

# **Special Education Law**

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# Special Education Law

*Third Edition*

**Thomas F. Guernsey**

PRESIDENT AND DEAN  
ALBANY LAW SCHOOL

**Kathe Klare**

PROFESSOR  
ALBANY LAW SCHOOL

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*For our parents Ruth and Richard Guernsey and  
William and Anita Klare  
whose wonderful support and interest encouraged us to become lawyers  
in order to make a difference in other children's lives.*

*For Alison and Adam who unselfishly shared their parents with other children.*

*For our many special education clients who have enriched our lives.*



# Contents

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Table of Cases	xv
Preface	xxxiii
Notes on Abbreviations	xxxvii
<b>Chapter 1 · An Historical Overview</b>	<b>3</b>
1.1 Introduction	3
1.2 2004 Reauthorization of IDEA Statute and IDEA Regulations	4
1.3 Brief History	5
1.4 IDEA: An Overview	9
1.5 Section 504: An Overview	11
1.5.1 Historical Overview of the Validity of Section 504 Regulations and Undue Burden	11
1.5.2 Section 504 Undue Burden— Case Examples	15
1.6 Section 1983 and IDEA	17
1.7 Education Department General Administrative Regulations	19
1.8 Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act	20
<b>Chapter 2 · Parties to the Process</b>	<b>21</b>
2.1 Parents and Child as Parties	21
2.2 Effect of Termination of Parental Custody	24
2.3 Surrogate Parents in General	25
2.3.1 The State and Its Employees as Surrogate Parents	26
2.4 Foster Parents in General	26
2.4.1 Foster Parents as Surrogate Parents	26
2.5 The LEA as a Party	27
2.5.1 Determining the Appropriate LEA Against Whom to Proceed (Residency)	28
2.6 The State as a Party Defendant	30
2.7 The State as a Plaintiff	30
2.8 Third-Party Interests	30
<b>Chapter 3 · Provision of a Free Appropriate Education</b>	<b>33</b>
3.1 Introduction	33
3.2 Provision of a FAPE as a Procedural Right in General	34
3.3 Provision of a FAPE as a Substantive Right in General	35
3.3.1 Level of Education Required to Constitute FAPE Under IDEA	36

3.3.2 Higher State Standard for Level of Services	38
3.3.3 Level of Education Required to Constitute FAPE Under § 504	38
3.4 Education to Be at No Cost to Parents	39
3.5 Cost as Factor in Providing FAPE	40
3.6 Age Coverage	41
3.7 The Effect of Graduation Under IDEA	43
3.8 The Effect of Graduation Under § 504	43
3.9 Related Services in General	44
3.9.1 Equipment Versus Services	45
3.9.2 Transportation as a Related Service	47
3.9.3 Speech Pathology and Audiology as Related Services	48
3.9.4 Interpreting Services	48
3.9.5 Psychological Services and Counseling as Related Services	49
3.9.6 Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Orientation and Mobility, Recreation, Early Identification and Assessment of Disabilities as Related Services	50
3.9.7 Medical Services as Related Services	50
3.9.8 School Health Services as Related Services	52
3.9.9 Social Work Services, Parent Counseling and Training as Related Services	53
3.10 Related Services Without Special Education	54
3.11 Physical Education	54
3.12 Travel Training	55
3.13 Vocational Education	55
3.14 Extracurricular Activities	55
<b>Chapter 4 · Identification and Evaluation</b>	<b>57</b>
4.1 In General	57
4.2 Identification	57
4.3 Preplacement Evaluations	59
4.4 Reevaluations Under IDEA	61
4.5 Reevaluations Under § 504	62
4.6 Evaluation Standards Under IDEA	64
4.7 Evaluation Standards Under § 504	66
4.8 Notice and Consent for Evaluation Under IDEA	67
4.9 Notice and Consent for Evaluation Under § 504	69
4.10 Evaluators Under IDEA	69
4.11 Evaluators Under § 504	70
4.12 Reporting Evaluation Results Under Both IDEA and § 504	70
4.13 Parental Participation	71
4.14 Disputes Over Evaluation	71
4.15 Identification/Evaluation Checklist-Summary	72
<b>Chapter 5 · Eligibility</b>	<b>75</b>
5.1 In General	75
5.2 Specially Designed Instruction	76
5.2.1 Nonacademic Instruction	76
5.2.2 Medical v. Educational Needs	77
5.2.3 Ability to Benefit From Educational Services	79



5.3 Qualifying Conditions in General	80
5.3.1 Hearing Impairments	80
5.3.2 Visual Impairment	83
5.3.3 Orthopedic Impairments in General	84
5.3.3.1 Congenital Orthopedic Disorders	85
5.3.3.2 Orthopedic Impairments Caused by Disease	86
5.3.3.3 Other Orthopedic Impairments	86
5.3.4 Mental and Emotional Impairments in General	87
5.3.4.1 Mental Retardation	87
5.3.4.2 Specific Learning Disabilities in General	89
5.3.4.3 Perceptual Disabilities	90
5.3.4.4 Brain Injury and Minimal Brain Dysfunction	91
5.3.4.5 Dyslexia	91
5.3.4.6 Developmental Aphasia	92
5.3.4.7 Emotional Disturbances	92
5.3.4.8 Autism	94
5.3.4.9 Traumatic Brain Injury	94
5.3.5 Catch-All Categories in General	94
5.3.5.1 Multihandicapped	95
5.3.5.2 Other Health Impaired	95
5.3.5.3 Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)	96
5.3.6 Disabilities Not Mentioned Under IDEA—the Role of § 504	99
5.3.6.1 Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS)	99
<b>Chapter 6 · Independent Educational Evaluations</b>	<b>103</b>
6.1 In General	103
6.2 Notice of Availability of IEE	104
6.3 Parental Request for an IEE	105
6.4 Standards for IEE	105
6.5 Cost of IEE	105
6.6 Unilateral Action by Parent to Obtain IEE	106
6.7 IEE At Public Expense Is Limited to One	107
6.8 Use of IEE	107
6.9 IEE At Parental Expense	107
6.10 Hearing Officer Ordered IEE	107
<b>Chapter 7 · Individualized Education Program</b>	<b>109</b>
7.1 In General	109
7.2 Agency Responsible for IEP Development	111
7.3 Time Frame for Development of IEP	112
7.4 Placement Decisions and the IEP	113
7.5 IEP Meetings	113
7.6 Parental Participation	115
7.7 Drafting the Document	116
7.7.1 Drafting Example	118
7.8 Private Placements	119
7.9 Children with Disabilities in Public Charter Schools	121
7.10 Handling Disputes over the IEP	121
7.11 IEP Checklist	122

<b>Chapter 8 · Placement</b>	125
8.1 Placement Criteria	125
8.2 Location/Least Restrictive Environment/Mainstreaming	126
8.3 Annual Review of Placement Required	131
8.4 Change in Placement	131
8.5 Placement Decision-Makers	133
8.6 Extended School Day and Year	133
8.7 Continuum of Placements Required	134
8.8 Residential School Placements	135
8.9 Private Placement by LEA in General	136
8.9.1 Requirements for Private Facilities Where LEA Places Child	137
8.10 Unilateral Private Placement by Parents Where LEA Offers FAPE	138
8.10.1 Non-IDEA Services Required for Unilateral Private School Placements	141
8.11 Parental Placement in Parochial School/Separation of Church and State	143
<b>Chapter 9 · Notice and Consent</b>	147
9.1 In General	147
9.2 Notice Concerning Identification, Evaluation, and Placement in General	148
9.2.1 Notice of Preplacement Evaluation	149
9.2.2 Notice of Initial Placement	150
9.2.3 Notice of Change in Placement	150
9.3 Notices after Hearing Request	151
9.4 When Parental Consent Required	151
9.4.1 Content of Consent	152
9.4.2 Refusal to Provide Consent	153
9.5 Notice Checklist	154
9.6 Consent Checklist	154
<b>Chapter 10 · Discipline</b>	157
10.1 In General	157
10.2 Changes in Placement	160
10.3 Provision of a FAPE for Suspended or Expelled Student	161
10.4 Functional Assessment	161
10.5 Interim Alternative Placement—Weapons, Drugs and Bodily Harm	162
10.6 Manifestation Determination Review	163
10.7 Parental Appeal—Expedited Due Process Hearing	165
10.8 Hearing Officer Authority	165
10.9 Placements during Appeals	166
10.10 Protections for Children Not Yet Eligible for Special Education and Related Services	166
10.11 Referral to and Action by Law Enforcement and Juvenile Courts	167
10.12 Chemical Dependency and Suspension	167
10.13 Constitutional Considerations	168
10.14 Steps to Take in Disciplinary Actions	168
<b>Chapter 11 · Impartial Due Process Hearing</b>	171
11.1 In General	171
11.2 Statute of Limitations	171
11.3 Scope of Review	172

11.4 Requesting the Due Process Hearing	176
11.5 The Resolution Process	178
11.6 The Hearing Officer in General	179
11.6.1 Hearing Officer Impartiality	180
11.6.2 Scope of Hearing Officer’s Authority	181
11.6.3 Procedural Rights Related to the Hearing	183
11.7 Status of Child during Due Process—“Stay-Put” Provision	185
11.8 Discovery	187
11.9 Burden of Proof under the Act	189
11.10 Rules of Evidence	189
11.11 Conducting the Hearing	189
11.12 Hearing Officer’s Decision	189
11.13 Due Process Hearing Checklist	190
<b>Chapter 12 · Administrative Appeals</b>	<b>195</b>
12.1 In General	195
12.2 Statute of Limitations and Notice of Appeal	195
12.3 Timelines	196
12.4 Subject Matter/Scope of Review	196
12.5 Who May Appeal—Parties Aggrieved	197
12.6 Impartiality	198
12.7 Additional Evidence Allowed	199
12.8 Finality of Decision	200
12.9 Child’s Status During Proceedings	200
12.10 Administrative Review Checklist	201
<b>Chapter 13 · Judicial Review</b>	<b>203</b>
13.1 In General	203
13.2 Statute of Limitations	203
13.3 Exhaustion of Administrative Remedies	204
13.4 Removal from State to Federal Court	208
13.5 Issues Considered	208
13.6 Discovery	210
13.7 Standard of Review in General	210
13.7.1 Traditional Administrative Review	211
13.7.2 <i>De Novo</i> Review and Due Weight	212
13.7.3 Issues Subject to Due Weight	216
13.8 Burden of Proof in General	218
13.8.1 Burden of Persuasion on Substantive Issues	219
13.8.2 Burden of Proof on Procedural Issues	220
13.9 Jury Trials	221
13.10 Evidence	222
13.11 Appellate Review of Judicial Determinations	223
<b>Chapter 14 · Remedies</b>	<b>227</b>
14.1 In General	227
14.2 State Immunity Abrogated	227
14.2.1 Avoiding Eleventh Amendment Immunity	230
14.3 Damages in General	231

