

# Elements of a Free and Appropriate Education



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Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is a legal term used in the United States that ensures that children with disabilities have access to an education that is tailored to their individual needs and is provided at no cost to their parents or guardians. FAPE is a critical component of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which is a federal law enacted to protect the educational rights of students with disabilities.

Under IDEA, all eligible children with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21 years are entitled to receive special education and related services that are designed to meet their unique needs and help them make meaningful educational progress. These services are provided in the least restrictive environment, which means that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated alongside their non-disabled peers.

# Key Elements of FAPE

## Individualized Education Program (IEP)

FAPE recognizes that each child possesses a unique set of strengths and challenges. To provide the most effective education, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are crafted for every eligible student. All IEPs guarantee all these elements of FAPE.

## Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Students with disabilities should not be isolated from their non-disabled peers. FAPE ensures that education is delivered in the Least Restrictive Environment, allowing students to participate in general education classrooms to the maximum extent appropriate. This approach fosters an inclusive culture and promotes social growth for all learners. (Stay tuned for a blog post on this.)

FAPE aims to create an inclusive educational environment where students with disabilities can develop their skills and abilities alongside their non-disabled peers, promoting a sense of belonging and equal opportunities for all students. It recognizes that each child is unique and requires an individualized approach to learning to reach their full potential

## Equal Access to Opportunities

FAPE removes the barriers that have historically hindered students with disabilities from accessing

quality education. FAPE ensures access to specialized services and assistive technologies, so your child can fully participate in the learning process, explore their interests, and develop their talents alongside their grade-level peers. This includes having the same access to grade-level field trips, assemblies, and birthday parties to the best of your child's ability. (Sometimes these things are too over-stimulating.) This is also where teacher-parent collaboration is important.

## Collaboration and Parental Involvement

An essential point of FAPE is the collaborative effort involving parents or guardians, teachers, specialists, and school administrators. This teamwork ensures that all stakeholders work together to design your child's IEP.

## Zero Cost to Parents

FAPE requires that the services and support provided to students with disabilities must be provided at no cost to their parents or guardians. The government funds special education programs to ensure accessibility to all eligible students. This can include transportation to and from school if your child's disability impacts their ability to access their education, assistive technology, wheelchairs, or walkers to name a few but this list depends on what your team determines your child needs to access their education.

# Procedural Safeguards

IDEA also includes procedural safeguards to protect the rights of students and their parents or guardians, such as the right to participate in the IEP process, the right to dispute decisions through due process, and the right to access educational records.

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If you have read my previous posts, you should be seeing some common threads within the world of special education. Everything is interconnected. Starting with the law that tells teams what they need to do to create a rock-solid IEP that drives FAPE and your rights as parents. I'll be back to share more. If you have questions or what me to answer a specific question, please send me an email at [Alison.Whiteley@toad-allyexceptionallearners.com](mailto:Alison.Whiteley@toad-allyexceptionallearners.com)

Note: It's important to note that FAPE is specific to the United States educational system and may have different equivalents or variations in other countries' special education laws and policies.

