CALVIN COOLIDGE PRESIDENTIAL FOUNDATION

DEBATE BRIEF

Resolved: The United States federal government should abolish its Department of Education.

FALL 2025

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BACKGROUND

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

"Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled, That there shall be established, at the city of Washington, a department of education, for the purpose of collecting such statistics and facts as shall show the condition and progress of education in the several States and Territories, and of diffusing such information respecting the organization and management of schools and school systems, and methods of teaching, as shall aid the people of the United States in the establishment and maintenance of efficient school systems, and otherwise promote the cause of education throughout the country.

"SEC. 2. And be it further enacted, That there shall be appointed by the President, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate, a commissioner of education, who shall be intrusted with the management of the department herein established..."

— Act to Establish a Department of Education, March 2, 1867, § 1-2[1]

"The cause of education has long had the thoughtful solicitude of the National Government. While it is realized that it is a State affair, rather than a national affair, nevertheless it has provided by law a Bureau of Education. It has not been thought wise to undertake to collect money from the various States into the National Treasury and distribute it again among the various States for the direct support of education. It has seemed a better policy to leave their taxable resources to the States, and permit them to make their own assessments for the support of their own schools in their own way.

But for a long time the cause of education has been regarded as so important and so preeminently an American cause, that the National Government has sought to encourage it, scientifically to investigate its needs, and furnish information and advice for its constant advancement. Pending before the Congress is the report of a committee which proposes to establish a Department of Education and Relief, to be presided over by a Cabinet officer. Bearing in mind that this does not mean any interference with the local control, but is rather an attempt to recognize and dignify the importance of educational effort, such proposal has my hearty indorsement and support."

—President Calvin Coolidge, July 4, 1924[2]

[1] Kosar, K. R. (2011, February 19). Act to establish a federal department of education, 1867. Federal Education Policy History. https://federaleducationpolicy.org/2011/02/19/1867-act-to-establish-a-federal-department-of-education/

[2] Coolidge, C. (1924, July 4). *Education: The cornerstone of self-government* [Speech delivered to the National Education Association, Washington, D.C.]. Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation. https://coolidgefoundation.org/resources/education-the-cornerstone-of-self-government/

"The Supreme Court of the United States has decided that separate public educational facilities for the races are inherently unequal and therefore compulsory school segregation laws are unconstitutional... The very basis of our individual rights and freedoms rests upon the certainty that the President and the Executive Branch of Government will support and insure the carrying out of the decisions of the Federal Courts, even, when necessary with all the means at the President's command."

—President Dwight Eisenhower, September 24, 1957, on deploying federal troops to Little Rock, Arkansas[3]

"Primary responsibility for education should rest with those States, localities, and private institutions that have made our Nation's educational system the best in the world, but the Federal Government has for too long failed to play its own supporting role in education as effectively as it could. Instead of assisting school officials at the local level, it has too often added to their burden.

"Instead of setting a strong administrative model, the Federal structure has contributed to bureaucratic buck passing. Instead of stimulating needed debate of educational issues, the Federal Government has confused its role of junior partner in American education with that of silent partner. The time has passed when the Federal Government can afford to give second-level, part-time attention to its responsibilities in American education."

—President Jimmy Carter, October 17, 1979[4]

"But better education doesn't mean a bigger Department of Education. In fact, that Department should be abolished. Instead, we must do a better job teaching the basics, insisting on discipline and results, encouraging competition and, above all, remembering that education does not begin with Washington officials or even State and local officials. It begins in the home, where it is the right and responsibility of every American."

—President Ronald Reagan, March 12, 1983[5]

[3] Eisenhower, D. D. (1957, September 24). *Radio and television address to the American people on the situation in Little Rock.* The American Presidency Project. https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/radio-and-television-address-the-american-people-the-situation-little-rock

[4] Carter, J. (1979, October 17). *Department of Education Organization Act: Statement on signing S. 210 into law.* The American Presidency Project. University of California, Santa Barbara. https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/department-education-organization-act-statement-signing-s-210-into-law

[5] Reagan, R. (1983, March 12). *Radio address to the nation on education* [Radio broadcast]. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library & Museum. https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/radio-address-nation-education-1

"...[D]espite resources that are unmatched anywhere in the world, we've let our grades slip, our schools crumble, our teacher quality fall short, and other nations outpace us. Let me give you a few statistics. In 8th-grade math, we've fallen to 9th place. Singapore's middle-schoolers outperform ours three to one. Just a third of our 13- and 14-year-olds can read as well as they should. And year after year, a stubborn gap persists between how well white students are doing compared to their African American and Latino classmates. The relative decline of American education is untenable for our economy, it's unsustainable for our democracy, it's unacceptable for our children -- and we can't afford to let it continue."

—President Barack Obama, March 10, 2009[6]

President Jimmy Carter signs the Department of Education Organization Act on October 17, 1979, establishing the U.S. Department of Education.[7]

[6] Obama, B. (2009, March 10). *Remarks by the President to the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce on a complete and competitive American education* [Speech transcript]. The White House (Obama Administration) Archives, Office of the Press Secretary. https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-united-states-hispanic-chamber-commerce

[7] U.S. Department of Education [@usedgov]. (2025, October 17). [Image attached] [Post]. X. https://x.com/usedgov/status/1846936840823079402

CONTEXT AND HISTORY

Consternation over the federal role in education is not new. It is a little-known fact that the story of the United States Department of Education stretches back to 1867. That is when Congress authorized, and President Andrew Johnson reluctantly signed, legislation establishing such a department for the first time. James Dixon, a Republican Senator from Connecticut, persuaded President Johnson to sign the bill by reassuring him that the "true and obvious intent of the bill was not to centralize the administration of schools," but rather "to perform the work every year which the census undertakes to do every 10 years."[8] The Department's purpose was limited to collecting information and statistics, and it had only four employees.[9] Its leader was called not "secretary" but "commissioner," which meant the head of the department was not in the President's Cabinet.

Noted education leader of the time, Henry Bernard, answered the call to lead the nascent Department.[10] The broad respect Bernard commanded helped to secure the bill's passage, as his appointment put at ease those members of Congress who objected to President Johnson having the power to appoint a Commissioner of Education. Bernard hewed narrowly to the Department's statutory mission to collect data, but objections to the Department's work, and the rising tide of opposition to Reconstruction, doomed it from the outset.[11] "You can't overestimate how inflammatory it was for former Confederate leaders to have a federal Department of Education because they equated 'federal' with Reconstruction," explains Binghamton University professor of education and history, Adam Laats.[12] Concerns that the Department would exercise too much control over local schools led to the quick demotion of the Department to a mere "Office of Education" in 1868, just a year after its original creation.

Fast forward to the earliest decades of the twentieth century, when life in America was changing rapidly. Education was no exception. Schoolhouses, once mostly one-room buildings serving a few dozen farm children, were giving way to graded schools in towns and cities. High schools, once rare, became a community priority. Americans came to view youth no longer as part-time laborers, but as students preparing for careers in a leading industrialized and urbanized country.

In turn, the scope of American compulsory education laws greatly expanded. By 1920, 37 states required school attendance until at least the age of 16.[13] Still, the federal government's role in education was minimal. Funding and decision-making authority rested in state capitols or with local school boards.

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[8] Steiner, B. C. (1919). *Life of Henry Barnard: The first United States Commissioner of Education, 1867–1870* (Bulletin No. 8). Bureau of Education, Department of the Interior. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED541144
[9] Friedman, J. (2024, December 4). *The rise and rapid fall of the first US Department of Education*. HISTORY. https://www.history.com/articles/department-education-andrew-johnson-reconstruction
[10] Monroe, W. S. (1893). The educational labors of Henry Barnard; a study in the history of American pedagogy (p. 36). https://archive.org/details/educationallabo01monrgoog/page/n36/mode/2up
[11] Warren, D. R. (1974). The U.S. Department of Education: A Reconstruction Promise to Black Americans. *The Journal of Negro Education*, *43*(4), 437–451. https://doi.org/10.2307/2966702
[12] Friedman, J. (2024, December 4). *The rise and rapid fall of the first U.S. Department of Education*. HISTORY. https://www.history.com/articles/department-education-andrew-johnson-reconstruction
[13] Katz, M. S. (1976). *A history of compulsory education laws* (Fastback Series No. 75, Bicentennial Series). Phi Delta Kappa. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED119389

Calvin Coolidge Advocates for a Cabinet-Level Department of Education

Coolidge grew up in rural Plymouth Notch, Vermont, where he attended a one-room schoolhouse through eighth grade. He then enrolled in Black River Academy in nearby Ludlow, Vermont, graduating from high school in 1890. After a preparatory term at St. Johnsbury Academy in Vermont, Calvin was accepted to Amherst College in Massachusetts, from which he graduated in 1895. When it came time to prepare for a career in the law, Coolidge opted to "read the law," an education by which he apprenticed with a law firm while self-studying to pass the bar exam.

Throughout his life and public career, Coolidge was a forceful advocate for education. Coolidge linked education to self-government, explaining, "To live up to the full measure of citizenship in this nation requires not only action, but it requires intelligent action. It is necessary to secure information and to acquire education."[14]

Before Coolidge became President, Congress had convened a Joint Committee on the Reorganization of the Executive Branch under the Harding administration, and its efforts continued into 1924. The bill produced by the committee included elevating the Bureau of Education from within the Department of the Interior to become the Department of Education and Relief. This new Department, according to the plan, would have been presided over by a Cabinet-level secretary.

Carefully noting that doing so must not interfere with local control, President Coolidge endorsed this cabinet-level position for education, stating, "Pending before the Congress is the report of a committee which proposes to establish a Department of Education and Relief, to be presided over by a Cabinet officer. Bearing in mind that this does not mean any interference with the local control but is rather an attempt to recognize and dignify the importance of educational effort, such proposal has my hearty indorsement and support."[15]

Congress never voted on the reorganization bill, and thus, the Education Department elevation Coolidge supported failed to come to fruition.[16] But, even later in his presidency, Coolidge continued to express support for the concept, stating in his 1927 Annual Message to Congress, "I am still of the opinion that much good could be accomplished through the establishment of a Department of Education and Relief, into which would be gathered all of these functions under one directing member of the Cabinet."[17]

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[14] Coolidge, C. (1924, November 3). *The duties of citizenship* [Radio address]. Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation. https://coolidgefoundation.org/resources/the-duties-of-citizenship/

[15] Coolidge, C. (1924, July 4). *Education: The cornerstone of self-government* [Speech transcript]. Delivered in Washington, D.C. Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation. https://coolidgefoundation.org/resources/education-the-cornerstone-of-self-government/

[16] History, Art & Archives, U.S. House of Representatives. (2018, April 18). *A committee of one. Whereas: Stories from the People's House*. https://history.house.gov/Blog/2018/April/4-17-Committee-of-One/

[17] Coolidge, C. (1927, December 6). *Fifth annual message to the Congress of the United States*. Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation. https://coolidgefoundation.org/resources/fifth-annual-message/

A Growing Federal Role

During the Great Depression, the New Deal's national program involved itself to an unprecedented extent in the business of running schools. Institutions such as the Works Progress Administration built thousands of schools and utilized the teaching profession as a source of employment. In the name of strengthening the workforce, federally sponsored adult education programs offered basic literacy and vocational training to the unemployed. Colleges and universities also expanded.

The Morrill Land-Grant Acts, initially passed in 1862 and expanded in 1890, enabled the establishment of larger and more numerous public universities. Engineering, agriculture, and teacher training were commonly taught at these land-grant colleges.[18] In a further push to professionalize the field of education, teacher training itself moved from short-term "normal schools" toward four-year degrees.

World War II continued to widen the federal reach. The GI Bill of 1944 revolutionized higher education, enabling millions of veterans to attend college or vocational programs. After the Sputnik launch by the Soviet Union in 1957, the U.S. responded the following year with the National Defense Education Act, pouring money into science, math, and foreign languages, thanks to their importance to national security.[19]

The Fight for Equality in Education

Another reason federal involvement in schools continued to increase was that not everyone had equal access to educational opportunities. In the first few decades of the 1900s, Black pupils in the South attended lesser schools with meager funding, dilapidated facilities, and outdated books. Native American children were often forced into boarding schools designed to erase their languages and traditions. Children with disabilities were frequently shut out altogether.

Challenges to this system steadily gained momentum. Founded in 1909, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, or NAACP, made education a central part of its mission and brought legal challenges that ultimately led to the end of segregation in the United States. The watershed moment came in 1954, when *Brown v. Board of Education* struck down the policy of "separate but equal" in public schooling.[20] After *Brown*, the federal role expanded dramatically. Because many states openly resisted desegregation, federal authority was needed to enforce the Court's ruling. In 1957, President Dwight Eisenhower sent federal troops to escort the "Little Rock Nine" into Central High School. This was a turning point that showed that Washington would step in when states violated court orders and the Constitution.[21]

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[18] Sorber, N. M. (2018). *Land-Grant Colleges and Popular Revolt: The Origins of the Morrill Act and the Reform of Higher Education*. Cornell University Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.7591/j.ctt21kk28r

[19] Urban, W. J. (2018). *More than science and Sputnik: The National Defense Education Act of 1958*. University of Alabama Press.

