

GRASSROOTS MOBILIZATION

For this campaign to be effective, it is imperative that local voices are heard so state and federal legislators can understand local and personal impact.



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Talking Points

For utilization in school board meetings or other public settings.

Opening Statement

- Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.
- I am here on behalf of my district, our students with disabilities, and the families we serve.
- We are requesting that Congress fulfill its longstanding commitment to fund 40 percent of special education costs under IDEA.

Congress Made a Promise in 1975 - and Has Never Met It

- When IDEA was adopted, Congress pledged to pay 40 percent of the cost to educate students to help cover the excess costs of special education services.
- Today, federal funding covers just 10 percent of those costs.
- This shortfall shifts millions of dollars in costs to school districts every year.

The Impact on My District

- My district's annual special education shortfall is [insert amount].
- This means we must divert general education revenue to cover federally mandated services.
- These are dollars we should be using to reduce class sizes, update curriculum, hire staff, expand mental health services, and support academic recovery.
- The federal funding gap grows each year and is becoming structurally unsustainable.

Chronic Underfunding Creates Inequities

- Rural and property-poor districts carry deeper proportional burdens.
- Districts with high special education populations face severe resource constraints.
- Students in all programs are affected because districts must reallocate limited dollars to cover the federal shortfall.

Our Schools Deliver High-Quality, Legally Required Services - but Need Federal Support

- [Insert state] educators are committed to serving students with disabilities with excellence.
- Districts provide robust services because IDEA requires it - and because it is the right thing to do.
- Over the past 50 years, the number of students and the intensity of student needs have increased exponentially, going from 3.9 million students in 1975 to 8.3 million students in 2027.
- It is increasingly difficult to fund these services without Congress meeting its obligation.

Talking Points

For utilization in school board meetings or other public settings.

What We Are Asking Congress to Do

- Enact a multi-year glide path to reach the 40 percent federal share
- Increase IDEA appropriations each year until the 40 percent promise is fulfilled.
- Protect IDEA from across-the-board cuts.
- Reaffirm Congress's commitment to students with disabilities and the schools that serve them.

What Full Federal Funding Would Mean for My District

- We could reduce our subsidy of the federal shortfall and stabilize our budget.
- We could increase classroom supports, mental health services, and intervention programs.
- We could hire and retain more specialized staff.
- We could limit or avoid local levy increases.
- We could improve across our district.

This Is Not a Partisan Issue

- Fully funding IDEA is a bipartisan, multi-generational commitment.
- Every congressional session - regardless of majority control - has fallen short.
- This is about keeping a promise to students, families, and communities.

The Fiscal Ask Is Reasonable and Achievable

- A predictable federal funding ramp up would allow Congress to reach the 40 percent level.
- The return on investment is significant: stable budgets, stronger outcomes.

Closing Message

- Students with disabilities deserve the services Congress promised.
- Districts cannot continue subsidizing federal underfunding at the expense of general education.
- Congress has an opportunity - right now - to fix a 50-year-old problem.
- We respectfully urge you to support full IDEA funding and help deliver on the 40 percent promise.

Presentation Outline

Pick and choose what you need for your state. We recommend no more than 10 -12 slides for any presentation.

Slide and Title	Suggested Content
Slide 1 - Title Slide	40 by 2040 — Still Waiting: The Federal IDEA Funding Promise [insert state] Advocacy Campaign [Insert date]
Slide 2 - Why We Are Here	Congress promised in 1975 to fund 40 percent of special education costs under IDEA. Today, schools receive just 10 percent. The result: [insert state] districts collectively cover over [insert amount] annually to cover the federal funding shortfall. This campaign demands that Congress fulfill its commitment.
Slide 3 - The IDEA Promise	IDEA became law in 1975 with a federal commitment to fund 40% of special education costs. Actual funding has never reached this promise. Federal shortfalls force districts to subsidize mandated services from general education funds.
Slide 4 - Why It Matters for [insert]	[Insert State] districts are legally required to provide services, regardless of funding gaps. Statewide contributions to cover the funding gap now exceed [insert amount]. Rural and property-poor districts are disproportionately impacted. Every dollar shifted to special education is a dollar pulled from general education.
Slide 5 - The Impact on School Districts	Larger class sizes, Delayed curriculum updates, Fewer mental health supports, Staff reductions, Increased reliance on local levies, Structural budget deficits.
Slide 6 - The Campaign Goal	To secure bipartisan federal commitment to meet the 40% IDEA funding promise- through a multi-year glide path.
Slide 7 - Core Campaign	Congress promised. Students are waiting. Districts are subsidizing. It's time for Congress to fund what it required.
Slide 8 - Key Policy Requests	1. Enact a federal funding ramp to reach 40% IDEA funding. 2. Protect IDEA from future cuts. 3. Provide predictable, formula-driven allocations.
Slide 9 - [insert amount] Evidence - The Federal Funding Shortfall	Statewide: more than [insert amount]. Regular education is the payer of last resort. Without federal relief, the shortfall grows each year.
Slide 10 - Congressional Asks	We urge Congress to: Cosponsor IDEA Full Funding bills. Support annual appropriations that increase IDEA funding to 40 percent on a ten-year glide path. Commit publicly to honoring the 40% promise

