

November 19, 2004

SCHAKOWSKY SUPPORTS REAUTHORIZATION OF INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of the Conference Report on H.R. 1350, the Improving Education Results for Children with Disabilities Act (IDEA), because it continues to protect the right of students with disabilities to receive a free and appropriate education. The very purpose of IDEA is to protect the civil rights of disabled students and I am pleased to see that my colleagues were able to remove the provisions in the House bill that undermined that purpose.

I have received many letters and phone calls from my constituents letting me know about the difference that IDEA has made for their children. One constituent wrote to me about her son, who has a form of autism, and how IDEA rights are helping him thrive for the first time in his life. Two other constituents of mine shared a story with me regarding their 12 year old granddaughter, Veronica, and how IDEA allowed her to receive the proper attention she needed at an early stage in her schooling. Veronica has improved greatly since then and her needs are now met with minimal intervention.

This agreement goes a long way towards ensuring that IDEA will continue to benefit children with disabilities. For example, unlike in the House version of this bill, students will not be moved indefinitely to "alternative placements" for any violation of a school code of conduct-even if a child's disability is the cause of the specific behavior.

However, I would like to express my disappointment that this agreement still does not force us to live up to our funding promises for IDEA. Ever since IDEA's initial enactment in 1975, the law has included a commitment to pay 40% of the average per student cost for every special education student. The federal government currently pays for about 19% of the cost of educating a child with disabilities and at the current rate of increase we will never reach that promised level of funding.

The lack of funding for IDEA hurts students and it hurts schools. I urge my colleagues to join with me in voting for this conference report today, and then I urge them to join with me in fighting to make sure that we live up to our funding promises.