

January 24, 2017

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
United States Senate
131 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Isakson,

Thank you for the opportunity to more fully explain my position on the importance of protecting the rights of students with disabilities and ensuring that they receive the quality education they need and deserve. I am committed to enforcing all federal laws and protecting the hard won rights of students with disabilities.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, commonly called IDEA, protects the rights of students with disabilities to gain access to a high-quality education. I would like to address three specific aspects of IDEA: (1) the federal role in implementing IDEA, (2) the importance of a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP), and (3) my passion for expanding educational options for parents who have a child with a disability.

Federal Role in Implementing IDEA

I believe that all students, including individuals with disabilities, deserve an equal opportunity to lead full, productive and successful lives. To that end, I am committed to supporting the remarkable parents and educators who make this vision a reality for students with disabilities in states and communities across our great nation. IDEA requires a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment for all students with disabilities.

At the federal level, we need to continue to guide and monitor compliance while supporting states with the tools they need to help parents, schools, districts and other stakeholders succeed. For example, we must fund research and disseminate information about evidence based practices that work best for students with disabilities.

The Individualized Educational Program (IEP)

At the federal level, we must encourage states to work with parents, schools and districts to create more effective IEPs that are useful for increasing learning gains for students with disabilities. IEPs must include measurable annual goals for monitoring progress and clear information for parents about student progress toward high but achievable expectations. The IEP should be viewed as a practical blueprint for action. Students with disabilities are accomplishing great things in states and districts that recognize their

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uniqueness. We can shine a light on these successes so that others know what is possible. If confirmed as Secretary, I will make it a priority to highlight what works best for students with disabilities.

Expanding Educational Options for Parents

One additional strategy I will pursue is to look for ways to increase access by students with disabilities to a broader range of educational options. I have seen exciting changes in students with disabilities when they attend schools that meet their needs. My friends, Sam Myers and his mother Tera, attended my confirmation hearing last week. Sam, who has Down's Syndrome, was a Jon Peterson Special Needs Scholarship recipient. The program exemplifies how states can -- and do -- implement the federal law and use their flexibility to ensure parents can choose the learning environment in which their children with disabilities will achieve and thrive.

I am eager to bring a sense of urgency around all of these issues: implementation and enforcement of IDEA at federal, state, and local levels; improving the quality of IEPs; and expanding the conversation about school choice opportunities for parents of students with disabilities.

To me, IDEA is a wonderful example of what happens when parents are regarded as full partners in their child's educational decision-making.

Sincerely,



Betsy DeVos