

Action Report #3

Donald Trump Can't Actually Dismantle the Department of Education, but His Policies Still Threaten Us All

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Over the last year, Americans have heard a lot about [Project 2025](#), an initiative backed by conservative organizations like the Heritage Foundation in an effort to align with President Donald [Trump's policy agenda](#). Project 2025 includes numerous proposals to drastically reshape the work of the Department of Education, including a proposal to entirely dismantle the agency. Advocates of this extreme proposal have long argued that federal oversight in education “stifles local control and parental rights.” However, such an action would devastate public education, exacerbate inequities across the country, and devastate economic priorities and workforce development.

This concept of abolishing the Department of Education isn't new; [Newt Gingrich championed similar ideas](#), citing a desire to reduce federal involvement in state matters. More recently, policymakers like Senator Rand Paul have [introduced bills](#) to eliminate the Department of Education, reflecting a long-standing ideological push within certain factions of the Republican Party. These proposals, while often dismissed as unrealistic, signal broader efforts to erode federal education programs, raising concerns about the future of equitable access to learning in the United States.

But in the first weeks of the Trump administration, Americans have seen an unprecedented weaponization of the federal agency, turning the Department of Education into a full-fledged [propaganda machine](#) for the [supremacy of their political ideologies](#). The Trump administration is leveraging the full weight of the agency to control what is taught in classrooms and discussed across college campuses. Their focus isn't on “local control” or “parental rights.” They are campaigning against diversity and equitable educational opportunities and attacking any positions that may not be directly in line with the current whims of Donald Trump, as evidenced by the [recent executive order on antisemitism](#) and [accompanying fact sheet](#) attacking “left-wing radicals.” Without a doubt, attacks on American students, families, and communities will

ultimately backfire against Trump and the ideologues seeking to destroy the Department of Education. And the political price will be paid by our most vulnerable.

The Consequences of Eliminating the Department of Education

First, it should be noted that it is entirely illegal for the president to eliminate a Congressionally authorized and mandated agency. Not only can the Trump administration not do this, any efforts to attempt to eliminate the department will likely result in dire economic consequences that would undermine American interests for generations.

1. Monumental Economic Impact

Eliminating the Department of Education would curtail substantial federal funding for K-12 schools and institutions of higher education, leading to devastating economic consequences particularly for low-income and rural communities that rely heavily on these resources. Federal funds account for a significant amount of total K-12 education spending, and federal cuts would cause schools in low-income areas to face severe budget shortfalls, leading to higher local taxes, teacher layoffs, increased class sizes, and the possible elimination of essential services like special education, counseling, and extracurricular programs.

The impact across higher education would likely be even more extreme, with direct economic consequences for students, institutions, and the broader national workforce. Any plans to dismantle the Department of Education would cause significant disruptions to the federal financial aid programs, including likely shuttering the Office of Federal Student Aid which has disbursed billions of direct federal aid to students, families, colleges, and universities. Further, since roughly eighty percent of Pell Grants are funded through annually appropriated discretionary spending, it is likely that these critical grants would see dramatic cuts in addition to needing another agency to disburse them directly to students and families. And while the responsibility for administering student loans would likely shift to the Department of the Treasury, any effort would likely cause substantial delays and significant problems in further management of existing servicing contracts, data sharing issues, and system failures. Just look at the [impact of the delayed implementation](#) of the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) simplification effort as an example of the likely chaos to ensue. FAFSA spent years updating a complicated system, was met with funding limitations, and identified numerous technical issues which created substantial delays and ultimately affected the aid disbursements for millions of students. Those effects would

be magnified by completely subverting entire systems that students, families, and colleges have relied on for decades. The best-case scenario will be a massive disruption to the flow of financial aid and the elimination of critical protections and programs to make education affordable, including income-driven loan repayment plans and Public Service Loan Forgiveness that millions of firefighters, nurses, military members, and civil servants rely on. The worst-case scenario would also include massive cuts to the amount of financial aid available.

