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Transcript of Conference Call Presentation

No Child Left Behind: Implications for Secondary Education and Transition

presented by:

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DR. JOHNSON: First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. Pasternack, the Assistant Secretary of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, for taking this call today and providing a little bit of a background for us on our policy here in the Department.

DR. PASTERNAK: Thank you all for taking time out of your busy schedules to share a few minutes about some of the things that we have been dealing with as we have celebrated the President's success with the passage of HR-1. The No Child Left Behind Act is the most sweeping educational reform in a generation, and the President's commitment to leaving no child behind is clearly indicative of his passion for improving results for all of America's kids including kids with disabilities.

I will take a second here and read to you something that you may not be aware of that this Saturday — as you know, every Saturday the President has a radio address — this past Saturday for the first time in history the President of the United States took advantage of his radio address to talk about issues affecting kids with disabilities.

And I just want to start for a minute and read to you just a little bit about what the President said. In part he said, "Now, our challenge is to make sure that every child has a fair chance to succeed in life. That is why education is the great civil rights issue of our time. So, my administration worked with Republicans and Democrats to enact into law the most far-reaching education reform in a generation. We are insisting on high standards for all our children. We are putting a new emphasis on reading as a first step toward achievement. We are offering

teachers new training and states and localities new flexibility. And we are going to measure and test how everyone is doing in our new accountability system so we can get help to children before it's too late."

"We have a special obligation to disadvantaged children to close the achievement gap in our nation. In my next budget I will propose an increase of one billion dollars for the federal program that aids disadvantaged school districts. That's on top of the 18% increase in last year's budget. In fact, federal spending on Title One will increase as much in the first two years of my administration as it did in all the previous eight years combined. I hope Congress will approve this request."

Now, here is what I really wanted to read to you. "At the same time as we fund Title One, we are giving extra help to children with special needs. The federal program for special needs children was established by the law known as IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. My 2003 budget requests an additional one billion for IDEA as well — an important increase. But we want these new dollars to carry to special education the same spirit of reform and accountability we have brought to other education programs."

"This reform effort began last Tuesday when Education Secretary, Rod Paige, convened the first meeting of the new Presidential Commission on Excellence in Special Education, a distinguished and diverse group chaired by former Iowa Governor Terry Branstad, has a clear mission, to propose reforms that will make special education an integral part of an education system that expects all children to reach their full potential. We must have high

expectations for children who are more difficult to teach or who have fallen behind. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. would accept no less than an equal concern for every child in America and neither will my administration.”

So, I share that with you just to kind of give you a sense of how important the IDEA is to the President of the United States. And when I met with him last week, he was telling me that IDEA is next. So, he is aware of the incredible success that he enjoyed from bipartisan, bicameral support to get HR-1 passed and signed into law. And one of the things that we all need to talk about, although we are not going to talk about it too much today, is what impact that has for kids with disabilities.

So, let me just quickly give you what I think is my view of the biggest impact. Most of you by now have heard me say as I have been going around the country that a part of my mission in serving the President in this role is to make sure that the right kids are in special education receiving appropriate services. And my suspicion, as well as the suspicion that I think many of you on this call have, is that some of the kids that are in special education are not, in fact, kids with disabilities. They are, in fact, instructional casualties. They are, in fact, kids who haven't been taught successfully using scientifically validated instructional approaches and research validated curricula in the general education system and general education settings.

And, that has led to high rates of referrals to special education, and most of you are aware of the data that most of the kids that are referred for assessment to place them in special education actually wind up getting diagnosed and subsequently being placed in special education with, in many instances, questionable outcomes. And by outcomes you have to look no further than graduation rates, and I know that's an issue that's near and dear to the hearts of most of you who are on this phone call and the people at the National Center for Secondary Education and Transition who are working so hard with us and with you to improve the outcomes for kids with disabilities as they move from school to post-school opportunities.

So, the biggest impact of HR-1 is hopefully going to be in the area of reading first. That \$925 million or \$950 million of new money a year for the next five years is going to build the capacity of states to deliver scientifically validated and scientifically based reading research, validated curricula and instructional strategies in classrooms across America.

And the President believes and Congress believes and we certainly believe that if we do that, if we provide professional development to teachers, and we know that three billion dollars of the bill is targeted toward professional development, we deliver high quality professional development if it's sustained, if it's systematic, if it's embedded in what teachers do, then, in fact, we can go ahead and improve the capacity of teachers to address the learning needs of the heterogeneous groups of kids that they have in front of them on a daily basis.

