



Understanding Current Threats Facing the Federal Department of Education and What They Mean for Students with Disabilities

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What Is Happening Right Now?

The Department of Education (ED) is a government agency that oversees federal education policy and administers funding for programs and individuals. The ED has undergone numerous changes throughout the Trump administration, such as:

- On March 20, 2025, President Trump signed an [Executive Order](#), directing the federal Department of Education to “facilitate the closure of the Department of Education and return authority over education to the States...”
- President Trump and Education Secretary Linda McMahon have taken steps to dismantle the department, [firing](#) nearly 50% of its workforce.
- In September 2025, the Trump administration [cancelled more than \\$30 million](#) of federal grants supporting students with disabilities. Additionally, the FY 2026 budget, now stalled in Congress, calls for a [15% decrease](#) in overall funding to the Department of Education.
- Most recently, on October 10, 2025, the [Trump administration announced a “reduction-in-force”](#), which cut almost all staff in the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. These staff members were responsible for billions of dollars in special education funding and providing special education services to the 7.5 million children with disabilities in the country.

How Does the Department of Education Support Students with Disabilities?

The federal Department of Education, particularly the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, plays a critical role in civil rights enforcement and special education funding, including ensuring that disabled students have access to Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), speech therapy, and more. [Nationwide](#), 15% of all public school students have a disability. The Department of Education also plays a key role in funding schools across the country. Schools, including those in Massachusetts, rely on federal funding to support students with disabilities, pay for special education educators and services, and more.

What Relevant Laws Are Threatened by These Actions?

[The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act](#) (IDEA) was passed in [1975](#) to ensure that students with disabilities are provided with an education that is tailored to their needs. Among other important provisions, IDEA requires that public schools create an IEP for every student who needs it and requires that students with disabilities, as much as possible, are educated alongside their peers in the “least restrictive environment.” With the destruction of Education offices, the Trump Administration has stated their intentions to move IDEA programs to the Department of Health and Human Services,

separating special education from the broader education system, undermining their right to equal access, inclusion, and accountability in schools.

[Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973](#) (Section 504) is a civil rights law that ensures that people with disabilities are not excluded from programs or activities that receive federal funding, including schools. It requires that programs are accessible, and that reasonable accommodations are made. Section 504 does not only cover schools; it includes hospitals, transportation systems, and more. Specific to education, Section 504 requires that schools create 504 plans to provide accommodations and modifications needed for students to learn.

Although the above-mentioned changes do not explicitly affect these civil rights laws, the extreme reductions in staff and department infrastructure may hinder protections for students with disabilities. The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) are central to enforcement, but the cuts have diminished the ability of the agency to conduct discrimination investigations, monitor compliance, and to provide guidance to schools on accessibility standards.

What Happens Next?

Importantly, Executive Orders do not supersede laws passed by Congress. Lawsuits can challenge Executive Orders, and several have already been filed. This will likely be a lengthy legal process. The Arc of Massachusetts will continue to do everything we can and share resources to help you navigate the growing challenges posed by federal policy changes.

What Can I Do in Massachusetts?

We must voice our concerns to our congressional delegation and ensure that Massachusetts is prepared to support students.

- **Contact** your members of congress and share your story of why special education and non-discrimination policies are important. [Find your federal legislators here.](#)
- **Take Action** by filling out [The Arc of the United States' Action Alert](#) which tells lawmakers to protect the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services
- **Join us!** Advocacy is more effective when individuals join together. Sign up for [The Arc of Massachusetts's action alerts](#) and [The Arc of the United States' action alerts](#)

For More Information

Please reach out for more detailed information by contacting Nora Bent, Director of Government Affairs and Strategic Partnerships, at nbent@arcmass.org.