

Improving Special Education

In May of 2004, the U.S. Senate passed S. 1248 (Gregg) with an overwhelmingly bipartisan vote of 95-3 to improve federal special education programs and set historic funding increases to benefit children with disabilities.

The bill, which passed unanimously from the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP), helps make sure students are learning, reduces the paperwork burden on teachers and unites parents and schools to better meet the needs of children with disabilities.

As HELP Committee Chairman and member of the Budget Committee, Senator Gregg has made special education funding a top priority. Since he was first elected, funding for special education has increased from \$2 billion to more than \$11 billion nationwide. **New Hampshire's allocation of special education dollars has grown by over 477% from \$7.9 million to \$45.6 million.** After significant debate on the Senate floor, an amendment to S. 1248 by Senator Gregg was adopted to put funding for special education grants to states on a path to reach the federal government's full, 40-percent share in seven years. The funding levels in the Gregg amendment mark historic highs for federal special education spending. In addition, the bill provides the following much-needed reforms:

Makes sure students are learning...

For too long IDEA has been a system that measures progress by how many boxes have been checked, rather than how well children are learning. Specifically the bill ensures states focus on improved academic results, clarifies methods for measuring student progress and provides for a national study of assessment systems.

Reconnects teachers and students...

A majority of special education teachers spend a day and a half or more each week on paperwork and bureaucracy-related meetings, robbing students of valuable time and energy. The bill streamlines state and local requirements, simplifies contractual paperwork, establishes consistency in regulations and requires further review of paperwork simplification possibilities by the Department of Education.

Helps parents and schools work together...

Elaborate requirements combined with complicated conflict resolution procedures have cultivated an adversarial relationship between parents and schools. The bill provides alternate dispute resolution, strengthens mediation processes, requires direct communication when complaints are filed, encourages prompt resolution, and improves the integrity of the conflict resolution process.

Gives schools the tools they need to ensure safety for all...

Students with disabilities can at times present behavioral and safety challenges. Schools must have the flexibility to ensure the safety of their students and teachers in a way that is fair and equitable to all. The bill improves existing discipline provisions by simplifying administration while ensuring rights are protected and support is provided.