



Advocates for Children of New York

Protecting every child's right to learn

News Release

For immediate release

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Response to Executive Order on the Future of the U.S. Department of Education

March 21, 2025 (NEW YORK CITY) — *Kim Sweet, Executive Director of Advocates for Children of New York (AFC), issued the following statement in response to the President's Executive Order seeking to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education:*

For more than four decades, the U.S. Department of Education has played a key role in enforcing civil rights laws like the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); supporting districts as they strive to provide a quality education to all students; and funding and disseminating educational research to improve the quality of teaching and learning nationwide. We are deeply concerned about what will happen to these important functions in the wake of the Executive Order calling for the Department's closure and the huge cuts already made to Department staffing.

The U.S. Department of Education cannot be shuttered without an act of Congress. But at Advocates for Children, we have been hearing from parents panicked that their children with disabilities will lose access to the supports and services they need to learn; from educators who want to know if and how they can support their transgender and nonbinary students; and from immigrant parents who are worried about sending their children to school.

We want to make very clear to families: ***your rights in New York City public schools have not changed.***

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act remains in place. All students with disabilities have the right to a free and appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. Your child should receive all the supports and services on their Individualized Education Program (IEP).
- Transgender and gender expansive students are protected by state and local law and regulations. Schools are required to use a student's chosen name and pronouns, and all students have the right to use restrooms and participate on sports teams that match their gender identity.
- Your child has the right to attend public school, no matter the language you speak, the country you were born in, or when your family arrived in the United States. Schools should not ask students or families to report their immigration status, and non-local law enforcement, including ICE, are not allowed into school buildings unless they have a warrant signed by a judge.

All children have the right to learn, and universal public schooling is the lifeblood of a healthy democracy. Yet access to a quality public education has never been truly universal in the United States; from the anti-literacy laws of the nineteenth century, which made it illegal to teach Black Americans how to read and write, to the warehousing and systemic exclusion of children with disabilities from public school prior to the 1970s, our nation's history makes clear that opportunity to learn is far from guaranteed. While there is still much work to do, we cannot roll back the progress that has been made.

Advocates for Children is proud to stand with parents, students, educators, and advocates across the country who are fighting to keep the federal protections and programs our children need.

About Advocates for Children of New York (AFC)

Since 1971, Advocates for Children of New York has worked to ensure a high-quality education for New York students who face barriers to academic success, focusing on students from low-income backgrounds who are at greatest risk for failure or discrimination in school because of their poverty, disability, race, ethnicity, immigrant or English Language Learner status, sexual orientation, gender identity, homelessness, or involvement in the foster care or juvenile justice systems. AFC uses four integrated strategies: free advice and legal representation for families of students; free trainings and workshops for parents, communities, and educators and other professionals to equip them to advocate on behalf of students; policy advocacy to effect change in the education system and improve education outcomes; and impact litigation to protect the right to quality education and compel needed reform.