

**PARC v. Pennsylvania: Pioneering the Right to Education for Children with Cognitive  
Impairments**

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**Junior Group Website**

**Student-Composed Words: 1199**

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**Process Paper Word Count: 499**

## Process Paper

This year's theme, *frontiers in history: people, places, and ideas*, asks students to research the events that have pioneered and allowed for the notable movements, innovations, and discoveries of modern history. After reflecting on this theme, we decided to research frontiers in the disability rights movement. Our team chose to explore this area of history for two main reasons. First, we knew little prior information about the disability rights movement, providing us with the opportunity to expand our historical knowledge. Secondly, this topic is also personal to our team. One of our team members has a physical disability and thus has been personally impacted by the disability rights movement. As such, we felt that it was important for us to highlight this often overlooked part of history.

While researching the disability rights movement, we read about the push in the late 1960's and 1970's to establish the right to education for children with cognitive impairments. Central to this initiative was *PARC v. Pennsylvania*, our topic this year. *PARC v. Pennsylvania* pioneered education rights for the cognitively impaired as the first court case to establish that all children are entitled to a free appropriate education provided in the least restrictive environment.

We began our research by accessing the *PARC v. Pennsylvania* case docket, which provided us with all relevant legal documents. Next, we researched specific aspects of the *PARC v. Pennsylvania* case in greater depth using interviews, government records, and papers written at the time of the case. A combination of secondary and primary sources were used while researching the background and impact of our topic. Finally, we used the WebCentral website builder, provided by National History Day, to make our web pages.

Throughout our project, we argued that *PARC v. Pennsylvania* was a frontier in the disability rights movement by establishing the right to education for children with cognitive impairments. This argument was supported by primary source material and analysis across the website.

Well often overlooked, *PARC v. Pennsylvania* has had a profound impact on special education and the rights of cognitively impaired citizens. First, *PARC* introduced the idea that a child's educational program must suit their educational profile, also known as providing a "free appropriate public education (FAPE)." Second, *PARC* introduced the idea

that a child with cognitive impairments should be educated alongside their peers to the greatest extent possible, known as educating a child in the “least restrictive environment.” These two protections, established by the PARC v. Pennsylvania decision, are still extremely relevant in the field of special education today. However, most notably, PARC was the first court case to find that all children with cognitive impairments can benefit from education and rule that denying a cognitively impaired child a free public education violates the equal protection clause. These findings were tracked directly into the Education for All Handicapped Children Act. Now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), this piece of legislation continues to shape the field of special education, impacting the education of millions of children every day.