Presentation Outline, continued

Pick and choose what you need for your state. We recommend no more than 10 -12 slides for any presentation.

Slide and Title	Suggested Content
Slide 11 - Storytelling Why It's Essential	Congress acts when stories meet data: Student success stories, District fiscal impact, Superintendent narrative, Parent perspective, Staff recruitment & retention impact
Slide 12: [insert State School Boards Association] Role	Statewide coordination of advocacy: Unified district messaging, Federal delegation engagement, Data and communications toolkit, Coalition partnerships (COSSBA, NSBA, NREA, AASA)
Slide 13: Week of Action	A targeted, coordinated push including: Email campaigns, Social media, Superintendent op-eds, Board resolutions, Congressional call-in days, Media briefings
Slide 14: Tools for School Districts	[insert State School Board Association] will provide: District Federal Funding Shortfall fact sheets, Template letters to Congress, Storytelling guide, Social media toolkit, Advocacy one-pager, Video scripts, Board resolution template
Slide 15: How School Boards Can Engage	Pass the IDEA funding resolution: Meet with your member of Congress, Share local impact stories, Participate in advocacy alerts, Publish op-eds and district-wide messages, Mobilize parent networks
Slide 16: How Superintendents Can Engage	Lead annual federal briefings with legislators: Provide district-level federal funding shortfall data, Speak at statewide or national press events, Record short videos for advocacy, Push out campaign materials in district communications
Slide 17: Communications Strategy	Press release announcing campaign, Coordinated media op-eds, Testimony at federal briefings, Social media messages, Advocacy landing page with tools and stories, National coalition amplification
Slide 18: The Cost of Inaction	Without fulfilling the IDEA promise: Federal Funding gaps grow, General education suffers, Staff shortages intensify, Districts face long-term structural instability
Slide 19: The Solution	Congress must: Fund IDEA at 40%, Adopt a steady growth formula, Protect IDEA from cuts, Deliver predictable, sustained funding
Slide 20: The Call to Action	Students with disabilities deserve fully funded services. Districts deserve predictable financial support. Congress must keep its word. "40 by 2040 - Fulfill the IDEA Promise" Let's finish the job.
Slide 21: Closing Message	This is not a partisan issue. It is a fiscal responsibility issue, and a promise long overdue. Together, we can ensure Congress fulfills IDEA's historic commitment.
Slide 22: Thank You	For additional campaign materials or district support, contact: [Insert staff name]

Sample Board Resolution

Resolution Urging Congress to Fulfill Its Promise to Fund 40 Percent of IDEA Costs

RESOLUTION NO. ____

A Resolution of the [Insert School District Name] School Board Urging the United States Congress to Fulfill Its Longstanding Commitment to Fund 40 Percent of Special Education Costs Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

WHEREAS, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in 1975 to ensure that students with disabilities receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE); and
WHEREAS, Congress made a clear commitment in IDEA to fund 40 percent of the cost to educate students to help cover the excess costs of providing special education services; and
WHEREAS, despite this longstanding promise, federal IDEA funding has consistently fallen far short in 2027 providing just 10 percent of the cost—leaving state, local school districts, and taxpayers to subsidize the federal government’s unmet obligation; and
WHEREAS students covered by IDEA have grown exponentially from 3.7 million in 1975 to 8.3 million students today; and
WHEREAS, [insert state] school districts collectively face a statewide special education shortfall exceeding [insert amount] million annually, requiring local districts to redirect general education revenues to meet mandated special education needs; and
WHEREAS, the federal funding shortfall places significant and increasing pressure on local budgets, widens funding imbalances among school districts, undermines general education programs, and forces reductions in staffing, class size initiatives, mental health supports, and other essential student services; and
WHEREAS, fulfilling the federal promise of 40 percent IDEA funding would provide substantial relief to [insert state] school districts, reduce reliance on local levies, stabilize district budgets, and strengthen educational outcomes for all students;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the School Board of [insert district] hereby urges the United States Congress to:

