

**President's Commission on Excellence in Special Education
Finance Task Force
March 21, 2002 // Los Angeles**

**Opening Remarks
Douglas H. Gill**

GOOD MORNING. MY NAME IS DOUG GILL. I AM A MEMBER OF THE PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON EXCELLENCE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION, AND I AM STATE DIRECTOR OF SPECIAL EDUCATION FOR THE STATE OF WASHINGTON. I WELCOME YOU TO THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE COMMISSION. OUR HEARING TODAY IS LED BY THE COMMISSION'S FINANCE TASK FORCE, WHICH I CHAIR.

OUR GOAL TODAY IS TO CLOSELY EXAMINE THE COMPLEX ISSUES AND FACTORS RELATING TO THE FINANCING OF SPECIAL EDUCATION. HOWEVER, BEFORE WE GET STARTED I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE A STEP BACK AND BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE COMMISSION'S MISSION AND ACTIVITIES.

PRESIDENT BUSH ESTABLISHED THIS COMMISSION LAST OCTOBER. HIS GOAL IN CREATING THE COMMISSION WAS A SIMPLE ONE THAT CAN BE SUMMED UP IN FOUR WORDS: "NO CHILD 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 BECAUSE – AS THE PRESIDENT HAS POINTED OUT – THOSE AT THE GREATEST RISK OF BEING LEFT BEHIND ARE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.

IN OUR WORK, THE COMMISSION WILL USE THE FOUR FOUNDATION PRINCIPLES OF THE “THE NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ACT.” THOSE PRINCIPLES ARE:

1. ACCOUNTABILITY FOR RESULTS;
2. FLEXIBILITY AND LOCAL CONTROL;
3. EXPANDED OPTIONS FOR PARENTS; AND,
4. USE OF EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES BASED ON GOOD SCIENCE.

THE COMMISSION IS HOLDING HEARINGS AND COLLECTING INFORMATION TO STUDY ISSUES RELATED TO FEDERAL, STATE AND LOCAL SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS. ULTIMATELY, WE WILL RECOMMEND POLICIES TO IMPROVE THE EDUCATIONAL PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES. 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 PRESIDENT HAS CHARGED US WITH PROVIDING FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS IN THE FOLLOWING NINE AREAS:

1. COST-EFFECTIVENESS.
2. IMPROVING RESULTS.
3. RESEARCH.
4. EARLY INTERVENTION.
5. FUNDING.
6. TEACHER QUALITY AND STUDENT ACCOUNTABILITY.
7. REGULATIONS AND RED TAPE.
8. MODELS.
9. FEDERAL VERSUS LOCAL FUNDING.

TODAY WE WILL EXAMINE THREE OF THOSE AREAS:
FUNDING, FINANCING, AND COST-EFFECTIVENESS. MORE
SPECIFICALLY, WE WILL LOOK AT:

1. HOW SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDS ARE SPENT. WHILE THE ADMINISTRATION IS FUNDING SPECIAL EDUCATION AT RECORD LEVELS, IT RECOGNIZES THAT MONEY WON'T SOLVE ALL THE PROBLEMS FACING SPECIAL EDUCATION TODAY. THAT MEANS WE NEED TO LOOK AT FRESH IDEAS ABOUT HOW WE CAN BETTER SPEND FEDERAL RESOURCES TO IMPROVE SPECIAL EDUCATION.
2. THE APPROPRIATE ROLE OF THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IN SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMMING AND FUNDING.
3. “COST DRIVERS.” WE NEED TO LOOK CLOSELY AT THE FACTORS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE GROWING COSTS OF PROVIDING SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES.
4. FEDERAL AND STATE REGULATIONS AND RED TAPE. WE NEED TO REVIEW THE IMPACT OF REGULATIONS AND RED TAPE – NOT ONLY FOR THEIR POTENTIAL TO INCREASE COSTS, BUT ALSO BECAUSE THEY HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO OBSTRUCT THE ABILITY OF SCHOOLS TO BETTER SERVE CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.
5. THE IMPACT OF FEDERAL IDEA FUNDS ON STATE AND LOCAL EDUCATION SPENDING.

THE COMMISSION NEEDS YOUR SUGGESTIONS TO HELP US TACKLE THESE ISSUES. TELL US ABOUT WHAT WORKS. SHOW US THE MODELS. WE WILL HAVE A PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD THIS AFTERNOON TO ENSURE THAT EVERYONE HAS A CHANCE TO PROVIDE US WITH INPUT.

AS WE EXAMINE THESE ISSUES, I HOPE WE CAN BEAR IN MIND THAT OUR GOAL IS TO DO WHAT'S BEST FOR CHILDREN – NOT WHAT'S BEST FOR “THE SYSTEM” OR WHAT'S BEST FOR ONE GOVERNMENT AGENCY OR ANOTHER. AS SECRETARY PAIGE SAID AT THE COMMISSION'S FIRST HEARING JANUARY, “THE WAY WE EDUCATE OUR CHILDREN REVEALS OUR CHARACTER. LET'S SHOW STRONG CHARACTER. NO AMERICAN SHOULD BE SATISFIED UNTIL EVERY AMERICAN CHILD IS LEARNING.”

THANK YOU FOR YOUR INTEREST IN THIS COMMISSION. WE APPRECIATE EVERYONE WHO HAS TAKEN THE TIME TO ATTEND OUR MEETING. WE WILL NOW OPEN TODAY'S HEARING OF THE FINANCE TASK FORCE.

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