



National School Boards Association
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March 21, 2019

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Jared Huffman
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: The IDEA Full Funding Act

Dear Senator Van Hollen and Representative Huffman:

On behalf of our state associations and the 90,000 school board members who govern our country's 14,000 local school districts, the National School Boards Association (NSBA) applauds your leadership to champion the federal investment in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Your introduction of the IDEA Full Funding Act is greatly appreciated, as this legislation will establish a clear path towards fully achieving the federal share of resources needed to address the unique needs of almost seven million students with disabilities.

Full funding and modernization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is one of NSBA's top priorities: It's Time for a Great IDEA! NSBA has launched this new [initiative](#)¹ to help ensure our country's students with disabilities receive the access and supports they need to succeed. This initiative will highlight the critical need for the federal government to fulfill a long overdue promise to provide equal access to public education for all children in the United States. This grassroots effort is guided by these five principles:

1. High Expectations and Accountability, Not Bureaucratic Procedures, Deliver Positive Outcomes for Students with Disabilities.
2. Effectively Serving Students with Disabilities and their Families is a Shared Financial Responsibility.
3. Positive Engagement and Collaboration with Families Helps Students with Disabilities.
4. The Success of Students with Disabilities Depends on Access to Effective Teachers and Other Special Education Professionals.
5. Expanded Supports Directed at the Youngest Students with Disabilities Will Place More Learners on an Earlier Path Toward Academic Life and Success.

Achieving IDEA's promise – that all students with disabilities will have access to a free appropriate public education – will require a much more balanced federal-state-local partnership. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the average federal investment for each student educated through IDEA is approximately \$1,770 for Fiscal Year 2019, and would decline to \$1,758 in Fiscal Year 2020 if the program is level-funded. Chiefly, the federal government must begin providing the level of dedicated annual funding for students with disabilities that is commensurate not only with IDEA's vision and goals, but also with our moral commitment to these vitally important students and their families.

¹ "It's Time for a Great IDEA!" National School Boards Association, <https://www.nsba.org/nsba4idea>, January 2019.

The Honorable Chris Van Hollen
The Honorable Jared Huffman
March 21, 2019
Page Two

For far too long, Congress has only provided roughly 15 percent of the funding required to educate students with disabilities. Substantially greater federal resources are essential to meet the rising instructional costs and related supports associated with helping them succeed. For many students, these supports may include speech-language pathology and audiology services, assistive technology, interpreting services, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, early identification and assessments, counseling services, transportation and mobility services, and more.

Each year, many school boards devote budgetary increases to their departments of special education to address these and other unique needs. As noted by data from the U.S. Department of Education, the number of children aged 3 through 21 who are served through IDEA continues to increase. With each increase in the child count, our school districts are adjusting their budgets to accommodate this growth and ensure that each child receives the appropriate supports, including those for students affected by multiple disabilities whose individual education plans require more resources. For example, one school district has noted that fifty percent of its general education budget is devoted to special education services.²

Nevertheless, our school boards and educators remain committed to providing students with disabilities and their families the supports they need to become working, contributing, engaging members of society. Hence, the IDEA Full Funding Act would be extremely useful in addressing goals for sustainability in several districts that have implemented successful program innovations, such as those for early learning and interventions, special educator teams and student transitions.

Further, the IDEA Full Funding Act will authorize a course for a stronger federal commitment to help close achievement gaps and also help address the nation's workforce skills gap. According to the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSE), youth with disabilities were more likely to have enrolled in postsecondary education within four years of leaving high school in 2005 than in 1990. The rate of youth with disabilities who were currently enrolled in postsecondary education and/or employed was 86 percent in 2005--a 21 percentage-point increase over 1990. This data represents the successes we must continue and improve upon with a sustained intergovernmental partnership to address equity in education.

NSBA greatly appreciates your leadership to address this critical issue affecting school districts across the nation. We support the IDEA Full Funding Act and thank each co-sponsor for the bipartisan efforts in both the House and Senate to enact this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Thomas J. Gentzel
Executive Director and Chief Executive Officer

² "It's Time for a Great IDEA: NSBA Exemplary Case Studies," National School Boards Association, https://cdn-files.nsba.org/s3fs-public/NSBA_CASE_STUDIES.p, January 2019.