.</b> Associate Director for Training of the Georgetown University Child Development Center, Director, Division of Physical Therapy and Associate Professor, Department of Pediatrics</p> <p>The moderator will be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Deborah Phillips</b>, Chair and Professor, Department of Psychology, Georgetown University</li> </ul>	<p>BACKGROUND.....2</p> <p>IDEA REAUTHORIZATION: THE CURRENT CONTROVERSIES.....2</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Recent Activity of the Bush Administration.....4</p> <p>TRANSLATING FEDERAL POLICY INTO LOCAL PRACTICE.....6</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">A Brief History of IDEA.....6.</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Important Features of IDEA.....7</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">The Challenges on the Ground.....8</p> <p>THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IDEA WITHIN THE DCPS.....10</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">At the Beginning, an Uphill Climb.....10</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">Notable Progress, Continuing Challenges and Opportunities.....12</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">The Cycle of Compounding Costs...13</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Barriers to Parental Involvement.....14</p> <p>REFERENCES.....16</p> <p>APPENDICES A, B, C</p>

**FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICIES AND STUDENTS WITH  
SPECIAL NEEDS:  
Challenges and Opportunities for Children in the District**

**BACKGROUND**

Children with special education needs and their families face significant challenges in the District of Columbia Public School (DCPS) system as well as in many other urban school districts. With reauthorization of the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA), currently under consideration by Congress, and the recent passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, however, it is an auspicious time to consider both how federal policies have and will create challenges for fulfilling the mandate for public schools to serve children with special needs as well as how these policies might provide new opportunities for such children within the DCPS.

**IDEA REAUTHORIZATION: THE CURRENT CONTROVERSIES**

While the IDEA (originally the *Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975*) promised to provide a free and appropriate education for all students, including those with disabilities, it has always been an unfunded mandate. Congress allocates IDEA funds to states on a discretionary basis and annual appropriations have never risen to the maximum authorized allotment of 40 percent of the current national average per pupil expenditure (APPE) per disabled child. For example, in FY2002, states received an estimated 16.5 percent of national APPE per disabled child served. It is significant to note, however, that there has been a 224 percent increase in state grants for Part B of IDEA, which relates to school-age children, since FY1995. Nonetheless, public school systems throughout the country, especially in those in urban areas like the District of Columbia, cite the lack of full federal funding as the largest obstacle to translating the goals of IDEA into realities. Not only are many of these school districts charged with serving relatively large

populations of students with special needs, but they, like the District, are also mired in pre-existing fiscal crises.

It is not surprising, then, that funding has emerged as a major issue in the current debate over congressional reauthorization. In 2001, the Senate passed an amendment calling for full funding of IDEA, yet it was opposed by the White House and House Republicans who supported reforms of special education policy as a prerequisite to any substantial funding increases. The ultimate resolution of this issue will have critical implications for the provision of special education services in the DC public schools.

Another hot issue surrounding IDEA reauthorization includes the concern about over-identification of minority students throughout the country for special education services. Critics argue that overzealousness in this regard results in the segregation of minorities into low-achieving classes, which put them on a course for school failure. Resulting excesses in regulatory paperwork and spiraling expenses from the increased litigation that stems from due process procedures further intensify the problem (Fletcher, 2001). In addition to the identification *process*, others have criticized the categories of disabilities themselves, citing the explosive growth in the “other health impairment” (up 319 percent) and “specific learning disability” (up 36 percent) categories over the last decade. Arguing over the lack of consistently applied diagnostic criteria for such “high-incidence” disabilities, Lyon et al. (2001) remarked, “The real tragedy is that conceptualizations of LD [specific learning disability] have not changed over 30 years despite the completion of significant research in the past 15 years. What we know from research now needs to be implemented.” A related contention in the current reauthorization debate is that many of the students identified as having learning disabilities or behavioral problems simply cannot read. Those with this perspective argue that increasing and improving teachers’ utilization of evidence-based and alternative strategies to teach reading could significantly reduce the population of special needs children in the U.S.

