



FULFILL THE IDEA PROMISE

ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN AND TOOLKIT



40 By 40:
Fulfill the IDEA Promise
Individuals with Disabilities Education
Act (IDEA)

Table of Contents

Campaign Background and Overview	1-2
Strategic Framework	3
High Level Launch Plan	4
Messaging Framework	5
Toolkit	6
Recommended Strategies and Tactics	7
Grassroots Mobilization	8
Talking Points	9-10
Presentation Outline	11-12
Sample Board Resolution	13
One Minute Video Scripts	14-15
Media and Press	16
Sample Press Release	17-18
Local Op-Ed	19
Congressional Outreach	20
Letter to Congress	21
Copy for Leave Behind	22-23
Sample Congressional Testimony	24
Dedicated Week of Action	25-27
Social Media	28-29
Other Resources	30

Campaign Background

Fulfilling the IDEA Promise: Congress Must Fund 40 Percent

In 1975, Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and committed to fund 40 percent of the cost to educate students to help cover the excess costs of special education services. Fifty years later, federal funding remains at just 10 percent. This chronic underfunding shifts billions in costs onto states and local school districts who must meet IDEA requirements regardless of federal support.

[Insert state] school districts alone must fund [insert amount] million per year in special education costs which means significant - local dollars are required to cover the federal shortfall.

Why it Matters

- The federal funding gap diverts funds from general education. Local districts must use general education revenue to cover special education shortfalls, reducing their ability to invest in literacy, mental health, STEM programming, career pathways, teacher recruitment, and class size reduction.
- The burden is heaviest for rural and property-poor districts. Districts with limited tax capacity or high special education populations face disproportionate financial strain.





Campaign Overview

The purpose of this campaign is to mobilize school districts across the country and other national educational partners to demand that Congress finally meet its decades-old commitment to fund 40 percent of the cost to educate students in need of special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A promise made in 1975, which has been unmet ever since.

Core Campaign Message

In 1975, Congress promised to fund 40 percent of special education expenses. Today that is 10 percent. Every dollar withheld is shifted onto local school districts - and ultimately onto general education. Congress must fulfill its promise.

Strategic Framework

Campaign Goals

- Secure bipartisan congressional support for a multi-year path to reach 40 percent.
- Increase public awareness of how federal underfunding forces school districts to subsidize required special education services.
- Provide compelling state-specific data and stories to congressional offices.
- Generate significant lawmaker, media, and grassroots attention.

Target Audiences



CAMPAIGN INFLUENCERS

State School Boards Association
School Board Members
Superintendents and other District
Personnel
Parents and other District Community
Stakeholders
National Education Policy Groups



CAMPAIGN MESSAGE RECIPIENTS

School Board Members
State Congressional Delegation
Congressional Appropriators
Local and National Media
The Public

High Level Launch Plan

Phase One Target Audience: Campaign Influencers

GOAL: Ensure key state school influencers are informed about the campaign and have the tools they need to support this initiative.

Month 1/ September	Purpose Inform school districts and education associations about campaign	Key Actions • Presentations (state and national) • Schedule meetings with key influencers to inform them about campaign
Month 2/ October	Purpose Launch materials for education influencers	Key Actions • Press release • Advocacy hub goes live • Social media rollout starts • Informational webinar
Month 3 & 4 November/ December	Purpose Local action	Key Actions • IDEA resolution • Collection of superintendent parent, educator videos and testimonials • State op-eds • Launch public facing website (tbd)
Month 5/ January	Purpose Statewide action	Key Actions • Statewide “IDEA Weeks of Action” to include: ◦ School Board resolutions ◦ Social media ◦ Superintendent op-eds ◦ Press briefings • Launch digital toolkit containing (tbd): ◦ Social media files ◦ Videos and testimonials

Phase Two Target Audience: Campaign Recipients

GOAL: Month 6 and beyond, the tools and communications will move from educating and notifying individuals about the issue to utilizing them as influencers.

