

Education Department wipes out special ed office in shutdown layoffs, union says

The agency cut nearly everyone who works to administer federal funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, one staffer said.

How many Education Department employees were laid off?

What is the political motive behind the Education Department layoffs?

Why does Education Secretary McMahon suggest moving IDEA oversight to HHS?

WASHINGTON – The U.S. Department of Education fired nearly everyone in the [Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services](#) in a wave of new layoffs that began Friday, according to the union representing the agency's employees.

Without an official estimate from the agency, it wasn't immediately clear how many people in the division were fired. Yet based on reports from staff and their managers, most employees below the leadership level were part of the [workforce reduction](#), said Rachel Gittleman, the president of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 252.

Separately, employees involved in the [college access program known as TRIO](#), which is located in a different office, were also let go, she said.

Read more: [Education Department lays off roughly 20% of its workforce amid shutdown](#)

The firings, which the union has challenged in court, "double down on the harm to K-12 students and schools across the country," Gittleman told USA TODAY.

Spokespeople for the Education Department did not respond to requests for comment Saturday. Education Secretary Linda McMahon has said on multiple occasions that safeguarding students with disabilities, and making sure they have access to the educational resources they're legally entitled to, is a top priority.

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"I would like to see even more funding go to the states for that," she [told CNN](#) in March.

In a Friday court filing, the Justice Department said more than 460 Education Department employees had been laid off, cutting roughly a fifth of the agency's already-hamstrung workforce.

The terminations, which have hit [more than half a dozen federal agencies](#), are part of a broader effort by the Trump administration to pressure congressional Democrats to end the ongoing government shutdown. Nearly 90% of the Education Department is furloughed, too.

An Education Department staffer told USA TODAY the agency laid off just about every employee who works to administer funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, the primary federal law supporting students with disabilities. He was unsure how those programs will exist moving forward.

Read more: [Colleges report widespread problems with financial aid since Education Department layoffs](#)

"The system is designed to happen at the school level, with oversight from the district, with oversight from the state, and then with oversight from the federal level," said Glenna Wright-Gallo, who served as assistant secretary in the office from 2023 to 2025. "Now we're losing that checks and balances system."

Secretary McMahon has suggested that oversight of IDEA funding could be better positioned in the Department of Health and Human Services, rather than at her agency. Officially moving it would take an act of Congress, though.

In the likely absence of federal wraparound services for students with disabilities, Wright-Gallo recommended that parents and advocates start paying more attention to support systems at the local and state level.