

## 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, devices, and family supports.

According to the U.S. Department of Education's (ED) Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 congressional budget justification for special education, the number of infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities served under IDEA continues to grow, reaching a projected 8.7 million during the 2025-2026 school year. Stagnant federal funding, a rise in the number of eligible children, a growing shortage of personnel, and an increase in the price of services create significant budgetary challenges.

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 FY 2026 for all public education and early childhood programs, specifically the programs listed to the right.

#### Members of Congress are Urged to:

Invest no less than:

- \$16.7 billion in IDEA Part B State Grants
- \$632 million in IDEA Part C Infants and Toddlers
- \$491 million in IDEA Part B Preschool Program
- \$135 million in IDEA Part D Personnel Preparation
- \$70 million in the National Center for Special Education Research
- \$32 million in the Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Grants
- \$250 million in School-Based Mental Health Professionals

### SUPPORTING SPECIAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS

Approximately 7.6 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 with a disability. 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 11%, leaving states and school districts to pay the balance and increasing the burden on local taxpayers. In 2024, the U.S. Department of Education estimates that fully funding IDEA could support 400,000 additional special educators and specialized instructional support personnel. Congress must put the IDEA on the first step of a 10-year glidepath to full funding in FY 2026 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 1.4 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). That figure is expected to rise considerably for FY 2026. Part C programs are designed to provide early intervention services that improve outcomes, support the transition to preschool, and mitigate the need for future IDEA services. A national longitudinal study found that more than 40% of Part C recipients did not need IDEA services in kindergarten because of early interventions. Despite this growth in enrollment and documented positive outcomes, federal funding has failed to keep pace. According to the U.S. Department of Education, in 2024, the federal investment per child has decreased by over 40% during the last 30 years. Significant increases are needed to support infants, toddlers, and preschool children with disabilities and their families and to continue to benefit from the return on investment in the K-12 system.

## REJECT PROPOSED CUTS IN THE FY 2026 BUDGET

The FY 2026 budget proposal recommends eliminating IDEA Personnel Preparation, the IDEA Preschool Program, the Javits Program, and the National Center for Special Education Research within the Institute of Education Sciences (IES).

The elimination of these programs would have outsized negative consequences:

- Further Damaging the Educator Pipeline:**  
 Cutting Part D Personnel Preparation, along with all other parts of the IDEA National Activities (IDEA Part D), including technical assistance centers, would severely limit the pipeline of qualified special educators and reduce access to professional development and resources critical for effective IDEA implementation. At a time when special educators make up the highest educator shortage areas in nearly all states, this proposal is particularly devastating.
- Failing Preschool-aged Children at Long-term Personal and Financial Cost:**  
 Eliminating the IDEA Preschool Program would deny early intervention services to children aged 3–5, preventing preschool-aged children from making meaningful progress during a critical phase of human brain development and leading to more intensive and expensive K–12 special education needs in elementary school and beyond.
- Weakening Evidence-Based Policy:**  
 The loss of IES-supported research would hinder states’ and districts’ ability to make data-driven decisions, implement proven practices, and adapt to evolving student needs and technologies. This will cause educational systems to waste money using programs and data in ways that don’t improve outcomes for students, ultimately harming schools and students.
- Providing States with Less Funding:**  
 18 K-12 education grant programs, including the Javits program and School-Based Mental Health Professionals Grants, would be consolidated into a K-12 Simplified Funding Program under the budget proposal. This would result in considerably fewer dollars flowing to states and the elimination of a funding infrastructure to target funds to specific needs, including gifted and talented education, the pipeline of mental health professionals, and many other programs that were developed in response to national need.

### FUNDING FAST FACTS

- Two-thirds of voters support increased funding for education (Navigator Research poll, November 2023).
- Without a significant increase for the IDEA grants to states program in FY 2026, the federal share will be 11% or approximately one-quarter of “full funding” (U.S. Department of Education).
- Filling the gap between current funding and “full funding” could support more than 400,000 special education jobs (U.S. Department of Education, 2024).
- Students with disabilities show persistent underrepresentation in gifted and talented education programs or other advanced or accelerated learning opportunities (U.S. Department of Education Civil Rights Data Collection).
- For the 2023-24 school year, 43 States, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia projected a shortage of qualified teachers in special education, more than for any other teacher shortage area by an eight-state margin (U.S. Department of Education).
- Teacher attrition in special education is nearly double that of general education, driven in part by overwhelming caseloads and lack of support—both tied to inadequate funding (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).
- Eliminating IDEA National Activities and the IDEA Preschool Program would further erode the special educator pipeline, limit the special education field’s access to critical evidence-based research, and harm preschool-aged children with disabilities.