

The end of special education?

I started a teaching career about two decades before the federal government intervened on behalf of children with disabilities.

In the mid-1970's the federal government essentially declared that children with disabilities had the fundamental right to a free and appropriate education.

Educating children with disabilities can be really hard (and expensive). Public school districts have typically been underfunded; thus high-cost special education programs did not get included in most public school district budgets until the federal government required a free and appropriate education for those with disabilities and provided at least a modicum of financial support.

The new federal budget will fund special education through the Special Education Simplified Program. This "block grant" program will not guarantee that the various categories of disability will be accommodated, particularly in Ohio, wherein public school districts are mostly underfunded by the state.

Voucher-loving state legislators will be tempted to use the federal "block-grant" funding for special education for a voucher scheme that embraces no regulations and accountability. Under this scheme, programming for Special Education children could return to the low level provided in the 1950's.

From the viewpoint of a previous local school district administrator, at times some of the regulations embedded in Special Education programming seemed at times onerous; however, it is often the case that government policy is necessary to protect a particular class of children.