**Policy Recommendations for the Reauthorization of the
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)
July 2002**

<u>Introduction</u>
The Learning Disability Roundtable is comprised of ten national organizations. Together, we represent over 350,000 parents, teachers, professionals and related services personnel who care deeply about how students with Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD) are identified and served in our public schools. We support Congress' effort to improve the IDEA while maintaining access to a free, appropriate, public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). Whether students have access to the general education curriculum in the regular education classroom, or in another environment, the procedural safeguards of IDEA must protect students with SLD.

SLD is a neurological condition, which can cause unexpectedly low performance in a few specific areas or skills within an individual at different times and in different environments across the life span. Low achievement in all areas does not indicate SLD. Keys to success for students with SLD include the procedural safeguards of IDEA, coupled with the active participation and collaboration among their parents and the professionals who serve them. Professionals must be given the necessary training and support to provide the high quality instruction that will ensure success through positive educational outcomes. Adequate funding to conduct research and validate practices, disseminate information, provide training and technical assistance and collect data to ensure better academic outcomes for students must be available through Part D of the Act. We urge you to consider the following policy recommendations.

<u>Identification</u>

- **The statutory definition of SLD should be maintained in IDEA.**

- **Section 614 (b) of IDEA-97, should be maintained**. That section states, "In conducting the evaluation, the local educational agency shall not use any single procedure as the sole criterion for determining whether a child is a child with a disability."

- **All preschoolers should be screened to assess early language and reading skill development just as they are for vision and hearing**. According to a report of the National Institutes of Health, 80% of students in the SLD category have their primary problem in the area of reading. NIH also reports that 75% of children with reading difficulties who are not identified by age 9 will still have poor reading skills at grade 12.

- **Preschool and kindergarten programs should be required to provide targeted early instruction to all children to minimize any risks for reading failure**. Early intervention for language problems may minimize later difficulty in academic, behavioral and social skills.

- **IQ-Achievement discrepancy formulae should not be used to determine eligibility for students with learning disabilities.**

- **Identification should include a student-centered, comprehensive evaluation and problem solving process by an inter-disciplinary team** that ensures students who have a learning disability are efficiently identified and receive services in a timely manner.

- **Students must be evaluated on an individual basis** and assessed for intra-individual differences in the seven domains that comprise the definition of SLD in the law -- listening, thinking, speaking, reading, writing, spelling, and mathematical calculation.

- **All assessments must be culturally and linguistically unbiased**.

- **Identification must be documented by systemic assessments and reporting**, appropriate regular education interventions, high quality instruction, administrative and other support services for all professionals.

- **New methods for identifying students with SLD must be piloted in classroom settings, and demonstrated through data-based analysis to improve educational outcomes prior to widespread adoption.**

- **Information on existing methods for identifying students with SLD must be validated and disseminated as soon as possible**.

Eligibility

- **Eligibility decisions must draw from information collected from a comprehensive individual evaluation using multiple methods including clinical judgement and other sources of information**.

- **Eligibility decisions must be made through an inter-disciplinary team**, be student-centered and informed by appropriate data, and based on student needs and strengths.

- **Eligibility must ensure a student with SLD has access to different levels of special education and related services at various times during the school experience**.

Personnel Preparation

- **Statutory language should index Part D funding based on Part B, Preschool and Part C formula programs**. We support funding for Part D equal to 10% of the funding for Parts B and C.

- **Professional development must be provided in ways that recognize how adults acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes.**

- **Training and technical assistance must develop competencies for high quality instruction** by general and special education teachers, instructional leadership by administrators, and effective collaboration by related and support services personnel.

- **Professional development must encourage collaboration among professional personnel** and implementation of scientific, research-based promising practices for assessment and intervention.

The organizations participating in the Learning Disabilities Roundtable consists of the following:

- Association for Higher Education and Disability, AHEAD (www.ahead.org)

- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, ASHA (www.asha.org)

- Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Communicative Disabilities and Deafness, DCDD (www.gsu.edu/~wwwdhh)

- Council for Exceptional Children's Division for Learning Disabilities, DLD (www.TeachingLD.org)

- Council for Learning Disabilities, CLD (www.cldinternational.org)

- Learning Disabilities Association of America, LDA (www.ldaamerica.org)

- International Dyslexia Association, IDA (www.interdys.org)

- International Reading Association, IRA (www.ira.org)

- National Association of School Psychologists, NASP (www.nasponline.org)

- National Center for Learning Disabilities, NCLD (www.LD.org)