

Trump administration launches bigoted assault on education and democratic rights in Northern Virginia

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On August 19, the US Department of Education (DOE) announced it was placing five school divisions in Northern Virginia on “high-risk status,” with the condition that all federal funding be delivered by reimbursement only.

The change in policy, which subjects schools to increased scrutiny whenever seeking federal funds, follows a late-July investigation by the DOE’s Office of Civil Rights (OCR), which determined that the school districts had violated Title IX in their policies regarding bathroom and locker room usage as it pertains to LGBTQ+ students.

The policy targets districts in Alexandria City, Arlington, Fairfax County, Loudoun County, and Prince William County. Together, the five school divisions enroll well over 400,000 students, with Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS) serving over 183,000, making it the largest district in Virginia and the ninth largest in the country. In all, the Trump administration has launched 575 investigations into Virginia schools alone.

In a letter posted on the district’s website, FCPS Superintendent Michelle Reid stated, “We were given 10 days to update our policies and regulations or risk potential penalties, including losing up to \$160 million in federal funding.”

The federal aid at risk includes funding for Title I programs that support low-income students, special education under IDEA, and school nutrition. By forcing districts to cover costs up front, the DOE’s reimbursement policy particularly targets underserved students and working class families who rely most heavily on these programs.

Linda McMahon, the billionaire wrestling magnate

and secretary of education, has been positioned at the helm of these attacks on education and democratic rights. According to her, the Northern Virginia school districts have chosen “to abide by woke gender ideology” and must now prove that every federal dollar is being used for a legal purpose. At the same time that the DOE undergoes dismantlement through budget cuts, McMahon’s role in carrying out this assault reflects the relentless assault on public education in the country.

The OCR has proposed a resolution agreement requiring that the school divisions rescind all policies and regulations allowing students to access restrooms and locker rooms based on gender identity rather than biological sex. The proposal goes even further by requiring the school divisions to issue a memorandum affirming that “any future policies related to access to intimate facilities must be consistent with Title IX by separating students strictly on the basis of sex,” as well as to adopt a biological definition of “male” and “female” in all Title IX-related policies and practices.

The OCR gave the school divisions 10 days to voluntarily accept the terms or risk imminent enforcement action, including a potential referral to the US Department of Justice. Every school division rejected the resolution agreement by the August 15 deadline.

As a consequence, the Department of Education has begun administrative proceedings to suspend or terminate their federal financial assistance.

To ensure that federal funding is not being used for supposed “illegal activity,” the DOE is placing these school divisions on “reimbursement status for all Department funds, including formula funding,

discretionary grants, and impact aid grants, totaling over \$50 million.” The DOE added that the school divisions will now be required to pay their education expenses up front and then request reimbursement for expenditures in order to access funds obligated by the department.

The attack on Northern Virginia’s K-12 schools is not occurring in isolation. Only a few days earlier, the DOE ruled that George Mason University’s diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies also violated civil rights law, placing the university under the same threat of financial strangulation. As GMU welcomes a record number of incoming students for the 2025 fall semester, the university faces the loss of millions in federal support. Much like the K-12 divisions, the DOE gave GMU just 10 days to comply with a resolution agreement, which included a public statement of compliance in the form of a formal apology.

Meanwhile, school districts throughout the country are grappling with serious funding crises. In Philadelphia, where some 14,000 educators have been on the verge of a work stoppage after the first day of classes as their contracts run out, the school district faces a \$306 million deficit, which could balloon to almost \$2 billion by 2030.

In Chicago, where President Trump has threatened to deploy the National Guard on the false pretense of rampant crime, Chicago Public Schools (CPS) is facing a significant financial crisis, with a projected budget deficit of about \$734 million for fiscal year 2025, as of August 2025. Numerous other school districts around the country face similar circumstances.

In all cases, the fundamental obstacle to workers’ attempts to fight back has been the pro-corporate trade union bureaucracy. In Philadelphia, where teachers voted to strike in June, the Philadelphia Federation of Teachers has sought to bury the strike vote by announcing a sellout tentative agreement which meets none of the educators’ demands. This, the union leaders declare, will buy them “labor peace.”

In fact, as the Trump administration’s deepening assault on public education demonstrates, such sellout agreements engineered to block a movement of the working class serve to hamstring workers in the face of their class enemies.

For its part, the Virginia Education Association (VEA) has busied itself with support for Democratic

Party candidates in the state’s upcoming gubernatorial election in November. The VEA’s Fund for Children and Public Education, its electoral arm, has endorsed Democratic Party candidate Abigail Spanberger, one of several Democratic Party officials with national security and intelligence backgrounds. Spanberger, a former CIA agent, has consistently taken positions that are pro-military and pro-war and to the detriment of public education.

As schools resume around the country, the nationwide campaign to undermine education must be understood as part of a deepening crisis of American capitalism. The broad assault on students’ democratic rights and the attack on public education are inseparable from the other crises inherent in the capitalist system. Its burden will fall heaviest on the working class, which must be mobilized independently in defense of public education and the democratic rights of all students.



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