1. Fulfill its statutory commitment to fund 40 percent of IDEA special education costs through a multi-year glide path;
2. Support annual increases in IDEA appropriations that meaningfully reduce the federal funding shortfall;
3. Ensure IDEA funding remains stable and protected from across-the-board cuts.
4. Publicly reaffirm the federal government’s responsibility to fully fund (40%) mandated special education services.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Board President and Superintendent are directed to share this resolution with:

- Members of [insert state] congressional delegation;
- [insert state association];
- [insert The Commissioner of Education or other education authority]; and
- Local legislators.

ADOPTED by the School Board of [insert School District Name] on this ____ day of _____, 2026 (or 2027).

One Minute Video Scripts

Superintendent or other District Administrator

Tone: Clear, steady, authoritative, relatable

Audience: Congressional offices, community members, statewide networks

Script:

Hello, I'm [insert name], Superintendent of [insert school district].

I want to talk with you about a promise Congress made 50 years ago.

When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act - IDEA - was passed in 1975, Congress committed to funding 40 percent of the cost to educate students to help cover the excess costs of special education services.

Today, schools receive just 10 percent. That means our district must cover the rest. Here in [insert state], our special education federal funding shortfall is [insert amount]. These are dollars we must take from general education - class sizes, mental health supports, curriculum, and staffing - to ensure we meet the needs of our students with disabilities.

We are proud of the services we provide. Our students deserve them. But Congress needs to honor its commitment.

Fully funding IDEA would stabilize our budget, strengthen services for every student, and keep a decades-old promise.

We're asking Congress to adopt a glide path to 40 percent and fully fund IDEA.

It's time to keep the promise.

Thank you.

Parent/Guardian

Tone: Emotional but steady; human-centered; respectful

Audience: Congress, media, community advocates

Script:

Hello, my name is [insert], and I'm a parent in [insert district].

My child receives special education services. These services aren't optional—they're essential to my child's success in school. IDEA guarantees these supports, but Congress has never fully funded what it promised. When IDEA passed in 1975, Congress pledged to fund 40 percent of the cost. Today, schools receive just 10 percent.

That shortfall doesn't disappear. It becomes a cost our local school district must cover—pulling money away from classrooms, teachers, mental health support, and academic programs for all students.

Our schools are doing everything they can. But it's time for Congress to do its part.

Fully funding IDEA would strengthen support for my child—and for every student in our district.

We urge Congress to fulfill the 40 percent IDEA promise.

Thank you.

One Minute Video Scripts

School Board Member

Tone: Governance-centered; emphasizes fiscal responsibility and support for all students.

Audience: Congressional staff, state education advocates, community leaders

Script:

I'm [insert name], Chair of the [insert school district] School Board.

Our board is responsible for ensuring that every student—every single one—receives the education they deserve. Special education services are legally required, and more importantly, they reflect our values as a community.

When Congress enacted legislation to require these services, they knew it would be costly for local districts and so they promised to help shoulder the excess costs. But Congress has never met its obligation to fund IDEA. The promise was 40 percent. Today, districts receive just 10 percent.

In [insert state], that creates a federal funding shortfall of [insert amount], meaning we must use local general education dollars to pay for federally mandated services. This forces difficult decisions affecting every student we serve.

We're asking Congress to fulfill the commitment made in 1975. A glide path to full 40 percent funding would stabilize district budgets and strengthen opportunities for all students.

Please support full IDEA funding. Let's keep the promise.

Thank you.

Potential Text for Social Media Posts

Superintendent:

Congress promised to fund 40 percent of special education costs. Today, we get just 10 percent. Our district fills the gap with local dollars. It's time for Congress to fund IDEA and keep the promise.

Parent:

My child depends on special education services. Our district provides them, but Congress has never funded what it promised. Fund IDEA. Support our students.

[insert]-branded:

IDEA promised 40 percent. Schools receive just 10 percent. [insert state] districts subsidize hundreds of millions every year. Congress must fully fund IDEA.