Some of you who I know well who are on the phone have heard me before I took this job, and now since I have taken the job, talk honestly with the colleges and universities about my serious concern about the skills that teacher candidates receive before they leave those colleges and universities and enter the classrooms across America. One of the challenges that I have asked the deans of the colleges of education to take a look at, why is it that so many teachers are prepared for an experience that's very different than the experiences they encounter when they actually get into classrooms?

If, in fact, the teachers are being prepared well, then why is there such a serious disparity between what they think they are going to find when they get into the classroom and what they find when they actually enter the classroom? And why is it that the average teacher in America lasts five years but the average special ed. teacher only lasts three years?

We have a critical shortage of qualified personnel. I do not believe that certified means qualified. I wish that it did, but I think there are many instances where we have people who are certified who really are not qualified to do the very difficult task that we are asking them to do of teaching America's children, teaching all of

America's children, including the kids that I am responsible for and that you are responsible for that are students with disabilities.

So, in asking you to help me make sure that the right kids are in special education receiving the right services I just want to quickly remind you of the principles that are embedded in HR-1. The first one is the one that you have heard the President talk a great deal about, which is accountability for results. We really believe that in the past we have looked to the federal government for money and just for money, and you know that seven percent of the funding in education is provided by the government although the majority of the regulations and the rules and the laws are federally promulgated and federally driven. So, we know that education is a state and local responsibility which leads to the second principle of educational reform embedded in HR-1, and that's local control and flexibility.

But I want to go back to the accountability for a second. You know that one of the most hotly debated elements of HR-1 was the President's desire to have every child in third through eighth grade tested in reading and math every year. And he succeeded in getting that into law. And what we are going to do by that is make sure that we are measuring the right stuff, and the right stuff is are kids learning to read and are they learning basic math calculation and application skills. And the only way we are going to know if we are being successful is if we measure how well we are doing. The best way to measure that is by testing kids every year.

Now, some people say, well, you know, what you wind up doing is spending an inordinate amount of time teaching to the test. Well, I hope that you would all agree that if it's a good test, it's okay to teach to the test. It's important that if we agree that a test measures the right skills and those skills are fundamentally important to kids being successful later in life, then we absolutely need to make sure that we are measuring the acquisition of the skills that are being taught to kids across America.

So, there has been a lot of discussion when the President was in Albuquerque — those of you from New Mexico who are on the call will remember when he was there in August and I had the great thrill of being there with him — he was asked if it was racist to test. And he said that in his opinion it was racist not to test, and in spite of all the concerns that are raised by some people who feel that testing is racially biased the reality is that there are good tests. If the tests are universally designed to accommodate the needs of all learners, then it might be okay to, in fact, teach to the test because what you want to make sure is that kids are picking up the skills that we have all agreed are important and should be measured by the good kinds of tests that are being developed by people around the country.

So, the accountability issue is going to be huge, and no longer are we just going to give money and say that you are not going to be accountable. Clearly we have in the past focused on fiscal accountability, but we really haven't focused on instructional accountability and programmatic accountability. And our thinking here is that we clearly are going to be focused on programmatic and instructional accountability, not only the fiscal accountability.

And let me just say another word about that because this is something that you also have heard me talk about, some of my friends who are on the call. OSEP has been famous for focusing on process, and we have a law that is very heavily weighted towards compliance and the set of regulations that overwhelmingly focus on compliance and on process and on procedure. One of the challenges that I face in trying to shepherd the bill through its next iteration through reauthorization is to really emphasize and stress results and outcomes and focus less on process and on compliance. And I think that in the President's talking about accountability for results, that's what he's talking about.

Just to dramatize it for a second, I was in California a while ago and met with a teacher who has been teaching special ed. in a school for 22 years. I asked her if she had my job what would she

do to change special education to make it better for kids across America. And she went to her desk, and she retrieved for me what she had gotten in the mail that day and unwrapped it, and it was a very large book, much bigger than eight and a half by eleven and much thicker than the briefcase that I carry around.

And if we were on TV or if I was in the room with you, I would show you the book because I keep it in the office. And it was the twenty-first annual compilation of special education law in the state of California. And so, my question to her and my question to you and my question to the Secretary and my question to the President is, "what does a teacher need with a law book?" I mean, we have gotten to the point where we have developed a system that is so regulated, that is so adversarial, it's so fraught with legal complexity and legal focus and process and compliance driven, that we have gotten away from, I think, why we all got into this very noble profession and that was what was supposed to be the intent of the last reauthorization, which was supposed to be a focus on teaching, learning, and results.

