

Education NEWS & NOTES

Paying A Fair Share For Special Needs Children

(NAPSA)—Since its inception in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has given millions of children with disabilities access to education and the opportunity to achieve to their potential. The Annual Reports to Congress state that in the past 10 years, the number of students with disabilities who graduate from high school has increased more than 30 percent, while the number of students “with special needs going into post-secondary education has doubled.”

More than half the students with disabilities who enroll in post-secondary education stay with it, according to the U.S. Department of Education. And, students with disabilities who have a bachelor’s degree are doing almost as well in the job market as those who are not disabled, 67 percent vs. 73 percent, respectively. Special education has achieved these gains despite chronic underfunding and the resulting lack of resources and qualified teachers.

When IDEA—the law that governs special education—was passed, Congress authorized the federal government to pay 40 percent of each state’s “excess costs” of educating children with disabilities. But the federal government has not upheld its end of the bargain. To date, the highest federal contribution to state and local special education programs has been only 18.6 percent, and new federal funding fails to keep pace with increasing costs at the local level.

Full funding for IDEA is essential if we are to provide all children with disabilities with a quality education, says the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC).

“Congress’s breach of promise hurts our nation’s most vulnerable



Lack of special education funding strains states’ ability to provide high quality educational programs for all children.

children—children with disabilities,” says Deb Ziegler, CEC’s executive director of public policy. “Without adequate funding for special education, many children are taught by unlicensed professionals who lack the necessary skills to ensure educational success. Our nation’s children with special needs cannot wait any longer for the education they need.”

Also, as a result of Congress’s failure to live up to its financial obligation, local communities and states have been forced to pay a higher proportion of special education costs. This has resulted in budget strains and, in some cases, pitted the parents of students in general education against those of children with disabilities.

Congress should enact legislation this year that guarantees the federal government will pay 40 percent of special education costs within eight years and make IDEA funding part of the federal government’s mandatory spending program, says CEC.

For more information, visit www.cec.sped.org.