

Governors Adopt New Special Education Policy

BOISE - The nation's governors voted to adopt an historic joint policy in support of quality education for all students, including students with disabilities, during the closing plenary session of the NGA Annual Meeting in Boise, Idaho. The new IDEA Policy (HR-23) was developed in preparation for the upcoming reauthorization effort.

Developed jointly with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the IDEA policy marks the first time in NGA history that a policy that has been developed in conjunction with another major state organization. HR-23 directs federal support to the education of children with disabilities as well as enhances the opportunity for students with disabilities to be prepared for, and participate in the 21st Century economy.

"The upcoming reauthorization of IDEA provides an opportunity to refocus federal policy and strengthen the commitment to children with disabilities," said NGA co-lead governor on K-12 Education Mississippi Gov. Ronnie Musgrove. "The fact that this policy marks the first time in NGA history that the association has adopted a joint policy reflects, the critical nature of this issue and the changing nature of education in America."

The joint policy was developed by a working group of governors and chief state school officers led by Gov. Musgrove and Suellen K. Reed of Indiana, president of CCSSO.

The policy calls for:

- Congress and the Administration to meet its full mandatory funding commitment of 40 percent of the average per pupil expenditure. (Currently the federal government provides less than 17 percent.) Additionally, the federal government should provide sufficient flexibility in the use of funds to allow states and school districts to implement the new IDEA in concert with the No Child Left Behind Act and state reform measures.
- The primary goal of the new IDEA must be to improve educational outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Procedural protections to be retained, but paperwork associated with them should be streamlined. Increased emphasis must be placed on teaching and learning and closing the achievement gap between children with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.
- Improved outcomes are dependent upon a unified system of quality services and accountability. Quality services must be provided to all children. General education and special education must be flexible and responsive to individual needs. All teachers must be prepared to teach diverse learners and no child should be excluded from the accountability systems.

The Council of Chief State School Officers are expected to adopt the policy later this month.