

March 10, 2016

Senator Thad Cochran
Chair, Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Harold Rogers
Chair, House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Barbara Mikulski
Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations Committee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Nita Lowery
Ranking Member, House Appropriations Committee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Roy Blunt
Chair, Senate LHHS Appropriations SubCommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Tom Cole
Chair, House LHHS Appropriations SubCommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Senator Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Senate LHHS Appropriations
SubCommittee
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Representative Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, House LHHS Appropriations
SubCommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Committee Members,

The undersigned organizations represent a coalition of education organizations dedicated to increasing funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). On behalf of students with disabilities, teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, parents, school boards and administrators, we write to urge you to provide a significant increase in funding for IDEA in the FY2017 LHHS-Education appropriation over FY2016 levels.

The President's FY17 budget would fund IDEA at FY16 levels. This level funding equates to 16 percent of what is historically considered the additional cost of educating students with disabilities, less than half of the 40 percent that was the federal government's original commitment to students with disabilities.

Since its inception in 1975, IDEA has protected students with disabilities by ensuring access to a free appropriate public education. At the time the statute was enacted, Congress promised to pay 40 percent of the National Average per Pupil Expenditure. While special education funding has received significant increases over the past 15 years, including a one-time infusion of funds included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, federal funding has leveled off recently and has even been cut. The closest the federal government has come to reaching its 40 percent commitment was 18 percent in 2005. This means that the President's proposed funding level for FY 17 is below that of more than a decade ago. The chronic underfunding of IDEA by the federal government places an additional funding burden on states and local school districts to pay for needed services. This often means using local budget dollars to cover the federal shortfall, shortchanging other school programs that students with disabilities often also benefit from.

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. It indicates that Congress is serious in meeting its commitment to helping school districts support all students. Our organizations strongly support full federal funding for IDEA. 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.

Thank you for your leadership on the full funding of IDEA, and we very much appreciate your work to support efforts in Congress to move toward meeting its IDEA funding commitment. Please direct any questions to Noelle Ellerson (nellerson@aasa.org).

Sincerely,

AASA, The School Superintendents Association
American Art Therapy Association
American Council for School Social Work
American Counseling Association
American Federation of Teachers, AFL-CIO
American Music Therapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Psychological Association
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Association of Educational Service Agencies
Association of School Business Officials International
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Great City Schools
National Association of Elementary School Principals
National Association of Pupil Services Administrators
National Association of Secondary School Principals
National Association of School Nurses
National Association of School Psychologists
National Association of Social Workers
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Education Association
National Rural Education Advocacy Coalition
National Rural Education Association
National School Boards Association

Cc: Members of the Senate and House Appropriations Committees