



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

Principles for the reauthorization of Elementary and Secondary Education Act

Students with disabilities have benefitted greatly from the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) because the law requires their academic achievement to be measured and reported. As a result, more students with disabilities have been afforded the opportunity to learn and master grade level academic content. The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Education Task Force looks forward to assisting the efforts of Congress and the Department of Education to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act so that all students can learn and thrive in school and be career and college ready. In order for all students to achieve academic excellence, the undersigned members of CCD urge Congress to incorporate the following principles in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA):

All students are general education students first. Whether they receive special education or related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, all students are entitled to receive an appropriate education from the public school system. ESEA must continue to work in conjunction with IDEA to promote a learning environment in which all children are given the opportunity to become proficient on grade-level content standards. The integration of IDEA, Section 504 and ESEA must be enhanced to ensure all students regardless of disability status receive an appropriate education.

All students should leave high school ready for college or a career. All students – including those with disabilities – must graduate from high school prepared to succeed in postsecondary education and/or in the workplace. All students deserve an educational experience that fosters academic and social growth by providing a challenging, meaningful, and enriched learning environment that builds upon their strengths and addresses their individual needs. Preparing our nation’s students to excel in the global marketplace is our strongest strategy for retaining our status as a worldwide leader.

General and special education teachers must have the skills and knowledge necessary for teaching grade-level content and diverse learners. State, district, and individual school systems must ensure that appropriately qualified teachers are available in all schools. Teachers must know how to identify student learning needs, address challenging behaviors appropriately, select and implement evidence-based instruction, and modify curriculum and assessment using principles of universal design for learning to meet the needs of diverse learners. Teachers must be able to incorporate these skills into grade-level content for the grade in which the student is enrolled.

Struggling learners should be identified early and should receive targeted instruction or interventions. Students who are struggling to meet their grade-level academic standards should receive targeted instruction and appropriate behavior supports as soon as possible. Targeted instruction and intervention, through school-wide strategies such as positive behavior supports, response to intervention or other scientifically-based interventions that work to assist struggling learners, create a positive school climate and result in better outcomes for students. Targeted instruction and intervention must not delay or deny an evaluation for special education services for a child who may be eligible for such services.

Schools must integrate into the academic curriculum programs and services to address barriers to learning. The Commission on No Child Left Behind (2007) found that it is critical to comprehensively address students' behavioral, social and emotional needs. Research demonstrates that students are more likely to achieve academic success when schools identify and address barriers to learning such as access to mental health services, assistive technology, specialized instructional support services, and adequate nutrition. In addition, strategies such as positive behavior supports, response to intervention or other scientifically-based interventions should be implemented school-wide to ensure a positive climate for learning resulting in better outcomes for students.

Assessments must be designed and implemented to ensure that all students can accurately demonstrate their academic knowledge and skills. State, district and classroom based assessments must utilize the principles of Universal Design for Learning to ensure that all students – including those with disabilities – can meaningfully demonstrate their knowledge and skills, thereby providing a more accurate understanding of student academic performance for evaluation by educators, families and policymakers. This 'next generation' of assessments must consider the needs of diverse learners from creation, rather than attempting to retrofit assessments during their implementation. An assessment can only be considered an accurate picture of a student's knowledge and skills if it is designed to allow a student to most effectively demonstrate what they know. Moreover, students should be allowed to use accommodations on assessments that are available to them on their individualized education plans (IEPs). If those accommodations are such that they will invalidate the assessment score, then the student should count as having taken the assessment and/or another more appropriate means of assessing the student should be determined.

If growth models replace the status model as a means of measuring student growth for all students, they must include all students with disabilities and ensure all students are held to high expectations. Growth models are relevant and important indicators of the effectiveness of schools as long as the growth model ensures that all students are fully included, that all students and their progress are valued and counted in the same manner, and that there are no exceptions.

The principles of universal design for learning must apply throughout ESEA. All state and district-wide assessments must be developed using the principles of universal design for learning. Curriculum objectives, materials, teaching methods and classroom assessments must be consistent with the principles of universal design for learning.

The Individualized Education Program (IEP) is not an appropriate accountability tool to measure a student's academic progress. The IEP is an agreement between parents and schools that details the specific skills, services and supports a child needs to make progress in the general education curriculum. Moreover, the final regulations to IDEA reaffirm that the IEP is not appropriate for school accountability purposes. ESEA provides academic accountability for students with disabilities, like it does for every other student. Therefore, all statewide assessments used for ESEA accountability purposes, including alternate assessments, must continue to measure only academic achievement, not progress on functional goals.

Families must be empowered to be effective advocates for their child and students with disabilities need to be included in the decision-making process about their academic opportunities to the extent appropriate. Families need specific tools, training and other technical assistance in order to make informed and appropriate decisions about their child's educational needs. ESEA should incentivize meaningful family engagement policies and practices that drive student achievement for *all* students and create infrastructure and capacity for effective family engagement at the federal, state, and local levels.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act must be adequately funded so that public schools have the resources they need to meet the needs of all students. While ESEA is not an appropriations bill, it and IDEA must be adequately funded to be implemented.

Alexander Graham Bell Association for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing
American Association of People with Disabilities
American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities
American Counseling Association
American Dance Therapy Association
American Music Therapy Association
American Occupational Therapy Association
American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Association of Assistive Technology Act Programs
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Autism National Committee
Autism Society of America
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Children and Adults with Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders
Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf
Council for Exceptional Children
Council for Learning Disabilities
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund
Easter Seals
Epilepsy Foundation
Helen Keller National Center

Higher Education Consortium on Special Education
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
Mental Health America
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of School Psychologists
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Coalition on Deaf-Blindness
National Council on Independent Living
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Down Syndrome Society
National PTA
School Social Work Association of America
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
The Advocacy Institute
The Arc of the United States
Tourette Syndrome Association
United Cerebral Palsy

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a coalition of nearly 100 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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