

The Role of Compensatory Education in Supporting Special Education Students



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[Compensatory education ensures Missouri students](#) with disabilities are provided with their constitutional right to an appropriate education — whether that’s in the form of programs to extend school years, adaptive technology, or services like behavioral therapy, for example. Unfortunately, however, young children’s access to [early intervention or special education services](#) in Missouri significantly fell during the pandemic, a recent report from the National Institute for Early Education Research reveals. As such, it’s important Missouri parents and teachers recognize the urgent need for compensatory education to address the resulting potential setbacks and disparities experienced.

Compensatory education: improving academic, social, and emotional development

Compensatory services can play a key role in facilitating academic, social, and emotional development in students with disabilities — areas hindered by the rise of online learning and lack of special education services that occurred during the pandemic. In terms of emotional development, in particular, the change in routine coupled with social isolation caused an [increase in stress, anxiety](#), and a sense of disconnection among students with disabilities. So, in this case, compensatory education may involve one-on-one counseling and social skills training to address emotional challenges, provide coping strategies, and build positive connections with peers. Students may also benefit from private tutoring sessions as an effective way to catch up on missed content, bridge learning disparities, and reinforce foundational skills. Notably, private tutoring [takes a personalized and targeted approach](#) designed to address individual learning needs, and improve students' overall academic performance and confidence.

According to experts, students in need of compensatory education should be identified and served as soon as possible — as these students are likely finding it challenging to move up to the next grade levels. “We've definitely seen the effect of COVID on early education, and those kids missing those early childhood experiences of being able to be with their peers, being able to learn through play and interacting with an adult other than their primary caregiver,” comments Dana Walker, director of children’s services for St. Louis Arc. “When they are going into the early education setting, the elementary setting, they're not prepared.”

Ensuring educational equity

Missouri provides compensatory education services to students if their school district failed to provide the special education services outlined in the student's [IEP \(Individualized Education Program\)](#) — a personalized legal document explaining the services a child is entitled to, and designed to promote educational equity. So, for instance, if a student was meant to receive speech and language therapy three times weekly, but only received sessions once weekly, compensatory education may be awarded to make up for the sessions the student missed — with the ultimate goals of bringing the child up to the same standard he or she would have been if the IEP had been followed. Compensatory education may either be provided following formal investigations, administrative hearing, or court decisions.

Is your child entitled to compensatory education under IDEA?

If your child demonstrates learning gaps, delays, or behaviors suggesting their IEP hasn't been followed, they may be entitled to compensatory education. Arrange a meeting with your child's IEP team, and be ready to discuss the reasons why you think your child is in need of compensatory education — detail the services your child missed, why they were missed, and the relevant dates. Alternatively, you may instead want to highlight how the services were provided, but failed to meet your child's needs.

Although there isn't one clear-cut way to bring a student up to speed, a quantitative approach is often taken — so, for example, if a student missed 20 hours of their specialized reading program, they may now be awarded with 20 hours of specialized reading program participation. Alternatively, students who are about to be too old to be eligible for special education services may be able to extend their eligibility for another year through compensatory education.

Compensatory education plays a key role in helping Missouri students with disabilities thrive academically, emotionally, and socially. Missouri parents are encouraged to actively engage with the compensatory education process, work with their child's teachers, and advocate for their child's rights to benefit from an equitable and inclusive learning environment.

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