Finally, the lack of clarity in the disciplinary policies established for special education students has also been a focal point in the current debate. School administrators throughout the country have criticized the guidelines established within IDEA for being too vague and leading to considerable variation in interpretation across the states and their school systems. As a consequence, decisions over which disciplinary procedures can and should be allowable under IDEA are being left to the nation's courts. For example, cases have been brought against public school systems that have expelled children with behavioral problems, citing their failure to provide equal education to students with special needs. Indeed, in *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia*, 348 F. Supp. 866 (1972), the District of Columbia was found guilty of excluding a number of students from receiving a public education because they had a behavioral problem. A further concern is with the length of time that students may be without special education services when they have been removed from their classes for disciplinary reasons, even if temporarily. On the flip side, while recognizing that the disciplinary guidelines in the IDEA were designed to protect the rights of students with disabilities, many school administrators claim that adherence to them can in certain cases compromise the safety of teachers and other students.

Full appreciation of the current policy climate surrounding IDEA reauthorization requires a review of other recent education policy initiatives advanced by the White House.

### **Recent Activity of the Bush Administration**

Since its inception, the Bush Administration has been actively trying to shape the debate over IDEA reauthorization and embraced the issue as its next major education reform task following the successful passage of the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*<sup>1</sup>. In October of 2001, President Bush appointed a commission to recommend changes in IDEA and members of the Commission submitted the report, *A New Era: Revitalizing Special*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/esea/exec-sum.html>

*Education for Children and Their Families*, on July 1, 2002<sup>2</sup>. The report recommended that revisions in IDEA be modeled after the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB), and the Bush Administration's subsequent proposals followed these recommendations. The four basic principles that are key to NCLB – stronger accountability for results, increased flexibility and local control, expanded options for parents, and an emphasis on teaching methods that have been proven to work – are reflected in the Bush Administration's principles for special education reform. These principles, set forth by U.S. Secretary of Education Rod Paige on February 25, 2003, call for IDEA reauthorization to incorporate the NCLB principles of assessment for children receiving special education and align with NCLB accordingly to enhance state efforts to improve student achievement. They also call for increased flexibility for states to use special education money, earlier and easier access for parents of students with disabilities to alternative dispute resolution processes, increased choices and meaningful involvement for parents, and the targeting of federal education dollars to implement research-based practices that have been proven to help students with disabilities learn.

On March 19, 2003, House Republicans introduced IDEA reauthorization legislation that proposes reforms aligned with NCLB. The legislation is aimed at encouraging earlier intervention, reducing the law's paperwork requirements and allowing parents whose children attend under-performing schools to use public money to buy private services. A central goal of the bill is to keep students with basic reading difficulties and a disproportionate number of minority students from being mistakenly tracked into special education (Fletcher, 2003). Democrats disagree over issues of spending and student discipline. Secretary Paige voiced support for the legislation, stating that the proposal “appears to be aligned with [the Bush Administration's] principles for reauthorization.” The bill would increase federal spending from 18 to 40 percent of the per-student cost within seven years, but this would not be guaranteed given that funding for IDEA will remain discretionary.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.ed.gov/inits/commissionboards/whspecialeducation>

## **TRANSLATING FEDERAL POLICY INTO LOCAL PRACTICE**

Having provided an overview of the controversies surrounding the reauthorization of IDEA, our next focus is upon the pragmatic tasks of translating the goals of the federal mandate into practices at the local level.

### **A Brief History of IDEA**

The IDEA legislation, originally signed into law by President Gerald R. Ford, established grants to states for the education of children with disabilities. While currently up for reauthorization, the act has been amended several times during its history (U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2002).

