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Making Sense of Program and Policy Changes in Washington Impacting the Disability Community

Education Edition

LPA Committee on Advocacy

October 16, 2025

What role does the Department of Education play?

- The Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights (OCR) enforces and provides guidance on civil rights laws, like section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, that bar discrimination based on race, ethnicity, sex, age and disability. OCR handles complaints that school districts are unlawfully discriminating against students or failing to accommodate them.
- The Department makes grants under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Part B, or preschool through transition age. These grants help school districts provide services and resources for students with disabilities. The department's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) implements and monitors the IDEA.

Department of Education Office of Civil Rights



- On March 11, the administration laid off 1,300 of a total of 4,100 Department of Education employees.
- The Department of Education Office of Civil Rights lost nearly half of their staff. 243 out of 557 employees were terminated, and seven out of the 12 OCR regional offices were closed. Only a skeleton staff were left in the remaining five offices.
- In 2024, OCR received 22,687 complaints. Before the cuts, there was already a backlog of cases at OCR.
- On March 20, President Trump signed Executive Order 14242 “Improving Education Outcomes by Empowering Parents, States, and Communities” that directed that the “Secretary of Education shall, to the maximum extent appropriate and permitted by law, take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education”

IDEA program changes in 2025

- IDEA funding has generally been unaffected in the program changes at the Department of Education underway since March.
- Oversight offices' staffs, on the other hand, have seen significant reductions.
- On October 10, almost the entire staff of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, including the Office of Special Education Programs, which oversees \$15 billion in special education funding was fired, effective December 9, as part of a broader government-wide RIF.
- This action is being challenged in court.

Department of Education funding in FY 2026

- The Trump Administration proposed funding for Department of Education programs in the fiscal year 2026 budget request reflects cuts underway in 2025.
 - Department of Education – total reduction of \$12 billion or 15% from the FY25 level
 - IDEA funding increased but targeted program support for areas like parent information centers and personnel preparation eliminated.
 - Office of Civil Rights funding cut from \$164 million to \$91 million.
 - Funding for the National Center for Special Education Research eliminated (\$70 million)
 - The Congressional Appropriations Committees, especially in the Senate, have largely rejected these cuts and the proposed organizational changes in their budget legislation for 2026.

Questions?

Advocacy Committee

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