

Senate HELP Appropriations Hearing Highlights Deep Concerns Over Education Department Budget, Restructuring, and Program Cuts

April 28, 2026

Education Secretary Linda McMahon testified before the [Senate HELP Appropriations Subcommittee](#) on the [President's FY 2027 budget request](#), outlining an agenda centered on reducing the federal role in education, shifting authority to states, and restructuring core department functions. In her [opening remarks](#), McMahon emphasized efforts to “shrink bureaucracy,” consolidate programs, expand workforce development, and pursue [interagency agreements \(IAAs\)](#) to transition responsibilities to other federal agencies.

Throughout the hearing, however, bipartisan concern emerged around the real-world implications of these proposals. Senators repeatedly pressed on the proposed elimination or restructuring of longstanding programs like TRIO and GEAR UP, as well as the consolidation of K-12 funding streams into a significantly smaller block grant — including proposals to combine multiple programs into a single funding stream with substantially reduced overall funding. Lawmakers also raised concerns about the department's expanding use of IAAs with agencies like the Department of Labor and Treasury. While McMahon framed these shifts as opportunities for flexibility and experimentation, members questioned whether partner agencies have the capacity, expertise, or statutory authority to effectively administer education programs, particularly amid early implementation delays and confusion.

Student aid and borrower protections were another major focus. Senators highlighted confusion surrounding repayment transitions, [backlogs in Public Service Loan Forgiveness processing](#), and broader concerns about moving core federal student aid functions outside the Department. McMahon pointed to fraud prevention efforts and proposed reforms like Workforce Pell, but questions remain about implementation readiness and borrower impact — raising concerns about potential harm to borrowers and uncertainty for institutions navigating these changes.

Civil rights enforcement and oversight capacity also drew sharp scrutiny. Members raised alarms about significant proposed cuts to the Office for Civil Rights (35 percent), [unresolved case backlogs](#), and the broader implications of staff reductions and office closures for students' access to timely protections and enforcement of federal civil rights laws. At multiple points, senators challenged whether the department is meeting its legal obligations to protect students, particularly as responsibilities shift across agencies.

Many of these proposals lack clear timelines or implementation details, further complicating how institutions and students can prepare for potential changes. Across both parties, there was a consistent throughline: while the administration frames this budget as a return of power to states and a rethinking of federal education policy, many lawmakers see growing risks to program integrity, student protections, and the timely delivery of services. The hearing made clear that significant questions remain about how these proposals will function in practice — and what they will ultimately mean for students, institutions, and the broader education ecosystem.

For a deeper look at what these proposals mean for college access, affordability, and student support, we encourage members to review [NACAC's analysis of the President's FY27 budget request](#).