

# How US Education Secretary Linda McMahon is dismantling public education

Nancy Hanover  
5 March 2025

*Join the upcoming online meeting of the Educators Rank-and-File Committee (US), 'Stop Trump's Plans to Gut Public Education! Mobilize the Working Class in Defense of Immigrants and Social Rights!' on March 15, at 12 p.m. EDT. Register here.*

The US Department of Education is being dismantled from within following Linda McMahon's confirmation as Trump's Secretary of Education on Monday, March 3. All Department of Education (ED) employees were offered a buyout of up to \$25,000 to resign by March 3, effective at the end of the month.

With a federal government shutdown looming as of March 14, *Forbes* has raised the possibility that many ED services may never be restored. The 4,200-person department has already experienced abrupt DOGE-style job cuts. McMahon's mandate is to dismantle the agency piece by piece, devolving or terminating its services until Congress approves its final elimination. Much of the damage inflicted is already irreparable.

The Department of Education, founded in 1979, oversees the delivery of public education to over 100 million American children and college students. Both Trump and McMahon have demanded an end to federal oversight and record-keeping, a universal K-12 voucher scheme, the privatization of public education and the end of federal subsidies for student loans.

McMahon's confirmation vote in the Senate was 51-45, along party lines. While Democrats voted as a bloc against McMahon, they waged no campaign against the elevation of the World Wrestling Entertainment billionaire to the nation's highest education position, just as they have acceded to the mass firings of federal workers across the US.

After taking the oath of office, McMahon issued a statement entitled, "Our Department's Final Mission." She used the word "final" six times in the short statement, emphasizing her eagerness to scrap the 45-year-old agency. Having spent one year of her life in an education-related job, the wrestling magnate denigrated the rigorous training and specialized expertise of educational professionals, saying that "no one is more qualified than a parent" to make educational decisions.

She denounced the Department of Education (ED) as "not working" and responsible for "consistently languish[ing] student outcomes," a problem that will supposedly be resolved by sending education "back to the states." Speaking as the hatchetwoman, McMahon wrote, "This is our opportunity to perform one final, unforgettable public service ..."

Within hours of her swearing-in, McMahon displayed her fascist bona fides by collaborating with Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. to threaten the revocation of all

federal funding from colleges which do not deny anti-genocide students' rights to freedom of speech. She targeted Columbia University and its \$5 billion in federal contracts.

Repeating the vicious lie promoted by both parties that opposition to the Gaza genocide is "antisemitism," McMahon said there were "very serious questions about" Columbia's "fitness to continue doing business with the United States government."

## AFT "working together" with McMahon

American Federation of Teachers (AFT) President Randi Weingarten reacted to McMahon's confirmation by expressing her "deep concern" that "Donald Trump wants ... to take a wrecking ball to the Department of Education and this nation's public schools." Nonetheless, Weingarten emphasized that she was "extending her hand to work together" with the sworn enemy of public schools.

"Working together" with privatizers and budget cutters is what Weingarten does best. To cover her tracks, she launched a public relations campaign that advises teachers to pressure Congress. This included a "March Forth" "clap-in" or "clap-out" in which teachers were organized to applaud their students and wear red on March 4, supposedly to "stand up against assaults on public education."

This worthless exercise was only exceeded in uselessness by letter-writing events and a Times Square digital ad buy (with teachers' hard-earned dues money) to show an "Egg Counter" and illustrate Trump's lies about food prices.

Speaking like the prominent Wall Street operator she is, Weingarten also wrote a letter February 27 to BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, noting that as AFT president, she oversees \$4 trillion in retirement funds. She urged a review of Tesla's stock valuation, claiming she was doing so to "protect AFT members."

What a fraud! A real struggle requires a national strike to stop Elon Musk and the destruction of the Department of Education, which the union bureaucracy opposes at all costs.

Weingarten, a union bureaucrat for nearly three decades, is taking in some \$500,000 a year in her unelected position and is working every day to suppress a fightback by educators against the onslaught on public schools engineered by Wall Street. That struggle must come from educators, parents and students themselves.

## What is at stake?

With the collusion of the unions, the destruction of the ED is already well underway.

