



## **Kansas Special Education by the Numbers**

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The National School Boards Association is leading an effort to review and revise the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), called “It’s Time for A Great IDEA.” KASB is conducting three workshops on IDEA, special education in Kansas schools and the 2020 U.S. Census in Topeka (Aug. 27), Dodge City (Aug. 28) and Salina (Aug. 29). Here are some facts about special education in Kansas.

### **Enrollment**

Nearly one in six Kansas students receive special education services. The number of Kansas students receiving services under the IDEA is growing much faster than overall student enrollment, and faster than the U.S. average.

According to the [U.S. Digest of Education statistics](#), the number of 3-21-year-olds served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in Kansas (in both public and private schools) increased from 61,267 in 2000-01 to 73,729 in 2017-18, or 20.3 percent.

The total headcount enrollment of all students in Kansas public school districts increased from 468,334 to 491,270, or 4.9 percent.

That percentage increase of special education students in Kansas was almost double the national average of 10.6 percent.

Included with that total, early childhood special education for Kansas students ages three and four identified with special needs, increased from 7,728 in 2000-01 to 11,772, or 52.3 percent. That percentage increase was also higher than the national average of 33.9 percent.

Although the IDEA population in Kansas has been increasing faster than the U.S. average, the percentage of students in special education is not dramatically higher than the U.S. average or other states in the region.

In 2018, students served under IDEA equaled 14.9 percent of total public-school enrollment in Kansas. That was 1.2 percent above the national average of 13.7 percent. Kansas is about average compared to states in the region: higher than Colorado (11.2), Iowa (12.9), and North Dakota (13.9); equal to Missouri (14.9); and lower than Minnesota (15.3), Nebraska (15.6); Oklahoma (16.1), and South Dakota (15.4).

### **Teachers**

With an increase in special education students, the number of special education teachers is increasing much faster than overall Kansas school district staff.

Special education teacher positions increased from 3,294.5 in 1997-98 to 4,125.1 in 2018-19, or 830.6 positions (25 percent). Special education paraprofessional positions increased from 3,321.3 to 6,419, or 3,097.7 positions (93 percent).

Total school district staff increased by 19.5 percent over this period.

Combined, these special education positions increased 3,928.3, which is almost half (47.1 percent) of the total increase in all instructional positions (all teachers, paraprofessionals and classroom aides) from 1998 to 2019, and one-third (33.8 percent) of total school district positions added.

### **Cost and Funding**

Special education costs and funding are also increasing at a faster rate than overall K-12 funding.

According to the Kansas State Department of Education, total expenditures for special education increased from \$471.3 million in 2000-01 to \$899.7 million in 2018-19, an increase of \$428.4 million, or 90.1 percent.

Over the same period, combined school district general fund, local option budget and special education state aid expenditures increased from \$2.815 billion to \$4.345 billion, or \$1.53 billion (54.4 percent.) As a result, special education expenditures increased from 16.7 percent of general fund/LOB/special education state aid in 2001 to 20.1 percent in 2018.

Total school district expenditures increased from \$3.669 billion in 2001 to \$6.493 billion in 2018, or 77.0 percent. (Total expenditures include capital costs for building, equipment and debt service, federal funds and increased state aid to address the unfunded liability of KPERS.)

Average special education expenditures per headcount student receiving IDEA services increased from \$7,692 in 2001 to \$12,203 in 2018, or 58.6 percent.

Average general fund/LOB and special education state aid per headcount enrollment of all students increased from \$6,010 in 2001 to \$8,771 in 2018, or 45.9 percent. Total expenditures per pupil all students increased from \$7,834 to \$13,106, or 67.3 percent.

State special education aid increased from \$233.4 million in 2001 to \$436 million in 2018. However, as percentage of “excess cost,” special education aid dropped from 92 percent in 2009 to 78.5 percent in 2018. Excess cost is defined as the portion of special education costs that exceed the cost of “regular” education and federal payments that help fund special education. When state and federal aid do not cover the additional cost of special education services, districts must reallocate funding from regular classrooms and other programs to cover those services.

### **Other resources:**

National School Boards Association [IDEA Fact Sheet #1](#)

Kansas Division of Legislative Post Audit, [K-12 Education: Evaluating Special Education Costs](#)