14.4 Reimbursement for Unilateral Placements	231
14.5 Compensatory Education	235
14.5.1 Compensatory Education Beyond Graduation and or Beyond Age 21	237
14.6 Monetary Damages	238
14.7 Procedural Violation Remedy	241
<b>Chapter 15 · Attorney's Fees and Costs</b>	<b>251</b>
15.1 Attorney's Fees in General	251
15.2 Availability of Attorney's Fees for Work in Administrative Proceedings	252
15.2.1 What Constitutes the Administrative Proceedings?	254
15.2.2 Authority of Administrative Officer to Award	254
15.3 Ability to File Suit Solely for Attorney's Fees	255
15.4 Lay Advocates/Paralegals/Parent Advocates	259
15.5 Costs As Well As Attorney's Fees	261
15.5.1 Expert Fees and Expenses	261
15.5.2 Transcripts	263
15.5.3 Discovery and Miscellaneous Expenses	263
15.6 Is There a Dispute and are the Parents Prevailing Parties?	264
15.6.1 Prevailing on Part of the Claim	266
15.6.2 Procedural and Substantive Violations	267
15.7 Setting the Fee	268
15.7.1 No Bonus or Multiplier	270
15.8 Fees or Costs Subsequent to Time of Written Offer to Settle	271
15.8.1 Justified Rejection of the Offer	272
15.9 Procedural Violations or Undue Protraction By LEA	273
15.10 Complaints Resolved By Settlement	276
15.11 Waiver of Attorney's Fees	277
<b>Chapter 16 · Records</b>	<b>279</b>
16.1 In General	279
16.2 Safeguards	281
<b>Chapter 17 · Monitoring and Compliance</b>	<b>283</b>
17.1 State Monitoring and Compliance	283
17.1.1 State Complaint Checklist	285
17.2 Office of Special Education Programs	285
17.3 Office for Civil Rights	286
17.3.1 OCR Complaint Checklist	289
17.4 Coordination of OCR and OSEP	291
17.5 Mediation	291
17.6 Choosing Dispute Resolution Process	292
<b>Chapter 18 · Infants and Toddlers</b>	<b>295</b>
18.1 Introduction to Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities Act	295
18.2 ITDA Relationship to Other Laws	296
18.3 Funds	297
18.4 Eligibility	297
18.5 Identification and Assessment	298

18.6 Individualized Family Service Plan	299
18.7 Early Intervention Services	300
18.7.1 Assistive Technology Services	301
18.7.2 Audiology Services	301
18.7.3 Service Coordination/Case Management Services	302
18.7.4 Family Training, Counseling, Home Visits	302
18.7.5 Health Services	302
18.7.6 Medical Services for Diagnosis or Evaluation	303
18.7.7 Nursing Services	303
18.7.8 Nutrition Services	303
18.7.9 Occupational Therapy	304
18.7.10 Physical Therapy	304
18.7.11 Psychological Services	304
18.7.12 Social Work Services	304
18.7.13 Special Instruction	305
18.7.14 Speech-Language Pathology	305
18.7.15 Vision Services	305
18.7.16 Transportation	305
18.7.17 Personnel	305
18.8 Procedural Safeguards	306
18.9 Comparison of IDEA and ITDA	307
<b>Appendix 1 · Note to Nonlawyers</b>	<b>311</b>
<b>Appendix 2 · Education Directory of States and Territories</b>	<b>314</b>
States	314
Territories	320
<b>Appendix 3 · United States Department of Education Addresses</b>	<b>322</b>
Regional Offices Office for Civil Rights	322
<b>Appendix 4 · Forms</b>	<b>324</b>
<b>Tables</b>	<b>359</b>
<b>Index</b>	<b>391</b>



# Table of Cases

---

- A.A. v. Board of Educ., Central Islip Union Free School Dist., 205, 235
- A.A. v. Cooperman, 54
- A.B. v. Lawson,, 36, 64, 67, 126, 215
- A.K. v. Alexandria City School Bd., 209
- A.R. v N.Y. City Dep't of Educ., 265, 269, 276
- A.S. v. Madison Metropolitan School Dist., 213
- A.V. v. Burlington Tp. Bd. of Educ., 207
- A.W. v. Jersey City Public Schools, 9, 17, 57, 228, 239
- A.W. v. Northwest R-1 School Dist., 127–129, 174
- Abney v. District of Columbia, 25, 33, 206
- Abrahamson v. Hershman, 40, 77–78, 135–136, 173–174, 216–217, 221, 25
- Adam J. v. Keller Independent School ist., 246
- Adams Central School Dist. No. 090 v. Deist, 225, 235
- Adams v. Bell, 287–288
- Adams v. Oregon, 196, 299
- Adashunas v. Negley, 6
- Adler v. Education Dept., 257
- Agapito v. District of Columbia, 260
- Agostini v. Felton, 144
- Aguilar v. Felton, 155
- Aguirre v. Los Angeles Unified School Dist., 8
- Akers v. Bolton, 99, 103
- Alamo Heights Indep. School Dist. v. State Bd. of Educ., 47, 133–134
- Alegria v. Dist. of Columbia,, 265
- Alex G. v. Bd. of Trs., 158
- Alexander K. v. Virginia Bd. of Educ., 174
- Alexander v. Choate, 13–14
- Alexander v. Sandoval, 137
- Alexopulos v. Riles, 223, 235, 237
- Alexopulos v. San Francisco Unified School Dist., 228, 235
- Alice M. v. Board of Educ. of Bradley-Bourbonnais High, 77, 136
- Alison H. v. Byard, 277
- Allstate Construction Co. v. Durkin, 14
- Allstate Ins. Co. v. Bethlehem Area School Dist, 30
- Alston v. District of Columbia, 150, 185
- Alvin Independent School Dist. v. A.D., 97
- Amanda J. v. Clark County School Dist., 213, 215
- Amann v. Town of Stow, 115, 213
- Amelia County School Bd. v. Virginia Bd. of Educ., 208
- American Council of the Blind of Colorado v. Romer, 264
- Amos v. Maryland Dept. of Pub. Safety & Correctional Servs., 229
- Andalusia City Bd. of Educ. v. AnDress, 264
- Andersen v. District of Columbia, 186, 248
- Anderson v. Thompson, 7, 104, 238–239
- Andre H. v. Ambach, 205
- Andrew B. v. Board of Educ. of Community High School Dist. 99, 43
- Andrew M. v. Delaware County Office of Mental Health and Mental, 299, 301
- Andrew S. v. School Committee of Town of Greenfield, 207
- Andrews v. Ledbetter, 31
- Angela L. v. Pasadena Indep. School Dist., 252, 255, 266
- Antkowiak v. Ambach, 136–137, 198 xv
- Antoine M. v. Chester Upland School Dist., 214

- Arlington Central School District Board of Education v. Murphy, 263
- Armstrong v. Alicante School, 157
- Armstrong v. Kline, 206
- Armstrong v. Vance 328 F. Supp. 2d 50 (D.D.C. 2004), 259
- Arnow v. District of Columbia, 262
- Arons v. New Jersey State Bd. of Educ., 260
- Ashli C.v. Hawaii, 97
- Association for Community Living v. Romer, 207
- Association For Retarded Citizens In Colorado v. Frazier, 16
- Association for Retarded Citizens of Alabama, Inc. v. Teague, 8
- AW v. Fairfax County Sch. Bd., 111, 121, 132, 150
- B.H. v. Southington Bd. of Educ. 273, 239
- B.H.Y. b/n/f/ Young v. La Pryor, 19
- B.R. v. San Ramon Valley Unified School Dist., 113
- B.v. Napa Valley Unified School Dist, 114, 175, 246
- Baer v. Klagholz, 70
- Bailey v. District of Columbia, 262
- Baisden v. West Virginia Secondary Schs. Activities Comm'n., 56
- Baker v. Babcock & Wilcox Co., 189
- Bales v. Clarke, 48
- Baltimore City Bd. of School Comm'rs. v. Taylorch, 233
- Barnes v. Gorman, 241
- Barnett v. Fairfax County School Bd., 239
- Barwacz v. Michigan Dept. of Educ., 8, 38, 209, 214, 223
- Baser v. Corpus Christi Independent School Dist., 77
- Battle v. Pennsylvania, 76, 133, 174, 206
- Bay Shore Union Free Sch. Dist. v. T, 143
- BD v. DeBuono,, 262
- Beard v. Teska, 268–269, 274
- Behavior Research Institute v. Ambach, 270
- Benjamin v. Greater Clark County Schools, 177
- Berger v. Medina City School Dist., 132, 232, 234
- Bernard v. School Bd. of City of Norfolk, 177
- Bernardsville Bd. of Educ. v. J.H., 126, 214
- Bertolucci v. San Carlos Elementary School Dist., 37
- Beth B. v. Mark Van Clay, 37
- Beth B. v. Van Clay, 128, 130, 213
- Beth R. v. Forrestville Valley Community Unit School, 157
- Beth v. Carroll, 18, 115
- Bill Rivers Trailers, Inc. v. Miller, 260
- Birmingham and Lamphere School Dist. v. Superintendent, 197
- Birmingham v. Omaha School Dist., 200
- Blackman v. District of Columbia, 205
- Blackmon v. Springfield R-XII School Dist., 174
- Blanchard v. Bergeron, 269
- Blanchard v. Morton School Dist., 206
- Block v. District of Columbia, 247
- Blum v. Stenson, 268–270
- Board of Educ. Oak Park v. Nathan, 264
- Board of Educ. of Community H.S. Dist. No. 218 v. Illinois State Bd. of Educ., 186
- Board of Educ. of Community Unit School Dist. No. 428 v. Board of Educ. of High School Dist. No. 214, 28
- Board of Educ. of Fayette County, Ky. v. L.M., 183
- Board of Educ. of LaGrange v. Illinois Bd. of Educ., 128
- Board of Educ. of Montgomery Co. v. Brett Y., 175,207
- Board of Educ. of Oak Park and River Forest H.S. Dist. No. 200 v. Kelly E., 228
- Board of Educ. of Oak Park v. Nathan, 264
- Board of Educ. of Pawling Central School Dist. v. Schutz, 185
- Board of Educ. of the County of Cabell v. Dienelt, 195
- Board of Educ. of the Town of Bozrah v. State Bd. of Educ., 30



