

December 1, 2017

U.S. House of Representatives  
2176 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Members of the House Education and Workforce Committee,

CAST is writing today in response to the introduction of H.R. 4508 the Promoting Real Opportunity, Success, and Prosperity through Education Reform (PROSPER) Act, a bill to reauthorize the Higher Education Act (HEA).

CAST is a nonprofit education research and development organization that works to expand learning opportunities for all individuals through Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Since its founding in 1984, CAST has seeded and grown the field of UDL through creative research and development, strategic partnerships, teacher preparation and support, and international outreach. Our work, both in the U.S. and abroad brings us together with world-class educators, learning scientists, instructional designers, literacy experts, policy analysts, UX and graphic designers, software engineers and others to create, develop and implement innovative ways to bust barriers to learning for all students, no matter their challenge. Today we write to share recommendations as you consider reauthorizing the Higher Education Act (HEA).

CAST is proud to say that the definition of UDL originates in the HEA. Currently, the law describes UDL as *“a scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that (A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and (B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient.”* Universal design for learning is recognized by 20 years of best practices which over 29 states have embraced since 2008, when the HEA was last authorized.

The HEA places a strong focus on teacher preparation, professional learning, and grant programs, which support all learners, including students with disabilities. We are pleased with the above definition, and believe any reauthorization of the HEA must preserve this language. Currently, teachers utilize principles of UDL to rethink traditional educational models which inhibit learning for students with learning disabilities. The results of a well-designed school and/or classroom utilizing UDL shows us that the more flexible and responsive the instructional environment is, the more likely it becomes to achieve efficiency, as learners have more options for successfully demonstrating their

skills and knowledge. In addition, is it imperative that teachers have protected professional time that allows them to design their instruction in ways that most strongly leverage UDL's potential to support the achievement of high standards by all students.

The proposed Title II cuts in the PROSPER Act would severely weaken teacher training and ultimately, negatively impact students with diverse learning needs. CAST recommends that any HEA reauthorization bolster teacher preparation programs with UDL principles to prepare teachers for a diverse classroom of learners. We ask you to reconsider your support for the teachers who need nuanced and comprehensive training in order to provide effective instruction to all students by restoring the definition of UDL and Title II during Committee consideration of the PROSPER Act.

Thank you for considering CAST's comments. Please let us know if we can provide additional insight or support as the HEA reauthorization makes its way through the Committee process.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Gerstle".

Linda Gerstle  
Chief Executive Office