

How Dismantling the U.S. Department of Education Will Impact Pennsylvania Students

April 2025

Dismantling and potentially eliminating the U.S. Department of Education will result in significant cuts to federal funding, particularly for our most underfunded schools; a lack of federal oversight and enforcement of federal education laws; and an erosion of federal civil rights protections.

Pennsylvania families rely on the U.S. Department of Education to distribute a total of \$1.6 billion in federal funds annually to our schools, plus \$6 billion in higher education financial aid. These investments are now at risk.

Deep reductions in staff – [slashing Education Department employees by 50%](#) – make it difficult to maintain and administer K-12 federal programs. The administration has committed to cutting federal funding overall and “[returning authority over education to the states](#),” and the Project 2025 blueprint specifically calls for cuts in K-12 funding. The administration is also interested in using [federal block grants](#) to bypass federal requirements and restrictions, allowing each state to use federal dollars as it determines instead of directing sufficient funding to marginalized students. An overview of Pennsylvania’s funds from federal grant programs is available [here](#).

ELC developed the eight fact sheets below to highlight how specific student groups will be affected. See also our [“Action Alert”](#) on the U.S. Department of Education.

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1. IMPACT ON STUDENTS OF COLOR

IMPORTANCE OF FEDERAL ROLE IN ADVANCING EQUITY

- Due to systemic and structural racism and individual racial bias, Black and Brown students disproportionately attend Pennsylvania's [most underfunded schools](#) and are most likely to attend Title I schools with [high concentrations of students experiencing poverty](#).
- Due to racism, Black and Brown students are disproportionately represented in nearly every category of students who rely on federal funding: They are more likely to experience [homelessness](#), be immigrant students, be identified as [students with disabilities](#), and be referred to the [foster care](#) or [juvenile justice system](#).
- Black and Brown students are also subjected to [racial discrimination](#) in school, [including bullying and harassment](#), and will be deeply impacted by the absence of enforcement of federal civil rights laws.
- Black and Brown students will be most impacted by the erasure of DEI and the stoppage of federal data collection, including through the [Civil Rights Data Collection](#). This has been an essential tool in identifying and addressing disparities in discipline and educational opportunities for Black and Brown students. Without data and federal oversight, state and local education agencies will not be held accountable for racial disparities in discipline and inequitable school resources.

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WHAT DISMANTLING THE DEPARTMENT MEANS FOR BLACK AND BROWN STUDENTS

- Being educated in overcrowded classrooms in underfunded schools with fewer experienced trained teachers, afterschool programs, and academic supports.
- Increases in racial discrimination, unaddressed bullying and harassment, and hostile school environments.
- Increased racial segregation and inequities in educational [opportunity](#) and the widening of racial disparities in school discipline.
- Harm to [all students](#) due to lack of racially and socioeconomically diverse schools, which provide cognitive and academic benefits to all.

2. IMPACT ON STUDENTS LIVING IN POVERTY

IMPORTANCE OF FEDERAL ROLE IN ADVANCING EQUITY

- Recognizing that students experiencing poverty have greater educational needs, Title I Part A of the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) provides supplemental federal funding to states to ensure that all children, regardless of their income status, receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education. These funds, distributed to [approximately 63%](#) of public schools nationally, are now at risk.
- [Title I funds](#) are distributed to schools with high numbers or percentages of children from low-income backgrounds. They help ensure that children in Pennsylvania impacted by poverty can meet the state standards in reading, language arts, and mathematics. The federal government provides over [\\$700 million](#) in Title I Part A funding to schools across the state.
- Funds currently [may be used](#) to upgrade the entire curriculum, help specific children by providing early intervention services, fund before-school and after-school programs, summer programs, hire additional teachers and staff, provide technology and professional development and training for teachers and school staff, as well as other vital services for students.

The federal government provides over \$700 million in Title I Part A funding to schools across Pennsylvania.

WHAT DISMANTLING THE DEPARTMENT MEANS FOR STUDENTS IMPACTED BY POVERTY

- [Significantly worsened teacher and staff shortages](#) due to the anticipated loss of Title I funds, meaning fewer educators in classrooms and potentially lower teacher retention rates.
- Removal of crucial academic programs – afterschool programs, summer school, etc. – depriving students impacted by poverty of equitable access to education.
- Educators lacking the instructional support and curriculum tools they need to provide the effective comprehensive education that our students deserve and are legally entitled to receive.

3. IMPACT ON STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

IMPORTANCE OF FEDERAL ROLE IN ADVANCING EQUITY

- The Education Department uses its expertise to calculate and distribute more than [\\$15 billion through grants to states](#), including an estimated [\\$525 million to Pennsylvania](#), to support special education programs in schools across the state.
- The department's staff provides essential guidance and accountability to effectively implement individualized education programs and defend parents' rights.
- The department distributes Title I funds to high-poverty schools, which are more likely to have a [high representation of students with disabilities](#). This funding is critical to provide smaller classes, targeted reading interventions, and increased mental health supports.
- The department has the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that individual school districts and charter schools comply with special education laws. It provides [essential guidance to states and schools](#) about how to implement and comply with the law and investigates [complaints of disability-based discrimination](#).
- The department also oversees and distributes IDEA funds to states to provide critical [early intervention](#) services, including free services to [nearly 120,000 young children](#) in Pennsylvania who experience delays in growth and development from birth to 5 years old, to help them develop skills for school success and lifelong wellbeing.

