



A History of the
Families and Advocates
Partnership for Education
Project (FAPE)

*Linking Policy and Practices to Improve
Educational Outcomes for Children with Disabilities*



www.FAPE.org

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PACER Center—The **P**arent **A**dvocacy **C**oalition for **E**ducational **R**ights expands opportunities and enhances the quality of life of children and young adults with disabilities and their families, based on the concept of parents helping parents.

FAPE—The **F**amilies and **A**dvocates **P**artnership for **E**ducation project is a strong partnership that aims to improve the educational outcomes for children with disabilities. It links families, advocates, and self-advocates to communicate the new focus of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The project represents the needs of 6 million children with disabilities.



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Introduction

“Together we have the best IDEA”

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 1997 placed a renewed emphasis on improving results for children with disabilities by requiring challenging curricula, higher expectations, and regular assessment of progress, with an increased focus on parental involvement. Children with disabilities were expected to obtain high quality outcomes, similar in expectations for children who do not have disabilities. These enhanced expectations for children with disabilities required a new commitment on the part of stakeholders in the field, including families and advocates, to understand the changes to the law and the implications of such changes for their respective roles in improving results. IDEA 1997 presented a unique and exciting opportunity to build upon what was learned over the last 25 years and to support children with disabilities to achieve high standards in schools, communities, and workplaces across America.

The IDEA Partnership Projects Created

In response to these challenges, the U.S. Department of Education spearheaded a culture change in the ways in which parents and advocates, service providers, administrators, and policy makers communicated and collaborated to improve educational outcomes for the over 6 million children in the United States who receive special education services. The Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) sought proposals from organizations willing to work on these issues, using a new paradigm. The result was the creation of four IDEA Partnership Projects, an unprecedented network of over 105 organizations representing the various stakeholders that were committed to collaborate on behalf of children who receive special education. Through the IDEA Partnership Projects, these groups learned from one another, worked together, and made changes to improve outcomes for children.

The IDEA Partnership Projects were funded by OSEP for a five-year period which, began on October 1, 1998, and ended on September 30, 2003.

The partnership consisted of four distinct projects representing:

- **families and advocate**—FAPE (*Families and Advocates Partnership for Education*)
- **teachers and related service providers**—ASPIIRE (*Associations of Service Providers Implementing IDEA Reforms in Education*)
- **administrators**—ILIAD (*IDEA Local Implementation by Local Administrators*)
- **policymakers such as school board members and state legislators**—PMP (*Policymaker Partnership*).

The national coordinating office for each of the IDEA Partnership Projects was PACER Center (FAPE), the Council for Exceptional Children (ASPIIRE and ILIAD), and the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (PMP). Each of these national coordinating offices then developed a network of partners who shared its vision for helping children with disabilities succeed in school. OSEP took an active role in the project and acted as the fifth partner. The IDEA Partnership Projects committed to team up to ensure that all children with disabilities are learning, progressing, and meeting high expectations.

Project Coordinating Committee (PCC)

To ensure maximum collaboration among the IDEA Partnership Projects, a Project Coordinating Committee (PCC) was formed consisting of the executive directors, principal investigators, project directors and other senior staff from each project. Two project officers from the Office of Special Education Programs joined them. The chairperson of the PCC was rotated from among the four projects. Face-to-face meetings were held quarterly and were enhanced by regular conference calls. Evaluators for each of the four projects routinely attended the quarterly meetings.

The PCC developed joint strategies and projects to ensure that a common message on the new IDEA '97 law and regulations was projected across the constituencies of the four projects. Initially each organization dedicated funds for a specific joint strategy, but in years four and five, each project pooled funds into a central account to fund priority activities.

Examples of activities that were spearheaded by the PCC were:

- the development of issue papers framing selected issues within IDEA
- the development of joint marketing and educational materials

- sponsorship of two national summits on the implementation of IDEA
- sponsorship and the provision of technical assistance to planners of eight state summits on the implementation of IDEA
- provision of technical assistance and resource materials to a variety of organizations
- sponsorship of conferences dealing with children's mental health
- sponsorship of a one-day conference on the federal No Child Left Behind law; and
- the provision of joint training opportunities for the partners of each IDEA Partnership Project.

