

February 15, 2012

To: Members Senate Committee on Education  
Members, Assembly Committee on Education

From: Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities  
Disability Rights Wisconsin  
Wisconsin FACETS

Re: **AB 558, SB 461 – Creation of the Read to Lead Development Council; Literacy Grants**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on these bills, AB 558 and SB 461, which aim to improve reading instruction and reading performance for all students in Wisconsin schools. As three leading statewide disability agencies which were not part of the Read to Lead Task Force, we have a keen interest in these bills. We have long had a concern that students with all range of disabilities, including many students with the most significant disabilities, are capable of reaching proficiency in reading, but are not currently receiving sufficient or appropriate reading instruction<sup>1</sup>. Not all of the students struggling with reading in our state are categorized as students with learning disabilities or students with dyslexia. We provide these comments based on our expertise with students who have all types and levels of disability.

### **Section 1 – Read to Lead Development Council**

As you know, there is a great need to demonstrate progress in improving reading skills for all children with disabilities in Wisconsin; therefore, we hope you will agree to amend Section 1 of this bill regarding the membership of the Read to Lead Development Council. Specifically, we recommend that the Council include a representative with knowledge of both the needs and evidence-based practices for teaching reading to children with all range of disabilities, including those with the most significant disabilities. As the bill is currently drafted, no such expertise or representation is listed in the membership. We suggest amending the bill by adding: “k. One person representing a disability organization which has as its mission, service to children with all range of disabilities, including the most significant disabilities.” We also note that the Council does not include representation by a parent or parent organization, yet know that family involvement is strongly tied to academic success for all children.

### **Section 5 – Grants for Literacy Improvement**

We strongly support the issuance of grants for literacy and early childhood development. We are concerned that the amendment in Section 5 eliminates the possibility that a non-profit, or

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<sup>1</sup> L. M. Pinkus, ed., *Meaningful Measurement: The Role of Assessments in Improving High School Education in the Twenty-First Century* (Washington, DC: Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009).

government organization working on behalf of children with disabilities could be eligible to apply for a literacy improvement grant. We think it is important that grants are made available to capture a wide variety of expertise, and we therefore request this change.

### **Section 17 – Teacher Preparation Programs**

(These comments also apply to Section 21 regarding initial teaching licenses.)

We are concerned that the bill does not sufficiently address the training necessary for both general and special educators to instruct children with all range of disabilities how to read. As stated earlier, even students with the most significant disabilities can reach proficiency in reading when provided with appropriate instruction, accommodation, and access to technology. Updating our teacher preparation programs to address the learning needs of all students with disabilities is a significant opportunity. Specifically, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), the largest professional organization dedicated to improving the educational success of students with disabilities, recommends key areas for teacher preparation and licensure that are aligned with Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium standards.<sup>2</sup>

We feel strongly that this legislation should be amended to address two key areas referenced in national standards: the need for knowledge in assistive technology and accommodations for students with disabilities. The CEC recommends the following provisions regarding teacher knowledge that address these areas:

*Special education teachers have knowledge of the range of assistive technology (e.g. augmentative communication devices, student-specific software, optical devices) that support students in the learning environment and know how to access resources related to this technology (e.g., through the Internet, district/state agencies, professional organizations).*

*All teachers understand that students with disabilities may need accommodations, modifications, and/or adaptations to the general curriculum depending on their learning strengths and needs.*

*Special education teachers have knowledge of when and how to develop, structure and implement accommodations, modifications and/or adaptations to provide access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities.*

### **Section 19 - Educator Effectiveness**

We are concerned with the absence of accountability for the performance of children with disabilities. The phrase “student learning objectives” suggests that this may include the Individualized Education Plan (IEP) for a student with disabilities, but the bill language is vague.

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<sup>2</sup> Council for Exceptional Children. (2008). What every special educator must know: Ethics, standards, and guidelines (6th ed.). Arlington, VA: Author.

[http://www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ProfessionalDevelopment/ProfessionalStandards/What\\_Every\\_Special\\_Educator\\_Should\\_Know\\_6th\\_Ed\\_revised\\_2009.pdf](http://www.cec.sped.org/Content/NavigationMenu/ProfessionalDevelopment/ProfessionalStandards/What_Every_Special_Educator_Should_Know_6th_Ed_revised_2009.pdf)

In order to measure the effectiveness of both general and special educators who teach children with disabilities, there must be some analysis of their performance not only on statewide examinations, but performance on alternative assessments, and the soon to be applied Dynamic Learning Maps, which will include Wisconsin students with the most significant disabilities. Moreover, the assessments of the progress of students with disabilities should be based on quality IEPs that are aligned with the Common Core Standards.

### **Section 20 – Assessments**

We fully support universal screening of 5 year old kindergarten students, with the possibility of screening 4 year old kindergarten students if budget funds exist for those children. In addition, students with known disabilities should be assured access to accommodations and assistive technology during these assessments, including augmentative communication for students with little or no speech (as per Individuals with Disabilities Education Act federal regulation, Sec. 300.105, Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(1), 1412(a)(12)(B)(i)).

We also note a disconnect between this screening and the federally and state mandated child find obligations for school districts which require them to locate students with disabilities. One expected outcome of these screenings is that some students with possible disabilities will be identified. School districts should refer those students to possible special education evaluations, with parental notification and consent, per Secs. 115.77(1m)(a) and 115.777, Wis. Stats. (This comment also applies to Section 24 regarding pupil reading assessments.)

Thank you for considering our concerns. We will be glad to work with you to help Wisconsin provide the best possible reading instruction resulting in the best possible reading performance for children with disabilities.

### **For further information:**

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