

Disability Matters – Advocacy Matters

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Special Education and the 115th Congress

Special education is a top priority for many disability organizations, including Disability Rights Pennsylvania. There are many reasons why. Most importantly, it is a pathway to competitive and integrated employment.

The U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2013, a person without a high school diploma earns 27% less than a person with a high school diploma. That same year, the graduation rate for students with disabilities was 64%.

Disability policy at a national level has a great impact on what happens in Pennsylvania and across the country. An important question to ask as we near the end of the 115th Congress, is what has this Congress done in the area of special education?

The answer is simple - not much. Simply nothing has moved.

One major piece of legislation, the Individual with Disabilities Education Act, IDEA, was last reauthorized in 2004, but no one in congress was ready to move a reauthorization in the last 2 years.

Congress still has not followed through on its promise to provide 40 percent of the average cost per pupil expenditure to help schools meet their IDEA requirements. Congress first made that promise to states and school districts in 1975, 43 years ago. Each fiscal year, school districts wait to hope that congress provides adequate funding to meet the cost of educating students with disabilities. Another fiscal year has passed without adequate funding. To read more about the funding gap, go to our website at www.disabilityrightspa.org and you will find a report issued in February 2018 by the National Council on Disability.

The Senate confirmed the nomination of U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. Much of the activity related to special education has centered on regulatory and sub-regulatory action. Examples include collection of data, evaluation and repeal of existing regulations, and the approval of new regulations.

DRP has posted all copies of press releases and comments to the issuance of regulations on our website from the National Disability Rights Network and COPAA, the Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates. Visit www.disabilityrightspa.org to find this information.

#AdvocacyMatters and special education is important. If you or someone you know needs help with a special education issue in Pennsylvania, please have them contact us. If the matter is in another state, you can find our sister agencies at www.ndrn.org.