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Bureau of Special Education FY'17 Memo #29

Date: March 7, 2017

To: Superintendents
Special Education Directors

From: Office of the Commissioner of Education

Division of Educational Improvement
Bureau of Special Education

RE: Preschool children with disabilities access to inclusive high-quality early childhood programs where they are provided with individualized and appropriate supports to enable them to meet high expectations

The New Hampshire Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education would like to inform you that on January 9, 2017 the U.S. Department of Education (ED) released a "Dear Colleague Letter" that reaffirms the position that all young children with disabilities should have access to inclusive, high-quality early childhood programs where they are provided with individualized and appropriate supports to enable them to meet high expectations. As noted in the letter: "Despite the expansion of early childhood programs, there has not yet been a proportionate expansion of inclusive early learning opportunities for young children with disabilities. Given this concern and the ED-HHS policy statement on early childhood inclusion, the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) is updating the February 29, 2012, Dear Colleague Letter (DCL) to reaffirm our commitment to inclusive preschool education programs for children with disabilities and to reiterate that the least restrictive environment (LRE) requirements in section 612(a)(5) of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA or Act) are fully applicable to the placement of preschool children with disabilities."

<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/idea/memosdcltrs/preschool-lre-dcl-1-10-17.pdf>

The letter references the policy statement on inclusion of children with disabilities in early childhood programs (<https://www2.ed.gov/policy/speced/guid/earlylearning/joint-statement-full-text.pdf>). Key sections described in the letter include:

- Key Statutory and Regulatory Requirements
- Preschool Placement Options
- Reporting Educational Environments Data for Preschool Children with Disabilities
- Use of IDEA Part B Funds for Preschool Children with Disabilities
- Conclusions

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A resource for more information on settings for Preschool Children with Disabilities is the Race2K website <http://nhssect.org/lre/>. Race2K is funded by the NH Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education to provide technical assistance around LRE for preschool children. Race2K offers support to districts in reviewing program models and with data reporting requirements.

For additional questions, contact the NH Department of Education Preschool Special Education Coordinator, Ruth Littlefield at ruth.littlefield@doe.nh.gov.