

Senator Thad Cochran
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Rodney P. Frelinghuysen
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Patrick Leahy
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Nita Lowey
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Roy Blunt
Chair, Senate LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Tom Cole
Chair, House LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Senate LHHS Appropriations
Subcommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Rosa DeLauro
Ranking member, House LHHS Appropriations
Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

March 7, 2018

Dear Member of Congress,

The undersigned organizations represent a coalition of education organizations dedicated to fulfilling the funding promise for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). On behalf of over 6.8 million students with disabilities, their teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, parents, school boards and administrators, we write to urge you to provide a significant increase in funding for IDEA as part of a fair and proportional allocation for the final FY18 LHHS-Education appropriations bill.

Since its inception in 1975, IDEA has protected students with disabilities by ensuring access to a free appropriate public education. At the time the statute was enacted, Congress promised to pay 40 percent of the National Average per Pupil Expenditure. While special education funding has received significant increases over the past 17 years, federal funding has leveled off recently and has even been cut. The closest the federal government has come to reaching its 40 percent commitment was 18 percent in 2005.

In light of Congress' recent actions to raise the funding caps for both defense and non-defense discretionary programs, which includes IDEA, it is critical Congress act to alleviate the pressure created by its unfunded mandate. 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 are also beneficial to students with disabilities.

In December 2017, AASA surveyed school superintendents across the nation and included a question that asked what percentage of their local budget is being used to cover federal mandates related to special education. Just 10% of respondents indicated that it was less than 10% of total spending, compared to 48.2% of respondents who

indicated they used 10-20% of total spending to cover the federal IDEA shortfall, 25.6% reporting 20-30%; and 8.5% reporting they used 30-40%¹.

IDEA is currently funded at \$12 billion. This level funding equates to approximately 15 percent of what is historically considered the additional cost of educating students with disabilities, less than half of the 40 percent that was the federal government's original commitment to students with disabilities. We support prioritized and robust investment in IDEA, without negatively impacting funding for other education programs, and urge Congress to ensure a significant increase for IDEA in the final FY18 appropriations statute and use that appropriately adjusted funding level as the basis for further increased investment in FY19.

Please direct any questions to Noelle Ellerson Ng (nellerson@aasa.org).

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees
American Federation of Teachers
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents
Association of School Business Officials International (ASBO)
Council for Exceptional Children
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Education Association
National PTA
National Rural Education Advocacy Consortium
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association

CC: U.S. Senate, Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives, Appropriations Committee

¹ AASA, The School Superintendents Association (2017). [Ten Years Later: How Funding Pressures Continue to Impact Our Nation's Schools](#)