110TH CONGRESS 1ST SESSION H.R. 2609

To require the establishment of a task force to identify and disseminate evidence-based educational strategies and promising best practices to improve the quality of learning for individuals with autism in grades K-12.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

JUNE 7, 2007

Mr. YARMUTH introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Education and Labor

A BILL

- To require the establishment of a task force to identify and disseminate evidence-based educational strategies and promising best practices to improve the quality of learning for individuals with autism in grades K-12.
 - 1 Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-
 - 2 tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

3 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

4 This Act may be cited as the "Empowering Children

5 with Autism through Education Act of 2007".

6 SEC. 2. FINDINGS.

7 Congress finds the following:

1 (1) Autism is widely recognized as an urgent 2 national healthcare crisis. According to the Centers 3 for Disease Control and Prevention, the prevalence 4 rate of autism is 0.75 percent, or one in every 150 5 children born today.

6 (2) Based on statistics from the Department of 7 Education and other governmental agencies, autism 8 is growing at the rate of ten to 17 percent per year. 9 At this rate, the estimates of the prevalence of au-10 tism could reach 4,000,000 Americans in the next 11 decade.

(3) While no known cure for autism exists, the
general agreement is that early diagnosis followed by
appropriate intervention can improve outcomes for
later years for most children with autism.

16 (4) The National Council on Disability reported 17 that students with autism should be provided with 18 the opportunities and encouragement necessary to 19 achieve the same general outcomes that are viewed 20 as essential for all students. However, the special 21 characteristics of students with autism indicate cer-22 tain outcomes that require increased emphasis. In 23 particular, educational programs for these individ-24 uals should include as objectives the development of social competence and independence in the perform ance of life skills.

(5) The limited access to successful evidence-3 4 based services for children with autism is a major 5 impediment to the implementation of quality services 6 in public schools. Without these programs, successful 7 interventions are not provided as part of a child's 8 Individualized Education Program (IEP). As a re-9 sult, individuals and families who wish to access 10 services are often only able to do so through incur-11 ring significant non-reimbursable costs.

12 (6) The Individuals with Disabilities Education 13 Act (IDEA) guarantees a continuum of education 14 and service options in the least restrictive environ-15 ment for students with disabilities. However, meet-16 ing these requirements is challenging because many 17 regular educators do not have education or practical 18 experience with instruction of children with autism, 19 and even experienced special education teachers may 20 need additional preparation to work effectively with 21 students who have autism.

22 SEC. 3. DEFINITIONS.

23 In this Act:

24 (1) AUTISM.—The term "autism" means an au25 tism spectrum disorder or a related developmental

disability that is the result of a neurological disorder
 affecting the normal functioning of the brain and
 impacting development in the areas of social inter action and communication skills.

5 (2) COST-EFFECTIVENESS.—The term "cost-ef6 fectiveness" describes an alternative that effectively
7 balances costs and benefits delivering maximum ben8 efits for the investment costs.

9 (3) EVIDENCE-BASED.—The term "evidence-10 based" means research that applies rigorous, sys-11 tematic, and objective procedures to obtain valid 12 knowledge relevant to autism instruction, and in-13 cludes research that employs experimental, quasi-ex-14 perimental, and qualitative research methods involv-15 ing rigorous data analyses that are adequate to test 16 the stated hypotheses and justify the general conclu-17 sions drawn.

18 (4) INTERVENTION.—The term "intervention"
19 means the application of a structured, individualized
20 approach to skill-development for children with au21 tism.

(5) LEARNING MODELS.—The term "learning
models" means any complimentary learning techniques designed to improve classroom learning for

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1	students with autism, incorporating curricula,
2	courses, lessons, books, and workbooks.
3	(6) Professional development needs.—
4	The term "professional development needs" means
5	job-embedded, ongoing professional development that
6	helps teachers, administrators, and school leaders
7	identify the potential indicators of autism, and im-
8	plement proven strategies to improve the quality of
9	learning for individuals with autism.
10	(7) PROMISING BEST PRACTICES.—The term
11	"promising best practices" means any technique,
12	method, process, activity, incentive, or reward with
13	demonstrated success in the learning environment.
14	(8) SERVICES.—The term "services" means any
15	complementary interventions or therapies done on an
16	individual basis or integrated into an educational
17	program, in an effort to help increase communica-
18	tion skills, develop social interaction, promote pro-so-
19	cial behavior, increase academic achievement, and
20	provide a sense of accomplishment.
21	(9) STATE.—The term "State" means any of
22	the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto
23	Rico.
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24 (10) TASK FORCE.—The term "Task Force"25 means the Empowering Children with Autism

through Education Task Force established by the
 Secretary of Education under section 4(a).

3 SEC. 4. ESTABLISHMENT OF TASK FORCE.

4 (a) ESTABLISHMENT.—Not later than 90 days after
5 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of
6 Education shall establish a task force to be known as the
7 Empowering Children with Autism through Education
8 Task Force.

