



EDUCATION

Trump prepares order dismantling the Education Department

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Secretary of Education Linda McMahon leaves the House chamber after President Trump addresses to a joint session of Congress at the Capitol in Washington, D.C. on Tuesday.

Jose Luis Magana/AP

President Trump is expected to issue an executive action as early as Thursday calling on Education Secretary Linda McMahon to "take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education," according to a draft of the action obtained by NPR.

The move has been expected since early February, when the White House revealed its intentions but withheld the action itself until after McMahon's Senate confirmation.



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Republicans' love/hate relationship with the Education Department

The Senate voted Monday to make McMahon the next education secretary. Democrats uniformly opposed her after McMahon publicly committed to unwinding the department.

The draft action instructs McMahon to act "to the maximum extent appropriate and permitted by law," an acknowledgement that the department and its signature responsibilities were created by Congress, are protected by statute and cannot legally be altered without congressional approval, which would almost certainly require 60 votes to overcome a Democratic filibuster.

News of the action was first reported by The Wall Street Journal.

The White House did not respond to a request for comment.

The order offers as justification for the department's closure that, "since its founding in 1979, the Department of Education has spent more than \$1 trillion without producing virtually any improvement in student reading and mathematics scores."

According to The Nation's Report Card, one of the oldest and most reliable barometers of student achievement in the U.S., reading scores changed little between 1992 and 2019, though math achievement improved considerably. The pandemic though wrought havoc on student achievement, with many learning gaps remaining nearly five years after schools first closed.



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Linda McMahon has been confirmed as Trump's secretary of education

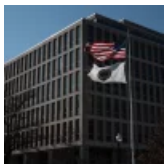
The draft executive action declares "the experiment of controlling American education through Federal programs and dollars ... has failed our children."

On average, federal dollars make up roughly 10% of public schools' funding, the lion's share coming from states and local taxes. Those federal dollars are also largely targeted to help the nation's most vulnerable students: those living in low-income communities, including millions of rural students, and children with disabilities. The department is prohibited by law from telling schools what, or how, to teach.

Within hours of McMahon's confirmation Monday, she shared a lengthy message with Education Department staff attempting to rally support for the department's unwinding, calling it "our opportunity to perform one final, unforgettable public service to future generations of students."

Early moves to reduce the department

The executive action also arrives as the department has already been the subject of widespread cuts and staff departures. Last month, the administration gutted the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), which is responsible for gathering and disseminating data on a wide range of topics, including research-backed teaching practices and the state of U.S. student achievement.



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Trump administration targets Education Department research arm in latest cuts

Among the canceled department grants were programs exploring how to accelerate students' math learning and efforts to study how best to prepare some students with disabilities for the difficult transition from high school into the working world.

The Trump administration has also laid off dozens of newer, probationary employees and put dozens more on paid leave for having any associations with DEIA programs, including some who were encouraged to attend a diversity workshop during the first Trump administration.

During her Senate confirmation hearing, McMahon was asked about this looming executive action and whether she would faithfully execute it. She would, she said.

"We'd like to do this right," McMahon told the committee, saying she would present Congress with a plan to unwind even the department's key, statutory responsibilities "that I think our senators could get on board with."

Key programs target poor communities and students with disabilities

Multiple senators asked whether the department's dismantling would include cuts to two key federal funding streams for K-12 schools: Title I for students in lower-income communities and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for students with disabilities.

McMahon said repeatedly that she considers the department separate from that funding. The former, she said, can be dismantled without affecting the latter. "It is not the president's goal to defund the programs. It was only to have it operate more efficiently."

Later, McMahon elaborated that IDEA funding, for example, is protected by statute and would not be targeted for cuts. But, she offered, it might be more effectively administered by a different agency, perhaps the Department of Health and Human Services.

The department also has legal authority to enforce federal civil rights laws on behalf of students, and it's unclear how its unwinding would affect the department's Office for Civil Rights. Though the Trump administration has already sent a warning to all schools that receive federal money, K-12 and colleges alike, that they must stop all DEIA programs or risk being investigated by the department and potentially losing their federal funding.

House Republicans have tried before to close the department and failed, and Republicans enjoy only narrow majorities in the House and Senate. Many of the department's statutory responsibilities enjoy the support of Republicans as well as Democrats.

