POLICY BRIEF

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Federal funds are vital to Ohio's public schools

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Ohio's public schools rely on **more than $3 billion**[1] in federal funding a year to help meet the needs of every student — including the 1 in 6 public school students who have disabilities[2] — pay for school meals, train educators, and more. That amounts to 11.6% of Ohio's public-school revenue.

President Trump and Secretary of Education Linda McMahon have vowed to eliminate the federal Department of Education, which, along with the Department of Agriculture, distributes the congressionally approved federal funds and ensures that the money is spent in compliance with federal regulations. The department also works to ensure that students' civil rights are respected and all kids, regardless of race, ZIP code, or disability, have access to educational opportunities.

The Trump administration is acting unilaterally to frustrate the agency's ability to carry out its responsibilities and obligations. Last week, nearly half of the Department of Education staff was eliminated, either through termination, voluntary separation, or retirement.[3] Notably, the Cleveland field office of the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights division is shuttered. Reporting has noted this closure will impact roughly 1,100 cases brought by students and parents.[4] The office was a resource for parents facing a wide range of issues, including the improper restraint of children with disabilities, harassment or bullying on the basis of sex, and unfair impediments to student supports and opportunities, like college credit plus or AP courses.[5]

A president cannot eliminate a congressionally created agency or the statutory acts it administers through an executive order. The existence of the U.S. Department of Education and the funding it distributes throughout Ohio and the nation are questions for Congress, requiring congressional action to change or eliminate. The legality of the firings and additional attempts to indirectly eliminate the agency through executive hiring and firing powers are questions for the courts.

The stakes are high for Ohioans as many in Congress are planning to cut the federal budget, threatening public education funding nationwide. The House Education and Workforce Committee has been directed to cut $330 billion in spending to help offset the cost of a $4.5 trillion tax-cut package that overwhelmingly benefits the wealthiest in the nation. Modeling

[1] "Public School Federal Operating Revenue." Ryan Brown. LSC Members Brief. Jan. 31, 2025.
[2] "Ohio's Education Landscape" Ohio Dept. of Education & Workforce. Accessed March 17, 2025.
[3] U.S. Department of Education press release. "Reduction in Force." March 11, 2025.
[4] "Trump administration closes Cleveland's US Department of Education Office," March 13, 2025.
[5] *See,* Civil Rights Data Collection Office, US Department of Education, Ohio profile, 2020-21, most recent available, accessed March 20, 2025.

shows that the tax package would create on average increases for people making less than $360,000.[6]

Various proposals to realize these cuts have been floated in Congress, including: Sunsetting Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) — which funds school districts based on the percentage of economically disadvantaged children in the district — and converting federal funding from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to a block grant administered by the Department of Health and Human Services.[7]

Cutting these funds, either directly through congressional action or indirectly by hamstringing the agency that administers them, will directly harm Ohio's 611 public school districts, which serve 1,532,197 students.[8] In Ohio, federal funding cuts threaten:[9]

> **$514,854,000 in Title 1** funding, which provides for school districts educating children from low-income families to close educational achievement gaps. Title 1 funds can be used to pay teachers; support homeless students; provide counseling, mental health, and dropout prevention programs; and more.[10] Almost every district in Ohio (99%) receives Title 1 funding.
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> **$393,813,000 in IDEA** funding, which helps districts meet the needs of students with disabilities. Funds can be used to implement IEPs, hire and train special education teachers, purchase assistive devices for students, provide accessible transportation to school, and more.[11] Almost every district in Ohio (98%) receives IDEA funding.
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> **$950,014,000 in Child Nutrition Act** funding, including the National School Lunch, Special Milk, and School Breakfast programs, which provide kids with healthy food so they can come to class ready to learn.[12] Almost every district in Ohio (97%) receives Child Nutrition Act funding.

See which federal funds your district relies on.

Federal cuts will only compound the harm done by state funding cuts — like those Gov. DeWine proposed in his Executive Budget — and they'll do the most damage to districts with the greatest need. Many of the districts facing the largest federal cuts are the same high-poverty rural and urban districts that need more support, not less.

Every child should be able to get a great education at a public school in their district. Federal funding is a critical part of making that a reality. At a time when Ohio's state leaders are planning to go back on their promise to fund schools fairly, public school kids, families, and communities cannot afford to lose federal dollars as well.

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[6] Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy, "A Distributional Analysis of Donald Trump's Tax Plan," Figure 3, October, 2024, accessed March 20, 2025.
[7] See "President Trump, Congressional Republican Proposals Would Shift Large Costs to States, Inflict Widespread Harm." Wesley Tharpe and Meg Wiehe. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. January 30, 2025. Also see chapter 11 of Project 2025's Mandate for Leadership.
[8] National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core Data, School District Finance Survey (F33), FY 2022. Note: The total public-school student count omits between 60 to 70 students attending Put-In-Bay Local School District and Kelleys Island Local School District schools, for which federal funding data were not available.
[9] Same as above.
[10] "Title I -Improving the Academic Achievement of the Disadvantaged." Ohio Dept. of Education & Workforce.
[11] IDEA Part B Use of Funds Guidance. Ohio Dept. of Education.
[12] "Child Nutrition Programs." Ohio Dept. of Education & Workforce.