



Education Roundtable

**“What Dismantling the Department of Education Means for
Students”**

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ORAL TESTIMONY

***Augustus Mays, Vice President for Partnerships and
Engagement***

Congressman Scott, members of the House Democratic Caucus, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.

My name is Augustus Mays, and I’m the vice president for partnerships and engagement at EdTrust. EdTrust is a national nonprofit organization focused on closing opportunity gaps and advancing racial and economic justice in education. We believe education is not just a pathway to opportunity — it is a civil right. The Department of Education has been charged with clearing those pathways and enforcing those rights through programmatic funding, data collection, and legal actions for over four decades. But under this administration, educational access for too many students — especially Black, Latino, and Native students, students from low-income backgrounds, English learners, and students with disabilities — is hanging by a thread.

Over the last year, we have witnessed an unprecedented assault on public education from the Trump administration that will have

devastating, long-term consequences for students for generations. Over the course of the prior year, the Trump administration delayed or cancelled over 12 billion dollars of federal education funding – funding that supports teacher preparation, before-and-after school programs, civil rights enforcement, mental health supports, and access to public education for underserved students to name only a few. The impact of these actions is a loss of services and supports for millions of students, especially students of color, students from low-income backgrounds, students with disabilities, and those who are undocumented or have family members who are.

And the administration's campaign to dismantle public education goes beyond cutting funding. Last year, Congress passed the reconciliation law that includes an unprecedented private school voucher tax scheme that will provide billions for private school access for wealthy families. Furthermore, the legislation includes devastating cuts to SNAP and Medicaid that will destroy state budgets and deny students and families' access to food and health supports.

The attacks on public education escalated in November when the administration announced their intentions to unlawfully dismantle the Department of Education and sell it for parts. By fragmenting programs and services across as many as six different federal agencies, states, cities, and school districts will have to navigate multiple agencies and points of contact in the federal government to get information on funding status, technical assistance, and legal guidance for programs. As funding shifts into systems and agencies not built for education, bottlenecks will arise: grants stall, states and districts face conflicting rules and new systems, and federal

dollars may lapse before reaching students, like we saw last summer when the administration illegally withheld funding for after school programs and English learners, among other student populations.

We've already seen the problems created for states and districts in the wake of an illegal transfer of the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education to the Department of Labor last summer. States reported technical problems, communication lapses, bureaucratic hurdles, and delays in funding.

This approach treats K-12 students as widgets to be plugged into a job training system that has little to do with assisting homeless youth or supporting the arts. Let's be very clear: our students from low-income backgrounds and students of color are the learners that are placed at highest risk by these unlawful transfers.

We expect additional transfers in the coming weeks despite the fact that as recently as last week, the President signed into law a bipartisan appropriations bill that prohibits the transfer of funding from the Department of Education to other Federal agencies, and added report language stating there is no authority that allows them to take these actions.

Finally, by encouraging states to request waivers from ESSA, the administration is potentially allowing low-performing schools to be hidden from view and vital funding streams dedicated to historically underserved students, including rural students and students of color, to be block granted. We are speaking out against those policy choices and will be watching closely as more waiver requests are filed.

Make no mistake: we are living in what EdTrust calls the Great American Heist. But we stand ready to fight for the future of public education and reimagine a system where investments are increased, civil rights are enforced, privatization is rejected, and opportunities are expanded for students of color and students from low-income backgrounds at every level, in every ZIP code. Our students, the nation's greatest resource, deserve nothing less.

Thank you for the opportunity to join this conversation, and I look forward to your questions.