



The Struggles of Academic Support to Students with Learning Disabilities

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I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The issue of support to those with learning disabilities has been prevalent in the United States' society for the past forty to fifty years, increasing the debates to more modern times as of 2025. The brief will cover how the United States has experienced a lack of support to those with learning disabilities, and how to address the concerns in a manner that brings equality to students.

II. OVERVIEW

Before the Civil Rights Era and other reforms that happened during the twentieth century, students with learning disabilities were often excluded from the normal school system due to the lack of specialized education and training being accessed. Taking into account the learning differences and other factors needed to enable a student with the right amount of assistance and tools, new innovations of the modern day like text-to-speech and audiobooks were steps in the right direction for the overall support of students with learning disabilities. A large proportion of students did not have access to these accommodations and support systems needed to succeed in their academic environment. From the Learning Disabilities Association of America, "There are approximately 56.6 million students in elementary and secondary schools in the United States (Educationdata.org). 20%, or 1 in 5, would

represent 11.2 million students with learning and attention issues. Approximately 8.25% are identified in school and receive some specialized instruction or accommodations through an IEP or a 504. Less than half of the total number of students estimated to have learning and attention issues. What about the other 11.75%, or 6.65 million, students?"[1]. Thus, the initiative and innovation of the modern day has still not helped the majority of students with learning disabilities, pushing the need for a different approach to ensure that all locations across the United States have access to support for all their students

A. Relevance

American society outlines the importance that every student in the United States should have access and the opportunity to the same level of education as the person next to them, despite the struggles and obstacles in the way. If one school does not have the tools to equip support for those with learning accommodations and another school does, it is harming the student in the long run and is breaking the 14th amendment, stating that denying any person of "life, liberty, or property" without due process of the law is unconstitutional connecting to the idea that inclusion is a must in today's society for further progression and can be achieved through public initiative. Furthermore, the stigma against those with learning disabilities changes if they are more interconnected and included with the same

curriculum and not rejected from school with other kids.

III. HISTORY

A. Current Stances

With the turning point and start of children with learning disabilities is the PARC vs. Pennsylvania & Mills vs. Board of Education in 1971, children with learning disabilities were granted the right to public education starting the trend of increased awareness and support for the programs. Transitioning to the 1990's, further protections were added and implementation to the U.S. school curriculum was prevalent now in many schools, rather than a handful, which were in smaller numbers. Now in today's modern day, equity has been the major concern due to the lack of public funding from school districts to address the concerns of parents with students who struggle with learning disabilities and need accommodations. Mark Elias states in an article with Discovery ABA Therapy that "18% of students with learning disabilities drop out of school"[2]. eighteen percent of students with learning disabilities, approximately 2 million students drop out, which is significant in comparison to the 11.2 million students, who have learning disabilities in need of accommodations. Consequently, policy problems and debates have arisen to determine the undermining cause and future initiative that must be taken. As someone with expressive and receptive language disorder, we need to spark a change because the access that I got is definitely not the same for other students in the United States.

IV. POLICY PROBLEM

The first problem that is associated with students who struggle with learning disabilities is disproportionate identification for certain ethnicities and races, which falls also under misclassification. To elaborate on the disproportionate identifications, there are potential biases that are assumed during these surveys and observations, which gives inaccurate data to see the effects of support for these types of students, making it hard to improve and expand upon. NeaToday illustrates these ideas by criticizing the fact that "People make a lot of judgment calls," says Woodward. "Those biases ... play into your beliefs around the child's capacity"[3]. Thus, the systematic assumptions towards ethnicities results in inaccurate assumptions and data, altering the method of teaching used and ultimately not helping the students learn and grow, which has happened to numerous across United States history. Such cases are seen in examples like white students being classified into kids who have dyslexia and kids of color with intellectual diseases or emotional disturbances. Additionally, the rates identified are used based on the racial composition of the school consequently. Thus, the education is gapped and these students who are misinterpreted to be students that they are not get different educations, which disrupts the equity that varies between student to student. The second problem lies in the timing of interventions to help support the students starting from the age of a toddler who is and will be starting school soon. When the support is not directed at the appropriate and correct time, the education can be limited as the information might be received and processed

