

Transcript: Education Policy Basics: Individuals with Disabilities  
Education Act and the Current Environment

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Um, the slides are available on the event page. Uh, we had a little kerfuffle today. We do not have cart captionings.

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There's the recording. We do not have captioning, but the, um...

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The closed captioning is on for Zoom, so if you go...

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through your Zoom app on your computer, or you look for the button at the bottom that says Show Captions.

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Um, CC, or it might say Live Transcript in the bar controls at the bottom.

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Usually it's at the bottom. Um, if you don't see it, click More, and it should be in there.

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And when that comes up, you can click the button that says Enable Auto Transcription, or something like that, that'll turn the captions on for you.

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Um, and as I say, there will be a full transcript available afterwards as well.

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Uh, next slide, Andrew. Oh, and Andrew is putting, thank you, those instructions into the chat, so that you have those instructions on the captioning.

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Um, this is, um, I am here to welcome you on behalf of the AUCD policy team, all four of them.

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Although I'm the only one you're going to see speaking today.

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Let's go on to the next slide.

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Our speakers today, I think that's the next slide, right? Yeah. Um, our speakers today, I am really excited because both of them are people that I consider friends, as well as colleagues,

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In the education realm,

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Um, Stephanie Smith-Lee is the... from the National Down Syndrome Congress, the policy and advocacy co-director,

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I could give a very long description of everything Stephanie has done in this field over 40 years of policy experience, including serving in senior staff positions at the U.S. Senate and House, um,

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Since her daughter Laura was born, and she'll talk a little about Laura, I hope, with Down syndrome in 1982, she's done... led a lot of successful advocacy efforts in the disability world, at the state, local, and federal level. She also was the director at the Office of Special Education Programs at the Department of Education. Um, she has been involved in, I think, every

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piece of disability, particularly disability education, since that's what we're talking about here,

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Legislation since, um...

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A long time! Since back before Laura was born, I would say. Um, so anyway, Stephanie will be speaking first

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And then, um, Nicole Fuller is the Associate Director of Policy and Advocacy at the National Center for Learning Disabilities. They can each tell you a little bit more about their organizations, as well as the work that they're doing.

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She supports and advances NCLD's public policy and advocacy agenda

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Uh, she co-chairs two national coalitions, the IDEA Full Funding Coalition. My computer is just binging all the time, I'm sorry. Uh, and the National Coalition for Public Education serves on the board of directors of the Committee for Education Funding.

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Um, prior to NCLD, Nicole was a middle school math teacher for Fairfax County Public Schools.

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has worked with Transition Tennessee, she's worked with VR providers. Again, Nicole has been really active in the education world for quite a number of years and brings a lot of experience to this, so I am just

thrilled to have the two of them here to talk about IDEA, to kind of do both a 101

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As well as what's going on right now. So I'm going to toss at Stephanie, to you, and when your piece is done, go ahead and toss it to Nicole. I don't have to come back on again until the end.

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Well, thank you, Denise.

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As Janice said, I'm Stephanie Smith-Lee. I'm a white woman with shoulder-length blonde hair and a picture of the Capitol and the Supreme Court behind me. Next slide.

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I'm the Policy and Advocacy Co-Director for the National Down Syndrome Congress, which is the oldest organization supporting individuals with Down syndrome, their families,

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And, uh, professionals who support them.

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We have an annual conference of about 3,500 people. Next year, it's in Florida. Would love to have you there.

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Um, uh, we're known for our convention, and we're also known for the policy and advocacy work that we do.

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Uh, the National Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition is free and open to anyone who's interested. I'll tell you a little bit more about that later. We also do

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provide resources, we have education conferences and webinars on various topics. Next slide.

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I'm going to be sharing a little bit about the history of IDEA and talking about

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what are the basic things that are important to know about IDEA?

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And then after Nicole speaks, I'll tell you a little bit about some of the challenges that we're facing right now.

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Now, you might wonder why we're bothering to talk about the history, and one of the reasons that it's important to do so is that history has a way of repeating itself.

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And we are actually now seeing some of the challenges repeat that we've seen in

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previous years. It's also important to remember that

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We can always stand to lose things that we have, so it's important to understand how IDEA, the Federal Special Education Law, came about.

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And why it's important.

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Before IDEA, the first version of IDEA, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act,

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passed in 1975.

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And before that time, only 1 in 5 children with disabilities was educated.

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More than 1.75 million children with significant disabilities were excluded from the education system.

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States had laws, many states had laws saying that certain

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Uh, students with certain disabilities would not be allowed to go to school. Another 3.5 million did not receive appropriate services

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And close to 100,000 children were in institutions, and

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Particularly at that time, these could be very gruesome kinds of places.

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We are about to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the passage of the first version of IDEA.

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And that law came about because of advocacy. Advocacy by individuals with disabilities, particularly advocacy by

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There are family members. There was, um...

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some local and some state legislation prior to 1975,

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Two critical things were successful U.S. District Court cases in 1971,

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that established that... first, that established that students with intellectual and developmental disabilities have the right to go to school,

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And then establish that all students with disabilities have the right to go to school.

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And these court cases and the advocacy resulted in the passage of what's sometimes referred to by its public law number, PL94142,

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the education for all handicapped Children Act.

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And it's important to know that this law passed on a bipartisan basis. It was signed into law by the Republican President Ford.

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And disability laws and special education laws have always been

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bipartisan. I also want you to remember that it is a

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Fundamentally a civil rights law. Sometimes you will hear IDEA referred to as an unfunded mandate. It is not an unfunded mandate. It is a civil rights law that is based on the 14th Amendment to the Constitution.

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And it also provides, uh, grants.

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So these are the basic pillars of IDEA.

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Every student with a disability is entitled to a free,

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appropriate public education.

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The, uh, local school districts have an obligation for what's called child fine. That means they must find and identify

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children with disabilities. Once the child is identified, or if the parent says they feel that their child has a disability,

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Then the school district must provide an evaluation.

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of the child to determine, first, do they have a disability? And if so, do they require special education services?

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Parent participation is a very important part of the law. The parents are part of the team that determines the evaluation procedures and works on the evaluation.

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And they're part of what's called the Individualized Education Program Team.

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That determines, uh, the goals for the child and the placement.

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procedural safeguards are very important piece of it, and we'll get into a little bit more detail about each of these as we go forward.

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So, it was wonderful that this law finally got passed after many, many years of parents advocating for this. It started in the 1950s.

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But then when the Reagan administration came in, we ran into some problems.

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The break-in administration, uh, issued proposed regulations for the law,

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that would have drastically diminished important provisions and rights in the regulations. You'll hear me later talk a little bit about block granting,

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One of the, uh, recommendations that was being considered was to

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take the provisions in the law and just block... grant them into one

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Kind of thing, and send the money to the states and let them do what they want with it. Now, advocacy came into play again.

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Remember, this was before computers, this was before the internet,

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This was before fax means... fax machines, and

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Mostly families, but other concerned citizens wrote over 100,000 letters to members of Congress and the administration.

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Big bags of mail were being dumped.

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at the doorways to congressional offices and in the Department of Education.

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Congress opposed these regulations. 350 members of Congress wrote in opposing

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The regulations, and those regulations were beaten back.

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Sometimes history is more interesting. If you hear about it from somebody who's been involved in some aspects of it, so I'm going to share a little bit about my own

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Involvement. I actually was a young Capitol Hill staffer when I IDEA first passed in 1975.

