Senator Harkin  
Chair, Health Education Labor and Pensions Committee  
Chair, LHHS Appropriations Subcommittee  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

September 9, 2014

Dear Senator Harkin,

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 and administrators, and school board members, we write to express our strong support for your IDEA Full Funding Act.

Since its inception, IDEA has protected students with disabilities by ensuring access to a free and appropriate public education. The original statute included a Congressional promise to pay 40 percent of the National Average per Pupil Expenditure. 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. Many times, 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.

The number of students with disabilities has increased more than 25 percent over the last 20 years, a growth that federal funding has struggled to support. In fact, for FY14 (the 2014-15 school year), the federal share for IDEA is 15.8%, less than half of the Congressional commitment to students with special needs. Our reality is that we remain committed to Congress meeting its commitment to fund 40% of the additional costs.

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. 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.

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 of Great City Schools  
Council for Exceptional Children
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Education Association
National School Boards Association
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition
National Rural Education Association