



ISSUE BRIEF: Higher Education Act Reauthorization

Legislative Request

Retain and improve higher education programs for students with intellectual disabilities so they have access to financial aid and inclusive college programs that lead to competitive, integrated paid employment.

Background and Summary

The Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 established numerous federal programs that provide support to both individuals pursuing postsecondary education and institutions of higher education. Those programs include the federal government's major student aid programs, as well as services and support for less-advantaged students.

The HEA was last comprehensively reauthorized in 2008 by the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008. That legislation included important new provisions that allow students with intellectual disabilities to access certain forms of federal financial aid (grants and work-study jobs) if the student meets the definition of "intellectual disability" and is enrolled in a Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Program for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (CTP). The law also authorized Transition and Postsecondary Programs for Students with Intellectual Disability (TPSIDs) to create or expand high-quality model programs and a National Coordinating Center (NCC) to provide technical assistance, evaluate the TPSIDS, and recommend program standards.

Congress is in the process of considering a major rewrite of the HEA. On December 13, the House Education and the Workforce Committee voted to favorably report H.R. 4508, the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act, on a party-line vote of 23-17. It is currently awaiting consideration by the full House. That legislation maintains the TPSID program; includes new, improved data collection on students with disabilities and their postsecondary completion rates; includes new grants to improve post-secondary access and completion for disadvantaged groups, including students with disabilities, and maintains the National Technical Assistance Center that provides information to students and families on post-secondary options and supports college faculty in serving students with disabilities.¹ However, the legislation eliminates several important programs and does not include reforms that would eliminate additional barriers to student participation in higher education programs.

¹ See www.ndscenter.org/wp-content/uploads/HEA-House-Ltr-12-11-17-FINAL.pdf

On February 13, 2018, the Chairman and Ranking Member of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee announced that it would also be working on a bipartisan effort to reauthorize the HEA, and urged interested parties to submit comments or suggestions for consideration by February 23. As part of that process, the Inclusive Higher Education Committee (IHEC), led by the National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC), submitted a comment letter to the HELP Committee with a number of recommendations for improving participation in higher education programs for students with intellectual disabilities.

Key Message

→ Forty years of advancement in K-12 policy and practice – spurred by the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) – has improved access to the general curriculum, classroom inclusion, and academic achievement of students with disabilities. Yet, higher education policy has not kept pace with K-12 system improvements, resulting in a lack of higher education and competitive integrated employment options for individuals with disabilities.

Answers to Questions about the Higher Education Act Reauthorization

1. What specific changes should be made to the HEA that would improve access to inclusive college programs for people with intellectual disabilities?

Both the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities² and the Inclusive Higher Education Committee³ submitted detailed recommendations to the Senate HELP Committee on HEA Reauthorization. Particularly noteworthy recommendations include:

- Requiring CTPs to offer both academic and career development components;
- Increasing inclusive housing opportunities;
- Strengthening requirements for meaningful credentials; and
- Increasing student outcome data collection.

2. What, if any, of these recommendations, can be made administratively by the Department of Education?

The IHEC is urging that these recommendations be implemented administratively by the Department of Education. However, if that doesn't happen, we urge that they are included as part of HEA reauthorization.

3. How many college programs exist for students with intellectual disabilities?

² <https://www.aucd.org/docs/CCD%20to%20Alexander-Murray%20reHEA%20Final.pdf>.

³ https://www.aucd.org/template/news.cfm?news_id=13334&id=17.

Today, there are 266 two and four-year colleges and universities that include students with intellectual disabilities in educational, independent living and vocational/career programs.⁴ Students receive a variety of supports and are typically provided opportunities to participate in traditional college classes with support. They also may participate in internships and other vocational opportunities and participate in college campus life, including belonging to clubs and living in dormitories.

Resources

“The Implications for Increasing the Employment of People with Disabilities,” National Council on Disability – <https://ncd.gov/publications/2015/05192015>.

“Higher Education Act Reauthorization Recommendations,” Inclusive Higher Education Committee – https://www.aucd.org/template/news.cfm?news_id=13334&id=17.

Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Recommendations to the Senate HELP Committee – <https://www.aucd.org/docs/CCD%20to%20Alexander-Murray%20reHEA%20Final.pdf>

⁴ <https://thinkcollege.net/college-search>