As of March 4, 2025, the administration has canceled over \$1.25 billion in contracts and grants or made other operational reductions, halting at least 89 active projects. These included longitudinal studies tracking student outcomes from kindergarten through high school, evaluations of reading instruction strategies, and research on support systems for students with disabilities. The administration has made clear it intends to abolish the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), the department's primary research arm.

Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs), operational for over 50 years, were cut by \$335 million. These laboratories developed programs and policies based on local needs.

These included: literacy improvement and trauma-informed educational practices in the Northwest; rural educator recruitment and retention in Alaska, Idaho and Washington; English-language learning supports in the West; a Mathematical Alliance for Florida, Georgia and Alabama; best practices to address chronic absenteeism in Nevada and California; college and career readiness assistance in Appalachia, and much more.

Teacher Quality Partnership Grants (TQP) were reduced by \$600 million. This program supported collaborations between universities and high-need school districts. Rural schools, which represented 60 percent of TQP grant recipients, face severe teacher shortages. At Winston-Salem TEACH—a consortium that includes Wake Forest University and Winston-Salem State University—a \$4.7 million grant for teacher stipends and Title I school placements was suddenly canceled.

Likewise, Louisiana lost \$23 million for rural teacher pipelines, and Ohio terminated a mentorship program connecting districts with educator preparation programs. These cuts worsen existing teacher shortages, which left 49,000 vacancies unfilled in the 2024–25 school year.

The Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) initiative has lost its entire \$50 million allocation. These grants supported evidence-based professional development in STEM, literacy and computational thinking. In Tennessee alone, the cancellation of SEED-funded training for 35 school leaders and 125 teachers in rural districts affected 3,200 students.

Similarly, the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) saw a reduction of \$120 million in supporting workforce retraining grants.

As painful as these cuts are, they are only the beginning.

Massive reductions will be imposed on public schools through the evisceration of all programs under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) including:

- Title I, which funds schools with at least 40 percent low-income students (2024 budget \$21 billion) and the Individuals with Disabilities Act (\$15 billion);
- Title II, which provides training for teachers and principals;
- Title III, which supports language instruction for English learners and immigrants;
- Title IV, which funds advanced STEM education, magnet schools, mental health services, technology integration and summer programs;
- Title V, which addresses unique local needs, such as the Rural

Education Achievement Program;

- Title VI, which supports Native American, Native Hawaiian and Alaska Native Education;
- Title VII, which provides assistance to military base schools and reservation schools;
- and Title IX, which ensures access to education for homeless students.

Nearly \$2 trillion in student loans currently overseen by the Department of Education in the Office of Federal Student Aid (FSA) is expected to move to the Treasury Department to tighten the screws on already impoverished students and former students. Already, more than 100 FSA staff members, constituting 10 percent of its workforce, reportedly accepted buyout offers.

The Trump/McMahon plan aims to impose a vast reduction of benefits, including the elimination of the wildly popular Pell Grant, the privatization of student loans and the ending of loan forgiveness programs. This would shift higher education financing to states and individuals and force young people to secure bank loans (if they can qualify) or forgo college.

## Weaponization of the Office of Civil Rights

The Office of Civil Rights (OCR) within the Department of Education has undergone a seismic shift. It has both lost staff and been refocused to go after gender-neutral bathrooms, banning transgender athletes from women's sports and investigating claims of "discrimination against white students" or phony "antisemitism."

These measures, a complete repudiation of civil rights legislation, spell disaster for many students, including those with disabilities. When Trump took office, there were approximately 6,000 disability-related complaints over unfair discipline, denial of accommodations, or inadequacy of support services, and about 3,200 racial discrimination cases. Many students and families pursued relief through the OCR as a cost-free alternative when their schools failed to resolve issues. These cases have been now largely, if not entirely, dropped.

Polling has consistently shown that Americans, Trump voters included, overwhelmingly support their public schools. They must be made aware of the wide-ranging social contribution made by the workers in the Department of Education, as well as the countless other agencies DOGE and Trump are vilifying as "bureaucratic."

There is no time to lose in mobilizing the working class against this grotesque asset grab by Musk and the financial elite. Hands off public education, one of the most fundamental social rights of workers! Build the Educators Rank-and-File Committee!



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