

ISSUE BRIEF: APPROPRIATIONS

Overview

Infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents participate in and benefit from all federal public education and early childhood programs. A strong federal investment in programs that provide targeted support is critical to ensuring success in the early years, in school, and beyond, as well as increasing opportunities for all. Unfortunately, these programs are consistently and woefully underfunded, straining the entire education system.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the preeminent federal law for providing services to infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. Fully funding the IDEA would significantly improve outcomes by ensuring access to early intervention services, special educators trained to provide specially designed instruction, specialized instructional support services, curricula, and devices, as well as family supports. Fully funding IDEA would also support learning in an environment that respects the dignity, culture, language, and background of children and youth with disabilities.

As many states know, redirecting any public education funding to support vouchers, tax credits, or other funding mechanisms promoting the privatization of education is harmful to public schools and all students. Strengthening and investing in public education is the means to ensure all children and youth, regardless of background or disability, can access a high-quality education.

Consistently well-funded programs will result in a better future for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. We call on Congress to provide appropriate funding levels in Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 for all of public education, and specifically the programs listed to the right.

Members of Congress are Urged to:

- ▶ Invest no less than \$16.2 billion in IDEA Part B State Grants (Sec. 611).
- ▶ Invest \$932 million in IDEA Part C.
- ▶ Invest \$503 million in IDEA Part B Section 619.
- ▶ Invest \$300 million in IDEA Part D personnel preparation (Sec. 662).
- ▶ Invest \$1 billion in School-Based Health Professionals.
- ▶ Invest \$70 million National Center for Special Education Research.
- ▶ Invest \$32 million in the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Grants.

Supporting Special Education in Schools

Approximately 7.5 million school-aged children and youth in the United States benefit from the individualized special education and specialized instructional support services provided by the IDEA. These services—provided by special and general education teachers and specialized instructional support personnel—are tailored to meet the specific needs of each child or youth. The IDEA includes a commitment from the federal government to cover 40% of the “excess costs” of serving children and youth with disabilities, referred to as “full funding.” Unfortunately, the federal share is currently only about 12%, leaving states and school districts to pay the balance and increasing the burden on local taxpayers. Congress must put the IDEA on the first step of a 10-year glidepath to full funding in FY 2024 to enable districts to better support children and youth with disabilities and hire more fully prepared special education personnel.



Supporting the Needs of Young Children with Disabilities and their Families

IDEA’s early childhood programs serve approximately 1.2 million children with disabilities and their families annually through the Part C program for infants and toddlers and Part B, Section 619 (Preschool Special Education). Over the last 30 years, the number of children served by these programs has increased by approximately 50%. Despite this growth in enrollment and documented positive outcomes, federal funding has failed to keep pace. In fact, the federal investment per child has decreased by over 40% during this time. Significant increases are needed to support infants, toddlers, and preschool children with disabilities and their families.

Ensuring a High-Quality Special Educator Pipeline

IDEA Part D, Section 662 (Personnel Preparation), focuses on preparing special educators, early interventionists, and specialized instructional support personnel to help ensure an adequate number of providers with the skills and knowledge necessary to support infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities—with an emphasis on incorporating research into training programs and practice. This program is increasingly critical to addressing pervasive personnel shortages across the nation. Congress must provide a significant increase for this program.

Supporting School Mental Health Services

There is a significant mental health crisis in this country—an estimated 1 in 6 children and youth experience a mental health disorder each year. This challenge, further exacerbated by the pandemic, hampers success inside and outside the classroom. In the FY 2024 budget proposal for the

U.S. Department of Education, the Biden Administration recommends \$1 billion through two competitive grants for school health professionals, including school counselors, school nurses, school social workers, and school psychologists.

Delivering the Research that Guides Best Practices

The National Center on Special Education Research (NCSE) is the primary driver of special education and early intervention research in the nation and identifies evidence-based practices for classroom teachers and early intervention practitioners. NCSE continues to be seriously underfunded, significantly hampering support for ongoing research and the ability to undertake new projects. Restoring funding to NCSE is critical to researching pressing questions in special education, including learning loss and other impacts resulting from the pandemic.

Meeting the Needs of Learners with Gifts and Talents

A significant “excellence gap” exists at the top achievement levels between students of color and white students, and between low-income students and their more advantaged peers. The Javits Act—the sole federal initiative supporting students with gifts and talents—seeks to address this gap by promoting research and programs to better identify and serve high-ability students from underserved backgrounds, including students with disabilities. Javits funding remained static for a number of years, finally receiving an increase in 2020 and small increases each year since.

FUNDING FAST FACTS

- ▶ Two thirds of voters believe the U.S. spends too little on education,
- ▶ The number of students receiving services under IDEA continues to rise, with an increase just between 2020 and 2021 of 1.9% in ages 3-21, and 2.5% in school-aged students (ages 5-21).
- ▶ Even with the significant increase requested for IDEA for FY 2024, the federal share will be just at one third of full funding.
- ▶ Approximately 6% of public school students are enrolled in gifted and talented programs, but no federal funds are provided directly to local school districts for services to these students.
- ▶ 98% of school districts report special educator shortages.
- ▶ Only half of youth with mental health conditions received treatment last year.