



IDEA Mandatory 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.

Funding the federal, state and local partnership to provide an equal educational opportunity for all students has not worked very well from the local district perspective. While special education funding has received significant increases in the last decade funding has leveled off and even been cut in recent years. And even despite the significant infusion of funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, we have been told this is temporary money. 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. AASA supports efforts to fully fund IDEA through mandatory funding.

Senators Tom Harkin (D-Ia.) and Pat Roberts (R-Ks.) have introduced a bill, S 1652, to full fund IDEA in 6 years through making the increases mandatory. Representatives Chris VanHollen (D-Md.), Todd Platts (R-Pa.) and Tim Walz (D-Minn.) plan to introduce the House version of the full funding bill on Monday, September 14, 2009. A bill number will be provided during the conference. 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. Ask your Senators to become an original cosponsor of S 1652 by Senators Harkin (D-Ia.) and Roberts (R-Ks.) to make the increases to IDEA mandatory and ensure full funding in six years.
3. Ask your Representatives to become original cosponsors of the EDUCATE Act (Reps. Van Hollen (D-Md.), Platts (R-Pa.) and Walz (D-Minn.)), that would provide mandatory increases for IDEA ensuring full funding.