Months 6-7 January/ February	Purpose Broad state and nationwide public launch	Key Actions • Launch statement • Press release • Coordinated op-eds • Social media campaign
Months 8-9 March/April	Purpose Congressional advocacy	Key Actions • Congressional meetings • District specific funding gap information • Unified statewide leave behind • Letter-writing strategy • Testimony and hearings

Messaging Framework

For 50 years, Congress has underfunded IDEA. Districts must legally provide services yet carry the unfunded cost. In [insert state], special education costs exceed [insert amount] statewide. This diverts resources from general education, class size reduction, instructional materials, transportation, and mental health support.

Consequences of Underfunding

- Reduces district financial stability
- Fewer opportunities for all students as districts must use general education dollars to make up for the lack of federal funding.
- Penalizes rural and property-poor districts the deepest
- Increases pressure on local levies

The Solution

Congress must deliver 40 percent federal funding. A multi-year ramp-up is realistic, fiscally responsible, and overdue.

The Call to Action

Honor the IDEA commitment. Fund 40 percent. Students with disabilities - and the schools that serve them - cannot wait another 50 years.



CAMPAIGN TOOLKIT

All the communications materials you need to launch a successful 40 by 40 campaign are outlined, with information on how to access all communications materials.



Strategies & Tactics

For a broad campaign such as this, some recommended tactics are outlined below. Many tactics can be used across multiple strategies.



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.

TACTICS TO REFERENCE:

- Board Resolutions
- Local stories and videos
- Op-eds
- District impact numbers
- Social media
- Create your own webpage or centralized hub



MEDIA AND PRESS

Media is a very effective, no cost tool to get key messages across.

TACTICS TO REFERENCE:

- Press releases
- Op-eds
- Coordinated op-eds from multiple stakeholders within same community
- Talking points



CONGRESSIONAL OUTREACH

For this campaign to be effective, members of congress need to receive multiple messages from various stakeholders with personal stories.

TACTICS TO REFERENCE:

- Schedule coordinated meetings with members of congress
- Provide district-specific funding gap data
- Initiate letter/email writing campaign
- Prepare congressional testimony



DEDICATED WEEKS OF ACTION

Having a unified, targeted week of organized action magnifies attention on your message

TACTICS TO REFERENCE:

- See detail in packet



SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a mandatory presence for awareness these days. If you are able, have multiple people and accounts send messages across social media.

TACTICS TO REFERENCE:

- See detail in packet



BACKGROUND AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- Historical background and supporting information.

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.

Talking Points	Pages 9-10
Presentation Slides	Pages 11-12
School Board Resolution Template	Page 13
One Minute Video Scripts	Page 14

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 excess 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.



MEDIA AND PRESS

Media is a very effective, no cost tool to get key messages across.

Press Release	Pages 17-18
Local Op-ed	Page 19

Press Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

[Insert association] Launches Statewide and National Advocacy Campaign Urging Congress to Fulfill IDEA's 40 Percent Funding Promise

Date: [Insert Date]

Contact: [Insert Name, Title]

Phone: [Insert Number]

Email: [Insert Email]

[insert CITY, STATE, MONTH , DATE] – The [insert association] today announced a statewide advocacy campaign calling on Congress to fulfill its 50-year-old commitment to fund 40 percent of the cost of special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Congress pledged to fund 40 percent when IDEA was enacted in 1975. Today, the federal government contributes just 10 percent, leaving [insert state] school districts to subsidize federally mandated services with local general education funds. The statewide special education federal funding shortfall now exceeds [insert amount] annually. If Congress fulfilled its obligation [insert state] would have [insert amount] instead of taking money from the general fund and property taxpayers.

“This is a promise Congress made to students, families, and local schools—and it is a promise that remains unfulfilled,” said [insert]. “Every dollar that Congress withholds is a dollar that schools must divert from general education. Our students deserve better, and our communities deserve the federal support they were promised.”

[Insert association]'s 40 by40 campaign highlights the financial and educational consequences of chronic federal underfunding and urges Congress to adopt a multi-year path to achieve the 40 percent federal share by 2040. “This is not a partisan issue,” said [insert]. “It is a fiscal issue, and an educational achievement issue. [Insert state] districts are proud to provide high-quality services to students with disabilities, but the federal government must honor its obligation.”