IDEA has several parts, one of which – Part B – entitles all eligible school-aged children and youth with disabilities to receive a “free appropriate public education” (FAPE). Provisions were also established to provide incentives for states to make FAPE available for all preschool-aged children with special needs, as well as to help states develop early intervention programs for infants and toddlers with developmental difficulties. The most recent amendments to the legislation were enacted under the Clinton Administration in 1997. These amendments restructured IDEA into four parts: Part A addresses General Provisions; Part B includes the Assistance for Education of All Children with Disabilities; Part C covers Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities; and Part D provides for National Activities to Improve the Education of Children with Disabilities (*NICHCY News Digest 21*, 2000).

A key purpose of the IDEA Amendments of 1997 was to expand and promote opportunities for parents and school personnel to work in new partnerships at the state and local levels. IDEA helped fund special education and related services for about 6 million children with disabilities, or roughly 12 percent of the nation’s schoolchildren, during the 1998-1999 school year (Apling & Jones, 2002).

## **Important Features of IDEA**

The central importance of IDEA is that it requires that FAPE, including special education and related services, be made available to children and youth with disabilities<sup>3</sup>. Special education is defined as “instruction that is specially designed, at no cost to parents, to meet a child’s unique needs; specially designed instruction means adapting the content, methodology, or delivery of instruction.” There are 13 separate categories of disability in IDEA under which children can qualify, if sufficient need is demonstrated, for special education services (See Appendix A). By law, students who qualify for such services must then obtain an Individualized Education Program (IEP) plan, which is a written statement for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in a meeting in accordance with the requirements of IDEA and its associated regulations (NICHCY *News Digest 21*, 2000).

In addition, IDEA requires that states and school districts identify, locate and evaluate all children with disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disability, in order to determine eligibility for special education and related services (Apling & Jones, 2002). The legislation and its regulations also include provisions designed to ensure that students with disabilities are educated in what is known as the “least restrictive environment,” or LRE. IDEA’s LRE requirements, intended to encourage the education of children with disabilities in the same environments as their nondisabled peers, apply to students in public or private institutions or other care facilities.

Unless a child’s IEP requires some other arrangement, the child must be educated in the school he or she would attend if he or she did not have a disability (NICHCY *News Digest 21*, 2000). IDEA currently allows parents to use public funds to move their child out of a special education program to the private program of their choice if an IEP team agrees the child would be more appropriately served in such a program (U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, 2002).

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<sup>3</sup> [www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/IDEA/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/IDEA/index.html)



## **The Challenges on the Ground**

To assess the ability of any State's public school system to meet the goals mandated by IDEA requires an appreciation of the populations whose needs are to be served. As our nation's capital, Washington, D.C. has the unique distinction of being considered both a city and a state, while it also faces many of the economic and social challenges of the country's other metropolitan areas.

According to the most recent Census report, approximately 572,059 people live in the District of Columbia.<sup>4</sup> African Americans currently make up 60 percent of the population, whites account for 31 percent, and Asians round out the top three racial groups with an additional 3 percent of DC residents. The median age of the average citizen in the District is 34.6 years old and women account for more than half of the population (52.9 percent). An estimated 78 percent of the 25 years or older population has a high school degree or higher and nearly 40 percent of this age group hold at least a bachelor's degree.

Although the District of Columbia has a median household income of \$40,127, approximately 20 percent of DC residents live below poverty threshold.<sup>5</sup> Nearly thirty percent of the population spends 35 percent or more of their household income on rent. Despite the economic growth of the 1990s, the District of Columbia's unemployment rates was around 8.9 percent; in June of 2002 the unemployment rate rose to 12.9 percent in the District's poorer neighborhoods.

High rates of unemployment and poverty in the District have both had a substantial impact on the public schools. The number of children living in poverty recently rose to 32 percent, while the number of homeless families increased by 137 percent from 1999 to 2000. During the 2001-2002 school year, 73 percent of DC students received free or reduced-cost lunch. In addition to the increase in child poverty, the District has also seen

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<sup>4</sup> American Fact Finder@ U.S. Census Bureau. <http://factfinder.census.gov/>.

