



SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING AND EXPENDITURES

Students with Disabilities

The federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Arkansas Code § 6-41-202 guarantees a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) to each child with a disability in Arkansas.

Every IDEA-eligible student has an individualized education program (IEP) which is a plan or program that ensures every child with a disability identified under the law attending an elementary or secondary educational institution receives specialized instruction and related services. IEPs are developed by the student’s IEP team that includes: regular education teachers, special education teachers, parents, a representative of the local education agency/school district, an individual who can interpret instructional implications of evaluation results, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise, and the child whenever appropriate.

There are 12 categories of disabilities used to determine students’ eligibility for special education:

1. Autism
2. Deafness
3. Hearing Impairment
4. Emotional Disturbance
5. Intellectual Disability
6. Multiple Disabilities
7. Orthopedic Impairment
8. Specific Learning Disability
9. Speech/Lang. Impairment
10. Traumatic Brain Injury
11. Vision Impairment
12. Other Health Impairment

In the 2018-19 school year, there were 63,935 students with disabilities aged 5-21 in Arkansas public schools, or 13.4% of total student enrollment in the state.

Student Placement

Under IDEA, students with disabilities are to be educated in the “least restrictive environment.” According to federal law (20 U.S.C. §1412(a)(5)(A)), students with disabilities should be educated with children who are not disabled “to the maximum extent appropriate.”

In the 2018-19 school year, **56% of students with disabilities spent 80% of the school day in a regular classroom, 29% spent between 40% - 79% in a regular classroom, 13% spent 40% or less of the school day in a regular classroom. The remaining 2% were in publicly funded facilities, private day schools, hospitals, private or public residential facilities, etc.**

Student Assessment

Students with disabilities are required to participate in state assessments. Students’ IEP teams must decide whether each special education student will take the ACT Aspire, the ACT Aspire with accommodations, or, for a very small percentage of students with significant cognitive disabilities, an alternate assessment (Dynamic Learning Maps – DLM).

In the 2018-19 school year, about 35,000 students with disabilities took the ACT Aspire. In 2019, 7.2% of students with disabilities tested ready or exceeding in English language arts (ELA) on the ACT Aspire compared to 49.8% of students without disabilities. In the same year, 12.2% of students with disabilities scored ready or exceeding in math compared to 52.5% of students without disabilities. About 4,000 students with disabilities took the alternate assessment in the 2018-19 school year. Nearly 21% of students with disabilities scored ready or exceeding in math and 41% did in ELA.

Special Education Funding

Arkansas funds special education primarily through **the foundation funding matrix**, which provides funding for 2.9 special education teachers for every 500 students, or \$381.70 per student in the 2018-19 school year. Arkansas also provides funding for special education in the form of **special education high-cost occurrence funding**. This is provided to districts and charters when the special education services required in a student’s IEP are unduly expensive, extraordinary, or beyond the routine and normal costs associated with special education. These funds are provided as reimbursements. Districts receive \$0 of the first \$15,000, 100% of expenditures between \$15,000 and \$65,000, and 80% of expenditures between \$65,000 and \$100,000.

In the 2018-19 school year, the total amount eligible for reimbursement was 33.9 million. Due to limited funding, districts and charters received \$13 million or 38.4568% of that maximum amount of reimbursement.

Districts and charters also receive federal funding for special education. This primarily is provided **through IDEA Part B funding** to meet the excess costs of providing special education and related services to children with disabilities. Districts and charters also receive federal funding through **Medicaid**, which reimburses claims for certain services included in the IEP.

Special Education Expenditures

Districts spent **\$458 million** on special education services, or about \$7,382 per student with a disability. Charters spent **\$8.8 million** on special education services, or about \$4,382 per student with a disability.

For districts, the most common special education expenditures were for instruction in resource rooms and self-contained classrooms. For charters, instruction in resource rooms and speech therapy and audiology services were the most common special education expenditures.