



January 9, 2016

Senator Lamar Alexander
Chairman, HELP Committee
455 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Patty Murray
Ranking Member, HELP Committee
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Alexander & Ranking Member Murray,

On behalf of the National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD), which represents the 1 in 5 individuals with learning and attention issues, I write to respectfully share our views regarding the nomination of Betsy DeVos for U.S. Secretary of Education and urge you to seek clarification from Ms. DeVos about issues of critical importance to our community. Now, more than ever, students with disabilities need a Secretary of Education who recognizes their potential, values their education, and is committed to their success.

For over 40 years, NCLD has worked to improve the lives of the 1 in 5 with learning and attention issues, which are brain-based difficulties that cover a wide range of challenges children may face in school, at home and in the community, including trouble with reading, writing, math, organization, concentration, listening comprehension, social skills, motor skills or a combination of these. NCLD's mission is to empower parents, students and young adults; transform schools; and advocate for equal rights and opportunities. Our long history is rooted in ensuring that students with learning and attention issues, including those with learning disabilities, receive a high-quality education and have access to the same opportunities for success as their peers.

The Department of Education plays a critical role in ensuring our students receive the supports and services they need to succeed. As a result, students with disabilities have made great strides over the last decade. We have seen an increase in graduation rates, a decrease in dropout rates, and more students with disabilities going to college than ever before. But there is still much work to be done, and we cannot lose momentum.

In recent years, the Department has challenged states to set high expectations for students with disabilities and supported them as they made impactful changes in policy and practice for these students. The Department has also issued guidance and developed resources that empower parents and educators to better understand and support students who struggle. NCLD and parents across the country hope the incoming Administration will continue to advocate for students with disabilities, maintain strong partnerships with the disability community, and enforce and uphold critically important laws – such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Rehabilitation Act – and preserve essential guidance, including but not limited to guidance issued: in 2016 on the topics of: [the rights students with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder \(ADHD\)](#), [the rights of children with disabilities in accessing behavioral supports](#), and [the legal obligations of online public schools when serving students with disabilities](#); in 2015 on the topics of: [encouraging states and school districts to use specific terms when describing learning disabilities, such as dyslexia](#) and [aligning individualized educational programs](#)

[to grade-level standards](#); and in 2014 on the topic of [how to identify, avoid, and remedy discriminatory discipline practices](#).

Therefore, during her nomination hearing, we urge you to ask Ms. DeVos to clarify how the Department of Education, under her leadership, will:

- **Uphold rights, protections and access for students with disabilities**, including how the Department will ensure equal educational opportunities through the provision of special education services, supports, and accommodations they are entitled to;
- **Promote policies that enhance the strengths of students with disabilities** and are rooted in high expectations for their performance;
- **Protect investment in public education** and reject proposals that will divert resources away from public schools in the form of vouchers; and
- **Ensure that all educators are equipped to address the needs of students with disabilities**, including plans for pre-service education and ongoing professional development and educator support.

Ultimately, the Secretary must be someone who values public education and the obligation of our public schools to provide every student with the opportunities and supports they need to succeed. Anything less is a disservice to our nation's parents who care beyond measure for their children, our nation's educators who dedicate their lives to ensuring students achieve, and our nation's students who deserve every chance for success.

We thank you for considering our opinions and encourage you to raise these issues in the hearing. Parents, educators and the community will be interested to learn how Ms. DeVos plans to support students with disabilities as Secretary of Education. If you have any questions or concerns or if we can be of more assistance as you prepare, please feel free to contact our Vice President, Chief Policy & Advocacy Officer, Lindsay Jones (ljones@nclld.org).

Sincerely,



Mimi Corcoran
President & CEO
National Center for Learning Disabilities

cc: Members of the Senate HELP Committee