

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 11, 2026

The Honorable Linda McMahon  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Education  
400 Maryland Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon:

We write to urge you to take immediate steps to ensure the timely obligation of appropriations for the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) consistent with bipartisan Congressional intent. This will enable IES to fulfill its statutory responsibilities to expand fundamental knowledge about what works in education to improve student outcomes and provide reliable information on the condition and progress of education and effectiveness of federal and other education programs.

As the statistics, research, and evaluation arm of the U.S. Department of Education, IES plays a critical role in developing the research base for and evaluating the effectiveness of the nation's education programs, as well as collecting education statistics. IES helps ensure that taxpayers' money is being invested in efforts that are supported by rigorous research and demonstrated results. While the vast majority of funding for public education comes from local and state sources,<sup>1</sup> the federal government carries out a critical role in providing, supporting, and overseeing billions of supplemental dollars in public education each year, particularly for children, youth and students with disabilities and students from low-income families. Education and policymakers at all levels, nationwide, depend on IES-supported evidence to inform the best decisions for these dollars.

Congress annually appropriates funding for IES programs on a bipartisan basis, and that funding can be used over a two-year period. This was done to allow sufficient time to plan to carry out its statutory functions in the most effective manner and ensure the best use of federal taxpayer resources. The *Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025*, which President Trump signed into law, continued Fiscal Year (FY) 2024 appropriations of \$793 million for IES. The *Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026*, which President Trump also signed into law, appropriated \$789.6 million for IES and provided specific allocations for major statutory programs of IES.

According to the latest IES apportionment data, significant available balances from FY2025 and FY2026 appropriations remain unallocated, with no less than \$290 million at risk of lapsing at the end of this fiscal year.<sup>2</sup> Special education research and statistical activities could experience

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<sup>1</sup> NCSL Staff, *FAQ: The Education Department and the Federal Role in Education*, National Conference of State Legislatures (March 21, 2025), <https://www.ncsl.org/state-legislatures-news/details/faq-the-education-department-and-the-federal-role-in-education>.

<sup>2</sup> 2025/2026 - *Institute for Education Sciences*, Open OMB (Feb. 27, 2026), [https://openomb.org/file/11508577#tafs\\_11508577--091-1100-2025-2026--2--2026](https://openomb.org/file/11508577#tafs_11508577--091-1100-2025-2026--2--2026); 2026/2027 - *Institute for Education Sciences*, Open OMB (Feb. 18, 2026), [https://openomb.org/file/11505291#tafs\\_11505291--091-1100-](https://openomb.org/file/11505291#tafs_11505291--091-1100-)

the biggest impact from this lack of spending.<sup>3</sup> This level of spending continues a sharp decline in IES spending evidenced in FY2025.<sup>4</sup> We urge you to work with the Office of Management and Budget to allocate these funds in a timely manner in order for IES to meet its statutory obligations to support education research, statistics, evaluation, and evidence building to improve students' academic outcomes.

We are also concerned with the recent reduction of IES staff. According to the Department of Education's monthly reporting, in March 2025, IES staffing was reduced from 187 employees to 30 on-board staff from January 2025 to February 2026. These cuts were particularly felt at the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), one of four education centers operating under the IES, which saw its staffing drop from approximately 100 staff to 11. These reductions in staff have directly contributed to significantly fewer research, data, and evidence-use products being published by IES.

Furthermore, in March 2026, IES announced the closeouts of hundreds of unreviewed FY2025 grant proposals within the National Center for Education Research (NCER), and the National Center for Special Education Research (NCSER). This resulted in no new awards being made over the past year, and these awards are crucial to addressing urgent educational challenges facing students.

