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Preparing Future Educators to Meet the Needs of Children with Disabilities

SUMMARY

- The *Individual's with Disabilities Act* (IDEA) Personnel Preparation Program provides financial assistance to some 8,000 future special educators in exchange for service in a high-need school. Funding cuts have hurt the program.
- The reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act must require teacher preparation programs to train **all** future educators to address the needs of students with disabilities.
- Teacher preparation programs should emphasize high-quality clinical experiences for teaching candidates to demonstrate their content and pedagogical knowledge prior to program completion (i.e. edTPA).
- Chronic shortages in special education must be addressed through student loan forgiveness and scholarship programs, such as the TEACH Grant Program.
- Accountability measures for teacher preparation programs must not rely on value-added measures of teachers once in the classroom as they are not valid or reliable.
- CEC supports *The Educator Preparation Reform Act* (S. 1062/H.R. 2172) introduced by Senator Jack Reed (D-R.I) and Representative Mike Honda (D-Calif.).

More than 6 million children and youth with disabilities across the nation rely on the expertise of professionals who are fully prepared to provide individualized instruction, which is the heart of special education.

Research has demonstrated that the quality of a teacher is the most important school-based factor for improving student outcomes. Since the passage of IDEA in 1975, it has been difficult to recruit and retain special educators. In fact, 49 states continue to report a shortage of special educators and 90% of high-poverty school districts report difficulty in attracting highly-qualified special education teachers.



49 states continue to report a shortage of special educators, a trend that has spanned decades.

Unfortunately, the challenges continue in the classroom as special educators leave the profession at nearly twice the rate of general educators. The cost of teacher turnover is estimated to be more than \$4 billion per year to school districts, not to mention the cost to students and communities. The national shortage of special educators, coupled with their high attrition and low retention rate, require a federal response.

To further address chronic shortages, IDEA's Personnel Preparation Program provides financial assistance to some 8,000 students studying special education, who then provide two years of service in a high-need school for every year of financial support. Increasing the pipeline of special educators is critical to meeting the needs of students with disabilities. Federal funding has been cut from this program since 2010, when it was funded at \$90.6 million, and must rebound in order to increase the number of future special educators.

To further address chronic shortages, U.S. Sen. Jack Reed (D-R.I.) and U.S. Rep. Mike Honda (D-Calif.) have introduced *The Educator Preparation Reform Act* (S.1062/H.R. 2172), legislation that recognizes recruiting and retaining high quality individuals into the field of education, which is central to creating learning environments that foster developmental and academic success. This legislation recognizes the important role of preparation and proposes significant positive changes to the current system to better prepare our future teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, and school leadership for the realities of the classroom, while also increasing accountability measures for teacher preparation programs.

Of great importance to special educators, *The Educator Preparation Reform Act* places a larger emphasis on real-world experiences during the preparation process thereby providing educators with the hands-on experience that is so critical to success in the classroom. Innovative approaches, such as the Ed Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA), which are permitted under this legislation, provide all educators with high-quality clinical experiences that allow teaching-candidates to demonstrate their content and pedagogical knowledge prior to program completion. CEC is pleased to support *The Educator Preparation Reform Act* as one step toward addressing this chronic challenge.

The Educator Preparation Reform Act (S.1062/H.R.2172)

Introduced by Senator Jack Reed (D-R.I.) and Congressman Mike Honda (D-Calif.)

- ✓ Emphasizes preparation for all educators on needs of students with disabilities.
- ✓ Increases clinical preparation requirements and eligibility.
- ✓ Enhances the Teacher Quality Partnership Grants Program, an initiative to create partnerships between teacher preparation programs and high-need schools, program graduates are all prepared to teacher students with disabilities and must teach for at least three years in a high-need school.
- ✓ Supports TEACH Grants which provide up to \$16,000 scholarships to recruit high performing students into teaching in high-need fields, including special educators, in exchange for four years of teaching in high-need school.
- ✓ Includes accountability measures for preparation programs based on admissions standards, clinical preparation requirements and outcomes measures such as placement, retention, and performance.