



# PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM SET FOR SHAKE UP UNDER TRUMP - THE EPOCH TIMES

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Expected policy changes to U.S. public education under the Trump administration will likely involve areas such as universal school choice, critical race theory, transgender ideology, student college debt relief, and higher education accreditation.

In addition, the fate of the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) itself hangs in the balance—though dismantling it would require an act of Congress.

“We will send Education BACK TO THE STATES, and Linda will spearhead that effort,” Trump wrote in a Nov. 19 statement when announcing his [nomination](#) of Linda McMahon to lead the DOE in his administration.

The Department of Education was established in 1979 by President Jimmy Carter.

Its scope was to ensure equal educational opportunities, to share research and information that can help state and local education agencies, to provide additional funds to very low-income schools that cannot get by with just state aid and local property tax dollars; and to administer federal grant and loan programs for higher education.

The federal agency cannot mandate curriculum, graduation requirements, or teacher and administrator credentials. Those decisions are made at the state and local levels, where municipal property taxes and state aid fund schools.

The department has taken on more recent tasks such as special education funding, civil rights investigations, and guidance on technology and artificial intelligence education.

Jonathan Butcher, a senior research fellow at the Heritage Foundation Center for Education Policy, says all of those functions could easily be absorbed into other federal agencies, resulting in massive savings for taxpayers.

“Washington is paying an administration to do the work that state departments of education should already be doing,” Butcher told The Epoch Times, adding that federal aid to poor districts amounts to less than 10 percent of per-student allocations.

“Abolishing the U.S. Department of Education provides more authority for states and districts to make decisions for themselves.”

Butcher said the DOE “certainly did not advance policy in any meaningful way,” citing the unsuccessful attempts to provide student debt relief, the continuation of low test scores, and the lack of support for allowing males to compete in female sports.

Under the Trump administration, Butcher said he expects the DOE to cut redundant administrative costs, emphasize academic improvement, empower state and local education administrators to lead better, and promote universal school choice nationwide.

Representatives from the American Council on Education (ACE), during a Nov. 6 panel [discussion](#), said in the past 40 years Congress has lacked the political will to dismantle the department.

With a Republican majority, it could eliminate positions in the agency to save millions of dollars, but abolishing it may not be advantageous, ACE representatives said.

“The Department of Education is a massive, influential, visible tool to reach into every school district, to reach into every college and university campus and exert attention and pressure and other things as to your administration’s policy priorities,” said Jon Fansmith, ACE’s assistant vice president of government relations.

“Why would you give that up if that’s now with your authority?”

The Epoch Times contacted the U.S. Department of Education, but did not receive a response.

## Gender Ideology and Critical Race Theory

During a July [rally](#) in St. Cloud, Minnesota, Donald Trump vowed to cut federal education funds to schools that push critical race theory (CRT), gender ideology, and “other inappropriate racial, sexual, or political content onto the shoulders of our children.”

“And I will not give one penny to any school that has a vaccine mandate or a mask mandate,” Trump said. “And I’ll keep men out of women’s sports.”

The nonprofit Parents Defending Education (PDE) organization publishes an online [map](#) that identifies incidents of liberal ideology in schools.

Its research is based on complaints submitted by parents and requests for freedom of information that verify the incidents.

Recent incidents include a California district that paid a consultant \$530,000 to develop a curriculum around “CRT, whiteness, and social justice activism”; a story time program in Vermont to teach kindergartners how to explore gender identity; and a district in Virginia that collaborated with a Chinese organization that wanted to establish schools with U.S. curriculum in the communist country as part of a “cultural exchange” program.

Most states had at least one instance where a district hid a student’s “gender identity” to comply with President Joe Biden’s executive order amending Title IX, according to PDE research.

Michelle Exner, PDE director of federal affairs, said the election results came as no surprise to her considering the number of complaints her organization received in every state in the past four years.

“Parents are fed up,” she said. “There’s an erosion of parental trust. Schools can’t hide information from parents. We are getting back to merit and meritocracy. Lowering the bar and getting rid of metrics doesn’t help the students.”

Exner does not think Trump will immediately leverage federal funding to force lower-income school districts to eliminate CRT and gender ideology programs.

Instead, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights, which investigates complaints of discrimination or harassment and publishes its findings, will apply pressure on non-complying schools and remind them they risk losing the aid if they don't take corrective actions.



"It's a way to dismantle the woke cancer that is affecting education," Exner said.