[20] *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954). https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/347/483/

[21] Eisenhower, D. D. (1957, September 24). *Radio and television address to the American people on the situation in Little Rock*. The American Presidency Project. https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/radio-and-television-address-the-american-people-the-situation-little-rock

The Civil Rights Act of 1964, signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson, granted the federal government further authority in education. Title IV of the Act authorized the federal government, acting through the Attorney General, to pursue litigation to enforce school desegregation. Title VI of the Act prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any program or activity that receives federal financial funding.[22]

President Lyndon Johnson's "War on Poverty" further involved the federal government in education policy. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, also known as ESEA, committed to a robust federal role in ensuring access to equal, quality education by directing new, large appropriations to low-income schools, but only if they followed the recently established nondiscrimination rules.[23] The ESEA attempted to make education a tool for mitigating inequality and directed funds to disadvantaged students. The addition of protections for children with disabilities and English language learners expanded the law's reach over time. This law marked the beginning of a new era in which federal rules increasingly influenced education policy.

More legislation expanding the federal role followed close behind. By creating extensive new financial aid programs, such as grants and loans, the Higher Education Act of 1965 significantly increased Washington's funding for student aid, including the Educational Opportunity Grants (the precursor to Pell Grants) and the Guaranteed Student Loan Program (later known as Stafford Loans). In another change, Washington emerged as a significant funding source for Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or HBCUs, and colleges with substantial Hispanic and Native American populations.[24] Additionally, the Act expanded data collected on institutions and linked federal aid to adherence to nondiscrimination regulations.[25] Later, sex discrimination was outlawed in all educational programs receiving federal funding by Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972.[26]

Establishing the Modern Department of Education

By the 1970s, the federal government had become increasingly involved in education, actively enforcing civil rights, providing financial assistance to students, and increasing funding. However, education policy was still dispersed among various departments, particularly the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, or HEW. Many teachers and policymakers said that these duties needed better direction from the cabinet level. Jimmy Carter promised to make a separate Department of Education during his 1976 presidential campaign.

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[22] Civil Rights Act of 1964, Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241. https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-78/pdf/STATUTE-78-Pg241.pdf

[23] Jeffrey, J. (1978). *Education for children of the poor: A study of the origins and implementation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.

[24] Congressional Research Service. (2023, April 10). *The Higher Education Act (HEA): A primer* (Report No. R43351). https://sgp.fas.org/crs/misc/R43351.pdf

[25] Investopedia. (n.d.). *Higher Education Act of 1965 (HEA): Definition and provisions.* https://www.investopedia.com/terms/h/higher-education-act-of-1965-hea.asp

[26] Education Amendments of 1972, Pub. L. No. 92-318, 86 Stat. 235 (1972). https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/STATUTE-86/pdf/STATUTE-86-Pg235.pdf

The National Education Association strongly supported him.[27] After he was elected, Carter pushed Congress to act. In October 1979, he signed the Department of Education Organization Act, which transferred education responsibilities from HEW to a new cabinet secretary and officially created the modern federal Department of Education.[28]

Reform Movements Take Center Stage

In 1983, the report *A Nation at Risk* warned of a "rising tide of mediocrity," sparking calls for stricter standards and more accountability.[29] States responded with more standardized tests, more stringent graduation requirements, and new structures within their educational systems. In 1988, longtime President of the American Federation of Teachers, Albert Shanker, brought the concept of charter schools to national attention.[30] Independently operated but publicly funded, charter schools aim to apply market principles to the school system, enhancing choices for parents and students. By 1991, Minnesota had passed the nation's first charter school law. The first charter school opened in 1992, marking the beginning of public school choice that, at least at the time, enjoyed support from policymakers on both sides of the aisle.[31] States soon expanded experimentation with related school choice proposals, such as vouchers, tax-credit scholarships, and open enrollment. Critics were concerned about diverting funds away from traditional schools, while supporters emphasized flexibility and parental control.

Scrutiny of public schools continued to intensify into the twenty-first century. In January 2002, President George W. Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act into law. This federal law required states to set academic standards against which students could be tested annually. Federal funding was tied to school performance, with consequences for schools that failed to make "adequate yearly progress." Cornell Law professor Michael Heise called No Child Left Behind "the federal government's most dramatic foray into the elementary and secondary public school policymaking terrain."[32] In 2015, President Barack Obama signed the Every Student Succeeds Act, replacing No Child Left Behind and returning authority to the states to define and enforce school performance accountability measures.

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[27] Sawchuk, S. (2024, December 19). *Jimmy Carter's education legacy stretched from the school board to the White House. Education Week*. https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/jimmy-carters-education-legacy-stretched-from-the-school-board-to-the-white-house/2024/12

[28] Arkontaky, A., & Roller, I. (2025, April 22). *The history of the United States Department of Education explained*. New York State Bar Association. https://nysba.org/the-history-of-the-united-states-department-of-education-explained/

[29] National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983). *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform* (Report). U.S. Department of Education. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED226006.pdf

[30] Sawchuk, S. (2006, February 21). *Shanker on charters*. Education Week. https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/shanker-on-charters/2006/02

[31] Fairbanks, C. C. (2023, July 27). *History of parent-driven education: Part 5 – Charter schools and pre-pandemic public-school choice.* Sutherland Institute. https://sutherlandinstitute.org/history-of-parent-driven-education-part-5-charter-schools-and-pre-pandemic-public-school-choice/

[32] Heise, M. (2017). *From No Child Left Behind to Every Student Succeeds: Back to a future for education federalism*. Columbia Law Review, 117(7), 1859–1896. https://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/facpub/1642

By the 2010s, reform energy spread to other domains. Personalization, project-based learning, and competency-based education gained traction.[33] At the same time, political and cultural disputes over curriculum, especially in the ways it addresses race and gender, have kept education at the center of America's public debates.[34] Frustration with higher education has also boiled over. Tuition costs have risen sharply, student loan debt has ballooned, and debate has intensified over whether college can remain the engine of upward mobility that it became in the 20th century.[35] New models such as dual enrollment, early college high schools, and career academies have blurred the lines between K–12 and higher education.

The COVID-19 pandemic brought a new level of scrutiny to the nation's education system. Inconsistent reopening plans and extended periods of remote learning prompted working parents to seek ways to balance their home life. Other parents feared for their children's health and pressured policymakers to continue delaying their return to the classroom. Now, five years later, millions of parents have opted for an alternative to the traditional K-12 public school system, where enrollment has declined. At the same time, charter schools have "gained more than 300,000 students since 2019-20. Meanwhile, district public schools have been unable to recover the 1.5 million students they lost during the pandemic."[36] Homeschooling saw yet greater gains than charters. The Home Education Research Institute reports that more than three million children are today homeschooled.[37] An analysis by the *Washington Post* revealed "a picture of home schooling as the fastest growing part of the U.S. education system…In the first year of the pandemic, home schooling surged. Although small declines followed in the next two years, the number of children in home schooling remained 45 percent higher in the 2022-23 academic year than it was in 2017-18."[38]

INTERPRETING THE RESOLUTION

Remaining topical is essential in Coolidge debate. Competitors who go off topic will not be successful. Also important: do not make the debate about the wording of the resolution. Citizen judges seek persuasive arguments about the topic, not a clever dissection of the resolution's wording. The Foundation desires for debaters to focus on the topic's central conflicts to improve their preparation and enhance the likelihood of quality discourse.

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[33] Pane, J. F., Steiner, E. D., Baird, M. D., Hamilton, L. S., & Pane, J. D. (2017, July). *Informing progress: Insights on personalized learning implementation and effects* (RR-2042-BMGF). RAND Corporation. https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2042
[34] Finn, C. E. (2022, March 28). *In defense of education in the culture wars*. Thomas B. Fordham Institute. https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/commentary/defense-education-culture-wars
[35] Council on Foreign Relations. (2024, April 16). *What Should the U.S. Do About Rising Student Loan Debt?* https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-student-loan-debt-trends-economic-impact
[36] Jacobs, D., & Veney, D. (2023, December). *Believing in public education: A demographic and state-level analysis of public charter school and district public school enrollment trends*. National Alliance for Public Charter Schools. https://publiccharters.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/2023-Enrollment-Report.pdf
[37] Ray, B. D. (2025, January 27). *Research facts on homeschooling*. National Home Education Research Institute. https://nheri.org/research-facts-on-homeschooling/
[38] Meckler, L., & Jamison, P. (2023, October 31). *The Post examined home schooling's surge in the U.S. Here's what we found*. The Washington Post. https://wapo.st/4lQP052

The resolution aims to prompt debaters to examine the net benefits of abolishing the United States Department of Education. There will be room to debate which functions of the Department are diminished, discontinued, devolved to states, or transferred to other federal agencies. For example, civil rights protections or protections for students with disabilities could, of course, be handled by the Department of Justice. Servicing of existing student loans could likewise be reassigned to another department, such as Treasury. It would be unwise to interpret this resolution as implying that *all* current Department of Education responsibilities would be transferred to other departments. Under such a weak interpretation, what would be the purpose of abolishing the department? Merely shuffling the organizational chart of the executive branch is not what animates advocates of Department of Education abolition.

Overall, it is important for debaters to consider the proper role of the federal government in education. This is because the intent is for students to debate the net benefits of abolishing the United States Department of Education broadly.

President George W. Bush signs the No Child Left Behind Act at Hamilton High School on January 8, 2002, in Ohio.[39]

[39] Morse, P. (Photographer). (2002, January 8). [Photograph]. Records of the White House Photo Office (George W. Bush Administration), National Archives Identifier 7369314; Local Identifier P12123-24. National Archives Catalog. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/7369314

GLOSSARY

Bureaucratic Uncertainty - The unpredictability and inconsistency in rules, regulations, or policy directives issued by government agencies, which can create confusion for individuals, institutions, or local governments attempting to comply or plan effectively. Bureaucratic uncertainty can also arise from competing layers of bureaucracy—for example, the federal government's education priorities versus those of a state, versus those of a local school district.

Disparate Impact Discrimination - Policies or practices in schools and educational institutions that appear neutral on their face but have a disproportionate adverse effect on students based on race, color, national origin, sex, or disability. Unlike *disparate treatment* (which involves intentional discrimination), disparate impact attempts to address the effects of a policy, even when no discriminatory intent is shown. The Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) has investigated instances of disparate impact discrimination under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 since its creation.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) - The 1965 ESEA, part of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, provided federal funds to disadvantaged schools and launched Title I programs. In many ways, it established the modern federal role in K–12 education.

Title I - A section of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that directs funds to schools with high percentages of low-income students, aiming to close achievement gaps.

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) - A 1990 federal law that requires schools to provide students with disabilities a free and appropriate public education, including individualized support and services.

National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) - A nationally administered test, often called the "Nation's Report Card," used to measure student achievement. It was established in 1969 to standardize assessments (although it does not replace state testing) so that policymakers can compare results across states. The NAEP sometimes reveals gaps between what state tests report as "proficient" and national standards.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) - Was a 2002 law that expanded federal accountability by requiring schools to test all students annually and demonstrate progress for each student subgroup. No Child Left Behind was replaced by the **Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015**.

Pell Grants - Federal grants that provide need-based financial aid to low-income college students. Unlike loans, they do not require repayment.

Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 - Authorized the federal government, acting through the Attorney General of the United States, to pursue litigation to enforce school desegregation.

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 - Prohibits discrimination in federally funded programs on the basis of race, color, or national origin. The Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights enforces Title VI as it relates to education.

Tenth Amendment - Enshrines the principle of federalism by making clear that any powers not granted to the federal government by the Constitution belong to the states or the people. It affirms that the federal government has only enumerated powers, while states retain broad authority over their own affairs.

Linda McMahon, United States Secretary of Education, takes the oath of office on March 7, 2025.[40]

[40] McMahon, L. [@Linda_McMahon]. (2025, March 7). Image attached] [Post]. X. https://x.com/Linda_McMahon/status/1898197127114703196

AFFIRMATIVE

1. The Department of Education is failing at its mission to improve educational outcomes and should therefore be abolished.

The federal Department of Education's stated mission is "to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access."[41] Yet, the overwhelming takeaway from reviewing the evidence is that American students are underperforming academically, and rather dramatically.

Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP—a congressionally mandated assessment conducted by the Department of Education—are particularly revealing. In 2022, some 69 percent of eighth-grade students in the United States were not proficient in reading, as measured by the NAEP assessment, and 31 percent scored below even a basic reading level. Among twelfth graders, that is, students about to complete high school, some 63 percent scored less than proficient, and 30 percent were below even a basic proficiency level.[42]

Key Point: Among twelfth graders, an alarming 76 percent scored below proficient and 40 percent below a basic level in mathematics in 2019 (the most recent year with available NAEP data for twelfth graders).

As the following chart shows, unfortunately, reading achievement levels among eighth graders have shown no noticeable improvement over the last twenty years. And, going back even further, NAEP reports "[t]he average reading score for 13-year-old students in 2023 was not statistically significantly different from the average score in 1971." That is to say, American students' average reading scores are no better today than they were fifty years ago—a time span that encompasses the entire existence of the United States Department of Education. Despite all the efforts of the Education Department, American children continue to struggle with reading.

