



## Advocates Respond to OSERS Listening Session

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*Statement from the Advance IDEA Coalition (Council for Exceptional Children, Council of Parent Attorneys & Advocates, National Center for Learning Disabilities, The Arc of the United States, and The Center for Learner Equity)*

We were pleased that the Department of Education hosted a formal listening session to hear personal experiences with special education and vocational rehabilitation from parents, teachers, students with disabilities, and other advocates. The session provided an opportunity for stakeholders across our communities to share specific examples of the importance of IDEA and Section 504 and why the Administration must not shift key functions and roles that these and other federal laws require the Secretary of Education to oversee.

For three hours, stakeholders in the listening session shared their stories. There was decisive, universal consensus that the Department of Education provides vital functions for individuals with disabilities and the education personnel on whom they rely, and that the Department must not be dismantled, fractured, or decimated.

Rob Harris, a parent from Colorado, shared during the session the need to keep a focus on federal oversight rather than assuming states will maintain proper oversight.

“Families are not asking for perfection—we are asking for predictability, clarity, and accountability,” Harris said. “Across states, IDEA implementation varies so widely that access to services depends more on zip code than need. Parents are expected to be experts in law, data collection, and dispute resolution just to secure baseline services. When systems fail, the burden quietly shifts to families, especially those caring for students with low-incidence disabilities, like blindness.”

During the three-hour session, which the Department organized to hear how to “empower parents, teachers, and local leaders and return education to the states,” **not a single speaker expressed support for decreasing federal oversight of IDEA.**

Shirley Dawson, a Utah-based education expert with 40 years of experience in classrooms from kindergarten through doctoral programs, also participated in the listening session.

“As educators, we depend on clear guidance, evidence-based resources, and accountability to support infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities,” Dawson said. “The move to dismantle the Department of Education is not solving a problem—there is no evidence that HHS or Labor are better equipped to support students than the Department of Education.”

The Department continues to hear the same message repeatedly from stakeholders: **now is the time to advance IDEA, not dismantle 50 years of progress.**

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