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***Commission’s D.C. Advisory Committee Findings
Spur Federal Investigation into Special Education Barriers
in D.C. Public Schools***

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights (Commission) has been at the forefront of examining barriers facing students with disabilities. A 2024 report by the Commission’s District of Columbia Advisory Committee (Committee), [Accessing Services for Students with Disabilities in DC Public Schools](#), detailed systemic failures in special education services—including delayed identification, persistent funding challenges, and transportation barriers—resulting in significant and long-term harm for students and their families.

The Committee’s findings prompted the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to launch a federal investigation into D.C. Public Schools in March 2025. [OCR’s investigation](#) examined whether the District failed to properly identify and serve students with disabilities and imposed undue burdens on families seeking legally required services.

Chair Rochelle M. Garza stated, “OCR’s findings reinforce what families and advocates have long experienced, and we hope they lead to the adoption of the District of Columbia Advisory Committee’s unanimous recommendations to ensure students receive the services they are entitled to.”

In addition to documenting these challenges, the Committee advanced a comprehensive set of bipartisan recommendations to the Commission, Congress, and federal and local policymakers aimed at:

- strengthening IDEA implementation,
- improving service delivery,
- addressing workforce shortages, and
- reducing barriers that force families into due process complaints to access services.

The Committee further reinforced these findings through a [2026 addendum](#), unanimously adopted on a bipartisan basis, incorporating continued testimony from

policymakers, advocates, and families and underscoring the persistence of the challenges identified in the original report.

This work reflects a broader, sustained effort by the Commission and its Advisory Committees nationwide to examine IDEA compliance and barriers to services. Building on findings from the [Arkansas](#) and [Nevada](#) Advisory Committees, the Commission further examined these issues in its 2025 Statutory Enforcement Report, [*The Federal Response to Teacher Shortage Impacts on Students with Disabilities*](#), including through a [public briefing](#) and a [virtual listening session](#) with affected communities.

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The U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, established by the Civil Rights Act of 1957, is the only independent, bipartisan agency charged with advising the President and Congress on civil rights and reporting annually on federal civil rights enforcement. Our 56 state Advisory Committees offer a broad perspective on civil rights concerns at state and local levels. For information about the Commission, please visit www.usccr.gov.