

# Trump's move to dismantle DOE sparks fears of racial segregation, 'Attack on Black children'

*Elected officials and civil rights groups warn that racial discrimination cases and overall access to educational services are in jeopardy as President Trump moves to eliminate the 45-year-old agency.*

GERREN KEITH GAYNOR ([HTTPS://THEGRIO.COM/AUTHOR/GERRENGAYNOR/](https://thegrio.com/author/gerrengaynor/))

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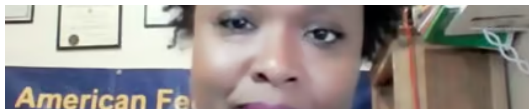
WASHINGTON, DC - MARCH 20: U.S. President Donald Trump signs an executive order to reduce the size and scope of the Education Department alongside school children signing their own versions, during a ceremony in the East Room of the White House on March 20, 2025 in Washington, DC. (Photo by Chip Somodevilla/Getty Images)

Reactions from elected leaders and activists to President Donald Trump's [executive order \(https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/improving-education-outcomes-by-empowering-parents-states-and-communities/\)](https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/03/improving-education-outcomes-by-empowering-parents-states-and-communities/) to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education were swift, sparking outrage and fears about the future of education for millions of Black children across the country.

President Trump, flanked by schoolchildren sitting at classroom desks in the White House East Room on Thursday, signed the order instructing Education Secretary Linda McMahon to "take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure" of the DOE and "return authority over education to the States and local communities while ensuring the effective and uninterrupted delivery of services, programs, and benefits on which Americans rely."

“This dismantling is a calculated, strategic assault on Black educational freedom and a direct attack on our children’s futures,” said Cicley Gay, board chair of Black Lives Matter. “Make no mistake – this is not about bureaucratic efficiency. This is about systematically destroying the infrastructure that has helped generations of Black students access education as a pathway to liberation.”

Trump’s order argues that the Education Department has been ineffective in its 45 years of existence, citing the low proficiency in math and reading among a majority of American students. Therefore, the Trump administration argues, the authority over public education should “return” to states.



**Also Read:**

[This Harvard-educated civil rights lawyer was laid off from the DOE—now she’s fighting back \(https://thegrio.com/2025/03/19/this-harvard-educated-civil-rights-lawyer-lost-her-doe-job-now-shes-fighting-back/\)](https://thegrio.com/2025/03/19/this-harvard-educated-civil-rights-lawyer-lost-her-doe-job-now-shes-fighting-back/)

Eric Duncan, director of P-12 policy at EdTrust, says that the argument is “misleading,” telling theGrio that the DOE “doesn’t instruct or tell states what they can teach and how they can teach it.” He explained, “They really are concerned with who is being taught and making sure that all students are being provided a fair and equitable education.”

A major concern among advocates is that the Trump administration’s plan to dismantle the DOE will lead to an exacerbation of racial segregation in public classrooms, which are already [significantly segregated \(https://www.npr.org/2022/07/14/1111060299/school-segregation-report\)](https://www.npr.org/2022/07/14/1111060299/school-segregation-report) despite the nation’s school children being more diverse than ever before.

“In 1954, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *Brown v. Board of Education* that the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine established in *Plessy v. Ferguson* was unconstitutional. In the decades since, the Department of Education has played a vital role in ensuring equal access to education and enforcing desegregation laws,” said U.S. Rep. Yvette Clarke, D-N.Y., chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus. “President Trump’s executive actions to further dismantle the Department of Education will make our schools more segregated and unequal.”



WASHINGTON, DC – MARCH 13: Naomi, 7 (L), and Makena, 9 (C) hold signs and chant during a rally in front of the Department of Education to protest budget cuts on March 13, 2025 in Washington, DC. (Photo by Kayla Bartkowski/Getty Images)

Duncan expressed concern about the “rhetoric” used by the Trump administration about states’ rights, which he says harkens back to America’s dark past of racial oppression and segregation.

