

# OSPI Special Education November 2023 Update



## Legislative Session Update

Click [HERE](#) for updates on OSPI bill proposals and other news on the upcoming legislative session.

## Native American Heritage Month

The 2023 theme for Native American Heritage Month is Celebrating Tribal Sovereignty and Identity. To learn more about this year's theme and about the history of Native American Heritage Month, visit the [Bureau of Indian Education website](#).

According to the 2010 US Census, 24% of Native Americans and Alaska Natives have a disability, compared to 19% of the general population. This disproportionate number of Native Americans and Alaska Natives with disabilities necessitates a need for services, however, Native Americans and Alaska Natives remain unserved or underserved by support agencies and organizations across the country.

Valerie Williams, Director of the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) consistently reiterates OSEP's support to assist The Bureau of Indian Education (BIE) in continuing their journey towards meeting requirements of IDEA and improving outcomes for students with disabilities in the 174 BIE-funded schools with academic programs across 23 states. Watch [this short video](#) from Director Williams where she discusses the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the urgency required to ensure that all students with disabilities are receiving high quality special education services. This includes recognition of the progress that has been made because of the work done by the BIE and the continued commitment from OSEP to support those efforts and improvements.

## Resources for Military-Connected Children with Disabilities and Their Families

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), recently released [a letter addressing the need to continue to help support military-connected children with disabilities and their families](#) through the numerous educational and life transitions they may face.

Due to frequent transitions, the families of military-connected children with disabilities may have the added challenges related to family and support networks separation and disruptions in the continuity of early intervention services and special education and related services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

[These resources](#) can help to support states, districts, families, and others to meet the unique needs of military-connected children with disabilities and ensure the timely provision of required early intervention and special education and related services.

## **Special Education Division Staff Spotlight: Assistant Director of Dispute Resolution, Alyssa Fairbanks**

### **What is your role at OSPI?**

I am the Assistant Director of Special Education Dispute Resolution. This means I oversee our special education dispute resolution system in Washington, including facilitated IEPs, mediation, special education community complaints, and due process. I also support policy development, the development of guidance and technical assistance, and work with our Equity and Civil Rights Office and OSPI's Legal Office. This year two of my priorities for the dispute resolution team are to dig more into data around the accessibility of the dispute resolution system and to focus on ensuring effective corrective actions in complaints.

### **What do you like about working in the Special Education Division at OSPI?**

One thing I love about my job is seeing the impact on students eligible for special education in Washington. Even though many of the situations we deal with in dispute resolution are tense and emotional, the complaint decisions have a real impact on students. Several years ago, I got an email from a parent who had filed a complaint that has always stuck with me. The parent shared that following the complaint decision the student's IEP had been implemented, the student was receiving services, and the student had ended the school year receiving straight A's! It is outcomes like this that reinforce how important this work is and remind me that there are students at the center of all the work I do. My other favorite thing about working at OSPI is the wonderful, passionate, smart, and collaborative colleagues I get to work with every day.

### **What are your favorite things to do outside of work?**

I read a ton, love to cook, spend time with family and friends, and exercise. I've been getting back into

yoga and last spring started taking a tai chi class. I also bike, with my most recent big bike ride being the cycling portion of the Ski to Sea team relay race in May 2023. I also am in the midst of a multi-year reading quest to read a biography of every president in chronological order and visit a historical site associated with each president. I've just finished reading James K. Polk and I am about to start Zachary Taylor, and this summer I visited Berkeley Plantation in Virginia, which is where William Henry Harrison, who served the shortest presidential term, grew up!