

**PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON
EXCELLENCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION
SYSTEM ADMINISTRATION TASK FORCE
APRIL 23, 2002 // SAN DIEGO, CA**

**ADELA ACOSTA
OPENING REMARKS**

GOOD MORNING. I AM ADELA ACOSTA, CHAIR OF THE SYSTEM ADMINISTRATION TASK FORCE OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON EXCELLENCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION. I WELCOME YOU TO TODAY'S HEARING.

THE FOCUS OF OUR HEARING IS ADMINISTRATIVE BARRIERS TO EFFECTIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES. THE TASK FORCE AND ITS WITNESSES WILL EXPLORE WAYS IN WHICH WE CAN OVERCOME MANY OF THE BARRIERS THAT HINDER SPECIAL EDUCATION. THESE BARRIERS INCLUDE EXCESSIVE PAPERWORK, A FOCUS ON REGULATORY COMPLIANCE RATHER THAN ACADEMIC OUTCOMES, AND EXCESSIVE LITIGATION.

BEFORE WE BEGIN OUR HEARING, I WOULD LIKE TO BRIEFLY PROVIDE YOU WITH BACKGROUND ABOUT THE COMMISSION.

PRESIDENT BUSH ESTABLISHED THE COMMISSION LAST OCTOBER TO COLLECT INFORMATION AND TO STUDY ISSUES RELATED TO FEDERAL, STATE, AND LOCAL SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS. THE COMMISSION'S GOAL IS TO RECOMMEND POLICIES TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES SO THAT NO CHILD WILL BE LEFT BEHIND.

OUR WORK IS *NOT* DESIGNED TO REPLACE THE 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.

OVER THE PAST TWO MONTHS, THE COMMISSION AND ITS TASK FORCES HAVE HELD HEARINGS IN HOUSTON, DENVER, DES MOINES, LOS ANGELES, CORAL GABLES, NEW YORK CITY, AND NASHVILLE. THE COMMISSION HAS LOOKED AT ISSUES SUCH AS

TEACHER QUALITY, ACCOUNTABILITY, FUNDING, COST EFFECTIVENESS, PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT, IDENTIFICATION OF CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES, AND RESEARCH.

TODAY, WE TURN OUR ATTENTION TO THE ADMINISTRATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION. ANYONE REMOTELY CONNECTED WITH EDUCATION KNOWS THAT SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES ARE BURDENED WITH PAPERWORK, REGULATIONS, AND LITIGATION. WHILE ADMINISTRATIVE PROCEDURES AND “COMPLIANCE” ARE NEEDED TO GUARANTEE ALL CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES RECEIVE A FREE AND APPROPRIATE EDUCATION, PROCEDURES AND REGULATIONS MUST NOT OVERWHELM TEACHERS, CHILDREN, AND FAMILIES. INSTEAD, THEY SHOULD ENSURE THAT CHILDREN RECEIVE QUALITY SERVICES WITH *REAL* ACADEMIC OUTCOMES.

HOURS SPENT ON EXCESSIVE PAPERWORK IS A SIGNIFICANT BARRIER TO EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF EDUCATION SERVICES TO CHILDREN WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES. FIFTY-THREE PERCENT OF ALL SPECIAL

EDUCATION TEACHERS REPORT THAT ROUTINE DUTIES AND PAPERWORK INTERFERE “TO A GREAT EXTENT” WITH TEACHING. POLICY MAKERS AND REGULATORY AUTHORITIES MUST LOOK FOR NEW WAYS TO REDUCE PAPERWORK SO THAT TEACHERS CAN FOCUS ON THE MOST IMPORTANT TASK AT HAND: TEACHING CHILDREN.

PAPERWORK IS NOT THE ONLY FACTOR THAT DETRACTS FROM EFFECTIVELY SERVING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES – EXCESSIVE LITIGATION DOES, TOO. THE CURRENT DISPUTE SYSTEM SANCTIONED BY IDEA INCREASES THE CHANCES OF DUE PROCESS PROCEEDINGS AND ACTUALLY PROMOTES THE USE OF ATTORNEYS AND ADVOCATES. DISPUTE RESOLUTION IS AN ALTERNATIVE TO LITIGATION WE SHOULD EXPLORE.

WE WILL HEAR PRESENTATIONS FROM EXPERTS AND EDUCATORS ON THESE TOPICS. WE WILL ALSO HAVE A PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD THIS AFTERNOON. WHAT WE LEARN FROM ALL THESE SOURCES WILL PROVIDE US WITH THE VALUABLE INPUT WE NEED TO

DEVELOP OUR RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE
PRESIDENT.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST IN THE
COMMISSION. WE WILL NOW BEGIN TODAY'S
HEARING.

(END)