CEC Calls for Reform of the *No Child Left Behind Act* on Its Fifth Anniversary

While the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) supports the principles of the *No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB)*, it believes Congress must reexamine the legislation to address its shortcomings. Now, at NCLB’s fifth anniversary, significant strides have been made in the education of students with disabilities, such as higher standards and accountability for these students’ academic success, but many areas need improvement. These areas include: funding to implement the law, highly qualified teacher requirements, assessments for children with disabilities, the current system of sanctions for schools that fail to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) requirements, and more focused attention on children who are gifted and talented.

“*NCLB* states a noble ambition: to ensure all children—including those with disabilities and those from diverse cultures—meet high academic standards,” says CEC’s Associate Executive Director for Public Policy Deb Ziegler. “However, through our work with special educators across the nation, as well as parents of children with exceptionalities, CEC recognizes that as the law is currently written, its goals are difficult to achieve. CEC will work with Congress and the administration to make the necessary changes and ensure *NCLB* retains its overarching aim while rectifying its problems.”

For *NCLB* to meet the needs of students with exceptionalities, CEC has identified the following areas, among others, for improvement:

- A process must be developed to enable middle and high school special education teachers who teach multiple core subjects to demonstrate that they meet highly qualified requirements via a variety of methods.
- Student assessment must be changed to more fairly and accurately measure student progress. States must be allowed to measure students’ growth in achievement as well as their performance in relation to pre-determined levels of academic proficiency. Also, multiple indicators of student achievement, in addition to standardized tests, should be used to determine student and school performance.
School improvement plans should be allowed sufficient time to make a difference in student achievement before sanctions are applied. Further, sanctions should not be applied if they undermine existing effective reform efforts.

NCLB must recognize and address the unique learning needs of students with gifts and talents to allow these students to realize their potential.

NCLB funding must be increased. Funding must cover a substantial percentage of the cost states and districts will incur to carry out the law. Fully funding NCLB must not reduce expenditures for other education programs.

CEC will release its formal specific recommendations on NCLB in the near future and is currently seeking the input of its members. Tell CEC your thoughts on NCLB by clicking here to fill out an online survey.

Additionally, CEC is a founding member of the Forum on Educational Accountability, a diverse group of organizations, including educational, disability, civil rights, and religious, that have joined together to address the reform of NCLB and issue recommendations.

For more information about CEC’s positions on NCLB:

- Joint Organizational Statement on the No Child Left Behind Act
- Forum on Educational Accountability Press Release
- Fill out CEC’s online questionnaire to share your views on NCLB.

Secretary Spellings Calls for Renewal of No Child Left Behind Act Before Audience of Business Professionals; Administration Mets with Congressional Leaders

On Monday, Secretary Spellings celebrated the fifth anniversary of the No Child Left Behind Act by sharing her vision of the future of the education law before an audience of business professionals at the Chamber of Commerce. While CEC and a handful of other education organizations were present, the tone of Spellings speech was directed to the business professionals who made up much of the audience.

After much praise for the business community, Spellings offered a trip down memory lane, informing the audience of how Congressional leaders of both parties came together with administration officials to create the landmark education legislation. Touting its accomplishments, Spellings stressed that as a nation we are moving towards reaching proficiency by 2014 – the law’s stated goal – and further, “The Nation's Report Card showed our younger students made more reading progress in 5 years than in the previous 28 combined and reading and math scores are reaching all-time highs for younger students,” stated Spellings.

Throughout her speech, Spellings emphasized a need to reauthorize NCLB this year as it is scheduled, a process whereby Congress will analyze and make changes to the law. Congress began laying the groundwork to reauthorize NCLB last year during a series of Congressional hearings. CEC will inform Congress of its recommendations on how to improve NCLB in the near future. Click here to fill out CEC’s online questionnaire to share your views on NCLB.
On Monday afternoon, Congressional leaders – Senator Kennedy (D-MA), Senator Enzi (R-WY), Congressman Miller (D-CA), Congressman McKeon (R-CA) – met with President Bush, First Lady Laura Bush and Secretary Spellings to discuss the future of NCLB. In a show of bipartisan support for the landmark education bill, officials from both parties pledged to support the overarching goals of NCLB.

President Bush stated, “I am proud of this piece of legislation. I think it's made an enormous difference, particularly in the lives of some of our poorer students. This country needs to get it right when it comes to public education, and the bill that I was honored to sign is an important first step toward making sure every child gets a good education in America.”

While Democratic leaders remain generally supportive of NCLB, both Chairmen – Kennedy and Miller – stressed the critical need to provide additional funding necessary to effectively carry out programs and goals of NCLB.

Senator Kennedy, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor Pensions Committee, stated, “We're [Democrats] prepared to work with the President and as a first step we urged him to send a message in this year's budget that every child counts and deserves the benefits of our liberty. We will continue to fight for the resources we know are needed to fulfill this promise.”

Congressman Miller, Chairman of the House Education and Labor Committee, stated, “The No Child Left Behind Act has brought important changes to our public education system - for example, by shining a spotlight on the persistent achievement gap that exists among different groups of students in our country,” said Miller. “But if we are going to fulfill our original commitment to children and parents, then the law, its implementation, and its funding must be improved.”

