

Gov. DeWine joins President Trump for signing of order cutting Education Department

Trump will direct his education secretary, Linda McMahon, to take 'all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education.'

By Joey Garrison and Zachary Schermele
USA Today

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine will attend President Donald Trump's executive order signing to dismantle the U.S. Department of education.

Trump signed the order Thursday afternoon at a White House ceremony attended by several other Republican governors and state education commissioners.

"Today, I joined President Trump and several fellow governors at the White House in support of the president's proposal to return education back to the states," DeWine said.

Trump directed his education secretary, Linda McMahon, to take "all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education and return education authority to the States," according to a White House summary of the order reviewed by USA TODAY. It also calls for the "uninterrupted delivery of services, programs, and benefits on which Americans rely."

"Every student, family, and community is different. In Ohio, we've achieved great results by focusing on our administration's priorities, like improving literacy achievement, ensuring all students have pathways to thrive in our workforce, and more. Now it's time to take the next step," DeWine said. "By giving states more authority over education, we will have the flexibility to focus our efforts on tailoring an educational experience that is best for our children and that meets Ohio's needs, rather than trying to chase federal priorities."

Trump's order, which is almost certain to invite legal challenges from the left, sets up a new test for the bounds of presidential authority after the Trump administration's efforts to shut down the U.S. Agency for International Development [were blocked this week](#) by a federal district judge in Maryland.

The department, established as a Cabinet-level agency by Congress in 1979, will not close immediately with Trump's signature. Eliminating it in its entirety would require action from Congress.

Although Trump has reduced the agency's workforce dramatically in recent weeks, the agency still exists and continues to oversee vital federal funding programs for schools.

Harrison Fields, White House principal deputy press secretary, said in a statement to USA TODAY the order "will empower parents, states, and communities to take control and improve outcomes for all students." He said recent test scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress exam "reveal a national crisis – our children are falling behind."

A final copy of the order was not available Wednesday, but it is expected to closely [resemble a draft that USA TODAY](#) and other media outlets reported earlier this month was prepared for Trump.

The order takes aim at "regulations and paperwork" required by the Department of Education, arguing federal guidance in the form of "Dear Colleague" letters from the department "redirect resources toward complying with ideological initiatives, which diverts staff time and attention away from schools' primary role of teaching," according to the White House summary.

Federal funding for students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Title I funding for low-income schools and federal student loan payments will remain unchanged under the order while McMahon works on a plan to "bring these funds closer to states, localities, and more importantly, students," a White House official said.

Under the order, education programs or activities that receive "any remaining Department of Education funds" will not be allowed to

advance diversity, equity and inclusion or gender ideology, according to the White House summary.

Other governors joining Trump include Ron DeSantis of Florida, Glenn Youngkin of Virginia and Greg Abbott of Texas.

Republicans have long accused the federal government of holding too much power over local and state education policy, even though the federal government has no control over school curriculum. Trump told reporters last month that he hopes McMahon eventually puts herself "out of a job."

His order comes after [more than 1,300 Education Department employees](#) received termination notices last week as part of large-scale "reductions in force" across the federal government pushed by Elon Musk's Department of Government Efficiency. Combining cuts with voluntary buyouts, the Trump administration has trimmed the department's workforce from 4,133 workers to 2,183 workers since the start of his second term.

Trump has increasingly criticized the performance of U.S. public schools compared with schools in other countries. "We're ranked at the very bottom of the list, but we're at the top of the list in one thing: the cost per pupil," he said last month.

In levying those complaints, Trump and other Republicans have often relied on data from the Education Department's research arm, a branch the administration has reduced to a skeleton staff, raising questions about tracking school progress in the future.

The order argues that even though the department has spent \$1 trillion in federal education dollars over 46 years, the U.S. has not improved in education. It singles out that math and reading scores for 13-year-old students have dropped to their lowest level in decades, and argues that low-performing students have "fallen further behind."

Since returning to the White House, Trump has discussed giving states the complete authority to oversee schools, often singling out Iowa and Indiana as two strongly performing states that "should run their own education." Local school districts and states already oversee what is taught in schools. The federal government, on the other hand, provides limited oversight for schools that receive federal funding.

The White House's Fields blamed the Democratic leadership of the last four years for the nation's education troubles. He pointed to immigrants in the country without authorization for straining school resources, arguing this dynamic “coupled with the rise of anti-American CRT and DEI indoctrination” had hurt America’s most vulnerable students.

Trump's order marks another test of expansive executive authority embraced by Trump, who has ignored Congress to shut down the offices of USAID and dismantle operations of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Passing legislation in Congress to eliminate the Department of Education would require support from Democrats, making such an effort highly unlikely. It's not even clear moderate Republicans in the U.S. Senate are on board with a GOP proposal to shift the agency's offices elsewhere within the federal government (Trump has begun [discussing the idea](#) with his Cabinet anyway).

Meanwhile, the Education Department is already reeling from waves of employee [suspensions](#), [resignations](#) and [broader policy shifts affecting students and schools](#).

McMahon repeatedly stressed during her [Senate confirmation hearing](#) that congressionally appropriated funding for schools and students wouldn't be impacted by the Trump administration's efforts to dismantle the Education Department. Democrats, and some Republicans, viewed that message with skepticism.

In the same hearing, McMahon [promised](#) to protect a specific student loan forgiveness plan for public servants that Republicans and Democrats in Congress approved in 2007. Weeks later, [Trump signed an executive order](#) aimed at limiting the types of borrowers eligible for that same program.