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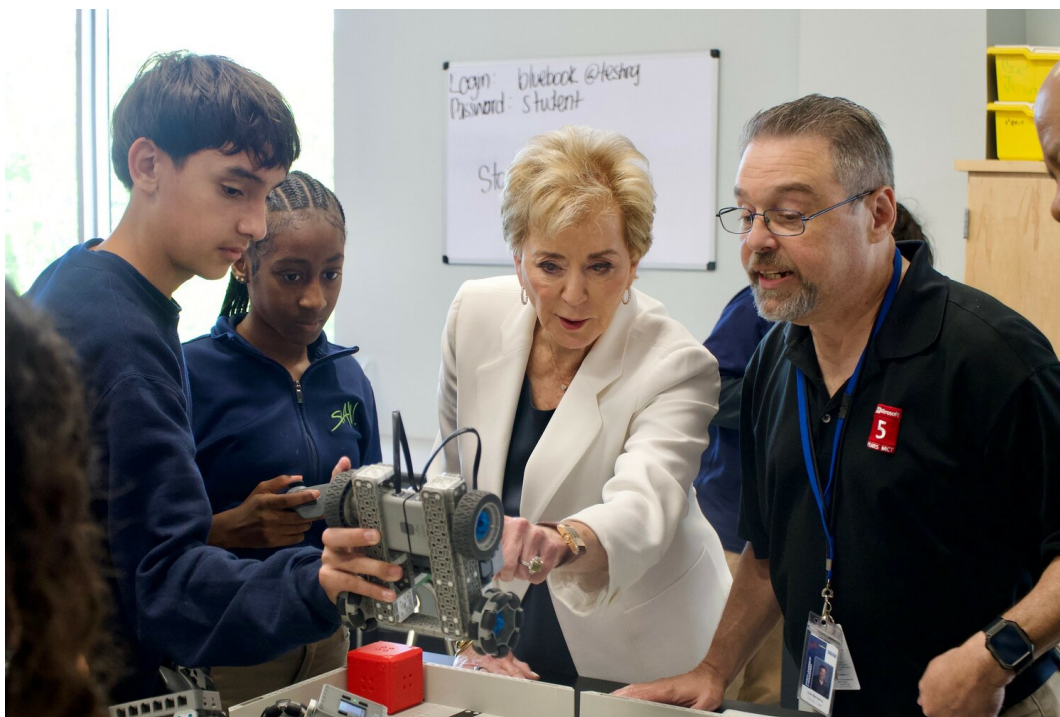
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Fed'1 DOE to lay off more than 1,300 employees, including some in NYC

About one-third of agency's workers could be fired



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The Supreme Court has effectively OK'd the Trump administration's dismantling of the federal Department of Education, an effort being overseen by Education Secretary Linda McMahon, pictured above.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Posted Monday, July 21, 2025 11:59 am

BY STERLING SEWELL The Chief

More than 1,300 workers at the federal Department of Education could lose their jobs following last week's U.S. Supreme Court decision that essentially greenlights the Trump administration's effort to dismantle the agency.

For New Yorkers, the firings could lead to less responsiveness regarding civil rights protections and student financial aid disbursement. The DOE is responsible for managing federal student loans, dispersing federal funding to public school districts, collecting data on nationwide student achievement and enforcing civil rights laws for federal education funding recipients.

The combined layoffs, along with retirements, could cut the Education Department's workforce by roughly 50 percent, down from the more than 4,000 employees it had at the beginning of the year and those losses would slam the Office of Civil Rights.

The OCR is responsible for enforcing federal laws prohibiting discrimination in schools or educational programs that use federal funding, including those in public schools, charter schools, universities and trade schools.

Much of the OCR's work is enforcement-based, said Brittany Coleman, an attorney for the Office of Civil Rights and a chief steward with AFGE Local 252, and that work is being compromised.

Seven of the OCR's 12 regional offices were shuttered in March, including those in New York City and Boston. Complaints that typically would have been handed off to regional offices closest to the complainant to process and investigate are now being handled elsewhere, with claims from the New York City area are now being handled by the Washington, D.C., office.