These steps would force many low- and middle-income students out of higher education altogether. As a result, enrollment would likely free fall, and faculty across the country would be laid off in droves. Furthermore, thousands of colleges and universities without sizable endowments to weather the financial disaster brought to their doors would face the threat of campus closures. These closures would disproportionately affect community colleges and regional public universities that serve the majority of American higher education students.

The impact would extend beyond individual colleges and students. The US economy depends on a well-educated workforce, and removing federal support for higher education would reduce the number of skilled workers in critical fields such as healthcare, technology, and engineering at a time when the US is already falling farther behind the rest of the world. Employers already struggling with labor shortages would find it harder to fill high-skill positions, weakening the nation's global competitiveness, and job losses would extend to local economies that rely on these institutions.

Additionally, fewer federal loans means more students forced to rely solely on private loans. As a former Department of Education official, I specialized in tracking student debt. I have witnessed the impact of predatory student loan companies, draining the savings of hardworking American families with higher fees and interest rates, less flexible repayment options, and fewer consumer protections. America cannot afford more generations saddled with higher levels of personal debt and reduced consumer spending over time.

Finally, the economic impact would be substantial to state and local governments, who without federal support would be forced to either raise taxes or make drastic budget cuts elsewhere, further straining already limited resources.

2. Loss of Federal Protections for Vulnerable Students

The Department of Education plays a critical role in enforcing civil rights in education, ensuring that millions of students with disabilities, students of color, and LGBTQ+ students have equal access to educational opportunities. This isn't just about programs. It is also about school funding, quality of school facilities, staffing, and professional development programs that make teachers better educators for all students. Ensuring that students aren't singled out for harassment, discrimination, and harm has a direct impact on school safety and maintaining welcoming environments that keep young people in school and teachers in a professional pipeline.

Dismantling the Department of Education would undermine the protections under Title IX, special needs programs and investments in school facility upgrades through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the compliance with and enforcement of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, leaving vulnerable populations exposed to discrimination.

3. Threats to Educational Equity

The Department of Education distributes federal funding directly to K-12 schools and institutions of higher education, with over \$18 billion in Title I funding for low-income elementary and secondary schools and billions in funding to colleges and universities that provide high-quality education to underserved student populations and provide necessary training opportunities through TRIO, Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs, Strengthening Institutions, Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, Child Care Access Means Parents in School, and grants to special populations. Disrupting this funding would cause immediate closures and decimate our student learning outcomes; harm rural, suburban, and urban communities in all fifty states; and shake the foundation of our workforce by making countless educators unemployed but rapidly escalating our workforce skills gap.

Cutting off federal funding would disproportionately harm minority-serving institutions, historically Black colleges and universities, and tribal colleges, many of which depend on federal grants and aid to support underserved communities. Without these resources, economic inequality would widen and social mobility would decline. In the long run, the loss of federal investment in higher education would translate into lower earnings for individuals, reduced tax revenues for governments, and weaker economic growth overall. Without the Department of Education to drive federal financial support for educational equity to our communities, states with limited resources and no political will to prioritize education funding will see widened disparities between wealthy and impoverished communities, exacerbating systemic inequality.

4. Compromised Accountability

The Department of Education oversees accountability measures tied to student performance and school quality, ensuring that taxpayer dollars are spent effectively. In its absence, there would be a complete free-for-all where scam schools will crop up to prey on vulnerable communities. This would further leave millions of students without the tools to succeed in an increasingly competitive global economy.

5. Disruption to Educational Research and Innovation

The Department of Education is part of a vast federal infrastructure which supports research that drives educational innovation, from evidence-based teaching practices to technology integration. Without the Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences operating as a nexus point for education research and innovation, funding and coordination for this critical work would stall progress and leave educators without the resources to improve outcomes for their students.

Real Impact to Higher Education

Ultimately, the ramifications of dismantling the Department of Education far outweigh any purported political benefit, even for extremists like Trump and Musk. But the risk does not start and finish with full destruction of the agency, and we have seen this administration already throw out the scalpel and grab the sledgehammer in their efforts to create real and lasting harm to our institutions. This type of danger is very much in the cards for the future of America's students and educational infrastructure. The areas that those who care about the future of America's development and leadership should look at with greatest concern include:

Deregulation and Privatization

Weakened federal oversight could open the door for unchecked privatization of public education at both the K-12 and higher education levels. We've already seen attempts by the first Trump administration to drive federal funds to private and charter schools with less oversight and accountability. Trump's executive order [Expanding Educational Freedom and Opportunity for Families](#) accelerates this plan ([see our analysis here](#)).

