

September 3, 2025

The Honorable Linda McMahon
U.S. Secretary of Education
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon,

On behalf of the Learning and Education Academic Research Network (LEARN) Coalition, we are writing to express our concern regarding recent media reports that the Department of Education (ED) may not make continuation awards or may otherwise terminate IDEA Part D grants. We are concerned that the loss of these awards would harm the training and technical assistance functions in special education that they help to support, in turn making it exceedingly difficult to provide key services to our most vulnerable children. We urge the Department to discount these reports and ensure that these awards are continued and/or funded.

LEARN, a coalition of 41 leading research colleges across the country, advocates for the importance of research on learning and development. As experts in the field, LEARN members provide evidence-based information to guide legislators and policy makers while advocating for an increased Federal investment in education research.

As you know, the need for special education teachers is dire across the country. As of the 2023-2024 school year, ED estimated that 42 States had fewer special education teachers than were needed to provide intensive, individualized instruction to the 7.3 million students eligible for special education services. This shortfall is a continuation of the ongoing shortages that have been reported for the last several years but has become particularly acute since the winding down of the COVID pandemic. Recent data from the School Pulse Panel and Principal Survey found that 65% of schools surveyed reported being understaffed in special education teachers. OSEP technical assistance (TA) centers provide State-requested supports to all 50 SEAs and over 27,500 schools, serving millions of students and families, across the full range of school types (e.g., charter, parochial, private, public).

Training grants from ED are essential to closing these gaps by both preparing educators to provide necessary services to a vulnerable population, as well as preparing academics who conduct vital research on best practices to support the education of disabled students. Eliminating these grants will worsen the immediate need we have for special education teachers and also harm the existing pipeline for years to come.

The media has also reported that grants that fund TA centers are at risk. These centers develop best practices that support special education and enable disabled students to be as successful as their nondisabled peers. Many of the TA centers are in cycle – including National Technical Assistance Center to Support Implementation and Scaling Up of Evidence-Based Practices and Early Childhood Systems Technical Assistance Center, among others. These centers work to advance key priorities that improve special education instruction and results for children with disabilities. Cancelling grants mid-cycle would prevent students, families, and educators from accessing the vital information these centers have developed.

These grants help to advance the priorities of the Administration. Training programs funded by IDEA Part D grants follow evidence-based practice and the teaching methods taught include those based on the Science of Reading. Furthermore, many of these programs leverage partnerships with their States and graduates of training programs for

Auburn University College of Education

Boston University Wheelock College of Education & Human Development

Boston College Lynch School of Education and Human Development

Florida State University Anne Spencer Daves College of Education, Health, and Human Sciences

Georgia State University College of Education & Human Development

Indiana University School of Education

Iowa State University College of Health and Human Sciences

John Hopkins University School of Education

Lehigh University College of Education

New York University Steinhardt School of Culture, Education, and Human Development

North Carolina State University College of Education

Penn State University College of Education

Purdue University College of Education

Syracuse University School of Education

Teachers College – Columbia University

Texas A&M University College of Education & Human Development

The University of Arizona School of Education

The University of Texas at Austin College of Education

University of Buffalo Graduate School of Education

University of California – Berkeley, Berkeley School of Education

University of California – Santa Barbara, The Gevirtz Graduate School of Education

University of Central Florida College of Community Innovation and Education

University of Connecticut Neag School of Education

University of Florida College of Education

University of Houston College of Education

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign College of Education

University of Iowa College of Education

University of Kansas School of Education and Human Sciences

University of Maryland College Park College of Education

University of Minnesota College of Education and Human Development

University of Missouri College of Education & Human Development

University of Nevada-Reno College of Education & Human Development

University of Oregon College of Education

University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education

University of Pittsburgh School of Education

University of South Florida College of Education

University of Southern California Rossier School of Education

University of Vermont College of Education and Social Services

University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development

University of Wisconsin – Madison School of Education

University of Wyoming College of Education

Vanderbilt University Peabody College of Education and Human Development

Virginia Commonwealth University School of Education

special education teachers go on to teach in every type of school – public, charter, and private – to ensure that students with disabilities are able to access the resources and instruction needed for them to thrive.

We urge ED to not terminate these grants and provide continuation awards to enable more and better trained special education personnel and the design, testing, and implementation of new interventions to continually improve outcomes of children with disabilities and their families.

Sincerely,

Camilla P. Benbow, Ed.D.

Co-Chair, Learning and Education Academic Research Network (LEARN)

Patricia and Rodes Hart Dean of Education and Human Development of the Peabody College of Education and Human Development, Vanderbilt University

Rick Ginsberg, Ph.D.

Co-Chair, Learning and Education Academic Research Network (LEARN)

Dean of the School of Education, University of Kansas

Glenn E. Good, Ph.D.

Co-Chair, Learning and Education Academic Research Network (LEARN)

Dean of the College of Education, University of Florida