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Yudin to leave OSERS at end of month

As a veteran of the executive branch, having served in the Labor Department and the Social Security Administration before coming to the Education Department in 2010, Michael Yudin knew how to give the optimistic, making-great-progress kind of speech. Indeed, happy talk is the occupational hazard of political appointees.

As head of OSERS, however, Yudin was also not one to mince words when it came to the prospects for students with [IEPs](#).

At a conference in 2014, for example, he made it clear that the special ed field could not afford to keep doing what it had always been doing if it was serious about helping such students.

"For too long, we've focused only on meeting the requirements" of the IDEA, he told members of the [National Disability Rights Network](#). "The procedural safeguards are so critical for kids and families, but it's not enough. It's just not enough."

Now, as Yudin prepares to leave the Obama administration at the end of the month, it is incumbent on all who remain to keep that focus on results, according to Lindsay Jones, director of public policy and advocacy for the [National Center for Learning Disabilities](#).

Yudin's departure was announced April 6, with deputy OSERS chief Sue Swenson tapped to fill the post on an acting basis.

"The hallmarks of the Yudin era were breaking down silos -- so we saw more integration of OSERS work throughout the department than ever -- and, second, just a fierce dedication to outcomes and pushing a field that is sort of hunkered down and built for just compliance to try to see beyond that," Jones said. "I wouldn't say we're perfectly there, but he took some very important steps to move us toward outcomes."

For example, Jones said, Yudin was a proponent of OSEP's [Results-Driven Accountability](#) initiative, in which states are judged in part by their ability to improve test scores, graduation rates, and other performance-related data for students with IEPs.

Yudin also deserves credit, Jones said, for helping [repeal](#) the "2 percent" rule, which let states create alternate tests for students who did not qualify as among those with the most significant cognitive disabilities but nonetheless were not considered strong enough for regular tests.

Finally, Jones said, Yudin's name always will be associated with a *Dear Colleague* letter issued in November and reported at [66 IDELR 227](#), stressing that "in order to make FAPE available to each eligible child with a disability,

the child's IEP must be designed to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum."

"That letter -- to me, that's where we're going," Jones said.

Yudin also was known for his interest in behavioral issues, according to Barb Trader, executive director of [TASH](#).

"Michael is really concerned with discipline practices and has spent time thinking about how both to support schools in this era that we're living in but also to support students to be treated with equity," she said. "The OCR data collection has shown us that students of color and kids with disabilities have been unequally treated ... and I know that Michael has been a strong leader on disproportionality."

Nancy Reder, deputy executive director of the [National Association of State Directors of Special Education](#), said she has known Yudin since he was a Senate staffer, helping guide passage of IDEA 2004.

"His knowledge level coming into the department -- he certainly knew the programs inside and out even before he came to the department," she said.

And so the Yudin era comes to an end, with no word from the Education Department about what he will be doing next.

His straight-talking manner, however -- the trait that leavened what otherwise could have been a too-cheery message -- will not be forgotten.

At the NDRN conference, for example, he talked about the fact that the vast majority of eighth-grade students with IEPs are not proficient in reading or math.

"Four out of five high school students with disabilities say their primary goal is to go [to] college, [but] they can't go to college if they can't read at a high school level," he said. "They may be going, but you know what? They're not going to succeed."

See also:

- [Yudin, others to parse discipline disparities on YouTube](#) (March 14)
- [IEP guidance prompts praise, hesitation from observers](#) (Nov. 24)
- ['We have to do things differently,' Yudin says of low proficiency rates](#) (June 5, 2014)

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