

Appendix O: Children with Special Needs

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Terminology

A child with a disability is defined in IDEA as a child with at least one of thirteen specifically defined physical, emotional, learning or cognitive disabilities and who, by reason of the condition, needs “special education” and “related services.” At the discretion of the state, the definition may also include children ages three through nine or any subset of that age range, which are experiencing developmental delays. Special Education is specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability. A child with a disability is entitled to FAPE, a free appropriate public education. That public education should be provided in the LRE, the least restrictive environment. The term FAPE is defined in pre-K through secondary school special education as related services that are provided at public expense, without charge to the parent, under public supervision and direction; meeting the state's educational standards; and addressing the individualized educational needs of the student. IDEA's least restrictive environment directive requires the inclusion of children with disabilities, in the general education program to the maximum extent appropriate. An LEA, local education agency, is responsible for the identification and evaluation of children with disabilities and for the provision of FAPE to children found to be eligible for special education and related services.

Benefits of First Class Pre-K for Children with Disabilities

Rigorous educational research consistently shows that at-risk children who attend high-quality pre-k programs demonstrate gains in early learning skills and throughout their K-12 years. Significantly, research also shows that children with disabilities who attend pre-K in inclusive environments demonstrate gains in social skills, self-regulation, language development, and cognition. Moreover, integrating children with disabilities into typical pre-K programs does not simply improve the educational experience for the children with disabilities – pre-K classrooms that utilize inclusive materials and curricula, along with appropriate supports and services, provide social and educational benefits to the general pre-K population as well.

Eligibility of Children Receiving Special Education Services in the First Class Pre-K Program

A child who meets the eligibility requirements for the Alabama First Class Pre-K program and is also eligible for special education and/or related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) will not be denied access to the Alabama First Class Pre-K program. Therefore, dual enrollment in special education and the Alabama First Class Pre-K program is permitted. Children should receive services and supports in accordance with their IEP. First Class teachers should seek to be on classroom children's IEP committees and obtain copies of the children's IEP in order to incorporate suggestions into class instruction. If a pre-K provider suspects that a child has a disability or significant developmental delay, they are responsible for talking to the parent regarding referring that child to the appropriate local education agency (LEA) so that the child may be tested for eligibility to receive special education services. For contact information to local special education coordinators contact the Alabama State Department of Education at 334-242-9700 or www.alsde.edu.

