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Working Together to Make a Difference

The Learning Disabilities Association (LDA) of America's goals, outlined below, align with the Obama-Biden "Plan to Empower Americans with Disabilities" by enabling substantial public dollar savings while providing Americans with disabilities the educational opportunities they need to succeed, helping to create an understanding of learning disabilities, ending discrimination and promoting equal opportunity, increasing the employment rate of workers with disabilities and supporting independent, community-based living for Americans with disabilities. LDA looks forward to working with your transition team to examine new ways to increase educational and job opportunities, so that these Americans can become more productive contributors to our nation's economic growth.

The LDA Plan

LDA believes the United States should, and can, reap the economic and social benefits of being a world leader in empowering people with learning disabilities to take full advantage of their talents, paving the way for them to become independent, beneficial, integrated members of society. To that end, LDA of America supports the following plan:

A long term focus on prevention of learning disabilities rather than simply intervening to deal with their impact by, among other measures:

- Aggressive investigation into the role and remediation of environmental toxins and other environmental impacts in the development of learning and other cognitive disabilities and a delay in the creation and use of new chemical compounds until they are tested for human and environmental impacts

Refocusing in-school efforts in order to advance students with learning disabilities

- Early in-school identification of children with learning disabilities including a standardized comprehensive evaluation of the child's ability and preferred learning style to allow the child maximum opportunity to "learn how to learn".
- Placement in the least restrictive environment in the school setting where the child can best benefit from instruction, with exposure to the general education curriculum.
- Differentiated instruction using principles of universal design for learning (UDL) which will benefit all students.

Transitioning students with learning disabilities and integrating adults with learning disabilities into the US Workforce

By 2015, demographic imperatives will begin to affect a continuing decline in the size of the US workforce just as demand from US employers begins to grow. Therefore, the US must ensure new entrants into our workforce and should:



- Restore to prominence the value of career, technical and vocational education as a pathway to high school graduation and high skill/high wage/good benefit jobs as technicians, plumbers, carpenters, machinists and etc.
- Develop a comprehensive program for the transition of students with learning disabilities to work in such desirable technical careers or into post-secondary education “career pathways”.
- Immediately develop efforts targeting undereducated and underemployed adults with learning disabilities for such technical careers and other employment opportunities, including by highlighting the use of technology as an accommodation.
- Develop of a seamless and systemic model to address the impact of learning disabilities across a career and an individual’s lifespan.

LDA

Since 1967 The Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) has been the leading national grassroots non-profit organization advocating for children and adults with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD). LDA envisions a world in which all individuals with learning disabilities are educated, trained in job skills and empowered to become employed and contributing citizens of their community and of the nation. An estimated 15 percent of the U.S. population, or one in seven Americans, has some type of learning disability. More than 6 percent of school-age children, almost 3 million students, are receiving special education services because of learning disabilities. For many people with SLD failure to succeed in school and poor social skills can result in chronic unemployment or underemployment.

SLD is often referred to as an invisible disability. A learning disability is a neurological condition that can impact long and/or short memory, attention, reasoning, auditory or visual processing and may selectively interfere with a person’s ability to store, process, organize or produce information. Learning disabilities can affect one’s ability in reading, written or spoken language, spelling, math and social skills. Most individuals are identified as having a learning disability while in the public school system. However, many others are not identified, do not receive services and never know that their lack of success in school, work, community and family life is due to a learning disability.

Grim Statistics

Despite improved educational opportunities, continuing grim statistics demonstrate the substantive impact learning disabilities have on individuals across their lifespan and that too many Americans with SLD are not prepared to participate in a 21st century economy.

For instance:

- High school drop out rates are at an all time high: 38.7% of students with SLD drop out of high school – twice the rate of their non LD peers. Only 51% of students with SLD graduate from high school with a diploma.
- 66% of high-school graduates with learning disabilities were rated “not qualified” to enter a four year college, compared to 37% of non-disabled graduates.
- Only 13% of students with learning disabilities (compared to 53% of students in the general education population) have attended a 4-year post-secondary school program within two years of leaving high school.
- 62% of students with learning disabilities were unemployed one year after graduating from high school.
- 50% of females with learning disabilities will be mothers (many of them single) within one year of leaving school. Difficulty with reading comprehension and following a



systematic birth control plan are among the top reasons teenage girls identified for NOT using birth control aids.

- 31% of students with learning disabilities will be arrested 3-5 years out of high school; the U.S. Office of Juvenile Justice found that “LD youth were twice as likely to be judged delinquent by the courts as non-LD youth”
- 44% of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (welfare) population was found to have a learning disability. Substance addictions and learning disabilities are the most common impediments preventing welfare clients from attaining and maintaining employment.
- 60% of adults with severe literacy problems have undetected or untreated learning disabilities.
- 65.4% of households in which family members report having specific learning disabilities have an annual income of less than \$25,000 as compared with 38.8% of the general population.

To reverse these grim statistics and the systemic impact of learning disabilities on the lives of many individuals, the comprehensive approach we have suggested above, with both short term and long term strategies, will be required. The fiscal impact of improving the statistics in only one of the listed categories is staggering. For instance, The Silent Epidemic (www.silentepidemic.org) estimates that the government would reap \$45 billion in extra tax revenues and reduced costs in public health, crime, and welfare payments if the number of high school dropouts among 20-year olds in the U.S. today, which numbers more than 700,000 individuals – and a disproportionate number of individuals with learning disabilities, were cut in half.