



Legislative Priorities for the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education **January 2011**

Appropriations

Retain targeted programs for students with disabilities and the personnel who prepare them.

HECSE recommends retaining the current targeted programs below for students with disabilities and the personnel who prepare them. Consolidation of these programs into large funding pools would result in fewer expert personnel to work with students with disabilities and reduced services for students with disabilities.

Personnel Preparation under IDEA

IDEA authorizes funds for personnel preparation under Part D. This account has been level funded for years, despite the persistent and pervasive shortage of highly qualified special education teachers and faculty, especially in low incidence areas. In FY 2010, the account was funded at \$90 million – the same amount as FY 2009. Currently funding continues under a continuing resolution for FY 2011. There is sound evidence that these funds significantly impact the production of special education faculty who prepare tomorrow's teachers. **HECSE recommends an increase in this account for FY 2012, to \$180 million to better address the ongoing critical shortage of special education teachers and faculty.**

Demonstration Projects to Support Postsecondary Faculty, Staff and Administrators in Educating Students with Disabilities in the Higher Education Opportunity Act

Since 1998, the Higher Education Act has authorized this program at \$10 million to provide technical assistance for faculty in institutions of higher education so they can provide a quality postsecondary education to students with disabilities. Currently funded at \$6.7 million, this program was an ongoing target for elimination during the Bush Administration. The recent reauthorization of this program in the Higher Education Opportunity Act expanded its authority to address retention and transition issues. **HECSE recommends funding the program at the \$10 million level.**

Model Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities in the Higher Education Opportunity Act

This program was newly authorized in 2008 in the Higher Education Opportunity Act. It provides for grants to develop or expand model programs that serve students with intellectual disabilities in higher education. In FY 2010, the Congress appropriated \$11 million to develop these new programs as well as a coordinating center. **HECSE recommends continuing to fund this program for FY 2012 at \$11 million.**

Teacher Quality Partnership Grants in Title II of the Higher Education Opportunity Act

These partnership grants provide funding to institutions of higher education to develop or expand clinical programs at the undergraduate level and residency programs at the Masters level in order to prepare highly qualified teachers – particularly for shortage areas such as special education. In FY 2010 this program was funded at \$43 million. It continues funding under the current FY 2011 CR. This funding level allowed only 28 of 172 proposals to be funded. **HECSE recommends increasing the funding to \$100 million in FY 2012.**

Elementary and Secondary Education Act reauthorization

Ensuring Accountability for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities should be retained as a subgroup for accountability purposes under NCLB. Because of disaggregated scores, we know that students with disabilities are making progress and are sometimes scoring with distributions similar to their non-disabled peers. HECSE recommends that the existing 2% policy for students with modified standards be reconsidered. Intensive services and support for ALL significantly low performing students across all sub groups should be provided. Students with disabilities should be included in growth models systems under development in states.

Teacher Quality

Any definition of teacher effectiveness needs to include NCLB should ensure that in order to meet the definition of “highly effective” all special education teachers have completed a state approved special education preparation program and can demonstrate both the teaching skill and content knowledge needed to be effective teachers. Increasingly people are being labeled as “highly qualified special education teachers” when they have neither the preparation, the skill nor the curricular content knowledge to be effective special education

teachers. In order for the performance of students with disabilities to improve, the students must have effective teachers. Congress should reverse the recently enacted amendment on the FY 2011 CR that allows those in the midst of alternate route programs to serve as the teacher of record and be described as “highly qualified.”

When determining how to measure the effectiveness of special education teachers utilizing value added measures, HECSE urges careful consideration. Because of the unique roles of special educators, they are often one of many professionals involved in teaching students multiple subjects and determining their specific contribution to student learning is complex. In addition, some students receiving special education services do not participate in standardized tests and others may enter a classroom significantly below grade level. Learning growth of students with disabilities should involve measures other than standardized tests, and the overall evaluation of special education teachers should include measures of student performance as well as measures of teacher practice, and professional engagement with other teachers, students and their parents.

TEACH Grants

HECSE encourages greater utilization of the TEACH grants. The availability of \$16,000 scholarships for undergraduate students and \$8000 scholarships for Masters Students to become special education teachers is a much needed incentive. HECSE would like to see the program opened up to universities with programs in both the undergraduate and post-baccalaureate levels. **HECSE looks forward to continuing to work on the implementation of this important program.**

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