

LDA Public Policy Priorities

LDA advocates to ensure that each individual with learning disabilities is identified, supported, and protected. We support policies and practices that ensure every person with a learning disability will have access to an evaluation that considers the individual's unique set of circumstances, instruction, and intervention. Interventions must be supported by evidence and services, and accommodations that support the highest levels of educational, career, and personal success possible, must be provided. LDA advocates for and supports policies at the federal, state and local levels that promote the following basic tenets:

Equity in Access

- Literacy is a civil right; all individuals, especially individuals with learning disabilities, must have access to evidence-based literacy instruction.
- The first step in ensuring individuals with learning disabilities are appropriately supported is proper evaluation and identification. We advocate for continued research and training in evidence-based evaluation methods.
- Teacher preparation must include training in recognizing learning disabilities and evidence-based instruction and intervention.
- Individuals with learning disabilities must have access to testing accommodations at all levels.
- We work to ensure that racial, age, ethnic, language, gender, and economic factors do not create barriers to receiving a comprehensive evaluation, timely identification, evidence-based services and supports, and protections under the law.
- We recognize that youth with identified and unidentified learning and other disabilities are over-represented in the juvenile justice system, and we advocate for policies ensuring screening, evaluation, and evidence-based interventions for this population.
- Through the Healthy Children Project, LDA advocates for equitable access to high quality early education and maternal and child healthcare and nutrition in order to support healthy brain development and mitigate the impact of learning disabilities.

Funding

- Congress must fulfill its promise to fund the IDEA, and adequate state and local funding must be allocated to the education and support of students with learning disabilities.
- Congress must continue to support funding Head Start and increase early childhood education funding until all children have access to high quality early learning experiences.
- Federal and state education funds must remain in public schools and must not be used for any voucher or voucher-like programs, whether designed for students or educators (including but not limited to traditional vouchers, education savings accounts, tuition tax credits/scholarships, or microgrants). All students have the right to attend a high-quality public school that meets their needs while maintaining all of their rights under the IDEA and other civil rights statutes.
- We advocate for increased funding for research on learning disabilities.
- We advocate for increased public funding to ensure individuals with learning and other disabilities can fully access technology-based accommodations.

Safe and Supportive Schools and Communities

- Safe schools are schools that embrace and support all students, including students with learning and other disabilities.
- Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment requires a full continuum of services and supports to meet the unique needs of each student with learning disabilities. We reject one-size-fits-all approaches, such as full inclusion.
- We advocate for all educational policies and practices that ensure all learners are engaged and supported and are achieving academically.
- We recognize that seclusion, restraint, and exclusionary disciplinary practices cause harm to students and do little to keep schools safe.
- We recognize racial disparities in identification, placement and discipline of students with learning and other disabilities; and we advocate for expanded components of the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) on students with disabilities, to be fully disaggregated by disability category, age when identified, race, ethnicity, languages spoken, gender and socioeconomic status in order to better understand and properly address these disparities.

- All students, including students with learning disabilities, have the right to be educated in schools that are physically safe, clean and free from environmental toxins. Through the Healthy Children Project, LDA advocates for toxin free schools.

Federal Laws Protecting the Rights of Students and Adults with Learning Disabilities

- **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act** -Section 504 is a civil rights law under the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities. Section 504 ensures that the individual with a disability has equal access to an education. The individual may receive accommodations and modifications.
- **Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)** - The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to eligible infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities.
- **Title II & III of the Americans with Disabilities Amendment Act of 2008** - The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) prohibits discrimination and ensures equal opportunity for persons with disabilities in employment, state and local government services, public accommodations (including in higher education), commercial facilities, and transportation. Title III ensures that individuals with disabilities have the opportunity to fairly compete for and pursue such opportunities by requiring testing entities to offer exams in a manner accessible to persons with disabilities.
- **Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act** - The Workforce Investment Opportunity Act is designed to help all job seekers access employment, education, training, and support services to succeed in the labor market and to match employers with the skilled workforce they need.
- **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)** - ESSA amends the Elementary and Secondary Education Act to provide funding to K-12 schools to ensure a quality public education for all students. ESSA authorizes funds for professional development, instructional materials, resources to support educational programs, and for promotion of parental involvement.

Proposed Federal Legislation Advancing LDA's Policy Priorities

- **Coronavirus Child Care and Education Relief Act** – LDA supports CCCERA's provisions that would serve individuals with learning disabilities including investments in more than \$11 billion in IDEA Part B 611 programs, \$500 million in IDEA Part C programs, and \$400 million in IDEA Part B section 619 programs and ensuring that the use of Federal education funds must remain in public schools and adhere to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act, and other civil rights laws.
- **Research Investment to Secure the Economy (RISE) Act** – LDA supports the RISE Act's provisions that serve individuals with learning disabilities. Specifically, LDA supports the RISE Act's proposed investments of \$25 billion in emergency relief for federal science and education agencies, which includes \$200 million for the Institute of Education Sciences and \$3 billion to the National Science Foundation for research colleges and universities and national laboratories to continue work on federally-funded research. LDA supports continued research and training in evidence-based evaluation methods and increased funding for research on learning disabilities.
- **Supporting Children With Disabilities During COVID-19 ACT** – LDA supports the bill's provisions that would serve individuals with learning disabilities including investments in more than \$11 billion in IDEA Part B 611 programs, \$500 million in IDEA Part C programs, \$400 million in IDEA Part B section 619 programs, and \$300 million in IDEA Part D programs. These provisions would support more than 2 million students with specific learning disabilities, the highest proportion category of disabilities under the IDEA.
- **Equal Access to Information Act of 2020** – Schools often have a difficult time evaluating and identifying English language learners who have specific learning disabilities. LDA supports ensuring that racial and ethnic factors do not create barriers to receiving a comprehensive evaluation, timely identification, evidence-based services and support, and protections under federal law including IDEA and Section 504. This bill would coordinate Federal agencies' efforts to ensure English language learners with disabilities receive services offered by these agencies.

- **IDEA Full Funding Act** -This bipartisan legislation would finally ensure Congress' commitment to fully fund the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 1975, Congress passed IDEA to ensure that every child with a disability has access to educational opportunity.
- **READ Act** - The bipartisan bill would create a grant program to replicate Pennsylvania's Dyslexia Screening and Early Literacy Intervention Program which uses evidence-based screening, evidence-based instruction, and intervention for students found to be at risk for early reading deficiencies or dyslexia. The bill would allow other states to replicate this program to best support teachers in instructing students on how to read.
- **RISE Act** - The RISE Act amends the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) to ensure that students with disabilities succeed in college. It requires colleges to accept an IEP or 504 plan as evidence of disability when a student is seeking accommodations in college.
- **The National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA)** is a conduit to take action on toxic PFAS chemicals. Spending bills for the Department of Defense and the Environmental Protection Agency will significantly increase PFAS cleanup funding by the Pentagon, direct the EPA to accelerate efforts to restrict industrial discharges of PFAS, and also direct the EPA to complete efforts to designate PFOA and PFOS as hazardous substances.