

HOT TOPICS

A Tradition of Education Excellence and Opportunity for ALL

As it Relates to NH Special Education & Students with Disabilities

Public education is every citizen's one chance to a better life and the best way to strengthen our state and nation. It's the path forward to fostering a skilled workforce, personal responsibility, and self-sufficiency. Accountability is the cornerstone to ensuring our tax dollars are producing real results.

Today about 1 in 7 NH school children receive some form of special education. NH public schools **MUST** accept ALL students with a disability status regardless of national origin, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status to strive to foster the full potential of every student and to help them graduate job and career ready and become self-sufficient and contributing members of their communities.

The enactment of the Individuals with Disabilities Education ACT (IDEA) guarantees equal protection under the law for all children and youth with disabilities providing access to a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that meets their education and related services needs in the least restrictive environment (LRE).

"The implementation of IDEA has produced important improvements in the quality and effectiveness of the education received by more than six million children and youth with disabilities." (Frieden, 2003)

The "NH Standards for the Education of Children with Disabilities" are a model for student success as they support parental involvement and foster parent/school collaboration (*recognizing that parental control over their children's education is a fundamental NH value*); make the process more efficient, proactive and clear, reducing misunderstandings; protect students; and provide accountability and transparency; while being cost-effective, utilizing sound business practices, and producing results.

NH is proud to lead the nation in having one of the the *highest percentage of students with disabilities graduating from high school with a regular high school diploma, one of the lowest drop-out rates and a much higher than average percentage of students with disabilities enrolled in post-secondary education and/or employed* one year after completing high school (which means decreased dependence on government services).

NH already provides existing "school choice" options in public education through programs like Career and Technical Education (CTE), Extended Learning Activities (ELOs), and public Charter Schools (NH DOE, 2018) that provide opportunities in and outside of the classroom for hands-on, real world learning specifically related to jobs and careers. In cases where a student is struggling and parents believe the current school cannot meet the needs of that child (sometimes due to instances of bullying, unique programming needs, etc.), they have the right to appeal to their school board and request a school assignment change under RSA 193:3 Manifest Educational Hardship. Educational placement decisions for children with disabilities are made by each child's IEP team to ensure that the child receives services in a placement that can meet the child's needs and that is the least restrictive environment (LRE).

Inclusive Education benefits ALL students. Access to high quality inclusive education benefits both students with and without disabilities. Time spent educating students with and without disabilities together in the general education classroom environment and access to high academic expectations and core academic curriculum is positively correlated with math and reading achievement (Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013). In fact, students who experience intellectual disabilities educated in the general education classrooms make more progress in literacy skills compared to students served in special schools (Dessemontet, Bless & Morin, 2012).

One of the primary purposes of education is to prepare children for adult life. In a time where limited state and federal resources are being stretched, it's more important than ever that transitioning youth with disabilities (ages 14-21) leave high school as independent as possible and job and career ready. ***Students who have access to robust transition services beginning at age 14 are more likely to be employed after high school*** (Cimera, Burgess, & Bedesem, 2014).

Prioritizing Vocational Rehabilitation funding is necessary to provide Pre-employment Transition Services (PETS), for youth to engage in activities that promote successful transition into the working world including things like job exploration and counseling, internships, etc. before leaving high school. Supporting proven educational programs like project IMPACCT and Project Search will assist youth with disabilities to move into adult life and be productive working citizens in competitive integrative employment settings.

No Special Education Rights have been waived during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Children with disabilities are still entitled to receive a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in accordance with their IEP's, and when services cannot be provided or a child *cannot benefit from the way services are being delivered*, the IEP team needs to meet to determine what compensatory services the child may need to make up for what was not/ could not be provided. IEP team meetings can still be held, but are likely to be held remotely (e.g. using ZOOM or another online format). The NH Department of Education, Parent Information Center, Disabilities Rights Center, and others offer reliable information and resources on their websites.

Sources:

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