All of these activities, as well as many others, served to provide an example to the field on the necessity and advantages of using a cross-collaborative approach in ensuring effective implementation of IDEA. Simultaneous to participating on PCC priority activities, each IDEA Partnership Project embarked upon meeting its unique goals and objectives. Whenever possible and advantageous to do so, other IDEA Partnership Projects were included in these activities as well.

The Families and Advocates Partnership for Education (FAPE)

The FAPE Project goals focused specifically on helping families of children with disabilities and advocates from throughout the country to understand and use IDEA '97 by:

- 1) promoting research-based practices to help children with disabilities achieve greater educational outcomes.
- 2) ensuring a broad understanding of IDEA through collaborating, networking, and conducting outreach activities.

The FAPE Project included 11 Core partners, 21 Community partners, and 15 Extended Network partners representing America's grass roots in the truest sense. The FAPE partners and their respective coalitions of grass-roots parent and advocacy groups reached racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse families of children, with and without disabilities, in all areas of the United States, Puerto Rico, and U.S. territories, including urban, suburban and rural areas, and American Indian Nations (reservations and trust lands).

The Impact of FAPE

A National Presence

This impressive network of partners of parent and advocacy organizations was unprecedented in size and scope. Through this diverse network, FAPE established a strong national presence and made a significant impact on the nation's special education system by providing a wide range of services and materials focused on children and young adults with disabilities and their family members. FAPE developed and maintained a system of ongoing, coordinated communication with shared knowledge and skills among the partners, thus enabling them to respond and advocate for the educational needs of children within their respective constituencies.

For some partners, such as Fiesta Educativa and Family Voices, involvement in FAPE represented the first time they incorporated resources about special education into their menu of services and outreach efforts.

Through an annual evaluation process, FAPE core partners reported increased knowledge and capacity to provide individual assistance, conduct trainings, and disseminate information on IDEA, as well as to promote using best practices for including students with disabilities in the general education curriculum.

In building the partner knowledge base, FAPE was able to provide direct individual assistance to **71,757** families, advocates, professionals, and others on IDEA and related topics. Impact evaluations revealed that **80** percent of the parents surveyed said the information they received enabled them to obtain at least some of the services they felt their child needed; **93** percent said they felt more confident in their ability to work with the schools after speaking to a FAPE partner; and **84** percent agreed that they would not have received the assistance they needed if this service had not been available.

The Impact of FAPE

A Common Message

FAPE regularly disseminated information by monthly mailings, an electronic news line, and listserv. Several other tools over the course of the project were developed to support partners and other organizations.

These included the following curriculums that were jointly developed by FAPE and The National Technical Assistance ALLIANCE for Parent Centers:

- 1) IDEA '97
- 2) Positive Behavioral Interventions
- 3) Parent and Professional Collaboration: A Cultural Perspective
- 4) Understanding ADHD; and
- 5) Bullying Intervention Strategies.

The curriculums were made available in binders that included overheads and in CD versions. Several of the curriculums were translated into Spanish and some had Native American versions. All education-focused curriculums were vetted by the U.S. Department of Education.

They were disseminated to FAPE partners and IDEA Partnership Projects and the 106 Parent Training and Information Centers (PTIs) and Community Parent Resource Centers (CPRCs) across the nation. Throughout the length of the project, individual parent centers were often included in activities developed for the FAPE Partners, including joint workshops and dissemination efforts. Many found themselves on joint IDEA Partnership Project taskforces, committees, and panels at conventions. Several parent centers participated in the development and review of various FAPE products.

The Impact of FAPE

FAPE also produced 23 fact sheets and research briefs that were vetted by the Office of Special Education Programs and used by partners and other organizations to provide critical information to families, affiliate support groups, professionals, and others. During the life of the project, over 9 million people received fact sheets and newsletters containing FAPE information. The FAPE Web site included these fact sheets, research briefs, and other related information, including 866 links to other sites. This *www.fape.org* site proved to be a highly effective way to ensure access to information in family-friendly manner. Since its rollout, *www.fape.org* has received **500,000** visitors to date. Additionally, virtually all FAPE partners operated separate Web sites that provided information about FAPE, IDEA '97, and other education-focused information.

