



Elon Musk's Team Decimates Education Department Arm That Tracks National School Performance

The Trump administration canceled \$900 million in contracts overseen by the Institute of Education Sciences, which partners with scientists and education companies to compile and make public data about schools each year.



Elon Musk is leading an unprecedented effort to slice government programs. Tom Williams/CQ-Roll Call, Inc/Getty Images



by **Jodi S. Cohen** and **Jennifer Smith Richards**

February 11, 2025, 12:30 am

ProPublica is a nonprofit newsroom that investigates abuses of power. Sign up to receive [our biggest stories](#) as soon as they're published.

The Trump administration has terminated more than \$900 million in Education Department contracts, taking away a key source of data on the quality and performance of the nation's schools.

The cuts were made at the behest of [Elon Musk's cost-cutting crew](#), the Department of Government Efficiency, and were disclosed on X, the social media platform Musk owns, shortly after ProPublica posed questions to U.S. Department of Education staff about the decision to decimate the agency's research and statistics arm, the [Institute of Education Sciences](#).

A spokesperson for the department, Madi Biedermann, said that the standardized test known as the nation's report card, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, would not be affected. Neither would the [College Scorecard](#), which allows people to search for and compare information about colleges, she said.

IES is one of the country's largest funders of education research, and the slashing of contracts could mean a significant loss of public knowledge about schools. The institute maintains a massive database of education statistics and

Journalism That Holds Power to Account

Sign up for ProPublica's Big Story newsletter and get our latest stories delivered straight to your inbox.

Get the Newsletter

compare the achievement of students across states.

ADVERTISEMENT

There's been a federal education statistics agency since 1867, though the current iteration [was established in 2002 under President George W. Bush](#). Congress sets aside funding for the institute's work.

Biedermann, the Education Department's deputy assistant secretary for communications, told ProPublica she could not provide details about the canceled contracts, saying that "my understanding is we don't release specific information."

But she said there were 90 contracts that had been identified as "waste, fraud and abuse." She said canceling them was "in line with the department's goal of making sure it is focused on meaningful learning" and to "make sure taxpayer funds are used appropriately."

She directed a reporter to the DOGE account on X for more details.

DOGE [wrote in a post](#): "Also today, the Department Of Education terminated 89 contracts worth \$881mm. One contractor was paid \$1.5mm to 'observe mailing and clerical operations' at a mail center."

The Trump administration has repeatedly expressed a desire to "return" responsibility for schools to the states, although state and local governments already control the largest share of funding for education. There's no national curriculum; states and districts decide what to teach and dictate their own policies.

The American Institutes for Research, a nonprofit that conducts research in education and other areas, said Monday that it had received termination notices for multiple contracts that are underway, and that canceling them early would be a poor financial decision.

"This is an incredible waste of taxpayer dollars, which have been invested — per Congressional appropriations and many according to specific legislation — in long-standing data collection and analysis efforts, and policy and program evaluations," spokesperson Dana Tofig said in an email. The nonprofit has contracted with the department for years.

Schools and districts across the country rely on research from the IES and contractors such as the American Institutes for Research to guide best practices in classrooms.

"These investments inform the entire education system at all levels about the condition of education and the distribution of students, teachers, and resources in school districts across America," Tofig said.

"If the purpose of such cuts is to make sure taxpayer dollars are not wasted, and used well, the evaluation and data work that has been terminated is exactly the work that determines which programs are effective uses of federal dollars, and which are not."

Sen. Patty Murray, a Washington Democrat, blasted the contract terminations at IES. "An unelected billionaire is now bulldozing the research arm of the Department of Education — taking a wrecking ball to high-quality research and basic data we need to improve our public schools," she said in a statement. "Cutting off these investments after the contract has already been inked is the definition of wasteful."

We are continuing to report on the U.S. Department of Education. Are you a former or current Education Department employee? Are you a student or school employee impacted by changes at the department? You can reach our [tip line](#) on Signal at 917-512-0201. Please be as specific, detailed and clear as you can.

Journalism That Holds Power to Account

Sign up for ProPublica's Big Story newsletter and get our latest stories delivered straight to your inbox.

Jennifer Smith Richards



I pursue stories about abuses of power — often focusing on schools and education — and stories about private businesses throughout the Midwest.



[MORE STORIES](#) [NEED TO GET IN TOUCH?](#)

Tips about government and business, particularly in the Midwest, are welcome. I'm also eager to hear from educators and government officials. I want to connect with parents and students experiencing the administration's policy changes.

What We're Watching

During Donald Trump's second presidency, ProPublica will focus on the areas most in need of scrutiny. Here are some of the issues our reporters will be watching — and how to get in touch with them securely.

Journalism That Holds Power to Account

Sign up for ProPublica's Big Story newsletter and get our latest stories delivered straight to your inbox.



[Learn more about our reporting team.](#) We will continue to share our areas of interest as the news develops.

Sharon Lerner

I cover health and the environment and the agencies that govern them, including the Environmental Protection Agency.



[Contact me](#)

Journalism That Holds Power to Account

Sign up for ProPublica's Big Story newsletter and get our latest stories delivered straight to your inbox.

Melissa Sanchez

I report on immigration and labor, and I am based in Chicago.



Contact me

Jesse Coburn

I cover housing and transportation, including the companies working in those fields and the regulators overseeing them.



Contact me



Journalism That Holds Power to Account

Sign up for ProPublica's Big Story newsletter and get our latest stories delivered straight to your inbox.



Most Read



1 “Economic Civil War”: States Push Laws to Shield Oil and Gas Companies From Accountability

Journalism That Holds Power to Account

Sign up for ProPublica’s Big Story newsletter and get our latest stories delivered straight to your inbox.



2 The Federal Government Is Rushing Toward AI. Our Reporting Offers Three Cautionary Tales.

Journalism That Holds Power to Account

Sign up for ProPublica's Big Story newsletter and get our latest stories delivered straight to your inbox.



3 The Militia and the Mole

Journalism That Holds Power to Account

Sign up for ProPublica's Big Story newsletter and get our latest stories delivered straight to your inbox.



4 A Nursing Home Owner Got a Trump Pardon. The Families of His Patients Got Nothing.

Journalism That Holds Power to Account

Sign up for ProPublica's Big Story newsletter and get our latest stories delivered straight to your inbox.



5 RFK Jr. May Reverse a Peptide Ban He Calls “Illegal.” Former FDA Officials Say He Mischaracterized Their Work.

Journalism That Holds Power to Account

Sign up for ProPublica’s Big Story newsletter and get our latest stories delivered straight to your inbox.