“That’s the same rhetoric that segregationists have used historically and that states across the country have used to have tried to segregate students and not necessarily concern themselves with educating Black students,” he told theGrio.

Though Trump’s executive order calls for significantly scaling down the DOE while “ensuring the effective and uninterrupted delivery of services, programs, and benefits on which Americans rely,” Congresswoman Clarke said Trump’s executive order will “lessen” the DOE’s resources and “put pressure on already overburdened school systems.”

The CBC chairwoman continued: “Reducing the scale and size of the department will have a disparate impact on the learning opportunities of Black and minority students, HBCUs, Pell Grant recipients, children with special needs, lower income communities, as well as English as a Second Language students, and limit the government’s ability to enforce Title VI and Title IX laws that prohibit discrimination in education programs and activities based on race and gender.”

In the weeks before Thursday’s order, which is expected to be challenged in court as only Congress has the authority to shut down the agency, President Trump already fired nearly half of the DOE’s staff, including the Office of Civil Rights, which is responsible for investigating cases of racial discrimination.

Black Lives Matter points out that, without federal oversight, schools across the country can now “discriminate without consequences,” which will place “the onus on parents and individuals to fight back through costly and time-consuming legal battles—something many families simply cannot afford.”



#### Also Read:

[Department of Education layoffs stall civil rights investigations in schools: 'I fear that it's only just begun'](https://thegrio.com/2025/03/18/department-of-education-layoffs-stall-civil-rights-investigations-in-schools-i-fear-that-its-only-just-begun/) (<https://thegrio.com/2025/03/18/department-of-education-layoffs-stall-civil-rights-investigations-in-schools-i-fear-that-its-only-just-begun/>).

Angela Angel, a senior advisor at Black Lives Matter, said, “For Black parents navigating educational systems for children with special needs, this attack represents a devastating blow to already limited resources.” Angel is also a mother of children who depend on special education services.

“As someone who has spent years fighting for appropriate educational accommodations for my children with autism and dyslexia, I know firsthand the critical role federal protections play,” said Angel. “Without the Department of Education, Black families are left to battle entrenched discrimination on their own, but our community has never backed down from a fight for our children’s futures – and we won’t start now.”

Another major concern about the dismantling of the Department of Education is the impact it will have on student loan servicing. President Trump announced on Friday that the \$1.6 trillion loan system will instead be managed by the Small Business Administration. The administration has already halted enrollment in student repayment programs—including President Joe Biden’s [SAVE program](https://thegrio.com/2023/06/30/white-house-biden-student-loan-forgiveness-racial-wealth-gap/) (<https://thegrio.com/2023/06/30/white-house-biden-student-loan-forgiveness-racial-wealth-gap/>),—intended to ease the financial burden for student loan borrowers.



Student loan borrowers and advocates gather for the People's Rally to Cancel Student Debt during the Supreme Court hearings on student debt relief on Feb. 28 in Washington, D.C. (Photo: Jemal Countess/Getty Images)

“The biggest concern is the impact that this will have on Black student debt...Black students are incurring a ton of debt to pursue these educational opportunities,” said Duncan of EdTrust, who noted that students are also experiencing delays with the FAFSA [The Free Application for Federal Student Aid] website. He said that with “less staff and less capacity” for the DOE to provide those services, “this will only get worse.”

Maya Wiley, president and CEO of The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, said the Department of Education, established by President Jimmy Carter in 1979, was “born directly from our nation’s civil rights struggle.”

“The department exists because Americans rightfully demanded equal educational opportunity for all children. Black parents and other parents of color demanded that Congress protect the rights and wellbeing of their children – and Congress answered,” said Wiley.

The civil rights leader said the Trump administration’s efforts to dismantle the DOE not only come at the expense of Black and brown students, their parents, and teachers but ultimately is part of a larger plan.

“At the end of the day, this administration is looking to let communities struggle to support public education while it gives tax cuts to billionaires,” she said. “The Leadership Conference and our coalition will not allow this administration to erase decades of progress that has helped get us closer to the right to an equal opportunity for a better future.”

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HomeBuddy

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