

November 10, 2015

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
S-128, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
S-146 A, The Capitol  
Washington, D. C. 20510

The Honorable Harold Rogers  
Chairman  
Committee on Appropriations  
H-305, The Capitol  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Nita Lowey  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Appropriations  
1016 Longworth H.O.B.  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Appropriations Committees Chairmen and Ranking Members:

The undersigned organizations represent a coalition of education organizations dedicated to advocating for Congress to meet its commitment to provide 40% of the additional cost associated with educating students with special needs, as outlined in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). On behalf of students with disabilities, teachers, specialized instructional support professionals, parents and administrators, school boards we write to urge you to provide increased funding of \$1 billion for IDEA, ***without impacting other education programs***, within the FY2016 LHHS-Education appropriation.

We ask that you use the flexibility provided to you by the new budget caps to prioritize investment in IDEA in FY2016. As you know, under the old caps and allocations the House provided a \$502 million increase, while the Senate provided a \$125 million increase for IDEA Part B State Grants for FY 2016.

When Congress passed IDEA in 1975, it committed the federal government to helping ensure that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate education by funding 40 percent of the additional cost associated with educating students with disabilities, sometimes referred to as 'full funding'. 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%, meaning that school districts have to leverage more local dollars to cover an unfunded federal mandate.

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 special needs, the proposed funding level of \$11.7 billion represents 16% instead 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.

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.

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  
Association of Educational Service Agencies  
Association of School Business Officials International  
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association  
Council for Exceptional Children  
Council of the Great City Schools  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Association of State Directors of Special Education  
National Education Association  
National PTA  
National Rural Education Association  
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition  
National School Boards Association

Cc: Senator Roy Blunt, Chairman, Senate Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee  
Senator Patty Murray, Ranking Member, Senate Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee  
Representative Tom Cole, Chairman, House Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee  
Representative Rosa Delauro, Ranking Member, House Labor-HHS-Education Subcommittee