

Research Evidence Against Dismantling the U.S. Education Department

IMPLICATIONS OF BLOCK GRANTS AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF FEDERAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Fact Sheet

Key Takeaway

The Trump administration's goal is to loosen restrictions on federal education grants by: 1) consolidating existing categorical grant programs into block grants, and 2) approving waivers of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requirements. These actions present real risks for the nation's most vulnerable students, especially if states fail to allocate federal funds so that they reach the students they are intended to support. Block grant consolidation of federal funds or waivers that result in consolidation reduce transparency, accountability, and the structure needed to enforce federal laws designed to protect students.

The Issue

Easing restrictions through block grants could result in reduced funding sent to students with the greatest needs. The Trump administration claims that the goal of consolidation is to reduce administrative burden and empower states, but existing proposals trade minimal increases in flexibility for a significant reduction in funding. The Trump administration's FY27 budget proposal includes the "Make Education Great Again (MEGA)" program that consolidates 17 programs while reducing funding by 70%. It also proposes consolidating several Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) programs while providing additional flexibility in how those funds are spent. Though Congress rejected similar proposals for the FY26 budget and is likely to do so again, the administration has side-stepped Congress by encouraging and approving ESSA waivers that loosen restrictions on how states spend federal funds that are intended for particular student populations.

The Evidence

- Block grants have historically not aligned with actual need and are susceptible to reduced or stagnant funding. Stagnant funding often leads states to focus on short-term, rather than long-term, solutions that often result in fewer services for the neediest populations.
- Block grants are at risk of fraud and abuse, as evidenced by a recent Government Accountability Office report on the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. Recommendations for improvement have gone unaddressed.

- Block grants depend on strong administrative capacity, maintenance-of-effort rules, and data infrastructure at the state level for the state to assume the responsibility for oversight of funds in the absence of federal monitoring.
- Proposed consolidation and flexibility for special education funding, combined with reduced USED staffing and oversight, puts students with disabilities at risk. Federal monitoring provides a safeguard for state and district responsibilities; loosened oversight and greater state flexibility could threaten protections and services for students.

Both policy analysis and research on previous block grant programs suggest that the administrative requirements associated with current funding allocations may, in fact, be necessary to safeguard our nation's most vulnerable students. Restrictions on how funds are allocated and spent are the mechanism through which the federal government ensures funding reaches intended populations and is used on programs and services with demonstrated impact. Monitoring systems have continually shown that states often violate regulations and mismanage funds, and that federal oversight has identified such issues for corrective action in the past. Under block grants, states and school districts would have greater responsibility for ensuring that funds reach the student populations that are most in need and for whom they are intended. With diminished federal oversight, states will likely vary in the extent to which they achieve the goals for which the federal funding was originally designed.

Read the full research brief [here](#). Visit our [website](#) for more research evidence against the dismantling the U.S. Department of Education.