# POSITION DESCRIPTION

# Assistant Secretary for communications and outreach, Department of education

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| **OVERVIEW** | |
| Senate Committee | Health, Education, Labor and Pensions |
| Agency Mission | To promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access |
| Position Overview | The assistant secretary for communications and outreach provides overall leadership and policy development to the department's efforts to engage a wide variety of groups and the general public in the president's and secretary's education agenda.[[1]](#endnote-1) |
| Compensation | Level IV $155,500 (5 U.S.C. § 5315)[[2]](#endnote-2) |
| Position Reports to | The Secretary of Education and the Deputy Secretary of Education |
| **RESPONSIBILITIES** | |
| Management Scope | The Office of Communications and Outreach carries out a wide variety of functions, including media relations, public engagement, intergovernmental affairs, customer service, message development and speechwriting, web and digital strategy, photography and video, publications, event planning, internal communications and Education’s signature recognition programs for schools and students.[[3]](#endnote-3)  In 2016, the Office of Communication and Outreach had 86 nonseasonal, full-time permanent employees.[[4]](#endnote-4) The assistant secretary has about seven direct reports and manages a budget of about $18 million. |
| Primary Responsibilities | * Leads Education's communications and outreach efforts, and oversees press relations, digital media and content development, publications, contacts with organizations, and communication with parents, educators, students and citizens * Provides overall leadership for the creation, design, development and coordination of specialized media and outreach efforts, and provides management and direction to the organizational components * Offers policy advice on communications and outreach matters to the secretary and the department’s leadership; articulates the department's message; represents the department's and administration's position to national news media on critical and sensitive issues; and develops innovative communications strategies[[5]](#endnote-5) |
| Strategic Goals and Priorities | [Depends on the policy priorities of the administration] |
| **REQUIREMENTS AND COMPETENCIES** | |
| Requirements | * Experience with, or at minimum understanding of, all the tools of communications * Experience leading large teams (preferred) * Understanding of education issues (a plus) * Understanding of the federal policymaking process (a plus) |
| Competencies | * Strong communication and interpersonal skills * Excellent leadership skills * Ability to work under high pressure at all times * Ability to handle sensitive matters * Comfort with ambiguity and imperfection * Comfort with multitasking * Belief in the abilities of all team members * Ability to lead in a matrixed agency * Exceptional writing, editing and public-speaking skills * Understanding of, and appreciation for, the diversity of America, its schools and workplaces, and how communications strategies and messaging can vary by audience * Ability to work long hours and weekends, though not necessarily from the office |
| **PAST APPOINTEES** | |
| Matthew Lehrich (acting, 2016 to 2017) – Strategic Advisor to the Secretary for Communications at the Department of Education; Vice President of Global Reputation Management; White House Assistant Press Secretary | |
| Johnathan Schorr (acting 2014 to 2015) – Deputy Assistant Secretary for Communication Development at the Department of Education; Partner and Chief of Staff for the NewSchools Venture Fund; Director of New Initiatives at the KIPP network of schools | |
| Massie Ritsch (2012 to 2014) – Deputy Assistant Secretary for External Affairs & Outreach for the Department of Education; Communications Director of the Center for Responsive Politics; Vice President of the Sugarman Communications Group | |
| Peter Cunningham (2009 to 2012) – President of Cunningham Communications; Head Speechwriter to the Mayor of Chicago, Richard M. Daley; Staff Writer for the Chicago City Council Finance Committee | |

1. OPM [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017 (Public Law 115-31, May 5, 2017), contains a provision that continues the freeze on the payable pay rates for certain senior political officials at 2013 levels during calendar year 2017. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/oco/schorr.html [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Partnership for Public Service analysis of FedScope data [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. OPM [↑](#endnote-ref-5)