

Months after layoffs, Education Department employees remain on the federal payroll

By **Christopher Huffaker** Globe Staff, Updated July 7, 2025, 11:47 a.m.



Education Secretary Linda McMahon attended a House Committee on Education and Workforce hearing June 4 on Capitol Hill in Washington. JACQUELYN MARTIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

More than three months after the US Department of Education initiated sweeping layoffs of more than one-quarter of its workforce, most remain on the payroll but unable to work, according to Boston-based employees and the union that represents most of them.

Consequently, critical functions of the department have gone unfulfilled for months. In turn, families with discrimination complaints have been left to [worry that their cases aren't being taken seriously](#), critical research into student achievement has been left in limbo, and prospective college students from needy communities have been left to wonder whether a higher education is now out of reach.

The situation at hand calls into question whether the Trump administration's extensive cuts across the federal government are actually saving taxpayers' money. Union officials for Education Department employees estimate that paying just a portion of their laid-off membership is costing the government more than \$7 million per month — all for the workers to do nothing.

Sheria Smith, president of the union representing many Education Department workers, said in a statement to the Globe the staff “want to do this work.”

“Keeping us idle, with our hands tied from performing our jobs, will only hinder the success of our students and result in taxpayers wasting tens of millions of dollars,” Smith said. “The American public deserves better from their government.”

Though the department employees were forced to turn over their work computers and vacate offices months ago, the federal government has been unable to terminate them due to a March lawsuit by educators unions and others including [Somerville Public Schools](#). In May, Boston-based US District Judge Myong Joun [ordered the department](#) to bring back the laid-off workers.

The federal government, however, has resisted heeding that order. Trump officials have instead [asked the Supreme Court](#) to let them proceed with the layoffs. Even if the administration doesn't win the current case, it could potentially try to lay off the employees again as part of efforts to dismantle the department, according to a union official.

From its creation in 1979, the department has been targeted by small-government advocates for elimination. Trump allies say it has failed to improve education despite its large budget, while advocates of the department say it has critical functions, such as providing funding to low-income school districts and ensuring districts follow the law on educating students with disabilities.

The Education Department did not respond to requests for comment but has [said in the past](#) that it “continues to deliver on all programs that fall under the agency’s purview” and argued the judge’s ruling blocking the layoffs was [unfair to the Trump administration](#).

As of Thursday morning, the pending Supreme Court decision on the layoffs was one of [five pending “shadow docket” applications](#) that could be decided at any time. These cases are handled on an emergency basis often without the typical lengthy oral arguments and written decisions.

Some Education Department employees, meanwhile, are taking matters into their own hands, finding other ways to fulfill the federal government’s critical functions. Others are voluntarily removing themselves from the federal payroll by quitting.

Carolyn Grim, a Boston-based [former employee of the National Center for Education Statistics](#), is among those who continue to be paid but are unable to work. She expects to lose her job in the fall at the latest.



In March, Carolyn Grim was laid off from the National Center for Education Statistics in the Education Department where she worked nearly 15 years. JOHN TLUMACKI/GLOBE STAFF

“They’re not really putting us back to work,” she said.

Grim, however, said she maintains hope that some of her colleagues will return eventually. Still, she expects the federal government’s statistical and research role in education to remain largely eliminated, [save for the Nation’s Report Card tests](#) that provide critical data on student achievement.

To fill the gap, Grim and some colleagues have created a new home for their work outside of the federal government by founding a nonprofit, Agora, to preserve existing data and continue future collections. The department’s data underlie research on what works in education and much of it is now inaccessible, at a time when that information is desperately needed after a [decade of declining achievement](#).

Grim's new organization is seeking grant funding to look into whether a private organization can legally take over the role as data gatekeeper, at least until a future administration reclaims responsibility. Agora is seeking state contracts as well as grants but is currently self-funded, she said.

Beyond that role, Grim and her colleagues want to continue long-running research projects that the federal government has dropped — like a study she conducts tracking the development of a group of students over time.

Ariel Shepetovskiy, a former Education Department attorney, said many of her former colleagues have taken on volunteer work or part-time jobs since their terminations. She, meanwhile, chose to formally quit and take a new job, based on worries about her future.

"I'm a young attorney, I don't have a lot of work experience, and I can't keep accruing months of doing nothing on my resume," Shepetovskiy said. "I feel very sad about this."

Shepetovskiy took a job in June with an immigration law firm, she said, a position where she would be opposing the federal government in court. She couldn't ethically remain a government employee and take on that role.

Shepetovskiy, who lives in Malden, worked remotely for the Education Department's Office for Civil Rights location in Cleveland. In her role, she investigated complaints of school districts discriminating against vulnerable students.

"I feel like I'm abandoning my country in a time of need," she said.

Christopher Huffaker can be reached at christopher.huffaker@globe.com. Follow him [@huffakingit](https://twitter.com/huffakingit).

