



New Jersey School Boards Association 2026 Federal Advocacy Priorities

The New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA) is a non-partisan, state-created federation of boards of education founded in 1914. We deliver direct services, professional learning, advocacy, and resources to school boards across the state to advance public education and promote the achievement of all students. The NJSBA greatly values its partnerships with New Jersey's elected officials and appreciates the opportunity to share the following federal advocacy priorities.

40% by 2040: "40 by 40" IDEA Special Education Funding Campaign

Demands on state and local budgets to supplement federal special education funding grow every year. Congress should establish a clear, multi-year path to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by 2040. Under Part B of IDEA, Congress is obligated to fund 40% of the excess cost required to educate students with disabilities nationally, but funding has never exceeded 20% and it dropped to approximately 10% in 2025. IDEA funding remains distant from meeting the needs of states, districts, and students. For example, an estimate by the National Education Association suggests that Congress' IDEA funding shortfall cost New Jersey approximately \$822 million in FY2020. Full funding of IDEA would allow districts in New Jersey to enhance special education services, hire more certified teachers, and maintain funding for general education programs.

Budget Implications/Related Legislation: H.R.2598/S.1277 (IDEA Full Funding Act) - Establishes a multi-year glidepath to fully funding IDEA over ten subsequent fiscal years.

Educational Choice: Supporting America's Public Schools

The NJSBA believes that public funds should not be used to fund non-public schools and opposes the use of public funds for vouchers or tuition tax credits for attendance at private or religious schools. The diversion of funds away from public education undermines the ability of our members to provide high-quality programs, services, and staff to the 1.4 million public school students in New Jersey. Based on these values, as we await the implementing regulations of the new federal tax credit scholarship program created through the One Big Beautiful Bill Act in 2025, we plan to evaluate how the program balances its framework for supporting public school districts against its potential to divert funds away from those same districts.

Digital Learning: Providing Opportunities Through E-Rate

The federal E-Rate program provides critical funding that enables school districts to connect students with the digital resources necessary for modern education. In fact, E-Rate is the fifth-largest component of federal funding for schools nationwide, and

hundreds of school districts in New Jersey receive support through the program. While the Federal Communications Commission is currently reviewing the entirety of the program – which, concerningly, seems to include casting doubt on the utility and continued existence of the program – the NJSBA urges Congress to maintain support for districts to provide the technology and connectivity students need to learn and succeed.

Universal School Meals: Hungry Students Cannot Learn

While the NJSBA is proud of the state's commitment in recent years to expand access to nutritious school meals for all students, we also believe that such responsibility should fall solely on the federal government through administration of the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Child Nutrition Programs. Doing so would free up state budgets to respond more effectively to state-specific educational needs. The NJSBA urges Congress and the Trump Administration to enact any legislation and/or funding necessary to provide for a permanent universal free school meals program. Such a program would ensure all students are fed and ready to learn, regardless of family income. Hungry students cannot focus on learning, and universal meal programs reduce stigma while improving student outcomes.

FY2027 Education Appropriations

The NJSBA supports strong and sustained funding for federal education programs in the FY2027 appropriations bill and hopes the U.S. Department of Education and its partner agencies will distribute Congressionally-appropriated funding fully and in a timely manner.

To that end, the NJSBA **appreciates** various provisions of the House's FY2027 budget bill providing increases to various education programs (e.g. Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grants; ESEA Title IV-A; School Safety National Activities; and Career and Technical Education State Grants) but is **concerned** by the proposed reduction to ESEA Title I-A. Title I-A provides critical academic, social, emotional, and mental health support resources that help empower students from low-income families to succeed in school. New Jersey receives approximately \$450 million annually in Title I-A funds; Congress should sustain this funding.

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