



A Union of Professionals

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

In 1975, Congress passed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) that requires school districts to identify students with disabilities and provide them the supports to achieve academically.

Today, because of IDEA, over six million students with disabilities have access to a free appropriate public education. The program helps fund costs for special education teachers and administrators; related services providers (paraprofessionals, speech therapists, psychologists, etc.); materials and supplies for use with children with disabilities; professional development for special education personnel and other educators who work with children with disabilities; early intervening services; and specialized equipment or devices to assist children with disabilities.

The chronic underfunding of IDEA by the federal government places a burden on states and districts, shortchanging *all* students.

The original IDEA included a congressional promise to pay 40 percent of the additional cost associated with serving students with disabilities. But federal funding has never come close to reaching the promised 40 percent, causing states and local school districts to find ways to pay for needed services. The chronic underfunding of IDEA by the federal government places a burden on states and districts, shortchanging *all* students.

The closest the federal government has come to reaching its 40 percent commitment was 18 percent in 2005. (It is now about 15 percent, or \$13.2 billion.) Since 2005, the aggregated federal underpayment to states to help provide services to students with disabilities has reached \$233 billion. This amounts to an average of \$2,637 in additional funding each year for every special needs student in the country.

The **American Federation of Teachers** is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

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