

REORGANIZATION

A year after mass layoffs, Education Dept keeps handing off its programs to other agencies

An Education Department spokeswoman said the FY 2026 appropriations bill "does not preclude the department" from moving core programs to other agencies.



Jory Heckman | @jheckmanWFED
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A year after deep cuts to its workforce, the Education Department is still standing, but moving ahead with plans to shut down its operations and move its core programs to other parts of the federal government.

Education Secretary Linda McMahon [told employees last fall](https://federalnewsnetwork.com/reorganization/2025/11/education-dept-soft-launches-employee-reassignments-to-other-agencies-in-latest-step-of-closure-plans/) that dismantling the Department and transferring billions of dollars in grant programs to other agencies would "break up the federal education bureaucracy" and improve government efficiency.

But Senate Democrats and former department employees say the reorganization has already led to higher costs and that agencies inheriting

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Rachel Gittleman, the president of the American Federation of Government Employees Local 252, was one of the Education Department employees who received a RIF notice last year. She previously worked in the Ombudsman's Office of Federal Student Aid, and helped borrowers navigate the student loan system.

"I received an email from the agency stating that I was being fired and my organizational unit was being abolished to make the government more efficient," she told reporters at a press conference on Wednesday marking the one-year anniversary of these mass layoffs.

Gittleman said that after getting her RIF notice, her system access was immediately shut off, which left nearly 400 student loan borrowers without anyone to assist them.

"In the course of less than two months, the Trump administration had cut our agency's workforce in half, which they bragged about," she said.

Congress recently passed a spending package for the rest of fiscal 2026 that increased funding for the Education Department, and rejected the Trump administration's calls for deep budget cuts to reflect many of its core programs being moved elsewhere.

But the department's press secretary [said in a statement last month](#) (<https://federalnewsnetwork.com/reorganization/2026/02/congress-fully-funded-education-dept-but-its-moving-ahead-with-reassigning-employees-to-other-agencies/>) that the 2026 appropriations bill "does not preclude the department from partnering with better-positioned federal agencies to manage federal education programs."

The Education Department can't fully dismantle operations without approval from Congress, but it has [signed several interagency agreements](#) (<https://federalnewsnetwork.com/reorganization/2025/11/education-dept-soft-launches-employee-reassignments-to-other-agencies-in-latest-step-of-closure-plans/>) transferring programs and personnel to the departments of Labor, Interior, State, and Health and Human Services.

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Sen. Chris Van Hollen (D-Md.) said Congress "established the Department of Education for a purpose," and that the latest spending bill demonstrates that lawmakers want to keep the department running.

"We were able to pass a budget that rejected the very deep cuts the Trump administration was proposing to essentially eliminate big parts of the Department of Education. But now our challenge is to once again get the Trump administration to follow the law," Van Hollen said.

The Education Department tried to lay off another 500 employees last fall, during last year's government shutdown. These layoffs targeted the Office for Civil Rights, as well as offices covering K-12 education, special education and higher education. These layoff notices were eventually rescinded.

These interagency agreements will [move billions of dollars](#) (<https://federalnewsnetwork.com/reorganization/2025/11/education-department-offloads-some-work-to-other-agencies-as-trump-presses-for-its-closure/>) in grant programs to other agencies. The Labor Department, in particular, will oversee federal funding that goes to K-12 schools, including grants for schools serving low-income communities.

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A recent report (<https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-26-108320.pdf>) from the Government Accountability Office found that the Education Department spent up to \$38 million to keep hundreds of Office of Civil Rights employees on paid administrative leave. Agency officials tried to fire them, but were blocked by a federal court. The department eventually rehired them.

Sen. Mazie Hirono (D-Hawaii) said the Education Department is shifting about \$30 billion in education programs to these other agencies.

"None of these departments have any wherewithal to run these programs. These are called interagency agreements. They have had no hearings on it. They're just implementing these and eventually, these programs are probably going to fall by the wayside," Hirono said.

If you would like to contact this reporter about recent changes in the federal government, please email jheckman@federalnewsnetwork.com (<mailto:jheckman@federalnewsnetwork.com>), or reach out on Signal at [jheckman.29](#)

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Jory Heckman

Jory Heckman is a reporter at Federal News Network covering the Postal Service, Department of Veterans Affairs, IRS, big data and technology issues. Follow [@jheckmanWFED](#)

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