



The Honorable Patty Murray, Chair
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20015

The Honorable Richard Burr, Ranking Member
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20015

The Honorable Bobby Scott, Chair
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20010

The Honorable Virginia Foxx, Ranking Member
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20010

October 3, 2022

Dear Chairwoman Murray, Ranking Member Burr, Chairman Scott and Ranking Member Foxx:

The National Association of Private Special Education Centers (NAPSEC) was established in 1971 as a nonprofit association with the vision of supporting access to appropriate special education programs as a vital component of the continuum of alternative placements. In collaboration with our Council of Affiliated State Associations (CASA), we write to ask for your support in addressing the workforce crisis that is significantly impacting the ability of nonpublic special education programs to provide students with disabilities the services they need.

Together, NAPSEC and CASA represent over 800 specialized, nonpublic programs serving individuals with disabilities across the nation. These providers oftentimes serve students with the most complex social, emotional, and behavioral needs. Most students are placed in our programs at the request of their parents or guardians, in consultation with our public-school partners, as a means of providing a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) as required under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). All our members are proud to offer individualized education, behavioral health, and other clinical services to students with exceptional needs.

The Special Education Workforce Crisis and its Impact on Students

As you know, our nation is facing a staggering shortage of special education professionals. Exacerbated by the conditions of a global pandemic, at many nonpublic special education programs this longstanding staffing shortage has reached a critical level¹. Simultaneously, the percentage of students served under IDEA continues to climb, creating a supply and demand challenge that is negatively impacting our youth.²

¹ Lieberman, M. "How Bad Are School Staffing Shortages? What We Learned by Asking Administrators." Education Week, 22 Oct. 2021, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/how-bad-are-school-staffing-shortages-whatwe-learned-by-asking-administrators/2021/10>

² National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). Students With Disabilities. *Condition of Education*. U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences. <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator/cgg>.

High staff vacancy rates are preventing many programs from accepting students who are in dire need of specialized services³. As we recover from the global pandemic, high quality, specialized services are needed now more than ever. However, many students with disabilities are being placed on lengthy waitlists because nonpublic special education schools have been forced to reduce capacity and, in extreme cases, close their doors due to record levels of job abandonment and the chronic inability to hire and retain workers. This unfortunate reality is directly impacting student access to mandated educational opportunities.

Retention of existing special education program staff is challenged by several factors, including record inflation, historically low wages, and fatigue. National inflation rates disproportionately impact low-income workers – including those working in the special education field.⁴ Wages and salaries are under immense upward pressure as all schools are struggling to compete with other industries for employees. Many nonpublic special education programs are simply unable to keep up with the wages and benefits offered elsewhere. Within our industry, competition among schools for qualified employees is strong. The challenging conditions of working with some of the most acute and vulnerable students, coupled with lower rates of pay, have made it extremely difficult for nonpublic special education schools to recruit and retain teachers and staff. Further, low staffing levels have the compounding effect of causing the remaining special education professionals to overwork, burn out quickly, and seek less demanding and less stressful jobs.

What Can be Done

Investments in the development of the special educator pipeline are urgently needed. However, it is imperative that these investments stand to benefit both public schools and nonpublic special education programs which are serving public school students with the most complex needs.

We applaud federal relief efforts, like the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, which have provided critically needed support to school districts as they work to recover from the pandemic. Many districts have been able to leverage ARP funds to increase salaries and provide hiring and retention bonuses for teachers in an effort to help educators receive the compensation they deserve. Unfortunately, federal funding designated for nonpublic special education programs cannot be used for this purpose and has had little to no impact on the current workforce crisis. Many nonpublic special education schools have been unable to access any federal relief funding to curb the impact of COVID-19, despite educating public school children at the request of local school districts.

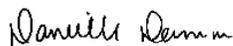
Every student should have access to qualified educators capable of meeting their unique social, emotional, mental health, and academic needs. No student should be denied FAPE because appropriate placements are being delayed or denied due to workforce challenges.

³ Jung, C. “A shortage of special education staff leaves many students without services they need.” Wbur, 17 December 2021, <https://www.wbur.org/news/2021/12/13/labor-shortage-special-education>

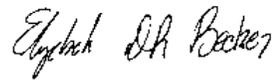
⁴ Horsley, S. “Inflation may be easing – but low-income people are still paying the steepest prices.” National Public Radio, May 2022, <https://www.npr.org/2022/05/11/1097966775/inflation-poor-income-inequality-biden-federal-reserve>

We stand ready to support programs and proposals that will benefit all students with disabilities. As you work to find ways to address the multifaceted workforce challenges facing our education system, please ensure that students with disabilities served in specialized nonpublic programs also stand to benefit. Teacher and staff shortages are directly impeding student access to educational opportunity and critically needed services. This reality is detrimental to students with disabilities and their families. As always, NAPSEC stands ready to assist in any way our unique expertise or programming may be helpful.

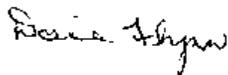
Respectfully,



Danielle Damm
Executive Director
National Association of Private Special
Education Centers



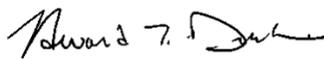
Elizabeth Dello Russo Becker
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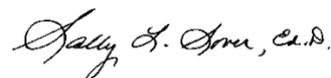
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