



Reduction in Force at the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

Background

On October 10th, the Department of Education issued a Reduction in Force (RIF) that impacted nearly all staff at the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS). Reportedly, affected staff were notified they would be terminated effective December 9, 2025. OSERS houses the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), both of which administer programs that support individuals with Down syndrome and other disabilities.

On November 12th, the President signed into law a spending measure that pauses any RIF activities, including those affecting the Department of Education, until January 30, 2026. The bill also rescinds any RIF issued during the shutdown beginning October 1, 2025.

What is OSEP?

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) implements the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), which ensures that students with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education. OSEP oversees nearly \$15 billion in state special education funding and ensures these funds are used according to federal law. OSEP also works to improve educational outcomes by providing research, resources, and guidance to parents, educators, and state agencies. Additionally, OSEP prepares the annual report to Congress and the President on IDEA implementation.

Examples of OSEP's work

- In 2019, OSEP conducted an on-site monitoring visit and found the Virginia Department of Education (VADOE) to lack procedures and practices to ensure full compliance at the local level. Over four years, OSEP provided assistance and by the end of 2024, Virginia was found to “meet requirements” for IDEA compliance.
- In 2022, OSEP partnered with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to issue guidance addressing the discriminatory use of discipline against students with disabilities. The guidance helped educators use safer, more effective strategies to manage challenging behavior, reducing reliance on restraint and seclusion.

What will happen to my child's IEP and their special education services?

IDEA remains the law, and your child continues to have a right to an Individualized Education Program (IEP) with access to services and supports. Congress has not changed the law, so all protections remain in place.

However, with OSEP staff drastically reduced, federal oversight of the 7.5 million students eligible for IEPs is weakened. This increases the risk that schools may struggle to comply with federal requirements, and that students' legal protections may not be enforced. While IEPs and services are still guaranteed, many states will struggle to uphold these protections with less federal support and oversight.



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What is RSA?

The Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) works to improve employment and community living opportunities for people with disabilities through grants and resource dissemination. One major program RSA oversees is Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), which helps people with disabilities access job training and continued support to find meaningful employment. RSA also prepares an annual report to Congress and the President.

Examples of RSA's work

- Minnesota's Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program faced several challenges identified in their [Fiscal Year 2010 RSA monitoring report](#), including compliance issues, inconsistent service delivery, and limited stakeholder engagement. With [targeted technical assistance and guidance from the Rehabilitation Services Administration \(RSA\)](#), the state implemented corrective actions. By [Fiscal Year 2019](#), these efforts led to improved data tracking, more efficient service delivery, stronger stakeholder collaboration, and a higher number of VR participants achieving competitive integrated employment, demonstrating the tangible impact of RSA's support.

What will happen to my VR Program?

Laws like the Rehabilitation Act and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), which authorize the 78 state VR agencies, remain in place. However, the RIF at RSA will weaken federal operations. The federal government covers about 80% of state VR program costs. Delays in funding distribution or oversight could cause services to lapse.

Loss of RSA staff will also slow the dissemination of research and best practices, reducing access to updated information and training for people with disabilities, their families, and service providers. Over time, this could lead to fewer employment opportunities, weaker independent living supports, and worse outcomes nationwide.

For more information, please contact our policy team at policy@ndss.org.