<sup>5</sup> State and County Quick Facts@ U.S. Census Bureau. <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/11000.html>.

an increase in the diversity of its student population. Although African Americans account for 83 percent of the student population in fall of 2002, the District has experienced a growth in its immigrant population. This has resulted in an increase in the number of students needing English language instruction. Approximately 12 percent of the DC student population is a part of a language minority in which English is the second language.

Given the strong association between growing up in poverty and the incidence of developmental disabilities and learning problems, it is not surprising that DCPS has also experienced a growth in the number of students requiring special education services. According to the most recent Census report (Census Bureau, 2000), there are 115,980 people with a disability living in the District. Of these persons with disabilities, 11,288 are between the ages of 5 to 20 years old.

Special education students account for 16.9 percent of the DCPS total student population of roughly 67,522. And while total enrollment in the DCPS has declined by 13 percent over the last decade, DCPS has seen an increase in the number of students with special needs. The number of special education students has risen from 8,178 in 1999 to 11,439 this year. The economic implications of this increase are not trivial. On average DCPS spends about \$7,057 per pupil on general education compared to \$8,624 per pupil on special education because of the additional requirements for qualified teachers and aides, as well as additional services.

Even aside from the costs of special education, available resources fall short of needs according to The D.C. Board of Education. This can be seen from the fact that despite declining enrollment overall, the Board has asked for a 14.5 percent increase in its proposed budget for 2004 -- an additional \$107.4 million -- that will make its total proposed budget for 2004 \$848 million<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> D.C. Public School Funding: Myth & Reality” *Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools*. February 2003. [www.dcwatch.com/parents/pu030207.htm](http://www.dcwatch.com/parents/pu030207.htm).

## **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF IDEA WITHIN THE DCPS**

Not unlike other public school systems with similar socioeconomic profiles, from the outset DCPS has faced significant obstacles in meeting the requirements of IDEA and some serious difficulties remain. Yet, as will be reviewed in this section, substantial progress has also been made within several aspects of the District's special education identification and delivery system.

### **At the Beginning, an Uphill Climb**

DCPS has historically had difficulty complying with many of the major requirements of IDEA. In 1998, the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) determined that several areas of special education in the District needed corrective action because they represented noncompliance with the requirements of IDEA. Some of the main issues of non-compliance that were noted included the failure to ensure that initial evaluations, placements, re-evaluations and hearings are completed in a timely matter, as well as the failure to ensure that children with disabilities receive services in the least restrictive environment and that hearing officer determinations are implemented within the proper time frame.

As a result of OSEP's findings of non-compliance with IDEA, DCPS entered into a Compliance Agreement with OSEP, aimed at improving results for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities and their families. In order to monitor compliance, OSEP designed the Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process to focus federal, state and local resources on improved results for children with disabilities and their families in DCPS. The Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process is a working partnership among OSEP, DCPS, the District of Columbia Department of Human Services (DHS), and parents

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and advocates for children with disabilities in the District. The work of the District's Steering Committee, which includes representatives from a broad array of stakeholders from DCPS, DHS and OSEP, constitutes a critical aspect of the process. The Steering Committee has assessed the effectiveness of DCPS systems for ensuring improved results and increasing compliance with IDEA and also helped design and coordinate implementation of the District's Special Education Improvement Plan<sup>7</sup> (Lee, 2002).

At the time of the Compliance Agreement, DCPS' special education division was widely seen as a program that had long failed to provide services to thousands of disabled children. There was a backlog of cases in which hundreds of children had not received special education services and several class action lawsuits were filed by parents against the District. In 1998 alone, DCPS expended approximately \$14 million on legal fees related to compliance failures in special education (4GL School Solutions, Inc., 2001). Two of the lawsuits, known as the Blackman and Jones cases, filed against DCPS in 1997 in U.S. District Court, were settled by the District in 1999. As part of the Court-ordered resolution, DCPS agreed to hold hearings or otherwise resolve the backlog of hearing requests, estimated at more than 700, by the end of the summer of 1999. DCPS also agreed to clear up the backlog of more than 1,000 students awaiting assessments and to additionally commit to creating new programs aimed at increasing the public schools' capacity to meet special education students' needs in their neighborhood schools. DCPS further agreed to hire an independent consultant, 4GL School Solutions, Inc., to assist them with efforts to create these new programs and develop the technology to track compliance with federal and local laws, as well as the settlement agreements in the Blackman and Jones cases (Bazon Center for Mental Health Law, 1999; Strauss, 1999).