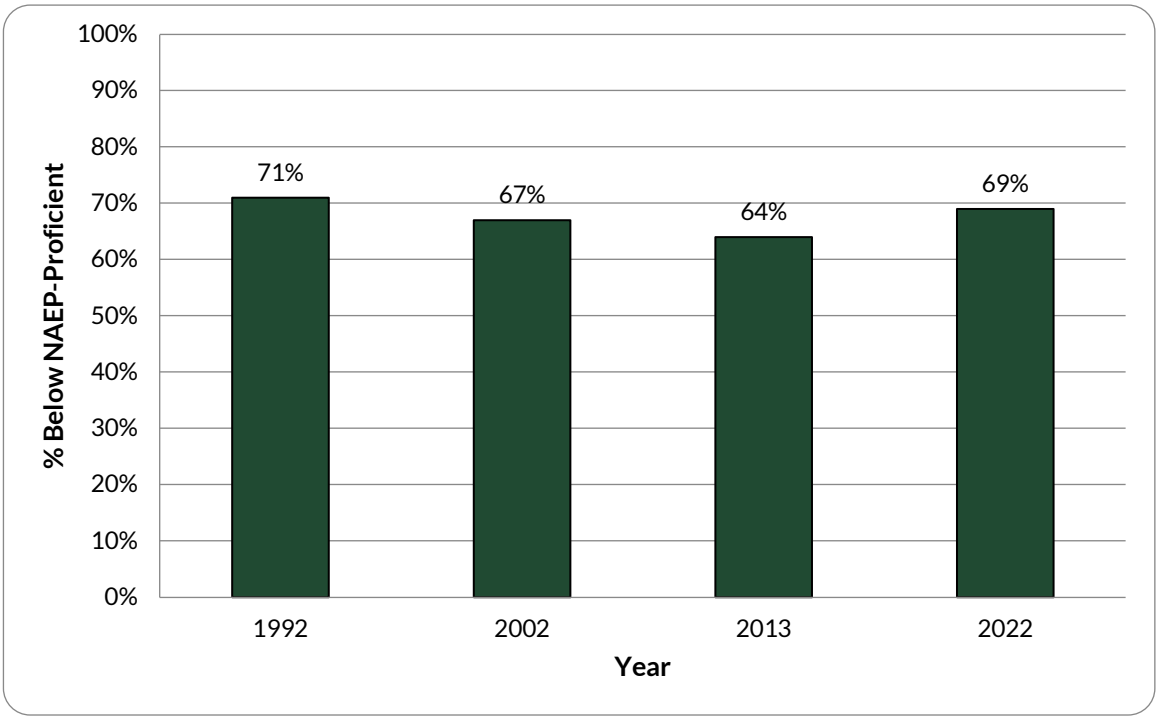
When it comes to mathematics, the news is no better. Some 73 percent of eighth graders in 2022 were less than proficient on the NAEP exam, and 38 percent scored below a basic level.[43] Among twelfth graders, an

[41] U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Mission of the U.S. Department of Education.* https://www.ed.gov/about/ed-overview/mission-of-the-us-department-of-education
[42] U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, & National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *NAEP report card: Reading (Grade 8)*. The Nation's Report Card. https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/reading/?grade=8
[43] U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, & National Center for Education Statistics, *NAEP report card: Highlights from the 2022 grade-4 and grade-8 mathematics assessments*, The Nation's Report Card. https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/mathematics/2022/

alarming 76 percent scored below proficient and 40 percent below a basic level in mathematics in 2019 (the most recent year with available NAEP data for twelfth graders).[44] Another indicator, the ACT exam, showed in 2023 that 70 percent of high school seniors failed to meet the college readiness benchmark in mathematics.[45] This data suggests that the Department of Education is failing in its mission to foster "educational excellence" and promote "high achievement."

The Department is likewise failing in its mission to prepare Americans to be globally competitive. On the 2022 Programme for International Student Assessment, or PISA, American 15-year-olds placed twenty-sixth in mathematics and twelfth in reading among developed countries, suggesting that increased federal involvement in education has not enhanced global competitiveness.[46]

Percentage of Eighth Graders Performing Below NAEP "Proficient" Level in Reading



Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (n.d.). *Table 221.12. Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale score and percentage of students attaining NAEP reading achievement levels, by selected school and student characteristics and grade: Selected years, 1992 through 2019*. In *Digest of Education Statistics, 2019*. Retrieved August 30, 2025, from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_221.12.asp. Graph produced by Coolidge Foundation.

[44] U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, & National Center for Education Statistics. (2020, October). *NAEP report card: Highlights from the 2019 grade-12 mathematics assessment*. The Nation's Report Card. https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/highlights/mathematics/2019/g12/

[45] ACT. (2023, October 10). *Fewer high school seniors ready for college as ACT scores continue to decline*. ACT Newsroom & Blog. https://leadershipblog.act.org/2023/10/act-scores-decline.html

[46] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2023). *PISA 2022 results: What students know and can do* (Vol. 1). OECD Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1787/53f23881-en

2. The Department of Education has failed to solve the achievement gap.

The federal government—and, for that matter, state and local governments—have devoted tremendous resources to improving education for minority groups and closing the achievement gap between White students and students of color. More than 45 years into the existence of the federal Department of Education, it would be reasonable to expect substantial progress. While NAEP scores have increased for Black and Hispanic students since the creation of the Department of Education, gains have been modest, and overall achievement levels remain low. For example, the average score on the NAEP reading exam by thirteen-year-old Black students increased a mere 1.7 percent between 1980 and 2023, while Hispanic students' scores improved only 4.2 percent.[47]

And the gap between White students and students of color has not narrowed significantly either. In 1978, the year before the Department's creation, the NAEP math score difference between nine-year-old White and Black students was 32 points, and the gap between White and Hispanic students was 21 points. In 2022, White and Black students were 33 points apart, and White and Hispanic students remained 21 points apart.[48]

Another way to quantify the failures of the nation's education system is through an analysis of the socioeconomic achievement gap. Erik Hanushek, Senior Fellow at Stanford's Hoover Institution, writing with co-authors, summarizes: "Contrary to recent perceptions, we find the opportunity gap—that is, the relationship between socioeconomic status and achievement—has not grown over the past 50 years. But neither has it closed. Instead, the gap between the haves and have-nots has persisted."[49]

Key Point: While NAEP scores have increased for Black and Hispanic students since the creation of the Department of Education, gains have been modest, and overall achievement levels remain low. For example, the average score on the NAEP reading exam by thirteen-year-old Black students increased a mere 1.7 percent between 1980 and 2023, while Hispanic students' scores improved only 4.2 percent.

[47] National Center for Education Statistics, *Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) reading scale score, by age and selected student characteristics: Selected years, 1971 through 2023* (Digest of Education Statistics, Table 221.85, 2023), U.S. Department of Education, https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_221.85.asp. Percentage calculations by the Coolidge Foundation.
[48] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2023, September). *Table 222.85. Average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) mathematics scale score, by age and selected student characteristics: Selected years, 1973–2023.* In *Digest of Education Statistics, 2023.* https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_222.85.asp
[49] Eric A. Hanushek, Paul E. Peterson, Laura M. Talpey, & Ludger Woessmann, *The Achievement Gap Fails to Close: Half-Century of Testing Shows Persistent Divide Between Haves and Have-Nots*, *Education Next*, Summer 2019 (Vol. 19, No. 3), pp. 8–17, https://www.educationnext.org/achievement-gap-fails-close-half-century-testing-shows-persistent-divide/

3. The Department of Education is costly. Eliminating it would save taxpayer money, an important priority given our country's substantial national debt.

The Department of Education spent a whopping $268 billion in fiscal year 2024. This is a massive amount of money—indeed, the Education Department is the federal government's sixth most costly agency.[50]

Government budgets seem only ever to grow and grow. The Education Department's budget in 1980, its first full year in operation, was $14.6 billion, the equivalent of around $57 billion in today's money.[51] This means Education Department spending has increased by more than 370 percent beyond the rate of inflation over the course of its existence. Recall that the original Department of Education had but four employees at its founding in 1867. That certainly has changed. By 2024, employee headcount at the Department had swelled to some 4,000 employees.[52]

The increases in budget and staffing might be worthwhile if it were clear that such outlays improved learning. But that is not the case. Former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos has advocated abolishing the Department. She urges Americans to remember "[t]he Department of Education does not run a single school. It does not employ any teachers in a single classroom." Rather, DeVos contends, the Department is a middleman that "shuffles money around; adds unnecessary requirements and political agendas via its grants; and then passes the buck when it comes time to assess if any of that adds value."[53]

The United States cannot afford to maintain ineffective bureaucracies. The Congressional Budget Office, or CBO, reports outstanding federal debt currently stands around $37.1 trillion, equivalent to more than $108,000 for every person in the United States.[54] That is a staggering level of debt, more than $7 trillion greater than the total annual output of the nation's economy.[55]

And things could still get yet worse: The CBO has projected that by 2034, the gross federal debt will have climbed to $56.8 trillion, the equivalent of around $167,000 per American.[56] Eliminating the Department of Education is a promising way to rein in out-of-control spending and begin to set America back on a more responsible fiscal trajectory.

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[50] Office of Management and Budget. *Historical tables: Table 4.1, outlays by agency: 1962–2024*. The White House. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-resources/budget/historical-tables/
[51] Office of Management and Budget. *Historical tables: Table 4.1, outlays by agency: 1962–2024*. The White House. Retrieved from https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/information-resources/budget/historical-tables/
[52] U.S. Department of Education. (2024). *FY 2025 Congressional Justification: Salaries and Expenses Overview*. U.S. Department of Education. (p. 5) https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/overview/budget/budget25/justifications/bb-seoverview.pdf
[53] Betsy DeVos. (2025, February 6). *Shut down the Department of Education*. The Free Press. https://www.thefp.com/p/betsy-devos-shut-down-the-department-of-education-trump-elon
[54] U.S. Department of the Treasury. (n.d.). *Debt to the penny*. Fiscal Data. https://fiscaldata.treasury.gov/datasets/debt-to-the-penny/debt-to-the-penny
[55] Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis. (n.d.). *Gross Domestic Product (GDP)*. https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/GDP
[56] Congressional Budget Office. (2023). *The budget and economic outlook: 2023 to 2033*. https://www.cbo.gov/publication/60419#:~:text=3%20The%20increase%20in%20federal,see%20Table%201%2D3

4. Abolishing the Department of Education will restore local control, empowering students and parents to take charge of their own education.

Our country was conceived in the theory of local self-government. It has been dedicated by long practice to that wise and beneficent policy. It is the foundation principle of our system of liberty. It makes the largest promise to the freedom and development of the individual. —Calvin Coolidge, 1925

As Calvin Coolidge observes, local control lies at the heart of American self-government. This principle is especially vital in education. Education is fundamentally not a bureaucratic function, but rather a deeply personal responsibility. Parents naturally care the most about the success of their children, and best understand their unique strengths, interests, and needs. The importance of parents and students themselves being empowered to take charge of their own education cannot be overstated.

Public schools exist to support families in the education of their children. When decision-making about public education is controlled locally, schools are more likely to be accountable to parents and, therefore, more responsive to the actual needs of students. Parents also need choices, and local control allows for flexibility that a rigid bureaucracy far off in Washington can never deliver.

Local control also fosters a virtuous cycle of community improvement. When education decisions are made at the community level, citizens have "skin in the game." They are more likely to invest time and resources into improving their schools when they have a strong say over how those resources will be used. Strong schools build stronger communities, which in turn attract even more engaged families interested in supporting education, creating further opportunities for young people. This is the kind of ground-up community improvement that is key to the vibrancy of America.

Key Point: States and school districts work 7.8 million hours each year collecting and disseminating information required under Title I of federal education law.

By contrast, federal control undermines these benefits. Centralized mandates and funding schemes take away the agency of parents and communities to make improvements for themselves. As a report by Cato Institute scholars points out, "the federal mandate for state and district central planning establishes a default mindset for education reform that encourages top-down approaches rather than bottom-up approaches, such as charter schools, tax credits for private and religious school choice, and homeschooling."[57]

For decades, local school districts have expressed frustration with the time-consuming federal compliance processes that divert attention from teaching and learning. Representative John Kline, Chair of the Committee on Education and the Workforce, reported in a 2011 congressional hearing on the burden of educational regulation, that "States and school districts work 7.8 million hours each year collecting and disseminating information required under Title I of federal education law. Those hours cost more than $235

[57] Amselem, M. C., Burke, L., Butcher, J., Gass, J., McCluskey, N., & Rebarber, T. (2020, May 4). *Rightsizing Fed Ed: Principles for reform and practical steps to move in the right direction* (Policy Analysis No. 891). Cato Institute. https://www.cato.org/sites/cato.org/files/2020-04/PA_891_DOI.pdf

million. The burden is tremendous, and this is just one of many federal laws weighing down our schools."[58] An analysis by the American Action Forum in 2015 reckoned the total cost of the Department's regulatory burden at over $3 billion annually, and found that the Department of Education "imposes an astounding 93.9 million paperwork burden hours across all levels of the agency."[59]

A return to local control is long overdue. To improve education in America, we must recall the principle that has guided our country so well: decisions are best made by the people they directly affect.