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The regulations for PL94-142 were not finalized until 1999,

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It was only a short time after that that my daughter Laura was born.

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Uh, with Down syndrome in 1982. You can see a picture of Laura as a one-year-old here. As you can see, she didn't

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didn't... didn't look so good. She had been in the hospital for the first 2 years of her life, and...

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had two heart operations then, and a number of them later. But when she was born,

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We were urged by the doctors to put her away.

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That was the term that was used. We were told everything that she would not be able to do.

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Uh, for her first open-heart surgery, the cardiac surgeon told us that if she did not have an operation within 3 days, she was going to die.

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But unfortunately, they didn't have an operating room.

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A wonderful, young cardiologist advocated for us, and Laura had that first of the number of operations.

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As you can see, she exceeded all of the low expectations that we were told for her.

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And in the relatively short time period, uh, since Laura was born, a little over 40 years ago, we've gone from institutions

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to institutes of higher education, you can see a picture of Laura here when she graduated from the George Mason University Life Program.

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And at the end of our webinar, I'll talk a little bit about new opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities.

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Laura was the first student in an inclusive high school program, and at a university,

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She had difficulty articulating, but did really a wonderful job testifying before our school board in Fairfax County, Virginia,

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through before the Virginia General Assembly, and I was surprised when I was testifying before Congress one time, Laura asked if she could too, and

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She was allowed to and did a great job. She ended up working in the World Bank,

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Uh, with some support and living independently. And the special education that she received over the years was key to her success.

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So, after all of this tumult with the Reagan administration and these regulations and some

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Some other really negative comments, comments from both Republican and Democratic members of Congress.

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Things, uh, improved during the 1980s. President Reagan brought in Madeleine Will, a parent.

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Uh, as the, uh, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services,

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Under her leadership, uh, there was something that was called the Regular Education Initiative, which was

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Grant programs to train teachers about how to include students with disabilities. This was all new at the time. How do you include students?

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How do you train the teachers? Early intervention and preschool services were added. We'll talk a little bit about

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More about that in a minute. Transition services were added for students 18 to 21 or 22, depending on the state.

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and supported employment.

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These priorities and other improvements were included in bipartisan reauthorizations of IDEA, a reauthorization is when Congress takes a look at a law and decides that some changes need to be made.

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The, uh, the name of the law was changed to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 1990.

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Next slide. So, thanks for going pretty well during the 80s, and then...

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We had some problems. Uh, in the 1994 election,

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Uh, those of you who are old enough or study history will know that there was something called the Republican Revolution.

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Um, the house, uh, the Republicans gained control of the House and the Senate, Newt Gingrich,

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was the Speaker of the House, the Tea Party was what was going on, and the contract with America.

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Now, I think most of you are familiar with, um, fiscal years. Today is the very last day of

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fiscal year 2025.

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Back, uh, during this time in the fiscal year 1996,

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education department appropriations, drastic cuts were considered.

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Uh, for the federal government. Now, is this sounding familiar?

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The government shut down, which it may also do tomorrow,

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And there were 13 continuing resolutions that were passed, one after another, and a continuing resolution is when

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The full appropriations bills are not passed.

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Uh, and the government

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passes what's called a continuing resolution to keep the government, uh, going.

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One of the things that was really difficult for students with disabilities is that six national organizations, sometimes referred to as the Gang of Six,

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lobbied for, uh, funding changes that would have been

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detrimental. Big focus on school safety was students with disabilities being

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blamed for problems with school safety, a big focus on wanting to be able to expel

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Students without safeguards, a focus on not allowing parents to get attorney's fees paid, and a big focus on what was referred to as paperwork reduction. Well, that sounds good to anybody. Let's reduce the paperwork.

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But unfortunately, one person's view of burdensome paperwork is another person's view of important protections for students.

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A lot of talk about flexibility. This was a very difficult time.

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The House Education and Workforce Subcommittee reported out a negative partisan bill on April 24th, 1996, which was the date that I personally got involved.

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Uh, at the national level on IDEA.

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Next slide. I was asked by the National Down Syndrome Congress to be the, um,

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Vice President for Policy and to volunteer my time on this issue. That's actually where I first met Denise Roselle.

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Uh, who was also working on this, so..

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These are... this is the original cut and paste. I went in my attic, I found some of these articles, I cut them out with scissors and pasted on here, so you could see what was going on in this time.

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very negative publicity about children with disabilities. At the same time, I was a mom,

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involved in the local PTA, and

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This kind of negative discussion about kids with disabilities was filtering down to the local level and impacting.

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families and students.

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We had a 3-year battle on this reauthorization of IDEA.

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Uh, at the first thing that happened was, uh, myself and Madeline Will and another parent went to speak to the chair of

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The House Educational Workforce Committee, Chairman Goodling, asked if he'd be willing to stop the usual legislative process,

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And give us a chance to work with the general education groups to see if we could come to agreement.

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Turned out that some of those general education groups didn't like this bill either for different reasons.

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We were, um...

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in a room for about 9 or 10 days at the NEA, and battled out an agreement on

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a consensus bill, but the House didn't pass it the way we'd agreed to it.

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Senators asked us to try to do the same thing on the Senate side, but we ran out of time.

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Madeleine and I talked to David Hoppe, who happens to be a parent of now a young man with Down syndrome. He was

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Uh, the majority leader's Chief of Staff. David did something incredible. He reached agreement with the Republican and the Democratic leaders of the House and the Senate and the committees to halt the usual congressional process.

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And have a bipartisan work group.

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Uh, this workgroup,

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came up with proposals for each provision in the bill. 10 meetings were held, and David Hoppies stood up there for sometimes 10 hours at a time.

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Listening to families and self-advocates who came from all across the country to talk about

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these bills. And people came from as far away as Hawaii and Alaska.

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Uh, and of course, the education groups also were able to say their piece, and one of the good things that happened is that

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Listening to each other helped come to consensus. A consensus was reached.

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Uh, the House passed their bill by all but 3 votes.

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I had an interesting experience. I was contacted by CNN

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Morning News, and asked to debate, um, then-Governor George Allen of Virginia the morning that the Senate was considering it. That was really an interesting

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experience, um...

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And the Senate passed the bill as well.

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I wanted to share a few of the improvements that were really important.

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The bill that was passed in 1997 had some really very important aspects to it.

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For the very first time, there was a requirement that students with disabilities learn the same curriculum that everyone else learns. The students

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had to have not just physical access, but the ability to participate in and make progress in the general curriculum.

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It was the first time that there was a requirement that all students be assessed with the state and district-wide assessments, including students with disabilities

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And that there be alternate assessments for students with cognitive... significant cognitive disabilities.

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Instead of this focus on expelling students, we came up with the idea of looking at why is that behavior occurring, doing functional behavioral assessments,

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And then coming up with, uh, behavior plans that include positive strategies and interventions.

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Um, there was also other, uh, import...

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important improvements. Next.

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I thought I'd just share a few of these pictures from the IDEA bill signing. It was a very happy day.

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Uh, up on the left here is a picture of my daughter Laura with President Clinton. Below that is, as Laura with Senator Harkin.

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You can see this picture of President Clinton when he signed the bill with Dave Hoppe, looking over his shoulder there.

