

U.S. Sen. Baldwin: Baldwin, Colleagues to Introduce Legislation to Fully Fund Title I, Special Education Programs

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WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, U.S. Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) helped announce the reintroduction of the Keep Our Promise to America’s Children and Teachers (PACT) Act, legislation led by Senator Chris Van Hollen (D-MD) and U.S. Representative Susie Lee (D-NV) to put Congress on a fiscally-responsible path to fully fund Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) on a mandatory basis.

“Long before the pandemic, many of our children were already facing obstacles in their learning experiences, and many of our teachers continue to lack the resources they need in the classroom. I’ve heard from students, parents, and educators in Wisconsin and it’s clear we need to do more to ensure all students have access to the quality education they deserve,” said Senator Baldwin. “Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act are important tools that help students in lower-income neighborhoods and students with disabilities get ahead. Our reform is the next step in making sure our schools receive the federal funding they need to support our teachers and help every student succeed, no matter where they live.”

“Regardless of their zip code, every child deserves a first-rate education. Congress made a historic commitment when it passed Title I and IDEA, but to hold up our end of the bargain, we must fully fund these critical programs to support students in lower-income neighborhoods and students with disabilities. Now more than ever –

as inequities in our education system widen due to the COVID-19 pandemic - it's time to get this done. I am committed to working alongside the Biden Administration and with the new Democratic majority in Congress to prioritize this issue and to finally fulfill our promise to children, parents, and educators in Maryland and across the country. This is a critical investment in our future, and it cannot wait," said Senator Van Hollen.

"Before coming to Congress, I had the privilege of helping our most at-risk students get the support they need to be able to succeed in school and graduate. It is no secret that children living in poverty and those with special needs require additional resources. IDEA and Title I funding provides school districts with those resources and it is critical to providing equal public education to all students, regardless of background or identity. I applaud Senator Van Hollen for reintroducing this critical legislation in the Senate, and I look forward to reintroducing the Keep Our PACT Act in the House," said Representative Lee.

Title I, which gives assistance to America's highest-need schools, is a critical tool to ensure that every child, no matter the zip code, has access to a quality education. However, it has been deeply underfunded, shortchanging our most vulnerable students living in poverty. According to the National Education Association, the Title I formula was underfunded in Fiscal Year 2019 by \$29 billion. Maryland alone was shortchanged by \$436 million.

Similarly, IDEA calls on the federal government to fund 40 percent of the cost of special education, but Congress has never fully funded the law. According to the National Education Association, IDEA state grants are currently funded at just 13.8 percent - the lowest percentage since 2000. In the state of Maryland, IDEA was underfunded by \$328.5 million in FY 2019 alone.

The Keep Our PACT Act would create a 10-year mandatory glide path to fully fund both Title I and IDEA, ensuring that education is a priority in the federal budget. It is supported by over 30 education, civil rights, and disability rights organizations nationwide, including the National Education Association, the American Federation of Teachers, the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, The School Superintendents Association (AASA), Journey for Justice Alliance, the NAACP, and The Arc.

In addition to Senators Baldwin and Van Hollen, this legislation is supported by Senators Jeff Merkley (D-OR), Jack Reed (D-RI), Ed Markey (D-MA), Ben Cardin (D-MD), Tina Smith (D-MN), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Sherrod Brown (D-OH), Dick

Durbin (D-IL), Cory Booker (D-NJ), Chris Murphy (D-CT), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Ben Ray Lujan (D-NM), Jon Tester (D-MT), Elizabeth Warren (D-MA), Jacky Rosen (D-NV), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), and Tammy Duckworth (D-IL).

“More than forty years ago, Congress made a commitment to help level the playing field and educate every kid in this country, regardless of their ability, what kind of neighborhood they live in, and the color of their skin. Now, as the COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare the inequities across our school systems, it is even more important for Congress to fix its chronic underfunding IDEA and Title I, the very programs that are geared to strengthening supports for children with disabilities and making opportunities available for all children, especially those who live in struggling communities who need them most. In public schools across America, resources are scarce for special education and disability assistance, guidance counselors, mental health services, school nurses, librarians and teaching assistants. The challenges facing our public schools cost money: the resources to help kids succeed are there, we just have to prioritize them,” said Randi Weingarten, President of the American Federation of Teachers.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the funding crisis that already existed in public education and shined a light on inequities. Now more than ever, Congress must fulfill its promise to our students and educators to fully fund Title I and IDEA. We applaud Senator Van Hollen and Representative Lee’s leadership on this issue, and we urge Congress to take up the Keep Our PACT Act immediately,” said Cheryl Bost, President of the Maryland State Education Association.

“Fully funding Title I and IDEA is a matter of equity. Title I and IDEA are vital to ensure students in poverty and students with disabilities receive the quality education they deserve,” said Marc Morial, President and CEO of the National Urban League.

“One of the high points of President Biden’s campaign was his promise to fully fund Title I. Fulfilling that promise could not come at a more critical point in our nation’s history,” said Keron Blair, Director of the Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools, which represents educators, parents, students and community members. “Keeping our pact with America’s working families means ensuring that every student attends a safe, welcoming and thriving neighborhood public school. That was the promise made in 1965, and that is the promise we, as a nation, must keep. For decades, but especially over the past year of this global pandemic, our students and their families have suffered underinvestment, institutional racism and lack of access to

the materials necessary for learning, such as broadband internet, safe buildings and a stable teaching workforce. Passage of the Keep Our PACT Act would give their schools and communities sorely needed resources to bring equity and justice to their learning conditions. We at AROS are thrilled that Senator Van Hollen is reintroducing the Keep Our Pact Act to a Congress poised to make good on its promises to our students and communities. We know it will send a strong message and set a firm foundation for the new Congress's commitment to high-quality public schools."

