



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% 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% of the cost to educate students to help cover the excess costs of special education services.
- Today, federal funding covers just 10% of those costs.
- This shortfall shifts millions of dollars in costs to school districts every year; in Illinois, the federal shortfall exceeds \$1.4 billion annually.

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

- Illinois 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 national 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.

What We Are Asking Congress to Do

- Enact a multi-year glide path to reach the 40% federal share
- Increase IDEA appropriations each year until the 40% promise is fulfilled – by the year 2040.
- 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% 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 by prioritizing annual IDEA appropriations increases to deliver on the 40% promise by 2040.
- Students cannot wait another 50 years for Congress to keep its promise.