



Protect Access and Opportunity for Students with Learning Disabilities

Federal action is needed to support students from K-12 through higher education

Students with learning disabilities (LD) and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)—from kindergarten through college—continue to face systemic barriers due to insufficient funding, limited access to accommodations, and a lack of targeted resources to support their academic success.

96% of 4th- and 8th-grade students with LD are not proficient in reading, and 92% are not proficient in math^{1,2}.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted in 1975, just over 50 years ago. Our nation's special education law is unique, and its principles, including child find and the least restrictive environment, have transformed the ways children with disabilities learn in schools. Today, its influence, coupled with other critical federal laws, must be upheld to ensure all students have access to a high-quality education. The U.S. Department of Education is essential for holding states and districts accountable for providing students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education. The federal government has important responsibilities.

The National Center for Learning Disabilities calls on Congress to reject the unlawful destruction of the Department of Education and take bold action to ensure that all students with learning disabilities have the tools, resources, and opportunities they need to succeed.

What is a Learning Disability?

A learning disability or specific learning disability (SLD) is a brain-based disorder that affects an individual's ability to read, write, and/or do math. (e.g., dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia)

BY THE NUMBERS

2.41 million students³

ages 5–21 in the U.S. are identified as having a learning disability.

21% of undergraduate students
have a disability⁴.

6.1 million children⁵

(estimated) ages 2–17 are diagnosed with ADHD, or
9.4% of the population.

1/3 of students⁶

with learning disabilities also have ADHD (estimated).



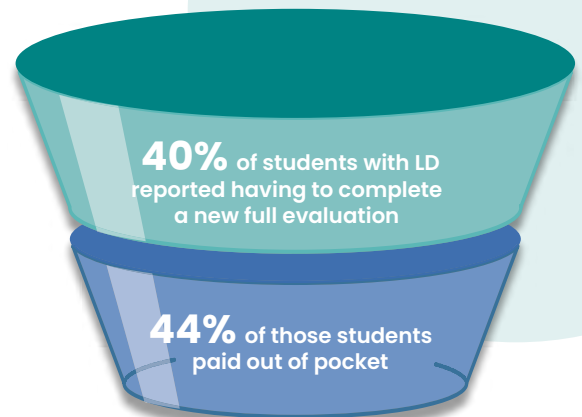
Ensure Access to Higher Education

The Respond, Innovate, Succeed, and Empower (RISE) Act requires colleges and universities to accept an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 Plan as proof of a disability when a student seeks accommodations.

THE ISSUE

Many students with disabilities receive accommodations throughout Pre-K–12 education. When transitioning to college, students must navigate new and burdensome requirements to document their disability.

- 40% of students with learning disabilities reported having to complete a new full evaluation as part of their school's disability disclosure process
 - Of those who paid for a new, full evaluation, nearly half (44%) reported paying out of pocket, which can cost up to \$5,000⁷.
- The red tape to obtain a new evaluation to re-prove a disability is time-consuming and stigmatizing.
- 1 in 5 reported leaving their postsecondary program because they did not receive the disability services that they needed.
- There is limited quality data about students with disabilities in higher education.



TAKE ACTION

Respond, Innovate, Succeed, and Empower (RISE) Act (H.R. 3939/ S. 3589)

This bipartisan bill would require colleges and universities to accept an Individualized Education Program (IEP), a 504 Plan, or other pre-existing documentation to establish proof of a disability status. This helps students access the support they need.

The RISE Act also improves the data collection on students with disabilities in postsecondary education. It authorizes additional funding for the National Center for Information and Technical Support for Postsecondary Students.

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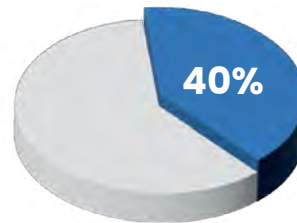
Keep the Promise on IDEA Full Funding

The IDEA Full Funding Act provides permanent, mandatory funding for IDEA state grants, ensuring the federal government pays the 40% of the average per-pupil expenditure for educating students with disabilities, a promise Congress made 50 years ago but has not met.