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.k12.dc.us/dcps/specialed>

## **Notable Progress, Continuing Challenges, and Opportunities**

DCPS has made significant progress over the last few years in coming into compliance with IDEA and fulfilling the terms of the settlement agreements. A report issued on June 18, 2002 by OSEP noted several improvements since the 1998 Compliance Agreement. These areas of improvement have included the creation of a Parent Affairs Office, creation of programs and services to reduce out-of-district placements, movement toward inclusive practices, proactive technical assistance in support of transition services, increased identification and location of children with disabilities, greater stability of the central office staff and structure, and more timely independent hearings and mediation conducted by trained hearing officers. In addition, DCPS has successfully implemented the Special Education Tracking System (SETS), with the help of outside consultant 4GL School Solutions, Inc.

SETS has supported program and managerial improvements and has been termed by District Superintendent Paul L. Vance as “the technology backbone to administrative processes” (Vance, 2001). With the help of SETS in facilitating data-driven decision making for special education management within DCPS, compliance violations dropped significantly by July of 2001 and DCPS legal fees related to compliance failures decreased dramatically between FY1999 and FY2000. In the “State of the Superintendency,” released on May 22, 2001, Vance stated, “[OSEP] has noted that...DCPS has made significant progress.” He went on to note that the number of children awaiting initial referrals had been reduced from over 2,000 to less than 100 and that the backlog of hearing requests had been reduced from 900 to 5. Vance also cited the creation of almost 1000 new placements for students with special needs within the public schools and ensured that special education will remain one of DCPS’ highest priorities (Vance, 2001).

Despite this ample progress, however, there continue to be areas of non-compliance observed by OSEP. These are identified as untimely evaluation and placement, an inadequate supply of qualified personnel to provide a free appropriate education, lack of

availability of services and provision of assistive technology devices, placements based on factors other than individual student needs, failure to identify and correct deficiencies and failure to implement hearing officer decisions in a timely manner.

DCPS is working to address these problems through its most recent Special Education Improvement Plan. Megan Blamble, a Graduate Fellow at Georgetown University Law Center's Family Advocacy Clinic, as well as an advocate who has helped establish a coalition of advocates to work on systemic reform of the special education system in DC, commented recently, "DCPS almost completely cleared up the backlog in hearings by 2001 and has gotten much better in adhering to the service provisions in the law. But it is hugely problematic that IDEA is an unfunded mandate; I think every school district is troubled by this and urban schools are even more challenged. DCPS is trying to build special education capacity up in its local schools, but the lack of funding generates some serious inequities" (Blamble, 2003). Indeed, to give shape to DCPS' future prospects for meeting the goals of IDEA, the next section focuses in detail on matters related to fiscal challenges.

### ***The Cycle of Compounding Costs***

Regardless of the progress DCPS has made to date and its commitment to continue in this vein, the reality is that under any of the likely reauthorization scenarios, DCPS will be forced to continue to labor under severely inadequate fiscal resources. This means not only that DCPS will continue to be unable to fully respond to all of the needs of DC children, but will bear even greater costs as a consequence of that failure – in essence, creating a cycle of compounding costs.

As discussed earlier, IDEA provides that when a school district is unable to meet the needs of their special education students, they are required to send them to private schools that *are* adequately equipped to meet those needs. Currently, DCPS spends \$34,000 per child, on average, to send these students to private schools and approximately 2,563 special

education students in DCPS attended private schools this year. At present, each day more than 2,000 DC schoolchildren who need special education are bused to private schools, many more than an hour's ride from their homes. In addition to paying tuition at these private schools, DCPS is also required to pay the costs of transportation as well as the attorney's fees that are often associated with the adjudication of these cases. School officials estimate that the busing of special-needs students costs more than \$16,000 annually per student. Even more troubling, however, are the burdens that placement outside of DCPS may impose on the children themselves via long and cumbersome daily commutes, as well as separations of these children from their neighborhood peers.

