

Education Department to slash half its workforce

“Employees will not be permitted in any ED facility on Wednesday, March 12th, for any reason,” a message to agency staff Tuesday stated.

By Juan Perez Jr.
POLITICO

The Education Department will begin cutting more than 1,300 people from its workforce and terminating some of its office leases across the country this week, as part of the Trump administration’s broader effort to cull the size of the U.S. government’s smallest Cabinet agency.

An agency official told reporters Tuesday that the job cuts being finalized over the coming weeks are expected to affect roughly half of the agency’s workforce.

The official said the department, which employs about 4,130 people, focused on cutting teams whose operations are redundant or not necessary to serve its core functions. But they also cast the announcement as another step in remaking the agency ahead of the president’s still-unreleased executive order [to dismantle it](#).

“Today’s RIF reflects our commitment to efficiency, accountability, and ensuring that resources are directed where they matter most: to students, parents, and teachers,” Education Secretary Linda McMahon [said in a statement](#) about the reduction in force posted to social media.

“I appreciate the work of the dedicated public servants and their contributions to the Department,” she said. “This is a significant step toward restoring the greatness of the United States education system.”

The agency said the cuts would not affect the work of its Federal Student Aid office and civil rights investigators, or how the department distributes federal funding for low-income and disabled students.

“We have a department now that exists largely to oversee contractors, add strings, and in many cases, do duplicative efforts across the department,” the official said.

Employees affected by Tuesday’s announced force reduction will have 90 days until they are actually terminated and will receive full pay and benefits during this time, in addition to severance pay.

Tuesday’s announced job cuts come atop approximately 259 employees who have already accepted a “deferred resignation” from the Trump administration that’s

intended to cover their pay and benefits through September. An additional 313 workers accepted a buyout offer that promised the equivalent of severance pay or \$25,000, whichever was less.

The department said approximately 2,200 employees will be left once Tuesday's force reduction take effect atop the resignations and buyouts.

Earlier on Tuesday, the agency closed its Washington-area offices for "security reasons" related to the mass firing plan, according to a department official and a notice sent to agency employees.

Department employees were told to vacate the building by 6 p.m., according to the Tuesday notice, and have been allowed to work from home on Wednesday if they have approved telework agreements.

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All offices were set to reopen to in-person work on March 13th, according to the notice.

The department official said the 1,315 employees affected by Tuesday's job cuts will work remotely until next week, when they will be placed on administrative leave until their formal termination in 90 days. The department also plans to consolidate its Washington operations into one building — instead of three — in the capital, the official said.

Tuesday's telework plans sparked significant confusion ahead of the planned staff cuts.

The American Federation of Government Employees, the union representing the agency's rank and file, told staffers that supervisors have likely already terminated remote and telework arrangements for many employees when complying with Trump's return-to-work order from earlier this year.

"If you are within the commuting area and not on an active telework agreement, we recommend informing your supervisor that you do not have an active telework agreement and requesting clarification on how to code your administrative leave for tomorrow," the union said in an email.

Tuesday's announcement also arrived hours after a group of former agency employees, union and political leaders assembled outside the department's headquarters to protest staff cuts and Trump's pending executive order.

"Every student will feel the impact of a decision to dismantle the department," Rep. Mark Takano (D-Calif.), a member of the House education and workforce committee, said during Tuesday's protest. "Rural students will feel it. Students in poor communities will feel it. LGBTQ+ students and students of color will feel it. College

students who rely on Pell Grants and Federal Student Aid will feel it. And students in special education all will be locked out.”

Hand-written signs could be seen in the agency headquarters building windows above Tuesday’s demonstration as officials spoke. “We miss you,” read one. “SOS,” said another. “Save ED.”

But Rep. Jim Jordan (R-Ohio) said Trump’s education agenda aligns with “where we conservatives and most of America have always been.”

“The Department of Education has got a bunch of bureaucrats here in DC. Do they really make a difference for a sixth-grader in Champaign County going to a local school? No,” Jordan told POLITICO on Tuesday. “They probably make life more difficult for the teacher who’s actually interacting with the kid on a daily basis. You’ll see buy-in from Republicans on his goals with the department.”

Rebecca Carballo and Amanda Friedman contributed to this report.