



## **IDEA Full Funding**

In 1975, our country took a major step forward in promoting the inclusion and equality of one of our most disenfranchised groups of citizens. Passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, assured that all children with disabilities would receive a free, appropriate public education. Millions of children with disabilities are no longer limited by their families' ability to afford private education, forced to attend costly state institutions, or worse, forced to stay home and miss out entirely on the benefits of an education. IDEA ensures that children with disabilities may attend public schools alongside their peers.

Despite all that has been accomplished on behalf of children with disabilities, much more remains to be done. When IDEA passed in 1975, Congress understood that it was creating a law that would have increased financial impact at the state and local level. It promised to pay a significant share (40 percent) of the excess costs of educating a child with a disability compared to a general education student. In the 1997 reauthorization the 40 percent of excess cost was changed to 40 percent of the National Average per Pupil Expenditure for every child enrolled in special education.

While special education funding has received significant increases in the last decade, funding has leveled off and even been cut in recent years. While all members of Congress are committed to the idea of fulfilling their 40 percent commitment, it is clear that we will never reach it through the current appropriations process. AESA supports efforts to fully fund IDEA through mandatory funding.

The FY12 funding proposal for IDEA includes a \$200 million increase. This is less than the \$250 million increase proposed in FY11 and is, for all intents and purposes, a proposal for level funding because it leaves Congressional effort hovering below 17 percent of the originally authorized 40 percent.

We are working to have a full-funding bill introduced in both the House and Senate. Conversations are being led by Senator Harkin and Representative VanHollen. Senator Harkin introduced the IDEA Full Funding Act (S 1403), and we hope to have the House bill introduced shortly after August recess. Urge your members to continue the increased investment in IDEA that begun under ARRA.

### **Talking Points:**

1. Share the impact that the special education shortfall has on your district including the encroachment on your general education budget. Explain to your members of Congress the financial relief that would come at the local level when Congress fully funds its share.
2. Urge your Senators and Representatives to safeguard IDEA funding in the FY12 appropriations process and to invest as much money as possible. Reiterate the importance of IDEA and its pressures on your local budgets, and urge them to oppose any effort to further reduce federal effort in the chronically under-funded program.