- Board of Educ. of Township H.S. Dist. No. 211 v. Kirtz-Imig, 158
- Board of Educ. v. Department of Educ., 49
- Bonadonna v. Cooperman, 64, 129
- Borengasser v. Arkansas State Bd. of Educ., 252, 272
- Bowman v. District of Columbia, 260
- Bradley v. Ark. Dep't of Educ., 47, 111, 116
- Bradley v. Arkansas Dept. of Educ., 36–37, 228, 230
- Brandon H. v. Kennewick School Dist., 223
- Brantley v. Independent School Dist. No 625, 9, 207, 235
- Brentwood Union Free School Dist. v. Ambach, 29
- Bretford Mfg., Inc. v. Smith System Mfg. Co., 270
- Briere v. Fair Haven Grade School Dist., 137
- Briggs v. Connecticut State Bd. of Educ., 129, 215
- Brimmer v. Traverse City Area Public Schools, 179
- Bristol Warren Regional School Committee v. Rhode Island Dept. of Educ., 138
- Brookhart v. Illinois State Bd. of Educ., 64
- Brookline School Comm. v. Golden, 150
- Brown v. Board of Education, 5
- Brown v. City of Oneonta, New York Police Dept., 281
- Brown v. District of Columbia Bd. of Educ., 173
- Brown v. Johnson, 18
- Bruschini v. Board of Educ. Arlington Central School Dist., 203
- Buckhannon Bd. & Care Home v. W. Va. Dep't of Health & Human Res, 264, 276
- Bucks County Dept. of Mental Health/Mental Retardation v. Pennsylvania, 306
- Buffolino v. Sachem Central School District, 206
- Burke County Bd. of Educ. v. Denton, 9, 11, 36, 209, 214–215
- Burpee v. Manchester School Dist., 8, 252
- Burr v. Ambach, 199, 231, 235, 237, 252
- Burr v. Sobol, 235, 237
- Butler v. Evans, 51, 78, 136
- C.C. v. Granby Bd. of Educ., 259, 268, 270
- C.G. v. Five Town Community School Dist., 203
- C.M. v. Board of Educ. of Henderson County, 257, 259
- C.W. v. Rocklin Unified School Dist., 115, 125
- Cain v. Yukon Pub. Schools Dist. I-27, 225
- Caitlin v. Sobol, 29
- Camenisch v. University of Texas, 6, 16
- Campbell v. Talladega County Bd. of Educ., 77, 236–237
- Capillano v. Hyde Park, 238
- Capistrano Unified School Dist. v. Wartenberg, 213
- Carey v. Piphus, 227
- Carl D. v. St. Louis County Special School Dist., 209
- Carlisle Area School v. Scott P., 236
- Carnwath v. Grasmick, 284
- Caroline T. v. Hudson School Dist., 184
- Carroll v. Capalbo, 68
- Carter v. Florence County School Dist. Four, 233
- Carter-Herman v. City of Philadelphia, 188
- Casey K. v. St. Anne Cmty. High Sch. Dist. No. 302, 62
- Cavallaro v. Ambach, 56
- Cavanagh v. Grasmick, 34, 150
- Cavanaugh v. Cardinal Local Sch. Dist., 23
- Cave v. East Meadow Union Free School Dist., 207
- Cedar Rapids Community School Dist. v. Garrett F., 38
- Cerra v. Pawling Central School Dist., 34
- Charlie F. v. Skokie Bd. of Educ., 239
- Chavez v. Board of Educ. of Tularosa Municipal School, 203

- Board of Educ. of Township H.S. Dist. No. 211 v. Kirtz-Imig, 158
- Board of Educ. v. Department of Educ., 49
- Bonadonna v. Cooperman, 64, 129
- Borengasser v. Arkansas State Bd. of Educ., 252, 272
- Bowman v. District of Columbia, 260
- Bradley v. Ark. Dep't of Educ., 47, 111, 116
- Bradley v. Arkansas Dept. of Educ., 36–37, 228, 230
- Brandon H. v. Kennewick School Dist., 223
- Brantley v. Independent School Dist. No 625, 9, 207, 235
- Brentwood Union Free School Dist. v. Ambach, 29
- Bretford Mfg., Inc. v. Smith System Mfg. Co., 270
- Briere v. Fair Haven Grade School Dist., 137
- Briggs v. Connecticut State Bd. of Educ., 129, 215
- Brimmer v. Traverse City Area Public Schools, 179
- Bristol Warren Regional School Committee v. Rhode Island Dept. of Educ., 138
- Brookhart v. Illinois State Bd. of Educ., 64
- Brookline School Comm. v. Golden, 150
- Brown v. Board of Education, 5
- Brown v. City of Oneonta, New York Police Dept., 281
- Brown v. District of Columbia Bd. of Educ., 173
- Brown v. Johnson, 18
- Bruschini v. Board of Educ. Arlington Central School Dist., 203
- Buckhannon Bd. & Care Home v. W. Va. Dep't of Health & Human Res, 264, 276
- Bucks County Dept. of Mental Health/Mental Retardation v. Pennsylvania, 306
- Buffolino v. Sachem Central School District, 206
- Burke County Bd. of Educ. v. Denton, 9, 11, 36, 209, 214–215
- Burpee v. Manchester School Dist., 8, 252
- Burr v. Ambach, 199, 231, 235, 237, 252
- Burr v. Sobol, 235, 237
- Butler v. Evans, 51, 78, 136
- C.C. v. Granby Bd. of Educ., 259, 268, 270
- C.G. v. Five Town Community School Dist., 203
- C.M. v. Board of Educ. of Henderson County, 257, 259
- C.W. v. Rocklin Unified School Dist., 115, 125
- Cain v. Yukon Pub. Schools Dist. I-27, 225
- Caitlin v. Sobol, 29
- Camenisch v. University of Texas, 6, 16
- Campbell v. Talladega County Bd. of Educ., 77, 236–237
- Capillano v. Hyde Park, 238
- Capistrano Unified School Dist. v. Wartenberg, 213
- Carey v. Piphus, 227
- Carl D. v. St. Louis County Special School Dist., 209
- Carlisle Area School v. Scott P., 236
- Carnwath v. Grasmick, 284
- Caroline T. v. Hudson School Dist., 184
- Carroll v. Capalbo, 68
- Carter v. Florence County School Dist. Four, 233
- Carter-Herman v. City of Philadelphia, 188
- Casey K. v. St. Anne Cmty. High Sch. Dist. No. 302, 62
- Cavallaro v. Ambach, 56
- Cavanagh v. Grasmick, 34, 150
- Cavanaugh v. Cardinal Local Sch. Dist., 23
- Cave v. East Meadow Union Free School Dist., 207
- Cedar Rapids Community School Dist. v. Garrett F., 38
- Cerra v. Pawling Central School Dist., 34
- Charlie F. v. Skokie Bd. of Educ., 239
- Chavez v. Board of Educ. of Tularosa Municipal School, 203

- Chris D. v. Montgomery County Board of Education, 53
- Christen G. v. Lower Merion School Dist., 34
- Christopher N. v. McDaniel, 200, 238
- Christopher S. v. Stanislaus County Office of Educ., 206
- Christopher W. v. Portsmouth School Comm., 141, 206
- Ciresoli v. M.S.A.D. No. 22, 40, 121
- City M.A. v. State Operated School Dist. of City of Newark, 228
- City of Boerne v. Flores, 228
- City of Chicago v. International College of Surgeons, 208
- City of Riverside v. Rivera, 269
- CJN v. Minneapolis Pub. Sch., 36
- Clear Creek Indep. Sch. Dist. v. J.K., 41
- Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School Dist. v. Boss, 110
- Clevenger v. Oak Ridge School Bd., 15, 40
- Cline v. Rocky Mountain, Inc., 259
- Clovis Unified School Dist. v. California Office of Admin. Hearings, 51, 136
- CM v. Board of Public Educ. of Henderson County, 209
- Cochran v. District of Columbia, 126, 207
- Coe v. Michigan Dept. of Educ., 203
- Cohen v. School Bd., 48
- Coleman v. Newburgh Enlarged City School Dist., 205–206
- Colin K. v. Schmidt, 7, 78, 135, 173, 179, 181, 198, 214, 225
- College Savings Bank v. Florida Postsecondary Educ. Expense Bd., 228–229
- Collinsgru v. Palmyra Bd. of Educ., 23–24
- Colven N. v. Lowndes, County School District, 166
- Combs v. School Bd. of Rockingham County, 8
- Community High School Dist. 155 v. Denz, 131, 197
- Concerned Parents & Citizens for the Continuing Educ. at Malcolm X v. New York City Bd. of Educ., 150
- Cone v. Randolph County Schools Bd. of Educ., 185
- Conn. Office of Prot. & Advocacy for Persons with Disabilities v. Hartford Bd. of Educ., 281
- Consolidated Rail Corp. v. Darrone, 240
- Converse County School Dist. No. Two v. Pratt, 26–27
- Coolbaugh v. Louisiana, 229
- Cordrey v. Euckert, 133–134, 221
- Cory D. v. Burke County School Dist., 257
- Cory H. v. Board of Educ. of City of Chicago, 125
- Counsel v. Dow, 252, 266
- County of San Diego v. California Special Educ. Hearing Office, 78
- County of Westchester v. New York, 27, 31
- County School Bd. of Henrico County, Va. v. R.T., 174, 206
- County School Board of Henrico County, Virginia v. Z.P., 215
- Covington v. Knox County School System, 206
- Cox v. Jenkins, 205
- CP v. Leon County Sch. Bd., 158
- Craig v. Gregg County, 264
- Crawford Fitting Co. v. J.T. Gibbons, Inc., 261, 265
- Crawford v. Pittman, 41
- Cremeans v. Fairland Local School Dist. Bd. of Educ., 224
- Criswell v. State Dept. of Educ., 26
- Curtis K. v. Sioux City Community School, 8
- Cypress-Fairbanks Indep. School Dist. v. Michael F., 252
- D.B. v. Ocean Township Bd. of Educ., 199, 214
- D.D. v. New York City Bd. of Educ., 209
- 34 D.F. v. Ramapo Cent. Sch. Dist., 136
- D.L. v. Unified School Dist. No. 497, 175
- Dale M. v. Board of Educ. of Bradley-Bourbonnais High, 51, 213
- Daniel B. v. Wisconsin Dept. of Pub. Instruction, 183, 209
- Darlene L. v. Illinois State Bd. of Educ., 15–16, 49, 51

