

Statement from Deborah Gordon Klehr, executive director, on U.S. Department of Education

March 20, 2025 – “The administration’s unlawful effort to destroy the U.S. Department of Education was already well underway before today, with mass layoffs of staff, withholding of congressionally approved funds, and an explicit refusal to address the department’s legal obligations to ensure equity and inclusion in our schools.

“No president can unilaterally eliminate the Department of Education, nor erase the legal rights of our students. But completely gutting the department would certainly mean far fewer federal resources for our most underfunded schools across the state and fewer supports for underserved students – including 26 million students impacted by poverty who are supported by Title I funding, [7.4 million students with disabilities](#) who benefit from IDEA funding, and multilingual learners, students experiencing homelessness, and students in rural schools. In all, the federal government provides [\\$4.67 billion in critical public education funding](#) to Pennsylvania students and schools, and that must be protected.

“The department has played two other critical roles: expanding student access to higher education through federal funding and ensuring greater equity for all students through guidance, monitoring, and enforcement of federal civil rights protections.

“We urge Congress to stop the abuse of executive authority, ensure that the federal funding our schools depend on continues to flow, and restore the federal commitment to equal access to education.

“If the federal administration truly wants to respect the authority of the states, it should honor their legal authority to determine curriculum and stop threatening to withhold funding from schools that teach accurate history, celebrate diversity, and uphold the rights of transgender and immigrant students. Moreover, the administration’s push for private school voucher programs undermines the work of states and local school districts to provide effective, well-resourced public school systems that serve all students.

“The administration erroneously claims that student test scores have been declining for decades and argues that the Department of Education and its investments in schools over 45 years have accomplished nothing. Their view overlooks many important improvements in public education since 1979 – for example, the dramatic gains in access to education for students with disabilities.

“The administration’s view that money doesn’t matter has been soundly rejected in education research and by the courts throughout the country, including in the fair funding decision here in Pennsylvania. Supplemental federal funding clearly matters and supports students across the commonwealth and the nation.”

The Education Law Center-PA (ELC) is a nonprofit, legal advocacy organization with offices in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh, dedicated to ensuring that all children in Pennsylvania have access to a quality public education. Through legal representation, impact litigation, community engagement, and policy advocacy, ELC advances the rights of underserved children, including children living in poverty, children of color, children in the foster care and juvenile justice systems, children with disabilities, multilingual learners, LGBTQ students, and children experiencing homelessness.