



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 2017-18 school year, ADE data shows that 61,553 students were enrolled in special education, which is about 12.9% 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:

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|-------------------------|------------------------------|
| Autism | Orthopedic Impairment |
| Deafness | Specific Learning Disability |
| Hearing Impairment | Speech/Lang. Impairment |
| Emotional Disturbance | Traumatic Brain Injury |
| Intellectual Disability | Vision Impairment |
| Multiple Disabilities | Other Health Impairment |

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 need to be provided to meet each student’s unique needs.

Student Placement

The Arkansas Department of Education 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 2017-18 school year, 55% of children with disabilities spent 80% or more of the day in a regular classroom, while 13% of children with disabilities spent less than 40% of the day in a regular class environment.

Student Assessment

All special education students are required to participate in state assessments. IEP teams determine whether each student with a disability will take the ACT Aspire or, for about one percent of those with significant cognitive disabilities, an alternate assessment. The alternate assessment for math and English language arts (ELA) is the multi-state alternate assessment (MSAA). In the 2016-17 school year, 13% of students with disabilities scored ready or exceeding in math on the ACT Aspire compared to 51% of students without disabilities. Nearly 10% of students with disabilities scored ready or exceeding in ELA on the ACT Aspire compared with 58% of students without disabilities. On the MSAA, 57% of students with disabilities scored ready or exceeding in math and 55% did in ELA.

Funding

Financial data for 2017-18 is not available in time for inclusion in this report. Currently, the foundation funding matrix funds 2.9 special education teachers per year, equaling about \$372.34 per 500 ADM in the 2016-17 school year. This totals about \$175.98 million in funding, including charter schools. The state also provides catastrophic funding to districts and charters 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 2016-17, districts and charters requested \$32.5 million in catastrophic funds, and the state provided \$11 million to 164 districts for 1,303 students, or about \$8,442 per student.

Another major source of K-12 special education funding in Arkansas is federal funds. This comes in two forms. The first is federal IDEA Part B funding (also known as Title VI-B). This funding is provided to the states, and subsequently to the districts and charters to meet the excess costs of providing special education and related services to children with disabilities. It is distributed based on historic funding levels, the number of children in the state, and the number of children living in poverty in the state. In 2016-17, districts and charters received nearly \$109 million in Part B funding.

The second form of federal funding is Medicaid. Schools can bill for Medicaid services provided to students with disabilities (and other Medicaid eligible students) in areas such as occupational therapy, speech therapy, personal care, and mental health services. Nearly 7% of districts’ and charters’ special education expenditures came from Medicaid in 2016-17. Districts and charters are also responsible for paying a Medicaid match payment. The match payment is typically about 30% of the total reimbursement.

Of the nearly \$443 million spent on special education services by districts and charters in 2016-17, 68% of those funds came from state and local sources and the remaining 32% came from federal sources. Nearly 75% was spent on instructional services. Almost 24% was spent on health expenditures, and the remaining 2% went towards other expenditures, such as transportation.