[Hide 57 comments](#)

57 Comments

Sort by:

Best

Newest

Oldest

**WhatIsWrongWithYouPeople!**

7/07/25 - 12:08PM

All these people getting paid to sit at home and do nothing - yet it does not affect, good or bad, the quality of education at our public schools. Maybe they were not needed to begin with?

Like (14)

Dislike (38)

Reply

Report

Ignore

**Mainebum**

7/07/25 - 12:12PM

where did you get the "does not affect, good or bad, the quality of education at our public schools" part?

Like (38)

Dislike (4)

Report

Ignore

**NrwlMike**

7/07/25 - 12:46PM

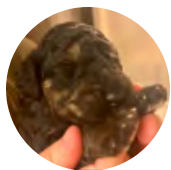
And rightly so, this time is also going towards their length of service for retirement purposes. And thankfully, their health coverage and life insurance coverage is still being provided. As it should be. They are the victims here.

Like (18)

Dislike (5)

Report

Ignore

[Show all 5 replies](#)***Bompas**

7/07/25 - 12:18PM

"A decade of declining achievement".....once you hit the bottom you can only go up....School Choice including home schooling...

Like (11)

Dislike (15)

Reply

Report

Ignore

**Rush Inbot**

7/07/25 - 12:27PM

The DOE and teachers unions think we have the best education system in the world. The rest of us think that we hit bottom years ago yet things keep getting worse.

Like (6)

Dislike (14)

Report

Ignore

**SOXINPA**

7/07/25 - 1:14PM

We need to break up the public school monopoly.

Like (6)

Dislike (19)

Report

Ignore

[Show all 6 replies](#)**Rush Inbot**

7/07/25 - 12:25PM

So everybody at the DOE is at home doing nothing and there is absolutely no noticeable difference for the rest of the country. I think President Trump and the Republicans have been proven correct on this one - the DOE is not needed and should be dismantled.

The federal government needs to stay in its lane and leave education to the states.

Like (10)

Dislike (23)

Reply

Report

Ignore

**Pabloc**

7/07/25 - 12:59PM

rush is lacking in any sort of critical thinking skills. Some thinks take time to manifest themselves, not that you'd notice them anyways.

[Like \(13\)](#)[Dislike \(3\)](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)**greyhoundgirl**

7/07/25 - 1:14PM

And you know this how, Rush? I seriously doubt that you are in any position to assess the quality of education nationwide.

[Like \(13\)](#)[Dislike \(2\)](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)[Show all 5 replies](#)**Henry Porter**

7/07/25 - 12:26PM

The Musk federal firings were done horribly but it does make you wonder the value of many of the jobs at the DOE from two of the people profiled in the article. One compiles data but what is ever done with that data? The other a lawyer looks for cases of discrimination in schools. I will give her credit for leaving when she could have just drawn a check.

[Like \(2\)](#)[Dislike \(16\)](#)[Reply](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)**LONG_GONE_JOHN**

7/07/25 - 3:22PM

The DOE collects and analyzes data on student performance and well being, demographics, and other data that can help local education departments to make better informed decisions. That includes the Nation's Report Card, which is a national snapshot of student performance in STEM and social studies.

[Like \(3\)](#)[Dislike \(1\)](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)**Osprey8**

7/07/25 - 12:38PM

So Trump in his infinite lack of wisdom puts a person connected to Professional Wrestling in charge of American Education???

[Like \(22\)](#)[Dislike \(3\)](#)[Reply](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)**JLBD**

7/07/25 - 1:20PM

And under investigation for sexual crimes involving minors, seems par for the course with the tRump appointees. So sick.

[Like \(15\)](#)[Dislike \(1\)](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)**Reaganfan10**

7/07/25 - 2:19PM

Another Judge over stepping his/her bounds.

[Like \(3\)](#)[Dislike \(5\)](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)[Show all 4 replies](#)**incredible1**

7/07/25 - 12:38PM

How much time did the Globe spend looking for an unflattering picture of Ms. McMahon?

[Like \(6\)](#)[Dislike \(15\)](#)[Reply](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)



JJJ

The same amount of time FOX spends looking for bad pictures of Elizabeth Warren.

Like (20)

Dislike (2)

Report

Ignore



LONG_GONE_JOHN

7/07/25 - 3:25PM

Who really care what she looks like besides Trump and MAGA, who only likes white faces. I do take issue with a cabinet secretary—of Education no less—who doesn't know the difference between AI and a certain brand of steak sauce.

Like (4)

Dislike (0)

Report

Ignore

[Show all 5 replies](#)

user_28985

7/07/25 - 1:05PM

Once they issue the press release they all lose interest. MAGA gonna maga.

Like (13)

Dislike (1)

Reply

Report

Ignore



SOXINPA

7/07/25 - 1:12PM

They do less damage at home. Fair trade.

Like (2)

Dislike (15)

Reply

Report

Ignore

This comment has been blocked.

**charlotte sato**

7/07/25 - 8:15PM

But yet it's being done by a Republican administration. So stupid that they don't save any money, but don't get the benefit of work. What are we doing here?