5. The Department of Education is unconstitutional and thus should be abolished.

The Department of Education allows the federal government to influence education in ways the Constitution never envisioned. Under the Tenth Amendment, "The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution … are reserved to the States respectively, or the people."[60] Since functions related to education are notably absent from the specific, enumerated powers laid out in Article I of the Constitution, the federal government has no authority to act on education.[61] Moreover, the Constitution's silence on education is a feature, not a flaw, of our nation's founding document. Ever wary of governmental overreach, the Founders believed that, on issues like education, institutions closest to the people should govern.[62]

Before the modern Department of Education's relatively recent creation in 1979, there was a bipartisan consensus that education was a state and local issue outside the purview of the federal government. For example, when the first federal Department of Education was established under President Andrew Johnson in 1867, it faced immediate resistance on the grounds that Congress was overstepping its bounds by interfering in local education. Such was the opposition to the newly created department that, less than a year later, Congress demoted it to a sub-cabinet office housed in the Department of the Interior.[63]

Furthermore, the Supreme Court has held consistently that the Constitution does not guarantee the right to taxpayer-funded public education. Judges across the ideological spectrum support this stance.[64] In *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973), the Court explicitly stated, "Education, of course, is not among the rights afforded explicit protection under our Federal Constitution. Nor do we find any basis for saying it is implicitly so protected."[65]

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[58] U.S. House of Representatives, *Education regulations: Weighing the burden on schools and students* (Serial No. 112-7), Committee on Education and the Workforce, March 1, 2011, https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-112hhrg64657/html/CHRG-112hhrg64657.htm

[59] Miller, C., & Batkins, S. (2015, May 13). *What are the Department of Education's regulatory burdens?* American Action Forum. https://www.americanactionforum.org/insight/what-are-the-department-of-educations-regulatory-burdens/

[60] U.S. Const. amend. X.

[61] McCluskey, N. (2010, December 8). *On federal education, Think Progress should think harder*. *Cato at Liberty* (Cato Institute). https://www.cato.org/blog/federal-education-think-progress-should-think-harder

[62] Boaz, D. (2006, May 1). *Education and the Constitution*. Cato at Liberty. https://www.cato.org/blog/education-constitution

[63] Burris, W. P. (1919). *The Federal Government and Education*. Texas Review, 4(4), 308–317. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43465330

[64] Boaz, D. (2006, May 1). *Education and the Constitution*. Cato at Liberty. Cato Institute. https://www.cato.org/blog/education-constitution

[65] Powell, L. F., Jr., & Supreme Court of the United States. (1973). San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez, 411 U.S. 1. https://supreme.justia.com/cases/federal/us/411/1/

Proponents of the Department of Education's constitutionality point to the General Welfare Clause in Article I, which specifies that "Congress shall have power to lay and collect taxes, duties, imposts and excises, to pay the debts and provide for the common defense and general welfare of the United States."[66] According to this line of thinking, education contributes to our country's general welfare, meaning that Article I grants the federal government the power to raise funds and spend them on education. As Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute explains, though, the General Welfare Clause does not itself confer any powers to the federal government. Instead, this clause only introduces the specific, enumerated powers that follow it, where, again, functions related to education are not listed.[67]

Other advocates of the Department of Education argue that its activities fall under the Commerce Clause of Article I, which grants the federal government the power to regulate commerce among the various states. However, Thomas Berry, also of the Cato Institute, argues that "Although the federal government may 'regulate' interstate commerce, most K-12 education involves purely intrastate activity. And although money can cross state lines in connection with student loans and other higher education operations, that is not enough to trigger federal jurisdiction."[68] Thus, the Constitution does not permit many, if not all, of the activities carried out by the Department of Education, and its existence is plainly unconstitutional. Eliminating the Department would restore the traditional balance of power between the state and federal governments, reaffirming that education is primarily a state and local responsibility.

6. Abolishing the Department of Education would reduce bureaucratic uncertainty and go a long way toward getting politics out of the classroom.

The very existence of a federal Department of Education harms students and schools. No doubt in some cases, the federal government may have a worthwhile policy or program. But it is crucially important to recognize that adding layers of bureaucracy onto schools has a pernicious effect.

Federal education policy changes frequently, and at the whim of national politics. The contrast between the policies of the administrations of George W. Bush and Barack Obama is a good example. President Bush championed the No Child Left Behind legislation that tied federal funding to school performance as measured by standardized tests. States and schools then developed systems and infrastructure to comply and hopefully succeed under this system. Then, just over a decade later, No Child Left Behind was abandoned by Washington. The Every Child Succeeds Act replaced it, signed into law by President Obama in 2015. This new act was a reversal of policy, returning more authority to the states. Regardless of the merits of either of these policy programs, the abrupt shifts jerk schools around. Bureaucratic uncertainty fosters a sense of helplessness among school leaders, not to mention parents and their young students.

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[66] U.S. Const. art. I

[67] McCluskey, N. (2010, December 8). *On federal education, Think Progress should think harder*. *Cato at Liberty*. https://www.cato.org/blog/federal-education-think-progress-should-think-harder

[68] Berry, T. A. (2025, March 21). *The president has a duty to end the Department of Education*. Cato Institute. https://www.cato.org/blog/president-has-duty-end-department-education

The involvement of a federal-level bureaucracy also opens classrooms to national politics and political agendas. Without the Department of Education, states and school districts would be freer to pursue curricula that reflect the values important to their communities. This shift would reduce political interference and ideological pressure from Washington, preserving the representativeness and diversity of local systems, and reducing the likelihood of the Department of Education imposing ideologically driven mandates nationwide.

Evidence shows there is no shortage of ideological influence in education originating from both ends of the American political spectrum. Many perceive America's education system to be biased in favor of progressive ideology, and looking leftwards, "among professors, 93% of contributions went to Democratic candidates or committees compared to 68% of those from K-12 teachers... Judging by their campaign contributions, it is clear that both professors and K-12 teachers lean further to the left than does the American electorate."[69]

It is not challenging to find examples of Department of Education actions during recent Democratic administrations that seem to confirm these accusations. A 2014 *Dear Colleague* letter from President Obama's Department admonished schools to limit disciplinary actions like student suspensions and expulsions on the grounds that they constituted disparate impact discrimination.[70] Evidence of racial bias in teachers' and administrators' use of the disciplinary tools is limited and highly contested, and "if misbehavior is not evenly distributed across groups, there is no reason to expect disciplinary referrals to be evenly distributed."[71]

Similarly ill-thought-out 2011 Department of Education guidelines upended due process rights for students accused of sexual harassment or assault on college campuses, lowering the standard of guilt to a mere preponderance of the evidence, among other problems.[72] Rick Hess, Director of Education Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute, concludes, "education skews so far to the left that expressing mainstream conservative concerns about federal overreach or the problems with race-based policy can be enough to get one classified as a clueless reactionary... rejecting federal policies that strip due process rights from students accused of sexual harassment is sufficient to be labeled a misogynist."[73]

In the spirit of two wrongs don't make a right, consider some conservatives' recent interventions in state and local education policy. In recent months, the pendulum has swung towards using the Department to enforce the right's agenda for curricula across the country. The Trump administration is "using federal funding to pressure schools and colleges to adopt his favored policies, including ending diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, participation of transgender female athletes in girls' sports, and more. It seems unlikely, however,

[69] Greene, J. P. (2024). Educators overwhelmingly support Democrats, even in Republican states [PDF]. Educational Freedom Institute. https://www.efinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/EFI-PoliticalDonations_JGreene.pdf
[70] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, & U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division. (2014, January 8). *Dear Colleague Letter: Nondiscriminatory administration of school discipline.* U.S. Department of Education. https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201401-title-vi.pdf
[71] Eden, M. (2019, March). *Safe and orderly schools: Updated guidance on school discipline.* Manhattan Institute. https://media4.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/R-ME-0319.pdf
[72] Foundation for Individual Rights in Education. (n.d.). *Frequently asked questions: OCR's April 4 "Dear Colleague" guidance letter.* https://www.thefire.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/2ed5a2e9ece4ba6386cbfd3cd59a0ced.pdf
[73] Hess, R. (2016, November 17). *Education is so far left, it can't really see the right. Education Week.* https://www.edweek.org/education/opinion-education-is-so-far-left-it-cant-really-see-the-right/2016/11

that Trump is being heavy-handed to poison people against the department."[74] Their *Dear Colleague* letter dated February 14, 2025, did not specify what "illegal DEI" means but nevertheless threatened to withhold federal funding from schools that support diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, sending schools scrambling to self-censor to avoid penalties.[75] Around the same time, a federal judge blocked the Department's historic order that would have penalized institutions for providing DEI programming, arguing that it was vague and went too far in restricting academic freedom.[76]

The Lyndon Baines Johnson building serves as the headquarters of the Department of Education in Washington, D.C.[77]

[74] McCluskey, N. (2025, August 26). *Still standing. Law & Liberty.* https://lawliberty.org/still-standing/?mc_cid=5e0695063a&mc_eid=c2a6322c3d

[75] Francois, L. (2025, April 22). *Educators speak out on harms of unlawful Education Department directive.* American Civil Liberties Union. https://www.aclu.org/news/racial-justice/educators-speak-out-on-harms-of-unlawful-education-department-directive

[76] Jotkoff, E. (2025, April 24). *Federal court grants preliminary injunction against Department of Education's unlawful directive* [Press release]. National Education Association. https://www.nea.org/about-nea/media-center/press-releases/federal-court-grants-preliminary-injunction-against-department-educations-unlawful-directive

[77] Source: Johnson, G. E. (2025). *Department of Education sign, Lyndon Baines Johnson building, Washington, D.C.* [Photograph]. Wikimedia Commons. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Department_of_Education_sign_Washington_DC_2025-02-07_14-09-02_1.jpg (Creative Commons License).

7. Eliminating college financial aid and loan programs would help restore affordability to college education.

Everybody knows college is expensive. Less understood is the role the United States Department of Education has played in enabling runaway college costs. The college financial aid and loan programs it administers have driven up the cost of higher education and put millions of young people deep in debt.

William Bennett, Secretary of Education from 1987 to 1993, developed what has become known as the Bennett Hypothesis.[78] This hypothesis states that federal financial aid programs increase tuition costs. Secretary Bennett's hypothesis seems counterintuitive: financial aid programs designed to help students afford college make college *more* expensive.

Education scholar Jenna Robinson of the James G. Martin Center reviewed academic studies looking into the Bennett Hypothesis and found "[f]ourteen studies, a clear majority, found some positive effect of federal subsidies on the price of higher education in at least one segment of the higher education market. Many of these found support for the Bennett Hypothesis across all segments of the market—public, private, and for-profit."[79] An especially highly cited study by the Federal Reserve Bank of New York finds "that increases in institution-specific subsidized (unsubsidized) loan maximums lead to a sticker-price increase of about 60 (40) cents on the dollar. This effect represents the additional amount that institutions raised their tuition in the years of the policy changes relative to what would have been expected without the policy change, which we measure using institutional fixed effects to capture the average tuition increases at an institution. All of these effects are highly significant and consistent with the Bennett Hypothesis."[80]

Key Point: Student loan programs have contributed significantly to the explosion in the cost of college in America.

It is true that financial aid can reduce the sticker price of college tuition for certain students, and that federal loan programs can provide a source of debt financing for students who would otherwise be unable to afford college. But, at a system-wide level, the availability of federal money via financial aid programs has led to an upward spiral of college costs. This is, in fact, very intuitive. In normal markets, businesses cannot raise prices beyond what customers are willing and able to pay. Yet, in the case of higher education, federal money has enabled colleges and universities to raise their tuition prices, knowing students will be able to borrow to pay the higher prices.

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[78] Bennett, W. J. (1987, February 18). *Our greedy colleges. The New York Times.* https://www.nytimes.com/1987/02/18/opinion/our-greedy-colleges.html

[79] Robinson, J. A. (2017, December). *The Bennett hypothesis turns 30.* James G. Martin Center for Academic Renewal. https://jamesgmartin.center/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Bennett_Hypothesis_Paper_Final-1.pdf

[80] Lucca, D. O., Nadauld, T., & Shen, K. (2017). *Credit supply and the rise in college tuition: Evidence from the expansion in federal student aid programs* (Staff Report No. 733). Federal Reserve Bank of New York. https://www.newyorkfed.org/medialibrary/media/research/staff_reports/sr733.p

Economist Richard Vedder has analyzed the increase in college tuition over time in the following chart. Professor Vedder finds that the rate of tuition increased as the presence of financial aid programs grew over time. Note especially that the explosion of tuition rate increases—to nearly four percent annually—has been a phenomenon observed since the creation of the modern Department of Education in the late 1970s. Before, tuition increases were negligible, meaning students and their families had a reasonable chance to pay for college without taking out large loans. That is no longer the case.

Changes in Real (Inflation-Adjusted) Tuition Fees at American Universities, 1939 to 2014

Time Period	Annual Percent Change in Tuition Fees	Federal Student Financial Aid Presence?
1939-1964	1.26%	Zero to Moderate
1964-1978	0.43	Moderate
1978-1990	3.14	Fairly Large
1990-2002	3.71	Large
2002-2014	3.8	Very Large

Source: Vedder, R. K. (2014, June 4). *Can college be made more affordable? It's about more than student loans* [Written testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on the Budget, hearing on "The Impact of Student Loan Debt on Borrowers and the Economy"]. U.S. Senate Committee on the Budget. https://www.budget.senate.gov/download/vedder-testimony

The dramatic increase in college tuition has had devastating consequences. Americans owe some $1.6 trillion in student loan debt, an amount higher than total U.S. credit card debt. Student loan debt is especially crushing for young people. Just as they enter the workforce, rather than being able to save and invest for their future, they must instead start paying back their loans. Survey data show that a quarter of Americans under the age of 40 currently carry student loans, and the median loan balance is over $20,000.[81] Among college graduates ages 25 to 39 who borrowed, 35 percent say the lifetime financial benefits of college were not worth the cost. In response, political leaders, including President Joe Biden, have advanced aggressive loan forgiveness proposals. Taken together, these facts reveal widespread dissatisfaction with the Department of Education's current student loan system. It is time to rethink these programs entirely and pursue alternatives outside the Department of Education.