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WHAT DISMANTLING THE DEPARTMENT MEANS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

- Fewer special education teachers and support staff in classrooms.
- Less inclusive classroom environments.
- Inability to successfully challenge delays in obtaining an evaluation.
- Failure to provide the supports and services mandated by a child's IEP, lack of robust transition services, and unaddressed deficiencies.
- Families paying for services and interventions out of pocket.

4. IMPACT ON STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

IMPORTANCE OF FEDERAL ROLE IN ADVANCING EQUITY

- The McKinney-Vento Act provides [critical and comprehensive protections](#) to pre-K through grade 12 students experiencing homelessness in all public schools, including school stability (the right to remain in the same school even when the student no longer lives in the district) and additional supports (e.g., uniforms, eyeglasses, school supplies) to ensure equal access to learning.
- Pennsylvania could lose funding for eight regional coordinators who have significant expertise supporting the growing number of students experiencing homelessness.*
- Due to intersecting systemic and resource-based inequities, students experiencing homelessness in Pennsylvania are [disproportionately Black and Brown students](#), English learners, students with disabilities, and students at the intersections of these identities.
 - The Education Department provides critical McKinney-Vento funding and [Title I Part A Funds](#) to support [over 46,700](#) students in Pennsylvania. Without it, [Pennsylvania](#) could lose funding for all of its eight [regional coordinators](#), who have significant expertise supporting the [growing number](#) of students experiencing homelessness. They provide technical assistance, training, and guidance to the local McKinney-Vento liaisons serving all [779 local education agencies](#) in Pennsylvania.
 - The department also provides [oversight and compliance monitoring](#) to ensure that Pennsylvania and all other states follow the McKinney-Vento Act.

WHAT DISMANTLING THE DEPARTMENT MEANS FOR STUDENTS EXPERIENCING HOMELESSNESS

- Students experiencing homelessness less likely to be identified and served.
- Students less likely to have school stability with transportation provided.
- Students more likely to be denied equal access to learning, resulting in more students experiencing homelessness giving up and dropping out.
- Families likely to lose important resources that help their children stay in school and support them to graduate.

5. IMPACT ON STUDENTS IN FOSTER CARE & THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

IMPORTANCE OF FEDERAL ROLE IN ADVANCING EQUITY

- Students in foster care have important rights under the [Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#), for which the department provides [guidance](#) and [accountability](#) to ensure students have school stability and equal access to learning. The department provides important expertise, oversight, and guidance to all states, including Pennsylvania, to ensure these rights are upheld.
- The department provides guidance and accountability to ensure that these students have school stability and equal access to learning.*
- The Department of Education provides essential funding to schools through Title I to support transportation to facilitate [school stability](#) for students in foster care.
 - The department's Title I Part D funding provides critical support, including [literacy and math programs](#), to students in foster care and the juvenile justice system.
 - Approximately [30-50% of youth in foster care are receiving special education services](#) because of a disability. These students often [experience barriers to receiving special education services](#); they rely on IDEA funding as well as federal oversight and enforcement of their rights.
 - Due to [persistent racism in the child welfare system](#) and [juvenile justice system](#), students in both systems are disproportionately Black and Brown, who will be harmed by the loss of targeted funding, administrative guidance, and federal accountability to uphold their rights.

WHAT DISMANTLING THE DEPARTMENT MEANS FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE SYSTEM-INVOLVED

Students in the foster care and juvenile justice systems are highly mobile and need appropriate supports to stay on track to graduate. Lack of federal funding and accountability will result in less school stability, the absence of needed remedial supports, and potentially the absence of “points of contact” or liaisons at the local level who are important advocates for children in schools.

6. IMPACT ON STUDENTS IN UNDERFUNDED RURAL SCHOOLS

IMPORTANCE OF FEDERAL ROLE IN ADVANCING EQUITY

- Students in underfunded school districts in rural counties across Pennsylvania are at significant risk of losing important federal resources as they face unique school funding challenges due to smaller enrollment sizes, stranded costs, increased transportation and technology needs, and staffing shortages.
- Many rural districts in Pennsylvania receive federal funds under [the Rural Education Achievement Program \(REAP\)](#). REAP consists of two programs: the Small Rural School Achievement Program and the Rural and Low-Income School Program. [Funds](#) can be used to improve academic achievement, enhance teacher quality and recruitment, purchase technology and curricula, and improve language instruction for multilingual learners.
- The Education Department is necessary to facilitate these grants and review the formula grant allocation procedures to determine eligibility. Replacing these funds would be difficult for many small, under-resourced rural districts in PA.
- Rural underfunded districts have limited ability to raise additional local revenue and rely on every dollar of state and federal funding.