When IDEA is underfunded, school districts must redirect funds from:

- Class size reduction
- Mental health supports
- Curriculum updates
- Staff recruitment and retention
- Career and technical education

Rural and property-poor districts bear a disproportionate burden because they have less capacity to raise local revenue.

[Insert association] is urging Congress to:

1. Enact a multi-year glidepath formula to reach the 40 percent IDEA commitment by 2040.
2. Increase annual IDEA appropriations.
3. Protect IDEA from across-the-board cuts.
4. Reaffirm the federal government's responsibility to fund mandated services.

Press Release, continued

[Insert association] has released an advocacy toolkit including a school board resolution template, Congressional letter templates, social media materials, local impact data, and talking points for school leaders. Districts, families, and community members can learn more and join the campaign at: [Insert advocacy website link]

About [insert]
[insert]

Local Op-ed

Congress Promised to Fund Special Education. It's Time to Keep That Promise.

Subhead: 50 Years Later, Special Education Is Still Underfunded

For more than 50 years, public schools have upheld a federal promise to students with disabilities. Congress has not. When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in 1975, Congress committed to covering 40 percent of the cost of educating students to help cover the excess costs of services for students with disabilities. That commitment was never intended to be optional. Yet today, the federal government funds only 10 percent, one-fourth of that promise, leaving states and local school districts to absorb the rest.

In [insert state], that gap is not theoretical - it is real and growing. Local school boards are legally required to provide special education services. We do not debate whether to comply; we do the work because it is right for students. But when federal funding falls short, districts are forced to redirect dollars from general education classrooms, student supports, and local priorities to meet these federal requirements.

This is not sustainable. Since 1975, the students covered under the act have increased from 3.7 million to 8.3 million students in 2027. Special education costs are rising faster than overall school funding, driven by increased student needs, workforce shortages, transportation costs, and specialized services. At the same time, Congress continues to fall short on its funding obligation—pushing more costs onto states and local taxpayers.

That is why school leaders across the country are calling for “40 by 40” - a renewed federal commitment to fund IDEA at the level originally promised – 40 percent by the year 2040. Fully funding IDEA would not create new mandates. It would simply honor an existing one. For communities like ours, that would mean:

- More resources staying in classrooms
- Reduced pressure on local property taxes
- Greater stability for special education staff
- Better outcomes for all students

This is not a partisan issue. IDEA has always enjoyed bipartisan support because access, achievement and opportunity for students with disabilities are shared values. What has been missing is follow-through. Local school boards are accountable to voters. Congress should be accountable to its commitments.

As Congress debates education funding in the coming months, our community should be clear: honoring the federal promise to students with disabilities is not optional—it is overdue.

Fifty years is long enough. It's time for Congress to deliver on 40 by 40.

[insert name]:

[insert name] is a [school board member/superintendent/education leader] in [insert district] and a member of the [State School Boards Association]



CONGRESSIONAL OUTREACH

For this campaign to be effective, members of congress need to receive multiple messages from various stakeholders with personal stories.

Letter to Congress	Page 21
Copy for Leave Behind	Pages 22-23
Sample Congressional Testimony	Page 24

Letter to Congress

The purpose is direct advocacy from school board members and district leaders; designed for email or printed delivery

Subject Line Options

- Keep the Federal Promise: Fully Fund IDEA (40 by 40)
- Congress Must Honor Its Commitment to Special Education
- IDEA Underfunding Is Hurting Local Schools

Dear Congressman/Congresswoman [insert last name]:

I am writing on behalf of the students, families, and taxpayers in [insert Congressional district] to urge you to support full federal funding of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) [insert bill number if available].

When IDEA was enacted, Congress committed to covering 40 percent of the cost of educating students with disabilities. Today, that promise remains unfulfilled. As a result, local school districts are forced to redirect funds from general education, student supports, and locally approved priorities to cover federally mandated services.

In [insert school district], this funding gap has real consequences. Special education costs continue to rise due to increased student needs, workforce shortages, transportation requirements, and specialized services. Yet federal funding has not kept pace - placing increasing strain on local budgets and taxpayers.

Local school boards do not have the option to scale back services. We meet our legal and moral obligations to students every day. But when the federal government does not meet its share, local communities are left to fill the gap. That is why we support the IDEA 40%. I am enclosing the board resolution our school board recently passed to call on Congress to fully fund IDEA at the level originally promised.

