

The Social Outcomes of Special Education in the U.S.

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Moving through the special education system in the U.S. presents a variety of barriers to families and students, particularly when students graduate from high school. The legislation currently in place to help handicapped students transition out of school and into independent life and/or the workforce is hard to find, outdated, and poorly caters to families' needs. So, the U.S. government needs to centralize aid for families who have handicapped children despite their continued operation under the restraints of the current special education system.

Fast Facts

13% of all public school students are enrolled in special education programming

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) (amended as of 1990) requires students with disabilities to have Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) and Individualized Family Service Plans (IFSPs) ("Guiding practices," 2012) (Cash, 2013).

Students with disabilities are more likely to be successful after high school graduation if they have had a paid job as a student (Gold et al., 2013).

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled that schools are required to provide "more than de minimis" accommodations for students (Butrymowicz & Mader, 2017).

Myths and Misconceptions

of students enrolled in special education graduate on time compared to the 83% of all students that graduate on time

65%

Ambiguity

What does the Supreme Court's "more than de minimis" ruling really mean?

Moving Through the System

IDEA's IEPs and IFSPs are harder to navigate than most people would expect, so families struggle to use those programs effectively ("Past, present, and future," 2012).

Barriers Transcend the Disability Itself

Students with disabilities often struggle socially because of:

"a lack of training and education, which respondents listed as the most common barrier to employment aside from the disabilities themselves" (Wong, 2016).

The Problem

Special education in the U.S. has been stagnant following IDEA's amendment in 1990. Transitioning to college and employment is a challenge for adults with disabilities...

"...due to low expectations, limited awareness of options, lack of access, and lackluster opportunities" (Oertle & Bragg, 2014).

Staffing

Given the staffing shortage in special education, teachers are forced to take on administration, strategic, and human relations roles that they would otherwise not be qualified to do (Cash, 2013). These educators are also tasked with bridging the gap between "regular" students and their own, making their jobs even harder. Teachers must have a creative mindset to not only complete all of these additional tasks, but also to cater to the diverse needs of their students given the wide range of special services they will require (Tate, 2009).

Funding

The special education system suffers from funding challenges that inhibit their ability to accommodate students and parents to the desired and necessary degree. Lacking sufficient funds results in programming restrictions and the inability to hire qualified individuals for necessary jobs. As a direct result of this absence of funding, families and their children must discern their own future, which leaves them unsatisfied with their child's education (Thompson et al., 2018).

Subsequent Outcomes

Handicapped students suffer from poor educational and vocational outcomes after high school graduation. Their insufficient education leads to an inability to adapt to environments outside of the classroom, thereby affecting these students for a lifetime (Thompson et al., 2018). The problems the system faces do not occur in isolation – they feed off of each other to create a cycle that reduces handicapped people's chance to better integrate themselves into society.

Smaller Transitional Aid Options

Marriott Bridges from School-to- Work Program

Students who are leaving high school special education systems are connected with employers in need of employees and are taught how to work effectively (Gold et al., 2013).

Exploration Academy at St. Michael's Special School in New Orleans

Handicapped high school graduates are helped with entering the workforce and living independently ("Exploration Academy").

A Special Needs Plan in Charlotte, North Carolina

Families who have a child with special needs are offered family planning services, providing families with consultants for legal and social advice ("A special needs plan").

Recommendation

As seen above, different cities have found a variety of ways to cope with the lack of aid available to families with graduating students who have special needs. Therefore, the government should create a way to connect families to these preexisting programs rather than spending more time and effort than necessary trying to implement one size fits all legislation to address the issue. Students with special needs require a diversity of aid that is likely best served in a smaller, local way. Additionally, the existing legislation is so hard to navigate that families may not engage with another government program like IDEA offers with IEPs and IFSPs.

Goal: give families greater access to the resources already in place and available to them while keeping in mind the financial and staffing limitations of the special education system as a whole.

The federal government should create a database by which smaller transitional aid firms can register and families can search for help in their area. So, family consultants who already exist will be able to continue the work they do, and the government will not have to create programming or amend IDEA. The government would pay the fixed cost of setting up the database and monitor companies' registration applications. Ideally, there would be subsidies for families who can otherwise not afford the consultant services. While no similar program exists, putting these companies in one centralized location will ameliorate the current issues families face with the red tape of IDEA and put limited pressure on the government and education system.

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