And while those of you who have been around like I have, heard the rhetoric that the last reauthorization was on teaching, learning, and results. In fact, I don't see it there. And if you see it there, you can help me see where it is, because what I see is just more attention to process, more attention to compliance, more attention to things like who is at the IEP rather than what's in the IEP. And I think it's time for us to recognize that the system is incredibly complex. It's incredibly legally driven. It's incredibly compliance oriented, and it's time for us to change that.

I think that families across this country are demanding that we make it simpler, are demanding that we go ahead and focus on accountability for results and let their kids learn. And that's, I think, what's driving some of the reform that was embedded in HR-1 and what will hopefully be some of the principles on which we can approach reauthorization now that it's going to be our opportunity to revisit some of the things in IDEA,

given the congressional mandate to reauthorize the law.

So, two other things real quickly that you know about, and then I will just finish up with a couple of other comments and then hopefully do some Q&A with you all, since I understand that that is something that we were going to try to do here. The next — the third principle — it's interesting to talk about it this week because we have the Parent Training and Information Centers coming to town for the Alliance Conference — and that is expanded parental empowerment.

The President last week eloquently talked about that. In his view, it's parents that are going to be primarily responsible for making education reform a reality in this country. I believe that. Some of you know that it was pretty lonely being the only State Director in the country going to the Alliance meetings. And I think that my view was that, you know, we have got to partner with the families, that we have got to have compassion and empathy for the incredible stress that families face in trying to raise kids with disabilities. And if we don't have empathy and compassion for the challenges faced by parents of kids with disabilities, then we should get into another profession. We should not be in this profession, and I think that, like Nick Cobb said ages ago, parents are the true professionals. They know more about their kids than anybody else, and that we in special ed. ought to serve as a resource and as consultants to those families. You know, I believed that before I came here, and I believe it now, I believe, that we have to really empower families to make good choices and to understand what's going on with their kids and what services their kids have a right to.

And you know, the intent was righteous 26 years ago. The intent was to get kids into school that were not in public school, and I think we need to applaud ourselves for many things, and one of the things we should be very proud of as a country is the fact that we got those kids into school. I think the challenge is that now that they are in school, they have a right to a quality education that produces the anticipated outcomes and results. And I don't think we are there yet, because we are still

too focused on compliance rather than outcomes and results. But giving parents choice, giving parents information, giving parents tools, giving parents skills, giving parents knowledge, all of those things are incredibly important to the President and incredibly important to me.

And you all will be seeing soon that I am hiring a woman to be OSEP's reading specialist, and she is a person with dyslexia and the parent of a son with dyslexia. And to me that's just more evidence that there is a need to translate some of this very difficult research, the incredibly wonderful research that's been done both by people that we have funded here at the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) through our Research to Practice Division and the incredibly important contribution of the scientists funded by our partners at Health and Human Services through their work, particularly the National Institute for Child Health and Human Development. And I know you are all aware of the incredibly important work and the contribution that those scientists have made.

But one of the challenges is that if you read that stuff, as I know some of you have struggled to do, it's very complex. You know, researchers write for other researchers, and one of the challenges that we face is translating that information into information that parents can understand and use. And so, I think we are going to be lucky to have found somebody who is uniquely qualified to translate that information into words and language that parents can understand, and I think that will help us in fulfilling the President's mandate that parents are going to make educational reform really happen in this country.

And then finally, since I just talked about research, the last principle of HR-1, and what the President has been talking a great deal about in his leadership of educational reform, is the whole notion of "let's do what works based on solid evidence and solid research." You know, he has been real clear to me. He said where we know what works - let's put it in the hands of people that need that information. And where we don't know what works - let's put the best minds in the country to work on finding out the answers about what works.

And so, again, going back to where I started out in special ed., if it's about us having the right kids in special ed. getting the right services, I think we can all acknowledge that even with scientifically-based reading, research, and instruction delivered by high quality teachers, well-qualified, well-trained, and well-compensated teachers in the classrooms across America, there is still going to be this group of kids that have intractable reading problems that are not going to learn to read even with the best possible instruction delivered by well-qualified instructional people, whether it's teachers or parents or people who get there through alternate routes to certification.

