



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

July 27, 2011

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the members of Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Education Task Force, we write to express our concerns about S. 1250, the "Growing Education Achievement Training Academies for Teachers and Principals Act." introduced by Senators Michael Bennet (D-CO), Lamar Alexander (R-TN), Barbara Mikulski (D-MD), Mary Landrieu (D-LA), and Mark Kirk (R-IL). The undersigned organizations oppose its enactment or inclusion in the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

The Task Force believes that all students are general education students first regardless of whether they receive special education or related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or accommodations under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The Task Force is deeply committed to the development of well-prepared, experienced, and effective teachers that are able to teach all students, including students with disabilities.

Every student with a disability deserves to have a fully prepared and effective teacher. To meet this goal, the Task Force believes that both general and special education teachers must have the skills and knowledge necessary for teaching grade-level content and diverse learners. It is critical that teachers are trained in how to differentiate instruction to account for the diverse needs of students with disabilities. As research has demonstrated, the best student outcomes are achieved for students with disabilities by having teachers who are fully prepared and certified.¹ In situations where fully prepared and certified teachers are not available, teachers that are less than fully prepared must be distributed equitably.

The Task Force fully supports strengthening education preparation programs so they can teach all students because teachers are the most important component of an instructional system. The Task Force believes that S. 1250 as introduced does not meet the goal of ensuring that every student with a disability has a fully prepared and effective teacher. The certificate to be issued by the academies is undefined but considered equivalent to a master's degree, with no requirements that it represent the set of academic and experiential requirements found to be essential for adequate teacher preparation including training in how to teach diverse learners.

S. 1250 will lower academic standards by allowing underprepared teachers to enter the classroom, often in schools that most critically in need fully prepared teachers. In allowing not-yet-fully prepared teachers to enter the classroom as teachers of record, the bill suggests that teachers do not need the depth and rigor of completing the full range of courses and experiences that are part of a full preparation program. Research indicates that the practice of hiring teachers that are less than fully prepared is especially harmful to low-income and minority students,

¹ Feng, L., & Sass, T. (2010). Special education teacher quality and student achievement. Retrieved from the National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research. Retrieved from <http://www.caldercenter.org/>; Brownell, M. T., Haager, D., Bishop, A. G., Klingner, J.K., Menon, S., Penfield, R., & Dingle, M. (2007, April). Teacher quality in special education: The role of knowledge, classroom practice, and school environment. Paper presented at the annual meeting for American Educational Research Association, Chicago, Illinois.

including students with disabilities, who are most likely to be assigned such teachers, and whose achievement is therefore adversely impacted.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Autism National Committee
Council for Learning Disabilities
Council of Parents Attorneys and Advocates
Easter Seals
Higher Education Consortium for Special Education
Mental Health America
National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Association of Private Special Education Centers
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National Down Syndrome Society
National PTA
Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children
The Advocacy Institute
The Arc of the United States
United Cerebral Palsy

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities is a coalition of nearly 100 national consumer, advocacy, provider and professional organizations headquartered in Washington, D.C. Since 1973, the CCD has advocated on behalf of people of all ages with physical and mental disabilities and their families. CCD has worked to achieve federal legislation and regulations that assure that the 54 million children and adults with disabilities are fully integrated into the mainstream of society. Approximately 50 national organizations participate in the CCD Education Task Force. For additional information, please contact:

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