- Daugherty v. Hamilton County School, 43
- David D. v. Dartmouth School Committee, 38, 209
- David H. v. Spring Branch Independent School Dist., 236
- Davis v. District of Columbia Bd. of Educ., 182
- De Rosa v. City of New York, 172
- Deal v. Hamilton County Bd. of Educ., 15, 34, 40, 113, 115, 125, 175, 244, 268
- DeFalco v. Deer Lake School Dist., 8
- DeKalb County Sch. Dist. v. M.T.V., 44
- Delaware County Intermediate Unit #25 v. Martin, 40
- DeLeon v. Susquehanna Comm. School Dist., 185
- Dell v. Board of Educ. Township High School 115, 115, 158, 271
- Dellmuth v. Muth, 198–199, 227, 267
- Department of Educ. v. Carl D., 257
- Department of Educ. v. Katherine D., 41, 53
- Department of Educ., State of Hawaii v. Cari Rae S., 52, 77
- Detsel v. Board of Education, 53
- Devine v. Indian River County, 23
- DeVries v. Spillane, 21, 71, 115, 122, 206
- Diamond v. McKenzie, 78, 135, 173, 182, 205
- Diatta v. District of Columbia, 183
- Diaz-Fonseca v. Puerto Rico, 125, 238
- Dima v. Macchiarola, 150
- Disability Rights Wisconsin, Inc. v. State of Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction, 281
- District 27 Community School Bd. of Educ. v. Board of Educ., 131
- District of Columbia v. R.R., 254
- District of Columbia v. Ramirez, 46–47, 174
- Dodds v. Simpson, 222
- Doe v. East Haven Board. of Education., 268
- Doe v. Alabama State Dept. of Educ., 25, 214
- Doe v. Alfred, 18
- Doe v. Anrig, 216, 225
- Doe v. Arizona Department of Educ., 206
- Doe v. Arlington County School Bd., 205
- Doe v. Belleville Pub. School Dist. No. 118, 207
- Doe v. Board of Educ. of Nashville-Davidson County, 51
- Doe v. Board of Educ. of Tullahoma City Schools, 129
- Doe v. Board of Education of Baltimore County, 260
- Doe v. Board of Pub. Educ., 66
- Doe v. Boston Pub. School, 358, 265
- Doe v. Brookline School Committee, 219
- Doe v. Defendant I, 110, 219, 248–249
- Doe v. Knox County Bd. of Educ., 281
- Doe v. Koger, 159
- Doe v. Maher, 121, 128, 159, 174, 206, 229, 231, 284
- Doe v. Nebraska, 229
- Doe v. Region 13 Mental Health-Mental Retardation Comm., 221
- Doe v. Sanders, 29
- Doe v. Smith, 215
- Donald B. v. Board of School Commissioners, 140
- Dong v. Board of Educ. of Rochester Comm. Schools, 219
- Donlan v. Wells Ogunquit Community School Dist., 180
- Doucet v. Chilton County Bd. of Educ., 255, 259
- Douglas W. v. Greenfield Public Schools, 209
- Doyle v. Arlington County Pub. School Bd., 215
- Dreher v. Amphitheater, 205
- Drennan v. Pulaski County Special School Dist., 174, 266
- Drew P. v. Clarke County School Dist., 78
- Duane M. v. Orleans Parish School Bd., 252, 255–256
- Dubner v. Ambach, 135
- Dubois v. Connecticut State Bd. of Educ., 54, 183
- Durkee v. Livonia Cent. School Dist., 68, 153
- E.B. v. Independent School Dist. No. 720, 78

- E.P. v. School Bd. of Broward County, 186, 307
- E.W. v. School Bd. Of Miami-Dade, 233
- East Brunswick Bd. of Educ. v. New Jersey State Bd. of Educ., 181
- Edelman v. Jordan, 227
- Eggers v. Bullitt County School Dist., 252, 255–256
- Eirschele v. Craven County Bd. of Educ., 256, 263
- Elizabeth S. v. Gilhool, 46
- Ellenberg v. New Mexico Military Institute, 204, 207
- Ellenberg v. New Mexico Military Institute, 204, 207
- Emery v. Roanoke City School Bd., 31,39
- Emma v. Eastin, 228, 230, 235
- Eric H. v. Methacton Sch. Dist., 69, 152–153
- Erickson v. Albuquerque Public Schools, 220, 224, 236
- Escambia County Bd. of Educ. v. Benton, 110, 208
- Espino v. Besteiro, 44
- Eva N. v. Brock,, 230
- Evans v. Board of Educ. of Rhinebeck Central School Dist., 113
- Evans v. District No. 17 of Douglas County, 244, 246
- Evans v. Jeff D., 277
- Everson v. Board of Education, 144
- Ex Parte Young, 230
- Executive Software North America, Inc. v. United States District Court for Central Dist. of California, 209
- F.B.v. Napa Valley Unified School Dist., 175
- Family and Children’s Center, Inc. v. School City of Mishawaka, 31
- Farbotko v. Clinton County, 268, 274
- Farmer’s Insurance Exchange v. South Lyon Community Schools, 31
- Farrar v. Hobby, 264
- Farrin v. Maine Sch. Admin. Dist. No. 59, 162
- Fay v. South Colonie Central School Dist., 209, 227, 239
- Fayetteville Perry Local School Dist. v. Reckers, 184
- Fee v. Herndon, 18
- Feller v. Board of Educ., 223
- Fick v. Sioux Falls 49-5, 47
- Field v. Haddonfield Bd. of Educ., 49
- First Gibraltar Bank v. Morales, 14
- Fitzgerald v. Camdenon R-III Sch. Dist., 58–59, 68, 153
- Fitzpatrick v. Town of Falmouth, 205
- Florence County School Dist. v. Carter, 126,131,137
- Florida Prepaid Postsecondary Educ. Expense Bd. v. College Sav. Bank, 228
- Flour Bluff Independent School Dist. v. Katherine M., 126
- Foley v. Special School Dist. of St. Louis, 139–140
- Fontenot v. Louisiana Bd. of Elementary and Secondary Educ., 18
- Fort Zumwalt School Dist. v. Clynes, 174, 177
- Foster v. District of Columbia Bd. of Educ., 61
- Fowler v. Unified School Dist. No. 259, 140
- Frank G. v. Bd. of Educ. of Hyde Park, 131
- Frank G. v. Board of Educ. of Hyde Park, 232
- Frank S. v. School of Committee of Dennis-Yarmouth Regional School Dist., 209
- Franklin v. Gwinnett County Public Schools, 240
- Frazier v. Fairhaven School Committee, 204, 207
- Frazier v. Fairhaven School Committee, 204, 207
- Freeman v. Cavazos, 288
- Frey v. Department of Health and Human Services, 188
- Friedman v. Board of Educ. of West Bloomfield, 38
- Frith v. Galetton Area School Dist., 18, 205
- Fuhrmann v. East Hanover Bd. of Educ, 71, 111, 119, 219

