



**CONSORTIUM FOR CITIZENS
WITH DISABILITIES**

May 13, 2020

Ashley Brizzo
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Room 3E325
Washington, DC 20202

Submitted via regulations.gov

Re: Docket ID ED-2020-OESE-0025

Dear Ms. Brizzo:

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) Education Task Force appreciates the opportunity to comment on the Notice of Proposed Requirements, Definition, and Selection Criteria; Teacher-Directed Professional Learning Experiences for the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program, as published in the April 13, 2020, Federal Register. CCD is committed to ensuring that all educators have the skills, knowledge and support required to effectively teach and support students with disabilities. We write to express the following concerns with this proposed grant program under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

The program does not meet the standard for evidence-based innovations

The EIR Program provides funding to create, develop, implement, replicate, or take to scale entrepreneurial, *evidence-based*, field-initiated innovations to improve student achievement and attainment for high-need students; and rigorously evaluate such innovations. Using EIR grants to fund professional development vouchers, with no evidence base of effectiveness, would contradict EIR grants as defined under ESEA. Section 8101(21)(A) of the ESEA (as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)) created a more rigorous definition of professional development:

“...the term ‘evidence-based,’ when used with respect to a State, local educational agency, or school activity, means an activity, strategy, or intervention that – (i) demonstrates a statistically significant effect on improving student outcomes or other relevant outcomes based on – (I) strong evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented experimental study; (II) moderate evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented quasi-experimental study; or (III) promising evidence from at least one well-designed and well-implemented correlational study with statistical controls for selection bias; or (ii) (I) demonstrates a rationale based on high-quality research findings or positive evaluation that such activity, strategy, or intervention is likely to improve student outcomes or other relevant outcomes; and (II) includes ongoing efforts to examine the effects of such activity, strategy, or intervention.”¹

The notice relies instead on a single publication on on-line learning for teachers that merely states that allowing educators to create their own professional learning plans and to select their activities to achieve the goals outlined in those plans *could* have positive effects on student achievement and attainment.² This is simply too low a bar to warrant funding under the EIR program.

The program does not meet best practice standards for professional development

Effective professional development is context-based and collaborative in structure, with the goal of building institutional and collective knowledge. A voucher program designed to service individual teachers does not align with that goal and is particularly ill suited to improving the outcomes of students with disabilities. Since students with disabilities are educated in both general and special education classrooms, their general and special education teachers must work together in developing their knowledge base of effective academic and behavioral strategies and should use these opportunities to have constructive exchanges on their own ideas, insights, and experiences.

The program undermines existing state and local requirements

The Department has repeatedly reaffirmed its belief that education is a matter best left to states and localities, yet this program would undermine the role of states and localities in creating their own professional development programs. States and districts across the country have longstanding professional development policies and programs which include extensive teacher input in their development. Further, in many cases, these are established in statute or regulation (for example, Florida’s professional development requirements are set in Chapter 1012 Section 98 of the Florida Statutes³).

The program will result in inequitable benefits

The program presumes that teachers have the time and inclination to carefully research the available professional development opportunities and weigh their relative strengths and weaknesses. The last thing teachers – particularly those in under resourced and distressed communities - are seeking is to take on more time consuming administrative responsibilities. Instead, what all teachers can benefit from is more resources for existing stakeholder systems created by their states and LEAs to provide a more robust set of options for collaborative learning.

CCD has consistently opposed the use of federal public education funds to support voucher programs for K-12 education and we maintain our opposition to vouchers for professional development especially when the program is not designed to support and align with all federal education statutes.

Sincerely,

Education Task Force Co-Chairs:

Annie Acosta, The Arc of the United States acosta@thearc.org

Amanda Lowe, National Disability Rights Network amanda.lowe@ndrn.org

Kim Musheno, Autism Society of America kmusheno@autism-society.org

Meghan Whittaker, National Center for Learning Disabilities mwhittaker@ncld.org

Laura Kaloi, Council of Parent Attorneys & Advocates and Natl. Center lkaloi@stridepolicy.com for Special Education in Charter Schools

The Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD) is the largest coalition of national organizations working together to advocate for federal public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society. The Education Task Force monitors federal legislation and regulations that address the educational needs of children with disabilities and their families, including the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) programs.

¹ <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/essa/guidanceusesinvestment.pdf>

² https://bplawassets.learningaccelerator.org/artifacts/pdf_files/Research-Based-Online-Learning-for-Teachers.pdf

³ <https://www.flsenate.gov/laws/statutes/2013/1012.98>