



**TEACHER
EDUCATION DIVISION**
OF THE COUNCIL FOR EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN

HECSE
Higher Education Consortium
for Special Education

June 26, 2017

Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman, Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member, Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20510

Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman, Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Ranking Member, Labor, Health and Human Services,
Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Blunt, Chairman Cole, Ranking Member Murray and Ranking Member DeLauro:

Our organizations write to share with you our concerns regarding the shrinking investment in the capacity of the field of special education to ensure that research informs practice and that general and special education personnel are prepared to effectively instruct students with disabilities.

Over the last several years, we have become increasingly concerned about the underfunding of three critical programs, as needs of students with disabilities and their families expand. We believe a strong federal investment in research and educator preparation is critical to creating positive academic and developmental outcomes for the nation's 6 million children and youth with disabilities. Our children thrive when they have access to educators who are trained to address their complex needs and have access to research-based strategies.

Specifically, for the FY 2018 spending bill, we request: \$70 million for the National Center for Research in Special Education (currently at \$54 million); \$90 million for IDEA Part D-Personnel (currently at \$83.7 million); and \$43.1 million for Teacher Quality Partnership Grants under Title II of the Higher Education Act (currently at \$43.1 million).

For years Congress has wisely acknowledged that the mandate of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act – to provide a free appropriate public education to every child, no matter how significant their disability may be – could not be carried out if we did not have a sound research base and the personnel with the required expertise to provide necessary and critical services. Children -- and families -- affected by autism, learning disabilities, deafness, blindness, emotional disorders, intellectual disabilities and other disabilities all depend on new research-based strategies and interventions that are delivered by well-prepared personnel to thrive in and out of school. Without this research base and critical personnel, the federal mandate simply cannot be fulfilled.

While impressive progress has been made since 1975, more is needed. Specifically:

- The dropout rate for students with disabilities is 23%, more than twice that of students without disabilities (Source: IDEAdata.org);

- Only 12% of students with disabilities scored “proficient” or above in 12th grade reading, and only 6% in 12th grade math. (Source: 2015 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).
- The employment rate for individuals with disabilities continues to be significantly lower than virtually any other minority group.

Providing an adequate investment in National Center for Special Education Research, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act’s (IDEA) Personnel Preparation, and Teacher Quality Partnership Grants under Title II of the Higher Education Act directly supports improving outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

- **National Center for Special Education Research of the Institute of Education Sciences (NCSE):** To meet the challenges our nation currently faces, children must achieve at their highest possible level and enter the workforce ready to succeed. The research activities funded by NCSE are one essential way the field of special education and research work to meet these goals. Since NCSE began awarding grants in 2006, NCSE has funded over 200 research projects in areas that improve the educational outcomes of children and youth with disabilities. This research – which has focused on projects such as student assessment, autism, literacy, early learning, and family involvement – has produced effective interventions, teaching practices, and strategies for learning that have proven to be an invaluable resource to families, educators and communities.

We note that over the last several years NCSE’s budget has been reduced from \$70 million to its current level of \$54 million, thereby limiting the scope of research that can be conducted to fully address challenges in the special education field. The funding has not kept pace with the research demands for special education. The new elementary and secondary education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act, relies on practitioners to utilize evidence based strategies. NCSE investments can expand the development and dissemination of such strategies to increase achievement for students with disabilities.

- **IDEA Personnel Preparation Program:** This program is designed to increase the pipeline of well-prepared special education teachers, early interventionists, administrators, and specialized instructional support personnel. In 2014, 1,455 scholars completed programs. In programs where scholar stipends are authorized, 73% of the grant funds directly supported students. Ninety three percent of degree/certification recipients work in the area (s) for which they were trained. There are currently 237 grants in 38 states and the District of Columbia which reinforces a longstanding professional community dedicated to the highest quality of preparation. This program is an essential component of IDEA, investing in a foundation of deployed special educators to carry out the mandate of Part B.

But the twin shortages of special education teachers and higher education special education faculty loom large, threatening our nation’s capacity to deliver mandated service. According to the U.S. Department of Education, nearly every state reports a shortage of special education teachers and specialized instructional support personnel (e.g., speech language pathologists)¹. In fact, 90% of high poverty districts reported difficulty in attracting qualified special education teachers². Further compounding this national shortage is the estimate that 1.6 million educators are expected to retire over the next decade, many of whom are special educators³. According to a 2011 report funded by the U.S. Department of Education, approximately 1/3 to 2/3 of faculty in institutions of higher education granting doctoral degrees in special education will retire between 2011-2017 (<http://journals.sagepub.com/toc/tesa/35/2>). This mass retirement will have a direct impact on children and

¹ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Postsecondary Education. *Teacher Shortage Areas: Nationwide Listing 1990-1991 through 2013-2014*. (March 2013). <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ope/pol/tsa.pdf>

² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development, Policy and Program Studies Service, State and Local Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act, Volume VIII— Teacher Quality Under NCLB: Final Report, Washington, D.C., 2009 <http://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/teaching/nclb-final/report.pdf>

³ U.S. Department of Education, Our Future, Our Teachers: The Obama Administration’s Plan for Teacher Education Reform and Improvement, Washington, D.C., 2011. <https://www.ed.gov/sites/default/files/our-future-our-teachers.pdf>

youth with disabilities as faculty shortages will lead to 50% fewer special education teachers and school leaders trained, further exacerbating the existing K-12 shortage⁴.

Funds for Personnel Preparation have been reduced from \$92 million to \$83.7 over the last few years limiting the capacity of our nation's schools to deliver positive outcomes for students with disabilities and their families.

- Teacher Quality Partnerships, Title II , Higher Education Act

The Teacher Quality Partnership Grants provide support for critical innovations in teacher preparation, requiring partnerships between high need PK-12 schools and educator preparation programs to prepare promising students to be teachers in shortage areas – math, science and special education – in high need schools. All teachers prepared by these partnerships, no matter what their field, must be skilled in teaching both students with disabilities and English Language Learners. The partnerships support one year residency programs and require participants to teach for at least three years in a high need school upon completion of their preparation – again, an important return on investment for the federal government and our nation's students.

We seek to retain the \$43.1 million level of funding for TQP. We do hope that at some point this program can realize its promise of systemic reform through a funding level closer to \$300 million which was envisioned when it was first created in 2008. This critical program provides well prepared new teachers for high need schools and fields, in addition to transforming how higher education prepares teachers so that preparation is well grounded in teaching practice. Teachers are prepared in response to workforce needs of the districts served by the partnership. The result is new teachers who are ready for the classroom on day one meeting the particular needs of the local school district.

We can turn the tide and strengthen our investment in the foundations of research and personnel preparation. Our nation's public schools depend on this infrastructure to generate the student gains that are demanded for 21st century success and the global challenges we face. We urge Congress to increase the investment in these three critical programs and prevent the promulgation of onerous unproductive teacher preparation regulations.

Sincerely,

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cc: Members of House and Senate Subcommittees on Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations

⁴ <http://www.cgu.edu/PDFFiles/IRIS-WEST/SEFNA%20Summary%20for%20Web.pdf>