



December 15, 2008

Congressman John Yarmuth
435 Cannon House Office Building
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
FAX 202-225-5776

Dear Representative Yarmuth:

On behalf of the Higher Education Consortium for Special Education (HECSE), it is my great pleasure to inform you that the Consortium has selected you for our 2009 HECSE National Leadership Award. We hope your schedule will permit you to join us for lunch at our annual meeting in Washington on Friday, January 30, 2009 so that we may present you with this award. Our luncheon is scheduled from 12:30 – 1:30. We plan to meet on Capitol Hill that day to facilitate your participation.

HECSE represents more than 60 leading universities that prepare special education teachers, teacher educators, and disability researchers. The University of Kentucky has long been a leading HECSE member. For more than 35 years, the Consortium has worked across institutions and with other groups to improve the quality of special education in America's schools.

HECSE members deeply appreciate your advocacy on behalf of students with disabilities and their teachers, your innovative thinking, and your determined action. As a first-term member of Congress you demonstrated remarkable leadership by drafting and enacting a new program designed to improve the quality of preparation general education teachers receive: *The Teach to Reach Grants in the Higher Education Opportunity Act*. Clearly, data reported as a result of *No Child Left Behind* provides powerful evidence that students with disabilities continue to struggle in America's schools. Because their academic test scores are now reported as a separate subgroup, educators, families, policy makers, and other concerned citizens recognize how much work is still needed to improve the quality of education received by students with disabilities and other low-achieving students..

As you know, more than 80% of all students with disabilities spend the majority of their learning time in general education classrooms. This means that virtually *every* teacher must be prepared to address unique learning and behavior challenges. In study after study general educators report feeling inadequately prepared for this complex responsibility.

The *Teach to Reach Grants* provide a clear vision for general educator teacher preparation that will impact children with disabilities. This important legislation will help ensure new general educators develop critical evidence-based teaching and management skills and, as a result, millions of children and youth with disabilities and other low-achieving students will be the beneficiaries. HECSE recognizes the significant impact you've had during your brief tenure in the House of Representatives, sincerely commends you for these efforts, and hopes you will continue to lead the effort to make sure that *all* students with disabilities have teachers who have the knowledge and skills needed to meet their needs.

On behalf of our membership, I hope that you will be able to attend our luncheon and accept our thanks and our award. Please know that we would be happy to work with you to find another time during our meeting (8:30-5:00 p.m.) if lunch is not convenient for you. If you need any additional information, please contact me at 785-864-0545 or chrisswt@ku.edu or Jane West, HECSE's education consultant, at 202-293-2450 or jwest@aacte.org.

With appreciation and best regards,

Chriss Walther-Thomas, Ph.D.
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University of Kansas
HECSE President