In my view, those students are, in fact, the right kids to be in special ed., and the challenge to us is to find the right instructional strategies to help those kids with these intractable reading problems learn how to read. Those are, in fact, the right kids for us to have in this. So, now, we do all of those things — I think one of the things we have asked you guys to do is submit — those of you who are the State Directors who are on this call anyway are particularly aware of the requirement to send the bi-annual performance indicators.

And you know, we have asked you to do three things: We have asked you tell us about the disaggregated data on the performance of kids with disabilities on state and district mandated tests. We have asked you to take a look at your dropout rates, decreasing those, and we have asked you to increase your graduation rates. And Martha Thurlow, Director of the National Center for Educational Outcomes, who is sitting here, has been helping me sort of analyze and synthesize the data that's been submitted across the country. And as you know, when I was in San Antonio, I showed the map about the fact that many states have not provided us with the data that we have asked them to provide us.

And so, in order for me to be able to be your advocate and to be able to speak knowledgeably about how well our system is doing in serving the six million kids that we are responsible for serving across this great country, I need your help and I

need those data. And I have already said that, but I just want to kind of reiterate that.

And I also want to finish up by talking a little bit about transition. One of the things that I have heard from you all and that I am concerned about is that the requirement is for special ed. to get the other agencies to participate in transition planning for kids. However, there are no teeth in that, so if the other agencies choose not to come, we don't really have any club to use to punish them or to force them to participate. So, I think that's something that we need to take a look at in terms of how do we build better interagency collaboration, how do we build those bridges across systems to make sure that, in fact, people understand the critical importance to be there at these meetings when we focus on the transition needs of kids with disabilities.

Secondly, we have the New Freedom Initiative, which is clearly the President's marching orders to the rehab system in terms of saying to the rehab system and to others both in public and private sectors, 70 percent of adults with disabilities are unemployed, 90 percent of adults with disabilities are underemployed. What are we going to do about that? At a time of unprecedented economic prosperity in this country, if we are doing such a great job in special ed., why are so many young adults with disabilities leaving school and not having the skills that they need to be able to find competitive and meaningful work?

Mary Henry, who is on the line, is one of the people that I look to help me with the whole notion of micro-enterprises and entrepreneurship as a strategy to basically say to kids with disabilities, "it's important for you to stay in school, and the reason it's important for you to stay in school is that you need certain skills to be able to bring your ideas that you have into reality." And those ideas are wonderful ideas, and they can manifest themselves in terms of starting businesses. And 70% of new businesses that start up in this country are sole proprietorships. So you know, it's an exciting strategy that other states may want to think about. New Mexico should be proud that it did.

So, the whole notion of school to work is an important one and also school to postsecondary opportunities. I mean, why is it that only around 10% of kids with disabilities can be found on our college campuses? Now, I think that we need to work with the colleges and universities to build their capacity to better serve students with disabilities who do get the skills in school to be able to go on to postsecondary opportunities. And we need to make sure that in your transition planning if students want to go on to college, community college, vo.tech., or whatever it is that they want to do. We ought to be putting the supports in place to make sure that they have that opportunity, and that they are successful in their postsecondary opportunities or if they want to go into the military or if they want to — whatever it is that they want to do.

I mean, the whole thing of transition planning and one of the things that Ed O'Leary taught me when he came and worked with us in New Mexico is that it ought to be strengths-based. It ought to be based on the interests of the kid. It ought to be all about the kid. And some of you have heard me say, as an example, that one of the changes that we could make — a statute that would profoundly change practice in special ed. across the country is right now. As you know, it says, "students should be invited to their IEP, where appropriate." Well, if we just take out the "where appropriate," to me it sends the message that all students should be at all IEPs. We should never do an IEP without having the student there. It certainly is a requirement in transition planning, and it ought to be a requirement all along the way. We ought to be building the skills of students to actively participate and manage their IEPs. And we ought to support that in a variety of ways.

So, in closing, thank you for taking time to listen a little bit. The interest that you have in HR-1 is important, because I have told people as I have gone across the country that we are never going to fix special ed. by only looking at special education, and that it's not just about special ed. or general education. It's about kids, and you know, the whole bifurcation in the system has not really served us

well, in my humble opinion. And I am working very hard here with my colleagues in Elementary and Secondary Education, Vocational and Adult Education, and the Office of Educational Research and Improvement to try to create a more unified approach to looking at this notion of implementing the President's charge that we leave no child behind, because you all know that talk is cheap. I have had the great thrill of looking the President in the eye when he has told me that he really believes that we can do this, that we can leave no child behind. I heard — Rob Rutherford is on the line, and I will look forward to talking with him because I have had a meeting in his office that I convened because I know that 70 percent of the kids in the juvenile justice system are purported to be kids with disabilities.