We have seen substantial data that show Americans generally support and trust their school districts, even if they have concerns about "schools" more broadly. Whether or not the Department of Education is shuttered, it will be used to push greater privatization of public schools. These efforts risk fundamentally undermining the financial stability and quality of education across the country and will lead to the

proliferation of low-quality, for-profit K-12 charter schools and short-term unaccredited postsecondary programs that prey on those with limited financial resources.

Political Interference in Education

The Department of Education is already being turned into a propaganda outlet, spreading disinformation about campus diversity programs, trans women, and other hot-button culture war issues. For example, the department has started removing two hundred web pages from its website, which it characterizes as “hous[ing] [DEI resources](#) and encourag[ing] schools and institutions of higher education to promote or endorse harmful ideological programs.” The Department of Education has also been [tasked with re-forming the 1776 Commission](#), a body created by the Trump administration in 2020 and tasked with creating teaching materials that whitewash America’s history of racial injustice. The first iteration of this commission was populated not by scholars of American history, but [rather right-wing partisans](#).

Turning the Department of Education into a vehicle for propaganda will allow partisan agendas to directly dictate curriculum and educational priorities from the federal level to state and local levels. We have seen in his speeches and early executive orders that Donald Trump plans to weaponize Department of Education funding and regulations to enforce ideological conformity and undermine free inquiry on college campuses. It is almost certain that he will not only do this on antiwar issues related to our government’s involvement in Israel’s aggression against Palestinian civilians but expand this rhetoric to gender equity, trans rights, and racial equity issues across educational materials, coursework, and extracurricular events organized on campus. This approach ultimately prioritizes narratives that align with far-right protofascist ideals, censoring critical discourse and undermining knowledge and academic freedom.

Manipulation of Data and Loss of Transparency

The Department of Education collects and disseminates vital data on educational outcomes, equity gaps, and school performance while prioritizing the protection of student-level data and enforcing privacy laws. Weakening these functions would reduce the public’s ability to hold policymakers accountable and address systemic challenges in education, risk endangering our students’ information, and undermine our ability to compete at the highest educational levels around the globe.

Erosion of Equity Infrastructure

Programs that provide grants that support historically underserved communities will very likely face cuts and/or restructuring. These programs are essential for creating

opportunities in our educational system, and their dismantlement would further entrench inequities in education.

A Call to Action

At its core, the Department of Education serves as a safeguard against inequity and a promoter of opportunity. Its elimination or erosion would be a huge step backward for the United States. Education is the foundation of a thriving democracy and a robust economy, and a strong federal presence ensures that no student—regardless of their identity or zip code—is forgotten.

This administration isn't audacious, bold, or imaginative. There is no desire to "make America great again" unless you believe democracy and laws should be overruled by kings and oligarchs. Donald Trump and Elon Musk's efforts will backfire. We have seen this happen across the country already as teacher walkouts and strikes have taken hold across conservative states like Kansas, Tennessee, and Arizona. Attacking the Department of Education and undermining students, teachers, programs, and essential resources is an attack on American families and the most precious commodity they and this nation have, our children and a new generation built on hope and opportunity.

Each of these attacks, whether full dismantling of the department or otherwise, are illegal without authorization from Congress or substantial regulatory efforts. At this moment, the Trump administration is gutting the rule of law governing our democratic institutions, and it is vital that Congress, the judicial system, and Americans across the country hold this administration accountable for its illegal efforts to undermine American education.

Fighting back means a new movement rooted in justice and equal opportunity for all throughout our schools, with teachers, faculty, students, parents, and communities coming together. This is not the time to weather a storm, it is time to rise up to demand that the American Dream won't be reserved just for billionaires. Few federal agencies have the reach or the imaginative hold on being so closely associated with this American Dream, and we must follow the movements that have fought and struggled and died to protect our freedoms.