

Testimony of Dr. Stan Shaw
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for the
Subcommittee on Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives

Honorable Ralph Regula, Chairman
Honorable David Obey, Ranking Member

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My name is Stan Shaw. I am the Coordinator of Special Education at the University of Connecticut. I am also the President of the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE). The Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE) is comprised of 54 universities with doctoral programs in special education. Our member institutions are at the forefront of teacher education, research and development in special education. We work extensively with local and state education agencies to ensure that teachers and other professionals have the skills they need to provide a free appropriate public education to all students with disabilities. I am pleased to share comments with you on behalf of HECSE.

The federal government has a long and effective tradition of supporting people with disabilities to enable their full participation in our society. Nations around the world look to our leadership, and we do not disappoint them. Our investments in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act have been among the most successful of our domestic policies. A baby born with Down Syndrome in 2006 has a far brighter future ahead than the same baby born in 1950.

But our accomplishments are threatened by diminishing investments that threaten to undermine the infrastructure which supports our success in educating students with disabilities. We are particularly vulnerable in the areas of personnel preparation, research and access to higher education.

Personnel Preparation under Part D of IDEA represents the federal government's key investment in preparing the special education workforce of tomorrow. This account has gradually diminished year after year with across the board cuts and inflationary demands so that it now stands at \$89.7 million. A reasonable federal investment in the

nation's future special education workforce would be in the \$300 million range.

Certainly the need is there.

The shortage of highly qualified special education teachers is greater than the shortage of highly qualified math and science teachers, and has been for some time. In some urban and rural schools, close to half of the special education teachers are unqualified. Every day over 600,000 students with disabilities are taught by teachers who are unqualified or under-qualified. Ninety eight percent of school districts report that one of their top priorities is to meet the demand for special education teachers. This shortage is exacerbated by the recently enacted requirements in IDEA 2004 requiring all special education teachers to meet requirements to be "highly qualified."

The No Child Left Behind Act sets the expectation that students with disabilities will be achieving along with their non-disabled peers. Their achievement is hampered when the special education teachers providing instruction are not qualified to do so. We support the high expectations for students with disabilities that are put forward in the No Child Left Behind Act. However, without the highly qualified special educators needed to provide specially designed instruction, the achievement levels of special education students will not grow.

College and university programs prepare about 22,000 special education teachers annually – about half the number needed to fill special educator vacancies. Higher education programs could prepare more highly qualified special education teachers, however the shortage of special education faculty is acute.

In the last two decades the number of doctorates produced in special education has decreased by 30%. In 2002, only 213 people received doctorates in special

education. Every year 30% of faculty vacancies go unfilled. Unfilled positions are often eliminated by universities, further reducing the capacity to train qualified special education teachers.

Despite these dire and ongoing needs, federal funds have been shrinking. With the exception of an increase for this program in FY 2002, federal funding for this account declined 50% between 1970 and 1999 in real dollars.

President Bush's budget calls for flat funding for Personnel Preparation under Part D of IDEA at \$89.7 million for FY 2007. This amount will not support the level of training needed to comply with the IDEA mandate for highly qualified special education teachers. We request at least \$109 million for Personnel Preparation under Part D of IDEA.

Both IDEA and NCLB require schools to implement evidence-based practice. The National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER) in the Institute of Education Sciences is the key to the development of research-based instruction that can be used by school personnel to close the achievement gap, reduce the over-representation of minority students in special education, and effectively implement early intervention strategies to successfully teach most students in the general education curriculum.

One of the most challenging aspects of NCLB has been to develop and implement appropriate assessments for special education students. The Department of Education has recently proposed regulations allowing states to assess up to 20% of special education students using modified assessments. However, these modified assessments do not exist. IES needs to invest in developing such assessments so that they are valid and reliable. This new policy will be impossible to implement if these assessments do not exist.

In FY 2006 the National Center for Special Education Research at the Institute of Education Sciences was funded at \$71.8 million, a cut of \$12 million from FY 2005. This year, the President’s budget recommends continuing funding at \$71.8 million. We recommend at least \$92 million for this critical account.

The Higher Education Act, in Title VII, authorizes one critical program that promotes access to higher education for students with disabilities: Demonstration projects to ensure students with disabilities receive a quality higher education. President Bush’s Commission on Excellence in Special Education in 2002 made the following recommendation: “Support higher education faculty, administrators and auxiliary service providers to more effectively provide and help post-secondary students with disabilities to complete a high quality post-secondary education.” These demonstration projects carry out this recommendation. While students with disabilities increasingly participate in postsecondary education, they lag far behind their peers in both participation and graduation. These projects support 27 institutions in 21 states providing essential technical assistance and professional development to college faculty and administrators to ensure that students with disabilities receive a quality postsecondary education. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics indicate that students with disabilities who graduate from college are as likely to get jobs as their counterparts without disabilities.

The President’s budget has requested the elimination of funding for this vital program. We urge you to provide \$10 million for the “Demonstration Projects to Ensure Students with Disabilities Receive a Quality Higher Education” in Title VII of the Higher Education Act in the FY2007 appropriations bill.