Statement of AUCD on Senate Bill to Reauthorize Education Law

SILVER SPRING, MD (June 11, 2013) — The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD) applauds Senate HELP Committee Chairman Tom Harkin (D-IA) for introducing the Strengthening America’s Schools Act, legislation to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The bill strengthens the law in ways that will increase students with disabilities’ chances to succeed academically, including supporting the use of multi-tiered systems of support, universal design for learning, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and new policies related to early intervention.

AUCD has learned that Republican committee members may introduce an amendment that would significantly lower academic expectations for students with disabilities by allowing the overuse of alternate assessments. It would do so by removing limits on how many students with disabilities can be counted as making sufficient progress using modified or alternate assessments, which are less challenging than the general assessments that most students take.

“Students with disabilities have made significant advancements in education, and most of them are taking the general state assessment today, said AUCD’s Executive Director, George Jesien. “Allowing states to place an unlimited number of students with disabilities into the alternate or modified assessment will marginalize students with disabilities, promote the idea that they can’t learn or achieve, and could take an unknown number of students off track for a regular high school diploma as early as third grade when assessment decisions are made in schools. The result is that these students will be relegated to lower career and college expectations, turning back the clock on all of the advancements made in educating students with disabilities. Additionally, this policy is contrary to the intent of the bill, as well as the U.S. Department of Education’s commitment to phase out the use of modified assessments (the 2% rule) by 2014-2015.”

The reauthorization of the ESEA is long overdue. AUCD strongly urges Congress to support the Strengthening America’s Schools Act without any amendments that would weaken the accountability system for students with disabilities.
The Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD), located in Silver Spring, MD, promotes and supports a national network of interdisciplinary centers on disabilities. The members of AUCD represent every U.S. state and territory. AUCD and its members work to advance policy and practice through research, education, leadership, and services for and with individuals with developmental and other disabilities, their families, and communities. For more information, visit AUCD’s website: www.aucd.org.

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