



**Division for  
Early Childhood**

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## The voice and vision of special education

March 18, 2013

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and its Division for Early Childhood (DEC), we are writing to express our appreciation for your leadership and commitment to supporting a continuum of high-quality early learning opportunities for children from birth to age five as discussed during the State of the Union address and outlined in “President Obama’s Plan for Early Education for All Americans.” We agree that an investment in high-quality early learning lays the foundation for academic success for all children, and in turn, benefits the economic well-being of our country. It is truly exciting to have the Administration enthusiastically supporting early learning opportunities for all young children.

CEC and DEC members serve on the frontline as special educators, early interventionists, administrators, researchers and higher education faculty, who work with children and youth with disabilities and their families. According to the U.S. Department of Education, over 453,000 infants and toddlers with disabilities and over 745,000 preschool children with disabilities were served by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2011<sup>1</sup>. Over the last several decades, there has been a steady increase in the number of young children who have received early intervention and/or special education through IDEA. However, as states face fiscal challenges, programs for preschool children with disabilities are facing budget cuts; and early intervention programs for infants and toddlers with disabilities have had to implement cost saving measures that restrict eligibility criteria of children served and increase the fees families are paying to receive services.

Assessment data from across the nation demonstrates that children who participated in IDEA’s early intervention and preschool programs demonstrate positive outcomes that support their development. According to the federally-funded Early Childhood Outcomes Center<sup>2</sup>, in 2010–11, for Part C (birth through age 2) approximately 70% of children showed greater than expected growth. These children were acquiring skills at a faster rate when they left the program than when they began it; and the percentage of children who exited the program functioning within age expectations ranged from 55% for *knowledge and skills* to 61% for *social relationships*. In 2010–11, for Part B Preschool (ages 3 through 5), 81% of children showed greater than expected growth for each outcome area; and the percentage of preschool children who exited within age expectations ranged from 53% for *knowledge and skills* to 66% for *taking action to meet needs*.

It is with these positive impacts in mind, that CEC and DEC strongly urge the Administration to ensure that all children with disabilities and the IDEA programs that provide services and supports for them are integral to any early learning proposals put forward. Specifically, CEC and DEC recommend that:

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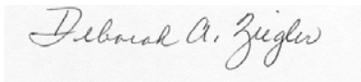
<sup>1</sup> Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Data, Data Accountability Center: [www.ideadata.org](http://www.ideadata.org). For the Infants and Toddlers program, this includes states that report both a cumulative and one-day count.

<sup>2</sup> The Early Childhood Outcomes Center (2012). Summary of child outcomes. *Outcomes for Children Served through IDEA’s Early Childhood Programs*. Retrieved March 5, 2013 from: <http://projects.fpg.unc.edu/~eco/pages/papers.cfm#childoutcomes2012>

- The U.S. Department of Education requires states that applying for early learning grants to involve IDEA's Preschool (Part B sec. 619) and Early Intervention (Part C) programs, not only in the submission of the grant but in its ongoing implementation. Partnerships at the state and local levels will ensure that :
  - Young children with disabilities and their families have meaningful access to early learning programs;
  - Service providers that work with these IDEA programs have access to professional development opportunities; and
  - State systems efforts focus on all young children including those with disabilities.
- Significant investment increases for IDEA's Early Intervention and Preschool programs to ensure that all young children with disabilities, developmental delays and their families have access to early intervention and special education that supports them in maximizing their opportunity to benefit from early learning programs.

On behalf of the early intervention and early childhood special education community, we appreciate and support your commitment to ensuring that all young children have access to high-quality early learning opportunities. The Council for Exceptional Children and its Division for Early Childhood stand ready to work with your Administration and Congressional policymakers to work toward meeting this important goal.

Sincerely,



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Cc: U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan