



IDEA Allies: ADVOCATE. AMPLIFY. ACT.



CELEBRATING 50 YEARS OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT—THE LAW THAT PROTECTS EVERY LEARNER AND STRENGTHENS EVERY CLASSROOM

IDEA Allies are **parents, educators, students** and **neighbors** who believe every child deserves a fair chance to learn and succeed.

Fifty years ago, IDEA guaranteed that right. It opened classroom doors for millions of students once denied access to public education.

Today, those rights—and the values behind them—are under pressure.

This 50th anniversary is more than a milestone. It's a reminder that **equality in education is everyone's responsibility.**

WHAT IDEA MEANS FOR EVERY FAMILY

IDEA is not someone else's issue, it's a shared promise that strengthens every school community.

- 1 Effective Educators**
Teachers receive training to meet diverse learning needs.
- 2 Early Intervention**
Early intervention helps children before challenges become barriers.
- 3 Inclusive Classrooms**
Classrooms become more inclusive, patient and connected.
- 4 Empathetic Peers**
Students learn cooperation, compassion and leadership.

When IDEA Works, Schools Work Better

 aft.org/idea50

**Join the movement.
Be an IDEA Ally. Advocate. Amplify. Act.**

A STORY OF CHANGE

Before IDEA

Children with disabilities were often excluded from public schools, placed in separate institutions, or denied any education at all.

After IDEA

In 1975, Congress passed a law that guaranteed the right to:

- Free appropriate public education (FAPE) at no cost to families
- An individualized education program (IEP) centered on each child's strengths and needs
- Learning in the least restrictive environment (LRE) alongside peers



FIRST CHILDREN TO ATTEND THE GRAVE SCHOOL, TOGETHER WITH MISS E. MORRIS, Teacher in charge, Mrs. E. OWEN.

THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

Even with 50 years of progress, IDEA faces serious challenges:

- **Privatization Pressure:** Voucher systems divert public funds and bypass IDEA protections.
- **The "Civil Rights Cliff":** IDEA protections end at high school graduation. In higher education, students must self-advocate for accommodations—many are unprepared or unsupported.
- **Funding Gap:** Congress pledged 40 percent of costs; federal funding remains below 11 percent.
- **Staffing Shortages:** Forty-eight states report critical shortages of special educators and support staff.
- **Oversight Risks:** Efforts to weaken or close the U.S. Department of Education and its Office of Special Education Programs threaten accountability.

Without oversight and funding, the door that IDEA opened could quietly close again.

BE AN IDEA ALLY

You don't have to be a policy expert to make a difference; be an ally who cares enough to act.

Advocate

Support full funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Ask your local and national leaders to uphold it as both a civil rights and education law.

Amplify

Share what you learn. Speak up when you hear stigma or misinformation. Celebrate every student's success story.

Act

- Host or attend an IDEA-at-50 event to celebrate the law's 50th year.
- Watch a Share My Lesson webinar on inclusive education.
- Volunteer or organize in your local PTA, Special Education Advisory Committee or community coalition.
- Contact Congress: Demand that the 40 percent federal funding promise be fulfilled.

The next 50 years of IDEA depend on all of us—educators, families and communities—standing together as IDEA Allies.