If we are talking about leaving no child behind, we have got to make sure that we address the needs of kids in the juvenile justice system who have been left out and left behind by every other system that exists. We have got huge challenges ahead to meet the mental health needs of kids. But I know that you are all working very hard, and I want to just applaud the incredible hard work that you are doing. Thank you very much for focusing on this issue of transition, because it is going to really define how well we do. I mean, there has been an obsession, and there needs to be an obsession, with early intervention and early childhood and prevention and all of those things are critically important.

But you and I know that there are way too many kids who have missed that window of opportunity to benefit from early intervention, and we have got to focus on the needs of those kids now. And the only way we are going to really know if we have been successful is what happens with these kids when they leave school, and that means increasing graduation rates, decreasing dropout rates, and making sure that they have the skills to get meaningful work, and I mean meaningful work. I don't mean just flipping burgers and entry-level work in the fast food industry or sacking groceries at a grocery store or being the greeter at Wal-Mart.

I mean, all that's wonderful and tomorrow I have the great privilege of having lunch with Eunice Shriver and sitting on a panel with her and thanking her for changing the perception about people with disabilities throughout the world by the fine work that they have done through Special Olympics. But the reality is we still have a long way to go to get kids with disabilities graduated. You know, all you have got to do — I hope there's nobody on the call from Mississippi — but I told Ritchie, the State Superintendent, the other day when I met with a bunch of the state chiefs that, you know, the fact that only 12 percent of the students with disabilities in the great state of Mississippi graduate high school is unacceptable. It's a travesty, it's a tragedy, and we have got to do something about it.

And you know, state after state can look at their graduation rates and realize that we all can do better. The goal, I think, is to see that every kid leaves school with a diploma and with the skills that they need to be able to have a meaningful life and meaningful work and to be able to fulfill their dreams and aspirations.

And with that, I will close. Let's see if there are some questions that people might have.

DR. JOHNSON: Let me just make a comment here. First, I would like to thank Dr. Pasternack for taking the time here in what is a very busy schedule today in Washington, DC, and providing us with these comments and view on the policy.

I would like to open it up now to people to ask questions and provide comment, but one little rule if we could observe it and that is — as you talk, please announce to Dr. Pasternack and the rest of us your name and where you are from — at least the state where you are from. I will now just open the forum to you. Are there questions?

MR. EMERSON: Yes, this is John Emerson from Casey Family Programs in Seattle. Bob, I wondered if you have information on the Reading First component to HR-1. Is that early literacy emphasis or will that also include remedial best practices and funding throughout K-12?

DR. PASTERNAK: Well, I think — thanks for the question and by the way, thanks for the

work that Casey does, and I should have also mentioned if we are talking about leaving no child behind, let's not forget kids in the foster care system and in the adoption maze. But I think that the focus is going to be on early intervention, early identification, early assessment, because we know a lot more about what to do with those kinds of kids K-3, because of the fine work that's been done that I was articulating earlier, John. So, I think that what you will see is that the emphasis is going to be on the early grades, because that's where we know the most about.

Now, while we are going to start out there, we clearly understand the need to have a middle school initiative and a high school initiative, but we are not there yet. We are going to have a conference on adolescent literacy in March where we are partnering with NIH to take a look at what are some proven models to help adolescents acquire better literacy skills because we know so much less about those issues than we know about how to teach very young children to learn how to read.

And since you asked, we also have some interesting data from the Rehabilitation Services Administration that I am also responsible for overseeing. We have a longitudinal study going on 8,000 adults who participate in the VR system across the country. And one of the things that we have learned from that study is that the better the reading skills of adults with disabilities, the higher their employability potential.

So, what that leads me to believe is that one of the things that we now have to do is go about the serious work of finding out what are some models to teach adults with disabilities how to learn how to read, because we just know so much less, John, about adolescent literacy and adult literacy. You know, something is very clear from the converging data that we have from all of these longitudinal studies that NICHD has been funding over the last 20 years, and that is we know a lot more about how to prevent reading disability than we know how to successfully intervene once a child has failed to learn how to read.

