



Statement of Policy: Abolition of the U.S. Department of Education March 10, 2025

The Trump administration secured its election victory in 2024 in part because of a pledge to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education (USDE). This document outlines the policy for the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) in response to this initiative.

POLICY 1: ACSI will not oppose the elimination of the USDE. We are strongly inclined to *support* it, but only if the process includes religious liberty protections in any reallocated program or process.

POLICY 2: If Congress chooses to provide block grants of federal funds to the states, the statute must include ways for religious schools to participate voluntarily without making them recipients of federal financial assistance (FFA). Equitable services and/or certificates for parents are the best methods to achieve this. The statute would need language requiring states to obey the Supreme Court’s principle in [Trinity Lutheran Church v. Comer \(2017\)](#) in which government may not exclude religious schools from programs of general applicability.

Reasoning for Policy 1:

1. **USDE has never been a friend of religious education.** Worse, in recent years it has been weaponized against religious education. The Department of Education’s use of Title IX regulations to attack human dignity by requiring males in women’s sports and private spaces is perhaps the best recent example.
2. **The USDE was famously a political gift from President Jimmy Carter to public sector unions, not to students or parents, and especially not to religious parents.**
3. **The USDE has very little to do with educating American children and has a record unworthy of support.** According to the [Congressional Research Service \(August 2024\)](#) USDE provides less than 10% of school funding. It very appropriately does not accredit schools; it does not and should not set testing standards. In many ways, it simply administers programs as a kind of middleman. In fact, in a recent op-ed in [The Free Press](#), former Education Secretary Betsy DeVos said “since its creation in 1979, the Department of Education has sent well more than [\\$1 trillion](#) to schools with the express purpose of closing the gaps between the highest and lowest performers. Today, those gaps are as wide as they have ever been, and by many measures, even wider.” She points to abysmal scores on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) in which “most students were even further behind than they were in 2022. Which was worse than [where they were in 2019](#). Which was worse than 2013.”

Solutions: Reasoning for Policy 2.

ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOLS INTERNATIONAL

Phone 719.528.6906 | Fax 719.531.0631 | [ACSI.org](#)
Post Office Box 62249 Colorado Springs, CO 80962

How might it happen? If the USDE is eliminated, federal education programs themselves likely will not disappear. Rather, most legislation is most likely to reallocate federal programs to other agencies. However, one recurring idea is to provide federal block grants to the states, perhaps by eliminating one or more programs to fund block grants.

To ensure religious school participation, three key factors need to be part of the solution. Any proposal must ensure that religious schools are not recipients of federal financial assistance (FFA). A block grant process should therefore include either or both:

1. **Equitable services** – ensure that children in religious schools have access to *services* provided by a government agency such as a local education agency (LEA). The process has worked since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) passed in 1965.
2. **Certificates** – provide certificates funded by the federal block grant to parents, which they can use at private and religious schools. The definition of a certificate must make clear that it is not FFA. Certificates have been in use in early education since the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) Act passed in 1993.
3. **Protect Religious Liberty** – a statute creating block grants must also include a requirement that states honor the principles in the Supreme Court’s ruling in *Trinity Lutheran v. Comer*, which forbids discrimination against religious institutions in programs of general applicability. State programs funded by federal dollars must respect this fundamental principle and not be allowed to use federal dollars to exclude religious schools.

Other Considerations to Be Evaluated:

There are risks in any approach, and the Christian school movement will need to pay close attention as the debate continues.

The USDE began as an information clearinghouse and could resume that role as or in another agency.

The USDE’s Office of Non-Public Education (ONPE) is a very small team of dedicated public servants that has done its part to ensure access to public funds for religious schools that choose to participate in them. A block grant program should consider preserving ONPE in some form or replicating it through creative means such as ensuring a federal ombudsman for religious education.