

PRESIDENT-ELECT TRUMP'S PLANS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

As colleges and universities prepare for a second Trump administration, we offer a summary of President-Elect Trump's proposals for reshaping federal higher education policy.

Dismantle the US Department of Education.

- Created in 1979, the department administers federal grant programs and the federal student loan program; enforces civil rights laws; and collects, analyzes and shares data.
- Trump has pledged to eliminate the department and “return” responsibility for education to the states. Many of his top advisors are architects of Project 2025, which calls on the federal government to “confine its involvement in education policy to that of a statistics-gathering agency that disseminates information to the states.”
- Closing the department would require congressional approval, including a supermajority of 60 votes in the Senate. If the department were eliminated, education would no longer be a cabinet-level priority. The practical implications would depend on how Congress reallocated the department's responsibilities.

Overhaul accreditation.

- Voluntary accreditation is essential to assuring educational quality while protecting higher education from direct government control and undue political influence.
- Trump has described control over accreditation as a “secret weapon” for forcing ideological changes in higher education, and he has proposed to replace accreditors, implement college entrance and exit exams, and require that colleges and universities offer “options for accelerated and low-cost degrees.”
- Project 2025 calls for prohibiting accreditors from requiring DEI-related policies. It also recommends severing the connection between accreditation and financial aid eligibility, which is critical to maintaining voluntary accreditation. States would be allowed to authorize accrediting agencies and serve as accreditors themselves.

Quash loan forgiveness and privatize lending.

- Trump has been publicly critical of President Biden's loan forgiveness efforts, calling them a “total catastrophe.”
- Project 2025 calls for rescinding regulations that make it easier for students to discharge their loans, ending both the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program and the income-driven repayment program Saving on a Valuable Education, and privatizing all federal lending programs.
- Private student loans typically have higher interest rates and less flexible repayment options. Also, private lenders have minimal incentives to fund programs with low private but high social value (e.g., teacher training) or to support low-income (and high-risk) borrowers.

Expand taxation of endowments.

- Trump has proposed to increase the 1.4% tax on income from the wealthiest university endowments that he signed into law in 2017 and to expand it to more institutions.
- The proposal would have an immediate impact on institutions that rely on endowments to support their education missions, and it would reduce the availability of funding for student financial aid. It could also set a precedent for compromising the tax-exempt status of colleges and universities.

Undo key Biden policies.

- President Biden used executive action to implement several signature higher education policies, including student loan reforms and civil rights protections for transgender students. President Trump can act unilaterally to undo these policies.
- Where Congressional action is needed to reshape higher education policy, single-party control of the White House and both houses of Congress creates a smoother path for the Republican platform.