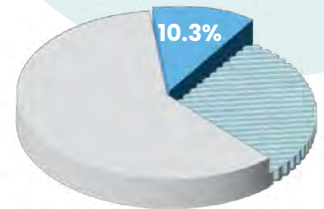
THE ISSUE

When the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was first introduced in 1975, Congress promised to fund 40% of the additional cost of educating students with disabilities – a threshold known as “full funding”. However, that promise has never been met.

- Congress currently contributes \$14.23 billion to schools, which is only 10% of the average per-pupil expenditures. This leaves states and local districts to cover significant portions of the costs associated with special education services.
- Over the last decade, the number of children served by IDEA has grown by 20% (serving over 7.5 million children with disabilities).



Promised Funding – 40%



Actual Funding – 10.3%

TAKE ACTION

IDEA Full Funding Act (H.R. 2598/ S.1277)

This bill creates a 10-year glide path to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Part B grants to states to support IDEA services. It also provides permanent, mandatory funding for IDEA grants to states.

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Protect and Defend the U.S. Department of Education

The Protect Students with Disabilities Act reinforces the Department of Education and prevents disruptions to IDEA programs and funds.

THE ISSUE

Since January 2025, federal education and workforce development programs have experienced significant turmoil, jeopardizing the programs that students depend on. A series of harmful federal actions has significantly weakened the oversight students with disabilities depend on. These actions include interagency agreements (IAAs) transferring programs to other agencies, noncontinuation of grants, delays in administering key funding streams, and significant staffing reductions at critical offices such as the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) and the Office for Civil Rights (OCR).

- In Congressional hearings in the spring of 2026, the Secretary of Education was asked about the transfer of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) out of the Department of Education, and she stated that she still plans to relocate it⁸.
- Approximately half of USED’s staff was laid off in 2025, including most of the employees of the Office for Civil Rights (OCR), who protect students with disabilities from discrimination in schools⁹. As a result, OCR reached 79% fewer disability resolution agreements for students with disabilities, which make up the largest share of cases.
- Stripping USED of its resources and/or moving IDEA implementation and enforcement to another federal agency would jeopardize vital services and support for students with learning disabilities.

TAKE ACTION

Protecting Students with Disabilities Act (H.R. 2333/S.2913)

This legislation reaffirms USED’s statutory responsibilities under IDEA and prevents any attempts to weaken enforcement or disrupt critical services for students with disabilities. The bill also prohibits the use of federal funds to eliminate or restructure any office within USED that administers or enforces IDEA programs.

ABOUT NCLD

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) partners with educators, students, families, and young adults to advance innovative research and advocate for equitable policies that address systemic barriers in schools, workplaces, and communities.

Learn more at
nclld.org



CITATIONS

- ¹ National Center for Learning Disabilities (2024). Reading Assessment Data among Students with Specific Learning Disabilities. <https://nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/31254-NCLD-2024-Reading-Snapshots-FINAL.pdf>
- ² National Center for Learning Disabilities (2024). Math Assessment Data among Students with Specific Learning Disabilities. <https://nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/31254-NCLD-NAEP-Math-Snapshots-FINAL.pdf>
- ³ U.S. Department of Education, EDFacts Data Warehouse (EDW): "IDEA Part B Child Count and Educational Environments Collection," 2022–23. Data extracted as of August 30, 2023 from file specifications 002 and 089.
- ⁴ National Center for Education Statistics. (2023, TBA). Table 311.10. Number and percentage distribution of students enrolled in postsecondary institutions, by level, disability status, and selected student characteristics: academic year 2019–20 [Data table]. In *Digest of education statistics*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education sciences.
- ⁵ Danielson, M. L., Bitsko, R. H., Ghandour, R. M., Holbrook, J. R., Kogan, M. D., & Blumberg, S. J. (2018). Prevalence of parent-reported ADHD diagnosis and associated treatment among US children and adolescents, 2016. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychology*, 47(2), 199–212.
- ⁶ World Health Organization. (2019). International Statistical Classification of Diseases and related health problems: Alphabetical Index (11th ed.). <https://icd.who.int/>
- ⁷ Rodrigo, S. A., Wong, L. N., Harris, S. L., Wilson, S. E., Malone, A. S., Stelitano, L., Fuller, N., Kubatzky, L., Gage, N. A., Blackorby, J., & LeBoyd, N. (2024). The State of Learning Disabilities: Navigating the transition to adulthood. National Center for Learning Disabilities



Connecticut

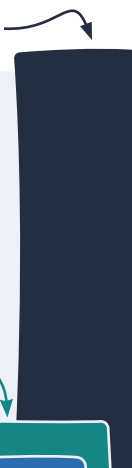
State Snapshot of Specific Learning Disabilities



US Public School Enrollment, 2022–2023: 49.6 Million Students

What is a **Specific Learning Disability (SLD)**?