- Fulginti v. Roxbury Township Public Schools, 53
- G.C. v. Coler, 9, 18, 207
- G.D. v. Westmoreland School Dist., 214
- G.M. v. New Britain Bd. of Educ., 269–270
- Gadsby v. Grasmink, 229
- Gadsden City Bd. of Educ. v. B.P., 205
- Gagliardo v. Arlington Cent. Sch. Dist., 119
- Gallagher v. Pontiac School Dist., 44
- Garland Independent School Dist. v. Wilks, 37
- Garro v. Connecticut, 228, 236
- Gary B. v. Cronin, 49
- Gary S. v. Manchester Sch. Dist., 140, 144
- Gehman v. Prudential Property and Casualty Ins. Co., 30
- Geis v. Board of Educ., 38, 78, 225
- Gellert v. D.C. Pub. Schs., 72
- George H. and Irene L. Walker Home for Children, Inc. v. Town of Franklin, 28
- Georgia Assn. of Retarded Citizens v. McDaniel, 133
- Gerasimou v. Ambach, 204
- Gilliam v. Omaha, 227
- Gladys J. v. Pearland Indep. School Dist., 78, 136
- Golden Gate Transit Corp. v. City of Los Angeles, 240
- Goleta Union Elementary School Dist. v. Ordway, 231
- Gonzaga Univ. v. Doe, 279
- Gonzales v. Puerto Rico Dept. of Educ., 244, 268
- Gonzalez v. Puerto Rico Dep't of Educ., 54
- Gordon v. Board of Educ. Howard County, 284
- Gorski v. Lynchburg School Bd., 43, 67, 152
- Goss v. Lopez, 161, 168
- Gradby v. Grasmick, 248
- Grand Rapids Pub. Sch. v. P.C., 30
- Gray v. Metts, 270
- Great American Fed. Savings and Loan Assn v. Novotny, 221
- Great Valley School Dist. v. Douglass, 141
- Greater Boston Television Corp. v. FCC, 211
- Green v. Johnson, 33
- Greenland School Dist. v. Amy N., 232
- Greer v. Rome City School Dist., 129–130
- Gregory K. v. Longview School Dist., 214, 226
- Greider v. Shawnee Mission Unified School Dist., 117
- Grieco v. New Jersey Dept. of Educ., 207
- Grkman v. Scanlon, 62
- Gross v. Perrysburg Exempted Village School Dist., 259, 262, 272
- Grove City College v. Bell, 44
- Grubbs v. General Elec. Corp., 208
- Grube v. Bethlehem Area School Dist., 56
- Grymes v. Madden, 198–199
- Guardians Assn v. Civil Service Commn., 221
- Guy J. v. New Hampshire Dept. of Educ., 204
- H.H. v. Indiana Board of Special Educ. Amanda J. v. Clark County School Dist., 210
- H.V. v. York School Dist., 179
- Hale v. Poplar Bluffs R-I School Dist., 173, 185
- Hall v. Freeman, 29, 152
- Hall v. Shawnee Mission School Dist, 78, 136
- Hall v. Vance County Bd. of Educ., 36, 38, 136, 267
- Hamilton v. School Bd. of Commissioners of Mobile County, 209
- Handberry v. Thompson, 33, 59, 127, 153
- Hartman v. Loudon County, 130
- Hayes v. Unified School Dist. No. 377, 157–158
- Heather S. v. Niles Township High School Dist. No. 219, 174
- Heather S. v. Wisconsin, 246
- Heiderman v. Rother, 238
- Heldman v. Sobol, 180
- Heldman v. Sobol, 180
- Helms v. Independent School Dist. No. 3 of Broken Arrow, 42–43
- Helms v. McDaniel, 198–200

- Helms v. Picard, 144
- Hendrick Hudson Dist. Bd. of Educ. v. Rowley, 115, 215
- Hendricks v. Gilhool, 206, 229
- Hendry County School Bd. v. Kujawski, 182
- Henry v. School Administrative Unit No. 29, 186
- Hensley v. Eckerhar, 261,266,267
- Herbin v. District of Columbia, 61–62
- Hessler v. State Bd. of Educ., 36, 106, 133, 135, 179
- Hill v. School Bd. of Pinellas County, 186
- Hiller v. Board of Educ., 70, 106
- Hjortness v. Neenah Joint School Dist, 125
- Holland v. District of Columbia, 115
- Hollenbeck v. Board of Educ., 180
- Holmes v. Dep't of Educ., 257
- Holmes v. Mill Creek Township School Dist., 103, 106
- Holmes v. Sobol, 50
- Holz v. Nenana City Public School Dist., 227
- Honig v. Doe, 10, 21, 34, 71, 115, 121, 128, 153, 157, 159, 174, 185–186, 205–206, 218, 229–231, 243, 249, 284
- Hood v. Encinitas Union School Dist., 226
- Hope v. Cortines, 205
- Hopkins v. Aldine Independent School Dist., 200
- Horton v. Liberty Mutual Ins. Co., 208
- Houston Independent School Dist. v. Bobby R., 173
- Houston Independent School Dist. v. Bobby R., 173
- Howard v. Friendswood Independent School Dist., 13
- Howell v. Waterford Pub. Schools, 9, 18, 205–206
- Hudson v. Bloomfield Hills, 127
- Hudson v. Wilson, 106, 116
- Hurry v. Jones, 47, 174
- Hyde Park Central School Dist. v. Peter C., 182
- Hyden v. Wilson County Bd. of Educ., 272
- Hymes v. Harnett County Bd. of Educ., 7, 53
- I.B. v. N.Y. City Dep't of Educ., 252
- IBM Corp. v. Edelman, 188
- Idea Pub. Charter Sch. v. Belton, 33
- Idea Public Charter School v. District of Columbia, 105, 175
- In re, 29, 46, 49, 187, 259, 288
- In re Arons, 259
- In re Children Residing at St. Aloysius Home, 29
- In Re Juvenile 2004-789-A., 29
- In Taylor v. Vt. Dep't of Educ., 23
- Independent School Dist. No. 283 v. S.D., 126, 128, 249
- Independent School Dist. No. 284 v. A.C., 51, 78, 173
- Ingraham v. Wright, 18
- Irving Indep. School Dist. v. Tatro, 79, 174, 216
- J. S. v. Shoreline Sch. Dist., 64
- J.A. v. Board of Educ. for Dist. of South Orange and Maplewood, 29
- J.B. v. Essex-Caledonia Supervisory Union, 257, 259
- J.B. v. Killingly Bd. of Educ., 40, 78
- J.C. v. Reg'l School Dist. 10, 255–256, 265
- J.C. v. Vacaville Unified School Dist., 181, 271
- J.D. v. Pawlet School District, 99
- J.G. v. Board of Education of the Rochester City School District, 276
- J.H. v. Henrico County Sch. Bd., 133
- J.J. Garcia v. Board of Educ., 153
- J.K. v. Alexandria City School Bd., 113
- J.P. v. County School Bd. of Hanover County, 126
- J.P. v. West Clark Community Schools, 40
- J.S. v. Attica Central Schools, 205–207
- Jackson v. Franklin County School Bd., 220, 225, 233, 236
- Jaffess v. Council Rock School Dist., 203
- James v. Arlington School Dist., 232
- James v. Nashua School Dist., 259
- Janzen v. Knox County Bd. of Educ., 257
- Jasa v. Millard Public School, 139

- Jasa v. Millard Public School District No. 17, 139
- Jason D.W. v. Houston Indep. School Dist., 269–270
- Jefferson County Bd. of Educ. v. Breen, 214, 235–236
- Jeffreys v. New Jersey Depart. of Educ., 77
- Jenkins v. Florida, 39
- Jeremy H. v. Mount Lebanon School Dist., 142, 207
- Jester v. Gov't. of the Dist. of Columbia, 259
- Jim C. v. Arkansas Dept. of Educ., 228–230
- John H. v. MacDonald, 22
- John T v. Iowa Dept. of Educ., 230
- John T. v. Del. County Intermediate Unit, 265
- Johnson v. Bismarck Public School Dist., 255
- Johnson v. Clarke, 238
- Johnson v. District of Columbia, 278
- Johnson v. Georgia Highway Express, Inc., 269
- Johnson v. Independent School Dist. No. 4, 134
- Johnson v. Lancaster-Lebanon Intermediate Unit 13, 199
- Johnson v. Special Educ. Hearing Office, State of Cal., 158, 186
- Spilsbury v. District of Columbia, 158
- Johnston v. Ann Arbor Pub. Schools, 127–128, 174
- Jose P. v. Ambach, 7, 60, 225
- Joshua B. v. New Trier Township High School Dist. 203, 186
- Joshua W. v. Board of Educ. of Wichita Public Schools, 28
- Joshua W. v. USD 259 Bd. of Educ., 28
- Justin G. v. Bd. of Educ. Montgomery County, 233
- K. v. Sea Isle City Bd. of Educ., 203–204
- K.P. v. Juzwic, 284
- K.R. v. Anderson, 139
- K. v. Independent School Dist. No. 721, 177
- Karl v. Board of Education, 212
- Kaseman v. District of Columbia, 255–258
- Kay v. Ehrler, 260
- KDM v. Reedsport School District, 138
- Kennedy v. Board of Educ., 47, 174
- Kenton County School Dist. v. Hunt, 133–134, 174
- Kerkam v. District of Columbia Bd. of Educ., 248
- Kerkam v. McKenzie, 247
- Kerr Center Parents Assn. v. Charles, 205
- Kevin G. v. Cranston, 127
- Kimmel v. Florida Bd. of Regents, 228
- King v. Floyd County Board of Education, 257–259
- Kings Local School Dist., Bd. of Educ. v. Zelazny, 115
- Kirby v. Cabell County Bd. of Educ., 110
- Kirkpatrick v. Lenoir County Bd. of Educ., 214–215
- Kiser v. Garret, 22, 24
- Kletzelman v. Capistrano Unified School Dist., 8, 264
- Knable v. Bexley City School Dist., 214
- Kominos v. Upper Saddle River Bd. of Educ., 205
- Konkel v. Elmbrook School Dist., 208, 222
- Korea Exchange Bank v. Trackwise Sales Corp., 208
- Kotowicz v. Mississippi State Bd. of Educ., 180
- Krista P. v. Manhattan Sch. Dist., 64
- Kristi W. v. Graham Independent School Dist., 268
- Kruelle v. Biggs, 199
- Kruelle v. New Castle County School Dist., 16, 40, 51, 77, 135–136, 173, 199, 229–230
- Kutasi v. Las Virgenes Unified School Dist, 206
- L.B. v. Nebo School Dist., 128–130
- L.E. v. Ramsey Bd. of Educ., 36, 127–128, 134
- L.I. v. Maine School Admin. Dist. No. 55, 182
- L.M.P. v. School Bd. of Broward County Fla, 206



