An Educational IDEA

By Bruce Menchetti, Ph.D.

The current Presidential Administration has announced and partially followed through on a plan to abolish the U.S. Department of Education. On March 20, 2025, President Trump signed an Executive Order to close the department and give the states the responsibility for educational policy in the United States. The stated goal is to provide parents and states with control over their kids’ education. This article discusses how we can make this promise of parental and state control a reality for kids with disabilities.

The U.S. Department of Education has traditionally been a key player in educating kids with disabilities. They wrote and shepherded legislation through Congress titled the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), giving the department oversight responsibilities on state administration of the IDEA law an. One of the key provisions of the law gives students with disabilities the right to learn in regular classrooms and settings as close to their non-disabled peers as possible. States were also mandated to involve parents in all decisions about their kids’ education. However, abolishing the Department of Education will leave a void in oversight. Without federal oversight, it is unclear how the nation will make sure that kids’ and parents’ rights under IDEA are still protected.

One way to make sure states follow the rules and ethical guidelines of IDEA is to give parents, teachers and school leaders the power to oversee how kids with disabilities are being taught in each state. What I am proposing is a board made up of parents of school-aged kids with disabilities, special education teachers, school principals and state education officials be given oversight powers to evaluate how well students with disabilities are being cared for in each state’s schools.

Although boards such as local school boards and higher education governing boards are becoming increasingly partisan and subject to the whims of those in power in Washington and the State capitals, this tendency does not have to be apply to these boards. This potential problem can be overcome with democracy and a mandate for non-partisan elections.

In March 2025, Secretary of Education Linda McMahon suggested that closing the federal Education Department won’t mean cutting money for those who rely on it, including students with special needs. The remaining federal special needs funds could be used to elect parents and teachers to serve on an IDEA compliance board in each state. These elections should be nonpartisan and open to all voters, increasing the likelihood that special interest groups will not take over the process.

To give parents and states more control over the education of students with disabilities, we could hold nonpartisan general elections every two years to elect members to these IDEA Compliance Boards. Candidates would nominated by a commission of educators that is mandated to nominate parents of children with autism, learning disabilities, developmental disabilities, sensory disabilities, emotional and behavioral disabilities and orthopedic and health disabilities as well as special education teachers and school administrators would have to meet state election law requirements to qualify as candidates.

Such a board, made up of people from all walks of life, would provide the oversight necessary to ensure state compliance with IDEA rules and policies. They’ would be empowered to check on schools’ compliance and provide reports on how well they’re doing. They could even give out an annual report card on how well schools are teaching kids with disabilities.

As a professor who specializes in education for kids with disabilities, my experience suggests that creating such boards in every state would be a good way of implementing IDEA and could help take up the slack from a missing U.S. Department of Education. Parents and teachers would have a powerful instrument to provide good education for kids. with special needs.