NCER funds research across all levels of the education ecosystem, and across all areas of education. Their findings have led to the development of programs used in schools across the nation, including literacy programs and practices that states are scaling up to improve reading achievement. This includes research and related activity underlying some of the Education Innovation and Research grant awards.<sup>5</sup>

This work is also critical for supporting students with disabilities. For example, NCSER research has been used to develop educational programs that have decreased high levels of anxiety in youth with autism, taught reading to individuals with Down Syndrome, and assisted students with learning disabilities in the mastery of mathematical word problems. NCSER also provides special educators and administrators research-based resources that support public education and interventions to foster self-determination in students with disabilities as they transition into adulthood. Concerningly, after investing approximately \$20 million in a long-term evaluation of transition support for students with disabilities and as services were being provided, the contract was cancelled.<sup>6</sup> Further, NCSER spending dropped by \$15 million last year<sup>7</sup> and, to this date, IES has not announced FY 2026 NCER or NCSER grant opportunities.

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<sup>3</sup> Jill Barshay, *As Deadline Looms, \$289 million in Federal Education Research Funding May Go Unspent*, The Hechinger Report (April 22, 2026), <https://hechingerreport.org/proof-points-ies-unspent-funds/>.

<sup>4</sup> *FY2025 ED Final Obligation Spend Plan*

[https://apportionment-public.max.gov/Spend%20Plans/FY2025%20ED%20Final%20Obligation%20Spend%20Plan.pdf](https://appportionment-public.max.gov/Spend%20Plans/FY2025%20ED%20Final%20Obligation%20Spend%20Plan.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> *Education Innovation and Research*, U.S. Department of Education (Jan. 13, 2026), <https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/grants-special-populations/grants-economically-disadvantaged-students/education-innovation-and-research#awards>.

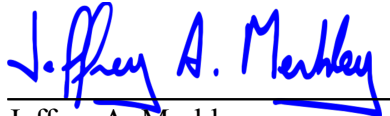
<sup>6</sup> Cory Tuner, *DOGE Abruptly Cut a Program for Teens with Disabilities. This Student is 'Devastated,'* NPR (Apr. 15, 2025), <https://www.npr.org/2025/04/14/nx-s1-5345870/trump-doge-students-disabilities>.

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As such, we urge the Department of Education to work with the Office of Management and Budget to allocate FY2025 funds to ensure funds are timely obligated and begin effectively spending FY2026 funds consistent with historical trendlines for IES to produce timely research, provide evidence-use products and assistance, and undertake data collections that meet the needs of states, districts, and educators across the nation.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey A. Merkley  
United States Senator



Thom Tillis  
United States Senator



Elizabeth Warren  
United States Senator



Tammy Baldwin  
United States Senator



Richard Blumenthal  
United States Senator



Cory A. Booker  
United States Senator



Susan M. Collins  
United States Senator



Richard J. Durbin  
United States Senator

<sup>7</sup> Department of Education, USASpending.gov (Sept. 29, 2025), <https://www.usaspending.gov/agency/departments-of-education?fy=2025>.



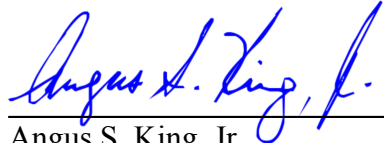
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Kirsten Gillibrand  
United States Senator



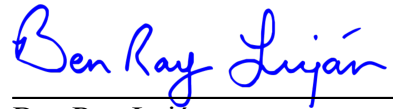
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Tim Kaine  
United States Senator



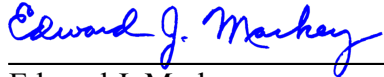
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Angus S. King, Jr.  
United States Senator



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Ben Ray Lujan  
United States Senator



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Edward J. Markey  
United States Senator



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Alex Padilla  
United States Senator



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Bernard Sanders  
United States Senator



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Adam B. Schiff  
United States Senator



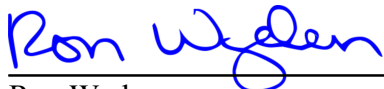
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Elissa Slotkin  
United States Senator



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Chris Van Hollen  
United States Senator



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Ron Wyden  
United States Senator