Understood Quick Insights Series

Uncertain future: The end of the Department of Education

On March 20, 2025, President Trump signed an executive order directing the secretary of education to "take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education." This significant policy change prompted widespread uncertainty about how it would affect children, particularly students requiring specialized support.

Understood.org conducted research to gauge parents' immediate reactions, concerns, and emotions. An online survey was conducted via Qualtrics with a nationally representative sample of 510 U.S. parents of children ages 18 or younger. The sample included a subset of 290 parents of children with IEPs or 504 plans, to learn specifically about perceptions among this population.

Key insights

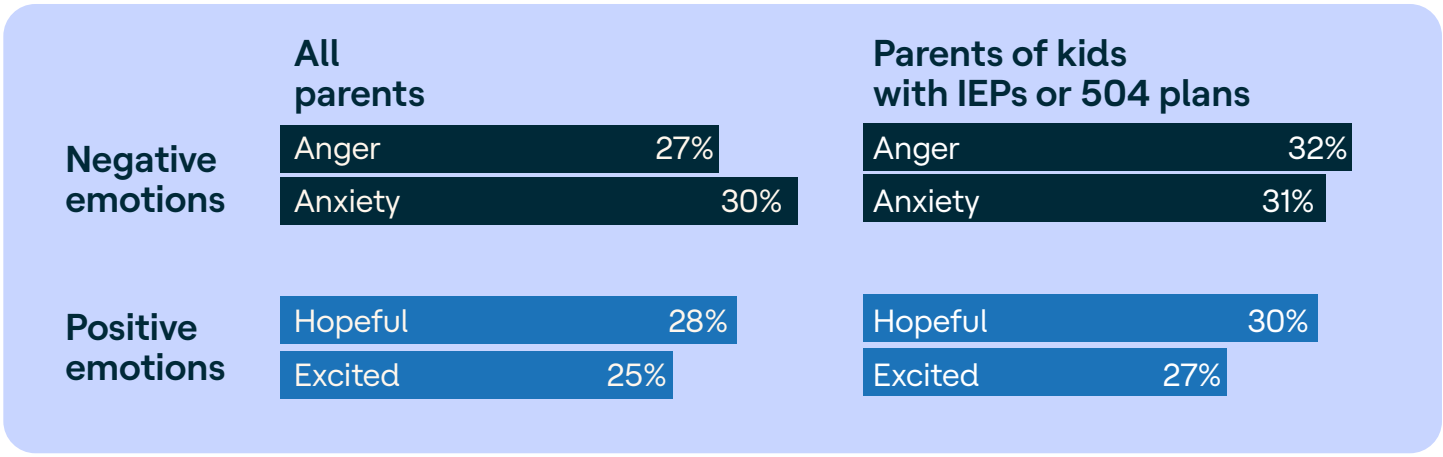
Parents of kids with IEPs or 504 plans were **significantly more concerned** about the dismantling of the Department of Education.

- 90% of these parents expressed concern (60% are very concerned), compared to 59% of parents overall.

Parents' **emotional reactions** are mixed — not one-sided.

- Parents expressed negative and positive feelings at similar rates. This held among parents of kids with IEPs or 504 plans.

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Parents prioritized concerns about school support services and funding.

- Among all parents, the leading concerns were that their child could lose **services or supports** (46%) and that **school budgets** could be impacted (46%). For parents of kids with IEPs or 504 plans, concern about losing services or supports rose to 57%.

Implications

These insights highlight the urgent need for clear communication from educational authorities about continued support and funding — especially for specialized programs. Understood.org proactively addresses parental concerns by providing expert-vetted information and accessible resources. See these recent articles:

- What happens to my child's IEP if the U.S. Department of Education closes?
- What does the Department of Education do for special education?

Future research should examine the long-term effects of these policy changes and help inform the development of supportive tools, resources, and advocacy efforts tailored to the needs of both parents and students.

Connect with us

We're always looking to collaborate and partner with others on our research. Reach out to our team at knowledge@understood.org to learn more.

Methodology: Between March 21 and March 28, 2025, the Understood.org research team conducted an online survey using Qualtrics with a nationally representative sample of 510 U.S. parents of children ages 18 or younger. Among these respondents, 290 were parents of children who have an IEP or a 504 plan. For this sample, the data are accurate to within ±4.3 percentage points at a 95% confidence level.

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