



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS  
WITH DISABILITIES**

May 22, 2014

Tom Harkin, Chairman  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and  
Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C.

John Kline, Chairman  
Committee on Education and the  
Workforce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C.

Lamar Alexander, Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor  
and Pensions  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C.

George Miller, Ranking Member  
Committee on Education and the  
Workforce  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Chairman Harkin, Ranking Member Alexander, Chairman Kline and Ranking Member Miller:

On behalf of the Education Task Force of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), the undersigned organizations submit the following recommendations regarding the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. CCD is comprised of national organizations that promote the full participation of people with disabilities in society. The Education Task Force is made up of organizations that are particularly dedicated to ensuring that students with disabilities can access education and achieve success at all levels – early childhood, PK-12 and postsecondary education.

**In the United States, people with disabilities remain the least employed group of Americans in society with only 33% reporting employment** (U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2011). We know that employment rates are significantly higher for people with a college education and that over a life time a person with a college degree will earn \$1 million more than a person with only a high school diploma (U.S. Census Bureau, 2002). Yet people with disabilities participate in higher education at a lower rate than their peers without disabilities and complete their course of study at a far lesser rate than others. For example, according to the U.S. Department of Education’s NLTS-2 study, while 89% of students with disabilities who were enrolled in postsecondary education programs were working toward a diploma or certificate, only 29% actually completed the program or graduated with a diploma when they left the postsecondary institution.

**Even though the last reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (in 2008) was a strong law for students with disabilities and the personnel who work with them, much of the promise embodied in the law has not been met.** Many of the key programs authorized were not funded; some were funded at low levels and administered with weak leadership at the Department of Education. While there certainly has been progress in addressing the needs of students with disabilities in higher education, most notably for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, much remains to be done.

**President Obama has put forward a worthy goal for our nation which includes being first in the world in college completion by 2020. Students with disabilities should be a part of that goal and the reauthorization can assist by addressing key areas of need.**

There are three key areas the CCD Education Task Force would like to draw the Committees' attention to as you work to reauthorize the law: 1) Access and Success in Higher Education for Students with Disabilities; 2) Programs Supporting Students with Intellectual Disabilities in Higher Education; and 3) the Preparation of Personnel to Work with Students with Disabilities.

### **ACCESS AND SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

#### **Strengthen, Update, Prioritize and Fund the National Center for Information and Technical Support for Postsecondary Students with Disabilities (Sec. 777).**

This technical assistance center was first authorized in 2008; however, it has never been funded. It is intended to provide information and support to students with disabilities and their families as well as institutions of higher education in order to improve access and success in higher education for students with disabilities. As was noted at the February 27<sup>th</sup> hearing in the Senate HELP Committee, students with disabilities experience multiple unique barriers in accessing college. These barriers include a lack of expectation that they will participate in college and transition planning beginning too late. Witnesses at the hearing described the need for students entering a college environment to understand their disability and how it affects their learning and be able to advocate for themselves and the services they need. What is often available in the PK-12 system may or may not be readily available in higher education and the individual student plays an important role through self-advocacy. Other challenges faced by students include inadequate transition services into and out of college, lack of documentation of the disability, lack of access to accessible instructional materials, attitudinal barriers, limited availability of services and supports, disincentives in other federal programs (such as Vocational Rehabilitation and SSI), a lack of coordination between the PK-12 system and higher education, and the need for professional development and support of faculty in higher education to better instruct students with disabilities. This Center would be a first step in gathering information about challenges and best practices and providing technical assistance and outreach to students with disabilities, their families and higher education.

Specifically we recommend:

1. Rename the center: The National Center for Access and Success in Higher Education for Students with Disabilities.
2. Add a provision to the National Center that would provide support for implementation of the Accessible Instructional Materials (AIM) Commission Report (2011), specifically professional development demonstration projects for higher education faculty and staff; models for identifying, validating and disseminating best practices in the provision of AIM and universally designed instructional materials in STEM courses; and demonstration projects that improve the quality and efficiency in the acquisition and provision of AIM.
3. Additional pilot projects should be funded through the Center that address best practices in the transition of students with disabilities from high school to college and from college to employment or graduate school. Such pilots should prioritize the development of self-advocacy skills for students with disabilities.
4. The Center should provide information and technical assistance to address the needs of faculty with disabilities in higher education.
5. The Center should provide information and technical assistance to address the unique needs of students with mental illness and psychiatric disabilities in higher education.
6. Add a provision requiring the National Center to undertake a study to answer the following questions, among others:
  - What needs to occur to strengthen the relationship between high schools and post secondary programs for youth with disabilities?
  - What barriers do students with disabilities face in obtaining a post-secondary education and how can they be addressed?
  - To what extent are students with disabilities able to access student loans and grants?
  - Are there unique barriers to obtaining financial support?
  - Are there policies in higher education that serve as barriers to the enrollment of students with disabilities?
  - Why do students with disabilities drop out of post secondary education programs and what are promising retention practices?
  - What are the characteristics of institutions of higher education that successfully recruit and graduate students with disabilities?