The future is not entirely grim, however. DCPS has recently begun identifying private schools that provide special education services and joining with them to develop District schools. DCPS has asked the city's private schools to expand their capacity to educate students with special needs and has encouraged private providers outside of the District to consider relocating to the city. Plans to open a campus of St. Coletta's, an Alexandria school nationally recognized for excellence in special education, in Southeast DC offer an initial example of such collaboration. The new school, which will be located near the Stadium-Armory Metro stop, is expected to make it easier for parents to become involved in the school lives of their children, a critical component of educational success, especially in special education (Bryant, 2003).

### ***Barriers to Parental Involvement***

As stated earlier, one of the main goals of the 1997 IDEA Amendments was to increase the opportunities for parental involvement in the special education process. DCPS has made significant strides towards reaching this goal. The Parents' Special Education Service Center, was established, which seeks to improve the assistance provided to parents during the process of their child's evaluation for special education service. The goal of the Service Center is to stay in very close touch with parents in order to reduce the frustration and uncertainty that too often has accompanied the special education process in the

District. It is also aimed at helping parents to understand the special education evaluation process (See Appendices B & C). It has a General Contact Number (listed on DCPS' website), is open 99 hours a week, and provides services in several languages; however, the center is not designed to be a walk-in facility.

In addition, DCPS conducts free IEP Parent Trainings through its Office of Parent Affairs. These services are valuable, as one of the biggest barriers to parental involvement is the complexity of the process mandated by IDEA and the lack of understanding of the many aspects of this process among parents. Blamble notes, "It is a pretty elaborate process...and it needs to be a more transparent process. A lot of parents aren't totally clear about the referral process and when they go to the school, they get conflicting messages or delays in response."

DCPS faces the additional challenge of overcoming negative perceptions held by parents of children with special education needs that are the legacy of the litigious environment of recent years. In order to ensure substantial progress in the future, it will be critical for DCPS to reestablish a relationship of cooperation and trust with the parents of children receiving special education in the District.



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## Appendix A

### ***\*Who is Eligible for Services Under IDEA?***

The regulations for IDEA define a “child with a disability” as including a child (a) who has been evaluated according to IDEA’s evaluation requirements; (b) who has been determined, through this evaluation, to have one or more of the disabilities listed *below*; AND (c) who, because of the disability, needs special education and related services. The disabilities listed by IDEA are:

- Mental retardation;
- A hearing impairment;
- A speech or language impairment;
- A visual impairment, including blindness;
- Serious emotional disturbance (hereafter referred to as emotional disturbance);
- An orthopedic impairment;
- Autism;
- Traumatic brain injury;
- Other health impairment;
- A specific learning disability;
- Deafness;
- Deaf-blindness; or
- Multiple disabilities

*Source:* National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities *News Digest 21*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. January 2000. <<http://www.nichcy.org>>

## **Appendix B**

### ***Useful IDEA Websites for Parents:***

- Families and Advocates Partnership for Education (FAPE)  
[www.fape.org](http://www.fape.org)
- National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY)  
[www.nichcy.org](http://www.nichcy.org)
- Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)  
[www.cec.spedu.org](http://www.cec.spedu.org)
- IDEA Partnerships  
[www.ideapractices.org](http://www.ideapractices.org)
- Center for Law and Education, Education Rights of Students with Disabilities  
<http://www.cleweb.org/Disabilities/QuestionAndAnswer.htm>
- Special Child Magazine  
<http://www.specialchild.com/index.html>
- US Department of Education – Office of Special Ed and Rehab Services (OSERS)  
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/>
- Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights  
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/>
- Advocates for Justice and Education  
<http://www.aje-dc.org/>
- Parent Educational Advocacy Training Center  
<http://www.peatc.org/>
- Untangling the Web – Disability Links  
<http://www.icdi.wvu.edu/others.htm>
- District of Columbia Public Schools – Special Education  
<http://www.k12.dc.us/dcps/specialed/specedhome.html>
- US Department of Education – Office of Special Education Programs  
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/>



