



Statement by Linda McMahon
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on
The President’s Fiscal Year 2026 Budget
before
Committee on Appropriations
Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies
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Introduction

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee, thank you for having me today to represent a Department on a mission—its final mission. As you know, President Trump appointed me as his Secretary of Education to “put myself out of a job,” and with the partnership of Congress, I will do so, beginning with the sensible cuts outlined in this budget.

I would like to begin by thanking all of the members for their time today, and by thanking all of the dedicated career staff and appointees whose hard work over several months has produced the Department of Education’s Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget request. All of us at the Department share the goal of fulfilling the campaign promises of President Trump—our boss—to responsibly eliminate Federal bureaucracy and return education to the states, as envisioned by our Constitution. We also understand our fiduciary responsibility to Congress, and we hope to arrive at a position that aligns the President’s goals with the insights of the legislative branch.

Since January 20 of this year, we have operated on an accelerated timeline to review our programs and identify non-statutory activities, impose austerity on spending, and apply additional accountability measures across the board. We have reassessed all contracts with third parties, executed a downsizing and reduction in force of nearly 50 percent, and suspended grants that violated Federal law or conflicted with the priorities of most Americans, as reflected in President Trump’s electoral mandate.

At the same time, we have been hard at work delivering on the President’s confident vision to make American education great again. We have been in constant conversation with governors, state superintendents, and educators across the country, working together on a plan to empower



states to take back the reins of education. We have placed families at the forefront, emphasizing parental choice through our support for charter schools and other education freedom policies. We have taken fiscally sound measures to correct the deficiencies in repayment guidelines for the student loan portfolio, while beginning to address the root cause of colleges' runaway costs. Finally, we have redoubled the efforts of the Office for Civil Rights, which has been streamlined to more efficiently address dangerous and repeated infractions of federal anti-discrimination laws against women and girls, Jewish students, and others singled out for their race, ethnicity, or background.

To carry out these decisive measures in an environment of renewed fiscal discipline, we have worked diligently to develop a FY 2026 proposal that accurately reflects our transformative vision for the American education system. The era of indiscriminately spending money without correcting underlying problems must end. In the proposed budget under review today, we prioritize fiscal responsibility, evidence-based programs, state-led innovation, education choice, and ensuring that every dollar serves students, not bureaucracy.

To this end, we are requesting that Congress adopt our FY 2026 discretionary request of \$66.7 billion—a 15.3 percent reduction from FY 2025. This budget reduction marks a pivotal step toward responsibly winding down the Department while preserving key programs and empowering states, parents, and educators to deliver a world-class education.

We are consolidating and creating efficiencies in the bureaucracy as it exists: which means less taxpayer money is needed to fund it. This is an outcome that all should celebrate.

We look forward to partnering with you as we move toward revolutionizing the American system, from classroom to career.

Eliminating Bureaucracy and Sending Education Back to the States

America is currently in an educational crisis. Taxpayers have afforded the Federal education bureaucracy over \$3 trillion since 1980, but it has failed to deliver for students. Seventy percent of 8th graders are below proficient in reading, and 72 percent are below proficient in math, according to the latest Nation's Report Card. Federal educational assistance to those who need it most should not be crowded out by flawed or ideological programs with a poor track record of helping students.



First and foremost, in our proposed budget, we recommend that programs rife with waste, fraud, or abuse be eliminated to keep our spending focused on improving student outcomes, not perpetuating a failing system. For example, we do not need to spend \$4.6 million for a third-party contractor to coordinate the Department’s video meetings, or \$3 million for a research project that shows our prior research projects were not utilized. Eliminating these and other wasteful expenditures is a necessary first step in eliminating the self-perpetuating education bureaucracy and returning power to the states, where it belongs.

At the same time, this budget maintains full funding for Title I to school districts for children from low-income families (Title I, Part A), and special education funding under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). By consolidating various disparate K-12 programs into a single streamlined program, we provide states flexibility to fund activities that make the most sense for their respective communities, including improving school leader quality, expanding choice, and building teacher capacity.

Eliminating unnecessary bureaucracy doesn’t mean cutting Federal education funding—in fact, it ensures that more funding reaches its intended recipients—students—by reducing administrative overhead.

National education data collection and progress reporting is a good example. We fully support the use of high-quality data by educators, but are finding ways the Institute of Education Sciences (IES) can better accomplish its statutory duties more efficiently. We began this year by canceling and renegotiating a number of contracts and we are now redirecting those resources toward a leaner operation that will provide useful data and tools for teachers, education experts, and school administrators. This is part of our plan to reimagine IES as a more effective and efficient research organization—one that delivers resources and best practices directly to teachers to improve student learning outcomes. Additionally, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) will continue to meet its statutory responsibility to provide high-quality Federal statistical products, including the Nation’s Report Card (National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)).

