



## **Statement on U.S. Dept. of Education announcement to shift special education responsibilities to other federal agencies.**

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The U.S. Department of Education announced yesterday it will transfer some its responsibilities to other federal agencies, including oversight of special education quality, programs that help students successfully move from school to work, and the enforcement of students with disabilities' civil right to an education.

Students with disabilities have the right to public education under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Before IDEA, students with disabilities were often refused admission to public schools or warehoused in substandard facilities where they learned little and had few rights. Congress gave the U.S. Department of Education primary responsibility for making sure states and schools are upholding the civil rights of students with disabilities to get a free and appropriate public education.

Responsibilities for special education quality and vocational rehabilitation are being transferred via interagency agreement to the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services. The responsibilities for investigating civil rights complaints from students and families will be transferred to the U.S. Department of Justice.

“Students with disabilities, families, teachers, and states benefit from having a central source of expertise focused on what is needed to help students with disabilities learn and excel. When a student’s rights are not being upheld, it helps parents to have one place to go for support,” said Jenny Price, Wisconsin Board for People with Developmental Disabilities (BPDD) Executive Director. “This announcement shifts important responsibilities to agencies that do not have education as their primary focus, and that do many other things.”

Last year, the U.S. Dept. of Education laid off 40% of the staff responsible for investigating parent’s complaints about schools that aren’t doing enough to make sure their students’ right to an education is honored. Half of the cases are related to special education.

“Splitting where special education work is housed makes it harder for families to know what to do or where to go when they need help,” said Sydney Badeau, BPDD Board Chair. “Lots of schools do a good job educating students with disabilities, but some don’t. By the time people are asking the federal government for help, learning has already been impacted, and parents need help from attorneys who understand the law that protects students with disabilities. Will they know where to go and will they get the help they need?”

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