So, I think that what you are going to see with Reading First and Early Reading First is a clear emphasis on early childhood and the early grades.

And I think that while that's important, it's critically important that we also understand that there is a huge need for us to ratchet up what we know in the areas of adolescent and adult literacy. And that gets back to the fourth principle that I articulated that's in HR-1, and that is the President's clear directive to us that if we don't know what results we are achieving, you better find out, and you better find out quick, and you better let the people who need to know about it.

So, I don't know if that's helpful, but if you want to know, there are these reading academies going on, John, and everybody else, where the Office of Elementary and Secondary Ed., the Susan Newman shop, is conducting three sets of reading academies. The first one is this week. They are in Washington. They are an attempt to build capacity at state departments to understand what's in HR-1, particularly Reading First and Early Reading First, and to be able to submit the competitive applications to be able to receive part of that \$900 million that will be available. It's a billion dollars a year over the next five years, but it's split between — the lion's share goes to Reading First and there is a relatively small amount of it allocated to Early Reading First, \$75 million. That's a little bit of an answer towards your question, John.

MR. EMERSON: Thank you very much, Bob.

MR. KIMMONS: Dr. Pasternack, this is Les Kimmons from Parent Training Information in Nebraska. I have two questions regarding the increased focus on expanded parent involvement. First of all, how are parents being involved in input for policymaking? Secondly, what is your perception of why we as parents have had to focus so much attention and efforts on compliance in the past?

DR. PASTERNAK: Well, the second question is a great question and one that I lose a lot of sleep about, but let me take the first question. I just came from a meeting at the Secretary's conference room that was being led by Susan Hall, who some of you may know is the co-author with Louisa Moats on one of the finest books that's been written on reading disabilities. And you know, she is a parent, and there were two other parents in

there who were doing this incredible PowerPoint on parent involvement in Reading First.

So, I want to just assure you that that is indicative of our serious intent to have parental involvement throughout the rollout of Reading First. You know, we have parents — I just came from — I have met, as you know, with a lot of parents around the country on my IDEA world tour, and we provided stipends for child care to encourage parental involvement. We had public forums at night at each one of the eight cities so we did what we could to encourage parental participation and parental involvement in those public forums.

So, I listened intently to parents in helping to guide our policy development — all our policy development, by the way. The second — so there has been parent involvement in Reading First. There was tremendous parent involvement in the crafting of some of the components of HR-1, and I can tell you based on some of the people who advise us and advise other people within the administration, that there is tremendous respect for the wisdom of parents and tremendous respect for the fact that parents can make choices if they have the right information to be able to make those choices, and we are committed to make that happen.

Now, the second question is a lot more problematic. And the second question speaks to my concern that I think in large part many parents don't trust that public schools are going to do the right thing for their kids with disabilities. And so, because they don't trust that public schools are going to do the right things for their kids, they have really fought hard for all of the due process provisions that are currently embedded in the IDEA. Now, I certainly don't want to take those protections away from kids nor take the rights and responsibilities away from parents, but I do think that we have got to struggle to create more trust between the parents and the public schools because the public school people don't get up in the morning thinking, "How am I going to go to school today and make life miserable for these kids or how am I going to deny providing services to these kids and their families?" I don't really believe

that. I know a lot of them, certainly the leadership of special ed. around the country, and these are fine, committed, dedicated folks, you know. Deb is a parent. She is on the call. Rebecca is a parent. I mean, these are not parents of kids with disabilities, but you know, these are parents, and they understand the challenges that you face just being a parent, let alone when it's compounded by being a parent of a child with a disability.

But you know, I think that the real question is, "have we gotten the kinds of results that parents are demanding by the current system that's in place?" And I think the answer to that question is "no." When you look at data and the aggregate, you know, particularly the kind of data that Martha Thurlow helps us with through the incredibly fine work that the National Center on Educational Outcomes does, that we should all be paying attention to. You know, things are better than they were before, no question about it. As I said earlier, we need to applaud ourselves for that work.

But the data is still not as good as it needs to be, in my humble opinion. You know, we need to have much better graduation rates, much lower dropout rates. And I hope that parents would want to be receptive to the notion of let's focus less on who is at the IEP and more on what's in the IEP. Let's focus more on results and outcomes, rather than compliance and process. Let's focus more on what the kid needs to learn, rather than on what rule and regulation has been violated or has been complied with. Let's focus more on making sure that the kids are at the IEP so that we all focus on the needs of the child at the IEP, rather than the adults trying to impress each other with big words that they can use at the IEP meeting.