[81] Fry, R., & Cilluffo, A. (2024, September 18). *5 facts about student loans*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2024/09/18/facts-about-student-loans/

NEGATIVE

1. Eliminating the Department of Education would compromise civil rights protections.

The Department currently enforces federal laws that protect vulnerable students. Without it, there is no consistent national mechanism to safeguard the rights of students with disabilities, students of color, or LGBTQ+ students, leading to increased disparities and inconsistent enforcement across states. The Learning Policy Institute summarizes, "Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VI) prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, or national origin in any program or activity that receives federal financial assistance, including states and school districts that receive federal financial support for schools. The U.S. Department of Education adopted a regulation to prohibit recipients of federal funds from implementing policies or practices that have the effect of discrimination, also known as disparate impact discrimination."[82]

Key Point: In its fiscal year 2024 annual report, the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights calculated it received the highest volume of complaints ever, totaling 22,687 complaints. That number represented an 18% increase over fiscal year 2023.

On some measures, Department of Education civil rights enforcement has likely contributed to a narrowing of the achievement gap between Black and White students. High school graduation rates are one example. In 1980, 87.5 percent of White students and 75.2 percent of Black students completed high school, a difference of 12.3 percentage points. By 2022, not only had outcomes improved for both groups, but the gap between them had also shrunk to under two percentage points, with 95.6 percent of White students and 93.8 percent of Black students completing high school.[83]

Such progress may come to an end, as the employees tasked with monitoring and litigating against districts that fail to comply face devastating cuts. The Office of Civil Rights, or OCR, which employed over 560 individuals and operated 12 regional offices during President Joe Biden's administration, has already been cut in half, resulting in the entire closure of six regional locations.[84] Meanwhile, complaints continue to increase.

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[82] Robinson, K. J. (2021). *Protecting education as a civil right: Remedying racial discrimination and ensuring a high-quality education* [Report]. Learning Policy Institute. https://doi.org/10.54300/407.455

[83] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics. (2023, July). *Table 219.65. High school completion rate of 18- to 24-year-olds not enrolled in high school (status completion rate), by sex and race/ethnicity: 1972 through 2022.* In *Digest of Education Statistics, 2023.* https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_219.65.asp

[84] Schultz, B., Lieberman, M., Schwartz, S., Najarro, I., & Stone, M. (2025, March 12). *Civil rights, research, and more: What's hit hardest by massive Ed. Dept. cuts.* Education Week. https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/civil-rights-research-and-more-whats-hit-hardest-by-massive-ed-dept-cuts/2025/03

In its fiscal year 2024 annual report, OCR calculated it "received the highest volume of complaints ever, totaling 22,687 complaints. That number represented an 18% increase" over fiscal year 2023.[85] Most families cannot afford to hire an attorney and pursue civil rights litigation, so they depend on the OCR's oversight process to remedy violations of the law.[86]

Students with disabilities are a protected class for whom the federal government has taken extra steps to protect. One such law is the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, which secures their equal access and support in public education. IDEA ensures a free and appropriate public education, including the creation of an individualized education plan for each student with a disability and a system of due process for them. Similarly, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and supporting Department of Education regulations require elementary and secondary schools to "ensure that students with disabilities are not excluded, denied services, segregated, or otherwise treated differently because of their disabilities, unless a school can demonstrate that accommodating a disabled student would fundamentally alter the nature of the school's program or cause an undue financial burden."[87] In fiscal year 2024, the Department of Education distributed over $15 billion of congressionally mandated funding to schools across the country towards this mission.[88]

Even that amount is inadequate, since "the federal government has never fully funded IDEA. The law allows the federal government to cover up to 40 percent of the average per-student cost of special education. The highest funding levels ever reached is about 18 percent of the per student cost of special education."[89]

Another risk of decentralization is that a patchwork of diminished protections would emerge. States, many of which lack the means, know-how, or will to act consistently, would be left in charge of enforcement in the absence of a national organization to supervise execution and guarantee protection of civil rights. In fact, states and school districts already have some latitude in the processes for identifying students who need special education support. In 2019, the Government Accountability Office, or GAO, found, for instance, that in fall 2016, the percentage of students aged six through 21 receiving IDEA services ranged dramatically from 6.4 percent to 15.1 percent across states.[90]

To assess their compliance with the law and success in serving students with disabilities, the Office of Special Education Programs, or OSEP, within the Department of Education requires states to submit an annual report "based on the [State Performance Plan and Annual Performance Report] submission, other state-

[85] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights. (2024, December). *Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Report to the President and Secretary of Education*. U.S. Department of Education. https://www.ed.gov/media/document/ocr-report-president-and-secretary-of-education-2024-109012.pdf
[86] Ma, A. (2025, March 16). *Education Department staff cuts could limit options for families of kids with disabilities*. AP News. https://www.apnews.com/article/218a04f50bcf21cb02175e8565a3a287
[87] Graber, A. A., & Dragoo, K. E. (2024, May 17). *The rights of students with disabilities under the IDEA, Section 504, and the ADA* (CRS Report No. R48068). Congressional Research Service. https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R48068
[88] Turner, C. (2025, March 5). *Trump preparing order dismantling the Education Department*. NPR. https://www.npr.org/2025/03/05/nx-s1-5282233/trump-to-make-big-cuts-to-education-department
[89] Weaver, A., Popkin, S. J., & Ferrante, D. (2025, February 19). *How dismantling the Education Department could affect disabled students across the US. Urban Wire*. Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/urban-wire/how-dismantling-education-department-could-affect-disabled-students-across-us
[90] U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2019, April 11). Special education: Varied state criteria may contribute to differences in percentages of children served (GAO Report No. GAO-19-348). https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-19-348.pdf

reported data, and other publicly available information."[91] After reviewing and scoring the data, in its 2021 report to Congress, the Department of Education put more than 20 states and the District of Columbia on a list noting they 'needed assistance' meeting IDEA for two or more consecutive years. Two additional states, New York and Vermont, were classified as 'needing intervention.'"[92] See Appendix B for all states' results.

2. Abolishing the Department of Education would lead to lower academic achievement standards.

The Department of Education helps ensure that all students, no matter where they live, receive an education that meets minimum quality standards. Eliminating it would exacerbate disparities between states, worsening educational inequality and making mobility more challenging for families. A baseline of educational expectations across states ensures that mobility, whether for military families, foster children, or job-seeking parents, does not lead to educational disruption or inequality.

Congress and the Department of Education have already granted states greater flexibility within the boundaries of federal standards. Under No Child Left Behind, or NCLB, the Adequate Yearly Progress, or AYP, system required all states and schools to demonstrate that all students were proficient in reading and math by 2014.[93] The successor legislation to NCLB, the ESSA, eliminated AYP, instead requiring states to develop their own accountability systems. To comply, the Department tells states to deliver "ambitious long-term goals and measurements of interim progress for improved academic achievement."[94] Yet enforcement suffers from ambiguity and inconsistent interpretation.[95] The National Center for Education Statistics has demonstrated the unevenness of state-selected achievement standards. For 2005, the NAEP-equivalent proficiency thresholds "vary widely, spanning a range of 60 to 80 NAEP score points."[96] If anything, states need more federal guidance, not less.

This matters because clear and rigorous standards have been shown to boost students' outcomes. Looking back to the more stringent requirements placed on states during the NCLB era, standards "generated statistically significant increases in the average math performance of fourth graders" with additional gains in 8th-grade math, especially for disadvantaged groups with lower achievement.[97]

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[91] New York State Education Department. (n.d.). Special education state performance plan (SPP)/annual performance report (APR). https://www.nysed.gov/special-education/spp-apr

[92] Sterman, J., Molina, D., Decker, J., Grey, J., Arens, J., Reyna, Y., Lorenzo, H., Latson, S., Wright, L., & Truex, L. (2022, August 22). *Unequal education: Special education policies differ from state to state.* WDBJ7 InvestigateTV. https://www.wdbj7.com/2022/08/22/unequal-education-special-education-policies-differ-state-state/

[93] The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights. (2016, April 20). *Accountability provisions in the Every Student Succeeds Act.* https://civilrightsdocs.info/pdf/education/ESSA/2016/Accountability-Fact-Sheet.pdf

[94] U.S. Department of Education. (2016). *State Plan Guidance under the Every Student Succeeds Act.* https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/policy/elsec/leg/essa/essastateplanguidance.pdf

[95] Reyna, R. (2025). *Goldilocks and the "ambitious" ESSA goals.* Education Strategy Group. https://edstrategy.org/resource/goldilocks-and-the-ambitious-essa-goals/

[96] National Center for Education Statistics. (2007). *Mapping 2005 state proficiency standards onto the NAEP scales* (NCES 2007-482). U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/pubs/studies/2007482.aspx

[97] Dee, T. S., & Jacob, B. (2011). *The impact of No Child Left Behind on student achievement. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 30*(3), 418–446. https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.20586

3. Abolishing the Department of Education would jeopardize support for economically disadvantaged students.

The federal Department of Education supports students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds through Pell Grants and other aid programs. One of the largest and best-known of these is "Title I" funding, which was first established by the ESEA in 1965 and has been reauthorized by Congress in subsequent education legislation. Eliminating the Department risks disrupting this support, disproportionately harming students and families who already struggle mightily to finance an education. There are no guarantees that state or local governments can or will replace these programs.

Title I exists to supplement funding for students in Pre-K through twelfth-grade school districts with high concentrations of low-income families. Schools with at least 40 percent low-income enrollment can utilize them for schoolwide programs that enhance instruction for all students, with a particular focus on the lowest achievers.[98] As the Learning Institute points out, "Unlike many peer nations, our country's tattered social safety net fails to lift many children out of poverty, which means mitigating disparities in school funding is critical for many public schools to address a myriad of student needs. Federal funding—like Title I of ESEA—is designed to level out state and local funding inequities and help drive more resources to school districts with concentrated poverty."[99] An increase of just $100 in Title I funding for each student in poverty results in a 5.3 percent increase in their likelihood of graduating from high school.[100] Title I funds often support instructional coaches, reading and math specialists, and extra learning time.[101]

Key Point: An increase of just $100 in Title I funding for each student in poverty results in a 5.3 percent increase in their likelihood of graduating from high school.

Targeting low-income undergraduate students, the Pell Grant program is the largest source of federal grant aid, providing approximately $31 billion to around 6.5 million students in fiscal year 2023 alone. For eligibility requirements, payout, and supervision, Pell and other Title IV aid, such as Work-Study, rely on federal administration. Now this assistance is on the chopping block.[102] Concerns over Pell Grants as a "quasi-entitlement program" and their rising cost have left Congress sharply divided as they explore a range of reforms.[103] Dismantling the Department of Education would necessitate a complicated transfer that could create gaps precisely where the need is greatest.

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[98] Skinner, R. R. (2020, November 9). *ESEA: Title I-A poverty measures and grants to local education agencies and schools* (CRS Report R46600). Congressional Research Service. https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/PDF/R46600/R46600.2.pdf

[99] Darling-Hammond, L., Kaplan, J., & DiNapoli, M. A., Jr. (2025, February 26). *How education funding matters: Lessons from NAEP, the pandemic, and recovery efforts*. Learning Policy Institute. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/blog/how-education-funding-matters-lessons-naep-pandemic-and-recovery-efforts

[100] Johnson, R. C. (2015). Follow the money: School spending from Title I to adult earnings. RSF: The Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences, 1(3), 50–76. https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF.2015.1.3.03

[101] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Planning, Evaluation and Policy Development. (2018, April). *Study of Title I schoolwide and targeted assistance programs: Final report*. American Institutes for Research. https://www.ed.gov/sites/ed/files/rschstat/eval/title-i/schoolwide-program/report.pdf

[102] Marquez, B., Burke, M., & DiPierro, A. (2025, June 5). *Trump's budget would reduce Pell Grant awards and work-study programs*. EdSource. https://edsource.org/2025/trumps-budget-would-reduce-pell-grant-awards-and-work-study-programs/734046

[103] Dortch, C. (2025, February 28). *Pell Grant program: Major congressional proposals* (CRS Report No. R48442). Congressional Research Service. https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/PDF/R48442/R48442.1.pdf

4. Abolishing the Department of Education would wreak havoc on student loans.

Beyond Pell Grants, which do not require repayment, the federal government also operates extensive loan programs designed to expand access to higher education. Federal loans' terms and conditions offer benefits such as fixed and lower interest rates, subsidies, postponement options, and payment deferrals—features often not available through private loans.[104]

Confidence in reliable federal student aid has been shaken in recent years, though. Students and families initiate their process of applying for federal student loans by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid, or FAFSA. During the 2024-25 application cycle, the Department of Education attempted to streamline FAFSA completion by overhauling its application system. What resulted was an onslaught of delays and technical issues, further confusing and complicating the financial aid process for millions of students and parents. Fortunately, by the 2025-26 cycle, the system began to stabilize for new applicants. But with the Trump administration's targeted changes at the department, applicants will yet again face another round of financial uncertainty and chaos.[105]

Supporters of student debt forgiveness demonstrate outside the Supreme Court on June 30, 2023, in Washington, D.C.[106]

[104] U.S. Department of Education, Federal Student Aid. (n.d.). *Federal versus private loans.* https://studentaid.gov/understand-aid/types/loans/federal-vs-private

[105] Nam, J. (2025, July 15). *Trump wants to close the Education Department. What does that mean for students' financial aid?* BestColleges. https://www.bestcolleges.com/news/trump-wants-to-end-education-department-what-does-that-mean-for-financial-aid/

[106] Douliery, O. (2023, June 30). *Supporters of student debt forgiveness demonstrate outside the US Supreme Court on June 30, 2023, in Washington, D.C.* [Photograph]. AFP via Getty Images, courtesy of Canva.