**Prioritize Students with Disabilities in All Initiatives Related to Increased Access, Success and Accountability for Higher Education.**

As new initiatives are developed in the Higher Education Act to address the critical challenges for all students related to access, success and accountability, students with disabilities, like other under-represented groups such as students of color and other minorities and first generation college-goers, should be prioritized to ensure that they are not left behind. Without this prioritization, students with disabilities are often overlooked and their progress is jeopardized.

## **Retain the Definition of Universal Design for Learning.**

The 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act included, for the first time in federal law, a definition of Universal Design for Learning. This definition has been pivotal in expanding efforts in both PK-12 and higher education in ensuring effective instruction for students with disabilities. It should be retained.

## **PROGRAMS SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

### **Strengthen, Update, Prioritize and Fund the Provisions Providing Financial Aid, Model Demonstration Programs and the National Coordinating Center for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (Sec. 485, 760, 766, 767, 769, 777, 778).**

Congress made a historic move and allowed students with intellectual disabilities (ID) to obtain financial aid (Pell grants, Federal Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants, and Work-Study aid) and authorized the Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities programs (TPSID) and the National Coordinating Center (NCC) in the Higher Education Opportunity Act. Research has shown that these postsecondary programs for students with ID have had a positive impact on student rates of employment and wages, social networks, self-determination skills, and community living. Since its creation in 2008, the TPSID program and related funding has supported the creation or expansion of replicable programs at 45 colleges and universities serving 1,379 students. These model programs focus on academic enrichment, socialization, independent living, and employment. A comprehensive evaluation system conducted by the NCC found that, in just three years:

- Seventy percent of participating students were involved in career development activities and paid internships.
- An additional 36% of students held 424 paid jobs, of which 89% paid minimum wage or higher, and some students held two or three jobs while they were going to college.
- Forty-two percent of employed students had never held a paid job prior to entering the TPSID program.
- Therefore, the employment rate of students in the TPSID programs is **double** the employment rate of other transitioning youth.

Great strides towards postsecondary education, life in the community and employment are being made through the TPSID programs. However, there are still far too few options available and further model development is needed to build on this success. A NCC continues to be especially important for evaluation, coordination, and technical assistance. The continued authorization of the TPSIDs, NCC and financial aid for students with ID is critical to their success. Specifically we recommend:

1. Retain provisions that allow students with ID to access financial aid. In report language, direct the Department of Education to address the need for transparency, timeliness, reviewer and staff training regarding the Comprehensive Transition Program (CTP) approval process.
2. Change “prepare for gainful employment” to “prepare for competitive, integrated employment”.
3. In the CTP definition (Sec. 760), update “(C) includes an advising and curriculum structure”

to (C) includes student advisement and a program of study” to clarify that a separate curriculum is not required. In the same section, specify that a student who is home-schooled or in private school meets the definition of “student with an intellectual disability” if documentation is provided as outlined in the regulations.

4. Reauthorize the TPSID model demonstration programs to fund a new five-year competition.(Sec. 767). Provide funding for four-year colleges and universities and also for community colleges. Create an evaluation reserve fund of \$25,000 per TPSID for each of two years following the grants to continue the collection and reporting of data, including outcome data.
5. Eliminate the 3% cap on funds for the NCC in order for the center to carry out its responsibilities (Sec 769). Update the Accreditation Workgroup requirement to address the further development of and strategies for the use of model accreditation standards (Sec 777).

### **PREPARATION OF PERSONNEL TO INSTRUCT AND SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

PK-12 students with disabilities are served by special educators, general educators and specialized instructional support personnel such as school counselors, speech language pathologists, school psychologists and others. Administrators, such as superintendents, principals and curriculum coordinators, lead instructional efforts that should always include students with disabilities. Thus, all personnel need to have skills required to be effective with students with disabilities.

In addition, special education teachers and special education faculty are in critical shortage.. The Secretary of Education’s Ninth Report on Teacher Quality, *Preparing and Credentialing the Nation’s Teachers* (2013) indicates that special education is the most commonly reported shortage area in teaching with 49 states citing it. It surpasses all other shortages, including those in math and science.

Likewise, the shortage of special education faculty in higher education continues, and it will be significantly exacerbated by impending retirements. It is expected that between one half and two thirds of special education faculty will retire within the next 6 years. To meet the projected demand, the nation’s doctoral programs will need to produce over six times the current number of special education doctorates. (*Assessing Trends in Leadership: Special Education’s Capacity to Produce a Highly Qualified Workforce*, Smith *et.al.* 2011). If left unaddressed, this shortage will diminish the field’s capacity to generate new knowledge and to ensure that teachers are prepared with evidence-based practices that yield student learning.

