

CPSD'S POLICY PRIORITIES FOR EDUCATION REFORM IN THE 113TH CONGRESS

The Collaboration to Promote Self-Determination (CPSD) is an advocacy network of national disability organizations committed, through the pursuit of high-impact, innovative public policy reform, to empowering citizens living with complex disabilities who also have significant support needs. The CPSD advocates for full inclusive education practices which benefit all students, and the prohibition on seclusion and restraint in schools. Additionally, public policies should promote students with special needs as part of the general education population and not as a segregated subpopulation. CPSD believes that this cycle must be reversed, and that special education should be considered a service, not a place.

1) ENSURE STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT INTELLECTUAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES HAVE INCREASED ACCESS TO THE GENERAL EDUCATION CURRICULUM BY ADDRESSING POLICY AND IMPLEMENTATION PROBLEMS FOR THE ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT BASED ON ALTERNATE ACHIEVEMENT STANDARDS (AA-AAS).

Studies show that the students currently taking the AA-AAS have much higher academic skills than is commonly believed, especially when their communication needs are met. CPSD seeks a reconsideration of the cap associated with the AA-AAS to better reflect the incidence of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities (around .5%). Also, it is important to address the many negative implications for students who take the AA-AAS. Under current Federal policy and its implementation, these students are usually denied the opportunity to earn a diploma, have less access to the curriculum, far fewer inclusive opportunities, and teachers with less grade level content knowledge than other students with disabilities. They are also kept in an assessment where many are “topping out” with much higher rates of proficiency than other students with disabilities and typical peers.

Assessing students for the AA-AAS separately for each academic subject and providing students access to the general curriculum will ensure that students with the most significant disabilities are challenged and given the opportunity to demonstrate what they are truly capable of achieving in school. To ensure that there is meaningful access to the curriculum for the grade in which the student is enrolled, alternate academic achievement standards must be aligned to the state's college and career ready content standards, reflect core concepts, principles, theories, skills and processes that students should know and understand and be supported by learning progressions for age and grade-level performance.

The cap on the number of advanced and proficient AA-AAS scores which can be used for accountability purposes is calculated by multiplying the number of students taking any state assessment by 1% (e.g. the cap number for district A which has 10,000 students would be 100).¹ Originally, the proposed regulations had a cap of .5%, which is more consistent with the incidence of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. However, the cap was doubled in the final regulations as a result of pressure from states and districts, despite the research that confirms that the 1% cap is flawed. That is why so many students with significant intellectual or developmental disabilities erroneously end up in this assessment. Congress must reverse this cycle of systematically presuming low expectations of students without

¹ However, the test can only be taken by students with disabilities. Roughly 10% of the student population has a disability (district A would have about 1,000 students with disabilities). Therefore, this 1% cap, which is based on all students is a number equal to about 10% of students with disabilities (for District A the cap of 100 would be applied to the 1,000 students with disabilities, so 10% of the 1,000 students could have their proficient and advanced scores used for accountability purposes). There is no limit on the number of students who can take the assessment but the number of proficient and advanced scores that exceed the cap will be counted as if they were not proficient. Some states have a much higher percentage than 10% of students with disabilities in the AA-AAS, since not every student is proficient.

affording them the opportunity to demonstrate what they are truly capable of achieving in school. Until the policy and implementation problems for the AA-AAS are addressed, the current educational system will continue to prevent opportunities for increased academic performance and full inclusion of students with significant intellectual or developmental disabilities.

2) REQUIRE EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL PERSONNEL TO HAVE ADEQUATE PREPARATION & SUPPORTS TO ENSURE THE SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT INTELLECTUAL/DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES IN GENERAL EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

CPSD seeks to prepare teachers to implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL) in classrooms integrated with both students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers. Integrated UDL classrooms benefit all students, and preparing and supporting teachers in these methods encourages fidelity to the practices and best outcomes. Additionally, both general education and special education teaching professionals require enhanced professional training and ongoing mentoring supports in how to implement inclusive education practices into the classroom effectively. Finally, CPSD believes that school districts must have both meaningful incentives and more stringent performance measures tied to funding (“carrots and sticks” approach) to encourage increased school transformation to fully inclusive settings as a key strategy for effectuating system-wide education reform.

3) REQUIRE PUBLICLY-FUNDED CHARTER SCHOOLS TO PROACTIVELY REACH AND SUPPORT THE FULL INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT INTELLECTUAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES

The promise of charter schools should be available to all students, and charter schools cannot become a haven for segregation. CPSD wants to incentivize schools to pursue full inclusion and prohibit schools from requiring students and families to waive their rights under IDEA or Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act as a condition for admission.

4) INCREASE FEDERAL INVESTMENT IN THE PROMOTION OF FAMILY & COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN THE SUCCESSFUL INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT INTELLECTUAL OR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES IN THE GENERAL EDUCATION SETTING

Families are an essential component of the successful inclusion of students with significant intellectual or developmental disabilities into general educational settings, and often families of students with significant disabilities are the most disenfranchised and isolated from other families in the educational system. The CPSD seeks policies which incentivizes schools to reach out to families of students with disabilities in a culturally sensitive and meaningful ways.

5) PROMOTE EFFECTIVE TRANSITION STRATEGIES TO ADEQUATELY PREPARE YOUTH WITH SIGNIFICANT DISABILITIES FOR POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION AND THE GENERAL WORKFORCE

The CPSD seeks a streamlining and bolstering of transition planning for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including inviting a representative of the State Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities Authority to participate as part of the IEP team for every student with an intellectual or developmental disability from age 14 until the student exits the school system. Additionally, initial federal investments to support the evolution of post-secondary education programs targeting students with I/DD and the implementation of amendments to the Higher Education Opportunities Act (HEOA) that allow non-degree seeking students to pursue work-study and federal grant assistance, must be sustained.

6) RESTRICT THE USE OF SECLUSION, RESTRAINT AND AVERSIVE INTERVENTIONS IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

The CPSD is in full alignment with the recommendations of the Alliance to Prevent Restraints, Aversive Interventions and Seclusion (APRAIS) in pushing for federal legislation that will ensure that states are directed to take measures to restrict and decrease the use of these dangerous practices that are not supported through evidence or research.