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So, let's talk about the basics.

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Part B is permanently authorized. That does not need to be reauthorized, uh, every 5 years.

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And, uh, that is the main part of IDEA.

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And it states very strongly that children with disabilities have the right to a free, appropriate public education, FAPE, you'll hear that term a lot,

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In the least restrictive environment.

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I talked about evaluation before. Every child must have

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An initial, full, and individual evaluation.

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That means that they must be assessed in all areas of suspected disability, and that it has to be individualized. You don't have one set of evaluations for every child.

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And that evaluation is to determine if the child has a disability and

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what their educational needs are, and if the disability means that they need special education services and supports.

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Now, uh, every 3 years, there's a re-evaluation,

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There was a change in the law, though, that you don't have to do the full

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Um, psychoeducational evaluation, you can look and determine what pieces are necessary.

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Now, let's talk about LRE. This is one of the most important fundamental aspects of the law, and what it means is

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That children with disabilities will be educated with non-disabled peers.

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To the maximum extent appropriate, and they cannot be removed from the general education class, and that means that the class they would have gone to if they didn't have a disability in their neighborhood school.

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They cannot be removed unless

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They cannot receive a satisfactory education, even with supplementary aids and services.

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And modifications are allowed.

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Then, after the evaluation, there's an individualized education program that focuses on the special education and related services

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that are needed for that individual child,

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to, uh, make progress in the general education curriculum, and make progress on functional goals.

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After the goals are met, after the services are decided, then the team decides on where the child should be placed. Will they be

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In a general education class full-time? Will they be pulled out some, or might they be in a special education class?

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or even a special education school. And as I said, the procedural safeguards are a very important piece of it,

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And the government's monitoring and providing technical assistance and enforcement. There's two links here that you can click on later to find out more about that.

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And Nicole will be sharing more about those two topics.

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So that's Part B, that's the main part. Let's go on to the next slide.

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Part C is early intervention. This is for the babies through age 2.

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And again, there must be an evaluation. It has to be

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Timely. It's important to get to those babies as early as possible. It must be comprehensive, and it must be multidisciplinary, so not just one area.

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And it's required to determine the eligibility of each child who's referred for an evaluation.

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or early intervention services, if they're suspected to have a disability. Some children, it's very clear they have a disability. If they're born

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blind or with Down syndrome, or deaf,

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Sometimes it's not as clear.

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And one of the things that distinguishes Part C from Part B and the early intervention piece

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is that if the child is eligible, instead of an IEP, they get what's called an IFSP, an Individualized Family Service Plan.

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And that's developed and includes services in the natural environment, and that means where the child would be otherwise. They might be at home, they might be in a daycare center,

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Uh, either somewhere else? And it supports for the child and the family.

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And in some states, the families are charged for services. There's a link here that explains the differences between

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early intervention and K-12, our preschool through K-12.

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Next slide.

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Now, the other important piece of IDEA is Part D, and remember Part D, because we're going to talk about this again at the end.

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Part D is the discretionary grants, and the Office of Special Education Programs, or OSEP, and this is the office that I directed

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for several years, uh, under President George W. Bush.

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This office provides grants under Part D to state educational agencies,

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Institutions of higher education and other non-profit organizations

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to support technical assistance and dissemination, there's technology and media services.

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There are grants for state personnel development grants, and the state determines what's important in their state for those grants.

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There's very important personnel preparation. I don't think I have to tell this group that there is a shortage of special education teachers and other service providers,

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And that personal preparation program is very important.

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There's also parent training and information centers in every state that provide information and training for parents to understand

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what IDEA is and how to get services for their child, and how to work collaboratively.

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Um, the Part D grants, uh, information about these programs appears to have been removed from the current department website, but you can go to this link.

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And, um, uh, see, get an idea of what these grants are.

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Next slide. And I'm now going to turn it over to Nicole. Thank you.

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Thanks, Stephanie. That was great, and I know you...

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Have some more to talk about later, about higher education, but, um, I think that was a good... a great segue. Um, I will reintroduce myself and my organization. Next slide, please.

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Next slide. Uh, again, great to be here.

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To give a visual description, I'm a millennial-aged white woman wearing a white and black striped sweater. I have brown hair.

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Um, I serve as the Associate Director of Policy and Advocacy at the National Center for Learning Disabilities. Next slide, please.

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Uh, my organization, we've been around for nearly 50 years. We were founded in 1977, so just 2 years after

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IDEA, uh, first became law, and, uh, services and supports for learning disabilities

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Uh, we're very new. Next slide, please.

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Uh... we are, you know, 45 years later, still, you know, focused on inclusive education,

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we conduct, uh, research, uh, fairly new, um, just last year, we conducted a research of...

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over a thousand young adults, it's one of the first nationally representative surveys of its kind, and it's available on our website. You can learn about

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Students with disabilities, um, learning disabilities in particular, and their transition, their high school experiences, their transition to higher education in the workforce, so it's...

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really important and insightful information about, um, the opportunities, but the barriers that many students face. Um, we also, um,

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coming in 2026, we'll have an educator survey, um,

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About general educators and special educators and their perspectives about collaboration and inclusion in the, um,

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classroom environment. So, if you are a consumer of research, I encourage you to check out that information. Um, we also have... I'm on our policy team, I do federal policy work predominantly, I'm

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I'm based in Washington, D.C., um, we do also have a young adult leadership council. This is a cohort-based program of young adults ages

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18 to roughly 30, sometimes that upper age, uh, can vary year to year. Um, and these are individuals who are extremely strong self-advocates, say,

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influence a lot of our policy work and our policy agenda. They fly into DC,

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Annually, sometimes even twice a year, and do advocacy on Capitol Hill, and I just really love working with

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All of them is a really exciting opportunity.

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We also... we were founded by families, and I think Stephanie did a really, uh...

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important job of underscoring the role of families and family advocacy, um...

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And, uh, our Family Leadership Council is also a way for family members of students with learning disabilities to build community with one another, and also inform our advocacy work.

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So, next slide, please.

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What are learning disabilities? I will not read this whole definition, this is the one, uh, straight from the statute, um...

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But I will talk a little bit, too, about the, um, you know, how the language of IDEA, and I think that's always really important, um...

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IDEA has 13 specific disability categories. Uh, next slide, please.

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Learning disabilities are...

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So, of all students who received special education services, that's about 15% of all students, so...

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Um, then of that 15%, there are 13 different special education categories.

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that specific learning disability category is the most common disability type.

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Um, and it... it makes up about a third of all students who receive special education services.

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Um, there are other categories, such as autism,

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other health impairment, which includes disabilities like ADHD, which certainly can

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co-occur with learning disabilities, um, but oftentimes the students

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IEP does contain information about their specific disability using one of those 13 categories. Sometimes it is identified as a primary and a secondary disability.

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Um, and, uh, I'll talk a little bit about this with regard to the funding as well, but there are...

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Now, over 7.5 million children across the country who receive special education services, we are...

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Um, at a record high, and, you know, have seen growth in some particular, um,

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Disability categories, um...

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And, uh, learning disability subgroup of that is about 2.5 million students.

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Next slide, please.

