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The "Dear Colleague Letter and Resource Guide on ADHD"

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201607-504-adhd.pdf>

As a concerned citizen, I want to raise a few points on why I object to the removal of "Dear Colleague Letter and Resource Guide on ADHD." Broadly, the early identification of ADHD promoted through this guidance has substantial benefits for our society. I hope to illustrate through my personal story that the guidance is helpful, necessary, and should remain in place.

As an adult recently diagnosed with ADHD at age 30, I can look back and see many ADHD related struggles I had in K-12. I can also see the continuation of those struggles in college, in my career, and in my personal life. If the mission of mandatory education in the United States is to prepare individuals to be productive, contributing members of our society, shouldn't we make an effort to identify neurodiversity so the affected individuals can maximize their abilities? Having guidelines in place that make it easier for teachers and parents to give ADHD students the support that will help them to succeed in an evidence-based, effective manner. The rights of students to access to support without guidelines could result in waste of money, time, and effort on the part of educators and students who need to know what effective support for this disorder means.

The diagnosis of ADHD is life-changing information. One of the most common issues that adults with ADHD have upon diagnosis is mourning the life that could have been. Time management problems, distractibility, focusing on something that isn't the most important part of a project, and chronic procrastination are examples of neurologically driven behaviors for people with ADHD. This can lead to poor performance in school and in the work place. Adults with ADHD have lived decades thinking they were lazy, lacking in motivation to pursue their dreams and talents, that they were irresponsible people. Undiagnosed and untreated ADHD can lead to further mental health issues including depression and anxiety. These additional disorders are a drain on our nation's collective productivity. A major cause of these secondary disorders appear to be repeated failures to accomplish activities that the ADHD makes difficult while comparing one's self to neurotypical individuals who have no problem accomplishing the same tasks. With the early knowledge of these weaknesses, a student and later a member of the US workforce can set up systems to mitigate these issues and avoid developing additional mental health issues.

As a gifted student with inattentive ADHD, it is unsurprising that my teachers missed the signs of my disorder given the stereotypical description of an ADHD kid as a physically out of control boy. I wasn't loud; I wasn't a distraction to other students in class. While I daydreamed in school, I was smart enough to put together the bits and pieces I had paid attention to in order to give the right answer in class most of the time. But I wasn't ok. The emotional dysregulation aspect of ADHD made embarrassing moments debilitating. Feeling angry, frustrated, or even excited

would kill any chance of my learning from the teacher that day. The negative consequences of strong feelings for the rest of my cognitive capacities had me pulling back and avoiding relationships that could potentially cause those feelings. Individuals who take the opposite tack, as many ADHD individuals do, sacrifice educational attainment while prioritizing building close relationships. Identification would allow students, teachers, and parents understand the sources of difficulty, allowing them to be addressed.

As a woman who holds a master's degree in a STEM field and will soon hold a doctorate, I am among the educational elite. Individuals like me lead our society. (<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/how-to-raise-a-genius-lessons-from-a-45-year-study-of-supersmart-children/>) Have I done pretty well in life? Yes. Could I have done better? Yes to that as well. Personally, unstructured work at the end of my doctorate has been an insurmountable challenge without knowledge of ADHD. I have lost years of productivity. With the diagnosis and my own discovery of the research on accommodations for adults I will work around my challenges and finish my degree this year. I am confident my diagnosis will lead me to doing more for society than I would have if I failed out of my doctorate program.

As the guidance letter discusses, without the guidance schools had frequently used high performance in school as an indicator that a student does not have ADHD or at least doesn't need support for their ADHD. This is simply inaccurate. There is regular rhetoric in this country that we value innovation, leaders, technological advancement, as well as celebrating our collective cultural achievements. ADHD brains are literally wired differently (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4915936/>). Intelligent individuals with ADHD have a lot to offer purely through the diversity of their thought processes. New, different ideas are what lead to innovation and breakthroughs. ADHD traits coincide with entrepreneurial orientation (<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/apps.12062/full>). When given the support and skills to channel their talents, they are job creators. Supporting ADHD students will support American industry and American values.

I hope my story and the many other personal stories related to this guidance letter will persuade the taskforce to retain the guidance.