Although FAFSA and other federal grants may not be dissolved with the Department of Education, students will likely experience disruptions in the process of restructuring the student loan system. Other departments could be strained if they absorb FAFSA and federal grant operations, especially given the Trump administration's recent budget cuts and mass layoffs. Such disruptions could delay or reduce financial aid packages. Thus, to pay their tuition on time, students may borrow from private lenders, where they could face higher interest rates, harsher repayment terms, and a lack of forgiveness options.[107]

Private lenders and for-profit colleges are especially incentivized to use high-pressure tactics to push students into expensive loans that are likely to end in default. For example, the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, CFPB, sued ITT Educational Services for misleading students into taking a zero-interest loan that required repayment in full at the end of their first academic year, despite knowing that students would be unlikely to repay such loans within that timeframe. Financial aid staff also rushed students through the borrowing process without adequately explaining the loan obligations and terms. Most notably, ITT projected a default rate of 64 percent for its students who took out private student loans—knowingly setting them up for failure. The CFPB found that many students took out these private loans because federal aid often did not cover the full cost of their tuition.[108] With additional uncertainties surrounding the FAFSA, potential budget cuts, and a lack of knowledge about loan obligations, college students are more likely to turn to these private and potentially predatory lenders, such as ITT.

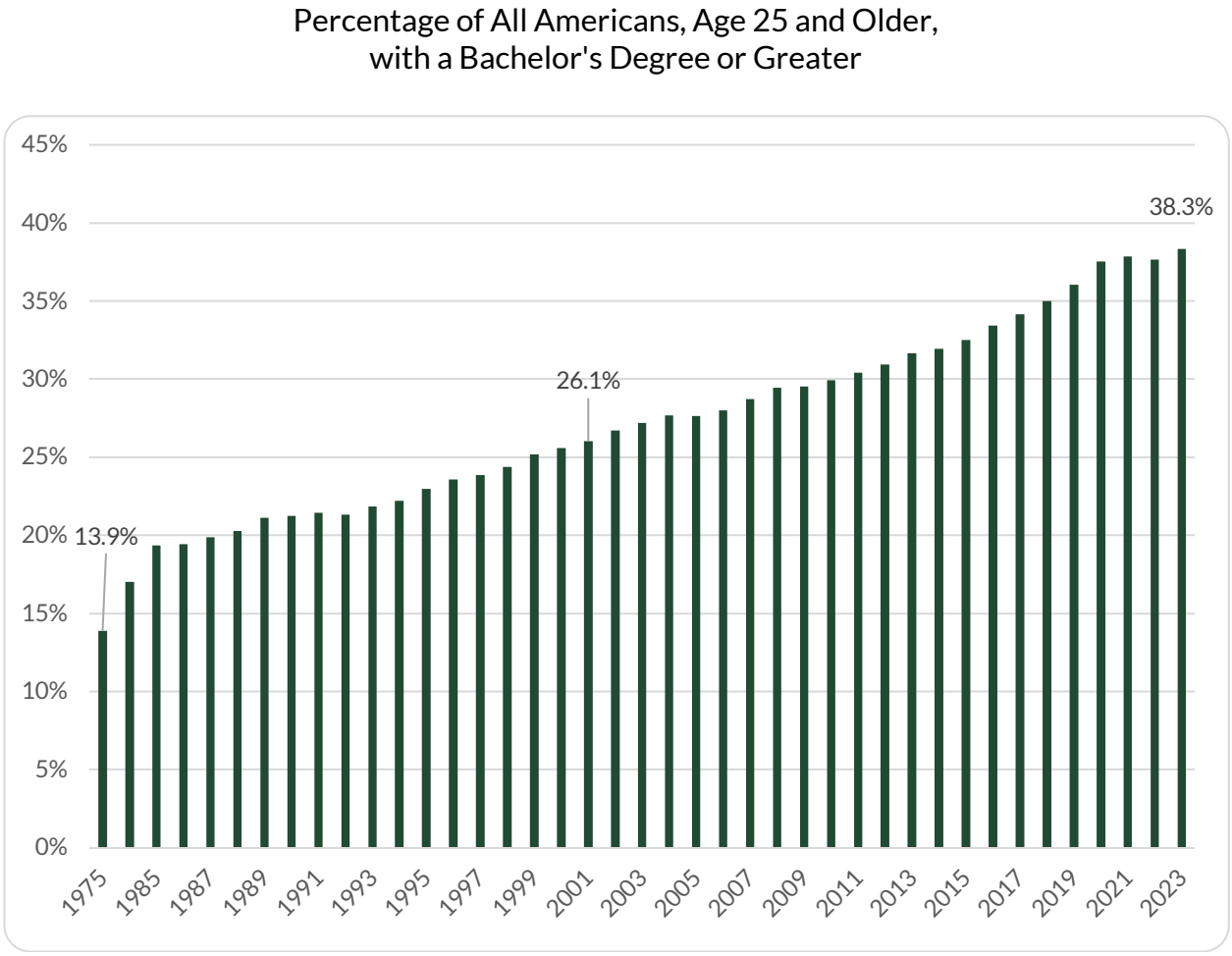
College attainment has soared in the decades since the establishment of the Department of Education and the growth of its student loan programs, as shown in the following graph. In 1975, only 13.9 percent of Americans over 25 years old had a four-year college degree. By the year 2000, more than one-in-four Americans were college graduates. And today, that figure stands at over 38 percent.

Racial minorities have made significant progress: in 1975, fewer than seven percent of Black and Hispanic Americans over age 25 had bachelor's degrees, compared to 29 percent of Black and 21 percent of Hispanic adults today.[109] Federal student financial aid programs have played an enormous role in making the dream of a college education a reality for millions of Americans. Eliminating the Department of Education would put these vital programs—and the continued expansion of educational opportunity—at risk.

[107] Nam, J. (2025, July 15). *Trump wants to close the Education Department. What does that mean for students' financial aid?* BestColleges. https://www.bestcolleges.com/news/trump-wants-to-end-education-department-what-does-that-mean-for-financial-aid/

[108] North Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. (n.d.). *CFPB sues for-profit college chain ITT for predatory lending.* https://www.veterans.nd.gov/news/cfpb-sues-profit-college-chain-itt-predatory-lending

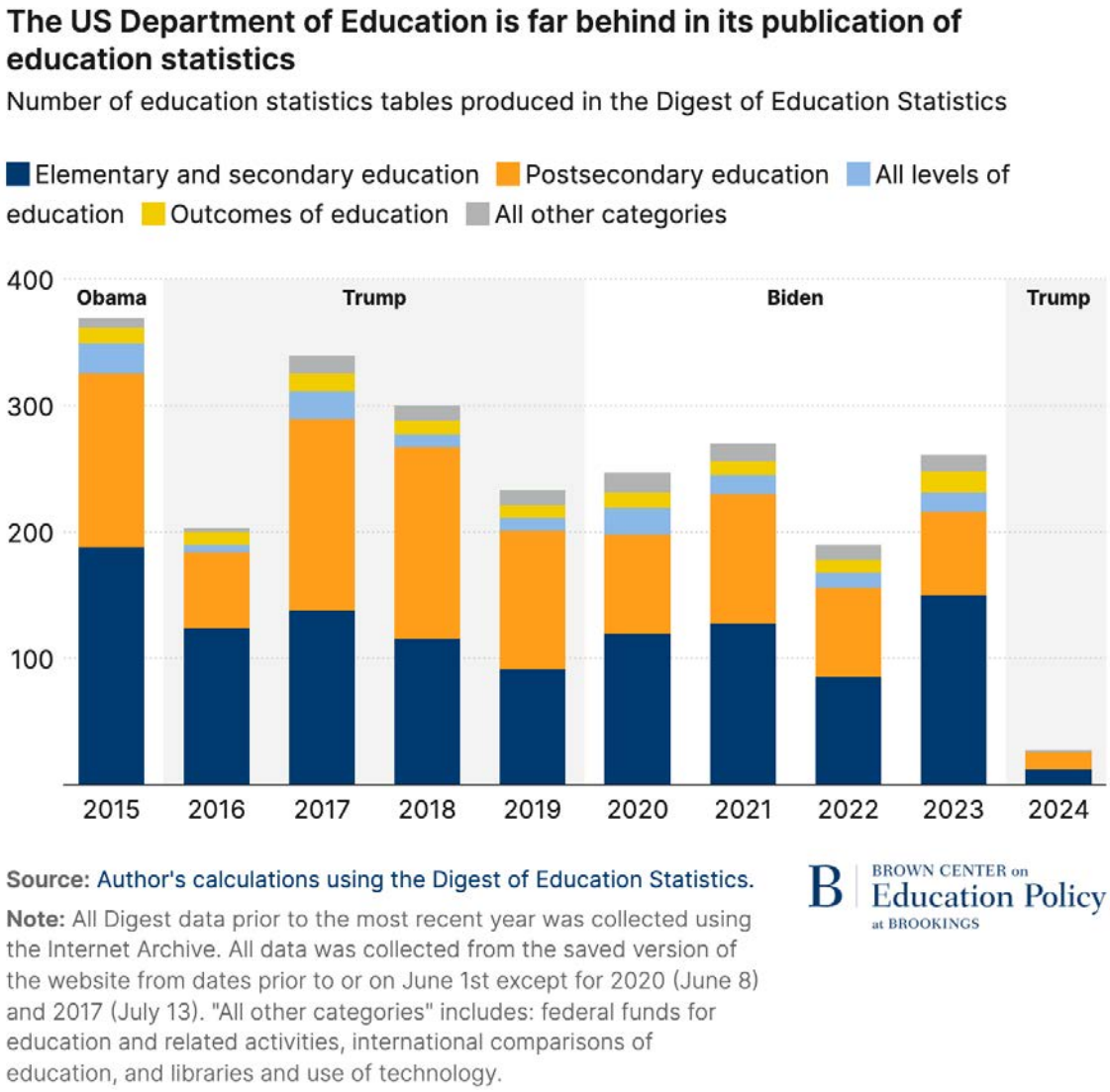
[109] National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). *Rates of high school completion and bachelor's degree attainment among persons age 25 and over, by race/ethnicity and sex: Selected years, 1910 through 2023* (Table 104.10). U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_104.10.asp



Source: National Center for Education Statistics. (2023). *Rates of high school completion and bachelor's degree attainment among persons age 25 and over, by race/ethnicity and sex: Selected years, 1910 through 2023* (Table 104.10). U.S. Department of Education. https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d23/tables/dt23_104.10.asp. Graph produced by Coolidge Foundation.

5. Abolishing the Department of Education would undermine national data collection, risking a wider gap between some students and schools.

Harkening back to its limited 1867 raison d'être, the U.S. Department of Education collects, analyzes, and publishes reliable data on America's schools and students. Through its National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), it tracks everything from enrollment and graduation rates to achievement gaps and funding trends. This data not only informs policymakers and researchers but also holds schools and governments accountable by making performance transparent to the public. Without the Department of Education, the nation would lose a trusted, centralized source of educational data, leaving states and families in the dark and weakening efforts to improve schools.



Source: Baker, D. J. (2025, June 25). *The U.S. Department of Education is far behind on producing key statistics.* Brookings Institution .https://www.brookings.edu/articles/the-u-s-department-of-education-is-far-behind-on-producing-key-statistics/

State-level data efforts alone cannot effectively substitute for the comprehensive national database offered by the federal government. They rely on federal data because they lack the resources to create their own data systems. For instance, FAFSA data significantly aided states like Virginia and Maryland, which had gaps in their data collection regarding financial aid and policy development. This has produced tangible effects on Virginia students, as Lee Andes, Director of Finance and Policy Innovation at the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, recalled how the ability to access and generate modeling from other states' data helped inform how a federal change in the calculation of students' financial aid eligibility would shift state budget

projections in Virginia. By supplementing state data with federal data, Andes was able to prevent previously eligible students from losing access to state financial aid and request more funding for these students to enroll and complete their college education.[110]

The Department is also the primary source of federal grant data, which helps the government determine where financial needs are greatest and whether previous grants have provided tangible benefits. Furthermore, the Department sets nationwide standards to ensure students across the country are receiving the same quality of education while also monitoring for disparities.[111] Moreover, even if states have similar data systems, it would be challenging to compare education outcomes and required policies because of variable collection methods, reporting standards, and definitions.[112]

6. Abolishing the Department of Education would reduce capacity for coordinated emergency response.

The Department has played a key role in mitigating the harms of national crises, from pandemics to natural disasters. Without it, states would be left on their own in future crises, weakening their ability to protect students and ensure continuity of learning during emergencies. No state agency alone could offer the same level of coordination.

