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Parents need help in fighting for kids' education

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Congress enacted the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to ensure that children with disabilities receive a free, appropriate public education.

Based on a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Schaffer v. Weast*, parents will have the burden of proof when challenging an individualized education plan (IEP).

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg dissented, relying on several significant points. Cash-strapped school districts will, if "left to their own devices," favor less expensive educational options. Additionally, the majority of parents with disabled children protected by IDEA lack the knowledge to effectively challenge an IEP.

It is now crucial that parents have legal counsel when challenging a school-proposed IEP or seeking special-education services for their children. With attorney assistance, parents will be more likely to prove a district is not appropriately serving their disabled children.

Ultimately, this decision is most onerous for low-income parents, who cannot afford to pay an attorney. The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland provides counsel for families with special-education needs. But Legal Aid's resources are already stretched.

With *Schaffer v. Weast*, the need for legal assistance will only grow.

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