

Opening Statement of Ranking Member Robert C. "Bobby" Scott (VA-03)

Full Committee on Education and Workforce Hearing

"Examining the Policies and Priorities of the Department of Education"

Wednesday, June 4, 2025 | 10:15 a.m.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning.

I want to thank Secretary McMahon for joining us today to discuss the Department's priorities and the effect this budget will have on students, teachers, and families.

Secretary McMahon, as Secretary of Education, you took an oath to oversee the Department of Education and uphold the Constitution. One of the missions of the Department of Education is to "strengthen the Federal commitment to assuring access to equal educational opportunity for every individual." I take no pleasure in pointing out that in the months since this Administration has taken office and you have been sworn in as the Department's Secretary, the actions taken by you, the unaccountable DOGE, and this Administration - generally - have contradicted this mission.

Some of the things that have happened:

- Nearly 50 percent of the Department's workforce have been proposed to be fired, eliminating key roles that keep our nation's schools running and our students safe.
- Universities have been stripped of necessary grant funding, undermining the integrity of higher education.
- Support for student loan borrowers has been reduced, and the key consumer protections have been threatened.
- And the Department of Education is being dismantled through the elimination of programs and offices, without congressional approval.

Thankfully, on May 22nd, a federal judge issued a preliminary injunction and ordered the Department to reinstate the previously terminated employees. During today's hearing, I expect you to share with us, specifically, what steps you are taking to comply with that court order.

Relatedly, we understand that the Department has repeatedly delayed and denied the Department's Office of Inspector General (OIG) access to requested documents, information, and staff to conduct a review related to the Department's recent workforce, program, and operational changes. Yesterday, I sent you a letter urging you to cooperate with the OIG in accordance with the law. It is my hope that because you have spoken to numerous news organizations about your plans to dismantle the Department, you will feel comfortable sharing your plans with Congress and the OIG.

For millions of Americans, we are struggling to understand how the actions you have taken at the Department address learning gaps and improve academic outcomes for this nation's children. Simply put, if all these positions are being vacated and resources are being cut for the sake of "efficiency," then who is doing the work to ensure

that the mission of the Department – to “strengthen the federal commitment to assuring access to equal educational opportunity for every individual” – is being met?

For example, another mission of the Department of Education is to “promote improvements in the quality and usefulness of education through federally supported research, evaluation, and sharing of information.” Yet, this Administration has stopped the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), which supports research and collects data on education across the country to improve students’ academic outcomes. Congress uses this research to determine how it can save money and ensure resources are allocated only to effective programs. However, since you have halted researchers in the middle of their projects, much their work is now useless to Congress. And that is the very definition of creating waste.

Also, the Department has abdicated its responsibility to ensure that *all* students are afforded safe, quality, and equitable education, regardless of their race, gender, immigration status, socioeconomic status, and disability status. Under your stewardship, the Office for Civil Rights is implementing a radical reinterpretation of our civil rights laws that abandons its long-standing duties to investigate, monitor, and provide resources to victims of potential civil rights violations. As a result, students and parents with open civil rights cases are now left with no recourse and no insight as to the status of their cases.

We have also seen valuable programs – such as the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP), Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED), and mental health grants, which were supported through the *Bipartisan Safer Communities Act* (BCSA) – canceled with no notice to states and no recourse to help support our nation’s public schools.

Furthermore, states are being denied reimbursements for COVID-19-related expenditures that the Department of Education had promised to pay. This is in addition to proposals in the Department’s Fiscal Year 2026 budget to eliminate programs like GEAR UP and TRIO, which provide support for low-income students and students with disabilities to obtain high school diplomas and prepare them for postsecondary education.

There is also the matter of many red states calling for education block grants – a regressive and illegal proposal that would make it virtually impossible for the federal government to hold states accountable for providing all students with a high-quality education free from discrimination. And yet, the Department’s budget proposal requests that Congress grant you the legal authority to block grant several programs– a clear acknowledgment that you currently lack this authority.

So we expect to hear from you *today* that you will deny the states’ requests for block grants without direct congressional authority. Most importantly, we want to hear how you will hold states accountable for upholding students’ civil rights.

I would be remiss if I did not note that the Department’s Fiscal Year 2026 budget proposal would make it more difficult for students to enroll in and afford a college education by proposing reductions in funding to need-based grants, such as Pell and Work Study. This is achieved by removing staff who oversee federal student aid administration and oversight, forcing borrowers into unaffordable repayment plans, and aggressively garnishing wages of low-income borrowers.

Additionally, the budget proposes reducing the Department’s workforce development programs by 33 percent! In sum, between the cuts to higher education and programs for alternative career paths, this budget proposal would leave our country’s workforce behind, rather than competing in the global economy.

At the end of the day, it is the students of this nation who will suffer under this budget proposal. Students from low-income families, students with disabilities, English learners, international students, and students of color will face more hurdles to accessing equal educational opportunity. Eliminating those burdens is the very mission of

the Department of Education. So regrettably, instead of investing in our children, your budget proposal would eviscerate vital evidence-based educational programs and offices at the Department as a means to attack programs promoting “diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility.”

Your success in this job will only come if you adhere to the mission of the Department of Education, faithfully execute the laws, and uphold your oath to the Constitution. Regrettably, this proposed budget does not signal a path of success for America’s students and families. That is why I am urging you to reverse course. I call on my colleagues on the other side of the aisle to critically review this proposal and reject it.

Democrats will not sit idly by while our students are under attack. We will fight any and all attempts to dismantle the Department. And we will continue to stand up for students, parents, and families who are struggling.

So, Madam Secretary, thank you for appearing before us today, we hope to get concrete and substantive answers from you.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back the balance of my time.