September 30, 2003

Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, HHS and Education
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Specter:

The IDEA Funding Coalition, representing administrators, teachers, school board members, principals, related service personnel, parents and other educators urges you to maintain the full $2.2 billion increase for IDEA, contained within the Senate version of the Labor/HHS/Education appropriations bill, in the conference report. By matching the increase approved in the Congressional budget resolution, Congress would be taking steps towards meeting its commitment to provide 40 percent of the national average per pupil expenditure for every child in special education.

We urge you to support this funding increase and to finally provide the resources promised time and time again. We feel this is an opportunity to make the education of children with disabilities a priority once again. According to the Congressional Research Service, increases of $1 billion yearly will never bring Congress to its 40 percent commitment.

The current opposition by the House Republican leadership to include this increase for IDEA is especially distressing given the broad support for an IDEA increase of $2.2 billion in the FY 2004 Budget Resolution and the recently passed HR 1350, the IDEA reauthorization bill. An increase of $2.2 billion represents the opportunity to match the money with the legislation, an effort which has been supported by the House of Representatives.

As districts across the country struggle to implement No Child Left Behind and states are continuing to face declining revenues, it is important that Congress live up to its 28 year-old promise to fully fund IDEA. Without these resources, states and districts will be forced to continue to dip into their general education program funding and “rob Peter to pay Paul.”

On behalf of educators and concerned communities across the country, please oppose any bill that does not include an increase in IDEA funding of at least $2.2 billion this year.

Sincerely,
American Association of School Administrators
American Federation of Teachers
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Association of Educational Service Agencies
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 School Boards Association