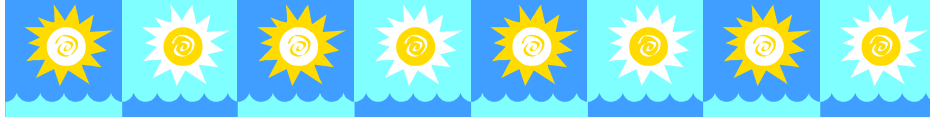


THE idea BEHIND IDEA (INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT)



Why is this law important to parents of children with special needs?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the landmark, cutting edge federal legislation that governs special education, for children /youth 3yrs. – 21yrs., and Early Intervention services to infants and toddlers, birth to 3 years of age, in the United States. Early special education legislation goes back to 1965. However, the federal program to provide services for infants and toddlers – birth to three was not included until an amendment was added in 1983.

What do you need to know about IDEA?

Some of IDEA's goals are "to level the playing field" between what, where, and how children with special needs and typically developing children are educated. The law is based on a philosophy that all children with special needs and their families should have the right to live, work, worship and play in their home towns and local communities. We know that children and youth with special needs become active, contributing members in their communities when they have the opportunities to share in the same experiences as other children.

IDEA is not a static law. As time goes by we learn more about what works or what doesn't work for children, what children with disabilities need in terms of education and support, and what early intervention and school systems need in order to respond. Every year, under IDEA, millions of infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities receive special educational services designed to meet their unique needs.

- For infants and toddlers with disabilities – birth to three – and their families, these special services are provided through Early Intervention. In New Jersey these services are offered through the NJ Department of Health and Senior Services. The goal of IDEA is that children should receive, to the maximum extent possible, Early Intervention services in the places where all infants and toddlers usually are – at home, in child care, at mommy & me classes and at library story hours, to name but a few of the places where Early Intervention can happen.
- For school-aged children and youth – 3 to 21 years - special education and related services are provided through their school system. The goal of IDEA is that all children ages 3 and up should be educated in what is called the least restrictive environment (LRE) which starts with consideration of your local, neighborhood school in the general education class for your child's educational placement.

As a nation we have learned there is no required skill set for living with one's family or in the community and the difference in ability does not make exclusion acceptable. The idea behind IDEA is important to understand when planning early intervention and educational services for your child. Several key mandates that are important to keep in mind:

For children birth to three

- Natural environments, which requires that infants and toddlers receive early intervention services in the home and community where all children and their families live and grow.
- Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP), a written plan that includes early intervention services for your child and family.

For children ages 3-21

- Free, appropriate public education (FAPE), which is required for all children, ages 3-21, with disabilities.
- Individualized Education Program (IEP), the written document prepared for each eligible child aged 3- 21 receiving special education services.
- Least restrictive environment (LRE), where children with disabilities are to receive their education.

To learn more about Early Intervention in New Jersey, speak with your Service Coordinator or visit us on the web at www.njeis.org.

To learn more about Special Education in New Jersey contact the Statewide Parent Advocacy Network at 800-654-SPAN or www.spannj.org, or your local school district.

Mid-Jersey CARES, Regional Early Intervention Collaborative
(732) 699-0944

Information taken from National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHD)
www.nichcy.org

Additional information on legislation can also be found at
<http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/Policy/IDEA/index.html>