



March 24, 2015

The Honorable Roy Blunt, Chairman
 The Honorable Patty Murray, Ranking Member
 Senate Subcommittee on
 Labor, HHS and Education Appropriations
 Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole, Chairman
 The Honorable Rosa DeLauro, Ranking Member
 House Subcommittee on
 Labor, HHS and Education Appropriations
 Washington, DC 20515

Dear Appropriator,

The undersigned organizations represent a coalition of education organizations dedicated to advocating for the full funding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). On behalf of students with disabilities, teachers, specialized instructional support professionals, parents, administrators, and school boards, we write to urge you to provide increased funding for IDEA within the FY2016 LHHs-Education appropriation.

When Congress passed IDEA in 1975, it committed the federal government to helping ensure that students with disabilities receive a free appropriate education by funding 40 percent of the additional cost associated with educating students with disabilities. Unfortunately, Congress has yet to realize that commitment, reaching a high water mark of 25% with the one-time infusion of emergency funding in 2009, and a high of 18% through the annual appropriations process in 2005. Unfortunately, the FY15 appropriations level finds IDEA funding at 16%.

The President's FY2016 budget proposal requests \$11.7 billion for IDEA. When calculated as the federal share of the authorized 40% of the additional cost of educating students with disabilities, the proposed funding level of \$11.7 billion represents 15.5% of the authorized 40%, or less than half of the federal government's commitment to students with special needs. The remaining 84% of the costs, or \$61 billion, will be covered by state and local governments.

While special education funding has received significant increases over the past fifteen years, including the one-time infusion of IDEA dollars in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, funding has leveled off recently and even been cut. Federal funding has never come close to reaching the promised 40%, causing states and local school districts to find ways to pay for needed services. This means using local budget dollars to cover the federal shortfall, at the direct expense of local district needs and expenditures, and/or increasing local taxes, which is an especially high burden in times of fiscal austerity and uncertainty.

Collectively, level funding through the appropriations process and the cuts of sequestration have exacerbated the need for school districts to raise taxes or use local budget dollars to cover an ever-growing share of the federal contribution to special education.

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, and represents an

indication that Congress is serious in meeting its commitment to helping school districts meet the needs of all students. Therefore, we strongly support full funding for IDEA. Given the unlikely nature of that happening in FY2016, we support a significant increase in FY16 appropriations for IDEA. The call for increased IDEA funding was bi-partisan in the last Congress, something we hope will continue this year:

- Republican Representatives Kline, Rokita, Sessions, and McMorris-Rodgers in their April 29, 2014 [letter to Appropriators](#);
- Republican Representatives Gibson, McKinley, and Reichart with their [co-sponsorship of H.R.4136](#), the IDEA Full Funding Act of 2014; and
- Rep. VanHollen and 30 Democratic Representatives who also [cosponsored H.R.4136](#).

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. Investing in education is the right thing for our students today and our nation’s future. We appreciate your commitment to fulfilling Congress’s original promise to IDEA and encourage you to provide the funding needed for all education programs.

Thank you for your leadership on the funding of IDEA, and we very much appreciate your efforts in helping Congress work toward meeting its IDEA funding commitment.

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Federation of Teachers
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Great City Schools
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 Association
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition
National School Boards Association

cc: Members of the Senate Labor, HHS and Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Members of the House Labor, HHS and Education Appropriations Subcommittee