Like (0)

Dislike (0)

Report

Ignore

**Dunelt**

7/07/25 - 3:01PM

What you see is what you get with this woman. A wrestling league low life ...and she's the education secretary? Makes about as much sense as appointing the Real Worlds Sean Duffy as Transportation Secretary, Fox TVs Pete Hegseth as Defense Secretary, RFK jr as Health Secretary, Kristy Noem as Homeland Security Chief, etc. Could there be a less qualified group of people in Trumps cabinet? Oh...yes...of course...the president himself.

Like (11)

Dislike (1)

Reply

Report

Ignore

**friar_tuck**

7/07/25 - 5:38PM

Have you already forgotten the PATHETIC group of DEI appointees Dementia Joe had surrounding him ... Mayor Pete, MAYORKAS, AWOL Austin, Garland ... and perhaps the dumbest of all Cackling Kamala ...

Biden had the least number of Cabinet Meetings in history

Let's not forget the insufferable KJP ... mindless and a LIAR.

Like (1)

Dislike (5)

Report

Ignore



kdl100

she is just a pawn - she isn't driving anything herself.

Like (0)

Dislike (0)

Report

Ignore

Show all 3 replies



DG2007

7/07/25 - 3:08PM

Look at who is in charge, from the top down. They don't know what they are doing and could care less. But Donald is going to save us from the imaginary horrible people who want to take over our country. They're eating the pets of the people who live here!

Like (9)

Dislike (1)

Reply

Report

Ignore



friar_tuck

7/07/25 - 5:41PM

Like your gas prices, egg prices, interest rates, closed border, stock market high, peace in Israel, economy booming, tariffs working, NATO contributing, stronger military , etc., etc.

Looks pretty damn good ...jealous??

Like (1)

Dislike (4)

Report

Ignore



GardenFan64

7/08/25 - 5:04AM

Friar, what are you smoking? Gas, eggs, interest rates, the stock market? They are all tanking. We have all gone through hell for six months. Wake up. Trumps is an idiot.

Like (0)

Dislike (0)

Report

Ignore



Jon from NH, now in CA

7/07/25 - 3:18PM

Thank you for this story. It amazes me how commenters feel qualified to weigh in that education in this country has not improved under the DOE. Me thinks their closed minds are a product of the poor education they received, and why they can't seem to figure out why anyone would want to improve the education system using taxpayer dollars. You can take a horse to water, but...

[Like \(7\)](#)[Dislike \(1\)](#)[Reply](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)**Ahoya**

7/07/25 - 4:45PM

Linda McMahon is a gilf

[Like \(0\)](#)[Dislike \(2\)](#)[Reply](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)**one quart low**

7/07/25 - 5:17PM

"Hey looka here" from Fred Sanford. A crat loses his job on the 7th floor and a week later is working on the 5th floor.
That's what you call the government carousal?

[Like \(0\)](#)[Dislike \(5\)](#)[Reply](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)**RonaldK**

7/07/25 - 5:26PM

What a dog, her picture should not be put in a public place.

[Like \(4\)](#)[Dislike \(2\)](#)[Reply](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)**KeepDreaming**

7/07/25 - 9:24PM

100% agree. Ugly soul.

[Like \(0\)](#)[Dislike \(0\)](#)[Report](#)[Ignore](#)

**user_1700434**

What a bunch of inept fools, McMahon and Trump, no other Administration would pay people for doing nothing, but with Trump that seems to be the norm.

Like (2)

Dislike (0)

Reply

Report

Ignore

**KeepDreaming**

7/07/25 - 9:24PM

So efficient! DOGE was and is an ugly joke. Fascists be damned.

Like (0)

Dislike (0)

Reply

Report

Ignore

**Mike01760**

7/07/25 - 10:38PM

How can the government save money if it can't restructure, reallocate, eliminate non-essential roles if all it takes is a union suit and an liberal activist judges in Boston that says keep paying them? Now if you were a private business or corporation that wouldn't happen....why? Shareholders that's why, but we don't view taxpayers that way in this country, just as someone to pickup the tab. Break public sector unions and government will work better and more efficient.

Like (1)

Dislike (0)

Reply

Report

Ignore

**GreenBean99**

7/12/25 - 3:22AM

The nonprofit mentioned as "Agora" is Agora Education Services (edevaluator.org). Many commenters seem to misunderstand the value of national education statistics. This data isn't just bureaucratic overhead—it's how we know if reading scores are declining, whether achievement gaps are widening, and which interventions actually work. News outlets like the Boston Globe, researchers, and policymakers all depend on this data to make

informed decisions about education policy. When this data collection stops, we're essentially flying blind on a \$800+ billion education system.

Like (0)

Dislike (0)

Reply

Report



Add a Comment (max 500 words)

GreenBean99 (Not you? [Logout](#))

Your comment is subject to the rules of our [Terms of Service](#).

Submit