

June 28, 2019

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

Dear Chairman Blunt and Ranking Member Murray:

As your subcommittee develops its FY 2020 spending bill, we urge you to **maintain the funding level of \$98.31 million for Personnel Preparation under IDEA as included in the House passed bill, H.R. 2740** on June 19. This represents an increased \$11.11 million investment in the preparation of new special educators to carry out the mandate of IDEA, thus ensuring that every eligible student receives a free appropriate public education. This program has suffered an ongoing diminishment of funds in the last several years, moving steadily downhill. This is the opportunity to turn the tide and increase this important investment to address the dramatic shortage of special educators, including teachers and related service providers -- often referred to as specialized instructional support personnel.

Recent data reveal:

- While there has been a 17% decrease in special education teachers in the last decade, there has been an increase in students served by special education from 6 million to 7 million;
- Special education is the field with the greatest teacher shortage, with 48 states and the District of Columbia reporting shortages;
- In many states, as a result of the teacher shortage, states are hiring unprepared unqualified people to serve as special educators – the proportion of uncertified teachers grew by 50% from 2014 to 2016;
- The pipeline does not look promising as the enrollment in teacher preparation programs is down 35% in the last five years;
- The shortage of special education faculty in higher education is fueling the shortage of special education teachers; since 2009 there has been a 19% reduction in the number of special education doctoral programs.

The Personnel Preparation program under IDEA goes a long way to addressing the special education shortage. In 2016, 1,593 scholars completed programs supported by these funds. 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. This program is an essential component of IDEA, investing in a foundation of deployed special educators to carry out the mandate of Part B.

Thank you for your consideration and your leadership on behalf of students with disabilities and those who serve them. We look forward to working with you to ensure that the special education workforce is robust and highly skilled.

American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education  
American Council on Education  
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association  
Association of Teacher Educators  
Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf  
Council for Exceptional Children  
Council for Learning Disabilities  
Council of Academic Deans from Research Education Institutions  
Council of Administrators of Special Education  
Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children  
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education  
Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities  
IDEA Infant Toddler Coordinator Association  
Learning Disabilities Association of America  
National Association of Community Colleges Teacher Education Programs  
National Association of Elementary School Principals  
National Association of Secondary School Principals  
National Center for Learning Disabilities  
National Disability Rights Network  
National Down Syndrome Congress  
Public Advocacy for Kids  
Teacher Education Council of State Colleges and Universities  
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children  
The Advocacy Institute

Cc: Members of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor/HHS/Education