

GIVE TEACHERS A BREAK: Cutting Red Tape to Unleash the Potential of America's Great Teachers

TOP TAKEAWAYS

Reforming Education for Children with Disabilities

THE PROBLEM

- Children with special needs deserve special education: nearly everyone agrees on this, which is why we have federal laws that protect the right to education for children with special needs.
- Unfortunately, due to an overbroad definition of disability, special education is being used to ameliorate the failures of general education, with students who are lagging behind being grouped with students with severe cognitive disabilities (e.g., Down syndrome), which makes little sense.
- While 504 plans were originally intended to ensure access to reasonable accommodations for students with learning disabilities who do not need special education, there has been accommodations creep, leading to students with relatively minor mental health concerns (e.g., mild anxiety) often relying on accommodations they don't actually need and might be better off without.

THE WAY FORWARD

Special education is necessary, but it needs to be reformed in order to serve the students who actually need it.

- **Enforce IDEA's Original Intent:** Federal policymakers should reevaluate how they define disability under IDEA and clarify the law to ensure that special education is reserved for students who have severe and discernible disabilities that require specialized instruction.
- **Crack Down on 504 Plan Misuse:** Federal policymakers should clearly define reasonable accommodations to prevent accommodation creep and ensure that students are not given a free pass just because they have a 504 plan.
- **Expand School Choice:** Students with disabilities can go to schools that are more effective for them, where teachers who desire to teach special education can fully concentrate on those students.

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