

Chapter 2. Expanding Educational Opportunities for Youth with Disabilities

A solid education is critical to ensuring that children with disabilities have an equal chance to succeed. Through the New Freedom Initiative, the President is determined to expand access to quality education for youth with disabilities and to work to improve the high school graduation rates of students with disabilities.

Increasing Funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Improving Reading in Early Grades

Accomplishments

- President Bush requested the largest increases of any President in history for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B State Grants program in his FY 2002 and FY 2003 budgets;
- The President signed legislation increasing by \$1.2 billion the FY 2002 budget for the IDEA Part B State Grants program to raise the Federal contribution of the cost of providing children with disabilities a free and appropriate public education. Overall, the Department of Education received more than \$7.5 billion for IDEA Part B to help states and localities provide special education and related services to America's students with disabilities.
- The President's Reading First and Early Reading First Initiatives, established in the No Child Left Behind Act, create a comprehensive reading program for students, including those with disabilities, from preschool through third grade. While these initiatives will benefit many students identified as disabled, there will be students who do not respond to these interventions and who need more intensive instruction. The Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs is supporting four reading projects that seek to identify the critical components necessary to ensure that children with the most severe reading disabilities who do not respond to effective classroom interventions learn to read.
- The President issued Executive Order 13227 in October 2001 creating the Presidential Commission on Excellence in Special Education and charging the Commission with developing recommendations for improving services for students with special education needs. The Commission will release its report in July 2002.

Other Accomplishments that Expand Education and Support Youth with Disabilities

- Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao created and convened the Department of Labor's 15-member Youth Advisory Committee in March 2002. The Committee is developing policy recommendations to present to the Secretary on issues regarding the education and employment of young people with disabilities.
- The Department of Health and Human Services has created a 10-year national action plan for children and youth with special health care needs that includes a focus on transitioning youth to all aspects of adulthood.
- The Department of Health and Human Services Family and Youth Services Bureau will host the National Youth Summit in June 2002. The conference will include a variety of presentations and workshops that will benefit youth with disabilities.

Next Steps

- The President requested in the FY 2003 budget an additional increase of \$1 billion for the IDEA Part B State Grants program, for a total of \$8.5 billion.
- The President requested an increase of \$20 million in the FY 2003 budget for the IDEA Part C Grants for Infants and Families program that provides crucial early intervention services for infants to toddlers, ages birth through 2 years old.