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September 16, 2011

The Honorable Patty Murray
U.S. Senate
448 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jeb Hensarling
U.S. House of Representatives
129 Cannon House Office Building
Washington D.C., 20515

Dear Senator Murray and Representative Hensarling:

On behalf of the ten million children and youth with disabilities and/or gifts and talents in the United States, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)¹ is writing to ask that the Joint Select Committee on Deficit Reduction protect federal education investments in special and gifted education from the reductions it recommends to Congress.

We congratulate you on your appointment to this important Committee and to the position of co-chair, and we thank you for your willingness to serve. While we understand the complicated and difficult financial circumstances facing our nation, CEC urges the Committee to consider that investments in education, specifically, special and gifted education, create and sustain long term economic growth for the nation. We hope you will consider the importance of these programs in your analysis of where to reduce the federal budget.

Protect Federal Funding for Special Education

CEC calls on the Committee to protect all federal investments in education. As a part of this, we want to highlight some positive outcomes of federal investment in education for children and youth with disabilities and discuss why it is important to maintain federal investments at current levels in this area.

Part B, Grants to States

Approximately 6.6 million children and youth with disabilities are served every day by our nation's schools and communities with services provided and paid for, in part or in full, by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Since its inception in 1975, IDEA has opened opportunities for millions of children who were previously denied an education. **As a result of this federal investment:**

¹ Founded in 1922, CEC is the largest professional organization of teachers, administrators, parents, and others concerned with the education of children and youth with disabilities, gifted and talents, or both. CEC sets professional standards for the field, provides strategic and innovative evidence based professional development, and advocates for appropriate federal policies which will improve the lives of children and youth with disabilities, gifted and talents, or both.

- ninety-five percent of students with disabilities attend a neighborhood school,
- two-thirds of all students with disabilities spend at least 80 percent of their day in a general education setting,
- six out of ten students with disabilities graduate high school with a regular diploma - twice the percentage of 25 years ago, and
- approximately half of students with disabilities enroll in postsecondary education.²

Part C, Grants to Infants and Toddlers, Part B Section 619, Preschool Grants Program

In 1986, Congress recognized the need for programs serving young children with disabilities. Thus, it created the Infants and Toddlers Program (also known as Part C) which serves ages birth through 2 years, and the Preschool Grants Program (also known as Section 619), which serves ages 3-5 years. An extensive body of research indicates that high quality early intervention for at-risk infants, toddlers and young children and their families is a sound economic investment.

As a result of this federal investment:

- Studies have found a number of long-term cost savings in terms from
 - decreased grade repetition,
 - reduced special education spending,
 - enhanced productivity,
 - increased tax revenues, and
 - lower juvenile justice costs.³

Part D Support Programs

None of this progress would have been possible without IDEA's critical Support Programs. These essential programs allow special education in the United States to continuously improve. Part D Support Programs, fund professional development, parent assistance, technical assistance, dissemination of knowledge about promising practices to improve results for children and youth with disabilities, and provide seed money for technology and related resources the field needs to provide 21st century skills. **As a result of this federal investment**, 46 states currently receive personnel development grants to build the pipeline of individuals entering the special education field and bolster their performance once in the classroom.

Research in Special Education

Similarly, Special Education research, which is administered by the Institute for Education Sciences, has also demonstrated its benefit over many years. Housed within IES, the National Center for Special Education Research sponsors research to expand knowledge about the needs

² To see all of these statistics and more see <https://www.ideadata.org/default.asp>

³ For a bibliography of these long term outcomes and savings to society, see <http://www.nectac.org/~pdfs/pubs/econbene.pdf>

of children and youth with disabilities, to improve services provided under IDEA, and to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of IDEA. Special education research programs have led to the development of many strategies – like Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and Response to Intervention (RTI)⁴ -- which support both special and general education. These are not programs that sit on a shelf. Instead, they are used in schools across the nation every single day. **As a result of this federal investment**, over 14,000 schools currently report implementing PBIS⁵ and that number is continually rising. Thus, this research led to real results.

In sum, IDEA is a federal education program that works. As the Congressional Budget Office recently stated, “spending for basic research and education may affect [economic] output only after a number of years, but once those investments begin to boost output, they may pay off over more years than would the average investment in physical capital.”⁶ Through all of its component programs, IDEA provides children and youth with the supports and services they need to succeed and move forward to live healthy and productive lives. It is a program worthy of federal investment, and we ask that you protect it.

Protect Federal Funding for Gifted Education

Although there has been a substantial focus on closing the achievement gap at lower levels of performance, little attention has been given to the growing *excellence gap*, the difference between disadvantaged students and their more advantaged peers at the top levels of achievement. Recent research by Indiana University which analyzed data derived from the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP) and state assessments demonstrates the existence of the *excellence gap* which will take up to a century to close among various subgroups.

Additionally, the National Science Foundation’s report *Preparing the Next Generation of STEM Innovators; Identifying and Developing Our Nation’s Human Capital* called for a coordinated and systemic federal effort to better address the needs of students with high ability, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Currently, the *Jacob K. Javits Gifted and Talented Students Education Act* is the sole federal program dedicated to addressing the unique academic needs of America’s three million students with gifts and talents.⁷ Over its twenty year existence, the Javits Act has developed tools used by teachers, administrators, and parents to ensure better identification and delivery of services to students with gifts and talents, with a concentration on students who are traditionally underrepresented in gifted education

⁴ For more information on RTI see <http://www.rti4success.org/>

⁵ See <http://www.pbis.org/> for an up to date number of schools reporting implementation of PBIS.

⁶ See Letter from Douglas W. Elmendorf, Director, Congressional Budget Office to Rep. Huelskamp, August 11, 2011.

⁷ Javits was not funded in FY2011. Although outside the purview of this Committee, CEC calls for investment in this area.



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(i.e. students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students with disabilities, and English language learners). **Among the results of this federal investment are:**

- Gifted Education Curriculum Developed by the College of William and Mary has impacted more than 600,000 students, has been distributed to school districts in all 50 states and 28 countries, and has trained 60,000 teachers resulting in improved student performance on standardized assessments, including for students who are eligible for Title I among other successes;
- Creating high quality science instruction for economically disadvantaged and/or culturally linguistically diverse students in 38 school districts and 100 schools in North Carolina, Colorado, Louisiana, Ohio, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Over 1,000 K-3 teachers are involved and more than 21,000 young children have been impacted.

CEC's members, like all Americans, have been greatly impacted by the recent financial crisis and decreasing state revenues. You and your colleagues have a historic opportunity to come to a broad bipartisan solution that will control debt and ensure America's future prosperity. **We urge you to protect investments in services and supports for children and youth with disabilities and/or those with gifts and talents.** Thank you for considering this information, and if CEC or its members can assist you in any way, please contact me directly at 703-264-9406.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deborah A. Ziegler".

Deborah A. Ziegler
Associate Executive Director
Policy and Advocacy Services
Council for Exceptional Children