Tell Congress to Consider Long-Overdue Education Funding Legislation!

As the new Congress convenes, it faces 10 of the 12 federal funding bills that were left unfinished from the previous Congress -- including the bill that provides funding to education, health and labor programs.

With the 2007 fiscal year now well underway -- it started in October -- Congress is now determining whether to address the fiscal year (FY) 2007 funding bills or leave funding levels at FY 2006 levels for the year and focus on FY 2008.
Leaving funding at last year's levels would continue to drastically under fund education programs -- and wouldn't even account for inflation and enrollment growth! All education programs would be affected including:

- The Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act was funded at $11.2 million in FY 2005, but it now faces elimination altogether in FY 2007. This is the only federal program that focuses on the education of those students who have gifts and talents. If the United States truly wants to compete on a global level, we should do all we can to foster the abilities of these students;

- Funding IDEA Part B at last year’s level would cut back the federal share of funding for students with disabilities, estimated at 6.9 million in FY07, to only 17 percent of the national average per pupil expenditure, far short of the promised 40 percent. In addition, funding IDEA Part B section 619 – preschool grants, IDEA Part C – infant and toddler program, and IDEA Part D – support programs at last year’s level leaves these programs drastically under funded, even despite increased enrollment and growing demand.

- The FY07 authorized level for NCLB is $39.4 billion, while funding at last year’s level in the joint resolution would provide only $23.5 billion, a difference of $15.9 billion, leaving more than 4 million disadvantaged students less than fully served.

Tell your elected officials that education funding needs to be addressed and increased, today!

Visit CEC’s Legislative Action Center to find out who your elected officials are and contact them instantly!

CEC Submits Recommendations to Improve Department of ED IDEA Part D Comprehensive Plan

Yesterday, CEC submitted its comments to the Department of Education on the proposed IDEA Part D Comprehensive Plan. The Plan outlined broad topics for projects and activities to fulfill seven outcomes that would carry out the goals of IDEA Part D programs, which are aimed at providing the infrastructure, training, research and development functions necessary to improve special education. Generally, CEC was pleased with the Plan as outlined by the Department, though it did have specific recommendations on how to strengthen and improve the Plan. CEC’s comments will be available online next week.

Seven outcomes detailed in the Plan:

**Outcome 1:** To the Maximum Extent Appropriate, Children With Disabilities Will Receive High Quality Educational and Early Intervention Services in Natural Settings With Typically Developing Peers

**Outcome 2:** Children With Disabilities Will Be Appropriately Identified and Served in a Timely Manner

**Outcome 3:** Children With Disabilities Will Demonstrate Improved Literacy, Including Early Language, Communication and Numeracy Skills
Outcome 4: Children With Disabilities Will Demonstrate Improved Social and Behavioral Skills

Outcome 5: Students With Disabilities Will Complete High School Prepared for Independent Living and Postsecondary Education and/or Competitive Employment

Outcome 6: All Service Providers, Including Special Education Teachers, Paraprofessionals, Related Service Personnel and Early Intervention Personnel Will Be Qualified, and Possess the Knowledge and Skills to Implement Effective, Research-Based Practices and Interventions

Outcome 7: Family Capacity will be Enhanced

CEC recommendations included: ensuring that early childhood considerations are addressed throughout the Plan, adding a focus on twice-exceptional students (students with disabilities and gifts and talents), incorporating the principles of Universal Design for Learning throughout the Plan, developing quality guidance to states on evidence-based Response to Interventions models for gradual use in the classroom, strengthening dissemination networks and collaboration with institutes of higher education, ensuring that alternative routes to certification programs are rigorous and of high quality, strengthening language to proactively undertake recruitment and retention efforts for special educators, helping families understand how IDEA and NCLB overlap though proactive outreach efforts.

CEC Wants to Hear Your Success Stories!

Do you know a child or youth who has made great strides and has a great story to share?

If so, CEC wants to hear from you!

As you may know, every year CEC publishes its Federal Outlook for Exceptional Children as a way to provide members of Congress, their staffs and officials at the Department of Education with CEC's funding recommendations for federal special and gifted education programs. To give these facts and figures a human touch, we include stories of children who have benefited from IDEA and the Javits program for students with gifts and talents. The Outlook is a vital grassroots tool that CEC staff and advocates use regularly on Capitol Hill.

Each year we put out a call for stories of students with disabilities, gifts and talents, or both who have benefited from IDEA or the Javits grant program. Please don't miss this chance to have a student you know be an advocate for increased federal funding for IDEA or Javits! The deadline for submitting stories is January 16, 2007.

Please consider submitting a story on how funding from IDEA and the Javits program have benefited students and/or educators. As Congress continues to drastically under fund special and gifted education, we are hoping stories can highlight the impact of federal funding (or lack thereof) on schools across the country.

Stories should be no more than 250 words, and a template is available online to assist in writing these stories.
More information.

Submit a story today by emailing kimk@cec.sped.org!