The FAPE Project provided presentations at 645 state and national conferences to 100,000 participants and disseminated various products from the partners to over 76,000 people. At the local level, partners provided over 530 workshops for over 16,000 parents, advocates, and professionals and provided materials to over 8,000 individuals. Through impact surveys conducted with individuals who attended these workshops, 63 percent responded that a child's IEP or education changed and/or they received more appropriate services as a result of attending these workshops/presentations.

FAPE partners conducted these conferences and workshops across the country with their affiliate groups and, in some cases, added new chapters as a result of the trainings. One partner said *“Our trainings are taking off like wildfire.”* Many partners reported that as a result of their increased knowledge, their organizations were perceived with greater credibility.

The Impact of FAPE

Outreach to Communities That Were Traditionally Underserved

Throughout the course of the FAPE project, a special emphasis was placed on ensuring that families, who have traditionally been underrepresented and underserved, received information on IDEA '97 and related topics. Twenty-nine workshops were customized specific to the needs of parents of children attending Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) schools. One thousand-five hundred Native Americans attended these sessions.

FAPE led the nation in creating a higher standard for ensuring that information was presented in alternative languages and formats. Brochures, fact sheets, research briefs, and curricula were routinely translated into Spanish, Hmong, and Somali. Audiotapes, videos, CDs, and DVDs were produced to ensure that the information was presented in a variety of mediums. These written materials continue to be disseminated to make a difference for families and professionals.

The Impact of FAPE

Larger Than the Sum of Its Parts

The FAPE partners, who represented a diverse group of organizations, were committed to working together to achieve common goals. Many personal and collaborative relationships were built over the duration of this project and remain in place today. **Some examples of these joint efforts include:**

- A training workshop designed and conducted by the National Council on Independent Living and the Center for Law and Education, which focused on IDEA and No Child Left Behind Act.
- The National Association of Children with Visual Impairments (NAPVI) and the National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC) have been sharing information and building linkages that led to members of the NDSC affiliates attending workshops sponsored by NAPVI in several state and local communities.
- Additionally, Fiesta Educativa and NAPVI collaborated to help strengthen and expand statewide parent networks in Texas, Florida, and California.

FAPE partners also viewed the focus on collaboration across the four IDEA Partnership Projects as an additional opportunity to build relationships and share information with groups with whom they had limited contact in the past.

The FAPE Partners felt the other stakeholders were gaining a better understanding of the parent and advocate perspective. Several reported that they had a “**seat at the table**” for the first time.

The Impact of FAPE

Larger Than the Sum of It's Parts (cont.)

As the project evolved during the five years, FAPE Partners were invited to attend and present at state and national conferences sponsored by ASPIIRE, ILLIAD, and the PMP. Additionally, FAPE partners came to the table to work on jointly conceived work and had substantive dialogue on topics related to discipline policies in IDEA, mental health services, over-representation of minority children in special education, parent involvement, transition services and other collaborative activities that occurred across the four IDEA Partnership Projects.

These experiences fostered an understanding on the behalf of the FAPE partners as to the value of reaching out and including key stakeholders in their outreach efforts aimed at families. Several of the partners began to include representatives from mental health, vocational rehabilitation, and juvenile justice in their dissemination efforts. The FAPE partners came to the realization that involving all of the varied stakeholders would result in a greater understanding and willingness to work together to create positive changes at the local, state, and national levels. An important catalyst critical for promoting this continued collaboration and capacity building were the national and state summits, whereby members of all IDEA Partnership Projects gathered to learn from one another on selected topics of concern.

Representatives from the FAPE partners and parent centers participated in the two national summits held in Washington D.C. These summits represented, for the first time ever, the coming together of special education leaders representing parents and advocates, teachers and other service providers, school administrators, and policymakers to exchange information and learn from one another. The first summit attended by over 800 representatives focused on cross collaboration and promoted developing a better understanding of the many perspectives that are part of the special education system. It identified approaches to address the implementation of IDEA. The second

The Impact of FAPE

summit, attended by over 700 representatives, focused on sharing expertise that included information on the latest research practices affecting students with disabilities, across several strands. It included a significant effort to link researchers to parents and practitioners in order to discuss research results, strategize on dissemination, and identify possible research topics.

The FAPE Project was borne out of a **new way of thinking**, one that values the voice of parents and advocates and believes in the value of their message. As part of the IDEA Partnership Projects, family and advocate organizations had an opportunity to collaborate with other critical partners and be **“viewed as equals.”** The FAPE partners flourished in the richness and diversity that each represented, and their work together broadened their perspectives.