- Lachman v. Illinois State Bd. of Educ., 128, 174
- Lamoine School Committee v. N.S., 78, 173
- Lamont X. v. Quisenberry, 159
- Land v. Washington County Minnesota, 227
- Lang v. Braintree School Comm., 232
- Larry P. v. Riles, 65, 67, 226
- Lascari v. Ramapo Indian Hills Reg. H.S. Bd. of Educ., 38
- Lau v. Nichols, 13
- Laura I. v. Clausen, 272
- Lauren T. v. Crisp County Board of Education, 254
- Lauren W. v. DeFlaminis, 103, 214, 236
- Lawrence Tp. v Bd. of Educ. v. N.J., 229
- Lawrence Twp. Bd. of Educ. v. New Jersey, 27, 31
- Learning Disabilities Association of Maryland Inc. v. Board of Educ. of Baltimore Co., 205
- Lemon v. District of Columbia, 205
- Lemon v. Kurtzman, 144
- Lenhoff v. Farmington Pub. Schools, 141
- Leonard v. McKenzie, 113, 209, 247
- Lessard v. Wilton-Lyndeborough Co-op. School Dist., 157
- Lester H. v. Gilhool, 237
- Lewis Cass Intermediate School Dist. v. M.K., 176
- Light v. Parkway c-2 School Dist., 158, 159
- Linda T. v. Rice Lake Area School Dist., 252, 255–256, 266
- Linda W. v. Indiana Dept. of Educ, 24, 232
- Liscio v. Woodland Hills School Dist., 127
- Little Rock School v. Pulaski Special School Dist., 264
- Livingston School Dist. Nos. 4 & 1 v. Keenan, 257
- Logue v. Shawnee Mission Public School Unified School Dist., No 512, 173
- Lora v. Board of Educ. of New York City, 13
- Lovell v. Chandler, 229, 240
- Lt. T.B. v. Warwick School Committee, 34
- Lucht v. Mollalla School Dist., 254
- M.C. v. Central Regional School Dist., 36, 77, 128, 235–236
- M.C. v. Voluntown Bd. of Educ., 49
- M.J. v. De Kalb County School Dist., 18
- M.L. v. Federal Way School Dist., 220, 244, 268
- M.L. v. Federal Way School Dist., 394  
F.3d 634 (9th Cir. 2005, 244, 268
- M.M v. School Dist. of Greenville County, 206, 214
- M.M. ex rel. C.M. School Bd. of Miami-Dade County, 233–234
- M.M. v. Red Clay Consolidated School Dist., 204
- M.M. v. Sch. Bd. of Miami-Dade County of Florida, 36, 47
- M.P. v. Independent School Dist. No. 721, 172
- M.S. v. Fairfax County School Bd., 122
- M.S. v. Mullica Tp. Bd. of Educ., 72
- M.S. v. Yonkers Bd. of Educ, 131
- M.T.V. v. DeKalb County School Dist., 72, 183
- Mackey v. Board of Educ. for Arlington Central School Dist., 257
- Maher v. Gagne, 276
- Mahoney v. Administrative School Dist., 39
- Maine School Administrative Dist. No. 35 v. Mr. R., 235
- Maine v. Thiboutot, 231
- Makentozos v. DeBuono, 37
- Manchester School Dist. v. Charles M.F., 133
- Manchester School Dist. v. Crisman, 28, 141
- Manchester School Dist. v. Williamson, 186
- Manchester-Essex Regional School Dist. School Committee v. Bureau of Special Education, 218
- Manecke v. School Board of Pinellas County, 18
- Marc V. v. North East Independent School Dist., 204
- Marek v. Chesney, 271, 273
- Mark A. v. Grant Wood Area Educ. Agency, 128, 174
- Maroni v. Pemi-Baker Reg'l Sch. Dist., 23

- Martin v. School Bd. of Prince George County, 236
- Martin v. Shawano-Gresham Sch. Dist., 161
- Martinez v. Bynum, 28–29
- Martinez v. School Bd., 100, 131
- Mary P. v. Illinois State Bd. of Educ., 64
- Mason v. Schenectady City School Dist., 205
- Massachusetts Dept. of Public Health v. School Committee of Tewksbury, 252
- Mather v. Hartford School Dist, 37
- Mathern v. Cambell County Children’s Center, 256
- Mathews v. Davis, 79, 225
- Matlock v. McElrath, 179–180
- Matthew v. Dekalb County School System, 261
- Mattie T. v. Holladay, 65
- Maulaire v. State of Conn. Dept. of Educ., 182
- Mavis v. Sobol, 37, 204
- Max M. v. New Trier High School Dist., 259
- Max M. v. Thompson, 49, 147, 235–236
- Max. M. v. Illinois State Bd. of Educ., 45
- Mayson v. Teague, 180
- McCormick v. Waukegan School, 206
- McKenzie v. Jefferson, 51
- McKenzie v. Smith, 62, 77–78, 120, 132, 136, 150, 225
- McLaughlin v. Holt Public Schools Bd. of Educ., 219, 225
- McNair v. Cardimone, 48
- McNair v. Oak Hills Local School Dist., 47–48, 140
- McQueen v. Colorado Springs School Dist. No. 11, 206
- McSombodies v. Burlingame Elementary School, 255–256
- McWhirt v. Williamson County Schools, 129
- Megan C. v. Independent School Dist. No. 625, 254
- Memphis Community School Dist. v. Stachura, 238
- Menecke v. School Bd., 205
- Metropolitan Bd. of Public Educ. v. Guest, 223
- Metropolitan Govt. of Nashville and Davidson County v. Tennessee Dept. of Educ., 78
- Metropolitan Govt. v. Cook, 223
- Meury v. Eagle-Union Community School Corp, 279
- Michael M. v. Board of Educ. of New York City School Dist., 259
- Miener v. Missouri, 6, 235–237, 239
- Miller v. Board of Educ. of Albuquerque Public Schools, 174
- Miller v. Lord, 238
- Milliken v. Bradley, 231
- Mills v. Board of Educ., 41
- Missouri Dep’t of Elem. & Secondary Educ. v. Springfield R-12, 135
- Mitchell v. Helms, 144–146
- Mitten v. Muscogee County School Dist., 255–256
- MM v. School Dist. of Greenville County, 246
- Mohawk Trail Regional School Dist. v. Shaun D., 216
- Monahan v. Nebraska, 30, 200, 205
- Montanye v. Wissahickon Sch. Dist., 68
- Monticello School District v. George L., 222
- Moore v. District of Columbia, 256
- Morton Community Unit School Dist. v. J.M., 53
- Moseley v. Board of Educ. of Albuquerque Public Schools, 43
- Moser v. Bret Harte Union High School Dist., 196
- Moubry v. Independent School Dist., 203
- Moubry v. Kreb, 208
- Mr. & Mrs. D. v. Southington Board. of Educ., 204
- Mr. & Mrs. R. v. Maine. School Administrative. District No. 35, 260
- Mr. and Mrs. B. v. Weston Bd. of Educ., 262
- Mr. I. v. Maine School Admin. Dist. No. 5, 237
- Mr. J. v. Bd. of Educ., 262
- Mr. L. v. Sloan, 276
- Mr. X v. New York State Educ. Dept., 215
- Mrs. B. v. Milford Bd. of Educ., 37, 39, 78, 136, 173

- Mrs. C. v. Wheaton, 9, 18, 150, 235–236  
 Mrs. M v. Bridgeport Board of Educ, 205  
 Mrs. W. v. Tirozzi, 17–18, 142, 206–207  
 Ms. C. v. Plainfield Bd. of Educ., 272  
 Ms. K. v. City of South Portland, 46  
 Ms. S. v. Scarborough Sch. Committee, 47  
 Ms. S. v. Vashon Island School Dist., 128–130  
 Muller v. Committee on Special Educ. of East Islip Union Free School Dist., 215  
 Murdock v. Mingus Union High School District, 208  
 Murphy v. Board of Education of Rochester City School Dist., 268  
 Murphy v. Timberlake, 259  
 Murphysboro Community Unit School Dist. v. Illinois State Bd. of Educ., 232  
 Murray v. Montrose County School Dist. RE-1J, 126  
 Muth v. Central Bucks School Dist., 198–199, 267  
 Muth v. Smith, 260
- N.B. v. Alachua County School Bd., 18  
 N.L. v. Knox County Schs., 71, 115  
 N.S. v. Attica Central School), 7  
 Nack v. Orange City Sch. Dist., 113, 115, 148  
 Nadeau v. Helgemoe, 270  
 Natrona County School Dist. No. 1 v. McKnight, 237  
 Naugatuck Bd. of Educ. v. Mrs. D., 78  
 Navin, v. Park Ridge Sch. Dist. 64, 23, 115  
 Nelson v. Southfield Pub. Schools, 184, 199  
 Neosho R-V School Dist. v. Clark, 8, 173, 262, 266  
 New Mexico Association for Retarded Citizens v. New Mexico, 3, 6, 13, 206  
 New Paltz Cent. Sch. Dist. v. St. Pierre, 39, 58  
 New York Gaslight Club, Inc. v. Carey, 253  
 New York State Assn. for Retarded Children v. Carey, 188
- Nieuwenhuis v. Delaval-Darien School Dist., 139  
 Nieves-Marquez v. Puerto Rico, 229, 238, 258  
 Norris v. Massachusetts Dept. of Educ., 106  
 North Allegheny School Dist. V. Gregory P., 23  
 North Carolina Dept. of Transportation v. Crest Street Community Council, 253  
 North v. District of Columbia Bd. of Educ., 51
- O.F. v. Chester Upland Sch. Dist., 60  
 Oberti v. Board of Educ. of the Borough of Clementon School Dist., 127  
 Ojai Unified School Dist. v. Jackson, 222  
 Ortega v. Bibb County School Dist., 241
- P. N. v. Clementon Bd. of Educ., 277  
 P.G. v. Southern York County School Dist, 203  
 P.L. v. Norwalk Bd. of Educ., 255  
 P.N. v. Greco, 57, 60, 120  
 P.N. v. Seattle School Dist., 255–256, 265  
 Pace v. Bogulusa City School Bd., 228  
 Pacht v. Seagren, 72, 128–130, 229–230  
 Padilla v. School Dist. No. 1, 206, 238–239  
 Papacoda v. Connecticut, 49, 78  
 Pardini v. Allegheny Intermediate Unit, 121, 132, 150, 186–187, 307  
 Parents of Child, Code No. 870901W v. Coker, 100  
 Park v. Anaheim Union High School Dist., 35, 237, 264, 266  
 Parks v. Pavkovic, 79  
 Pasatiempo v. Aizawa, 71  
 Patricia P. v. Board of Educ. of Oak Park, 72, 210  
 Patsy v. Florida Bd. of Regents, 7  
 Pawling Cent. School Dist. v. Munoz, 263  
 Payne v. Board of Education, 264  
 Peck v. Lansing School Dist., 144–145  
 Peniman v. Cartwright, 260  
 Pennhurst State School and Hospital v. Halderman, 231

- Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens (PARC) v. Pennsylvania, 5  
 People v. Hannon, 188  
 Peter v. Jax, 264  
 Peter v. Wedl, 139, 143, 145  
 Pettie v. District of Columbia, 284  
 Phil v. Massachusetts Dept. of Educ., 17, 237  
 Phillips v. Board of Educ. Hendrik Hudson School Dist., 172  
 Phipps v. New Hanover County Bd. of Educ., 174  
 Pink v. Mt. Diablo Unified School Dist., 38  
 Pinkerton v. Moye, 47, 127, 129  
 Pires v. Commonwealth, 176  
 Pitts v. Vaughn, 260  
 Plumbly v. Northeast Indep. Sch. Dist., 166  
 Polera v. Bd. of Educ., 6, 60, 238  
 Polk v. Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit 16, 36–37, 50, 76  
 Poolaw v. Bishop, 127  
 Porter v. Board of Trustees of Manhattan Beach Unified School Dist., 204–205, 207, 231  
 Powell v. Defore, 66, 235  
 Powers v. Indiana Dept. of Educ., 213, 259  
 Pres. Coalition v. Fed. Transit Admin., 277  
 Prescott v. Palos Verdes Peninsula Unified School Dist., 252  
  
 Quackenbush v. Johnson City School Dist., 7, 206, 212  
  
 R. R. v. Fairfax County Sch. Bd., 72  
 R. v. Fairfax County School Bd., 151, 257  
 R.B. v. Napa Valley Unified School Dist, 246  
 R.F. v. Warwick School Dist., 203  
 R.R. v. Fairfax County School Bd., 257  
 Rabinowitz v. New Jersey State Bd. of Educ., 29  
 Rafferty v. Cranston Public School Committee, 204, 207  
 Rafferty v. Cranston Public School Committee, 204, 207  
 Ramsey Bd. of Educ., 36, 127–128, 130, 134  
 Raymond S. v. Ramirez, 39, 103, 106  
 Reed v. Makena, 259  
 Reese v. Board of Educ. of Bismarck R-V School Dist., 239  
 Reid v. District of Columbia, 58, 183, 225, 237  
 Reid v. Lincolnshire-Prairie View School Dist., 19  
 Renner v. Board of Education of the Public School of Ann Arbor, 38  
 Rettig v. Kent City School Dist., 36, 133  
 Reusch v. Fountain, 175  
 Richardson v. Miller, 270  
 J.C. v. Vacaville Unified School Dist., 181, 271  
 Ridgewood Bd. of Educ. v. N.E., 36, 235–236  
 Ringwood Bd. of Educ. v. K.F.J., 187  
 Robb v. Bethel School Dist. #403, 204, 206–207  
 Roberson v. Giuliani, 265, 277  
 Robert D. v. Sobel, 259  
 Robert J. v. Keller Independent School Dist., 180  
 Robert M. v. Benton, 181, 199  
 Robertson v. Granite City Community Unit School Dist. No. 9, 100  
 Robinson v. Pinderhughes, 8, 19, 207  
 Rodiricus L. v. Waukegan School Dist., No. 60, 187  
 Roe v. Town of Westford, 210  
 Rogers v. Bennett, 205  
 Roland M. v. Concord School Commission, 214  
 Rollison v. Biggs, 16, 252  
 Roncker v. Walter, 40, 128–130, 212  
 Rose v. Nebraska, 19  
 Rose v. Yeaw, 205  
 Rosemary B. v. Board of Educ. of Community H.S., 259  
 Ross v. Beaumont Hospital, 222  
 Ross v. Bernhard, 222  
 Ross v. Framingham School Committee, 218  
 Rowe v. Henry County School Board, 30  
 Russman v. Board of Education of the

- Enlarged City School District of the City of Watervliet, 139, 143
- S.H. v. State-Operated School Dist. of City of Newark, 214
- S.M. v. Board of Educ. of Albuquerque Public, 174
- S.W. v. Holbrook Pub. Schs., 166
- S-1 v. Spangler, 181
- S1 v. State Bd. of Educ., 264
- S-1 v. Turlington, 13, 70, 133, 159, 177, 221
- Sabatini v. Corning-Painted Post Area School Dist., 182, 235
- Sacramento City Unified School District v. Rachel H., 130
- Saleh v. District of Columbia, 207
- Salley v. St. Tammany Parish School Bd., 60
- San Francisco Unified School Dist. v. California, 229
- San Rafael Elementary School Dist. v. California Special Educ. Hearing, 78, 196
- Sanchez v. Monumental Life Ins. Co., 208
- Sanders v. Marquette Pub. Schools, 6, 44
- Sandifer v. Lumberton Public School Dist., 204
- Sanger v. Montgomery County Bd. of Educ., 78, 136
- Santosky v. Kramer, 24
- Schaffer v. Weast, 71, 128, 149, 219
- Schimmel v. Spillane, 137, 233, 257, 267
- Schlumberger Industries, Inc. v. National Surety Corp., 208
- Schoenbach v. Dist. of Columbia, 113
- Schoenbach v. District of Columbia, 234
- School Bd. of Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 11 v. Renollett, 109
- School Bd. of Martin County v. A.S., 181
- School Bd. of Nassau County, Florida v. Arline, 14
- School Bd. of Prince William County v. Malone, 8, 159, 259
- School Bd. v. Beasley, 224
- School Board of Collier County, Fla. v. K.C., 223
- School Committee of the Town of Burlington v. Department of Education of Massachusetts, 48, 232, 236
- School Dist. No. 153 Cook County v. School Dist. No. 154, 28
- School Dist. of Wis. Dells v. Z.S., 130
- Schreiber v. Ridgewood Bd. of Educ, 78, 135
- Schuldt v. Mankato Indep. School Dist. No. 77, 127
- Scokin v. Texas, 257
- Scott M. v. Governor Wentworth Regional School Dist., 25
- Scruggs v. Campbell, 203
- Seals v. Loftis, 39, 45, 49, 51
- Seattle School Dist. No. 1 v. B.S., 103, 232
- Sellers v. School Bd. of Manassas, 238–239
- Seminole Tribe of Florida v. Florida, 228
- Serna v. Portales Municipal Schools, 13
- Shapiro v. Paradise Valley Unified School Dist. No., 260
- Shelby S v. Conroe Independent School Dist, 62, 172
- Sherman and Nishanian v. Mamaroneck Union Free Sch. Dist., 46
- Shook v. Gaston County Bd. of Educ., 39
- Shore Regional High School Bd. of Educ. v. P.S., 76, 225
- Shuttleworth v. Broward County, 221
- Sidney K. v. Ambach, 197
- Smith v. Fitchburg Pub. School, 277
- Smith v. Philadelphia School Dist., 238
- Smith v. Robinson, 6–9, 12, 16–18, 35, 49, 224, 239–240, 242–243, 251, 275
- Smith v. Special School Dist. No. 1, 172, 177
- Smith v. United States Postal Service, 6
- Smyth v. Rivero, 277
- Sobol v. Burr, 199, 231
- South Carolina v. Baker, 14
- Southeastern Community College v. Davis, 12
- Spaulding v. Mingo Bd. of Educ., 208
- Spencer v. District of Columbia, 205
- Spielberg v. Henrico County Pub. Schools, 113, 115–116, 120, 125, 175, 220, 224
- St. Johnsbury Academy v. D.H., 37, 120

- St. Louis Developmental Disabilities Treatment Center Parents Association v. Mallory, 15
- Stacey G. v. Pasadena Indep. School Dist., 41
- Stancourt v. Worthington City School Dist. Bd. of Educ., 224
- Stark v. Walter, 19, 200
- State v. Martindale, 188
- Stearns v. Board of Educ. for Warren Township High School Dist. No. 121, 167
- Stemple v. Board of Educ., 22, 115
- Steven M. v. Gilhool, 28
- Still v. De Buono, 306
- Straube v. Florida Union Free School Dist., 206
- Strawn v. Missouri State Bd. of Educ., 225
- Sullivan v. Vallejo City Unified School Dist., 207
- Susan N. v. Wilson School Dist., 214
- Susan R.M. v. Northeastern Independent School District, 24
- Susan v. Wilson School Dist., 17
- Susquenita School Dist. v. Raelee S., 21
- T. v. District of Columbia, 203
- T.B. v. Warwick School Committee, 34, 225
- T.D. v. LaGrange School Dist. No. 102, 252, 255–256, 262, 265
- T.F. v. Special School Dist. of St. Louis County, 177
- T.G. v. Board of Educ., 49
- T.H. v. Board of Educ. of Palatine Community Consolidated School, 174
- T.R. v. Kingwood Township Bd. of Educ., 71, 111, 225
- T.R. v. Kingwood Township Bd. of Educ., 71, 111, 225
- T.S. v. Independent School Dist. No. 54, Stroud, Oklahoma, 43, 175
- Tanberg v. Weld County Sheriff, 241
- Tatro v. Texas, 16, 219
- Taylor v. Board of Educ., 48, 128–129, 174
- Taylor v. Vermont Dept. of Educ, 205, 222, 238
- Tennessee Protection and Advocacy, Inc. v. Board of Educ. of Putnam Co., Tenn., 30
- Teresa Diane P. v. Alief Independent School Dist., 39
- Texas City Indep. School Dist. v. Jorstad, 158
- The People v. D.D. (In re D.D.), 29
- Thomas v. District of Columbia, 179
- Thomas F. v. Cincinnati Bd. of Educ., 147, 215
- Thomas v. Atascadero Unified School Dist., 131
- Thompson v. Board of Educ. of Special School Dist. No. 1, 172
- Thornock v. Boise Indep. School Dist., 128
- Tice v. Botetourt County School Bd., 51
- Tilton v. Jefferson County Bd. of Educ., 150
- Timms v. Metropolitan School Dist. of Wabash County, 235
- Timothy W. v. Rochester School Dist., 79
- Tindall v. Poultney High Sch. , 23
- Tokarcik v. Forest Hills School Dist., 53, 257
- Tompkins v. Forest Grove School Dist. #115, 196
- Tschanneral v. District of Columbia Bd. of Educ., 27
- Tuck v. HCA Health Services of Tenn., 6
- Tucker v. Bay Shore Union Free School Dist., 137
- Turilio v. Tyson, 16
- Turton v. Crisp County School Dist., 256
- Twp. Board of Educ. High School Dist. No. 211 v. Ross, 34
- Twp. of Bloomfield Bd. of Educ. v. S.C., 39
- Ullmo v. Gilmour Academy, 208
- United Mine Workers of America v. Gibbs, 209
- United States v. Bergh, 14
- Upper Valley Assn. for Handicapped Citizens v. Blue Mountain School Dist., 254
- Upper Valley Association for Handicapped Citizens v. Mills, 204