So, I think that that's part of it. I think that the PTIs have done an incredible job in terms of providing information and training, not just to parents but also to district personnel. And you know, I applaud the incredible work that the PTIs have done. We have seen big increases in PTI funding. But you know, the PTI funding has not kept up with funding for the Goals 2000 Centers for Parents or the P&A centers, and you know, I am aware of that. It's going to be a challenge in the

tight budget environment that we are going to face in fiscal year '03 whether we are going to be able to see any increases, and I am not optimistic that we are. And so, what I would hope would happen is that the Part D increases that we have seen and now with the Part C increase that we saw, thanks to Congress, for the first time in five years, that there is more money available to the states to be able to partner with the PTIs and through the State Improvement Grants.

I mean, there are other sources of funding that could be accessed to improve the training of parents and thereby the empowering of parents through parents getting access to the best quality factual information so that we can trust them to make the right kinds of decisions. And you know, I am also concerned about the lack of access to child care that the parents of kids with disabilities face, and working as chair of the Federal Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) to see what we can do about that is one of the issues that the Federal ICC is going to take on this year.

So, I appreciate those two questions. I don't know if that helped answer them or not.

MR. KIMMONS: Well, thank you for keeping your focus on those issues.

MS. POTTS: Hi, my name is Kathy Potts, and I am originally from Mississippi and moved to Iowa. I have a child that's 13 and has dyslexia, and we have just put him into a school here in Cedar Rapids. And he is in the eighth grade, and he is on third grade reading level. And our school is telling us that it's too late to teach him to read.

DR. PASTERNAK: Well, I think that first of all, I am sorry that a school would be telling you that. I, quite frankly, am an optimist at heart, and I believe that the challenge for us is to figure out the way the kid learns and teach the way the child learns. And that's a real challenge for us in special ed., to provide that specially designed instruction. I think that I would just hate to give up on any kid, and certainly the President is saying that we are not going to leave any kid behind.

Now, can your child learn? Yes. You know, there may be a need to emphasize functional academic skills as opposed to some of the other kinds of

approaches to teaching your child to read at that age. You know, the challenge is getting the information to your child in a way that your child can use the information, and I think that requires expert teaching. But to say just flatly that your kid can't learn to read, I would hate to be that flippant about it. I think all people can learn if the information is provided in the right way if we really spend the time with the child.

Assessment comes from the Latin word "to sit with," and I think that the whole notion of people sitting with your child to do the kind of functional assessment to really find out how is it that your child might learn and then deliver instruction in that way. You know, is your child going to become a fluent reader with the kind of automaticity that your child may have acquired had he or she been taught earlier, probably not. But clearly, just to give up, that's one of the criticisms that has been leveled against special education.

We should not have low expectations for kids with disabilities. We should have high standards and high expectations and demand excellence in what we do in special education. And from what you have just told me, I am saddened to hear that. And that gets to that earlier question about why then parents would want to have due process protection to basically be able to go to the table and say the law requires that you teach my child and you are not going to give up.

And I think that's one of the reasons why you as a mom need to know as much as you can to get the school district to do their job because it's their job to teach your kid, not your job to go home at night and teach your kid. And I know there's way too many parents spending way too much time every night at home trying to teach their kids because their kids are not getting the kind of high quality instruction that they should be getting in school.

And with that, I can see that we are at the end of the allotted time, and I am going to turn it over to these fine folks to move on to my next meeting.

DR. JOHNSON: I am sure there are many, many questions that you would like to direct to Dr. Pasternack. This is a very traveling assistant secretary. I have seen him at work in Minneapolis,

Alabama, all over the place, so he indeed travels. So, he will be at the state level for many of you to ask him these questions. Again, on behalf of the National Center on Secondary Education and Transition, I thank Dr. Pasternack and I thank you. This is a very, very interesting group. I think this is the largest group we have had on a teleconference yet, and I appreciate your interest and attendance in this. Please look forward to other things we will make available to you in the future.

DR. PASTERNAK: And I would be happy to get invited back to visit with you all by telephone so we could do more questions and answers as opposed to me just yakking at you, so hopefully that will be an opportunity that will get provided to me.

DR. JOHNSON: We will take that as a commitment.

DR. PASTERNAK: Thank you very much, guys.

(End of Teleconference)

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