**The following programs are authorized in the Higher Education Act and should be retained, strengthened, updated and robustly funded:**

#### **Teacher Quality Partnership Grants (Title II)**

Intended to transform teacher preparation, these grants were authorized at \$300 million dollars; however, they are funded at \$40 million. The grants are partnerships between high need schools and higher education programs that prepare teachers. Grantees must

provide extensive clinical preparation to candidates (most often a one year residency) and two year induction programs for new teachers. All teachers are prepared to teach students with disabilities, no matter what their field. Shortage areas, including special education, are prioritized. Graduates of the programs must teach for at least three years in a high need school.

**The Teacher Quality Partnership Grants should be expanded and reauthorized. Specific legislative language can be found in the Educator Preparation Reform Act (S. 1062/HR 2172).**

## **Title II Data collection and accountability (Sec. 205 and 206)**

Extensive data collection about teacher preparation is required in Title II. Several of the provisions are relevant to students with disabilities, including the following:

- A description of activities, including activities consistent with principles of universal design, that prepare teacher to effectively integrate technology into their instruction; and activities that prepare general education and special education teachers to teach students with disabilities effectively
- The extent to which teacher preparation programs prepare general education and special education teachers to teach students with disabilities effectively including training related to participation as a member of an IEP team
- Teacher preparation programs must provide assurances that:
  - Prospective special education teachers receive coursework in core academic subjects
  - General education teachers receive training in providing instruction to diverse populations, including student with disabilities

The results of this data collection are not readily available and the extent to which they may have resulted in program improvement is not clear. While the Secretary's annual report on Title II includes analysis of much data collected under Title II, it does not present information about the data noted above that is relevant to students with disabilities. **The Higher Education Act should require the Secretary's report to include an analysis of these data.**

## **Teach to Reach Grants**

Authorized for the first time in 2008, these grants are intended to prepare general education teachers to effectively educate students with disabilities. These grants were never funded. **CCD recommends funding these grants in conjunction with the data analysis of program capacity (noted above) so that programs could strengthen their preparation of all educators to instruct students with disabilities.**

## **Graduate Fellowships to Prepare Faculty in High Need Areas at Colleges of Education**

First authorized in 2008, these fellowships have never been funded. **They should be funded to address the critical special education faculty described above.**

## TEACH Grants

Enacted in 2007 as part of the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, the TEACH grants have been in place since July, 2008. These grants are designed to recruit high performing students into teaching in high need fields, including special education. These are scholarships for up to \$16,000 for undergraduates (up to \$4000 per year) and Master's students (up to \$8000 or \$4000 per year). Only those with at least a 3.25 GPA or scoring in the top 25% of a college admissions test are eligible for a TEACH grant. In exchange for the support, these new teachers must teach for at least four out of the eight subsequent years after graduation in a high need field in a high need school. If the TEACH recipient does not fulfill the service obligation, the grant reverts to a loan and must be repaid.

As of February, 2012, 2,363 TEACH grant recipients have begun teaching. Special education accounts for more new teachers than any other field, with 849 recipients now serving as special education teachers in high poverty schools.

This program is intended to attract high performing students into high need schools and fields and it is doing just that. While the program addresses a critical need in education, it is never promoted by the Department of Education and has not been utilized as much as it could be.

**CCD recommends continuing this program and updating it along the lines of recommendations in the Educator Preparation Reform Act. These updates including allowing only juniors, seniors, and post-baccalaureate students to be eligible and adjusting the pay back amount of time so that it is commensurate with the amount of the grant received. The Congress should encourage the Administration to promote this program to future teachers.**

We thank you for the opportunity to provide recommendations for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. We would be pleased to talk with you further and provide additional information as you move to reauthorize this important law.

Sincerely,

ACCSES  
American Council of the Blind  
American Dance Therapy Association  
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs  
Association of University Centers on Disabilities  
Council for Exceptional Children  
Easter Seals  
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education  
Learning Disabilities Association of America

National Alliance on Mental Illness  
National Association of School Psychologists  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Down Syndrome Congress  
National Down Syndrome Society  
Perkins  
School Social Work Association of America  
Teacher Education Division of Council for Exceptional Children  
The Arc

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a coalition of national consumer, advocacy, provider and professional organizations headquartered in Washington, D.C. Since 1973, the CCD has advocated on behalf of people of all ages with physical and mental disabilities and their families. CCD has worked to achieve federal legislation and regulations that assure that the 54 million children and adults with disabilities are fully integrated into the mainstream of society. For additional information, please contact:

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