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I just think this is an opportunity to talk about language, because we, you know, hear a lot of language, uh, being used when it, uh, pertains to students with disabilities, even just the last few slides, I said,

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specific learning disability, I said learning disability, sometimes you hear, you know,

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the specific disabilities, like dyslexia, Discalculia,

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Um, and, you know, in more recent years, uh, terminology, uh,

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like, neurodivergent, as opposed to neurotypical, um,

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is often used, especially by, uh, the younger generations, um,

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you know, I do think it's important to kind of recognize that language is always evolving, and, you know, especially, I know many of the folks on the call are

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Current educators or practitioners are training to be practitioners. Um, so my biggest recommendation to you is to, you know, listen for preferred language, um, and try to use the preferred language of

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the individual. Um, that said, there are some definite do's and don'ts. Um, the primary one, I would say, is that the term special needs is

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is very outdated and not preferred by the disability community.

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And then, I think, you know, the one that I think goes without saying is, uh...

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terminology, like the R word is just not...

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at all used in, in, um...

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language anymore. So, of course, language does matter, um, some students may even prefer person-first language, some prefer identity-first language.

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Um, so that's saying disabled student versus student with a disability. Um, so be flexible, be open-minded, um, but do try to listen

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for the language that, uh, the person self-identifies with.

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Next slide, please.

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Alright, so let's talk about funding.

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Stephanie set, um, a lot of this up, and she talked about state grants.  
Next slide, please.

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Um, I'll do a little bit of history, not quite as much as Stephanie, um,  
and I don't have quite as many newspaper clippings, but I do have, uh...

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President Gerald Ford, um, signing IDEA into law. Um...

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And when the law was first passed, 50 years ago this November, actually,  
we are very quickly approaching the 50th anniversary of IDEA.

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Um, Congress pledged

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a level of 40% of the additional cost of educating students with  
disabilities.

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Um, they recognized that there were certain supports and services that  
would cost, um, the school money.

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Um... and that 40%,

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has become known as the full funding amount. It was very low back in  
1978, it started as just 5%.

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Um, unfortunately, we still have not made significant progress towards  
that 40% level.

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Um, next slide, please. I have a graph. I'm a former math teacher. I do  
love a good, um, graph that helps folks to understand, so that yellow bar  
at the top,

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is the 40%, um, that...

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if the government ever fully funds IDEA, that would be their contribution, um..

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whatever is not funded by the federal government is covered, is made up by..

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state and local dollars, so right now, funding for special education is predominantly state and local dollars, um, which certainly also creates some inequities for,

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Uh, students from low-income backgrounds, um, some inequities,

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across dates, um, as well. Um, and you can actually even see in recent years,

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a dip, um, you know, we were, just a few years ago, at about 14%

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10% to 15%, um, as a federal contribution, and that.. that number today is less than 11%. So why is that? We actually have gotten small increases.

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in annual appropriations bills for IDEA funding.

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But it has not kept pace with the number of students that are served. So I gave that 7.5 million number.

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Um, you know, 5, 10 years ago, we were.. there were not that many students served, so.. because of the math, more students being served, um, and only small, incremental increases in funding.

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The federal share has gone down.

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Um, there is certainly a bipartisan advocacy movement for this. There is a..

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Bill introduced every, uh, Congress called the IDEA Full Funding Act.

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Um, legislators recognize that,

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Full funding isn't going to probably happen in one year. Um, typically, Congress is not going to make that much of a jump from, you know,

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14... 14 and change billion appropriation to something...

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Almost four times that. Um...

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But, uh, the full funding bill would put

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Funding on a 10-year glide path, so that over a decade, um...

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the funding would get to 40%. And I see there's a question in the chat, I can probably answer right now.

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Um, what happened in 2009. I think that was a, uh...

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a stimulus package in response to the recession. So, similar to what happened in

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2020 and 2021 with COVID relief funding, um, there was some extra funding that kind of inflated, you know, sent a lot of money out the door in one particular year.

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Um... yeah, good question.

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Alright, next slide, please.

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Um, you may be wondering, what can these funds be used for? Um, Stephanie already mentioned that they are... are grants that go out to states, um, on a formula basis.

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So, schools and districts, uh, have the decision to decide how they want to use these funds.

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Certainly, every student has that IEP, which will, uh, indicate what services and supports that they get.

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Um, I should have mentioned this in my introduction, um, I am the daughter of an occupational therapist and a physical therapist. My mom actually started her career working for Easterseals, um, going into schools, so I certainly...

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Um, support and, uh, appreciate all of the specialized, uh,

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an instructional support services at

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Um, and providers that support students with disabilities, um...

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As well, so, of course, teacher salaries, um...

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There are... there's a responsibility of the federal government to identify every children with a dis... sorry, not of the federal government, of the local education agency to identify

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Um, all of the eligible children, that's called child buying, so you can use funding for that. Um...

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Certainly, um...

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assistive technology, um...

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specialized equipment, they're quite a, um...

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a large, uh, variety of uses for funding. I do think in advocacy as well, I mean, I mentioned as well, like, I do federal advocacy, as does Stephanie, and, you know, we go to the Hill quite often, and we talk about

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Um, funding, but, you know, I really do underscore all of you, um,

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you know, talking about, uh, what do these funds actually mean for students, and telling stories about, um, how much, you know, anything on this list or not on this list can really transform a student's life.

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Um, I think those are really important impact stories to tell to a member of Congress, um, to your state legislature, to, um,

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your local school district in your advocacy.

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Next slide, please.

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Alright, pop quiz. Uh, you can use the chat if you would like. You also, uh, don't have to respond, there'll be a, uh, a nice teacher for today.

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Um, but would love to hear folks, uh, put in the chat what they think are the largest sources of federal funding for schools.

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Um, on the next slide, which don't go there yet, Andrew, uh, I'll be giving you four, so if you want to put

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1, 2, 3, anything that you think, um, and then I'll reveal the answer.

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It's not graded, I promise.

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Someone put Title I funding.

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Medicaid, IDEA, there are some... some correct answers in there, definitely.

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I'll give folks just two more seconds if anyone else wants to, uh...

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put in something that they think is the right answer.

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Alright, Andrew, next slide, please. We'll reveal.

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I... I heard Title I, this is funding from the edu... uh...

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elementary and secondary Education Act, um...

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It is just a little bit larger, um...

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than the IDEA state grants, um, they do go out to support economically disadvantaged.

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Students, oftentimes you may hear a school is identified as a Title I school, that means it met a certain threshold of

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uh, students who, um...

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are considered from economically disadvantaged background, and that school receives additional funding.

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IDEA funding is another major federal funding stream. Um, certainly very important for supporting students with disabilities, but also even, um,

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younger students, kindergarten, first, second grade, um, in particular with potentially unidentified learning disabilities, or considered at risk of having learning disabilities. I actually..

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Um, my nephew right now is in second grade, and he's going through the evaluation process, but, um, his school has been supporting him with early intervention and a summer learning and enrichment program.

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Um, I imagine that is being, um, funded primarily with IDEA funds.

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As well as Title I funds. I saw free rein... uh..

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free and reduced, uh, meals, child nutrition is certainly, um, not within the Department of Education's budget, but another,

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primary funding stream for schools.

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And then, yes, Medicaid was another one in the chat, and, uh, actually is the fourth largest, uh, funding stream.

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Uh, for, uh, schools.

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Next slide, please.

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Um, and we will talk a little bit about Medicaid in a little bit, so, um, if there are questions there.

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Um, please hold them.

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So, we talked about funding, um, something else, uh..

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Uh, related to funding is accountability. Next slide, please.

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So, IDEA is not just a funding law, um, that's something that

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Advocates have had to do a lot of communication and messaging around this year. Um, unfortunately, there is some... some rhetoric, um..

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of folks who are talking about IDEA, like, it is just funding that goes out the states, but that is

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Um, and I think Stephanie really talked about this as well, is the civil rights law, um, and we'll talk a little bit more about the Department of Education and what's been going on there.

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But historically, the federal government and the U.S. Department of Education specifically,

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is a backstop. It does annual monitoring, um, states submit data, they submit annual

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plans and the Department of Education and the Office of Special Education Programs specifically, um, they look at that data, um, they ensure compliance with IDEA, so...

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Um, there is a lot that happens, and it's a really essential backstop for...

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IDEA, uh, for students with disabilities, um..

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I'll give two examples. I think examples are often helpful.

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Um, of states in fairly recent years that have, uh,

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because of that oversight mechanism been found not in compliance with the law.

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Um, the first one is Texas. A few years ago.

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Students with dyslexia in Texas, um..

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were being identified as having... they were receiving 504 plans instead of IEPs. 504 plans

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can support students with disabilities, but oftentimes, um, these are students with disabilities who..

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only require accommodation, they don't require, um, interventions, or, um,

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uh, the full IEP. This was, um, not in compliance with IDEA, Students with Dyslexia. Um, we're certainly eligible for special education services, and they weren't getting them.

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Um, the state had also put

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an arbitrary cap on the number of students who could receive special education services. So..

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Um, the federal government, you know, through their monitoring process and provided some technical assistance to the state so that they could come

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into compliance with the law,

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And, you know, families, again, were really, really appreciative and, you know, had to fight for this as well. NCLD a few years ago, we had a..

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I Family Advisory Council specifically in Texas, and had a few families, um, you know, on the ground fighting for this as well, um, you know, because their students had been personally impacted.

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Another example, just last year, is in the state of Idaho.

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Um... identifying a learning disability, states can do it in different ways, but there are still some ways that are in compliance with the law and some ways that are not. Idaho was using too stringent of criteria.

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And, um, when you actually look at the data, Idaho had the smallest percentage of students with

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specific learning disabilities out of all 50 states and territories. So, you know, kind of even myself, just as an advocate, looking at that data, you kind of wonder, hmm, are they missing some students? And, um, the Department of Education, through their monitoring, um, and enforcement process,

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was able to support Idaho, and just this time last year in the fall, they passed a new

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special education handbook, um..

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Which really is important, um, for families of children with learning disabilities in that state, because now they can be properly identified, so..

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I share these as two examples to kind of talk about and illustrate, you know, the backstop role, um, the federal government is not, you know, making every single decision, but IDEA is a federal law.

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Um, that required monitoring and enforcement.

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The Office for Civil Rights is another entity within the Department of Education. It protects more than just disabled students, it protects

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students that are protected under any, um, civil rights, uh, law, race, ethnicity, um, to name a few others.

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But again, students with disabilities, um, again, can... can, uh, receive these protections in the Office of Civil Rights.

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investigates, uh, complaints and has a responsibility under civil rights laws to, um, determine if

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That student's rights has been violated. So, it's another important backstop, um,

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As well, and I think can help..

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folks to understand, you know, what exactly is the Department of Education doing? They are not setting curriculum, they are not, um, you know, making a ton of decisions, but they are..

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a really important, um...

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backstop for... for protecting rights.

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Next slide, please.

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Alright, I kind of started to alluded to some of this. Um, I will get us started, and then, uh, I know Stephanie will pick back up. Um, she's been a fantastic advocate and someone I've really enjoyed, um, working with this year.

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So what's been going on this year? It, uh...

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Needless to say, has not been a quiet year. Next slide, please.

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Um... Stephanie, we had a trend of pulling, uh, newspaper headlines, so, um, just to kind of illustrate, and you'll see the dates on these two articles were just earlier this month, um...

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a lot has happened. Of course, we have a new administration, um, who has set priorities, and I see there's a comment in the chat, I think we can get to it more at the end, but, um...

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you know, back in March, there was a very large reduction in force.

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I'm really kind of along... around the same time as an executive order around dismantling the Department of Education, um,

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That reduction in force really impacted the Office for Civil Rights very hard.

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Um, decimating the staff, as Michelle just put in the chat, um...

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Decimating, um, staff at regional offices for Office for Civil Rights, um...

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So that is, you know, something that, um, you know, has started to weaken the role, um,

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There is still staff at the Office of Special Education Programs,

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Um, but it is September 30th. We know that a government shutdown, um, could also... could also change things, so it's a very kind of pivotal point right now.

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Um, Congress has not passed a funding bill this year. Uh, they passed a continuing resolution that, uh, stopgap

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measure, um, to keep the government funded at current levels back in March.

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But even since then, and before then, there's been a lot of chaos, um, as it pertains to funding

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Um, back in February, uh, a number of contracts were canceled.

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impacting education research, and special... there were several contracts specifically around special education research as well.

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Um, over the summer, you may have seen these news headlines, um, the Department of Education on July 1st made an announcement that they were going to withhold approximately \$7 billion in federal funds. These were not IDEA funds, but these were funds for

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after-school programs, for English learners, for, um...

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whole child supports,

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It caused a lot of chaos, um, it did, uh...

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there was some reaction on Capitol Hill, members of Congress from both parties, um, wrote to the administration, and it was later reversed, but I do know that

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you know, even when something is reversed, it doesn't mean that, um, all of the staff can necessarily be reinstated. Districts over the summer

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may have had to make some tough decisions and let staff go, or, you know, reallocate them somewhere else.

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So, that certainly has constituted to chaos and uncertainty around, um,

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Federal funding for education at large, which certainly impacts students with disabilities.

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And then very recently, and this was kind of rumbling throughout the whole month of August, um, there was some...

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Credible information about, um, the cancellation of hundreds of special education grants.

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Stephanie mentioned that Part D of IDEA, that's funding for technical assistance, for preparing special education teachers and adjusting teacher shortages, um...

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And...

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There was some rumbling about, you know, some mass cancellation of grants, um...

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In September, um, the majority of grants, I think 400 and something, um,

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did actually go out. They... those grantees received their continuation awards.

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Um, but a few dozen did not. So, um, there were grants specifically for DeafBlind students, as that, um,

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K-12 dive article highlights, um, Ed Week talked about the millions of dollars that were canceled for special education teacher training.

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Um, these are still fairly new headlines. There was, um, an appeal process, but...

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Um, there are certainly a lot of chaos, and special education is not, um...

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not been immune to these cuts or this chaos by any means.

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Um, the other... Congress has certainly, um, you know, worked this year, uh,

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on a number of different things. I would say the... the biggest legislation that they have passed, um, was a, uh, what's called a reconciliation bill. It's a bill, um, pertaining to budget that can pass

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Um, Congress with a simple majority, um, because of the Republican trifecta in the House, the Senate, and..

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the White House, um...

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Many of you have now become familiar with this bill. It was called the One Big Beautiful Bill Act.

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It contained a lot of, uh, different provisions.

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The two that impact students with disabilities.

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Uh, the most, um, are a new, um, voucher program.

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Um, it's a new federal tax credit. I'll explain a little bit more of what this looks like and talk about...