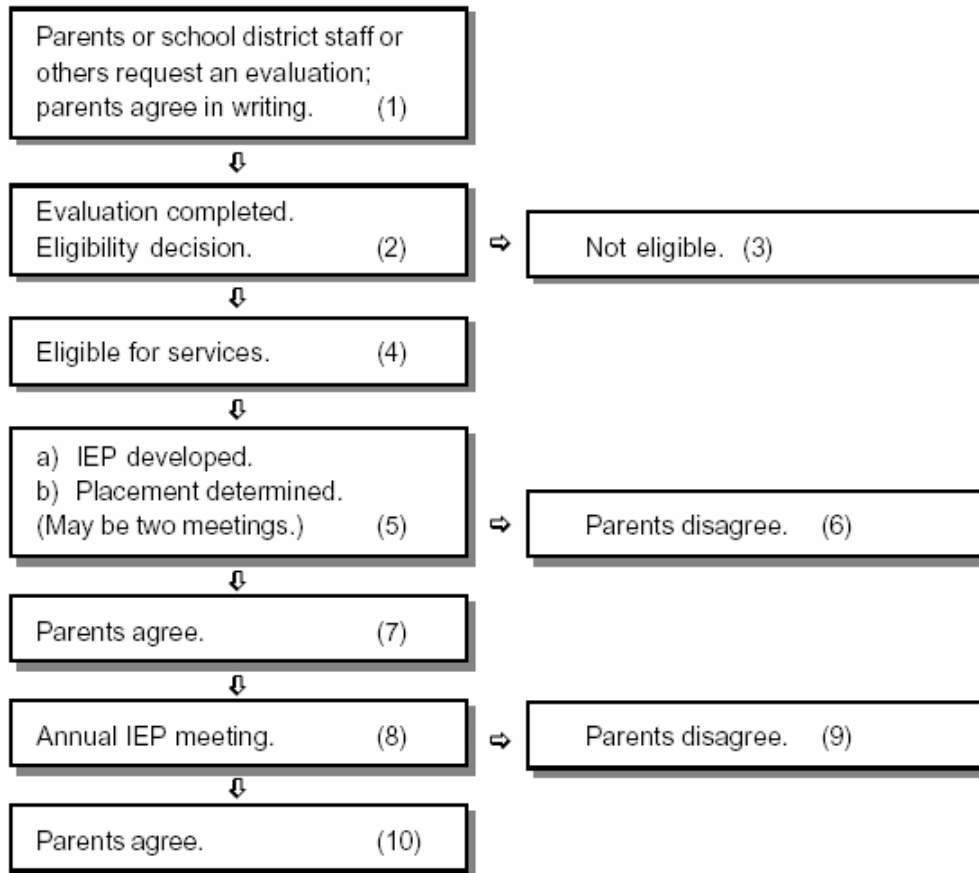
# Understanding the Special Education Process

FAPE-10

## An Overview for Parents

The chart below offers an overview of the special education process. It is not designed to show all steps or the specific details. It shows what happens from the time a child is referred for evaluation and is identified as having a disability, through the development of an individualized education program (IEP).

The process begins when someone (school staff, parents, etc.) makes a referral for an initial evaluation. An explanation of each numbered area follows the chart.



**Families and Advocates Partnership for Education (FAPE)**

FAPE Coordinating Office: PACER Center, Inc. 8161 Normandale Blvd., Minneapolis, MN 55437

952-838-9000 voice ~ 952-838-0190 TTY ~ 952-838-0199 fax ~ 1-888-248-0822 toll-free

Web site: [www.fape.org](http://www.fape.org) ~ E-mail: [fape@pacer.org](mailto:fape@pacer.org)

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