Progress of Education Reform: A look at funding for students with disabilities

This year is the 40th anniversary of the passage of Public Law 94-142 -- most commonly known as the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The law not only changed the way that students with disabilities are educated in this country, it also fundamentally changed the way that states fund their K-12 education programs.

This issue of ECS' Progress of Education Reform, A look at funding for students with disabilities, outlines some of the facts -- and myths -- surrounding IDEA and how its passage has made state policymakers think differently about how they fund their public schools.

"There is confusion about the amount of funding IDEA commits to provide," said ECS Senior Policy Analyst Mike Griffith. "IDEA does NOT commit to provide 40 percent of the cost of educating all students with disabilities. States and districts take on the majority of the costs."

Some important takeaways from this report:
- IDEA has driven state and local special education spending policies over the past 40 years.
- The federal government currently provides about one-third of the funds for special education that it committed to in the original legislation.
- While the population of students with disabilities is decreasing, the types of disabilities are changing, forcing policymakers to think differently about how funds are allocated.

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Related ECS resources and recent issues of The Progress of Education:
- Review ECS’ 50-state database of policies related to education funding of students with disabilities.
- A recent issue of The Progress of Education Reform outlines the key differences and explores how states can change their funding systems to address the needs of virtual charter schools.
- Review more past editions of The Progress of Education Reform.

For questions, contact ECS Director of Communications Amy Skinner at askinner@ecs.org or (303) 299. 3609.

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