

Talking Points for Meetings with Congressional Offices in January 17, 2008
DRAFT 12/10/07

NOTE: THIS WILL BE REVISED AND UPDATED FOR YOU WHEN YOU COME TO WASHINGTON ON JANUARY 16 TO REFLECT DEVELOPMENTS BETWEEN NOW AND THEN, AS MUCH IS STILL IN PLAY.

Who We Are

The Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE) is comprised of universities with Departments of Special Education that offer doctoral level training. HECSE members are throughout the nation training the special education teachers, researchers and leaders of tomorrow. We are the major voice for special education in higher education.

My Special Education Department

Provide information about your program, including the federal grants you receive and the impact they have, e.g. how many teachers, researchers, leaders you train. Review the unmet needs in your state and at your university. Highlight the faculty shortage and the challenges you face recruiting new faculty.

Legislative Priorities for HECSE

The Higher Education Act

(Note: The Higher Education Act reauthorization legislation- S. 1642- was unanimously endorsed by the Senate in June. The Higher Education Reauthorization legislation - HR 4137- was unanimously endorsed by the House Committee on Education and Labor in November. The next step is for the full House to vote on HR 4137. This is likely to occur in January or February, 2008. Then the two bills will go to conference before being sent to the President. It is highly likely that this legislation will be signed into law in 2008.)

Special Education Faculty Shortage

The House bill (HR 4137), but NOT the Senate bill, includes a new provision in Title VII to amend the Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need program creating a priority for those training to become special education faculty. This provision addresses the critical shortage of special education faculty, which is part of the reason for the shortage of special education teachers. **HECSE URGES THAT THIS PROVISION BE PART OF THE FINAL BILL.**

Preparing Special Education and General Education Teachers to Instruct Students with Disabilities

Both the House and Senate bills include provisions in Title II that focus on special education teachers and preparing general education teachers to work with students with disabilities. These provisions will help address the critical shortage of special education teachers, which is now greater than the shortage of math and science teachers, and the significant need for general education teachers to be able to work effectively with students with disabilities – as 80% of students with disabilities are now in general education classrooms 40% of the time.

HECSE URGES THAT THESE PROVISIONS BE PART OF THE FINAL BILL.

Access to Higher Education for Students with Disabilities

Both the House and Senate bills include provisions to strengthen the existing Title VII model demonstration programs for students with disabilities. Both bills also add a new model demonstration authority to develop and strengthen transition and higher education programs for students with intellectual disabilities, as well as a Technical Assistance Center. Both bills provide access to federal financial assistance for student with intellectual disabilities. The House bill authorizes a comprehensive National Technical Assistance Center to improve the recruitment, retention and completion rates of students with disabilities in higher education. The House bill authorizes an advisory commission on accessible instructional materials in higher education and model demonstration programs to improve accessible instructional materials. The House bill authorizes a national study on higher education access and success for students with disabilities. The House bill includes a definition of universal design for learning.

HECSE RECOMMENDS REAUTHORIZING THE HIGHER EDUCATION ACT TO INCLUDE THESE PROVISIONS.

Linking Federal Student Aid to Teacher Preparation Programs

Both bills include a provision that requires that all institutions of higher education that receive federal financial assistance which have teacher preparation programs ensure that their special education candidates are prepared in content areas and that their general education candidates are prepared to instruct students with disabilities.

HECSE SUPPORTS THESE PROVISIONS WITH MODIFICATIONS TO CLARIFY THAT NOT EVERY SINGLE TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAM HAS A SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM NOR WILL EVERY PROGRAM PREPARE TEACHERS FOR BOTH URBAN AND RURAL SETTINGS.

No Child Left Behind

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 continue as a regulatory policy while the statute includes provisions to target intensive services and support for ALL significantly low performing students across all sub groups and assess performance based on individual student academic growth.

Teacher Quality

NCLB should ensure that in order to meet the definition of “highly qualified” 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.

Appropriations

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 2006 the account received a 1% cut bringing it to \$89.72 million. In FY 2007 the account remained at \$89.72 million. While the FY 2008 bill is not yet complete, the account will not receive an increase and may well receive another cut. HECSE recommends an increase in this account for FY 2008, to at least \$110 million to address the ongoing critical shortage of special education teachers and faculty.

Demonstration Projects to Ensure Students with Disabilities Receive a Quality Higher Education

Title VII of the Higher Education Act authorizes 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 \$6.9 million, this program is frequently zeroed out in the president’s budget and often a target in appropriations bills. This program is the only program in higher education

specifically targeted to ensuring the success of students with disabilities. We recommend \$10 million in funding for FY 2009.

TEACH Grants

HECSE is very excited about the TEACH grants. The availability of \$16,000 scholarships for undergraduate students and \$8000 scholarships for Masters students to become special education teachers is exactly the incentive needed. HECSE looks forward to the regulations being developed and using the TEACH grants to recruit students into special education when they become available in July of 2008.