

# Trump administration cuts school mental health grants created after shootings

The Education Department discontinued more than \$1 billion in grant funding created after mass shootings to address mental health resources at K-12 schools.

May 1, 2025



By Ben Brasch

The Education Department this week began cutting about \$1 billion in mental-health-related grants created in response to mass school shootings, claiming that schools that want to diversify their pool of psychologists are misusing the funds.

School psychology professionals across the country are scrambling to figure out how to move forward after being told funding for their multiyear programs will expire at the end of December if they don't decide to appeal. The two grants affected received an additional \$1 billion after President Joe Biden signed a sweeping bipartisan gun-control bill into law in 2022, a month after the mass shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas.

The cuts that started Tuesday are in line with President Donald Trump's executive order that seeks to eliminate programs that foster diversity, equity and inclusion in schools. Last month the administration canceled grants funding gun-violence prevention programs and crime-victim advocacy.

Republicans over the past decade have sought to blame mass shootings, especially ones in schools, on mental health issues of the killers — as opposed to the United States having more guns per civilian than any other country.

“Our president claims that America’s gun violence crisis is a mental health issue, not a gun issue — then turns around and slashes \$1 billion in mental health resources for kids and schools,” said Emma Brown, executive director of the gun control advocacy group Giffords. “Republican leaders worked side by side with Democrats to allocate these funds to save lives and stop school shootings, and now the administration is trampling that progress. This decision will cost American children their lives.”

There has also been a focus on physical security measures, like metal detectors in schools in response to school shootings. But research shows those aren't as effective as addressing mental health issues, said Nancy Duchesneau, a senior research associate at Edtrust, an educational equity group.

"These resources are a lifeline for a lot of students. Many youth don't have access to resources for mental health outside of school," she said.

The programs affected by the cuts offer counseling to students, who Duchesneau said need help after the developmental and academic disruptions of covid. But the grants also remove financial barriers for people interested in becoming school psychologists, which has some worried that this move from the White House will crack the pipeline that helps people get training.

"The domino effect of this is tremendous," said Kelly Vaillancourt Strobach, director of policy and advocacy at the National Association of School Psychologists.

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Research shows students of color are more likely to seek out and engage with a counselor who has a similar background.

Education Department spokesperson Madi Biedermann said some grants were being misused and not helping students or mental health professionals in schools.

"Instead, under the deeply flawed priorities of the Biden administration, grant recipients used the funding to implement race-based actions like recruiting quotas in ways that have nothing to do with mental health and could hurt the very students the grants are supposed to help," Biedermann wrote in an email to The Washington Post.

Biedermann said some grant applications that were previously approved for funding had a diversity goal. For example, an applicant school wanted eight out of the 24 counselors hired using the grant and matching funds to be non-White. Another example Biedermann provided from an application was a training for counselor educators "to recognize and challenge systemic injustices, anti-racism, and the pervasiveness of white supremacy to ethically support diverse communities."

Leandra Parris said funding for her program was cut short Tuesday, but it had no race-based recruitment quotas nor does she know of anyone else whose program has such requirements.

Parris, a professor of school psychology at William & Mary, was in her office when she received the email that most of her \$3 million grant was not being continued.

“I just sat there and started shaking, and all I could think about were all the students we said we’d be supporting and all the schools we asked for a list of their students to help,” she said, adding: “I just started crying.”

Parris said she is the only trainer in the Tidewater region certified to train schools on how to prepare for and mitigate school crises, such as natural disasters or school shootings. She was set to provide the training in the Newport News, Norfolk and Chesapeake public school districts. “I just felt like this was a dream,” Parris said of the grant.

She said the government has given her no explanation as to why her grant has ended. She said all she can think of was that, in their application, they were told while applying during the Biden era that they would receive a competitive edge if they showed how they would diversify the field of school psychology and have inclusive practices.

“Now we’re being punished for doing that,” she said.

The cuts are happening as there is a severe shortage of school psychologists across the nation. Experts agree the ideal ratio is one school psychologist to every 500 students. The ratio of the Chesapeake Public Schools is 1 to 2,173 students and 1 to 2,177 for Newport News Public Schools during the 2023-2024 school year, Parris said.

She said her program included recruiting local residents interested in becoming school psychologists and offering them some money to complete their studies.

Parris said she will do the best she can with the \$500,000 her team has received so far, but they are sad to miss out on \$2.5 million more after being wrongly accused of violating guidelines.

“To be told we’re harming students or discriminating when that’s the opposite of what we intended to do, I had a good cry and mourned a little bit. But now we’re going to work on the appeal and do our best,” she said.

*Laura Meckler contributed to this report.*

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## What readers are saying

The comments overwhelmingly criticize the Trump administration's decision to cut mental health-related grants for schools, especially in the context of school shootings. Many commenters express frustration and anger, highlighting the perceived hypocrisy of blaming mental health... [Show more](#)

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