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February Advocate: IDEA Funding Is Up, But Federal Share Is Down

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Although Congress increased funding for special education grants to state (IDEA Part B) by \$400 million for fiscal year (FY) 2020, the federal share of the “excess” cost of educating students with disabilities actually fell from 14.3 percent in FY 2019 to an estimated 13 percent in FY 2020. (The FY 2019 estimate comes from the [Congressional Research Service](#), and the FY 2020 estimate was provided to us by the Department of Education.) This happens when the number of students needing services increases and/or as the intensity of needed services increases.

When Congress enacted the first special education law in 1975, it pledged to provide up to 40 percent of the excess cost of educating students with disabilities but has never come close to this “full funding” percentage. Federal law mandates that school systems provide a free appropriate public education to all students, regardless of the federal contribution. As a result, when the federal share of the costs declines schools need to use more of their state and local funding for special education. If the federal government increased its share of the cost, then more state and local education funding would be available to cover other education needs. For FY 2020, Congress would have had to triple the \$12.8 billion it provided to reach the full funding. Fully funding IDEA remains AESA's top advocacy priority.