

Layoffs, cancellation of tutoring, cuts to mental health services

# Trump tightens the screws on education funding

Nancy Hanover  
1 May 2025

Since Trump's March 20 executive order to close the Department of Education (ED), the nationwide coordinated effort to dismantle public education is escalating, resulting in educator layoffs, school closures or consolidations and the sudden termination of tutoring and other essential services.

On April 29, the ED announced it would terminate \$1 billion in grants for mental health professionals in K-12 schools. On April 15, Trump canceled \$400 million to AmeriCorps, which supplies more than 54,000 tutors, mentors, classroom assistants and reading or math specialists to schools and after-school programs. On April 1, five regional Head Start offices were closed, and it was then reported that Trump planned to eliminate the early childhood education program.

On March 28, Education Secretary Linda McMahon abruptly reversed \$4.4 billion in pandemic aid spending extensions.

According to lawsuits filed by at least 20 states against the Trump administration, these escalating "catastrophic" cuts are causing "immediate and devastating harm."

The stage was set in 2024, when the Biden administration chose not to renew funding for schools under the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund, which allocated \$190.5 billion to assist schools in three phases beginning in 2020. Instead, the Democrats prioritized the predatory US-NATO war against Russia, the US-Israeli genocide in Gaza and preparations for war with China.

The loss of the ESSER fund is, by far, the most significant source of the decline in K-12 revenues. However, Education Secretary Linda McMahon's abrupt layoff of half of the Department of Education staff and her sudden reversal of all state-approved ESSER III spending extensions have truly been a lethal blow.

McMahon justified the immediate revocation of billions of dollars in reimbursements to districts for approved and incurred school expenses by claiming COVID-19 is "over."

This pretext is a particularly cruel lie. COVID-19 is far from over. Children continue to be infected and reinfected in schools, which were never retrofitted with devices essential for clean air and disease control. Other airborne diseases are also rife in out-of-date school buildings across the US. The 2024-2025 flu

season took the lives of 188 children, a near record.

Further, Congress had already appropriated the ESSER funds, making McMahon's actions a violation of the Administrative Procedure Act, a foundational piece of federal law.

Baltimore, Maryland, presents a horrifying picture of the current assault on educators, children and families. After losing an estimated 100,000 manufacturing jobs—in steel and shipbuilding—in the second half of the 20th century, Baltimore now has a poverty rate of 20.3 percent and is among the nation's poorest cities.

Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) have long been underfunded. But the sudden revocation of federal pandemic assistance left City Schools with a shortfall of \$48 million from unreimbursed ESSER expenditures. This amounts to 14 percent of the district's budget. The results have been immediate and catastrophic, including:

- **Tutoring services** were shut down effective April 8, with **after-school programs** ending April 11. At least 1,000 students lost tutoring services previously provided at 44 physical locations and through a virtual platform. The afterschool programs provided homework assistance, enrichment activities and meals. Special education students lost access to sensory-friendly after-school hubs. A majority, 63 percent, of Baltimore families relied on the after-school programs for childcare; **127 jobs** were cut, including 89 tutors.

- **Summer learning** initiatives lost \$12.7 million in planned funding. This will reduce the student capacity by 12,000, a devastating blow to children. Both the Career Exploration Camp and extended academic support will be cut.

- **Asbestos remediation** is being "paused" at 12 schools.

- Twenty-eight **mental health** professionals have been terminated.

- **Infrastructure upgrades** have been "paused." HVAC (heating, ventilation and air conditioning) upgrades—critical for providing clean air and good learning conditions—may be left uncompleted in 11 buildings. Upgraded door-locking systems at 19 buildings are no longer funded.

- **Bilingual education** tutoring will be cut by 23 percent.

- Due to the overall end of ESSER funding, **virtual learning**

options have been significantly reduced. In January, virtual learning in grades 2-5, which affects 138 children, were eliminated, and the secondary programs were restructured, resulting in teacher layoffs and a reduction in course offerings.

The *World Socialist Web Site* spoke to one Baltimore educator, who lost her job in the recent cuts after working for several years in the virtual learning school. She described the consequences of the wide-ranging cuts in City Schools.

I was just “surplused.” I’ve never heard of a surplus. Where did that come from? There’s not enough teachers in Baltimore schools.

Class sizes will go up, overloading teachers and causing problems. Do we even have the facilities to put the children in those rooms? How can you teach students on that level effectively? You can’t.

The larger the class size is, the less the children are able to be helped individually, which is going to stop their educational progress. Yes, it’s a deficit of money—not a surplus of teachers.

They are setting up the students to fail. Many of my students came to the virtual school [which has been dramatically reduced] because it is safer. A couple of them have been shot, some have been robbed, and others have been bullied.

So now, students—not just the special ed students, but all of them—have lost access to additional help. Teachers also relied on tutoring after school for a second income. And parents needed the after-school programs for free childcare. Now, if they want tutoring, they will have to pay for it. You are reducing access for kids to get help, which will cause them to fail their classes. It’s going to cause our graduation numbers to go down. It’s going to create a lot of problems. Now they’re also not fixing the buildings, and that’s going to cause more problems.

Then they are cutting mental health. Trump is even shutting down the 988 suicide hotline, and this month is Mental Health Awareness Month!

They claim they are sending it back to the states, but the states don’t have the money. That’s why we need a Department of Education. The federal level is supposed to help in areas where states don’t do what they’re supposed to do or don’t have the funds.

If I take away your ability to get a better education, you are forced into the workforce. That’s all they want. They don’t want people to get a higher education because educated people fight back. The Democrats should be—they should be filibustering and everything else—but they’re not doing anything. They are part of the process, part of the oligarchy. They hoot and holler, but their actions show me that they’re okay with what Trump’s doing.

As is now routine, the Democrats are limiting themselves to lawsuits despite the immediate and devastating effects of McMahan’s illegal revocation of ESSER. Likewise, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA) have filed lawsuits and issued statements to cover up their refusal to mobilize their membership to fight. The unions have not even compiled a national roundup of job losses and service cuts, as they do not want to alert the working class to the unprecedented scale of the attack on public education.

Meanwhile, irrevocable damage is being done every day.

The cuts in Baltimore are the rule, not the exception. A brief survey of news sources around the country yields a near-endless list of cuts.

- About 2,300 California school employees are being terminated, including 395 educators being laid off in San Francisco, about 566 in 10 San Diego County districts, and almost 300 in the Santa Ana Unified School District.

- Washington state had \$497 million in planned reimbursements blocked by the McMahan’s revocation, including \$229 million for salaries and \$41 million for counseling. As a result, Spokane schools deferred HVAC upgrades and asbestos remediation. Seattle halved its tutoring program and introduced athletic fees.

- Hartford, Connecticut, eliminated 387 educators, and New Haven plans to lay off over 100. The state is losing \$14 million and will cut homeless student transportation and special education technology.

- Portland, Oregon, plans to cut 242 positions and end the International Baccalaureate programs at 12 elementary schools.

- New Bedford, Massachusetts, cancelled \$6.2 million in teletherapy contracts and postponed bilingual preschool expansion.

- Mississippi lost \$137 million, affecting jobs, summer school and ventilation system replacements; Missouri will lose \$630,000 for literacy training and rural schools; and California will lay off staff due to the loss of \$2.5 million.

- Flint, Michigan, schools have lost \$15 million for mental health staff and lead pipe replacement.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**