



Evaluating Plans to Abolish the U.S. Department of Education: Challenges and Implications

Frequently Asked Questions About the Impact on Utah Public Schools

During the 2024 campaign, President-elect Donald Trump proposed eliminating the U.S. Department of Education. As he prepares to assume office in January, this policy initiative has sparked significant concern among public educators, families, and policymakers. The implications for public schools and federal education funding would be considerable, potentially reshaping the landscape of education policy across the country.

What Is the Department of Education and What Does It Do?

The [U.S. Department of Education](#), established in 1979, aims to promote student achievement and ensure all Americans have access to quality education. It manages a range of federal education programs, including:

- **Title I:** Supporting low-income students.
- **Title II:** Improving teacher quality.
- **Title III:** Assisting English language learners.
- **Title IV:** Enhancing student support.
- **Title VI:** Focusing on Native American education.
- **Title IX:** Prohibiting sex-based discrimination in schools.

The department's mission is "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access." It strives to close educational gaps and uphold the rights of marginalized groups, including students with disabilities, racial minorities, and those from low-income families. Through the [Office for Civil Rights](#), the department enforces civil rights laws in schools to ensure equity and inclusivity.

Over the years, the Department of Education has played a vital role in safeguarding equal educational opportunities and advancing civil rights, contributing significantly to fostering fairness and excellence in the U.S. education system.

Is it Possible to Dismantle the U.S. Department of Education

While eliminating or significantly reducing the U.S. Department of Education has been suggested, doing so would face considerable legal, political, and practical obstacles. Fully dismantling the department would be an uphill battle requiring broad and bi-partisan political support.



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- **Legal Challenges:** The Department of Education was established by the [Department of Education Organization Act of 1979](#). Its closure or restructuring cannot be achieved through an executive order alone; it would require congressional approval, involving the repeal or amendment of existing federal law.
- **Political Feasibility:** Eliminating a major federal agency would be highly controversial. It could encounter strong opposition from Democrats and even some Republicans who support federal funding for education. Such a move would likely spark widespread debate over the federal government's role in ensuring educational equity and access.
- **Funding Implications:** The Department of Education administers substantial federal funding for K-12 schools, higher education, special education, and programs like Pell Grants. Disbanding the department would necessitate reallocating oversight and funding for these programs to other federal or state entities, a complex and politically fraught process

What Changes Could Be Made to the U.S. Department of Education?

While the Department of Education may not be eliminated entirely, significant changes could be made to its operations and priorities.

- **Decreased Funding for Public Schools:** The administration may advocate for cuts to federal education funding, particularly for programs like Title I, which supports low-income students, or for special education services. Such reductions could significantly impact public schools that rely on federal aid.
- **Expansion of School Choice:** Anti-public education politicians have strongly supported expanding and financially supporting school choice options, such as charter schools, private school vouchers, and education savings accounts (ESAs). Increasing these alternatives to traditional public schools is anticipated to be a strong focus in the coming years.
- **Rollback of Federal Regulations:** The administration may aim to reduce or eliminate federal oversight in education, including rolling back civil rights protections for students, easing teacher qualification requirements, and weakening accountability standards established under laws like the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). These changes would shift more decision-making power to states and local governments.



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What Are the Long-Term Consequences of a Smaller or Abolished U.S. Department of Education?

Reducing or eliminating the U.S. Department of Education could significantly affect the U.S. education system in the following ways:

- **Increased Inequity:** Federal oversight and funding play a critical role in leveling the playing field between wealthy and low-income school districts. Without these supports, wealthier districts could thrive while underfunded districts struggle, exacerbating disparities in educational opportunities and outcomes.
- **Deregulated Education:** A smaller department with reduced regulatory power would leave states and districts with greater autonomy to implement policies. While this could encourage innovation, it might also lead to decisions that undermine national goals for equity and access, such as cuts to special education funding or diminished protections for marginalized students.
- **Disruption to the Student Loan System:** The Department of Education oversees the federal student loan program, which millions of students and graduates rely on for financial aid and repayment assistance. Eliminating the department could create uncertainty and logistical challenges in maintaining this system, potentially leaving students without critical support.

What Is the UEA Doing to Preserve Public Education in Utah?

The Utah Education Association (UEA) is actively working to safeguard public education in Utah through legal action, advocacy, and strategic legislative initiatives. Here are key areas of focus:

- **Challenging Private Religious School Vouchers:** The UEA has filed a lawsuit against the state of Utah, challenging the constitutionality of the Utah Fits All scholarship program. This program diverts \$80 million in public funds to unaccountable private religious schools. By opposing this initiative, UEA aims to protect public education funding and ensure equitable access for all students.
- **Voiding Amendment A on the Ballot:** The UEA led the opposition against Amendment A, a ballot measure that sought to reallocate constitutionally protected funding for public education and social services to “other state needs.” Thanks to UEA's efforts, a judge voided the amendment weeks before the 2024 General Election, preserving essential resources for Utah’s students.



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- **2025 Legislative Priorities:** UEA advocates for increased financial support for education, including a 3% WPU increase above inflation and enrollment growth, expanded paid professional hours, and continued funding for the Stipends for Future Educators pilot program. Additional priorities include enhancing school safety and equity, protecting educators' rights, and ensuring parity in the Tier II retirement system.

What Can UEA Members Do?

Leverage the Power of Relationships: Contact your elected officials at both state and federal levels and urge them to oppose actions that harm public education. Engage your community in conversations about the importance of the Department of Education and harm to public education.

Get Involved Through UEA: Work with local leaders, who monitor proposals from administrators, school boards and state legislators that affect public education. Together, we are stronger and can achieve lasting victories for Utah's students and educators.

Invite Others to Join: Encourage colleagues to join UEA and support public education advocacy. By joining, we become part of the fight to preserve public education – the foundation of our democracy.

Participate in UEA's *Under the Dome* Program: Attend an *Educator Day on the Hill* during the legislative session to share your story with lawmakers. Stay informed about legislative issues through UEA's advocacy work.

Support UEA's Political Action Committee (PAC): Contribute monthly to UEA-PAC to help elect pro-public education candidates and strengthen advocacy efforts.

References

Federal role in Education. U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.).
<https://www.ed.gov/about/ed-overview/federal-role-in-education>