December 20, 2019

Chairman Richard Shelby  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

Ranking Member Patrick Leahy  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Nita Lowey  
House Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Kay Granger  
House Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairs Shelby and Lowey and Ranking Members Leahy and Granger:

On behalf of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), thank you for including in H.R. 1865 a request for a report from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) that examines the teacher shortage, and specifically requests a review and analysis of challenges facing recruitment of special educators, that includes teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and teacher aides.

CEC is a professional association comprised of educators dedicated to advancing the success of students with exceptionalities which accomplishes its mission through advocacy, standards, and professional development. CEC’s Professional Preparation Standards provide the gold standard for the field of special education- they define the specialized expertise that special educators must master to be effective. CEC’s standards also inform college preparation programs, accreditation organizations, credentialing agencies, and organizations providing professional development. CEC advocates for evidence-based best practices and the use of high leverage practices that support professionals educating students with exceptionalities at all levels, from early intervention through higher education.

The requested report from the GAO on special educator shortages is much needed if we are to develop strategies informed by data to thwart this condition. It is well documented that the persistent shortage of special educators and early intervention providers in the K-12 education system has reached crisis levels. Currently, there are special educator shortages in 48 states and the District of Columbia. Simultaneously, special educators are leaving the profession at an annual rate of over 12 percent, nearly twice the rate of their general education colleagues, and enrollment in educator preparation programs has dropped by over one-third in the last five years.

The shortage gravely impacts students, particularly students with exceptionalities, resulting in high turn-over rates for special educators and costing schools and districts; perpetuating the quality staffing gap and the student achievement gap. It is our hope that the GAO report can be used as a tool for Congress to enact measures that contribute to reversing the shortage trend and robustly supporting the educator pipeline.

Thank you again for your leadership to address teacher shortages.
Sincerely,

Mary Lynn Boscardin, Ph.D.
President

Cc:
Chairman Roy Blunt, Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Ranking Member Patty Murray, Senate Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro, House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Ranking Member Tom Cole, House Labor-HHS-Education Appropriations Subcommittee
Chairman Lamar Alexander, Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee
Chairman Bobby Scott, House Education and Labor Committee
Ranking Member Virginia Foxx, House Education and Labor Committee