

Patthoff, A. (2011). Floors and doors: The impact of metaphor on student entitlements under the IDEA.

Abstract

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act guarantees disabled students a “free appropriate public education.” It has been nearly thirty years since the United States Supreme Court first and last addressed the meaning of this guarantee. In the intervening years, federal education policy had undergone a sea change: congressional focus has shifted from simply subsidizing low-income public schools to requiring accountability from those schools for student achievement outcomes. Still, despite the accountability movement embodied by recent federal legislation, the judicially-created definition of “free appropriate public education” has remained unchanged. This article uses cognitive metaphor theory to argue that the standard for a “free appropriate public education” has not kept up with the changing education policies in part because the judicial metaphors that inform and comprise the definition have become outmoded.