For example, if the Department were to be abolished, offices such as the Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools, or REMS, would also follow. REMS plays a key role in aiding preparedness capacity for school districts at the local, state, and federal levels. REMS also acts as the primary source of information dissemination for schools across the nation during times of emergency.[113] Another aspect of the Department's emergency response system is through technical assistance centers, which aim to prevent school violence and support recovery efforts following violent incidents.[114] Without a coordinated, top-down communication and response system, thousands of schools could be left unprepared in times of crisis, lacking federal guidance.

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[110] Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2025, July 2). *The case for IES: Four ways states use federal data to guide postsecondary research and policy*. https://www.ihep.org/the-case-for-ies-four-ways-states-use-federal-data-to-guide-postsecondary-research-and-policy

[111] Santhanam, L. (2025, May 28). *Trump cuts to Education Department grants will cost students opportunities, educators and former employees say.* PBS NewsHour. https://www.pbs.org/newshour/education/trump-cuts-to-education-department-grants-will-cost-students-opportunities-educators-and-former-employees-say

[112] Institute for Higher Education Policy. (2025, July 2). *The case for IES: Four ways states use federal data to guide postsecondary research and policy*. https://www.ihep.org/the-case-for-ies-four-ways-states-use-federal-data-to-guide-postsecondary-research-and-policy

[113] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Safe and Supportive Schools. (2024, April 29). *About us. In Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center*. https://rems.ed.gov/AboutUs.aspx

[114] U.S. Department of Education, Office of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2025, January 14). *Safe school environments.* https://www.ed.gov/teaching-and-administration/safe-learning-environments/school-safety-and-security/safe-school-environments

In 2005, the Department intervened with a significant, emergency allocation of $227 million to cover 90 percent of costs for 372,000 students impacted by Hurricane Katrina.[115] During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Department played a pivotal role in the national education recovery. Critically, it distributed Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief, or ESSER, money: $13 billion under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES, March 2020), $54 billion under Coronavirus Response and Relief Supplemental Appropriations Act (CRRSA, December 2020), and $122 billion under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARP, March 2021). The Title I formula guided the allocation of ESSER funds based on the number of low-income children in each state. This ensured that districts serving more disadvantaged populations received the most aid. Each state had to direct at least 90 percent of the money directly to local districts.[116] Beyond financial support, the REMS Technical Assistance Center provided schools with centralized resources, webinars, and planning tools to help them remain open. Without the Department's framework and coordination, reactions to the pandemic would have been fragmented, exacerbating regional differences.

Demonstrators gather on March 13, 20205, outside the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., to protest mass layoffs and budget cuts initiated by the Trump administration.[117]

[115] Philanthropy News Digest. (2005, September 22). *Department of Ed plan would pay 90 percent of costs for students displaced by storm*. Philanthropy News Digest. https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/news/department-of-ed-plan-would-pay-90-percent-of-costs-for-students-displaced-by-storm

[116] National Conference of State Legislatures. (2021). *Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) fund tracker*. National Conference of State Legislatures. https://www.ncsl.org/in-dc/standing-committees/education/elementary-and-secondary-school-emergency-relief-fund-tracker

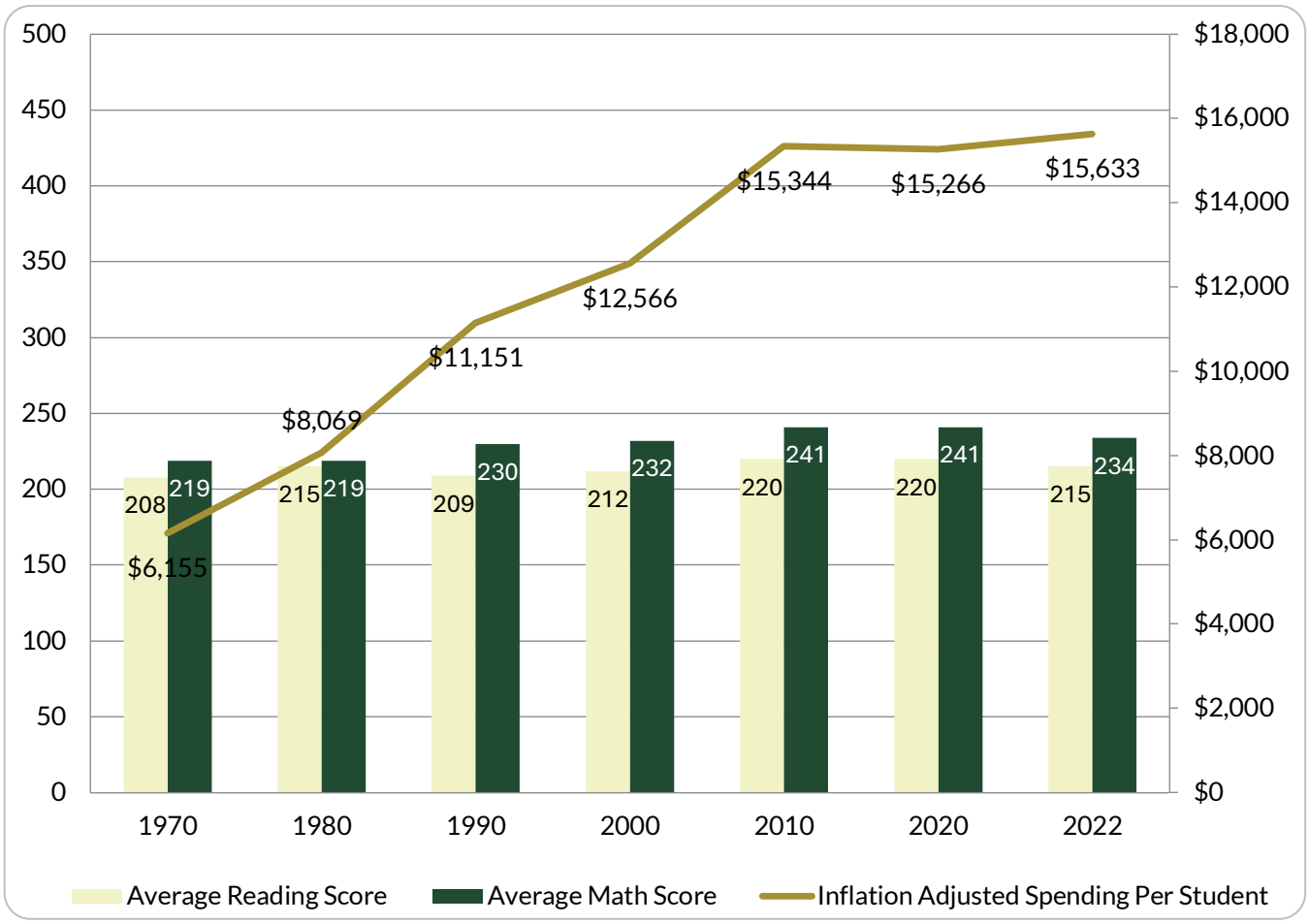
[117] *Dozier, B. (2025, March 13). Demonstrators gather outside of the offices of the U.S. Department of Education in Washington, D.C., to protest against mass layoffs and budget cuts at the agency, initiated by the Trump administration and DOGE [Photograph]. AFP via Getty Images.*

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Nationwide Education Spending & Academic Achievement

Evaluating education spending from all sources (local, state, and federal) against changes in NAEP data can provide a broad perspective on whether United States taxpayers receive a good return on investment from the nation's public school system.

Inflation-Adjusted US Education Spending & NAEP Scores



Year	Raw Spending Per Student	Inflation-Adjusted Spending	Average Reading Score	Average Math Score
1970	$816	$6,155	208	219
1980	$2,272	$8,069	215	219
1990	$4,980	$11,151	209	230
2000	$7,394	$12,566	212	232
2010	$11,433	$15,344	220	241
2020	$13,501	$15,266	220	241
2022	$15,633	$15,633	215	234

Source: Winstead, S. (2025, June 4). *Inflation-adjusted US education spending up 154 percent since 1970, but scores show little progress.* MyeLearningWorld. https://myelearningworld.com/us-educational-spending-50year-analysis/.

Appendix B. IDEA Compliance Status by State and Territory

The Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) within the Department of Education requires states to submit annual performance plans related to services for students with disabilities. It lists more than 20 states and the District of Columbia as needing assistance meeting IDEA standards.

Meets requirements	Needs assistance	Needs assistance: two or more consecutive years	Needs intervention	Needs intervention: two consecutive years	Needs intervention: three or more consecutive years
Arkansas	Arizona	Alabama	New York		Bureau of Indian Education
Florida	Connecticut	Alaska	Vermont		Palau
Georgia	Indiana	American Samoa	Virgin Islands		
Illinois	Montana	California			
Kansas	Nebraska	Colorado			
Kentucky	Northern Mariana Islands	Delaware			
Maine	Ohio	District of Columbia			
Massachusetts		Federated States of Micronesia			
Minnesota		Guam			
Missouri		Hawaii			
New Hampshire		Idaho			
New Jersey		Iowa			
North Carolina		Louisiana			
North Dakota		Maryland			
Oklahoma		Michigan			
Pennsylvania		Mississippi			
Republic of the Marshall Islands		Nevada			
South Dakota		New Mexico			
Virginia		Oregon			
West Virginia		Puerto Rico			
Wisconsin		Rhode Island			
Wyoming		South Carolina			
		Tennessee			
		Texas			
		Utah			
		Washington			

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. (2022, January). *43rd annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2021* (OSEP Report). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED616723.pdf

Appendix C: Speech by President Calvin Coolidge

"Education: the Cornerstone of Self-Government"

July 4, 1924 | Washington, D.C.

Speech delivered to the Convention of the National Education Association

For almost a century and a half the Fourth of July has been marked as Independence Day. It has been given over to the contemplation of those principles and those institutions which America peculiarly represents. In times gone by the exuberance of youth and the consciousness of power recently gained has often made it an occasion for boastfulness. Long orations have been made, which consisted for the most part of a reassurance to ourselves and a notice to the world that we were a great Nation. Those days are past. Our own people need no reassurance, the world needs no notice, of this long self-evident conclusion. Our country has not ceased to glory in its strength, but it has come to a realization that it must have something more than numbers and wealth, something more than a fleet and an army, to satisfy the longing of the soul. It knows that to power must be added wisdom, and to greatness must be added morality. It is no longer so solicitous to catalogue the powers which it possesses, as to direct those great forces for the spiritual advancement of the American people at home and the discharge of the obligations to humanity abroad. America is turning from the things that are seen to the things that are unseen.

By this I do not mean that there is in contemplation, or required, any change in our fundamental institutions. I mean, rather, that we are beginning to reap the rewards which accrue from the existence of those institutions and our devotion and loyalty to them. Some principles are so constant and so obvious that we do not need to change them, but we need rather to observe them. The world is fairly well agreed on the probable permanence of the first four tables of the arithmetic with which I struggled when I attended the district school. It is not thought that they need to be changed, or that we can make any progress by refusing to apply them. Those who seek to evade them in the ordinary business and procedure of life would undoubtedly find that such action would work either to the ruin of any commercial enterprise, or if it did not, the beneficiaries of such a disregard of the commonly accepted rules of addition would undoubtedly find that a very large majority of people would be old-fashioned enough to charge them with fraud. The institutions of the Government and society may not always be susceptible of a demonstration which is as exact as those of mathematics, but nevertheless political relationship is a very old science which has been set out in theory and wrought out in practice through very many centuries. Its fundamental principles are fairly well established. That there could have been gathered together a body of men so learned in that science, so experienced in its application, so talented and so wise in its statement and demonstration, as those who prepared, formulated, and secured the adoption of the American Constitution, will never cease to be the wonder and admiration of the profoundest students of Government. After making every allowance for a fortunate combination of circumstances and the accomplishments of human ingenuity, they have been nearly all forced to come to the belief that it can be accounted for only by the addition of another element, which we must recognize as the guiding hand of

Providence. As we can make progress in science not by the disregard, but by the application of the laws of mathematics, so in my firm conviction we can make progress politically and socially, not by a disregard of those fundamental principles which are the recognized, ratified and established American institutions, but by their scrupulous support and observance. American ideals do not require to be changed so much as they require to be understood and applied.

The return of this day quite naturally invites us to a reconsideration of those principles set out in the Declaration of Independence, which were for the first time fully established in a form of government by the adoption of the American Constitution. Such a consideration presents many angles, for it touches the entire life of the Nation. To deal with so large a subject adequately, it is obvious would require extensive treatment. On this occasion it is possible only to touch on one phase of it.

It can not be too often pointed out that the fundamental conception of American institutions is regard for the individual. The rights which are so clearly asserted in the Declaration of Independence are the rights of the individual. The wrongs of which that instrument complains, and which it asserts it is the purpose of its signers to redress, are the wrongs of the individual. Through it all runs the recognition of the dignity and worth of the individual, because of his possession of those qualities which are revealed to us by religion. It is this conception alone which warrants the assertion of the universal right to freedom. America has been the working out of the modern effort to provide a system of government and society which would give to the individual that freedom which his nature requires.

