



The Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC)

October 1, 2007

Donna Nangle
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave., SW, Room 6029
Potomac Center Plaza, Washington, DC 20204-2700

Re: Proposed Priorities for DRRPs, RRTCs, and RERCs and Priority 10: Research and Knowledge Translation Center for Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families

Dear Ms. Nangle:

These comments are provided on behalf of the Division for Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children (DEC). DEC is a professional membership organization whose mission is to promote policies and advance evidence-based practices that support families and enhance the optimal development of young children who have or are at risk for developmental delays and disabilities. DEC appreciates this opportunity to provide comments on these proposed priorities.

DEC recommends that NIDRR amend the proposed priority for the proposed Research and Knowledge Translation Center for Individuals with Disabilities and Their Families by giving increased emphasis to issues facing families as they navigate various programs and service delivery systems. This is particularly important in the early childhood years. It is during this time that families are often beginning to seek services and supports needed for their child and the rest of their family. Many communities still do not have necessary supports and services for young children with disabilities and their families. Often, these services are not coordinated in a way families can readily access them. It is important that this priority give preference to new knowledge about how to assist families in ensuring they can access the services necessary for their child and family.

In particular, we recommend the following so that the new center may better assist families and their children.

- The new center should focus on the early care and education, education, work/employment, and cash-transfer programs and systems.
- The new center should focus on the community integration and participation of families, not just of the individual child with a disability. Now, proposed priority (b) values only the community participation of the child.

- NIDRR should clarify that the “care-givers” include people who are not paid professionals.
- The new center should be sufficiently funded to carry out the NIDRR mission with regard to family research and initiatives should be funded for a five-year period of time.

We appreciate your consideration of these comments.

Mark Innocenti, DEC President

Sarah Mulligan, DEC Executive Director

Bonnie Keilty, DEC Governmental Relations Committee Chair

Sharon Walsh, DEC Consultant