



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES

THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY

December 8, 2025

Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities (CCD)  
Education Task Force Co-chairs

920 First Street, NE Suite 740  
Washington, DC 20002

RE: The Use of the Phrase "Special Needs" in Official U.S. Department of Education Communications

Dear Co-chairs and Members of the CCD Education Task Force:

Thank you for your letter dated October 9, 2025, addressed to Secretary McMahon, regarding the use of the phrase "Special Needs" in official U.S. Department of Education communications. The Secretary shared your concerns with me and asked me to provide a response.

I want to assure you that both the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS) have long-standing practices of using person-first language in all official communications. Consistent with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), our offices consistently use the terms "student with a disability" (OCR) or "child with a disability" (OSERS).<sup>1</sup> More broadly, neither office uses the term "special needs" as part of day-to-day work or external communications, and these practices will continue.

Thank you for your advocacy on this important matter. I look forward to a continued collaboration with the Task Force to protect the rights of children and students with disabilities.

Sincerely,

Kim Richey

Digitally signed by Kim  
Richey  
Date: 2025.12.08  
16:48:02 -05'00'

Kimberly M. Richey  
Acting Assistant Secretary  
Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services

<sup>1</sup> As appropriate, the Office of Special Education Programs also uses terms such as: "Infants, Toddlers, Children, and Youth with Disabilities" or "Infants and Toddlers with Disabilities"