slower due to the fact that one student may start later or earlier than another. As an example, some barriers may include the right resources and the confusion between whether the resources given at one time is correct or if the resources given at another should be later. Not only the impacts come from the learning environment, developmental issues may also arise which can be detrimental to some of these students. AP News mentions that “About one in six children in the U.S. has at least one developmental disability or other developmental delay, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Since all U.S. states and territories accept federal funding for Early Intervention, they are obligated to provide services to kids who qualify under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act”[4]. The lack of sufficient timing can be seen as a critical factor that damages the learning ability and equity that all students within the United States can obtain, increasing the gap between kids with and kids without learning disabilities. Connecting back to the topic of race within these types of services and programs, black and hispanic children are less likely to receive these programs/services to the color of their skin and discrimination benign taken into account even though they are eligible and meet the criteria to have their kids being placed for accommodations and additional support. This racial system we live in is due to the systematic racism within society and from many centuries ago in which rights were not granted for certain ethnicities impacting the modern day in a harmful way for millions of immigrants from across the world. The third and final problem lies within achievement gaps between ethnicities and the inadequate resources provided to some areas more than others due to public funding or lack of attention to students

with learning disabilities. In other words, some schools don't have enough support and information to help these students succeed in their environment, which is why the rates of success for example in work like Algebra 2 and Chemistry is very far from proficiency not only for students with limited resources, but for students of color. These opportunities that are critical for success in college are underlooked and not supported enough resulting in, again, disparities amongst communities and ethnicities across the United States.

V. TRIED POLICY

Recent policy that was implemented includes what the State of Texas has done in aiding students with learning disabilities. From the early 2020's, Texas schools have received special funding and the adoption of a new program ensuring more resources to the public school system: “In 2023, dyslexia advocates like Cooper successfully pushed for students with the condition to be served under the federal government's official umbrella of special education rather than a more informal process known as 504 accommodations, with the goal of providing them more fair and comprehensive services.

The move resulted in tens of thousands more students being routed into already overloaded and underfunded special education departments, adding to the strain on schools. Those students split time between regular and special education — and are therefore subject to the disability penalty”[6]. Such an example can be seen as a big effort to support and push the cause for other states within the U.S to draw large amounts of money each year for continuous support for specific special services like a 504 accommodation plan, which many in my school also use in the

State of California.

VI. POLICY OPTIONS

The first policy option I will explore and take a look at is more and full funding of the IDEA. The IDEA stands for Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and if there is an Increase in federal funding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the promised 40% to ensure schools can provide all mandated services, including specialized staff, assistive technology, and individualized instruction can be fulfilled. This funding would eliminate financial inequality across districts, reduce overburdened families, and improve service consistency for students with learning disabilities. The potential policy ensures that a compromise with federal law is supported by supportive and the correct resources, not local funding capacity. The second policy option includes mandating early screening within the school systems of the United States. Screening in education terms is used to identify areas of students at risk of poor learning and need additional support for their environment. The Government can require states to implement universal early screening for learning disabilities by first grade using specific tools to aid their search. Early identification must be paired with mandatory evidence-based interventions to prevent widening achievement gaps. Additionally, teacher training and ongoing monitoring would be built into the system to ensure accurate implementation and support across all school demographics and not based on personal biases, nor systematic racism within the society that we live in. The third option is to incentivize the practices of inclusion for students with accommodations and rewarding districts who do so at a large scale with the sufficient resources. Potentially, we can tie state and federal special education funding to measurable improvements in inclusion, such as increased time

in general education settings and use of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Schools demonstrating growth in academic performance and engagement among students with disabilities should receive additional support. The shifts focus on minimum compliance to educational equity through accountability and innovation.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, My writing mentioned the potential policies and initiatives that can be taken to promote educational equity for students who experience and are in need of special accommodations that fall under learning disabilities and additional support. Additionally, highlighting the attempted policies of recent times and the history of the issue including historic supreme court cases and backed statistics and data to support the educational equity within the United States of America like the racial injustices occurring in the nation and the disproportion and perception that certain ethnicities had certain issues like intellectual disabilities or dyslexia.

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