

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 17, 2025

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon:

We write to express our outrage that you, President Trump, and unelected billionaire Elon Musk are taking steps to abolish the Department of Education (“the Department”) and eliminate educational opportunities for millions of students across the country, something that 61 percent of Americans oppose.¹ This most recently includes a 50 percent cut to the workforce, resulting in the termination of over 1,300 workers at the Department of Education, as well as the abrupt, last minute closure of all Department of Education buildings beginning at 6:00 PM on the same day that these terminations were announced.²

At a time of massive income and wealth inequality, when 60 percent of people live paycheck to paycheck, millions of Americans cannot afford higher education, and 40 percent of our nation’s 4th graders and 33 percent of 8th graders read below basic proficiency,³ it is a national disgrace that the Trump Administration is attempting to illegally abolish the Department of Education and thus, undermine a high-quality education for our students.

As Secretary of Education, you are the foremost public servant responsible for carrying out the Department of Education’s mission to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access. Despite that responsibility, your first act as Secretary was announcing it was your “final mission”⁴ to dismantle the Department of Education, fire the public servants who keep it running, and terminate opportunities for students in public schools, colleges, and universities across the country.

The false claims of financial savings by dismantling the Department of Education so that billionaires can receive huge tax breaks is bad public policy and morally reprehensible. The billionaires that are in charge of our federal government right now will not be harmed by these egregious attacks: wealthy families sending their children to elite, private schools will still be able to get a quality education even if every public school disappears in this country. But for working-class families, high-quality public education is an opportunity they rely on for their children to have a path to do well in life.

¹ <https://www.wsj.com/politics/policy/donald-trump-policy-approval-poll-849feb84?page=1>

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/amp/news/education-department-staff-offices-closed/>

³ <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/reading-scores-fall-to-new-low-on-naep-fueled-by-declines-for-struggling-students/2025/01>

⁴ <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/speech/secretary-mcmahon-our-departments-final-mission>

Defunding federal support for public education would result in either higher property taxes or decreased funding for public schools, including in rural areas. It would also mean decreased enforcement of rights for children with disabilities and fewer resources for students from low-income backgrounds and children with disabilities, like the 26 million students from low-income backgrounds and over 100,000 public schools in every community across this country that rely on Title I funding; the 7.5 million students with disabilities who benefit under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the 7 million students who receive Pell grants to help access higher education.

It is undeniable that terminating 50 percent of the Department of Education’s workers will have harmful effects on public education in this country. The Department of Education already has the smallest staff of the 15 Cabinet agencies despite having the third largest discretionary budget, behind only the Departments of Defense and Health and Human Services.⁵ These reductions will have devastating impacts on our nation’s students and we are deeply concerned that without staff, the Department will be unable to fulfill critical functions, such as ensuring students can access federal financial aid, upholding students’ civil rights, and guaranteeing that federal funding reaches communities promptly and is well-spent. Not even 24 hours after the staff reductions were announced, the Free Application for Federal Financial Aid (FAFSA) experienced a glitch that prevented students and families from accessing the application, but the staff normally responsible for fixing those errors had reportedly been cut.⁶ The Department has also reportedly shuttered several regional offices responsible for investigating potential violations of students’ civil rights in local schools.⁷ We are deeply alarmed that cases will go uninvestigated and that students will be left in unsafe learning environments as a result.

The Trump Administration also says it wants to ‘return education back to the states.’ Let us be very clear—public education is already run by states and local school boards. While just 11 percent of public education is federally funded, the Department of Education has a necessary and irreplaceable responsibility to implement federal laws that ensure equal opportunity for all children in this country. These laws guarantee fundamental protections, such as ensuring that children with disabilities receive a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, that students from low-income backgrounds and students of color will not be disproportionately taught by less experienced and qualified teachers, and that parents will receive information about their child’s academic achievement.

Without the Department of Education, there is no guarantee that states would uphold students’ civil and educational rights. Let us not forget that it was federal troops who protected the “Little Rock Nine” from a violent mob of segregationists when they integrated Central High School in the wake of the *Brown v. Board* U.S. Supreme Court decision. Not only was the state not going to provide this protection, but it was then-Arkansas Governor Orval Faubus who ordered the state’s National Guard to bar Black students from entering the school. Even today, the Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights regularly investigates and resolves complaints

⁵ <https://www.npr.org/2025/01/31/nx-s1-5280417/federal-workers-workforce-facts-cuts>

⁶ https://apnews.com/article/student-loans-education-department-outage-layoffs-5afb5a0a1b51bbe50e5961a63b419041?taid=67d2352a98af7a000118ba7f&utm_campaign=TrueAnthem&utm_medium=AP&utm_source=Twitter

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/11/us/politics/trump-education-department-firings.html>

of student discrimination related to students' race, color, national origin, sex, age, or disability status.⁸

We will not stand by as you attempt to turn back the clock on education in this country through gutting the Department of Education. Our nation's public schools, colleges, and universities are preparing the next generation of America's leaders—we must take steps to strengthen education in this country, not take a wrecking ball to the agency that exists to do so.

Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders
United States Senator
Ranking Member, Committee
on Health, Education, Labor,
and Pensions



Mazie K. Hirono
United States Senator



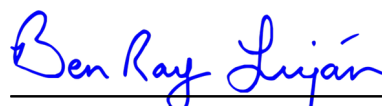
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Richard Blumenthal
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Tina Smith
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United States Senator

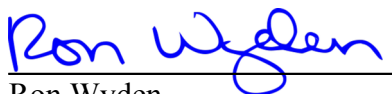


Christopher S. Murphy
United States Senator



Adam B. Schiff
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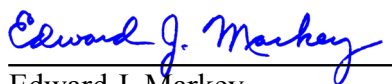
⁸ <https://ocrcas.ed.gov/ocr-search>



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



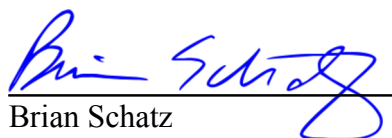
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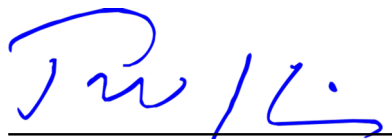
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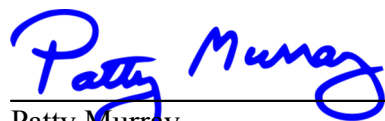
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