- Urban v. Jefferson County School Dist., 9, 18, 35, 147, 249
- Valerie J. v. Derry Cooperative School Dist., 231
- Van Duyn v. Baker School Dist. 5J, 128, 173
- Vander Malle v. Ambach, 22
- Verginia McC v. Corrigan-Camden Indep. School Dist., 264, 270
- Verhoeven v. Brunswick School Committee, 209
- Victoria L. v. District School Bd. of Lee County, 183, 198
- Visco v. School Dist., 129
- Vogel v. School Bd. of Montrose, 199
- Vultaggio v. Bd. of Educ., 252, 254
- W. K. v. Sea Isle City Bd. of Educ., 203
- W. T. v. Andalusia City Schools, 24, 264
- W.B. v. Matula, 57, 132
- W.G. v. Target School Dist. No. 23 Bd. of Trustees, 119
- W.L.G. v. Houston County Bd. of Educ., 264
- W.S. v. Rye City School Dist., 131, 135
- W.T. v. Andalusia City Schools, 24, 264
- Wagner v. Short, 34, 237
- Walczak v. Florida Union Free School Dist., 173
- Walker County School Dist. v. Bennett, 222–223
- Walker County School Dist. v. Bennett, 222–223
- Wall v. Mattiluck-Cutchogue School Dist., 215
- Walled Lake Consolidated School v. Jones, 184
- Waln v. Todd County School Dist., 168
- Walton Central School District v. Kirk, 159
- Warner v. Independent School Dist. No. 625, 255
- Warren G. v. Cumberland County School Dist., 131, 232
- Waterman v. Marquette—Alger Intermediate School Dist., 238
- Wayne County Regional Educ. Service Agency v. Pappas, 204
- Weber v. Cranston Pub. Sch. Comm., 69, 152–153
- Webster Groves School Dist. v. Pulitzer Pub. Co., 158
- Weil v. Board of Elementary & Secondary Educ., 150, 185
- Weiss v. School Bd. of County of Hillsborough, 248
- Weixel v. Board of Educ. of City of New York, 7
- Wenger v. Canastota School Dist., 182
- West Platte R-II School Dist. v. Wilson, 222, 225
- West Virginia University Hospitals, Inc. v. Casey, 262
- Wexler v. Westfield Bd. of Educ., 43
- Wharton v. Calderon, 188
- White v. Ascension Parish School Bd., 126–127, 185
- White v. California, 233, 236–237
- White v. School Bd. of Henrico County, 224
- West Platte R-II School Dist. v. Wilson, 222, 225
- Wikol v. Birmingham Pub. Schools. Board. of Educ., 266
- Wilder v. Virginia Hospital Association, 240
- Will v. Michigan State Police, 230–231
- Williams v. Boston School Committee, 252, 270
- Williams v. Overturf, 107
- Wilson v. Fairfax County School Bd., 159, 173, 185
- Wilson v. Garcia, 257
- Wilson v. Marana Unified School Dist., 129
- Wilson v. McDonald, 284
- Wilson v. School Dist. No. 1, 284
- Winkelman v. Parma City School District, 23
- Wise v. Ohio Dept. of Educ., 28
- Witte v. Clark County School Dist., 206
- Witters v. Washington Dept. of Services for the Blind, 143
- Wong v. The Regents of the University of California, 16
- Woods v. Roundout Valley Central School Dist. Board of Educ., 227





# Preface

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More than 7.1 million children from birth through 21 years of age are receiving special education and related services from more than 46,000 teachers in the United States. That means that 7.1 million Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) are developed each year involving millions of parents, thousands of teachers, and thousands of other professionals. Most of these IEPs are developed, and the students receive the educational services, with little conflict. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in effect provides a roadmap that both the parents and the school follow toward the same destination. A fair number of parents and local educators, however, do not reach agreement about the provision of special education and related services and formal disputes result.

This book assists in reading that map as well as in resolving those disputes. The book is designed to take the lawyers, educators, and other professionals without prior experience through the process leading to an agreement. If agreement, however, is not reached between the school and the public agency responsible for educating the child, the book is designed to help the participants through the process of resolving that disagreement.

In this third edition we continue to provide a comprehensive overview of the federal statutes, regulations, and case law that affect the education of children with disabilities from birth to age 22. The book provides a solid background in special education law and is fully up-to-date with the recent recodification of IDEA, the new Department of Education regulations, and the recent case law, including the most recent United States Supreme Court decisions.

The text is written so that lawyers, educators and parents all can understand the intricacies of special education law. One of the overriding themes of special education is that a child's educational programming should be individualized. As such, many of the cases in this area are fact specific. For the lawyer, therefore, comprehensive citations to statutes, regulations, and case law provide the information necessary to conduct detailed legal research. In addition, numerous checklists and forms provide assistance with the practical application of the legal requirements.

The book, by its very nature, is primarily limited to federal law in general and IDEA and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (§504) in particular. One of the difficulties dealing with special education law is the interplay of several federal statutes, primarily IDEA and §504, and to a lesser extent the Americans with Disabilities Act, (ADA), and 42 U.S.C. §1983, as well as supporting federal regulations. Further there are often statutes and regulations affecting general education that affect special education. For example, the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR)

and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA or the Buckley Amendments) each may play a significant role. Chapter 1 provides a general overview of IDEA and its interrelationship with § 504, § 1983, EDGAR and FERPA. In each of the succeeding chapters, the primary focus is on IDEA, however, full attention is also given to the impact § 504 has on the subject, as well as any additional federal statute affecting the particular area.

State law should always be checked. Each state has its own statutes and regulations implementing the IDEA. While these state statutes and regulations usually mirror the federal statutes and regulations, this is not always the case. For example, federal statutes and regulations are silent on some points, and Congress has allowed states to develop independent standards in some areas. Further, while the state may not provide fewer rights, some states actually provide more substantive and procedural rights than required under IDEA. The addresses where copies of state regulations can be obtained, often at no cost, are listed in the Appendix.

Even the lawyer reading the footnotes may find some authorities with which he or she is not familiar. There are of course citations to court decisions, federal statutes and regulations. In addition, however, there are numerous citations to opinions written by the staff of two offices of the Department of Education: The Office of Civil Rights (OCR), the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), and its Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). OSEP is responsible for monitoring compliance with IDEA while OCR is responsible for monitoring compliance with § 504. Each office, therefore, has occasion to interpret the regulations of the respective statutes. OCR and OSEP opinions, being the interpretation of the agency having written the regulation, are afforded considerable deference by courts. In areas where there are no court decisions, they may be particularly significant.

For the nonlawyer, a brief explanation of the primary authorities used is contained in the Appendix.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has been amended several times and its name has changed over the years. We refer to the statute as IDEA or the Act, except where quotations require reference to a previously used acronym such as EHA or EAHCA. We have also tried to inform the reader where significant changes have been made by the various amendments to the statutes and regulations over the years since their original enactment

Portions of this work have appeared, often in significantly different form, in the following law journals. The authors thank the journals for their permission to use the material in this book: Guernsey and Sweeney, *The Church, The State, And the EHA: Educating the Handicapped in Light of The Establishment Clause*, 73 *Marquette Law Review* 101 (1990); Guernsey, *The Education For All Handicapped Children Act*, 42 *U.S.C. Section 1983 and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973: Statutory Interaction Following the Handicapped Children's Protection Act of 1986*, 68 *Nebraska Law Review* 564 (1989); Guernsey, *The School Pays the Piper, But How Much? Attorneys' Fees in Special Education Cases After the Handicapped Children's Protection Act of 1986*, 23 *Wake Forest Law Review* 237 (1988); Guernsey, *When the Teachers and Parents Can't Agree, Who Really Decides? Burdens of Proof and Standards of Review Under the Education for All Handicapped Children Act*, 36 *Cleveland State Law Review* 67 (1987–1988).

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# Note on Abbreviations

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Special education law is replete with abbreviations beginning with the title of the Act. The abbreviations are explained throughout the text. We have, however, as a matter of convenience listed below the more common abbreviations.

AIDS	Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
DOE	Department of Education
EAHCA	Education for all Handicapped Children Act
EDGAR	Education Department General Administrative Regulations
EHA	Education for the Handicapped Act
ESY	Extended School Year
FAPE	Free Appropriate Public Education
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (Buckley Amendment)
HCPA	Handicapped Children's Protection Act of 1986
HIV	Human Immuno-deficiency Virus
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEE	Independent Educational Evaluation
IEP	Individualized Education Program
IFSP	Individualized Family Service Plan
ITDA	Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities Act
LEA	Local Education Authority
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
MDR	Manifestation Determination Review
OCR	Office of Civil Rights (U.S. Department of Education)
OSEP	Office of Special Education Programs (U.S. Department of Education)
OSERS	Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (U.S. Department of Education)
SEA	State Education Authority