The Education Department is among the smallest of all federal agencies, with roughly 4,200 employees. According to the website for the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE), the wages of Education Department employees account for 0.31% of all federal wages.

In an NPR/PBS News/Marist poll taken late last month, 63% of Americans surveyed said they would oppose getting rid of the department, compared with

37% who supported its closure.

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u.s. education department



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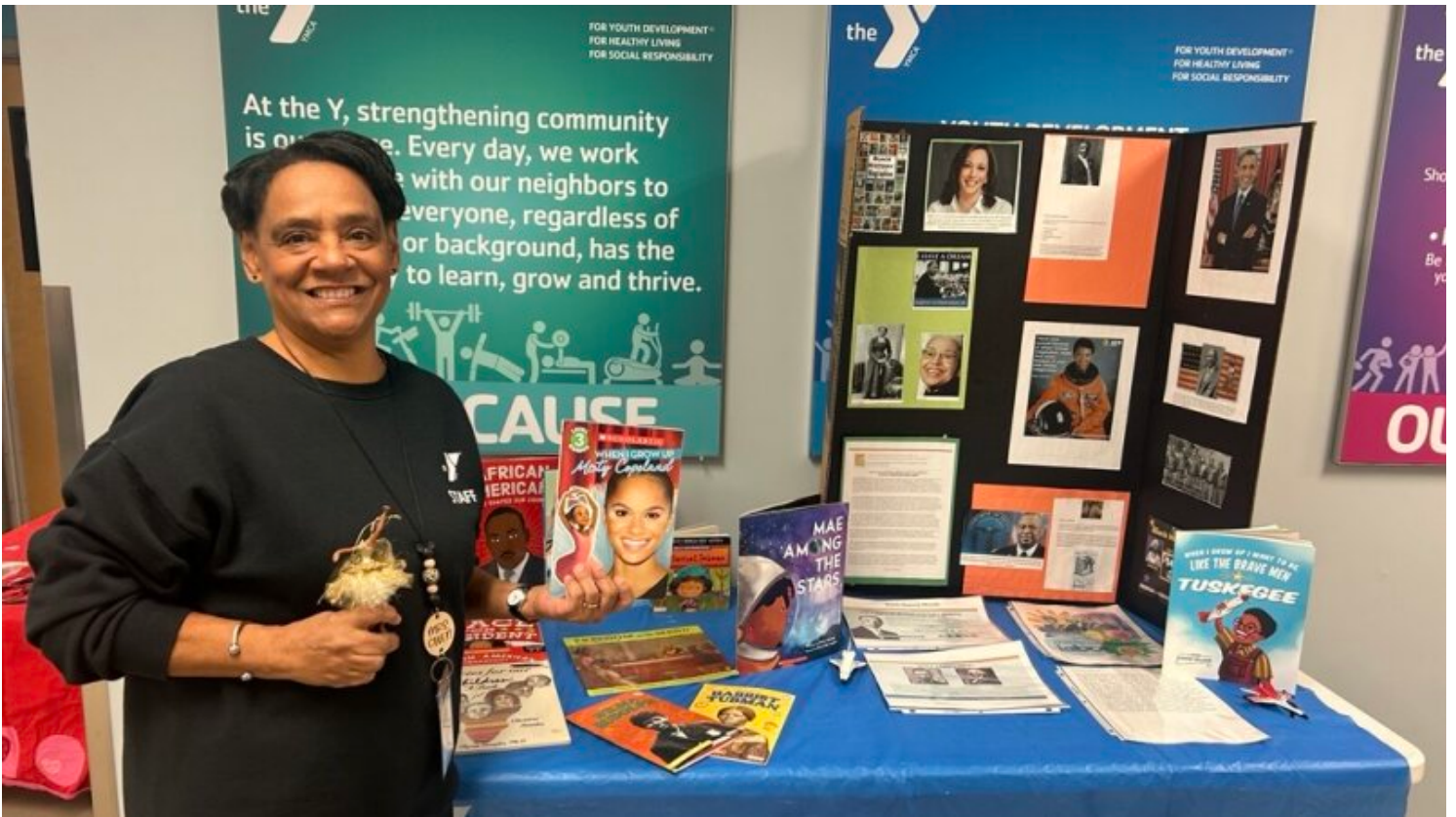


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