

# Perspective: Broken promise for funding law protecting students with disabilities

By The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 02.19.20

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Image 1. The U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, D.C. Photo: Andrew Van Huss/Wikimedia Commons.

In 1977, The Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) was created. This law later became the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The law was made to protect students with disabilities and make sure they receive the education they need to succeed.

Congress made promises in IDEA that it has not kept. Congress's failure has harmed many students with disabilities. This post explains the consequences of these broken promises.

## Who is Meghan Schrader?

This post was written by Meghan Schrader. Schrader has a master's degree in musicology. She has also taught college classes on disability studies. Her experience growing up with a learning disability motivated her to become a voice for people with disabilities.

This post was first published on a website called Rooted in Rights. This website posts stories to explain misunderstandings around disabilities.

In 1954, there was a U.S. Supreme Court case called *Brown vs. the Board of Education*. This case ended the separation of white and black students in school. The Supreme Court decided that every child should have the same opportunity for education.

Discrimination based on race is different from discrimination against people with disabilities. However, I bring this case up because speakers for people with disabilities used this idea to support including children with disabilities in their neighborhood schools.

### **IDEA Was Unpopular**

In 1977, IDEA was so unpopular that President Gerald Ford signed the law in secret. There were two reasons for the law not being popular. First, it promised to put students with disabilities and students without disabilities in the same classrooms. Second, it was expensive.

The law said that the U.S. government would pay 40 percent of the costs of IDEA. Today, the government pays for just 14.7 percent.

Lawmakers have proposed the IDEA Full Funding Act to close this gap. They say they will pay for all of IDEA by 2023. IDEA should have been fully paid for when it was made. Still, I am glad that this law has been filed.

### **Special Education Quality in Massachusetts**

I grew up in Massachusetts. People talked about civil rights and social justice, but they did not apply these to people with disabilities.

In 2000, state lawmakers voted to lower the quality of special education in Massachusetts to save money. Special education was not very important to them.

During that same year, my school decided that students needed to be failing to get special education services. This meant that students with disabilities who were doing well in school could no longer get the help they needed. Some of my services were cut, which made school even harder than it already was.



### **Paying For All Of IDEA**

Paying for all of IDEA would help break down this kind of unequal treatment. For example, more money for special education would help pay for the services that students with disabilities need to do well in school and get jobs.

Congress has broken its promise to pay for all of IDEA since 1977. Lawmakers broke this promise because some people think that special education is a waste of money. For example, President Ford claimed that the bill was too expensive. He said the U.S. government could not give all the money that IDEA needed.

But, this was not true. The U.S. government does have enough money to pay for IDEA. It showed that Ford did not value education for people with disabilities.

## **Paying For IDEA Today**

One reason against paying for special education is that people think that children with disabilities cost more money to educate. They think this money should instead be used only for kids without disabilities.

Not fully paying for IDEA has put people with disabilities in a bad situation. People with disabilities are sometimes disliked for needing help. At the same time, society has a system that does not teach them how to succeed.

If Congress finally pays for all of IDEA in 2023, its members should not be proud. They should say sorry to all of the people whose education has not been supported for almost 50 years.

## Quiz

- 1 What is the relationship between the Education for all Handicapped Children Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act?
- (A) The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was signed in 1977 and later became the Education for all Handicapped Children Act.
  - (B) The Education for all Handicapped Children Act was signed in 1977 and later became the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.
  - (C) Both the Education for all Handicapped Children Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act were passed in 1977.
  - (D) Both the Education for all Handicapped Children Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act failed to pass in Congress.
- 2 Why did Meghan Schrader feel frustrated after Massachusetts changed its special education policies?
- (A) She was forced to attend a different school that offered special education services.
  - (B) The changes decreased the number of special education teachers.
  - (C) She wanted them to add more special education services than they did.
  - (D) The changes removed some of the special education services she used.
- 3 Read the section "IDEA Was Unpopular."
- Which sentence shows the author's point of view about funding for IDEA?
- (A) In 1977, IDEA was so unpopular that President Gerald Ford signed the law in secret.
  - (B) The law said that the U.S. government would pay 40 percent of the costs of IDEA.
  - (C) Lawmakers have proposed the IDEA Full Funding Act to close this gap.
  - (D) IDEA should have been fully paid for when it was made.
- 4 What does the author want the reader to understand about educational access for students with disabilities?
- (A) Congress has made serious progress in its promise to fund special education through the IDEA Full Funding Act.
  - (B) Many Americans think that funding for special education programs such as IDEA is a waste of money.
  - (C) Congress has not yet fulfilled its promise to fund special education, which makes life harder and more unfair for students with disabilities.
  - (D) Many Americans support the full funding of IDEA, but Congress has not listened to them.