

FROM THE EDITOR

An in-depth look at IDEA

Gerald Ford was, if anything, a pragmatist during his rocky two-plus year tenure as president. He pardoned Richard Nixon in the wake of Watergate, oversaw the final withdrawal of troops from Vietnam, and signed one of the most significant federal education laws in history.

Ford's signing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 was overshadowed by those other events. But just as Ford saw the pardon and the troop withdrawal as ways to restore peace to a torn nation, he also saw the danger in the promises made by what is now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

"Unfortunately, this bill promises more than the federal government can deliver, and its good intentions could be thwarted by the many unwise provisions it contains," Ford said in a statement after signing the bill. "Everyone can agree with the objective stated in the title of this bill—educating all handicapped children in our nation. The key question is whether the bill will really accomplish that objective."

He also was eerily prescient in predicting the funding battles that continue over IDEA. "Even the strongest supporters of this measure know as well as I that they are falsely raising the expectations of the groups affected by claiming authorization levels that are excessive and unrealistic," Ford said.

Thirty-one years after signing the legislation, Ford died, on the day after Christmas. Coincidentally, the cere-

monies marking his passing came as two of our staff members worked on a major package of stories on IDEA.

Senior Editor Naomi Dillon takes an in-depth look at *Hendrick Hudson Central School District Board of Education v. Rowley*, the first IDEA case to reach the U.S. Supreme Court.

Thanks to a partnership with the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, which marks the 25th anniversary of the case with a major conference this month, *ASBJ* was granted exclusive access to the Rowley family. Naomi's research included a visit to Amy Rowley's home in Milwaukee, as well as a visit to the Milwaukee Sign Language School, a public school that Amy's daughter Neva attends. The story also includes interviews with the Hendrick Hudson attorney and superintendent involved in the case.

The story illustrates the ongoing fundamental dilemma that IDEA cases present—parents on one side, seeking the best possible services for their child; overburdened school districts wanting to do what's best for all children, and trying to do so with limited resources. It is fascinating reading.

Meanwhile, Associate Editor Joetta Sack-Min makes her *ASBJ* debut by examining the major issues surrounding IDEA. Joetta, who joined our staff last fall, also compiled the IDEA timeline that appears with her story.

We hope you enjoy this look at one of the most controversial, litigious laws that affect public education.

Glenn Cook, Editor-in-Chief