Fully funding IDEA would:

- strengthen educational services for students with disabilities;
- reduce pressure on state and local budgets;
- protect funding for all students;
- reinforce trust between federal, state, and local partners,
- and help facilitate better outcomes for all students.

This is not about creating new programs or mandates. It is about honoring an existing federal commitment. We urge you to make full IDEA funding a priority in upcoming appropriations and education legislation. Please support the annual increase for IDEA appropriations outlined in the IDEA Full Funding legislation and share your support with the Appropriations Committee. Our students - and our communities - are counting on your leadership.

Thank you for your service and your attention to this critical issue.

Sincerely,

[insert name]

Copy for Leave Behind

Front Page

Headline: The IDEA Promise: A Commitment Congress Made - and Has Never Kept

In 1975, when Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), it made a clear and explicit commitment: The federal government would fund 40 percent of the cost to educate students under the Act to help cover the excess costs of special education services.

Today - 50 years later- Students covered under the act have increased from 3.7 million in 1975 to 8.3 million in 2027 and Congress funds just 10 percent of the cost. The rest falls on states and local school districts. This funding gap undermines the promise of IDEA and places significant financial strain on [insert state] public schools.

The Impact on [insert state] Schools:

[Insert state] statewide special education federal funding shortfall now exceeds [insert amount] million annually. This means that districts must transfer hundreds of millions from general education funds to cover federally mandated special education services. Consequences for students and schools include:

- Larger class sizes
- Delayed or reduced academic programming
- Fewer mental health supports
- Reduced elective offerings
- Increased reliance on local levies
- Persistent structural budget deficits

Rural, small, and property-poor districts are hit hardest because they have fewer local tax resources to absorb the federal shortfall.

Why Fully Funding IDEA Matters?

Students with disabilities are legally entitled to services.

- It is a fiscal responsibility issue: schools must provide them regardless of cost.
- Underfunding forces districts to divert resources from the general education population to pay for special education services.
- It is a workforce issue: Districts cannot invest in needed staff, mental health services, transportation, and classroom supports when IDEA is chronically underfunded.

Page 2

District Example: [insert]

District: [insert]

Annual Federal Funding Shortfall : [insert]

Because IDEA is underfunded, our district must transfer local general education dollars to ensure legally required special education services. These diverted dollars could otherwise support:

- Smaller class sizes
- Literacy and math interventions
- Student mental health supports
- Career and technical education
- Technology, transportation, and staffing

Copy for Leave Behind

Page 2, continued

District Example: [insert]

District: [insert]

Annual Funding Gap: [insert]

Because IDEA is underfunded, our district must transfer local general education dollars to ensure legally required special education services. These diverted dollars could otherwise support:

- Smaller class sizes
- Literacy and math interventions
- Student mental health supports
- Career and technical education
- Technology, transportation, and staffing

This is not a sustainable financial model. Local schools cannot keep backfilling a federal responsibility.

What Fulfilling IDEA Would Mean for [insert state]

If Congress funded IDEA at the promised 40 percent level, [insert state] schools would receive [insert amount] in additional federal support annually - reducing local levies, stabilizing district budgets, and ensuring equitable, high-quality services for all students.

Sample Congressional Testimony

Congress made a promise in 1975—to fund 40 percent of the cost to educate students under IDEA to help cover the excess costs of special education services. Today, the number of students covered under the Act has increased from 3.7 million in 1975 to 8.3 million in 2027. And yet, Congress provides only 10 percent.

In [insert state], that gap forces school districts to redirect more than [insert amount] each year from general education just to meet federal requirements. These are dollars that should be going to reading support, mental health services, and classroom instruction—for all students.

We are proud to serve students with disabilities. That is not optional—it is essential. But the current system shifts a federal responsibility onto local communities.

This is not a new program or a new ask. It is a commitment already made.

We urge Congress to establish a clear, multi-year path to full funding by 2040. Our students—and our communities—cannot wait another 50 years.



DEDICATED WEEK OF ACTION

The goal of a fully coordinated Week of Action to mobilize school boards, superintendents, educators, students, families, and community partners to press Congress to fulfill the 40% IDEA funding promise.