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Um, why a lot of disability advocates have concerns about programs like these.

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And then the other...

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primary, um...

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element of this that will impact people with disabilities and children at large is Medicaid, and we all just wrote in the chat about Medicaid being one of the

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Um, the largest funding sources for schools, um, this specifically supports students who receive special education services and certain services, um,

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can receive Medicaid reimbursement, um...

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So, I think we still don't know exactly what the impact will be for schools and for disabled children. Um, it is also too soon to say what the impact will be on states, um, but the changes and cuts to Medicaid

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will have a significant impact on state budgets as well, um, and given how much of...

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Funding for education comes from state and local sources. This is...

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Likely to impact education, um, and special education quite a bit.

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So let's talk about vouchers. Um, Denise, when she introduced, um, me, she mentioned the coalition called the National Coalition for Public Education.

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Um, Andrew, you can head to the next slide, please. Um...

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We are a coalition that's been around for, um, nearly 50 years, quite a few disability advocates, um,

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are a part of this coalition.

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Um, and we oppose vouchers at the federal level. Um, we take no position on...

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Uh, state-level vouchers, which to date have been, uh, the most, uh, common voucher schemes, but this new...

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provision passed in July is really one of the first, kind of, federal voucher programs. So, what are vouchers? They are, um...

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tax dollars that are essentially flowing to usually private schools. They can flow in a few different ways. They can be just a conventional voucher, where, um...

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you know, uh, the tax money flows, um, to the private school, um, sometimes it is targeted to a specific population, like students with disabilities.

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Um, there are more indirect mechanisms for vouchers, like a tax credit, so, uh, people, uh, making a donation and getting a tax credit, and that funding going to a voucher rather than direct federal dollars.

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Education savings accounts, um, have also become more common across states in the past few years.

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Unlike a voucher, which usually goes directly to tuition, education savings accounts have

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A large variety of uses, um, they can sometimes be pay, uh, used for special education services, um, or..

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Um, related services.

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Um, there's also portability, where the dollars follow the students. So, um, we have never had a bill pass about IDEA portability or Title I portability, but there have certainly been bills in Congress where..

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Um, the funds could follow the student to whatever setting.

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Alright, um, I will talk a little bit more about vouchers and, um, you know, kind of, uh, 30,000-foot view, but I'm happy to share resources in the chat if folks want to dig in deeper.

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Um, Stephanie talked so much about IDEA and all of the rights that families get,

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Um, so the biggest, I think, takeaway is that when a student takes a voucher, they're considered to be parentally placed under IDEA.

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And they lose their IDEA rights. So, um, sometimes the families realize that they are waiving their rights,

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many of the times, they do not. So, um, sometimes the family takes the voucher,

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goes to the new school and doesn't realize, um, that they no longer have an IEP or due process rights.

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Um, discrimination, um, private schools can, uh, develop their own admissions policies, so many students with disabilities, um,

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I mean, I, uh, be accepted under that admission policy, um..

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Sometimes this is explicit, sometimes it's more implicit, where a school may tell a family that their child may just be better served elsewhere, or, um, allude to something like that.

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And then lack of transparency, there's a lot of, you know, families want information, especially families of students with disabilities, they want to know what rights do their children have, what services will they get.

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So another primary concern, um, on behalf of the disability community about vouchers is that

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families are lacking information, um, throughout the process.

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Alright. Um, we talked a lot about K-12, we're gonna talk a little bit about the transition, um, to higher education, and higher education in particular.

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Um, next slide, please.

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So just a few data points here, um..

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about 1 in 5 college students in undergrad identify as having a disability.

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Um, and about 1 in 10 graduate students identify as having a disability, so students with disabilities certainly go to college, um, Stephanie will talk a little bit more about inclusive higher education programs. I know she already touched on that a little bit with her daughter's experience.

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Um, there's still significant gaps, um, in entering the workforce.

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Only 18% of disabled adults over 25 have a bachelor's degree, um, and then the..

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gaps in labor, uh, force participation.

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are pretty significant, so I think, you know, as a field, we have done a tremendous job at K-12 education in making it, uh,

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a more inclusive and effective for students with disabilities, but I think we do have a long way to go in terms of improving post-school outcomes.

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Including higher education and employment.

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my animation was a little funky there. Alright.

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Uh, something that is really challenging for families, I mentioned our Young Adult Leadership Council earlier, um, something we hear from young adults all the time is how much they wish they knew.

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about their rights and responsibilities changing after they graduate from high school. IDEA,

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Only applies to K-12 education, so when a student graduates, um, the ADA and Section 504 are...

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The laws that protect them, um, they are...

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similar but different. Um, they do require

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a student with disabilities, um, in higher education in particular, to get reasonable accommodations for a student with a learning disability. This may be extended time, note-taking support, um...

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priority registration for classes, there's quite a wide range of accommodations that students may get in post-secondary.

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Unfortunately, getting accommodations in post-secondary is not a super straightforward process, um...

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you know, many students, you know, they come to learn that there is a disability services office on their campus, um...

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But when they go to Disability Services, and they take their IEP, or I mentioned the 504 plan,

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from, you know, any documentation they had, um, from high school, their college, um, usually tells them that they need a new evaluation.

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um, knew evaluations can be extremely costly.

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upward of 3,000, \$4,000, \$5,000, um...

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And I actually just had a focus group with several young adults last week. One young adult is actually in her PhD program,

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Um, but she was explaining how her undergrad, her master's program, and her PhD program

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all had different policies for accommodations and different procedures, so...

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Um, it can be really challenging to navigate, um, and I think...

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Something else is that there's just a lot of misunderstandings on college campuses about, um,

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The rights of students with disabilities, um, and I think, you know, a lot of stigma and education that's needed

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Um, about rights and responsibilities, in particular when it comes to accommodations.

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I mentioned that survey that NCLD did in our research. I have actually just a couple of data findings that I thought may be interesting to folks, um..

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only about half of institutions accepted a student's IEP or 504 plan. Um, a number of folks did have to pay out of pocket. Um, again, it's an extremely expensive price tag for a student to get a new evaluation.

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Um, to essentially reprove a learning disability or ADHD, or..

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Um, anything that they need to prove that, that, um..

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they indeed have in order to get accommodations. Next slide, please.

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Um, kind of, again, an interesting finding about half of students, um, felt like they were getting the supports that they need, and another half

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Felt like they were not, um, with about a quarter of students feeling like

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None of their instructors were very supportive, so again, I think it shows that, um, in higher education in particular, we have a long way to go.

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Um, especially when thinking about inclusion and supporting, um, all learners.

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Um, there is legislation that my organization and others like AUCD and the National Down Syndrome Congress have championed for a number of years. It's a federal bill called the RISE Act.

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um, rise standing for Respond, Innovate, Succeed, and Empower. Um, it really tries to streamline the accommodations process.

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require colleges to take that IEP or 504 plan so that students do not have to reprove and get a new evaluation, um, that is really just, um, a cost barrier for many students and families.

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It also funds technical assistance for, um,

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colleges, we know that there's thousands of colleges across the country, um, unlike the K-12 system.

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their, um..

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you know, is not a lot of information that's shared with faculty and staff about

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Um, best practices, universal design for learning. So, um, technical assistance can play a vital role there. Um..

