

# A Shared Responsibility

By Michael K. Yudin



**Michael K. Yudin** is the assistant secretary for special education and rehabilitative services and in that capacity leads the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) at the U.S. Department of Education. The president nominated Yudin for that position in July 2013, and the U.S. Senate confirmed his nomination on June 2, 2015. Yudin has been with the Department of Education since 2010, serving the secretary of education in a number of capacities dedicated to improving opportunities for all students. Yudin served as acting assistant secretary of OSERS from August 2012 to February 2015, leading the office in its mission to support full integration and participation in society of people with disabilities by promoting inclusion, ensuring equity, and creating opportunities for them from cradle through career. He also served as acting assistant secretary and principal deputy assistant secretary of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE) from June 2010 to July 2012. There he helped lead the formulation and development of policy designed to promote academic excellence and ensure equitable opportunities for educationally disadvantaged students in K-12 education.

Approximately 50 years ago, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed into law the original Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, ensuring children from disadvantaged backgrounds had the same kinds of educational opportunities as their more affluent peers. And when he signed that law, he said he believed that no law he had signed or will ever sign will mean more to the future of America. He set full educational opportunity as our first national goal.

In 1975, Congress passed what is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), guaranteeing to all children with disabilities a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.

It is clear that we have made significant progress in our efforts to advance the inclusion of children with disabilities in our schools and communities. Our nation stands on the shoulders of our teachers, our school leaders, and our families. Working together they have raised expectations, helping children with disabilities learn more and develop their skills beyond what was thought possible.

Together, both ESEA and IDEA have led to improved access, accountability, and achievement for children with disabilities. As classrooms become more inclusive, technology advances, and research tells us how to provide evidence-based instruction and interventions to support children with disabilities in the classroom, states and school districts can now focus on improving performance rather than just focusing on mere compliance with the law.

And, as a country, we've made tremendous progress over the last few years alone. Last year, we announced the highest graduation rate we've ever had as a nation—82 percent. This progress was driven in no small part by the significant reductions in the dropout rate among African American, Latino, and low-income students. We have seen a million more African American and

Latino students in college since President Obama took office. Millions more students now have access to higher education and access to high-quality preschool. And data suggests that the most recent college graduating class was not only the largest class ever but also the most diverse.

Nevertheless, significant challenges remain. Children with disabilities, including children who are deaf or hard of hearing, stand far behind their peers in almost every indicator of student achievement. Unfortunately, too many children with disabilities simply do not have opportunities to access and succeed in coursework necessary for college and career. Highly effective special education teachers are in short supply and high demand. And children with disabilities are more than twice as likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than students without disabilities.

For children who are deaf or hard of hearing, this situation is compounded by the lack of attention to individual student educational and social needs within schools and districts, the high cost of linguistic and communication access, and the limited school and community resources. These children all too often sit alone in the classroom—they are not “included” in the classroom academic and social interactions. Consequently, they struggle to learn key concepts. Research has shown that students who are deaf or hard of hearing achieve lower levels of reading and leave school with a typical reading delay of at least five years. With inadequate linguistic and communication access, inadequate instruction, and low expectations by unprepared teachers and faculty, students who are deaf or hard of hearing, even with normal or above-average potential, fall far behind their hearing classmates in academic achievement at all grade levels and at the postsecondary level.

How do we close this opportunity gap in academic achievement and ensure children who are deaf or hard of hearing have the skills necessary to compete in the 21<sup>st</sup> century knowledge-based economy? We know from 40 years of research that

children with disabilities do better when they are held to high expectations and have access to the general education curriculum. To be clear, that curriculum is the same curriculum as for nondisabled children and is based on a state's academic content standards for the grade in which a child is enrolled. We know that children with disabilities, including those who struggle in reading and math, can successfully learn grade-level content and make significant academic progress when appropriate instruction, services, and supports are provided. Therefore, to make certain that children with disabilities are held to high expectations and have meaningful access to a state's academic content standards, the special education and related services, supplementary aids and services, and other supports in a child's Individualized Education Program (IEP) must be designed to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum based on the state's academic content standards for the grade in which the child is enrolled.

It is incumbent upon all of us to ensure all children, regardless of zip code, race or ethnicity, income status, or ability, have the opportunity to graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and career. There is no single system or entity responsible for providing all of the necessary supports that children and youth need, including those who are deaf or hard of hearing. Strengthening linkages between general and special education, preschool and elementary education, and secondary and postsecondary education are the critical first

steps. Ultimately, cross-agency collaboration is necessary—both within and across child- and adult-service system at the federal, state, and local levels—to ensure children with disabilities receive the instruction, the special education and related services, the supplementary aids and services, and other supports necessary to meet grade-level content standards and graduate from high school college and career ready.

As you may know, President Obama recently signed the Every Student Succeeds Act, the latest reauthorization of ESEA, into law. He did so because he believes that not only does it build on the civil rights legacy of the original law but creates an opportunity for a reset in the national conversation about the future of schools and the path to educational equity and excellence for all children.

We all know it takes work—hard work—to make that opportunity real. But if you truly believe that all children deserve that kind of opportunity, then our collective work becomes extraordinarily clear. We know that when families, educators, and community leaders work together, they can unlock the “great vaults of opportunity of this nation”—to echo the words of Dr. King from his March on Washington.

More than 50 years ago, President Johnson said that “our society will not be great until every young mind is set free to scan the farthest reaches of thought and imagination. We are still far from that goal.” Our work together, living up to our shared responsibility, can help us reach that goal.

**It is incumbent upon all of us to ensure all children, regardless of zip code, race or ethnicity, income status, or ability, have the opportunity to graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and career.**


## The Premier Journal in Deaf Education



### American Annals of the Deaf

- The official organ of the Council of American Instructors of the Deaf (CAID) and the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD)
- Topics include communication methods and strategies, language development, mainstreaming and residential schools, parent-child relationships, and teacher training
- Annual reference issue features comprehensive listings of educational programs in the US and Canada

Read article abstracts and get subscription rates at:  
[gupress.gallaudet.edu/annals](http://gupress.gallaudet.edu/annals)

 American Annals of the Deaf  
 Gallaudet University Press  
 800 Florida Ave., NE, Washington, DC 20002-3695