

June 14, 2017

Representative Jared Huffman
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Representative Tim Walz
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Representative David McKinley
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Representative John Katko
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Representative Dave Reichert
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Representative Kurt Schrader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congress Member,

The undersigned organizations are dedicated to advocating for the full funding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). On behalf of over 6.2 million students with disabilities, their teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, parents, school boards and administrators, we write to express our strong support for the IDEA Full Funding Act.

Since its inception, IDEA has protected students with disabilities by ensuring access to a free and appropriate public education. The original statute included a Congressional promise to pay 40 percent of the National Average per Pupil Expenditure. Federal funding has never come close to reaching the promised 40 percent, causing states and local school districts to find ways to pay for needed services. While special education funding received much needed increases from 2000 to 2012, including the one-time infusion of IDEA dollars in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, funding has leveled off in recent years and has even been cut in some instances. The closest the federal government has come to reaching its 40 percent commitment was 18 percent in 2005, and the President's proposed funding level for FY18 would decrease IDEA funding to levels established more than a decade ago. The chronic underfunding of IDEA by the federal government places an additional funding burden on states, local school districts, and taxpayers to pay for needed services. This often means using local budget dollars to cover the federal shortfall, shortchanging other school programs that students with disabilities often also benefit from.

The number of students with disabilities has increased more than 25 percent over the last 20 years, a growth that federal funding has struggled to support. In fact, for FY17 (the upcoming 2017-18 school year), the federal share for IDEA is 15 percent, less than half of the Congressional commitment to students with special needs. Our organizations will remain steadfast in our approach to ensuring Congress meets its commitment to fund 40 percent of the additional costs.

Investing in IDEA, a federal flagship formula program designed to help level the education playing field for students with disabilities, is an investment in our nation's students and their future. It indicates that Congress is serious in meeting its commitment to helping school districts support all students. Our organizations strongly support full federal funding for IDEA. IDEA is the major—but not sole—vehicle for providing education to students with disabilities. In fact, students with disabilities are general education students first, with nearly two-thirds of students with disabilities spending at least 80 percent of their time in a general education setting.

Thank you for your leadership on the full funding of IDEA, and we very much appreciate your work to support efforts in Congress to move toward meeting its IDEA funding commitment. Please direct any questions to Neil Snyder (nsnyder@asha.org) or Noelle Ellerson Ng (nellerson@aasa.org).

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Council for School Social Work
American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees
American Federation of Teachers
American Music Therapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Physical Therapy Association
American Psychological Association
American Speech-Language-Hearing-Association
Association of School Business Officials International
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Clearinghouse on Women's Issues
Council of Administrators of Special Education
Council of Great City Schools
Council for Exceptional Children
Council for Exceptional Children (Teacher Education Division)
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association
School Social Work Association of America
Software & Information Industry Association
TASH
The ARC of the United States