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Unfortunately, sometimes it's just really hard to get legislation to move in Congress, especially standalone bills, despite persistent advocacy and bipartisan support. Um, so..

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We've started to see, thanks to, you know, grassroots and grass tops advocates, um, in states across the country, we've seen state-level versions of this bill passed. Arizona was the first several years ago,

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Illinois was the second, Minnesota, Virginia very recently, and it's been introduced in 3 other states. So, um, we're starting to see change and progress, and I think, um,

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you know, higher education is, um, something that many students with disabilities are pursuing, and, um, it's really essential that, um, we streamline, especially the accommodations process and make it, um,

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Much better for students.

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Uh, my organization, uh, the..

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formatting got a little funky at the bottom, but we are on social media. If you're ever interested in keeping up with us, um, and have a website, but, um..

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Stephanie, I know you have a few more things to talk about with higher education, so I'll pass it back to you. I saw a couple questions in the chat.

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Um, as well, and I think we're doing..

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pretty good on time to have a little bit of time at the end for questions as well.

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Great, thank you, Nicole. That was really helpful.

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I'm going to talk for... first of all, just a little bit about what the current challenges are, and Nicole covered much of this, so I'll, um, just highlight a few things.

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And then just a little bit about some exciting, uh, new opportunities for students with intellectual disability to go to college.

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Uh, Secretary Linda McMahon is the Secretary of Education, and she's made it very clear that her, quote,

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Final mission is to eliminate the Department of Education.

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Uh, half of the department's employees are gone. There were 4,133.

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Uh, last November, and it's now down to \$2,183. Who knows? There may be more gone today.

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Uh, as Nicole talked about the importance of the Office of Civil Rights, uh, half of the OCR employees were fired,

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Um, 7 of the 12 regional OCR offices were closed,

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Uh, now, there have been lawsuits about almost everything I'm talking about here, and the courts, uh,

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required some of those OCR employees to be rehired, or they were on administrative leave to have them reactivated.

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Uh, but it's still a very big problem, and what we're seeing is that many of the complaints that

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Uh, parents are filing about discrimination for their children are just being dismissed without really being considered.

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The Institute of Education Sciences, the research arm,

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Uh, at the department has, uh, been totally gutted, and the special education research is part of this.

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\$900 million in contracts and grants were canceled right away. Nicole's talked about some of the other cancellations that have happened since then.

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Um, one of the things that...

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really gets misunderstood sometimes is the role of the Department of Education and the role of states and local schools.

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If you'd like more information on this, I would encourage you to take a look at the NDSC

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a fact sheet here that explains what the department does, what local schools does,

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do, and why it's important to keep special education in the department and not close the department.

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We also have an action alert. Uh, it makes such a difference when individuals

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contact their members of Congress about these things, and we have been able to push back against some of the bad things that have happened that way.

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You probably heard about, uh, the President's executive order

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Uh, requiring that to the maximum extent appropriate and permitted by law that the Department of Education

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be closed and, quote, return authority over education to the states.

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The plan is to move other office... to move offices within the department

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to other agencies, like the Office of Special Education Programs moving to the Department of Health and Human Services. Now,

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It would require a law to actually do this. It's in

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IDEA, that OSEP is in the Department of Education. The Department of Education itself is in laws,

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It would require at least 60 votes in the Senate to overcome a filibuster.

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Uh, but that there's other ways to

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dismantle a department by firing employees, by getting rid of grants, and so on. And as, um, there are also proposals to block grant IDEA, remember I talked about that at the beginning, when that had happened under the Reagan administration?

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As well as block-granting, uh, Title I.

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So, as we've talked about, today is the last day of fiscal year 2025.

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And the administration's fiscal year 2026 budget request

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For, uh, special education.

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Um,

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Blunt-granted IDEA Part D. Remember, we were talking about Part D, and that's Technical Assistance Centers, Parent Training and Information Centers.

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So, the administration's request to Congress was to take all of those centers and

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grants in Part D, as well as the specific funding for preschool education for students with disabilities,

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And just kind of combine all of that money into the Part B,

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formula grants to state, so there would be no

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federal funding specifically for these important centers.

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Um, this would have eliminated the Part D National Activities Grant programs and the specific funding for preschools,

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And there was no information about any requirements for how the funds

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could be used. Um, one of the things that I did was contact every living

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Former Assistant Secretary, every living, and some have passed away.

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Former OSEP director, the position that I had, and we wrote a joint letter to Congress,

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Uh, that was signed by, uh, officials in every Republican and Democratic administration, going back to Nixon.

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Uh, officials who are responsible for overseeing special education, urging Congress not to close the department.

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Not to block grant IDEA, and not to move the Office of Special Education to

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Uh, to a different agency. There's a link to the letter here.

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And both the House and the Senate Appropriations Committee rejected these administration proposals, and this shows you again that advocacy can work.

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A lot of different organizations have been involved in this advocacy as well, including AUCD and CLD.

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Um, so those committees rejected these proposals,

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But we're now at the end of the fiscal year, so we don't know what's gonna happen.

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Um, OM... the Office of Management and Budget, by the way, has said that if there is no conti- um...

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If there is a continuing resolution, if there is a, um, government shutdown, that more, uh,

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agency, um, government officials will be

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fired. So, check in tomorrow, we'll find out what's going to happen next. Next, please.

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So, I want... uh, Denise wanted me just to say a few words about the new opportunities for students with intellectual disability, and this is something that, uh, Denise has been very, very involved in on behalf of AUCD.

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Um, in 2008, when there was a reauthorization of the Higher Education Act,

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We were able to get in new provisions for students with intellectual disabilities who are enrolled in what are called Comprehensive transition programs.

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Um, and the... this now allows these students to fill out the FAFSA and apply for financial aid.

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Uh, they're not able to get loans, but they can if they've, um,

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qualify under the FAFSA, get access to grants, like the Pell Grant and work-study job.

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Uh, the Higher Education Act of 2008 also provided funding for model programs.

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called TIPSAs and a National Coordinating Center, as well as having a work group that develop model accreditation program standards, and we now have a new accrediting agency.

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Next.

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When my daughter Laura wanted to go to college, um...

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Oh, gosh, I think it was about 25 years ago, there really were not options. We were lucky when we went to

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George Mason University, that they were willing to start a pilot program. Laura and her two friends were the first students in an inclusive university program.

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We now have, uh, 363 programs around the country. So, that's a lot of progress in 20 or 25 years. We still need to

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expand quite a bit more, but you can see there are now programs in almost every state. Now, this number 363, sometimes it goes up a little, sometimes it goes down a little. You can go on the Think College website and search what programs are available.

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Uh, in your state. Next slide.

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The National Coordinating Center is at Think College, at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston.

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They have, uh, excellent resources about this topic. It's, um, all kinds of information that you can find there, and I would encourage you to take a look at that.

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I'd encourage you to follow the National Down Syndrome Congress, whether it's on Facebook or Instagram.

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Um, or, uh, LinkedIn,

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Next slide.

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And I think I'm done. Denise, I'm going to turn it over to you to moderate questions or comments.

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Thanks! So, I see... the one comment I think we might want to go back to for a second, um, Nicole... well, actually, you both have answered this one, but there was a question that came up in the chat that I think would be worth explaining a little further.

