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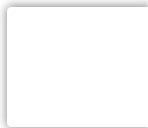
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# Crucial research halted as DOGE abruptly terminates Education Department contracts

By Kalyn Belsha | February 11, 2025, 4:59pm UTC | Updated: February 12, 2025, 12:38am UTC





*DOGE, Elon Musk's cost-cutting initiative, has axed contracts at the U.S. Department of Education worth \$881 million. Several were for education research and data-gathering initiatives. | (Erica S. Lee for Chalkbeat)*

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The Trump administration has terminated dozens of contracts worth nearly \$900 million at the U.S. Department of Education, halting crucial education research and data-gathering efforts.

The canceled contracts are part of an ongoing effort led by the U.S. DOGE Service, a [cost-cutting initiative headed by billionaire Elon Musk](#).

The contract terminations come as the Trump administration looks to significantly [scale back the size and scope of the Department of Education](#), with an [executive order to that effect reportedly coming soon](#).

On Monday night, DOGE announced on X, the social media platform owned by Musk, that it had terminated 89 Education Department contracts totaling \$881 million.

Many of those were for education research and program evaluation work done by the Institute of Education Sciences, or IES, the research arm of the Department of Education. U.S. Sen. Patty Murray, a Democrat who sits on the Senate education committee, said in a statement the cuts amounted to a “gutting” of IES.

When asked for comment, Alberto Bentacourt, a spokesperson for the Department of Education told Chalkbeat: “We kindly point you to the X post from DOGE.”

Madi Biedermann, another Education Department spokesperson, told ProPublica that 90 contracts had been identified as “waste, fraud, and abuse” and that canceling them was “in line with the department’s goal of making sure it is focused on meaningful learning.” Biedermann would not provide specifics about which contracts were cut short.

Several contractors for the Education Department told Chalkbeat they got notices on Monday saying that their contracts had been terminated and that work must stop immediately.

Dana Tofig, a spokesperson for the American Institutes for Research, said the nonprofit research organization had received termination notices for several IES contracts related to education statistics and evaluation work. The terminations were “for convenience,” he said, a clause that allows the federal government to end contracts without cause regardless of the contractor’s performance.

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“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,” Tofig wrote, noting several contracts were nearing their completion.

John Hutchins, a spokesperson for MDRC, which also conducts education research, said the nonprofit had two IES contracts canceled as of Tuesday.

The first was to conduct the ReSolve Math Study, a sweeping effort to help kids who are struggling in math following the pandemic. The second was to assist external evaluators who conduct research for the What Works Clearinghouse, a federal repository of best practices and education research that schools and lawmakers often rely on.

Some research projects had the plug pulled after they'd already collected years of data. It's unclear if any of that information will be salvaged or if it will be destroyed. One person who worked on a contract that was canceled mid-project — who spoke on the condition of anonymity in order to prevent retaliation by the Trump administration — likened it to having their work flushed down the toilet.

It's unclear exactly how many of the Education Department's hundreds of active contracts were terminated. In a statement, Felice Levine, who directs the American Educational Research Association, said 169 IES contracts had been terminated, including some for the National Center for Education Statistics, a part of IES that publishes key reports, some of which are mandated by Congress.

EdTrust, a prominent civil rights organization that relies on disaggregated education data by race, income, and other demographics to help identify disparities and inequities in schools, condemned the contract cuts.



“The sudden halting of these contracts jeopardizes our collective responsibility to identify and address the inequities that affect a variety of student populations, including students from low-income families, students of color, English language learners, students with disabilities, student parents, and students from rural communities,” the organization said in a statement.

In a conversation that aired Tuesday on LinkedIn, Mark Schneider, the director of IES for six years under President Joe Biden and during Trump’s first term, said he viewed what was happening not as a “tragedy” or a “catastrophe,” but as an opportunity to significantly overhaul research at the Education Department.

He saw room, for example, for IES to build a better statewide longitudinal data system that states could customize, instead of reinventing the wheel on their own.

He admitted the process had been chaotic, but said what happens next is more important.

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“These guys came in with a sledgehammer and they just broke shit,” Schneider said of the DOGE staff. “They probably swung the sledgehammer too fast and too hard because they broke things like [the Common Core of Data] that actually are important. ... What you really need is a crew that comes in there and has more knowledge than the DOGE people that are committed to rebuilding the education R&D infrastructure.”

Some programs were spared. ProPublica reported that the National Assessment of Educational Progress, a key test often called the nation’s report card, would not be affected by the cuts. The Trump administration pointed to disappointing NAEP scores,

released earlier this month, as a rationale to invest more in private school vouchers and other school choice programs.

The College Scorecard, which helps high schoolers compare college offerings and cost, is also unaffected.

The cuts also will not affect contractors working in IES's Small Business Innovation Research Program, which helps develop and evaluate new ed tech products, Education Week reported, or the Regional Education Laboratory Program, which has 10 outposts that help school districts, state education departments, and others gather data and make decisions about education policies and programs.

On Monday, DOGE announced the Education Department had also canceled 29 training grants related to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. It singled out a grant that trained teachers to “help students understand / interrogate the complex histories involved in oppression, and help students recognize areas of privilege and power on an individual and collective basis.”

Trump has issued executive orders seeking to prevent federal agencies from carrying out work related to DEI initiatives, and to stop K-12 schools from teaching students about concepts like white privilege and unconscious bias.

Already, the Education Department has scrubbed hundreds of documents from its website and put at least 50 staffers on leave.

*This story has been updated to add more information about canceled contracts and comments from former IES Director Mark Schneider.*



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