



March 4, 2024

Dr. Vicki Robinson
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue SW, Fifth floor
Washington, DC 20202

RE: 89 FR 6470

Dear Dr. Robinson,

The Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities (CCD) Education Task Force monitors federal legislation and regulations that address the educational needs of children and youth with disabilities and their families, including regulatory efforts under federal law such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). We advocate for high expectations for children with disabilities under these and other laws. We appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the U.S. Department of Education (Department) Proposed Priorities, Requirements, and Definition-Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence (Hawkins) Program.

The CCD Education Task Force has vigorously and consistently supported the Hawkins Program as a necessary and essential investment in the educator workforce. Given that Hawkins is a critical part of a suite of federal solutions – designed to address educator shortages while improving efforts to diversify the workforce and address high-needs shortage areas including special education – CCD encourages the Department to consider the following:

Proposed Priority 1: Increase Evidence-Based, Comprehensive Pre-service Clinical Experiences Through Teacher Preparation Programs.

CCD applauds and supports the emphasis on evidence-based pre-service clinical experiences as part of the Hawkins program. Specifically, CCD strongly supports the requirement for applicants to address how they will “implement pedagogical practices in teacher preparation programs that are inclusive with regard to race, ethnicity, culture, language, gender, and disability status and that prepare teachers to create inclusive, supportive, equitable, unbiased, and identity-safe learning environments for their students.” CCD also strongly supports the emphasis on preparing teacher candidates to effectively use technology and universal design for learning (UDL). The emphasis on inclusive programs, use of technology, and UDL are all key components of successful education for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. It is essential that these areas remain a priority in pre-service clinical experiences, regardless of whether teacher candidates are specializing in special education or general education, to best meet the needs of individuals with disabilities.

Proposed Priority 2: Projects that are Designed to Increase and Retain the Number of Well-Prepared Teachers from Diverse Backgrounds.

CCD encourages the Department to help institutions of higher education ensure teacher candidates with disabilities are supported by the Hawkins Program and are a priority in the design, development, and implementation of programs throughout each important phase: recruitment, preparation, and retention respectively. Educators with disabilities offer unique insights into the field and to their classrooms, especially as their experience provides a strong basis and ability to understand the students and families they serve through a personal lens. Likewise, they are able to serve as role models for their students. Thus, when creating plans under Proposed Priority 2, CCD encourages the Department to seek details about how programs will support well-prepared teachers with disabilities from diverse backgrounds.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments and recommendations. We look forward to working with the Department to ensure the needs of all educators and future educators are fully met. If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to one of the CCD Education Task Force Co-Chairs listed below.

Sincerely,

Access Ready Inc.
American Printing House for the Blind
Assistive Technology Industry Association
Autistic Self Advocacy Network
CAST
Center for Learner Equity
Council for Exceptional Children
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Family Voices
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Down Syndrome Congress
TASH
The Arc of the United States

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