The true measure of FAPE’s effectiveness will likely occur in years to come. Systems change efforts typically take longer than five years. Parent-professional collaborations, cross-stakeholder participation that genuinely includes parents and advocates, improved educational outcomes for children with disabilities, enhanced responsiveness to members of our society who have been traditionally underserved, reduction in the percentage of minority children over represented in special education, and increased parent participation in the educational planning for their children with disabilities are possible future performance measures and trends in which FAPE may have had a direct or indirect influence. Project materials and curriculums may be used by organizations throughout the country for years to come.

One FAPE partner suggested that the partnership was *“larger than the sum of its parts”* and that *“if we did our work alone, we wouldn’t have opened so many doors.”*

FAPE Core Partners

The FAPE Core Partners consisted of the following organizations, which agreed to engage in significant and substantial activities in an effort to implement the project’s goals and objectives:

Academy for Educational Development (AED)—a national organization, which operated the National Information Center for Children and Youth with Disabilities (NICHCY), an information clearinghouse used extensively by parents who have children with disabilities, advocacy organizations, and education service providers.

The Center for Law and Education (CLE)—a national advocacy organization dedicated to improving the quality of education for *all* children and youth, in particular those from low-income families.

Family Voices—a national grass-roots network that serves children with special health care needs in the U.S. It provides direct assistance and information services to parents of young children with disabilities, including those with severe disabilities, throughout the country.

Federation of Families for Children’s Mental Health (FFCMH)—a national parent-run organization for families of children with emotional, behavioral, or mental disorders, with a network of over 100 chapters and groups present in every state throughout the country.

Fiesta Educativa—an organization that assists Latino and Spanish-speaking families in urban and rural areas throughout the nation, particularly in California and Arizona.

National Association for Parents of the Visually Impaired (NAPVI)—a national organization that has a member in every state and provides resources to families of children with vision impairment.

National Coalition for Parent Involvement in Education (NCPIE)—a coalition of over 80 national organizations that work together to foster family, school, and community partnerships.

National Council on Independent Living (NCIL)—a national organization that provides information and assistance to more than 450 Centers for Independent Living serving throughout the nation. NCIL serves every state.

National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC)—a national advocacy organization for people with Down syndrome that has 600 affiliated parent groups encompassing all 50 states.

National Indian Child Welfare Association (NICWA)—a national organization that assists American Indian families who reside on reservations throughout the country and whose members include families, tribes, individuals, family service organizations, and Indian child-welfare programs.

The Technical Assistance ALLIANCE for Parent Centers—a national technical assistance project responsible for providing and coordinating technical assistance services to all 106 federally funded parent training and information centers and community parent resource centers in the United States and its territories.

FAPE Community Partners

The FAPE Community partners included the following organizations who agreed to disseminate information generated by the project to their constituents through the sponsorship of workshops, use of Web sites, and newsletters. Each of these organizations provided invaluable services to the project and to their members:

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (AG Bell)—an international membership organization promoting the use of spoken language by children and adults with hearing loss.

Alliance for Technology Access (ATA)—a network of community-based resource centers, developers, vendors, and associates dedicated to providing information and support services to children and adults with disabilities and increasing their use of standard, assistive, and information technologies.

American Society for Deaf Children (ASDC)—an organization of parents and families that advocates for children who are deaf or hard-of-hearing to participate in education, the family, and the community.

The Arc of the United States—a national organization of and for people with mental retardation and related developmental disabilities and their families. It is devoted to promoting and improving supports and services for them through a network of state and local affiliates.

Autism National Committee—an advocacy organization dedicated to social justice for all citizens with autism through a shared vision and a commitment to positive approaches.

Autism Society of America—a national organization consisting of over 20,000 members who are connected through a working network of over 200 chapters. Nearly every state is represented.

Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law—a national legal advocate for people with mental disabilities. It promotes system change through education, litigation, and public policy activities.

Brain Injury Association of America—a national network of more than 40 chartered state affiliates across the nation, as well as hundreds of local chapters and support groups dedicated to preventing brain injury and assisting those with brain injury.

Children and Adults with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (CHADD)—a national organization representing individuals with AD/HD, for education, advocacy and support. It is composed of grass-roots chapters.