Strengthening Enforcement of Federal Law and Ending Discrimination in Schools and Colleges

Reductions in spending may give the wrong impression about this Department’s capability for ensuring that federally-funded institutions comply with Federal law. I want to reassure the members of this committee that our FY 2026 budget request reflects a leaner, more focused



Office for Civil Rights (OCR) that has already established a strong track record under President Trump’s leadership. Despite a 35 percent reduction in OCR funds, we are setting a new standard for prompt and effective investigations.

Past administrations have muddled the enforcement of laws designed to protect students, creating administrative confusion and hostile environments. Massive backlogs of legitimate civil rights complaints languished in OCR, while legal staff were directed to focus on cases based on transgender ideology and other progressive causes.

The Trump Administration is taking decisive action to provide clarity on the widespread problem of illegal discrimination in our education system. We are strengthening oversight to ensure that both K-12 and higher education institutions adhere to civil rights laws, especially those addressing discrimination. To receive Federal funding, these institutions must comply with Federal law. Every student deserves an education free from bias, unfair treatment, or ideological agendas that undermine equal opportunity.

To this end, we have revised OCR’s case processing manual to ensure the timely evaluation of civil rights complaints. We have also reorganized personnel by specialized topics, not regions, a more focused approach that aligns well with the urgent yet legally diverse priorities being addressed.

The success of the dedicated task force for Title IX investigations is an example of how specialization creates greater efficiency. These reforms have enabled us to stay on pace with past administrations in our processing of civil rights complaints, including disability complaints, with a leaner OCR staff. As long as the Department exists and continues to oversee civil rights enforcement, we will never advocate for reductions in budget or staff that would debilitate this all-important charge.

Reversing Decline by Emphasizing School Choice and Meaningful Learning

Furthermore, the President’s FY 2026 budget seeks to reverse decades of educational decline by prioritizing school choice and meaningful learning, empowering parents and states to drive student success through the innovative teaching of core subjects. School choice is primarily an issue for Governors and state legislatures, but there are some investments that we make on the Federal level. This budget invests \$500 million—a \$60 million increase—in high-quality charter schools, proven to boost academic achievement and expand parental choice. Specialized local



charter models have long served as a path for parents of all backgrounds to offer educational excellence to their children.

Simultaneously, the budget introduces the K-12 Simplified Funding Program, consolidating 18 grant programs into a \$2 billion formula grant. This streamlines bureaucracy, reduces compliance costs, and empowers states to provide flexibility to districts and allocate funds to initiatives that will increase scores in core subjects like math, reading, science, and history. Again, full funding for Title I, Part A is preserved, and the increased decision-making authority on the state level will incentivize more evidence-based pedagogy that prioritizes academic quality. Together, choice and local control will create a system that equips students with the knowledge and skills to succeed after they graduate.

Treating Postsecondary Education as an Investment in America's Future

To better serve these high school graduates, the FY 2026 budget strengthens postsecondary education by prioritizing affordability, accountability, and opportunity while responsibly managing Federal resources. In it, we continue to support Pell Grants for low-income students and Career and Technical Education grants, aligning with this Administration's vision—expressed in multiple executive orders—of postsecondary pathways that include both four-year college and non-college options, such as work-based learning and apprenticeship opportunities.

To rectify the disarray of our \$1.6 trillion student loan portfolio, we are enforcing return-to-repayment policies, not debt bailouts that drive up the cost of college. This effort involves working with the U.S. Department of Treasury to restart involuntary collections and proactively reaching out to struggling borrowers to help them get out—and stay out—of default. We will no longer allow borrowers to transfer their student loan debt to taxpayers. And, we are introducing cost savings by following the commonsense policy of excluding non-citizens from all forms of Federal higher education assistance.

Working with Congress and through executive action, we are also tackling the root causes of soaring college costs. We have begun a wholesale reform of higher education regulations through the negotiated rulemaking process to promote competition and innovation while ensuring institutions meet rigorous standards. Colleges must be transparent and accountable to students so they can ascertain whether a particular program will yield a good return on investment. Matching college costs with career outcomes and high-paying jobs will ensure that the student loan portfolio does not slip into mass non-payment again in the future.



Conclusion

President Trump's vision is to make American education freer, fairer, and more competitive globally by eliminating Federal bureaucracy and empowering states, parents, and educators. Our FY 2026 budget request delivers on this promise by reducing spending for ineffective programs and prioritizing effective ones, while fully enforcing Federal law and giving power back to states, parents, and educators.

We ask that you support us in fulfilling the President's goal of responsibly winding down the Department of Education, and that you also work with us to ensure every child has access to a world-class education that prepares them for a prosperous future.

I look forward to your questions and to collaborating with this Subcommittee to arrive at clarity on this budget and to achieve these shared goals.