



Bureau Brief



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Special Education

Overview

All students with disabilities are assured access to special education services under the federal **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**.

Arkansas statute extends the assurance of a free and appropriate public education to students with disabilities (A.C.A. 6-41-202). For the 2012-13 school year, ADE reports that **54,222** students were enrolled in special education in school districts or charter schools, or about **11.5%** of all students.

In order to be considered eligible for special education programs, a child between the ages of three and 21 must be identified as having one or more of 12 distinct disabilities. These include but are not limited to autism, deafness, intellectual disability, orthopedic impairment, specific learning disability, and traumatic brain injury.

Special Education Plans

Each special education student has an **individualized education program (IEP)**, which serves as the plan for his or her specialized instruction. The IEP is a plan or program developed to ensure that a child who has a disability identified under the law and who is attending an elementary or secondary education institution receives specialized instruction and related services. IEP team members, including regular education teachers, special education teachers and parents, develop the IEP and determine the goals that outline performance associated with the student's grade level. The IEP also includes the special education programming and related services that are to be provided to meet each student's unique needs.

Identifying and Assessing Special Education Students

In a continued effort to accurately identify all students who may benefit from special education, a process known

as **Response to Intervention (RTI)** was implemented in 2004. Schools form teams that are used to identify those students with learning disorders and enhance and improve student performance. These teams collect extensive data on students' performance and progress over time in both math and literacy. If a student is not progressing as expected, the RTI team determines which intervention could be put in place. For example, a student may receive one-on-one help to give more individualized instruction, while another student may need more intensive help or more specific strategies.

The Arkansas Department of Education also ensures that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are not disabled. Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability threatens the success of the student in regular classes. In the 2011-2012 school year, 53.3% of children with IEPs spent 80% or more of the day in a regular classroom, while 12.5% of children with IEPs spent less than 40% of the day in a regular class environment.

All special education students are required to participate in state assessments. IEP teams determine whether each special education student will take the regular Benchmark exam, take the Benchmark with accommodations, or for a very small percentage with significant cognitive disabilities, take an alternate portfolio assessment. As with the general school-age population, the assessments for special education students are currently being amended to align with the Common Core curriculum. In the 2011-2012 school year, 45.42% of special education students tested as proficient in math, while 36.06% tested as proficient in literacy.

Funding

Currently, the foundation funding matrix funds 2.9 special education teachers per year, equaling about \$351.28 per 500 ADM in the 2012-2013 school year. This totals about \$160.6 million in funding, not including charter schools.

The state also provides catastrophic funding to school districts with special education students who require services exceeding \$15,000 (after Medicaid, federal special education grants, and other available third-party funding is applied). In 2012-13, the state provided \$11 million to 135 districts for 599 students, or about \$18,364 per student.

Another major source of K-12 special education funding in Arkansas is the federal IDEA Part B funding (also known as Title VI-B). In 2012-13, the state received nearly \$112 million Part B funding for school age children. Of that amount, the state passed on about \$99.3 million to school districts, charter schools and other entities, such as the Division of Youth Services, that provide special education services.

Schools can also become Medicaid providers and bill services in areas such as audiology, occupational therapy, speech therapy, personal care, and mental health services. In 2012-13, districts received the following amounts of Medicaid funding for each service.

Service	Medicaid Funding
Physical Therapy	\$4 million
Occupational Therapy	\$7.1 million
Speech-Language	\$8.1 million
Personal Care	\$640,000
Audiology	\$8,000