

ED Department Offers New Funding and Flexibility for Special Education Students

It may sound too good to be true, but last week (May 13) the U.S. Department of Education [announced](#) an additional \$144 million in support for students with disabilities through IDEA-related funding streams. It may not be a lot after it's disbursed, but this is an opportunity for states to demonstrate greater flexibility and schools providing innovative approaches to serving students with exceptionalities to actually get funds for doing so,

These funds will still flow through states under the existing federal IDEA framework and that means that in most cases, schools will not apply directly to the U.S. Department of Education for this funding. Instead, states will receive allocations and determine how funds are distributed, prioritized, or targeted consistent with federal law and state implementation plans.

The Department is clearly signaling that states may have greater flexibility and discretion in how they prioritize special education supports, interventions, technical assistance, and partnerships with schools and providers and it's up to schools to help them do just that.

In other words, this is not simply “more money” moving automatically through old systems.

States are likely to have increased latitude in determining which programs, providers, and approaches demonstrate impact and deserve expanded support. That means schools serving high proportions of students with disabilities should not wait passively for decisions to be made around them.

Schools should engage their state education agency now — proactively and directly — to demonstrate need, document outcomes, and position themselves as proven partners capable of serving students effectively.

Specifically, schools should immediately:

- Document the number of students with IEPs and students awaiting evaluation or services.
- Identify critical shortages or unmet needs, including staffing, behavioral supports, transportation, therapy access, literacy intervention, transition services, or specialized instructional support.

- Gather evidence of what is working. This may include academic growth, attendance improvement, successful inclusion models, parent engagement, workforce transition outcomes, or innovative supports for high-needs students.

Our recommendations are as follows:

Prepare a concise one- to two-page summary explaining: Who you serve, what challenges students face, what intervention or support could be expanded, what resources are needed, and how outcomes will be measured.

Then, send it to your chief state school officer. If you are close with your state representative and/or senator, copy them.

Then send a copy to your state education agency's special education or IDEA office. In your communication to the latter ask them:

- How these new funds will be distributed,
- whether there will be competitive or targeted opportunities,
- for an assurance that charter, specialized, independent, microschool, or other nontraditional providers may participate,
- and what documentation or timelines will apply.

Schools should not assume that states automatically know where the greatest need or strongest results exist. This is an opportunity for schools serving students whom traditional systems have struggled to support to proactively demonstrate impact and readiness.

The Department's announcement repeatedly emphasizes proven interventions, parent support, and state flexibility. Schools with effective models should make the case clearly and directly: families need services now, students need support now, and schools producing results should be part of the solution.

Let us know how you do and feel free to share any concerns or results!

Best Regards,



Founder & CEO

Center for Education Reform; Co-Founder of the
Yass Prize