

Melody Musgrove Welcome Address

MELODY: Hi, I'm Melody Musgrove, director of the Office of Special Education Programs [OSEP] in the U.S. Department of Education. I'm really sorry I can't be there with you in person to discuss this really important topic of educating children with disabilities in charter schools. I know you're there because you really care about educating children with disabilities, and you want to do it right. As President Obama says, every child in America deserves a world-class education, and, of course, that means it doesn't matter where they're from, who their parents are, if they have a disability, or where they go to school.

When President Gerald Ford signed the law that we now call the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA] in 1975, millions of children with disabilities in our country were not allowed to attend their neighborhood school simply because they had a disability. Then it was about gaining access to education, but now it's about educational results. It's about ensuring that children with disabilities get the best possible education that allows them to be successful not just in school but also in life.

Please remember that the vast majority of students with disabilities who are eligible to receive services under IDEA actually don't have cognitive disabilities. As a matter of fact, over 70 percent of the students who are receiving special education have something like only a speech and language disorder, or only specific learning disabilities, or physical disabilities only. There's nothing that prevents them from being able to master challenging academic content at the same level as that of their grade-level peers.

Also remember that students with disabilities are general education students first. They belong with their typical peers, they want to be educated with their typical peers, and they can be educated with their typical peers. The research has taught us that children with disabilities, even those that have mild cognitive disorders, can and should be mastering grade-level content.



The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in the preamble says improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, economic self-sufficiency, and independent living for individuals with disabilities. That's why on March 2 of this year, we announced that we were suspending all verification visits that were scheduled for this fall to states where we looked primarily at compliance, but now since we're so interested in improving educational results for children with disabilities in our country, we are spending this year working with stakeholders to develop a new process of accountability in special education. We've conducted conference calls with many stakeholder groups, and we will continue to do that.

I encourage you to submit comments if you are interested in this accountability system and have some suggestions for how we might improve educational results for children with disabilities. We've set up an e-mail box. The address for that e-mail box is OSEP-RDA-Input@ed.gov. That's for results-driven accountability [RDA]. Please submit your comments and any suggestions that you have for how we could improve the accountability system for children with disabilities.

OSEP has many resources available to assist you in your efforts to improve the education of children with disabilities in your schools. I encourage you to go to our Technical Assistance and Dissemination Network's website and see the many resources that are available for you. That's www.tadnet.org. You will see the many resources that are available for you. For instance, you may see the Positive Behavior[a] Interventions and Supports [PBIS] Center. I'm sure you're familiar with PBIS, and that's one of OSEP's great investments that we've had for many years that supports over 17,000 schools across the country at implementing positive behavior[a] interventions and supports. You will also see the [National] Center [on] Appropriate Dispute Resolution in [Special] Education—CADRE—which provides support to parents and schools across our country in meeting the dispute resolution requirements in IDEA and also to assist you in resolving any kinds of complaints that you experience with parents and with others as you work with students with disabilities.

Please do visit that website, and you will see the many centers that we have that are available to assist you as you work with students with disabilities. Feel free to call on us at OSEP if we can be of assistance to you. Our website you can access through the [\[www.\]ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov) website. We have many resources that are also there in addition to the technical assistance and dissemination resources. We have regional resource centers in all the regions across the country. We also have many centers. We have a number of customer service staff in our office who are available to help you. Please feel free to call on us.

I really appreciate your interest in ensuring that we get the best possible services to students with disabilities in charter schools. Thank you, and have a great conference.