In education, CRT and transgender ideology represent a national dichotomy.

Website pages for state education departments in some deep blue states highlight special events such as Transgender Day of Visibility.

In contrast, those in red states like Arizona and Arkansas have disclaimers noting bias that detracts from academic standards is not tolerated.

"Without commentating on politics, I am encouraged to see a new administration commit to removing the elements of Critical Race Theory and so-called diversity, equity, and inclusion from schools," Arizona Education Commissioner Tom Horne said in a statement to The Epoch Times.

"I have fought against those programs for years because they divide people on the basis of race when people should be judged on their character, their knowledge, and ability to appreciate beauty,"

## Expanding School Choice

At the national level, Sen. Bill Cassidy (R-La.) plans to push his Educational Choice for Children Act, which would provide income tax credits to individuals or organizations that donate money to private school voucher programs.

He said he has Trump's support and hopes to replace Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) as the chairman of the Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee when Republicans take control of the Senate in January.

Cassidy joined other politicians and education leaders in rallying for school choice during the Nov. 7 Center for Education Reform event in Washington.

They said restricting tax dollars to local schools is an outdated idea and that the funding should instead be given to the child's choice of public schools, private schools, or homeschooling expenses.

Christopher Marker, chief executive officer of the Freedom Institute of Collier County, Florida, said there are many outstanding public schools.

Still, he said school leaders and elected officials have dismissed parents instead of embracing them as partners in the education process.

Without more input from parents and universal school choice nationwide, he said, public education will become a trillion-dollar industry "of factory schools with warehouse model inefficiencies."

"We all love our schools and our school programs, but we don't love them more than we love our kids," he said.

The National Education Association (NEA) teacher's union, which endorsed Democratic presidential candidate Vice President Kamala Harris, issued a public [statement](#) expressing disappointment with the election results.

However, the union also claimed victory in that the referendum to end the taxpayer-funded private school voucher program in Nebraska passed, while referendums to codify school choice into the state constitutions in Colorado and Kentucky were defeated.

“Now that this election is over, elected leaders around the country should come together and focus on serving all Americans, ensuring all students can attend an excellent public school, and America’s educators have the support and respect they deserve,” NEA President Becky Pringle said in the Nov. 6 news release.



## Higher Education

During the Moms for Liberty summit in Philadelphia last year, Trump criticized Biden’s student loan forgiveness program, applauded the Supreme Court for its decision to prohibit affirmative action in college admissions, and said he would eliminate higher education diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs funded by the federal government.

Ted Mitchell, ACE president, said the election results usher in “an anxious moment” for higher education.

“An awful lot of Americans feel higher education is moving American society in the wrong direction,” Mitchell said during the Nov. 6 panel discussion.

ACE speakers said Trump might take steps similar to those taken by Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom and limit the number of foreign students; but they don’t believe he will reduce funding to Historically Black Colleges and Universities or tribal colleges, which have strong bipartisan support.

Fansmith predicts Trump will use the Department of Education’s Civil Rights office to oppose DEI hiring and curriculum programs.

“The critique is that they inherently discriminate against other groups of students,” he said.

Jan Friis, senior vice president for the Council of Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), agrees.

*Image by [Nikolay Georgiev](#) from [Pixabay](#)*

The CHEA, a nonprofit, oversees dozens of organizations that set and maintain industry standards in the humanities and STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math) subjects.

Under the Higher Education Act, college majors are required to be accredited in order to get federal money for research and other functions.

The CHEA is not federally funded, Friis said, but the U.S. government “accredits the accreditors.”

“Accreditation has been around a lot longer,” Friis told The Epoch Times. “Any threat would be met with a strong reaction from higher education.”

The American Civil Liberties Union notes on its website that it plans to fight the Trump administration from day one.

The organization vows to represent schools that teach CRT and transgender ideology.

“We call on lawmakers, students, parents, educators, and community members to support the fight against these classroom censorship attacks and book challenges. The battle is far from over,” says a page on the website titled Defending Our Right to Learn.

Exner, from PDE, said parent groups like hers are no strangers to litigation, and they expect a series of lawsuits from the ACLU in the years to come.

However, given Republicans’ success in the 2024 election, she said, supporters of education reform and an objective education for all

should be confident that change is coming.

“These are common sense 80/20 issues,” she said. “We are bracing for more friction and resistance, yes, but public sentiment is on our side so it’s an uphill battle for them.”



*Janice Hisle contributed to this report.*