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Project 2025's Attacks on Public Education



Jeremy Odrich, Former Social Policy & Politics Fellow

Presidential campaigns rarely state their specific policy positions, often leaving voters to fill in the gaps. But the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, written predominantly by high-level Trump aides, offers a uniquely detailed playbook of what a second Trump term would mean for each function of government. Among the most radical changes proposed are the alterations to K-12 education policy. Here, we focus on three of Trump's proposed areas of change that would dramatically reshape public education in the United States: eliminating the Head Start program, defunding Title I, and introducing culture war issues into classrooms. If implemented, these changes would hurt students, families, and educators from coast to coast.

Eliminate the Head Start Program

The Head Start program was created in 1965 as part of Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty. Across its 59-year history, it has helped 39 million families and currently serves 833,000 children each year through

comprehensive education, health care, nutrition, and family services for children living in poverty. Head Start recognizes that the first five years of a child's life are critical to their long-term development. When they are provided key services and support early on, children are more likely to lead productive and healthy lives and rely less on taxpayer-funded programs later in life. And beyond the long-term benefits, Head Start also provides immediate relief to lower-income families who spend as much 36% of their income on child care alone.

Yet Trump's Project 2025 advocates for the complete elimination of the Office of Head Start and the Head Start program it administers. It claims that Head Start is "fraught with scandal and abuse" and that the program provides "little or no long-term academic value for children." But the data show Head Start dramatically improves the lives of its participants. Children enrolled in Head Start are 40% more likely to finish college, 23% less likely to end up in poverty, and 27% less likely to depend on public assistance. In fact, the \$12 billion spent on Head Start each year yields \$84 billion in value as measured by increased earnings and decreased reliance on social services. Reduced poverty and higher educational attainment are hard to square with the claim that Head Start provides no long-term value for children.

The sad irony is that if Trump wins and eliminates Head Start, it will be rural Republican districts who suffer most. Children in rural counties are 37% more likely to live in poverty than their urban counterparts, so they're more likely to rely on Head Start for child care and early childhood education. A study by the Center for American Progress found that a third of all rural child care centers are Head Start Programs. Often, Head Start is the only child care available for these families. Students in rural areas already lag their contemporaries across key education metrics, Trump's education cuts would only widen the gap.

Defund Title I

Donald Trump's Project 2025 not only targets Head Start for elimination, but it also seeks to completely defund Title I. At \$17 billion in funding, the program is the single largest federal aid program for public schools in the country. Currently, one in five students, about 11 million, attend a Title I school. The program provides targeted funding to schools where at least 40% of the students come from low-income families, including schools that serve 200,000 homeless children, 1 million children with disabilities, and 2 million students with limited English proficiency.

Despite its crucial role in educating over 11 million of our country's most disadvantaged students, Project 2025 proposes cutting the program altogether. Trump wants to do this by first converting Title I into a grant for each state with few restrictions on its use. Under his plan, states would receive their Title I funding with no strings attached, free from any federal accountability for how those dollars are used. Then, over a 10-year period, Title I would be defunded entirely, with the burden to educate

students in poverty shifted fully to the states. Notably, the plan fails to address how states will fill the massive funding gap that will result from Title I's elimination.

It is important to be clear about what this cut means: millions of homeless, disabled, and otherwise under-served children will lose support with no alternative program to fill in the gaps. And much like the proposed elimination of Head Start, students in red states will bear the brunt of this burden. While Title I is mostly associated with large urban schools, it is also a key component of education in red states. Red states consistently rank lowest for total spending on education and highest on their reliance of Title I spending per pupil. In fact, four of the five most Title I-reliant states are run by Republicans (Mississippi, Louisiana, Montana, and Arizona).

Bring Culture Wars into the Classroom

As if defunding public education isn't enough, there is another insidious element to Trump's Project 2025 education platform—its insistence on injecting culture wars into the classroom.

Divisive and extreme stances on social issues are woven throughout the entirety of Project 2025 and are not just found in the education section. But their effects in this area would be felt most acutely by students in classrooms across the country. These proposals include:

- Rescinding federal civil rights protections for LGBT students;
- Decreasing funding for students with disabilities;
- Equating content about same-sex families in children's books/school curricula with pornography;
- Classifying librarians as sex offenders if they stock books about LGBT people;
- Allowing parents to sue schools over curricular content that offends them;
- Restricting the teaching of gender identity, sexual orientation, race, and history; and,
- Requiring teachers to out gay and transgender students, even if they live in an unsafe environment.

While the authors of Project 2025 claim they want to minimize federal involvement in education, the reality is that their plans would only bring more. Content that does not align with their worldview would be outlawed or equated with pornography. LGBT students would be left vulnerable to discrimination. Teaching about race and history would be limited only to what Trump and his advisors deem appropriate. And allowing parents the right to sue schools over curricular content they disagree with would require a massive federal enforcement apparatus. This is not lessening the role of the

federal government in education; it is a top-down remaking of our education system where only one worldview is permissible.

Conclusion

Donald Trump has repeatedly tried to distance himself from Project 2025 and for good reason. Its policy proposals are so radically out of step with the majority of Americans that only 4% of voters report viewing the policy platform positively. But more than half of Project 2025's authors, editors, and contributors are former Trump administration officials, including at least six of his former cabinet secretaries. These are the same people that will helm government agencies should Trump win a second term. So, when Trump's Project 2025 promises to eliminate Head Start, defund Title I, and inject divisive cultural issues into classrooms, it should be taken seriously. These changes will erode the health, safety, and education of millions of American children.

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[ALL TOPICS](#)[K-12 45](#)