

**PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION  
ON  
EXCELLENCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION**

**TASK FORCE ON ASSESSMENT & IDENTIFICATION  
APRIL 16, 2002 // BROOKLYN, NY**

**CHAIRMAN JACK FLETCHER  
OPENING REMARKS**

GOOD MORNING. I AM JACK FLETCHER,  
CHAIRMAN OF THE ASSESSMENT AND  
IDENTIFICATION TASK FORCE OF THE PRESIDENT'S  
COMMISSION ON EXCELLENCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION.  
I WELCOME YOU TO OUR MEETING. THE FOCUS OF OUR  
HEARING TODAY IS THE IDENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN  
WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES.

BEFORE WE GET STARTED I WANT TO BRIEFLY  
DESCRIBE TO YOU THE MISSION AND ACTIVITIES OF  
THE COMMISSION.

PRESIDENT BUSH ESTABLISHED THIS COMMISSION  
LAST OCTOBER TO COLLECT INFORMATION AND TO  
STUDY ISSUES RELATED TO FEDERAL, STATE AND

LOCAL SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS. THE COMMISSION'S ULTIMATE GOAL IS TO RECOMMEND POLICIES TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES SO THAT NO CHILD WILL BE LEFT BEHIND.

THE "NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND" MESSAGE HAS BECOME A FAMILIAR AND IMPORTANT ONE. IT IS THE GUIDING PRINCIPLE OF THE NEWLY REAUTHORIZED ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION ACT. NOW, IT COMES INTO PLAY WITH THE WORK OF THIS COMMISSION. WHY? *BECAUSE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES ARE AT THE GREATEST RISK OF BEING LEFT BEHIND.*

THE COMMISSION'S WORK IS *NOT* DESIGNED TO REPLACE THE UPCOMING CONGRESSIONAL REAUTHORIZATION OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT. RATHER, THE REPORT WE PRODUCE AND ISSUE THIS SUMMER WILL NOT ONLY PROVIDE VITAL INPUT INTO THE REAUTHORIZATION PROCESS, BUT ALSO INTO THE

NATIONAL DEBATE ON HOW BEST TO EDUCATE ALL CHILDREN.

THE COMMISSION AND ITS TASK FORCES HAVE HELD HEARINGS IN HOUSTON, DENVER, DES MOINES, LOS ANGELES, AND CORAL GABLES, FL. WE HAVE LOOKED AT ISSUES SUCH AS PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, TEACHER QUALITY, ACCOUNTABILITY, RESEARCH, FUNDING, AND COST EFFECTIVENESS.

OUR TOPIC TODAY IS A VERY IMPORTANT ONE. EFFECTIVE IDENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN WITH POTENTIAL LEARNING DISABILITIES IS ONE OF THE MOST COMPLEX ISSUES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION. WHILE SOME CHILDREN ARE “OVERIDENTIFIED” OR “MISIDENTIFIED” FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES DUE TO RACIAL, CULTURALLY OR LINGUISTIC FACTORS, OTHER STUDENTS WHO NEED SERVICES ARE NOT IDENTIFIED. IN ORDER FOR OUR PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO TRULY SERVE ALL STUDENTS AND ENSURE THAT NO CHILD WILL BE LEFT BEHIND, WE HAVE TO DEVELOP BETTER METHODS OF SCREENING AND DIAGNOSING CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES.

AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS IN PARTICULAR ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE OVERIDENTIFIED WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES. FOR EXAMPLE, WHILE AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS REPRESENT 16 PERCENT OF PUBLIC SCHOOL ENROLLMENTS, THEY CONSTITUTE 21 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL ENROLLMENT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION.

HOWEVER, SOME SCHOOL SYSTEMS HAVE RECENTLY TAKEN IMPORTANT STEPS TO IMPROVE IDENTIFICATION OF STUDENTS. FOR EXAMPLE, HERE IN NEW YORK CITY, THE BOARD OF EDUCATION AND THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION REACHED AGREEMENT IN 1997 ALLOWING THE CITY'S SCHOOL SYSTEM TO SIGNIFICANTLY REDUCE THE NUMBER OF INAPPROPRIATE AND DISPROPORTIONATE REFERRALS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN, HISPANIC AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS. THE SCHOOLS DID THIS THROUGH THE INCREASED USE OF REMEDIAL AND PRE-REFERRAL INTERVENTION PROGRAMS. THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS IS AWAITING FURTHER DATA FROM THE BOARD TO CONFIRM THE SUCCESS OF THE PROGRAMS.

EDUCATORS AND PARENTS NEED TO BE AWARE AND UNDERSTAND THE RANGE OF FACTORS INFLUENCE IDENTIFICATION. THESE FACTORS INCLUDE: TEACHER TRAINING, FUNDING, PARENTS' EDUCATIONAL LEVELS, HOUSEHOLD INCOME, RACE, CLASS SIZE, THE CATEGORIES OF SERVICES AS DEFINED BY IDEA, CRIME RATES IN SCHOOLS, AND URBAN, SUBURBAN AND RURAL ENVIRONMENTS.

THIS IS AN OUTCOME-ORIENTED COMMISSION THAT IS EAGER TO HEAR FROM YOU. WE NEED YOUR SUGGESTIONS. TELL US ABOUT WHAT WORKS. WE WILL HAVE A PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD THIS AFTERNOON TO ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE A CHANCE TO PROVIDE US WITH INPUT. THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST IN OUR WORK. WE WILL NOW BEGIN TODAY'S HEARING.

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