

April 24, 2017 at 4:36 pm

To Whom It May Concern:

The Education Taskforce of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities appreciates the opportunity to provide input on how the IDEA.ed.gov website can be updated to better support children with disabilities and their families, teachers, administrators, advocates, and other stakeholders. The CCD Education Task Force advocates for Federal public policy that ensures the self-determination, independence, empowerment, integration, and inclusion of children and adults with disabilities in all aspects of society.

The idea.ed.gov website has often served as a resource to parents, educators, and the advocacy community. While our comments will focus on how to improve idea.ed.gov, we urge the Department to consider how to align and streamline all of its online resources so that parents, educators, and the public can easily access information about laws impacting students with disabilities. This transparency is vital to upholding the mission and vision of IDEA.

(1) Serve as IDEA Information Hub

It is important for the public to have easily accessible information related to IDEA. One of the benefits of idea.ed.gov has been the ability to simultaneously search for key terms in the IDEA law and regulations. To build upon this functionality, the Department should consider cross referencing the following resources on the idea.ed.gov website: (1) relevant guidance, (2) Dear Colleague letters, (3) links to technical assistance & dissemination centers, (4) related IES research; (5) related information collected from the Office for Civil Rights, including findings from the Civil Rights Data Collection; and (6) links to any other relevant information. By creating a central place that stores information relevant to IDEA and by making this information searchable and accessible, the public will have the opportunity to better understand the law and its implications for children and youth.

(2) Accessibility

Translation of the idea.ed.gov website into Spanish and other languages is critical to reach the maximum number of families as possible. Additionally, USED must ensure that the content is available in read-aloud mode and is readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities consistent with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, particularly the adoption of best practices to ensure that electronic content conforms to Level A and Level AA Success Criteria and Conformance Requirements in Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0, conforms to the applicable functional performance criteria, and that all functionality is accessible either directly or by supporting the use of assistive technology.

(3) Streamline & align with other federal initiatives for maximum transparency

Historically, the Department has provided public access to many informational resources related to IDEA. Making this information publicly available is critical to high quality implementation of IDEA. In rethinking idea.ed.gov, we encourage the Department to take a critical look at how to reorganize existing resources to improve public access. For example, the Civil Rights Data Collection and findings has information that is likely relevant for audiences interested in accessing idea.ed.gov, and should be cross-referenced. The annual 618 data collection has its own home on a separate website. There is also another page that provides information on research to practice initiatives funded by OSEP, and another that shares information on IDEA annual determinations and other data displays. All of these initiatives are important and should be linked together in a more cohesive and accessible way. The public would greatly benefit from an IDEA-related website that connects each of these pages and allows users to

search for a key word to access information generated from across the Department, its various initiatives, and resource centers.

The CCD Education Taskforce appreciates the opportunity to share our views of how to improve the idea.ed.gov website. Again, we strongly encourage the Department to consider how the redesign of the idea.ed.gov website can complement, align and streamline other initiatives. Most importantly, we urge the Department to maintain transparency, quality, and timeliness in the information it provides to the public.

Sincerely,

The Advocacy Institute
American Council of the Blind
American Foundation for the Blind
American Network of Community Options and Resources
Association of University Centers on Disabilities
Autism Society
Brain Injury Association of America
Council for Learning Disabilities
Institute for Educational Leadership
Learning Disabilities Association of America
National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities
National Association of State Directors of Special Education
National Association of State Head Injury Administrators
National Center for Learning Disabilities
National Disability Rights Network
National Down Syndrome Congress
National PTA
Perkins School for the Blind
United Spinal Association