

Archived Information

February 9, 1998

Dear SEA Director:

As you may recall, I wrote last year to share with you information about the special education appropriations for FY 1997. Once again, I have the distinct pleasure of sharing good news about special education appropriations. We have received a 1998 appropriation of \$3.8 billion, a 22% increase over the 1997 level enabling us to expand the average per child Federal contribution for approximately \$413 in 1996 to \$638 in 1998. We have also received a substantial increase in funding for our Infant and Toddler program (Part H, soon to be Part C), with an increase from approximately \$315 million to \$350 million in 1998.

Last year I also asked you and local education directors throughout the country to share with me how the additional money was being spent. I heard from many who described creative ways they were enhancing the lives of students with disabilities through these additional funds.

Attached is a letter I am sending to local education directors which describes some of the innovative ways that state and local special education officials used those additional funds. I've also highlighted, in the attached letter, some interesting data trends that give us reason to feel positive about our directed efforts to ensure better results for students with disabilities. And once, again, I'm asking for information about how these funds are being used.

I hope you'll share with me your stories and encourage your State's local education directors to do the same. I look forward to hearing from you and working with you this year.

Sincerely,

Tom Hehir
Director
Office of Special Education Programs

Attachment

February 9, 1998

Dear Special Education Director:

Once again I have the opportunity to write you with great news! Special education has received its second year of record-breaking appropriations. The fiscal year 1998 appropriation of \$3.8 billion is an increase of \$694 million, or 22% over the 1997 level. As you will remember, the fiscal year 1997 appropriation was a \$784 million increase or 34% over the 1996 level. With these large increases, we are expanding the average per child Federal contribution from approximately \$413 in 1996 to approximately \$638 in 1998. Also, for the first time in recent years we have received a substantial increase in funding for our Infant and Toddler program (Part H, soon to be Part C), with an increase from \$315,754,000 in 1997 to \$350 million in 1998.

I know that you view these increases as a critical opportunity to improve educational options for students with disabilities, with a focus on improving results. Last year, I encouraged you to let me know how you planned to use this increased Federal funding in your districts. I'm asking you again to keep us informed about the use of these additional funds. I've highlighted below some of the innovative and effective uses you reported and how you and others have maximized the use of these additional federal dollars to make a difference for children with disabilities. Many of you used the funds to:

Improve the quality of teaching and learning

We heard how districts are providing additional training for professionals and paraprofessionals, particularly on positive behavioral supports. Recognizing the importance of the early years, some districts planned to expand their preschool programs by hiring more staff.

Expand the use of technology in the classroom and school-wide

Several districts outlined how they are upgrading and expanding the use of educational and assistive technology hardware and software to improve classroom instruction and reduce the amount of paperwork for teachers.

Improve services

Districts told us how they were employing more direct and related services staff: job coaches; employment specialists; bilingual teachers; occupational, speech and language therapists.

Improve reading throughout the community

Improving early intervention for students experiencing problems learning to read was certainly high on the list of priorities with funds being spent on training teachers and implementing research-based reading programs. One district planned to use the funds to provide training to parents and other volunteer reading tutors. All of these efforts contribute to the President's America Reads Initiative.

Improve early intervention

Recognizing the importance of the early years, some districts planned to expand their preschool programs by hiring more teachers or paraprofessionals. Other districts planned to expand services, for example, by providing more intense interventions or by using community-based settings.

As you know, integrating students with disabilities appropriately, with the proper supports, is associated with better educational results. Many of you are working, daily, to provide your students with more inclusive educational opportunities and improved results for students with disabilities. It appears those efforts are taking hold.

Listed below are some interesting trends:

Increase in the use of inclusive settings.

Over the past four years the number of students with disabilities educated in general education classes for 80% of the day or more has increased by 20% (from 1.6 million to 2.4 million).

Decrease in separate schooling for students with mental retardation.

Over the past four years, the number of students with mental retardation educated in separate public schools has decreased by 38% (from approximately 48,252 to 29,861); residential placements have decreased by 43% (from approximately 6100 to 3500).

Greater numbers of students completing school.

Although we continue to have an unacceptably high drop out rate among students with disabilities, the trend line appears positive. In 1995-96, 73% of students with disabilities completed school with a diploma or a certificate compared to 71.3% in the 92-93 school year. And although we do not have comparable data for previous years, the best available data, the National Longitudinal Transition Study, reported that only 67% completed school in the period from 1987 to 1990.

As you and others in your state implement IDEA'97, the results of your efforts to improve education for students with disabilities will receive much greater attention. The significant increases in appropriations, coupled with the reforms included in IDEA'97, should allow schools to make even greater strides in addressing the significant needs we have had in the field for many years.

Please continue to keep us informed about your local efforts to use these additional funds.

We have an Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) web site which is part of our effort to keep you informed about OSEP programs and IDEA'97 implementation. The web site address is: <http://www.ed.gov/offices/OSERS/OSEP/>.

As a former local director for most of my career before coming to OSEP, I know how difficult your job is. Please know that we appreciate the fine work you do on behalf of our nation's children and youth with disabilities.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Thomas Hehir
Director, Office of Special Education Programs

cc: State Education Agency Director