Easter Seals—a nationwide network of more than 450 service sites, which provide family-focused and innovative services tailored to meet the specific needs of the particular community they serve.

FAPE Community Partners *(cont.)*

EP Foundation for Education, Inc.—an organization dedicated to educating parents and professionals on all aspects of specific disabilities and to further the knowledge in the field of special needs.

Epilepsy Foundation—a national organization wholly dedicated to the welfare of people with epilepsy through research, education, advocacy, and service.

Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA)—a 40,000-member national organization advocating for individuals with learning disabilities, with over 200 state and local affiliates in 42 states and Puerto Rico.

National Association of Protection and Advocacy Systems (NAPAS)—a voluntary national membership association of protection and advocacy systems and client assistance programs.

National Down Syndrome Society—a national organization that benefits people with Down syndrome and their families through education, research, and advocacy.

National Organization of Parents of Blind Children—a membership organization of parents and friends of children who are blind that provides vital support, encouragement, and information.

100 Black Men of America, Inc.—a national organization dedicated to improving the quality of life and enhancing educational opportunities by overcoming the cultural and financial obstacles that have limited the achievements of African-American youth.

Spina Bifida Association of America—a national association representing 60 chapters developed to address the specific needs of the spina bifida community.

TASH—an international association of people with disabilities, their family members, other advocates, and professionals promoting a society in which inclusion of all people in all aspects of society is the norm.

Tourette Syndrome Association, Inc. (TSA)—a national voluntary membership organization consisting of approximately 50 U.S. chapters and 300 support groups.

United Cerebral Palsy—a national organization that advances the independence, productivity, and full citizenship of people with cerebral palsy and similar disabilities through an affiliate network.

FAPE Extended Partners

FAPE's network of Extended Partners agreed to disseminate information regarding IDEA and its potential impact on their constituents. They included:

International Rett Syndrome Association—an organization supporting and encouraging research, increasing public awareness, and providing informational and emotional support to families of children with Rett syndrome.

Let's Face It USA—a network that links people with facial disfigurement and all who care for them to resources that can enrich their lives.

The MAGIC Foundation—a national organization created to provide support services for the families of children affected by a wide variety of chronic and critical disorders, syndromes, and diseases that impact a child's growth.

National Association of the Deaf (NAD)—a national organization safeguarding the accessibility and civil rights of Americans who are deaf and hard of hearing, through a federation of 51 state association affiliates, organizational affiliates, and members.

National Association of Developmental Disabilities Councils—a national, member-driven organization consisting of 55 state and territorial councils that advocate for system change on behalf of individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

National Association for the Education of African American Children with Learning Disabilities (AACLD)—an organization consisting of a network of individuals and organizations experienced in minority research, which seeks to improve the quality of education for African American children by raising the level of awareness about learning differences and promoting an understanding among parents, educators, and others of the culturally sensitive issues facing minority children with learning disabilities.

National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)—a national center, which increases opportunities for all individuals with learning disabilities through public awareness, educational programs, and public policy.

National Family Association for the Deaf-Blind (NFADB)—a volunteer-based family association, which focuses on enhancing rights and opportunities for people who are deaf-blind.

National Practitioners Network for Fathers and Families—an organization, which strengthens supports for children in fragile families by enhancing the involvement of fathers and fostering communication, program development, education and collaboration among service providers.

Organic Acidemia Association—a voluntary self-help organization dedicated to providing information and support to families of children with inborn errors of metabolism.

FAPE Extended Partners (cont.)

Parent Project for Muscular Dystrophy Research, Inc.—an organization that focuses on identifying, funding and disseminating information about promising research and applications about Duchenne and Becker Muscular Dystrophy.

Self-Help for Hard of Hearing People, Inc.—a national organization striving to open the world of communication for people with hearing loss through information, education, advocacy, and support.

Share and Care Cockayne Syndrome Network, Inc.—an international organization that provides information and support services to families and professionals who have an interest in Cockayne Syndrome (CS).

WEEA Equity Resource Center at Education Development Center (WEEA)—a national organization which increases educational opportunities and outcomes for all students by focusing on gender equity and drawing on the strengths of gender, race, ethnicity, disability, and income.

Williams Syndrome Association—a national organization devoted exclusively to improving the lives of individuals with Williams syndrome and their families through research and education.