



1925-2025
Legacy. Impact. Possibilities.

September 17, 2025

The Honorable Bill Cassidy, MD
Chair, Health, Education, Labor and
Pensions Committee
United States Senate
428 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Ranking Member, Health, Education, Labor
and Pensions Committee
United States Senate
648 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cassidy and Ranking Member Sanders:

On behalf of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA), I am writing to share our views on the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee hearing on “The State of K-12 Education.”

ASHA is the national professional, scientific, and credentialing association for 241,000 members, certificate holders, and affiliates who are audiologists; speech-language pathologists (SLPs); speech, language, and hearing scientists; audiology and speech-language pathology assistants; and students. Nearly 47% of ASHA members work in early childhood and K-12 educational settings, including 5.3% who work in preschool settings.¹ These professionals play a central role in supporting students, families, and school staff in early intervention, early childhood, and both general and special education K-12 settings. The services provided by ASHA members are essential to helping children and students develop effective cognitive-communication skills and achieve positive learning outcomes.

Speech-language pathology services are particularly vital and highly utilized by students served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). According to the Department of Education’s (ED) *46th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2024*, speech or language impairments account for the second most common primary disability category for children receiving services under IDEA Part B (33% for ages 3 to 5 and 18% for ages 5 to 21).² Audiologists and SLPs provide essential early intervention services and educational support services to children, regardless of their primary disability category, and often provide assistance beyond the scope of IDEA.

ASHA strongly supports the continued existence of a well-resourced, independent, cabinet-level ED. We oppose efforts—such as staffing reductions and the cancelation of grants and contracts—that make it harder for states, local districts, and institutions of higher education to support student achievement and that hinder access to critical services provided by ASHA’s school-based members. ED plays a fundamental role in enforcing legal protections for students, particularly those with disabilities, and in supporting educators by elevating best practices. It complements the efforts of state and local education agencies to ensure a quality education and related support for all students and their families.

We are grateful that your colleagues on the Senate Appropriations Committee have rejected the Administration's fiscal year 2026 proposal to reduce ED spending by 15%. The following proposals would have a catastrophic impact on the ability of states and local districts to meet the educational needs of their communities:

- Reduce spending for K-12 education by 65% and consolidate funding for Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and other K-12 programs into a single block grant to states;
- Consolidate all funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) into a "Special Education Simplified Funding Program" that would be distributed as a block grant to states; and
- Reduce funding for the Office of Civil Rights by 35%.

In particular, the proposed consolidation of IDEA would (1) eliminate critical professional development programs that support the workforce pipeline of special educators, such as audiologists and SLPs, and (2) jeopardize the civil rights of families and students to receive services and a free appropriate public education as required by law.

We are greatly concerned that ED continues to ignore congressional intent by delaying, withholding, and redirecting appropriated funds for fiscal year 2025. The recent cancellation of IDEA Part D personnel preparation and technical assistance grants will make it more difficult to build a special education workforce pipeline to meet the needs of individuals with disabilities and to ensure that schools have the resources they need to provide all students with a free appropriate public education.

Robust funding for ED is also particularly important given changes to Medicaid included in the One Big Beautiful Bill Act (PL 119-21). Medicaid is the fourth largest federal funding stream for school districts, and services provided by audiologists and SLPs are a key source of Medicaid funds generated for school districts. States are already implementing changes to their Medicaid program requirements and decreasing provider reimbursement rates. These changes—even those designed to be confined to adult populations—and reduced federal spending will have a negative impact on both students' access to school-based health services and schools' access to funds for eligible health and related services.

It is imperative that ED remain a single, cabinet-level agency to ensure that educational programs and services—particularly those supporting students with disabilities—are developed, overseen, and implemented by individuals with the necessary expertise to ensure their success. This structure is critical to ensuring that all students, especially those with disabilities, receive the services they need throughout their educational journey, from early childhood programs through K-12 schools and into post-secondary education or career pathways.

ASHA appreciates the opportunity to provide this input for your consideration and is eager to provide informed analysis of any legislative proposals the Committee may subsequently develop and/or consider. ASHA urges you to ensure that any future legislative proposals are informed by the expertise of the professionals—such as educational audiologists and school-based SLPs—who provide the federally mandated services on which many of your constituents rely.

If you or your staff have questions or require additional information regarding the roles of audiologists and SLPs working in educational settings, please contact Eric Masten, ASHA's director of federal affairs for education, at emasten@asha.org.

Sincerely,



A. B. Mayfield-Clarke, PhD, CCC-SLP
2025 ASHA President

cc: United States Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations

¹ American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. (2025). *2024 Member & Affiliate Profile*.
<https://www.asha.org/siteassets/surveys/2024-member-affiliate-profile.pdf>

² U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Office of Special Education Programs. (June 2025). *46th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2024*. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/2024-annual-report-to-congress-on-the-individuals-with-disabilities-education-act-idea/>