Participants:

- School boards
- Superintendents
- Special education directors
- Educators
- Parents
- Students
- Community partners
- [insert school board association] + national partners

Core Message for the Entire Week:

- Congress promised to fund 40 percent of special education costs in 1975.
- [insert state] schools receive 10 percent today.
- It's time to fulfill the IDEA promise – 40% BY 2040

Daily Actions

Day 1: Launch & Awareness Day

The purpose is to introduce the campaign publicly and unify statewide messaging.

Actions

- [insert state school boards association] issues coordinated press release
- Districts share the announcement on websites, newsletters, and social media
- All districts post the unified message: “Congress promised 40%. Our students are still waiting”
- Superintendents distribute district federal funding shortfall numbers internally

Deliverables to Share Publicly

- Campaign graphics
- IDEA fact sheet
- Social media toolkit

Day 2: District Storytelling Day

- The purpose is to share the human impact behind the numbers. Key Message is that these are not just numbers - underfunding affects real students, families, and classrooms.



DEDICATED WEEK OF ACTION

Daily Actions

Actions

- Superintendents record short (30–60 sec) videos explaining their district's federal funding shortfall and impact
- Special education directors share real examples of how underfunding affects services (no private data)
- Parents and educators submit testimonials
- Districts push stories on social media with the tag #FundIDEA; 40by2040StillWaiting

Day 3: Media and Public Engagement Day

- The purpose is to raise the visibility of the issue in [insert state] communities. The key message is that the Federal underfunding of IDEA affects every student—not only those receiving special education services.

Actions

- Superintendents submit op-eds to local newspapers
- Board chairs give radio or local TV interviews
- Districts send communications to families explaining how IDEA underfunding impacts all students
- [insert state school boards association] posts statewide summary data

Day 4: Social Media Storm Day

- The purpose is to push unified messaging to create statewide, high-volume visibility.

Actions

- All districts in your state post 3–5 coordinated graphics throughout the day
- Share superintendent videos
- Boost parent and educator stories
- Encourage families and community members to tag congressional offices

Hashtags

- #FundIDEA
- #40By2040StillWaiting

Day 5: Community Engagement Day

- The purpose is to mobilize families, students, and community supporters. The key message is when IDEA is underfunded, the cost shifts locally. Our community is paying for federal underfunding.



DEDICATED WEEK OF ACTION

Daily Actions

Actions

- Districts host short virtual briefings for families about IDEA funding
- PTA/PTO groups share information via newsletters and social media pages
- Community organizations issue statements of support
- Stories are shared statewide through [insert state school boards association]
- Partner with your national organization such as COSSBA/NSBA

Day 6: Congressional Contact Day

- The purpose is to put direct pressure on federal lawmakers.

Actions

- All school board members email or call their members of congress
- Districts send official letters signed by the superintendent and board chair
- School boards pass the IDEA funding resolution (if not already adopted)
- [insert state school boards association] delivers a consolidated statewide packet to [insert state] delegation

Talking Points

- Congress promised 40%
- [insert state] receives just 10 %
- Our state's federal funding shortfall is [insert amount]
- We need a path to 40%

Day 7: Reflection, Gratitude, and Next Steps

- The purpose is to close the week with reinforcement and momentum-building. The key message is that IDEA funding is a federal commitment. With continued pressure, Congress can finally fulfill the promise.

Actions

- Superintendents post thank-you messages to families and staff for participating
- [insert state school boards association] publishes statewide Week of Action summary
- Districts preview next advocacy steps and encourage continued engagement
- Social media posts highlight "What Congress must do next"



SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a mandatory presence for awareness these days. If you are able, have multiple people and accounts send messages across social media.

Social Media

These are standalone text lines crafted specifically for graphic design. They are short enough for square and vertical formats and suitable for Canva, Adobe Express, or other branded templates.

The Core Message Series (5)

- Congress Promised 40%. Schools Receive Just 10 %.
- IDEA Funding: 50 Years Behind the Promise.
- [Insert state] Special Education Federal Funding Gap : [insert amount] Million and Rising.
- Local Schools Are Paying the Federal Shortfall. Students Deserve Better.
- “40 by 2040 — Still Waiting.” It’s Time to Keep the Promise.

