RECOMMENDATIONS

CEC urges Congress to:

- Increase investment in services and supports for young children with disabilities and their families through provision of:
  - $1.02 billion in funding for IDEA’s Part C Early Intervention Program; and
  - $1.12 billion in funding for IDEA’s Part B, Preschool Special Education Program (Section 619).

- Increase the availability of high-quality early learning opportunities for all young children starting at birth, including children with disabilities. These legislative efforts must focus on ensuring access and necessary supports and services to allow young children with disabilities to fully participate and thrive in newly expanded preschool programs.

BACKGROUND

This year marks the 31st anniversary of the enactment of P.L. 99-457, which reauthorized IDEA, creating the Early Intervention Program for Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities and revising the Preschool Special Education Grant program under Section 619 of Part B. These two programs were designed to provide funds to assist states in designing and implementing statewide systems of services for young children with disabilities from birth through age 5 and their families.

Through this federal investment and the continuous and significant commitment of states and communities, all states and eligible jurisdictions participate in these two federal programs. Throughout the country, all eligible young children and their families are ensured availability of individualized services and supports to enhance children’s outcomes and increase their likelihood of success as they enter school.

The Early Intervention and the Preschool Special Education Programs currently serve over 1.1 million children, about double the number of children served in 1991. This is based on a single-day count reported each year to the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Beginning this year, each state’s Early Intervention Program is required to also report the cumulative number of children served by the state in the entire year. Based on past years’ voluntary reports by states of this cumulative year-long Early Intervention count, the number of children served in the Early Intervention Program is expected to double.
Although states and local communities have increased the number of children served and expanded their fiscal contributions to the IDEA early childhood programs, federal funding has not kept pace:

- Stagnant federal funding means a current allocation of $469 per preschool child with a disability as compared to $803 per child in 1992. In fact, federal funding per child has hit a 25-year low for preschoolers with disabilities.

- Federal funding per child for the Early Intervention Program has continued to decrease since its high in 1999. Currently, the per-child amount allocated for children counted on a single day is $1,251. Assuming the actual number of children served is double the reported single-day child count, the available federal funding for each child in reality is half that—about $625 per child.

Although these services—known as Early Intervention and Preschool Special Education—are individualized to meet the needs of each child and family, they all share common goals of improving developmental outcomes. Research has demonstrated that intervening at the earliest age can improve outcomes for children with disabilities as they enter into kindergarten and progress in their education. In fact, studies have found a number of long-term cost savings such as decreased grade repetition, reduced special education spending, enhanced productivity, lower welfare costs, increased tax revenues and lower juvenile justice costs.

According to analysis by the Early Childhood Technical Assistance Center (ECTA), IDEA’s early childhood programs have demonstrated positive results for children, their families, and society across three required outcomes: knowledge and skills, social relationships, and taking action to meet needs.

- Between 66% and 73% of children who participated in IDEA’s Infant and Toddler Program showed greater than expected growth in the three domains.

- Between 77% and 79% of children who participated in IDEA’s Preschool Special Education Program showed greater than expected growth in the three domains.

IDEA early childhood programs are well placed to collaborate with current national and state efforts to ensure universal access for all children starting at birth to high-quality early learning opportunities.

To fully participate alongside their typically developing peers in high quality, early education programs, children with disabilities must have access to appropriate specialized supports. It is not sufficient to simply grant these children the opportunity to access early education programs; rather, they must be provided the supports and services to allow them to fully participate.

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**IDEA’s early childhood programs provide the necessary supports and services to enhance developmental progress, decrease the need for or intensity of special education services once a child reaches kindergarten, and prepare children to thrive in their education.**

**CEC supports legislative efforts designed to ensure full access and participation of all young children in high-quality learning opportunities starting at birth. This includes but is not limited to enactment of the pending reauthorizations of several early childhood laws such as the Early Hearing Diagnosis and Intervention Act (EHDI), the Child Abuse and Prevention Treatment Act (CAPTA) and Maternal, Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting. In addition, CEC appreciates the passage of the dedicated funding stream included in ESSA to enhanced early learning opportunities for young children.**