



CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS WITH DISABILITIES

Principles and Recommendations for the Higher Education Act

Ensuring that students with disabilities are college and career ready
is a challenging but critically important national goal

October 2015

A Few Facts:

- Despite significant strides in public policy, people with disabilities remain the poorest, least employed, and least educated minority in America (Senate HELP Committee, 2014). Without the education and training needed to start a career, young people with disabilities are trapped in a pattern of perpetual poverty and dependence upon state and federal benefits.
- Youth with intellectual disabilities have the lowest rates of education, work, or preparation for work after high school of all disability groups.
- The proportion of working-age people with disabilities who are in the labor force fell from 25 percent in 2001 to 16 percent in 2014 (Yin, 2015).
- Researchers have projected that 63 percent of all U.S. jobs by 2018 will require some postsecondary education and that 90 percent of new jobs in growing industries with high wages will require, at a minimum, some postsecondary education (National Center on Educational Outcomes, 2013).
- Americans with Disabilities Act and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act protect students with disabilities from discrimination and require institutions of higher education to provide reasonable accommodations. However, colleges and universities face challenges in supporting students who are unaware of their rights and responsibilities regarding accommodations and in providing accommodations, including services that involve specialized knowledge. Many faculty and staff are unaware of their legal obligations and how to accommodate students with disabilities (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2009).

Principles and Recommendations:

Students with disabilities should be fully considered as part of any policy changes being proposed to the Higher Education Act. These principles demonstrate the challenges facing students with disabilities

- Parents, families, professionals and students (including high school students) need better access to information about services, supports, legal requirements, and physical, programmatic, and instructional accommodations to help students be successful and graduate from postsecondary education programs. In addition, colleges and universities need technical assistance to effectively understand how to provide services and accommodations to all students with disabilities who enroll in postsecondary programs.

- Recommendation: The updated HEA should maintain the National Technical Assistance Center in Section 777(a) of the Higher Education Opportunity Act.
- Recommendation: The HEA bill should authorize funding to collect (and make available to the public) accurate data about the recruitment, retention, graduation, and employment of students and faculty with disabilities to help postsecondary programs in their ability to serve students with disabilities and to provide middle and high school students, parents, and faculty with information about postsecondary educational options, accessibility, enrollment procedures, supports, and rights and responsibilities.
- Recommendation: An HEA reauthorization should include a new commission on serving and supporting students with psychiatric disabilities.
- The updated HEA should clarify that, consistent with the ADA and other laws, students should not be penalized for behavior related to a disability where individualized, reasonable accommodations could mitigate this behavior.
- Higher education needs to be physically and programmatically accessible (as well as accessible in its curriculum) to all students. Students with disabilities, including those with intellectual disabilities, should be provided appropriate supports and services to allow them equal opportunity to participate in all aspects of higher education that are available to other students, including integrated classroom experiences, access to faculty who are skilled in instructing students with disabilities, accessible instructional materials, inclusive housing opportunities, accessible campus-sponsored transportation, assistive and other technology, work and career opportunities, flexible leave policies, and access to financial aid.
 - Recommendation: The updated HEA should retain the definition of “universal design for learning” included in the 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act. In addition, post-secondary education programs and their administration, staff and faculty should receive training, support, and technical assistance to ensure programs of instruction, curricula, and support services are developed according to the principles of universal design for learning
 - Recommendation: HEA should include provisions that require services, including but not limited to housing, websites, and athletic facilities, to be universally designed and accessible to students with disabilities, requires that institutions understand their legal obligation to provide reasonable accommodations.
 - Recommendation: HEA should require IHE programs to expand the list of accommodations available to students so that they address the diverse needs and diverse types of disabilities and mental health needs.
- In recognition of the increasing availability of web and computer-based instructional delivery and web and computer-based course materials, accessibility standards should be applied to all platforms used by institutions of higher education to deliver instruction.
- Students with disabilities, and professionals who work with children and adults with disabilities must be taken into consideration as our federal government tackles the important issue of affordability and access to higher education. Students with disabilities must be eligible for all types of financial aid and programs to create greater access for first generation college students as all other students. Federal law should ensure that students with disabilities are accommodated if they cannot meet credit-hour requirements per semester. The law must entitle them to certain student financial aid options, such as Pell Grants, if they cannot meet the requirement due to their disability. For example, an applicant to a teacher preparation program who otherwise meets qualifications for a scholarship should not be disqualified because he/she requires an accommodation of additional time to complete coursework.
 - Recommendation: An updated HEA must retain provisions that allow students with intellectual disabilities to access financial aid.
- Postsecondary programs for students with intellectual disabilities that focus on academic enrichment, socialization, independent living and employment are critical to the postsecondary success of students and must be expanded and geographically distributed across all states. In fact, since the creation of Transition and Postsecondary Programs for

Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) program in 2008, this program has had a positive impact on student rates of employment and wages, social networks, self-determination skills, and community living.

- Recommendation: HEA programs supporting individuals with intellectual disabilities, such as the Model Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Programs (TPSIDs) and the TPSID National Coordinating Center, must be expanded and include geographic diversity.
- Recommendation: Change the Title of Sec. 766 Model Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Programs to “Inclusive Higher Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities.”
- Recommendation: Require programs to integrate work experiences and career skills that lead to competitive integrated employment.
- Recommendation: Require TPSID programs to collect longitudinal outcome data for enrolled students.
- Recommendation: change “curriculum” to “program of study” to clarify that a separate curriculum is not desired or required.
- All personnel, including special educators, general educators and specialized instructional support personnel (such as school counselors, speech language pathologists, school psychologists and others), need to have skills required to be effective with students with disabilities at all grade levels. Administrators, such as superintendents, principals and curriculum coordinators, lead instructional efforts that should always include students with disabilities.
 - Recommendation: Universal Design for Learning (UDL) should be incorporated into teacher preparation coursework and professional development.
 - Recommendation: HEA should require that teacher preparation programs under the Higher Education Act should ensure that candidates complete their preparation prior to serving as the teacher of record and qualify for full state certification upon program completion.
 - Recommendation: HEA should require that individuals who complete teach preparation programs receiving funds via HEA demonstrate content knowledge and skill in instructing diverse learners, including students with disabilities.
 - Recommendations: Personnel preparation efforts, such as the Teacher Quality Partnership Grants should be strengthened and expanded with a focus on residency preparation, principal preparation and shortage areas such as special education, specialized instructional support personnel; professional development supported through the Higher Education Act should ensure skill development in using research-based practices that improve outcomes for all students, including students with disabilities.
 - Recommendation: HEA should include provisions that require the administration, staff and faculty of postsecondary program to receive training, support, and technical assistance to ensure programs of instruction, curricula, and support services are developed according to the principles of universal design for learning.
- HEA should ensure that educators, specialized instructional support personnel, and other professionals who work with people with disabilities are provided the financial support to pursue a public service career. These individuals are critical to ensuring that people with disabilities have access to the range of services and supports they need to participate in the workforce and community life.
 - Recommendation: Loan Forgiveness Programs and grants (such as the TEACH grants) should be maintained in an updated HEA.

Undersigned Members of the Education Task Force:

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association

American Counseling Association

American Foundation for the Blind

American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Center on Learning Disabilities
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Down Syndrome Society
Teacher Education Division of Council for Exceptional Children
The Advocacy Institute
United Cerebral Palsy