

Bob Dole



NEWS

U.S. SENATOR FOR KANSAS

FROM:

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SENATE ADOPTS DOLE AMENDMENT TO GOALS 2000 BILL STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES SHOULDN'T MISS THE BUS IN SCHOOL REFORM

Washington -- Senator Bob Dole issued the following statement today on his amendment to require a study of GOALS 2000 and students with disabilities:

I am pleased that my amendment which directs the Secretary of Education to conduct a study of how well students with disabilities are served by the GOALS 2000 school reforms has been included among the managers amendments. The National Academy of Sciences was selected as the contractor because of its reputation for both independence and excellence.

There are three reasons why this study is important and, in my view, way overdue.

First, I am concerned that students with disabilities will miss the bus when it comes to school reform. Whether one agrees with GOALS 2000 or not, the national debate over education sparked by the 1983 report A Nation At Risk has been important and sometimes riveting.

Regrettably, in the past 11 years there has been little attention to students with disabilities -- although they comprise 10 percent of all students and are among those most in need of education reforms. For example, GOALS 2000 aims for a 90-percent high school graduation rate. Even without reform, the graduation rate among nondisabled students has been growing, to 83 percent today. But among students with disabilities, those graduating with either a diploma or a certificate dropped from 60 percent to 52 percent between 1986 and 1989.

I know that the bill contains many references to students with disabilities, and I commend the Committee on Labor and Human Resources for its strong report language in this regard. But neither bill or report language can make up in one fell swoop for a decade of neglect. At the very least, I hope this study will jump start attention to this issue.

Second, there are many unanswered questions about GOALS 2000 school reforms and students with disabilities. Although I do not intend or expect this study to rewrite GOALS 2000, we must be sure that goals, standards, and assessments work for students with disabilities, not against them by promoting their exclusion.

Lastly, I hope that this study will also provide ideas for the upcoming reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and help spur a badly needed, careful review of how well this Nation educates its students with disabilities and the challenges faced by the states and by schools in serving such students.

When it comes to disability, we live in a new world. In 1990, Congress enacted the Americans with Disabilities Act, determined to make full participation by people with disabilities our national policy, and committed to the proposition that we can create a fully accessible society. I expect this study to be carried out in that spirit.

In closing, almost 25 years ago, in November 1969, I gave my first speech to this body on the education of students with disabilities. At that time I said, "in our nation, education has become the major route to full participation in society. [But] the simple stark truth is this: we have not committed ourselves to the concept of providing equality of educational opportunity. . . ." Since then, we have worked hard to close the opportunity gap. This study will help ensure we keep moving forward.