

March 10, 2025

Chairman Kevin Kiley
U.S. House of Representatives
2445 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici
U.S. House of Representatives
2231 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Kiley and Ranking Member Bonamici:

The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) partners with educators, students, families, and young adults to advance innovative research and advocate for equitable policies that address systemic barriers in schools, workplaces, and communities. We appreciate your attention to present issues that impact our nation's students and for holding this hearing, as well as the opportunity to submit this letter for the record.

Learning disabilities (LD) are brain-based disorders that impact an individual's ability to read, write, and perform mathematical tasks. Common examples include dyslexia, dysgraphia, and dyscalculia. Research shows that with appropriate support and instruction, students with LD can perform at the same level as their non-disabled peers. However, without these supports, they face barriers that extend into adulthood, potentially affecting their future education, employment prospects, well-being, and overall quality of life.

NCLD has previously engaged with national charter school networks and strongly supports high-quality public school choice options for families including charter schools and magnet schools. For example, in 2018-2019, we engaged five charter school networks to examine unique and innovative ways in which they were engaging students with disabilities in developing 21st century learning skills. We are also supportive of the right for families to choose to attend a private school or homeschool their student, however, we strongly believe that Congress should not divert taxpayer funds into any private school choice proposal and/or voucher system, including the District of Columbia private school voucher program.

Voucher, education savings accounts, and tax incentive programs allow families to use public money to pay for private school tuition. While school voucher programs theoretically expand choices for parents and students, any federally funded voucher program would undermine the ability for children with disabilities to receive a free appropriate education. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) data, about 1.7% of all students with disabilities are parentally placed in private schools. Private school teachers are not required to be certified in special education. Because of this, teachers and staff in schools that participate in voucher programs may not be appropriately trained to teach students with disabilities. There is no federal requirement that students with disabilities who are educated in private schools under voucher programs meet the same academic standards as their peers without disabilities.



School choice, in reality, is not the families' choice but the school's. Private schools make their own admissions decisions and determine their academic and support offerings, often resulting in discrimination against students with disabilities. This may ultimately result in the exclusion of many students with disabilities or signaling to families that the private school is not equipped to serve students with a specific type of disability or learning need. Finally, private school vouchers are not an appropriate policy solution to improve academic achievement. Studies of voucher and voucher-like programs in Louisiana, Indiana, Ohio, and Washington DC [show](#) that participating students experienced declines in academic performance. For these reasons, NCLD urges the Committee not to advance any legislation that drives public funding to private schools.

Investing in our public education systems is of utmost importance to NCLD. A robust education generates worthwhile economic benefits for individuals, communities, and society. IDEA was enacted 50 years ago, marking an important milestone this year for a key civil rights law. Over the last decade, the number of children served under IDEA has grown by 16%. Yet, the federal share of the average per pupil expenditure for IDEA is 10.2% – a historic low. Vouchers rarely cover full private school tuition costs for families. The current federal funding per child with a disability is about \$1800, on average, so proposals to block grant or voucherize IDEA are fully insufficient when that amount is compared to average private school tuition (over \$12,000 on average across the nation, and much more for schools that specialize in educating students with learning disabilities). The federal government should focus on providing more resources to our public schools and fulfilling its promise to invest in IDEA.

Our team at NCLD thanks you for your leadership and for taking the opportunity to address school choice and to discuss the implications of programs and proposals on the education of students with disabilities. We look forward to working with you to improve educational outcomes for students with learning disabilities in the 119th Congress.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jacqueline A. Rodriguez". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Jacqueline Rodriguez
Chief Executive Officer
National Center for Learning Disabilities