Rural districts face unique school funding challenges due to smaller enrollment sizes, stranded costs, increased transportation and technology needs, and staffing shortages.

WHAT DISMANTLING THE DEPARTMENT MEANS FOR RURAL STUDENTS

Without additional federal funds and the Department of Education to allocate those funds, students in rural areas will face additional struggles due to teacher staffing shortages, limited access to technology, rising transportation costs, and limited course offerings.

7. IMPACT ON EARLY EDUCATION & YOUNG LEARNERS

IMPORTANCE OF FEDERAL ROLE IN ADVANCING EQUITY

- The Department of Education uses its expertise to distribute vital Title I program funds to schools that serve more than [1.5 million preschool students](#) nationally, targeting schools that serve children experiencing poverty to ensure their access to [high-quality preschool programs](#).
- Elementary school recipients of Title I funds [coordinate with Head Start](#) programs, which annually serve more than 778,000 children and pregnant individuals experiencing poverty nationally, to ensure [continuity of educational programming and increased academic pre-readiness skills](#). This mandatory coordination is particularly important in rural regions where Head Start programs fill critical gaps in the availability of early childhood programs.
- The department provides funding and accountability to early intervention and special education programs that support [more than 1 million children with developmental delays and disabilities](#) nationally, ages birth to 5, in inclusive preschool programs. Without this funding and accountability, the ability of children to learn in inclusive settings will be gravely undermined.
- The department coordinates with other federal agencies involved in supporting preschool students and families to [provide guidance to address critical issues](#) impacting preschool education access, such as the use of suspensions and expulsions, which improperly exclude preschool students.

The Department of Education uses its expertise to distribute vital Title I program funds to schools that serve more than 1.5 million preschool students.

WHAT DISMANTLING THE DEPARTMENT MEANS FOR OUR STUDENTS

Early childhood education is essential for a child's development and lays the foundation for academic, social, and emotional growth and success. Without targeted federal funds to support early learning opportunities, our youngest learners will lack the foundational tools they need to enter kindergarten ready to learn. This will be an acute loss, especially for children in rural communities who rely on federal resources to access preschool education.

8. IMPACT ON MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS & IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

IMPORTANCE OF FEDERAL ROLE IN ADVANCING EQUITY

- Multilingual students, called [English learners](#) (ELs), are students who need effective English language instruction to access learning. Nearly [100,000 English learners](#) are enrolled in Pennsylvania public schools, most of whom [attend underfunded schools](#).
 - [Title III](#) provides essential federal funding to educate English learners. These funds help children learn English, meet state academic standards, support language instruction, and support professional development for teachers.
- Nearly 100,000 English learners are enrolled in Pennsylvania public schools, most of whom attend underfunded schools.*
- Title III [reporting requirements](#) ensure the collection of valuable data on English learner instruction and assessment and the effectiveness of programming to inform classroom instruction. Other federal data, including the [Civil Rights Data Collection](#), promotes accountability. The department also provides training and guidance to state and local education agencies on the education of English learners. However, the [Office of English Language Acquisition](#), which offers [toolkits and other resources](#) to assist schools in supporting English learners, recently lost all staff due to layoffs.
 - Funding from the [Migrant Education Program under Title I Part C](#) (MEP) also provides needed programming for migrant students. Nationally, as of January 2024, [267,643 children](#) ages 3-21 were eligible for this funding. The purpose of the MEP is to ensure that migrant children have access to high-quality education and to remove barriers that migrant children face due to high mobility.
 - English learners are [overrepresented](#) in schools with high poverty rates. They benefit from Title I funds and from IDEA funding for students with disabilities. [In 2021](#), some 830,000 ELs – over 15% – were identified as students with disabilities.
 - English learners have relied on the Office of Civil Rights to ensure that schools do not discriminate against them and their families.

WHAT DISMANTLING THE DEPARTMENT MEANS FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE MULTILINGUAL LEARNERS

- Fewer English as a Second Language teachers; less programming for English learners.
- Less professional development for all teachers and administrators.
- Insufficient funds for needed improvements to English language curricula, outreach to families, and concurrent enrollment programs to help ensure postsecondary success.
- Increased barriers for migrant children when they change school districts, and fewer supports to graduate from high school.

The Education Law Center-PA (ELC) is a nonprofit, legal advocacy organization with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education. Through legal representation, impact litigation, community engagement, and policy advocacy, ELC advances the rights of underserved children, including children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, English learners, LGBTQ students, and children experiencing homelessness.

ELC's publications provide a general statement of the law. However, each situation is different. If questions remain about how the law applies to a particular situation, contact ELC's Helpline for information and advice – visit www.elc-pa.org/contact or call 215-238-6970 (Eastern and Central PA) or 412-258-2120 (Western PA) – or contact another attorney of your choice.