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February 1, 2017

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) we urge you to carefully consider continued concerns over unanswered questions as you cast your vote for Betsy DeVos, the nominee for U.S. Secretary of Education:

- Will DeVos UPHOLD the basic tenets of IDEA?
- Will DeVos ENFORCE all provisions of IDEA?
- Will DeVos NOT DIVERT the use of public IDEA dollars to support private schools?
- Will DeVos GUARANTEE the civil rights of all children with disabilities and their families?

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC)—an international association of special educators, administrators, related service personnel, higher education faculty, and researchers—is the voice and vision of special education. Our mission is to advance the success of children with exceptionalities. We accomplish our mission through advocacy, standards, and professional development. CEC continues to support the core purposes of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):

- To ensure that all children with disabilities have available a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living;
- To ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected;
- To assist states, localities, educational service agencies, and federal agencies in providing for the education of all children with disabilities;
- To assist states in the implementation of a statewide, comprehensive, coordinated, multidisciplinary, interagency system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families;
- To ensure that educators and parents have the necessary tools to improve educational results for children with disabilities by supporting system improvement activities; coordinated research and personnel preparation; coordinated technical assistance, dissemination, and support; and technology development and media services; and
- To assess and ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities.

Currently, over 6.7 million children and youth with disabilities benefit from individualized special education and related services and early intervention through IDEA. These services, delivered by special educators and early interventionists, are tailored to meet the specific needs of each child and are planned and developed with the active participation of families and delivered in public schools and early intervention programs.

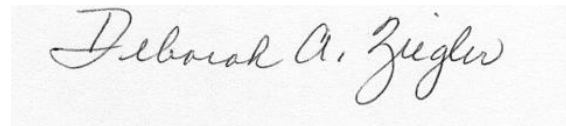
CEC believes that vouchers that use public funds to support private schools both contradict and undermine central purposes of civil rights laws designed to protect children and youth with disabilities and their families for the following reasons:

- Absence of necessary accountability;
- No guarantee of FAPE;
- Families must discard their procedural protections;
- Segregation within their private school;
- No guarantee of equal access;
- Promotes re-segregation rather than diversity; and
- Uses public education funds for private schools.

CEC thanks you for considering our positions and urges you to continue to guarantee the civil rights of all children and youth with exceptionalities and their families, ensuring high-quality, evidence-based practices including individualized specialized services to support children and youth in their development and education and assist them in achieving positive educational, developmental and behavioral outcomes and results.

Please feel free to contact me at debz@cec.sped.org if you have any questions or need additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Deborah A. Ziegler". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored, slightly textured background.

Deborah A. Ziegler, Ed.D.
Director
Policy and Advocacy