

## **Equal Opportunity For Exceptional Students**

It is the position of the New Mexico Association for the Gifted that exceptional children, including gifted children, should have educational plans guided by maximized expectations and served through efficient and effective services.

A Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) is the right of every child in the United States. Education is offered free to all children so that they may enjoy the opportunity to pursue a successful future. Appropriateness of that education is, in most cases, defined by standards for excellent grade-level learning. These standards conform at each grade level to the step just beyond an average child's level of intellectual development, prior knowledge, and need for preparation. The standards set high expectations, and establish a reasonable amount of time and resources to reach those goals. For an average student, this one free offering assures equal opportunity, but for children outside the norm this same offering can decrease opportunity for future success, because students with disabilities become frustrated, and gifted students are held back.

In the case of students who are disabled, it is a common rule of thumb to alter educational goals as little as possible, because such adjustments generally lead to diminished expectations and growth. Individual education plans are composed to offer students with disabilities additional free educational services as much as possible to achieve those altered goals, because increased services mean general education must trouble less with having to do something different for those few students.

For students who are gifted, the inverse is often true. Gifted children's educational goals (determining what is Appropriate) are often modified as much as possible, limited only by the imagination of the educational team. Their service plans (determining what is Free), paradoxically, are often crafted to provide as little as possible. This paradox persists for a variety of reasons including fear of perceived unfairness to average students, or the fact that general educators prefer their gifted children and want to keep them in class and thus not in a special class or pullout group.

FAPE should be offered to all students, but it is not the same for all students.

When FAPE for average students is used as a benchmark, today's typical approaches are unfair to both kinds of exceptional children. Equality should be measured not by how closely the programs of exceptional students match those of average students, but by how much the spirit of the core standards is upheld in each specific case. The relationship of the average student and core standards should be modeled to create FAPE for exceptional students.

Goals determining what is Appropriate should always focus on maximizing expectations, just as core standards do for the average student, though those expectations may vary greatly for students with disabilities and gifts.

Individual education plans determining what is Free should always offer reasonable time and resources to reach goals, neither wasting precious resources, nor denying what is necessary to develop the exceptional child's talents.

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