Equity and Impact Series (6)

- When IDEA Is Underfunded, All Students Are Affected.
- General Education Dollars Should Not Be Filling Federal Gaps.
- Our District’s Federal Funding Gap : [insert] Congress Needs to Act.
- Funding Shortfalls Mean Tough Choices. We Need 40 Percent.
- Our Students With Disabilities Deserve What Congress Promised in 1975.

Call-to-Action Series (3)

- Tell Congress: Fully Fund IDEA.
- A Promise Made Should Be a Promise Kept.
- Support Full IDEA Funding. Support Our Students.

Suggested Hashtags

Primary:

- #FundIDEA
- #40By2040StillWaiting
- #IDEAPromise

Secondary:

- #StudentsNotShortfalls
- #[insert state abbreviation]education
- #SPEDFunding
- #KeepThePromise



Background and Supporting Information

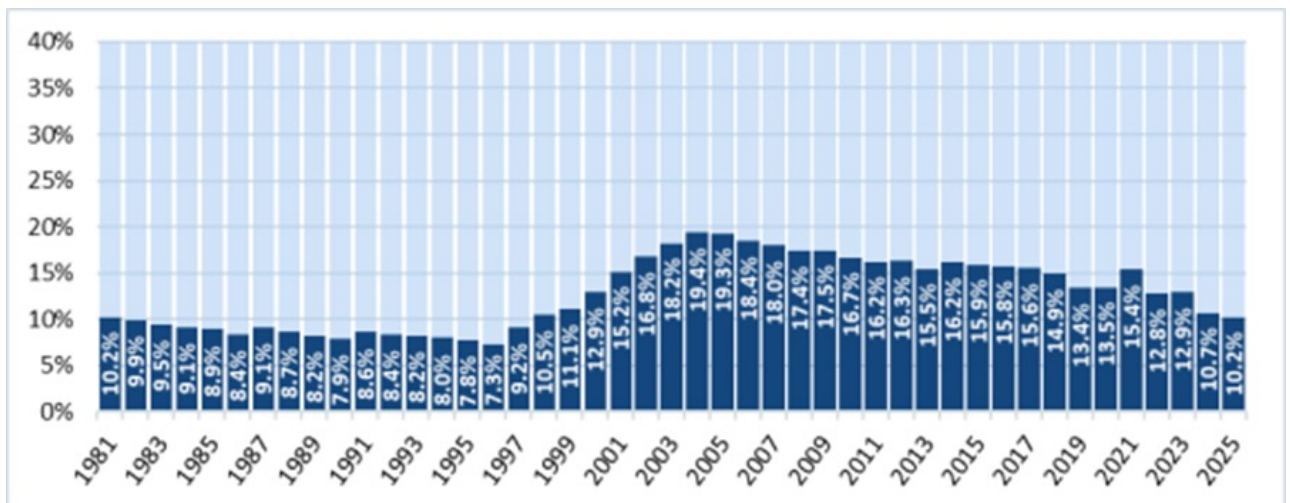
“If we are going to make a real commitment to full and appropriate services and expect the states to carry through on this commitment, we will have to put our money where our mouth is.” Senator Harrison Williams, upon introduction in 1972

Concerned about an estimated 1 million students with disabilities who were not being served, in 1975 Congress passed legislation to guarantee a Free Appropriate Public Education to these students. Knowing the mandate to provide these services would be costly for local school districts, Congress promised to provide 40 percent of the costs to educate students to cover the excess cost of special services. In the first year after the Act’s passage (1976-1977), 3.694 million students were served under the Act. The Department estimates that 8.3 million students will be served under the Act in 2027.

Sources: CRS Report cited below, US Dept of Ed, A History of the IDEA (Website); Dept of Education FY 2027 Budget Request to Congress

Historic Funding Levels for IDEA

After rapid escalation in the IDEA funding percentage in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the funding percentage began to decline in 2005.



Source: Congressional Research Service – Prepared by Congressional Research Service using data from the U. S. Department of Education

Source: CRS Report R44624, Kyrie Dragoo 2/13/2026