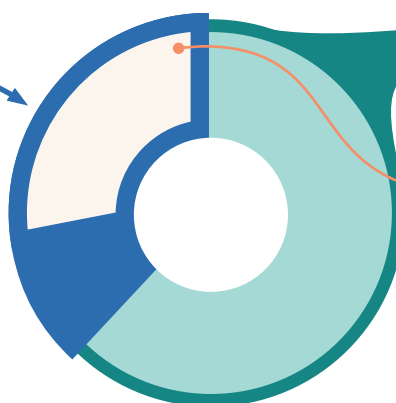
An **SLD** is a brain-based disorder that affects an individual's ability to read, write, and do math (e.g., dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia). Students identified with **SLD** receive special education services under the **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, a law that provides a free and appropriate public education to children with disabilities. Of the **14%** of the U.S. school-age population who received disability services under **IDEA** in the 2022–2023 academic year, **34%** received services for **SLD** as the primary disability.



CT Public School Enrollment, 2022–2023: 513,513 Students

SLD: 38%

CT Students with **SLD** (31,080) represent the largest proportion of students served under **IDEA** (81,926) in 2022 – 2023.

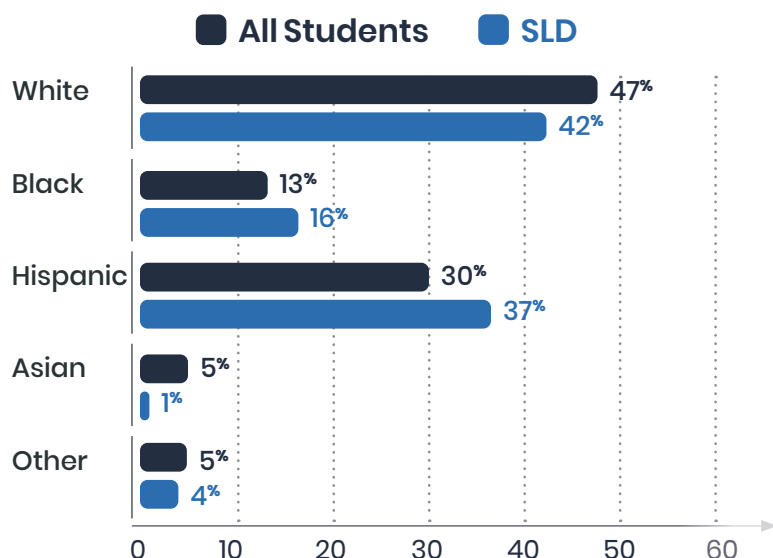


IDEA: 16%

68% of CT Students with **SLD** spend 80% or more of their school day with their general education classroom.



CT Racial / Ethnic Demographics, 2022 – 2023



Graduation Rates, 2022 – 2023

Totals:

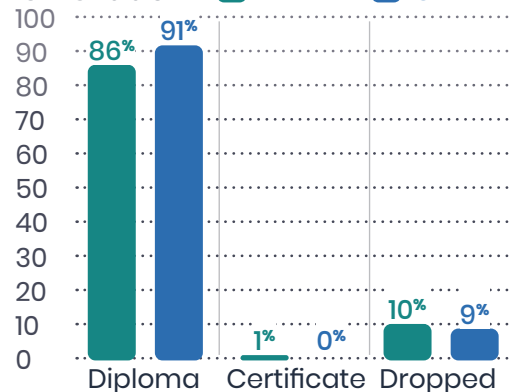


87%



89%

CT Grads



- Data missing or too low quality to include.



For full State Snapshot citations and more info, visit [NCLD.org](https://nclld.org)

Publication date 08/12/25 © 2025 National Center for Learning Disabilities