"Principals work each day to help each student progress toward their dreams, but we must acknowledge that students with special needs and students who live in poverty face a larger set of challenges to reaching them," said Ronn Nozoe, chief executive officer of the National Association of Secondary School Principals. "Congress recognizes that reality in Title I of ESSA and in IDEA, but Congress has consistently failed to meet even half of its financial obligation to fulfill those students' needs. As the pandemic intensifies student needs and as local budgets continue to feel immense and rapidly escalating pressure from shortfalls, schools need additional funding and resources to serve students with greatest needs. The Keep Our PACT Act is a crucial step toward closing that gap. The nation's principals are grateful to Senator Van Hollen and his colleagues both for bringing attention to this education funding crisis and making it a priority to address it."

"All students — no matter where they come from or where they live — deserve the opportunity for a great public education that meets their needs and opens doors for them. The 'Keep Our Promise to America's Children and Teachers Act' will make students, especially students with disabilities, a funding and investment priority. As the nation continues grappling with a growing teacher shortage, which the COVID-19 pandemic and accompanying economic crisis have exacerbated, this country continues to face mounting wealth and income inequality. Now is the time for Congress to invest responsibly so that the futures of our nation's public school students are secure. The National Education Association commends Sen. Chris Van Hollen for reintroducing this priority legislation as their first bill in the 117th Congress," said Becky Pringle, President of the National Education Association.

"At a time when our nation's schools are grappling with the hard work of safely opening schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, sustained and adequate funding is critical. The historic role of the federal government in K12 education was created by a pair of federal formula programs designed to help level the playing field for historically disadvantaged populations: the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) Title

I formula program for students in poverty, and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), for students in special education. The premise for these bills was simple: all students deserve to learn and the federal government is an important partner in making that happen. But laws alone are not enough, and the fact of the matter is that they remain chronically underfunded. We commend Senator Van Hollen for his leadership on this issue, and their willingness to highlight the important call to action for Congress to appropriately invest in these cornerstone educational programs,” said Daniel Domenech, Executive Director of AASA, The Superintendent Association.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has laid bare and worsened the persistent inequities in our schools, particularly for students with disabilities, students from low-income backgrounds, and students of color. Bold action must be taken to ensure schools can effectively and equitably serve all students now and as our nation recovers from the pandemic. We thank Senator Van Hollen for his leadership in introducing the Keep Our Promise to America’s Children and Teachers Act and his recognition that the chronic underfunding of IDEA and Title I of ESSA must not continue,” said Lindsay Jones, President & CEO, National Center for Learning Disabilities.

“The Arc of the United States is grateful to the drafters of the PACT act, and their recognition of the need for the Federal government to finally pay its promised share of the expense of providing a free and appropriate public education to all students with disabilities. This funding is desperately needed as local school districts have been stretched and stressed by COVID-19. In order to have truly individualized and comprehensive supports for all students, no matter their level of need, the full Federal funding of IDEA is imperative,” said Nicole Jorwic, Senior Director of Public Policy, the Arc.

“As Black communities demand racial justice, equity must be more than a soundbites, but policy that demonstrates a clear commitment to heal injustice. The Keep our Pact Act is equitable education policy that invests significantly in our low income and special education students. The Journey for Justice Alliance enthusiastically supports!” said Jitu Brown, National Director of the Journey for Justice Alliance.

“On behalf of the Council for Exceptional Children, I thank Senator Van Hollen for his tenacious support for carrying out Congress’s promise to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Title I. This bill would make enormous strides toward a more equitable system for all students and school personnel, and notably,

for students with disabilities and special educators. I am excited at the momentum and enthusiasm driving this bill forward,” said Dennis Cavitt, Ed.D., President of the Council for Exceptional Children.

“The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is pleased to support the ‘Keep Our Promise to America’s Children and Teachers (PACT) Act,’” said Anna Maria Chávez, Executive Director & CEO of NSBA. “Title I and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) are crucial programs for state school boards associations, school boards, and school districts, but the federal government must do more to fund these programs. The ‘Keep Our PACT Act’ would authorize the federal resources our educators and their communities need as they work to close achievement gaps and advance equity among all groups of students. We look forward to working with Senator Van Hollen on the legislation and appreciate his leadership.”

National Endorsing Organizations:

American Teacher Federation
Alliance to Reclaim Our Schools
The Arc
The School Superintendent Association (AASA)
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Great City Schools
Journey for Justice Alliance
NAACP
National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP)
National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD)
National PTA
NEA
National Urban League
National School Boards Association
Easterseals
National Association of School Psychologists
The Brain Injury Association of America
National Disability Rights Network
American Physical Therapy Association
The American Council of the Blind
National Down Syndrome Congress
Council of Administrators of Special Education

RespectAbility

Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA)

National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools

Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf

National Association of Elementary School Principals

SPAN Parent Advocacy Network (SPAN)

Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)

School Social Work Association of America (SSWAA)

Cure SMA

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

The American Psychological Association

CommunicationFIRST

National Association of State Head Injury Administrators

Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE)

Autistic Self-Advocacy Network