Improving Outcomes for Children with Disabilities Starts with Well Prepared Educators, Early Interventionists

Children and youth with disabilities – and their families – thrive when they have access to educators and professionals who are specially trained to address their complex needs. Over six million infants, toddlers and school aged children receive early intervention or special education services in every state across the nation through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). A key factor to creating positive academic and developmental outcomes for children with disabilities is the investment in training future professionals who specialize in early intervention, special education, and related services.

Supporting Educational Access Despite Nationwide Personnel Shortages

Children and youth with disabilities – starting from birth – rely on specially trained personnel to fulfill IDEA’s promise of a free appropriate public education. Through early intervention, preschool, and school based special education services, children and youth with disabilities receive individualized programs to support their academic, developmental and behavioral goals. Unfortunately, there continues to be a shortage of special education, early intervention, and related service personnel in nearly every state, a trend that has existed for decades.

IDEA’s Personnel Preparation Program Increases the Special Educator Pipeline

IDEA’s Personnel Preparation program recognizes the chronic personnel shortages in special education and is designed to increase the pipeline of well-prepared special education teachers, early interventionists, administrators, and related service personnel.

The Personnel Preparation program supports approximately 8,000 scholars annually, all of whom are preparing for a career to serve children and youth with disabilities. 65% of all Personnel Preparation funds go directly to future educators, serving as financial assistance that enables them to secure college degrees and gain expertise. Upon completion of the Personnel Preparation program, all recipients are required to “pay back” through two years of service in a high-need area for every year of federal support; a wise use of federal funding.

IDEA Personnel Preparation Program: Recent Investments (2008-2012)
Shrinking Federal Investment

Over the last three years, funding for IDEA’s Personnel Preparation program had decreased from $90.6 million in FY 2010 to $83.7 million in FY 2013.

As a result, fewer future special educators, early interventionists, and related service personnel are receiving the financial assistance needed to pursue careers focusing on children and youth with disabilities.

Building better outcomes for children with disabilities – and their families – starts with skilled professionals who work on their behalf.

At a minimum, funding for IDEA’s Personnel Preparation program must be restored to its fiscal year 2010 amount of $90.6 million, although to truly address the personnel shortages, an increase in funding is needed.

Answering the Needs of the Special Education Community

Consider these facts when thinking about the importance of investing in special education personnel:

- The incidence rate of children with autism spectrum disorder is 1 in 50; uniquely skilled special educators are necessary to meet student needs.
- Early identification of disability is critical to ensuring early access to services which leads to better outcomes for children with disabilities; personnel need to be trained for early detection and intervention.
- The US Department of Education reports a shortage of special education teachers in nearly every state.
- With the impending retirement of over a million educators in the next decade, new special education personnel will be needed to take their place.