

PANEL THREE: Federal Law Opens Doors (1975-1989)

FAMILY DISCUSSION GUIDE

Overview: This panel explores how federal legislation in 1975 and 1986 transformed education and early intervention for children with disabilities. Students will learn about the power of law to create systemic change, the implementation of new federal mandates, and the development of systems still in use today.

FOR YOUNGER CHILDREN (Ages 5-10):

- 1. Understanding rights:**
 - "The panel says all children have the RIGHT to go to school. What does 'right' mean?"
 - "Before 1975, some schools said certain children couldn't come. How would that make you feel?"
 - 2. Talking about IEPs (if relevant to your family):**
 - "Some students have a special plan called an IEP to help them learn. Do you know anyone with an IEP?"
 - "Why do you think it's good that teachers and parents work together on these plans?"
 - 3. Understanding fairness:**
 - "The law said schools must teach ALL children. Why is that fair?"
 - "How can we make sure everyone in our family and our community feels included?"
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FOR TWEENS/TEENS (Ages 11-17):

- 1. Discuss legal change:**
 - "Before 1975, education for children with disabilities depended on where you lived and whether your parents could fight for it. How did federal law change that?"
 - "Is there a difference between something being 'nice to do' versus being a legal requirement? Why does that matter?"
- 2. Connect to personal experience:**
 - "Do you know students in your school who receive special education services? Has that always seemed normal to you? Why?"
 - "The panel says that for your generation, the right to education is 'simply assumed.' What does that tell you about the power of law to shape what we consider normal?"

3. Explore complexity:

- "The panel mentions challenges: schools claimed they lacked resources, some parents and schools ended up in disputes. Why might implementing a good law still be hard?"
 - "What do you think 'least restrictive environment' means? How do you balance including everyone with meeting individual needs?"
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FOR FAMILIES WITH PERSONAL CONNECTIONS:

If your family receives special education services, has an IEP, or uses early intervention programs, this panel directly affects your life.

Conversation Starters:

- "The services we receive today—IEPs, therapy, school support—exist because of the 1975 law. Before that, families had to fight individually or go without. How does knowing that history feel?"
- "Missouri First Steps (if you've used it) was created because of the 1986 amendments. Early intervention for babies and toddlers wasn't guaranteed before that. What would life have been like without those early services?"
- "IEPs are required by federal law—schools must develop them with parent input. Have you participated in an IEP meeting? What was that experience like?"

For Families Currently in Special Education:

- "The panel says parents are supposed to be partners in the IEP process. Do you feel like a partner? What works well? What could be better?"
 - "The law says 'free appropriate public education.' Do you think the services provided are appropriate? If not, you have rights to challenge—that's part of what the law guarantees."
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INTERGENERATIONAL CONVERSATIONS:

If you have older family members who were educators, parents, or administrators during the 1970s-1980s, ask:

- "Do you remember when the federal special education law passed in 1975? What changed in schools?"
- "Were you part of implementing the new requirements? What was that like?"
- "How did attitudes about disability change during this period?"