

# Reforms in education connected with teaching children with disabilities

[Education](#), [Special Education](#)



## **Research Project: Special Education**

Education is considered by most to be an invaluable asset in a young person's life. A child's whole future rests on the quality of education that they receive. For those without disabilities, free education has been in place for almost 150 years. However, it has only been within the past few decades that laws have been passed in the United States requiring the same to be offered to those with disabilities, and in many ways their opportunities for education are still not equal to those without any special needs. Many teachers are still not prepared to teach those with disabilities, but fortunately, reforms are still being made.

Before the 1960's, there was no support from the government for programs for disabled students. Parents of those with disabilities had to either educate their children themselves, or pay money to send them to special private schools which were often very expensive. Because of parent advocacy groups, President John F. Kennedy took the first steps to providing federal funding by creating the President's Panel on Mental Retardation, followed by President Lyndon B. Johnson, who passed the first acts providing funds for primary education. Unfortunately, even with the Elementary and Secondary Acts in place, there was still a very small number of students with disabilities being taught in public schools until 1975 when two new laws were passed: The Education for All Handicapped Students Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. These two laws guaranteed free education for all students regardless of their disability, and special education for those who qualified.

The IDEA is a law that has been reformed multiple times, the most recent of which was in 2004. At that time, it was aligned with the No Child Left Behind Act in several ways. It ensured firstly that students with disabilities would not be left out of federal assessments to ensure that they were being educated properly, and to go along with that, it also requires that teachers now be qualified to teach them and that they use “scientifically based instruction” (Turnbull 2). The 2004 reform also modified its stand on discipline based on whether or not the disabled student could realistically control his or her behaviors, and clarifies a parent’s role in the student’s education, making sure that they are actively participating.

But what does any of that really mean for those with disabilities? It gives parents the opportunity to report if a school is not providing the education that is required by law for their child, regardless of their disability. It means that the government is taking steps to ensure that education is equal as much as possible, and that for those who need special attention, it is given to them, although with some restrictions. And although they address the issue of better preparing teachers, there is still much that needs to be done in that department.

One of the most commonly used resources a teacher has in a classroom for their special needs children, are aides, otherwise known as paraprofessionals. However, Nancy Stockall points out in her article *When an Aide Really Becomes an Aid: Providing Professional Development for Special Education Paraprofessionals*, there is little to no reports of positive outcomes when a student works one on one with a paraprofessional. Instead, many

teachers found that the aide was not only giving them the answers rather than helping them to figure it out on their own, they were also preventing the child from interacting with their peers. When the paraprofessional was not prepared, they were actually hindering the child's education, rather than helping it. When they are properly prepared, they can be a huge help to teachers, but the special education teachers also need to be prepared supervise the paraprofessionals.

The best way for teachers to be prepared is to be willing to converse with the aides openly. The two need to be on the same page for everything that is going to be happening in the classroom and for the education of their students. The key is in communication. When preparing the paraprofessionals to help the teachers, funding is usually the issue. However, training them in large groups does not seem to be as effective as one-on-one training. Training alongside an experienced teacher who can juggle training them while still teaching a classroom is the best way to train a paraprofessional.

It is also important for administrators and education leaders to be trained in order to instruct the special education teachers. While communication, teamwork, and problem solving as a group are important for any school leaders, they are especially important within the special education programs, because they are presented with unique challenges. It is important for administrators to be able to balance the need to include disabled students in classes with those who are not disabled while also being sure that they are given the attention they need to receive their education.

While all of the reforms and advances that have been made are important, there is still much that can be done to improve the educations of those who are disabled. Primarily, I feel the government needs to focus more on preparation for teachers, as they are the ones who will be making sure their students are receiving a proper education. While some progress has been made, there is still more that can be done to ensure that teachers have the resources they need to be sure the classroom is a safe and educational place. I also believe there should be more done in preparing students without disabilities on how to behave around those with special needs. Unless they personally have a relative, or perhaps a close friend with a relative who is disabled, many children don't know how to react to those who might have some mental handicaps. It is important when including disabled students into the public school system that they won't be met with judging stares and cruel treatment by other students. If anything, that will hinder their education the most.

This topic reaches me on a personal level because I not only know people with mental disabilities and who have relatives with mental disabilities, I also have a physical disability that made attending high school extremely difficult for me and eventually resulted in my dropping out of high school and earning my GED. Although I can see the improvements that have been made over the years, there is still much that can be done within school systems to ensure that every child is receiving the best education that can be offered. As someone who wants to become a teacher in the future, I can only hope

that improvements will continue to be made in ensuring that education is equal for all students.