

# Why Funding Matters for Students with Disabilities

In the 2022–2023 school year, approximately [18% of Alabama public school students had a disability](#). In 2023, a staggering 83% of students with disabilities were not proficient in ELA/Reading. Even worse, 91% were not proficient in math. These scores are the lowest of any subgroup in the state for both subjects. Students with disabilities can achieve success in school and in life when they are provided the right opportunities and resources.

Currently, [Alabama's funding formula](#) assumes only 5% of students in each district need special education services, which is a severe underestimation. Because the state is not providing funding for the actual number of students with disabilities, many schools cannot provide these students the supports they need, such as dyslexia support, additional staff, or special devices and technology. Regardless of the level or type of disability, additional funding can ensure that schools have the resources to support these students fully.

## Student-Weighted Funding Formulas Matter for Students with Disabilities

Student-weighted formulas are a way to make sure that schools have enough money from the state to help all students, no matter their unique learning needs. Forty-one states use a student-weighted formula to give more money to schools that have more students with disabilities.

A student-weighted formula would allocate funding for schools based on each actual, individual student with a disability that is served there, not based on just an estimate like we do now. This amount could be changed to respond to the needs of these students over time. In addition, having a clear amount set aside per student allows policymakers and the public to hold school leaders accountable for how those funds are used for the students they are intended to benefit.

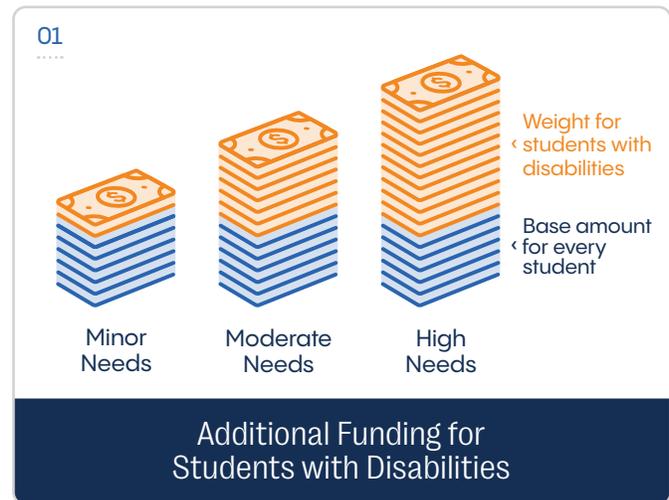
## Creating an Ideal School Funding Policy for Students with Disabilities

Serving students with disabilities presents unique challenges, and many of the resources these students need can cost substantially more than others. Students with disabilities should receive additional funding on top of the base amount set for all students.

In addition to the funding for these students in the formula, Alabama should continue its high-cost fund for students with disabilities who require extremely expensive special education services.

### A New Funding Formula for Alabama Should Include:

- A tiered weight for all students with disabilities on top of the base amount of funding they receive for each student.
- Tiers should increase for students with greater needs, based on the skills and abilities of students as identified by their Individualized Education Program (IEP). Students with IEPs have a wide range of disabilities depending on the resources needed to support them.



\*Base amount is the same for every student

**Figure 1:** Students with more needs cost more to educate and would receive additional funding in a student-weighted formula.

### What Other States Are Doing

- [South Carolina](#) has 9 weights for students with disabilities, ranging from 100% to 257%, which are based on what type of disability the student has (autism, learning disability, etc.).
- [Tennessee](#) recently revised its funding formula and uses weights ranging from 15% to 150% in 10 tiers based on the services and hours required in their Individualized Education Program (IEP).

See a complete 50 state comparison of funding for students with disabilities [here](#).

### Additional Resources

- [How Can School Finance Systems Support Students with Additional Learning Needs?](#) Bellwether, 2021
- [Five Ways that States Limit Special Education Spending](#), Education Commission of the States, 2019