

January 27, 2015

Dear Reps. Van Hollen, McKinley, Walz, Gibson, Huffman and Reichert:

We are pleased to offer our strong support for the IDEA Full Funding Act. We applaud your leadership and partnership on this important legislation that will enable students, teachers, specialized support personnel, local communities and states to fulfill the promise of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, known as IDEA.

IDEA provides appropriate supports and services for the approximately 6.4 million children and youth with disabilities and their families across the nation. IDEA ensures that students with disabilities make progress and achieve ever increasing outcomes and opportunities. As a result, each year more students graduate from high school with regular diplomas, enter into post-secondary education and the workforce and live full and enriching lives. Yet, despite this progress, students with disabilities continue to lag disproportionately behind their peers which results in far too many not graduating high school, receiving career training, entering college and working in integrated and competitive employment. Fully funding IDEA will greatly assist schools in providing much needed services and supports to help close this gap.

When Congress passed IDEA in 1975, it committed the federal government to helping to ensure that students with disabilities receive a free and appropriate public education by funding 40 percent of the additional cost to educate IDEA-eligible students. To date, the federal government has never fulfilled its commitment to fully fund the IDEA. In fact, it's never covered more than 16 percent of these costs.

This lack of federal investment, in combination with the recent education budget cuts at the state and local level, has made it increasingly difficult for schools and early education programs to continue to provide the services that young children and youth with disabilities need and to which they are legally entitled. Funding for IDEA helps foster excellence for all students. In this vulnerable economy, every school in the nation needs more IDEA funding.

Thank you again for your introduction of this important legislation. We support your introduction of the IDEA Full Funding Act and stand ready to assist you in any way possible.

Sincerely,



Denise Marshall
Executive Director