9 (b) PURPOSE.—The purpose of the Task Force is to 10 identify and disseminate evidence-based educational strat-11 egies and promising best practices to improve the quality 12 of learning for individuals with autism in grades K–12, 13 including the following:

14 (1) Learning models, interventions, and services
15 that demonstrate improvements in reading, writing,
16 and math proficiency for individuals with autism.

17 (2) The cost-effectiveness of these learning
18 models, interventions, and services, and their appli19 cability for local education agencies.

20 (3) Professional development needs of educators21 who serve individuals with autism.

(4) Methods for incorporating State-, local- and
community-based programs and services into the
classroom to provide comprehensive support for individuals with autism.

(5) Identification of barriers to successful im plementation of programs and services related to the
 education of and provision of services to children
 with autism and recommendations to address those
 barriers.

6 (6) Dissemination of findings to Congress, all
7 relevant agencies, and States and United States ter8 ritories to improve the quality of learning for indi9 viduals with autism.

10 SEC. 5. MEMBERSHIP OF TASK FORCE.

(a) COMPOSITION.—The Task Force shall be composed of not fewer than 20 members who meet quarterly,
of whom—

14 (1) four shall be appointed by the Secretary of15 Education;

16 (2) four shall be appointed by the Secretary of
17 Education from among persons recommended by the
18 National Institutes of Health;

19 (3) four shall be appointed by the Secretary of
20 Education from among persons recommended by the
21 National Council on Disability;

(4) four shall be appointed by the Secretary of
Education from among persons recommended by organizations that advocate for individuals with autism
and their families; and

(5) four shall be appointed by the Secretary of
 Education from among persons recommended by
 State education agencies to represent school dis tricts.

5 (b) EXPERTISE.—The Secretary shall ensure that the6 Task Force includes at minimum—

7 (1) special education professionals with exper8 tise in autism, general education teachers, and
9 teachers with experience developing and imple10 menting classroom learning models for students with
11 autism;

12 (2) healthcare providers with expertise in treat13 ing children with autism, including at least one
14 speech language pathologist;

(3) individuals with autism, families affected by
autism, and members of organizations that advocate
for individuals with autism and their families, whose
representation on the Task Force shall not be less
than one-fourth of all members; and

20 (4) health or education economists or other in21 dividuals with expertise in cost-benefit analysis and
22 health or education policy.

23 SEC. 6. REPORTING REQUIREMENTS.

24 (a) SUBMISSION.—

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(1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 27 months
 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Task
 Force shall submit to Congress, the Secretary of
 Education, and the National Institutes of Health a
 report detailing its findings under section 4(b).

6 (2) GUIDANCE TO STATES.—Not later than 27 7 months after the date of the enactment of this Act. 8 the Secretary of Education, in conjunction with the 9 heads of relevant agencies, shall disseminate to the 10 relevant departments of each State and of United 11 States Virgin Islands, Guam, American Samoa, and 12 the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands 13 the report of the Task Force under paragraph (1) 14 with the purpose of providing practical guidance to 15 improve the quality of learning for individuals with 16 autism in grades K-12.

17 (b) CONTENTS OF REPORT.—The report submitted18 by the Task Force under subsection (a)(1) shall include—

(1) measures taken to identify evidence-based
learning models, interventions and services, and
promising best practices, for improving the quality
of learning for individuals with autism in grades K12, including steps taken to ensure the participation
of individuals with autism, their families, and their
advocates;

1	(2) recommendations of learning models, inter-
2	ventions, services, and promising best practices most
3	applicable, cost-effective, and likely to raise pro-
4	ficiency in reading, writing, and math for individuals
5	with autism in grades K–12;
6	(3) assessment of existing professional develop-
7	ment programs for educators who work with stu-
8	dents with autism, and recommendations for expand-
9	ing professional development programs to meet the
10	growing need for qualified educators specializing in
11	classroom instruction for individuals with autism in
12	grades K–12, including—
13	(A) institutional limitations;
14	(B) considerations of existing continuing
15	education or professional development require-
16	ments;
17	(C) considerations of costs to educators as-
18	sociated with professional development; and
19	(D) quantitative analysis of resources
20	needed for the establishment of State autism
21	plans, provisions for professional development,
22	and the integration of community services; and
23	(4) overview of the States' and local school dis-
24	tricts' capacity to overcome barriers to successful de-
25	velopment, enhancement and implementation of pro-

1	grams and services for improving the quality of edu-
2	cation for individuals with autism in grades K–12,
3	including—
4	(A) school-, district-, and State-wide insti-
5	tutional limitations;
6	(B) categorical comparisons between re-
7	gions, urban and rural areas, socio-economic
8	groups, and ethnic groups; and
9	(C) quantitative analysis of resources need-
10	ed for the establishment of district-wide autism
11	plans, the purchase of new learning materials,
12	increased performance on State assessments,
13	improved graduation rates, and the implementa-
14	tion of learning models, interventions, services,
15	and promising best practices most likely to
16	raise proficiency in reading, writing, and math
17	for individuals with autism in grades K–12.

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