



December 11, 2017

Rep. Virginia Foxx
Chairwoman
Committee on Education
and the Workforce
US House of Representatives
2176 Rayburn House Office Building.
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Bobby Scott
Ranking Member
Committee on Education
and the Workforce
US House of Representatives
2101 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington DC 20515

Rep. Brett Guthrie
Chairman
Committee on Education
and the Workforce
US House of Representatives
2434 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Susan Davis
Ranking Member
Committee on Education
and the Workforce
US House of Representatives
1214 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs Foxx and Guthrie and Ranking Members Scott and Davis:

Together, the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE) and the Teacher Education Division (TED) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) represent special education experts in higher education who are preparing tomorrow's special educators, general educators, researchers and those who will prepare subsequent generations of educators. HECSE is comprised of 75 universities with doctoral programs in special education. Our member institutions are at the forefront of teacher education, research and development in special education. TED is one of 17 divisions comprised of CEC members who are dedicated to the preparation and development of future special educators. Over 2500 strong, TED members lead and support teacher education on behalf of students with exceptional needs and their families. Together HECSE and TED represent the voice of those preparing the next generation of special educators – teachers, leaders, researchers and higher education faculty.

We write to share our concerns about the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act. As the Committee marks this bill up we urge you to bear in mind the impact it will have in curtailing access to higher education programs for our nation's future special education teachers – in the midst of a critical shortage of special educators. Further, the bill does little to expand access to higher education for students with disabilities.

The PROSPER Act eliminates Title II of the Higher Education Act. Authorized under Title II, the Teacher Quality Partnership program represents the only federal investment in transforming teacher preparation. It is targeted to prepare teachers in high need fields, such as special education, and represents a state of the art highly effective strategy for meeting the workforce needs of school districts. Strong partnerships between higher education and local school districts, featuring one year residency programs, are a proven strategy for recruitment and retention of teachers in high need fields and schools. This program should be expanded to meet the many demands of today's teaching workforce, not eliminated.

The PROSPER Act eliminates the TEACH grants. These grants provide scholarships to attract teacher candidates in high need fields, such as special education. Through the service obligation requirement, the program ensures that new teachers will remain in the field. Special education faces a critical teacher shortage and this program should be expanded and strengthened, not eliminated.

The PROSPER Act eliminates loan forgiveness programs for future teachers. Loan forgiveness for teachers is a critical strategy for both recruitment and retention of teachers. Ending these programs eliminates a much needed incentive for a field that faces critical shortages and a shrinking pipeline of future teachers.

The PROSPER Act does not expand access to higher education for students with disabilities. Proposals, such as the bipartisan Rise Act, which would require colleges and universities to accept a student's IEP or 504 plan as evidence of their disability, are not included in the PROSPER Act. In addition, limitations on Pell Grants may create additional barriers for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities may require accommodations and flexibility with their schedules and course loads in order to meet their academic goals.

We appreciate the Committee's initiative in moving the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act forward. We particularly appreciate the retention of the Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) program which supports students with intellectual disabilities for academic and social inclusion in higher education in the PROSPER Act. We are also pleased to see the retention of the National Technical Assistance Center to provide information to students and families on post-secondary options for students with disabilities in the bill.

However, because of the many concerns noted above, HECSE and TED are unable to support the PROSPER Act at this time. We would like to work with you to improve the bill as it moves through the legislative process so that it will encourage and support college students who want to pursue teaching in special education as a career as well as students with disabilities who seek access to post-secondary education.

Thank you for your consideration.

Jeff Anderson

Jeffrey Anderson
Indiana University
HECSE President
Jander2@indiana.edu

Marcia Rock

Marcia Rock
University of North Carolina at Greensboro
TED President
mlrock@uncg.edu