It is easy to appreciate both the soundness and the grandeur of such a vision. Its magnitude implies that it was a conception not to be accomplished in a day or a year, but by the slow and toilsome experience of generations. The foundations of the structure have been laid, the rules of action have been stated. It is for us to make such contribution as we are able toward its completion and adoption. The end sought has been to create a nation wherein the individual might rise to the full stature of manhood and womanhood.

It needed but little contemplation to determine that the greatest obstacle to freedom was ignorance. If there was to be self-government, if there was to be popular sovereignty, if there was to be an almost unlimited privilege to vote and hold office, if the people were going to maintain themselves and administer their own political and social affairs, it was necessary as a purely practical matter that they should have a sufficiently trained and enlightened intelligence to accomplish that end. Popular government could only be predicated on popular education. In addition to this, the very conception of the value and responsibility of the individual, which made him worthy to be entrusted with this high estate, required that he should be furnished the opportunity to develop the spiritual nature, with which he was endowed, through adequate education. Merely to state the American ideal is to perceive not only how far we still are from its realization, but to comprehend with what patience we must view many seeming failures, while we contemplate with great satisfaction much assured success.

We can see the early beginnings of our country and understand the situation in those days better than it was understood by its own contemporaries. It was a time of great toil and hardship. The entire settled area could

be described as little more than a frontier. Everything in the way of modern convenience was wanting, and save where a sea-going commerce was beginning, there was an entire absence of wealth. The America which we know had yet to be made. But the land was blessed with a great people and with great leaders. Washington and Jefferson, Franklin and Mason, Hamilton and Madison, Adams and Marshall, suggest a type of citizenship and leadership, of scholarship and statesmanship, of wisdom and character, of ability and patriotism, unsurpassed by any group of men ever brought together to direct the political destinies of a nation. They did what they could in their time for the advancement of the public welfare, and they were not discontented because they could not immediately secure perfection. They had a vision and they worked toward it. They knew that in their day it was not to be fully realized. They did not lack the courage to have faith in the future.

They started the country on that long road of stupendous achievement with which you are all so familiar. To provide for that human welfare which was the cherished hope of the Declaration of Independence and the well-wroughtout plan of the Federal Constitution, it was necessary to develop the material resources of our country. There had to be created the instruments with which to minister to the well-being of the people. National poverty had to be replaced with national possessions. Transportation had to be provided by land and water. Manufacturing plants had to be erected. Great agricultural resources had to be brought under cultivation. The news service of the press had to be established. The schoolhouse, the university, the place of religious worship, all had to be built. All of these mighty agencies had to be created, that they might contribute to a unified national life where freedom might reign and where the citizen might be his own sovereign.

It was only as this work was accomplished, as these instruments were provided, these properties built, and these possessions accumulated, that there could be a reduction in the hours of labor, an increase in the rewards of employment, and a general betterment in those material conditions which result in a higher standard of living. The leisure for culture had to be secured in this way. Servitude of all kinds is scarcely ever abolished unless there is created economic opportunity for freedom. We are beginning to see that the economic development of our country was not only necessary for advancing the welfare of the people, but that we must maintain an expanding power of production if that welfare is to be increased. Business makes a most valuable contribution to human progress.

As we look back upon all this development, while we know that it was absolutely dependent upon a reign of law, nevertheless some of us can not help thinking how little of it has been dependent on acts of legislation. Given their institutions, the people themselves have in the past, as they must in the future, to a very large degree worked out their own salvation without the interposition of the Government. It is always possible to regulate and supervise by legislation what has already been created, but while legislation can stimulate and encourage, the real creative ability which builds up and develops the country, and in general makes human existence more tolerable and life more complete, has to be supplied by the genius of the people themselves. The Government can supply no substitute for enterprise.

As a result of the activity of all these forces, our country has developed enormous resources. It has likewise to be admitted that its requirements are very large, but the fact remains that it has come into a position where it

has the accumulations of wealth and means of production more adequately to provide for the welfare of its people, and more securely to establish their physical, mental, and moral well-being. You are making your contribution to this great work in the field of education. It is here especially that the growth and progress of our country can be most easily understood. You can realize what an opportunity for securing the higher things of life they have provided when you recall that it is claimed that one out of every four persons in this Nation, either as pupil, administrator, or teacher, is now in some capacity directly concerned in education.

In the year 1921-22, the latest time for which complete statistics have been compiled, the students in the elementary and secondary schools, in the colleges and universities, had reached the unprecedented number of 26,206,756, and the total number of teachers and administrators approximately 882,500. If to this number one should add the parents, the members of school boards, and the taxpayers who maintain them, it becomes clear at once how universal is the direct or indirect concern of our citizens with the schools.

Another indication, both of our increasing resources and of the tremendous importance of education in the life of the Nation, is the great amount of money which we are able to spend for it. Twelve years ago the total money expended for all educational purposes amounted approximate to $705,781,900. In 10 years this had increased to $2,144,651,000. Even when one takes into account the depreciation of the dollar, due to the economic changes caused by the World War, it becomes clear that the American people have demonstrated their faith in education and their determination to use the wealth of the Nation for the creation of the highest type of manhood and womanhood.

While I believe that educators are under obligation to expend public funds economically, it seems obvious that the recent increase in expenses for this purpose is a most wise investment. It is impossible to conceive that there should be any increase in agricultural products, in the production of manufactures, or any other increase in our material wealth, through ignorance. The reaction to using the resources of the country to develop the brains of the country through education has always been greatly to stimulate and increase the power of the people to produce.

As already indicated, America is turning from the mere thought of the material advantage to a greater appreciation of the cultural advantage of learning. It is coming to be valued more and more for its own sake. People desire not only the intelligence to comprehend economic and social problems, but they are finding increased leisure is little more than time wasted in indulgence, unless an opportunity for self-development and self-expression has been provided in youth by the cultivation of a taste for literature, history, and the fine arts.

It is necessary also that education should be the handmaid of citizenship. Our institutions are constantly and very properly the subject of critical inquiry. Unless their nature is comprehended, and their origin is understood, unless their value be properly assessed, the citizen falls ready prey to those selfish agitators who would exploit his prejudices to promote their own advantage. On this day, of all days, it ought to be made clear that America has had its revolution and placed the power of Government squarely, securely, and entirely in the hands of the people. For all changes which they may desire, for all grievances which they may suffer, the ballot box furnishes a complete method and remedy. Into their hands has been committed complete

jurisdiction and control over all the functions of Government. For the most part our institutions are attacked in the name of social and economic reform. Unless there be some teaching of sound economics in the schools, the voter and taxpayer are in danger of accepting vague theories which lead only to social discontent and public disaster. The body politic has little chance of choosing patriotic officials who can administer its financial affairs with wisdom and safety, unless there is a general diffusion of knowledge and information on elementary economic subjects sufficient to create and adequately to support public opinion. Everyone ought to realize that the sole source of national wealth is thrift and industry, and that the sole supply of the public treasury is the toil of the people. Of course, patriotism is always to be taught. National defense is a necessity and a virtue, but peace with honor is the normal, natural condition of mankind, and must be made the chief end to be sought in human relationship.

Another element must be secured in the training of citizenship, or all else will be in vain. All of our learning and science, our culture and our arts, will be of little avail, unless they are supported by high character, unless there be honor, truth, and justice. Unless our material resources are supported by moral and spiritual resources, there is no foundation for progress. A trained intelligence can do much, but there is no substitute for morality, character, and religious convictions. Unless these abide, American citizenship will be found unequal to its task.

It is with some diffidence that I speak of the required facilities of the school in this presence. We are able to give more attention to the schoolhouse than formerly. It ought to be not only convenient, commodious, and sanitary, but it ought to be a work of art which would appeal to the love of the beautiful. The schoolhouse itself ought to impress the scholar with an ideal, it ought to serve as an inspiration.

But the main factor of every school is the teacher. Teaching is one of the noblest of professions. It requires an adequate preparation and training, patience, devotion, and a deep sense of responsibility. Those who mold the human mind have wrought not for time, but for eternity. The obligation which we all owe to those devoted men and women who have given of their lives to the education of the youth of our country that they might have freedom through coming into a knowledge of the truth is one which can never be discharged. They are entitled not only to adequate rewards for their service, but to the veneration and honor of a grateful people.

It is not alone the youth of the land which needs and seeks education, but we have a large adult population requiring assistance in this direction. Our last census showed nearly 14,000,000 foreign-born white persons residing among us, made up largely of those beyond school age, many of whom nevertheless need the opportunity to learn to read and write the English language, that they may come into more direct contact with the ideals and standards of our life, political and social. There are likewise over 3,000,000 native illiterates. When it is remembered that ignorance is the most fruitful source of poverty, vice, and crime, it is easy to realize the necessity for removing what is a menace, not only to our social well-being, but to the very existence of the Republic. A failure to meet this obligation registers a serious and inexcusable defect in our Government. Such a condition not only works to a national disadvantage, but directly contradicts all our assertions regarding

human rights. One of the chief rights of an American citizen is the right to an education. The opportunity to secure it must not only be provided, but if necessary made compulsory.

It is in this connection that we are coming to give more attention to rural and small village schools, which serve 47 percent of the children of the Nation. It is significant that less than 70 percent of these children average to be in attendance on any school day, and that there is a tendency to leave them in charge of undertrained and underpaid teachers. The advent of good roads should do much to improve these conditions. The old one-room country school, such as I attended, ought to give way to the consolidated school, with a modern building, and an adequate teaching force, commensurate with the best advantages that are provided for our urban population. While life in the open country has many advantages that are denied to those reared on the pavements and among crowded buildings, it ought no longer to be handicapped by poor school facilities. The resources exist with which they can be provided, if they are but adequately marshalled and employed.

The encouragement and support of education is peculiarly the function of the several States. While the political units of the district, the township, and the county should not fail to make whatever contribution they are able, nevertheless since the wealth and resources of the different communities vary, while the needs of the youth for education in the rich city and in the poor country are exactly the same, and the obligations of society toward them are exactly the same, it is proper that the State treasury should be called on to supply the needed deficiency. The State must contribute, set the standard, and provide supervision if society is to discharge its full duty not only to the youth of the country, but even to itself.

The cause of education has long had the thoughtful solicitude of the National Government. While it is realized that it is a State affair, rather than a national affair, nevertheless it has provided by law a Bureau of Education. It has not been thought wise to undertake to collect money from the various States into the National Treasury and distribute it again among the various States for the direct support of education. It has seemed a better policy to leave their taxable resources to the States, and permit them to make their own assessments for the support of their own schools in their own way. But for a long time the cause of education has been regarded as so important and so preeminently an American cause, that the National Government has sought to encourage it, scientifically to investigate its needs, and furnish information and advice for its constant advancement. Pending before the Congress is the report of a committee which proposes to establish a Department of Education and Relief, to be presided over by a Cabinet officer. Bearing in mind that this does not mean any interference with the local control, but is rather an attempt to recognize and dignify the importance of educational effort, such proposal has my hearty indorsement and support.

It is thus that our educational system has been and is ministering to our national life. Our country is in process of development. Its physical elements are incomplete. Its institutions have been declared, but they are very far from being adopted and applied. We have not yet arrived at perfection. A scientific investigation of child life has been begun, but yet remains to be finished. There is a vast amount of ignorance and misunderstanding, of envy, hatred, and jealousy, with their attendant train of vice and crime. We are not yet free, but we are struggling to become free economically, socially, politically, spiritually. We have limited our amount of

immigration in order that the people who live here, whether of native or foreign origin, might continue to enjoy the economic advantages of our country, and that there might not be any lowering of the standards of our existence, that America might remain American. We have submitted an amendment to the national Constitution designed to protect the child life of the Nation from the unwarranted imposition of toil, that it might have greater opportunity for enlightenment. All of these movements are in the direction of increased national freedom, and an advance toward the realization of the vision of Washington and Lincoln.

A new importance is attaching to the cause of education. A new realization of its urgent necessity is taking hold of the Nation. A new comprehension that the problem is only beginning to be solved is upon the people. A new determination to meet the requirements of the situation is everywhere apparent. The economic and moral waste of ignorance will little longer be tolerated. This awakening is one of the most significant developments of the times. It indicates that our national spirit is reasserting itself. It is a most reassuring evidence that the country is recovering from the natural exhaustion of the war, and that it is rising to a new life and starting on a new course. It is intent, as never before, upon listening to the word of the teacher, whether it comes from the platform, the schoolhouse, or the pulpit. The power of evil is being broken. The power of the truth is reasserting itself. The Declaration of Independence is continuing to justify itself.

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ABOUT THE FOUNDATION

The Calvin Coolidge Presidential Foundation is the official foundation dedicated to preserving and promoting the legacy of America's 30th president, Calvin Coolidge, who served from August 1923 to March 1929. Coolidge values include civility, bipartisanship, restraint in government, wise budgeting, and the advancement of policies fostering economic growth. The Coolidge Foundation sponsors the Coolidge Scholarship and Senators program, an initiative that honors academic merit. The Foundation has built a national debate program, culminating in the Coolidge Cup, an invitational tournament held each July at the President's birthplace in Plymouth, Vermont. The Foundation was formed in 1960 by a group of Coolidge enthusiasts, including John Coolidge, the president's son. The Coolidge Foundation maintains offices in Plymouth, Vermont, where it works in cooperation with the Calvin Coolidge State Historic Site, and at Coolidge House in Washington, D.C.

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