



May 6, 2022

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Comment on Student Assistance General Provisions—Financial Assistance for Students with Intellectual Disabilities. ^(L)_(SEP) OMB Control Number: 1845-0099 Docket ID number ED-2022-SCC-0032

The National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC) is the country's oldest and largest organization for people with Down syndrome, their families, and the professionals who work with them. NDSC provides information, advocacy and support about issues related to Down syndrome throughout the lifespan and advocates for people with Down syndrome in matters of public policy. NDSC works to create a national climate in which all people will recognize and embrace the value and dignity of people with Down syndrome.

A top priority of the NDSC is promoting the expansion and improving the quality of inclusive postsecondary education (IPSE) options for students with intellectual disability (ID). We are closely involved with issues involving reauthorization, appropriations, and implementation of the ID provisions in the Higher Education Act (HEA). IPSE is expanding opportunities for individuals with Down syndrome to achieve enhanced education, competitive integrated employment, and community living.

We believe that this information collection is necessary to the proper functions of the Department and ensuring that the intent of the HEA is followed in U.S. Department of Education (ED) approval of Comprehensive Transition Programs (CTPs) for Title IV financial aid purposes. We strongly support the comments made by Think College National Coordinating Center^(L)_(SEP) (NCC) at the Institute for Community Inclusion, UMass Boston and wish to highlight and expand on two points made in their comments.

As indicated in their comments, the NCC is funded by ED to provide coordination, technical assistance, training, and evaluation for Transition and Postsecondary Education Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities (TPSID) and technical assistance, training resources, and support to all college programs for students with ID and to their families. One of the responsibilities of the NCC specified in the Higher Education Opportunity Act of 2008 is to convene an Accreditation Workgroup to develop model accreditation standards for CTPs. The most recent Accreditation Workgroup report to Congress, the Secretary of Education and NACIQI (see: <https://thinkcollege.net/resource/program-accreditation/report-on-model-accreditation-standards-for-higher-education-programs>) includes an important recommendation to ED regarding the CTP approval process.

Individualized support, reassurance and resources

The Accreditation Workgroup report states on page 30 and 31:

Concerns have also been raised that ED has approved some programs for CTP status that do not serve students with ID, among other challenges with the CTP approval process. Some students who do not have ID are seeking enrollment and being admitted to college programs for students with ID. This reality is partly due to the fact that campus disability services offices are understaffed and underfunded and that some students who require more supports to attend college are willing to attend a program for students with ID in order to get those supports. This pressure to admit students who do not have ID, or only students who are impacted minimally by ID, along with rigid admissions requirements in some programs, is causing serious concern among the students for whom these programs were intended, who now sometimes cannot gain entrance, and their families.

And on page 31 includes:

Recommendation to the Department of Education

- Review the selection of and training provided to CTP peer reviewers to ensure that there is a clear understanding and application of the definition of ID and other provisions in the law and regulations.

NDSC families have raised concerns about students with Down syndrome not being accepted at some programs due to the admissions requirements that do not meet the intent of the HEA. Concerns have also been raised that ED has approved some programs for CTP status that do not meet the HEA inclusion requirements.

We strongly agree with the NCC comments that “The Higher Education Act clearly states that students enrolled in CTP programs must participate at least half of their time in the program in academic components including^[1] coursework with students without disabilities or in internships or^[2] work-based training in settings with individuals without disabilities. CTP programs should not be approved that show less than 50% inclusion in academic courses or internships/work settings. Additionally, the law specifies that CTPs must enroll **students with intellectual disability** and only students with intellectual disability may access federal student aid under the CTP provisions. Some approved CTP programs enroll students who do not have intellectual disability.”

Recommendation: NDSC recommends that CTP reviewers be selected and trained to understand the HEA ID requirements and only approve programs that meet these and the other CTP requirements in the law.

The Department would enhance the quality, utility, and clarity of the information to be collected by adopting this recommendation.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

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Jordan Kough
Executive Director
National Down Syndrome Congress

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephanie Smith Lee". The signature is elegant and cursive, with the first name "Stephanie" being the most prominent part.

Stephanie Smith Lee
Senior Policy Advisor
National Down Syndrome Congress