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about vouchers, and why, when a student goes

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to a private school using a voucher, or goes using a voucher at all, that they lose their IDEA rights. I mean, part of the answer to that is what's written in the statute, but

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Um, why don't you go ahead and talk about that for a minute. Nicole, and then if there are other questions,

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Go ahead and put them in the chat.

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Sure, and I realize I went kind of quickly through that section. There's obviously... that could have been a session in itself, um, so I was trying to give a really brief overview, but appreciate the question.

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Um, Stephanie started off this webinar by talking about a free, appropriate public education.

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Um, a voucher takes away the free part.

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Oftentimes, a voucher is a set amount, say maybe, I'll just say a number, 7,000-something, and maybe the private school tuition is actually \$12,000. So the student actually is responsible for making up the difference, so it is certainly not free, as well as, um,

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private schools may charge, um,

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Other fees, transportation, um, etc. So, uh, that free part of VAPE is, is, uh, not in violation.

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And then IDEA does not apply to private schools and only applies to public schools.

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With the exception of a very few number of students who, um, on their IEP, may have.. an IEP has placement information,

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Um, within a public school setting that is maybe placement in the general education classroom, um, the placement may have information about, um,

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being pulled out for specific interventions, or, um..

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other classes, a placement may include more of the time in a special education classroom, as opposed to a general education classroom, a placement can be a separate school, and on very, uh,

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small number of occasions, a placement can include, um, a private school. So, um, generally that is not called a voucher, that is just a, um,

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a local education agency placing the student, um, in a..

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different school setting, but Stephanie, is there anything else that..

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You want to highlight or, um..

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No, I think it's just.. it's very clear you lose your rights.

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to due process, to evaluation, to IEPs, if you go to a private school.

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But what you said is very true. Many parents don't realize that.

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Great.

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Other questions? I actually don't see any other questions in the chat.

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While we are waiting to see if there are any others, we'd appreciate it if you would... if any on the call would

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take the survey, there's a link here to our survey monkey, there's a QR code, there's a link.

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Um, if you would do that, I'd appreciate it, and Andrew just put it in the chat as well. This is a way that we can track

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Um, how you all think this went.

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Um, other topics you might want to see in the future, what would be... any other way that we could either improve or, um, learn from.

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your comments on the webinar. So...

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I will give it another minute or so, and otherwise, we'll give you back...

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10 minutes, which is always nice.

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I want to thank, um, Stephanie and Nicole both.

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Oh, are there implications or applic... okay, here we go. Okay, um...

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Are there implications, applications with 504 and vouchers?

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Good question. We were talking about IDEA and vouchers. Go ahead, whoever.

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Nicole, I'll let you take that one.

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Sure. Um, Section 504 also does not apply to private schools. Section 504 is...

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a law that applies to any school that received federal funds, um, so similarly, if a student has a 504 plan,

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Um, the rights and protections are not transferred to a private school setting if the family takes a voucher.

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And then I've got a question about national organizations helping with advocacy regarding the frozen federal special ed funds.

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I know, Michelle, you are referring back to a comment you made earlier about, um, frozen funds in Fairfax County in particular.

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But, um, I think what I would say, and then the others can jump in here too,

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Um, the...

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Um, there are... oh, and that Virginia is systematically working to

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public school issues. Um...

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I think if you jump into any of these organizations, Stephanie talked about NDAC, which is their, um, advocacy arm, if you will, AUCD, you can subscribe on our website to our funding

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Our funding materials, um, uh, policy materials,

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NCLD, I know, has that. My recommendation at this moment, and then I'll let Stephanie and Nicole also jump in,

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Whatever organization, national organization that you are connected to, or whatever local organization, the ARC is doing a lot of work around funding as well, if you're connected to your local ARC.

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For instance, whatever the local organization is, I would start at the national version of that.

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To see, but most disability organizations are tracking funding, certainly. Um, and that is... that's everything from the closing down of education to the freezing of funding and other things. Um, Nicole or Stephanie, do you want to add to that?

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I would just add that NDSC, we have action alerts that you can sign up for.

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Uh, we've been... our big priorities right now are education, as well as Medicaid.

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Um, and we would, um, be very pleased to have people

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Use those action alerts or join our National Down Syndrome Advocacy Coalition. You don't have to have

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connection to anybody with Down syndrome to join.

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Yeah, I mean, if your local area or your state has been impacted, I certainly encourage you all to reach out to your members of Congress. Um, they should certainly be aware of the impact

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Um, most national organizations and CLD also has action alerts. Um, you can also just

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you know, use your, uh, use the website to help you find your member of Congress and their contact information and reach out independently and request a meeting.

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So, I definitely encourage you all, kind of as local constituents, to, um...

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to do that advocacy, um, but with regard to national organizations, yes, there have certainly been disability organizations writing letters, um,

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I put in the chat as well the link to the website for CEF, the Committee for Education Funding

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Um, they, uh, advocate for all education funding across the whole continuum, K-12, higher education,

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Um, so they write letters if you're ever looking for...

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Current funding levels, there's lots of charts. That chart that I had in my slides, um, with the full funding and the 40% that came from CEF, so they're a great resource if you're ever looking for information.

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And CEF, right, the CEF is a bigger coalition, so that's also sometimes valuable to be able to pull in all kinds of other education groups, in addition to those who are focusing on disability education.

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Um, these days, I think the bigger the coalition, um,

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the more impact we're having. Um..

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Oh, Liz, of course. Liz Weintraub, my colleague at AUCD, mentioned she's been doing a lot. We have a new Instagram, um, that Liz does, um,

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That's disability rights for all with Liz.

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with Liz, and there's been a number of IDEA things in there as well.

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So, and, um, so go on Insta and find those. Her Reels. Um..

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I think that's a good place to end, actually, is that comment about reach out, whatever the issue is that you are concerned about these days, reach out to your member of Congress.

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Um, you can do that in the district, you can do that.. I know we were talking about Virginia and Fairfax County, you guys are close, you could actually come here. You can also reach out in the district.

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Um, call and leave a message about what your concern. They pay attention. Um, they are counting the numbers of people calling and writing and..

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texting and whatever it is, however you communicate, um, about what you care about. And the Department of Education stuff writ large,

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Um, is an important piece of that right now that they are looking at. So, I would absolutely encourage that.

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Um, excellent. See, exactly. You're already calling Warner's office. Good job.

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Right.

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Um, from for Michelle and for others, then, go for it. Excellent.

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Denise, I would just add that providing specific information about how this is impacting your

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Great.

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School District is really important, as was put in the chat here.

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They want to know, what does this mean for my constituents, who are my voters?

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What's happening on the ground? And you are the folks who know what's happening on the ground in the district,

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to the people who vote for them.

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That's really bottom line here. And they're beginning, particularly in the House, they're obviously beginning to think about re-election, so it matters what voters are saying.

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So, go for it and continue to reach out. Um, thank you all. This has been a great call. I appreciate it. We will be sending out the...

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Um, the recording and the transcripts to everybody who signed up for the call, so that's all of you who are on it, as well as anyone who signed up and couldn't make it.

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Um, we go find all of these websites, you have lots of materials to play with, you'll have the slides, so you have the links.

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And I want to thank everybody for being here, and particularly for Stephanie and Nicole for taking the time to explain this all. It's not easy, folks. It's not simple, but it's important.

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Okay, thank you.

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Thank you.

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Thanks, Denise, thanks for having us.