

Dismantling the Department of Education: An Overview

What is the Department of Education?

Established in 1979 during the Carter Administration through an act of Congress, the Department of Education (DOE) was created **to provide equal access to education for all** as well as to consolidate education efforts across the federal government. (DeMio and Martinez, 2025)

What does it do?

The primary responsibilities of the department are to:

1. Enforce civil rights laws to ensure equal access to education for all students;
 2. Conduct research and evaluation to inform education practices and policies;
 3. Administer the Title I program which provides funding to districts that serve low-income students to help offset state and local funding disparities;
 4. Provide funding to states and districts to support students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA); and
 5. Operate the federal student aid program.
- (DeMio and Martinez, 2025)

What does it NOT do?

The agency **DOES NOT** operate US schools or set curricula – ***a responsibility that already belongs to the states and local districts.***

It **DOES NOT** control learning standards or reading lists, nor does it set graduation or enrollment requirements. (Faguy, 2025; Mosley, 2025; Washington Week, 2025)

Department Budget and Funding

Federal funding for the Department of Education makes up **ONLY 2% of the nation's budget**. (DeMio and Martinez, 2025) It is one of the smallest cabinet level departments. (Haake, et al., 2025)

LESS THAN 10% of K-12 funding comes from DOE. The ***majority of school funding comes from state and local taxes.*** K-12 federal funding is limited and typically pays for special-education aides, tutoring programs, school social workers, and additional teachers to help lower class size.

The department's **biggest expenditure is on higher education** with more than 70% of its \$224 billion budget going to the federal student aid program. (Goldstein, 2024)

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Why is it being targeted?

As part of the “Reforming the Federal Workforce to Better Serve Americans” Executive Order, federal agencies, including the DOE, have been directed to ***“undertake plans for large-scale reductions in force and determine which agency components (or agencies themselves) may be eliminated or combined...”*** (The White House, 2025a)

The Executive Order ordering the dismantling of the DOE, frames an educational crisis in the US and cites reading and math scores at near historic lows. Data that the department itself is tasked with providing. (Washington Week, 2025; The White House, 2025b)

The DOE has also long faced criticism and targeting ***in an effort to “return education to the states” despite education already being largely run by states and local governments.*** (Mosley, 2025)

Furthermore, the department is accused of “indoctrinating young people with inappropriate racial, sexual and political material.” (Faguy, 2025)

Conservatives and others have long argued that the department's other functions, such as student loans and civil rights infractions, should be handled by the US Department of Treasury and Department of Justice, respectively. (Faguy, 2025)

Impacts: Immediate and Long-Term

A total shutdown of the DOE would require an act of Congress. However, directives to dismantle the department would essentially direct the agency to shutter itself. (Anderson, 2025; Faguy 2025)

The department has around 4,200 employees, **the smallest staff of 15 cabinet agencies and only about .2% of all federal employees**, with half of its employees set to be laid off beginning March 21, 2025. (Schneid, 2025)

Program Migration

This includes moving student aid to the Small Business Administration (SBA), and special education and nutritional programs to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) - *some of the largest programs administered by the DOE*. However, both the SBA and HHS are currently facing labor cuts either through layoffs or buyouts. (Green, et al., 2025)

Nearly **\$800 million of department funding goes towards research and tracking the education performance of American students**, such as reading and math scores, teacher training, and educational improvement but *there is no plan of where this will be relocated*. (Washington Week, 2025; Goldstein, 2024)

Funding Impacts

Through executive order, the agency has also been directed to ensure that “funds do not go toward programs or activities that advance diversity, equity and inclusion goals or gender ideology.” However, these programs, often falling under the label of diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI, are “efforts to improve workplace culture and create more opportunities for disadvantaged groups, and *they are not inherently discriminatory*.” (Haake, et al., 2025)

Funding at risk currently includes but is not limited to: federal student aid, state funding for curriculum development, free or reduced lunch programs, and support for students with special needs. (Hampton et al., 2025)

States and districts **could lose up \$18.4 billion in Title I funding** that supports school districts with high populations of low-income students and **\$14.2 billion in support for over 7 million students with disabilities**. (DeMio and Martinez, 2025)

Additionally, **\$226 million in grants were eliminated** under the Comprehensive Centers Program, a network of regional and national centers intended at providing “capacity-building” services to states and systems within their regions, including reports and convenings to improve instructional materials and educational outcomes. These centers have been criticized for forcing “radical agendas onto states and systems.” (US Department of Education, 2025)

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