



Protection & Advocacy Project

400 E. Broadway, Suite 409
Bismarck, ND 58501
701-328-2950
1-800-472-2670
TTY: 711
www.ndpanda.org

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Celebrating 50 years of the Individual's with Disabilities Education Act

[Bismarck, ND] — The Individual's with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that ensures eligible students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment. Since its passage 50 years ago, on November 29th, 1975, IDEA has transformed public education by opening classroom doors to millions of students with a wide range of disabilities. In addition to school-aged services, IDEA also supports early intervention programs for infants and toddlers with developmental delays or disabilities including support for their families during the most critical years of development.

Before IDEA became law, only a small percent of students with disabilities had access to public education. IDEA changed that by guaranteeing individualized instruction through IEPs (Individualized Education Programs), ensuring parents have a meaningful role in educational decision-making, and supporting inclusion in general education classrooms whenever appropriate. These protections have helped students with disabilities achieve higher graduation rates and improved long-term outcomes, enabling them to reach their full potential.

Despite its successes, IDEA faces several significant threats at the federal level, including potential budget cuts that would reduce funding for special education services and a proposed transfer of oversight from the U.S. Department of Education to the Department of Health and Human Services. Such a transfer could weaken accountability, dilute IDEA's legal protections, and create confusion for families and schools as they navigate a new system. These changes have the potential to cause delays, disrupt services, and diminish the support available to students with disabilities.

The North Dakota Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Project is dedicated to advancing equality and inclusion for individuals with disabilities in every aspect of life, where we live, learn, work, and play. P&A advocates for the educational rights of individuals with disabilities, ensuring they have the support and resources they need to succeed. We commend Governor Armstrong's [recognition of the 50th anniversary of IDEA](#). This recognition underscores our state's commitment to ensuring that all students with disabilities receive the appropriate supports, technology, and resources to graduate prepared for college, careers, community living, and civic participation.