"Keep in mind, we were already understaffed anyway when we had 'full staff.' Our cases have been increasing every year and people are already overwhelmed," Coleman, who is based in Dallas, told The Chief last week. "So, now, the poor D.C. metro office is having to handle all those cases from New York and from Boston."

Gregory Faulkner, board chair of New York City Public Schools' Panel for Educational Policy, said the cuts could measurably increase instances of civil rights violations with no follow-ups.

"The biggest thing for me when you see the dismantling of an office like that, what the federal government is saying to us is 'It's OK to begin doing this stuff, because we're no longer going to be looking at it,'" Faulkner said in an interview last week. "We don't know who's going to be empowered to do things like this because there's no longer an office holding them accountable."

Coleman also noted that working in a regional office allows OCR employees to get to know the schools and districts they work in. That familiarity can expedite cases as negotiations between the regional office and local school administration can prevent cases from going through a longer court process, providing quicker relief to students. She also noted that employees often have to travel to address complaints in the regions they cover.

"It just makes sense financially that if you have a regional office that is just closer, you are going to save money on travel," Coleman said.

According to Coleman, on the day OCR employees were sent home, some employees realized that they could no longer use their work email to send mail to individuals outside of the department.

"If someone had a complaint in the New York office, for instance, and they had a pending complaint and they wanted to get a status update or if they had a question, we could receive their emails, but we could not respond back to them," Coleman said. "Which meant that, unfortunately, those complaints were left in the dark."

The OCR dismissed nearly 900 more cases between March and June than in the last three months of the Biden administration. The OCR under the Trump administration has opened 309 investigations between March and June, compared to 674 during the Biden administration's last three months.

Union fight

Coleman said the union is prepared to file a formal grievance, and potentially to go to arbitration should the layoffs continue, claiming that the firings were done in breach of the union's contract.

According to documents sent to union officials by the Education Department in March, 31 AFGE Local 252 employees in New York were initially up for layoffs before the judge's injunction. Following the Supreme Court decision, 13 of these employees will be immediately impacted by the potential layoffs.

The high court's decision included a temporary carveout for OCR employees. For the time being, those employees will remain on administrative leave.

All but one of the union employees set to be immediately impacted are from the Financial Student Aid Office, which manages financial assistance programs for nearly 10 million students.

Melanie Storey, president and CEO of the National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, said that since March, financial aid administrators have faced communications difficulties with the department.

"Our members, who work in financial aid offices at colleges and universities across the country, have reported operational delays, breakdowns in federal support systems, and an erosion of communication channels with the Department following the staff reductions in March," Storey said in a statement.

Storey also noted that these difficulties are likely to be felt by students and families who may have a more unpredictable experience receiving financial aid. According to Aaron Pallas, Ph.D., professor of sociology and education at Columbia University, this potential for unpredictable funding will likely be felt by schools and universities.

“The things that involve money, I think it's really important to have a professional workforce who knows how to allocate money so that it gets in the hands of the intended recipients,” Pallas said. “So, the biggest risk, I think, of the possible firing of these 1,300 or 1,400 workers is the department will be left without the capacity to ensure money will get to the right places.”

The Supreme Court’s decision overturned a preliminary injunction brought by U.S. District Judge Myong Joun of Boston. Joun’s injunction prevented the Trump administration from firing the employees until the conclusion of the lawsuit brought against the administration. As a result, employees set to be fired have remained on paid administrative leave since March. Without Joun’s injunction, the employees would have been fired in June.

“The record abundantly reveals that Defendants’ true intention is to effectively dismantle the Department without an authorizing statute,” Joun said regarding his preliminary injunction.

More than 500 Education Department employees have already left since the beginning of the year through the Trump administration’s buyout and early retirement offers. Layoffs are likely to begin even as the lawsuit to determine the legality of the Trump administration’s move is set to continue. While Congress is still the only body that can permanently disband the department, the case will likely determine the extent to which the administration can shave department employees and functions.

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