



May 21, 2014

Education Committee
Louisiana State Senate
P.O. Box 94183
Baton Rouge, LA 70804

Via email

Dear Senator:

On behalf of Louisiana's students with disabilities — boys and girls who, through education, are working to build bright futures — the below signed civil rights, disability, business, and education communities write to express our concerns with HB 1015. As passed by the Louisiana House and proposed in the Senate, the bill would severely undermine efforts to ensure schools are held accountable for the performance of the State's 70,000 students with disabilities. We urge you to vote NO on HB 1015.

Specifically, the bill would:

- Allow districts to grant high school diplomas to students with disabilities even if they haven't met the state's minimum standards in key subject areas. In other words, all students with disabilities, regardless of their severity or level of special education services, could be placed on an alternate pathway to a regular diploma that has no relationship to the diploma awarded their general education peers, and that does not prepare them for life after high school.
- Remove the long-standing expectation that schools and districts make academic progress with *all* students, including students with disabilities.
- Violate the civil rights of students with disabilities under The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, The Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act.

This bill would undermine all the good progress Louisiana has made in recent years in educating students with disabilities. For instance, since students with disabilities have been included in Louisiana's accountability system the percentage reading at grade level has increased three-fold. Why would Louisiana want to walk back from such success?

To be sure, Louisiana's students with disabilities still lag far behind their peers on all important educational outcomes. But this is not a reason to enact policy that further lowers academic standards and expectations for them. Instead, the state must focus on improving evidence-based instruction, access to assistive technology, early screening for learning problems, and providing a more intense focus on professional development for educators. These policies are proven to work. Louisiana should embrace them and work to build a meaningful and rigorous education system for all of its students, including its students with disabilities.

We urge you to vote NO on HB 1015.

Sincerely,

Advocacy Institute
Alliance for Excellent Education
Autism National Committee
Autistic Self-Advocacy Network
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
Democrats for Education Reform
Education Trust
National Center for Learning Disabilities