

UNCATEGORIZED

Education policy: How it will shift under new administration

By Dr. Dana Godek and Michael Moore December 3, 2024



The nomination of Linda McMahon as the new secretary of education under the Trump administration is getting a lot of attention in the education policy landscape. Her varied background—from leading WWE, serving as the head of the Small Business Administration, and service on the Connecticut Board of Education, to her role as chair of the America First Policy Institute—indicates a potential pivot in federal education priorities.

Given her business acumen, long-standing relationship with President Trump and involvement in conservative policy-making, McMahon's tenure is likely to emphasize workforce development, parental rights and a decentralization of federal education oversight.

A focus on workforce readiness

A likely area of immediate focus for McMahon in 2025 is leveraging existing federal funding mechanisms like Perkins V, which already distributes funds directly to states to support career and technical education. Expanding on this framework aligns neatly with the Trump administration's promise to decentralize education by "putting it in the hands of states."

Perkins V funding, combined with the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, provides a natural pathway to prioritize apprenticeship programs and workforce readiness initiatives. Similarly, higher education leaders can expect a push to include workforce training under Pell Grant eligibility and an increased emphasis on apprenticeships. This opens options for



students and families, but also significantly widens the post-secondary market to private training organizations, diverting potential funding away from colleges and universities.

For school districts, this focus on workforce readiness could mean a reallocation by states of federal funding toward career pathway initiatives, partnerships with local industries and high school curricula revamped or broadened to support technical pathways. While this pivot may benefit students pursuing non-college pathways, critics may argue that it comes at the expense of broader educational priorities, such as academic enrichment, holistic student development or so-called 21st Century skills

Districts can also expect a push to connect more substantively with state and local workforce investment boards, ensuring that schools align their CTE programs with the demands of regional labor markets. This strategy not only fulfills campaign promises but also signals a shift toward integrating education and economic policy, making workforce development a central component of federal education priorities.

We may also see a shift toward competency-based models, 'stacked' micro-credentialing, and related instructional approaches modeled on workforce needs.

Expanding parental control

McMahon's affiliation with policy organizations advocating decentralization underscores her commitment to parental rights and school choice. The president-elect's stated goal of "sending education back to the states" aligns with McMahon's likely agenda to promote charter schools, voucher programs and other mechanisms for parental control over educational decisions.

Her policies may include mandates for curriculum transparency, similar to recent state-level efforts, and the reallocation of federal funds to support school choice initiatives. This emphasis could shift resources away from traditional public schools, which may face tighter budgets and increased scrutiny over their curricula.

For superintendents, this will require navigating complex conversations with local communities, as some parents embrace these changes while others resist the decline of public school funding. Smart districts will find ways to leverage these changes to deepen relationships with parents who are frustrated by traditional settings.

3 tips to Consider

- 1. Increased federal support for CTE and apprenticeships will provide more opportunities for students to gain real-world skills.** Start engaging in work-based learning planning early. Reach out to business leaders now and structure a routine engagement plan to keep a pulse on their needs.
- 2. Expanded vouchers and charter school programs would give parents more control over their children's education.** Host parent roundtables now and clearly communicate changes you will make to respond to their needs, then act upon it. McMahon's focus on parental rights makes it essential for district leaders to build transparent relationships with families.
- 3. Reduced federal support and reallocated funding may strain already tight budgets.** Conduct a sobering ROI/LOI process with your cabinet and other key leaders. Advocate for your schools by strengthening relationships with state policymakers and ensuring your district's voice is heard.



2026 and beyond

Looking ahead to 2026 and beyond, the Trump administration is likely to pursue a reauthorization of the Every Student Succeeds Act with a focus on reshaping how federal education funds are allocated.

Building on the decentralized framework of Perkins V, entitlement and categorical funding could be distributed in a manner that aligns more closely with state-controlled models. This shift would empower states to have greater discretion over how federal dollars are used, emphasizing local innovation and workforce alignment over prescriptive federal mandates.

Districts should prepare for a landscape where funding streams are tied to measurable outcomes, such as workforce readiness, and prioritize partnerships with industries and workforce development boards. This reauthorization would represent a significant philosophical shift, signaling a move away from traditional equity-driven approaches in favor of economic outcomes and state flexibility.

For many districts, this could bring new opportunities to tailor programs to regional needs but also introduce challenges in ensuring equitable access for underserved communities.

How to remain resilient

Beyond 2026, significant changes within the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education are likely under the Trump administration. The department may shift away from providing federal training and technical assistance, particularly in areas supporting English language learners, special education, and other special populations.

This reduced federal involvement would place greater responsibility on states and districts to develop their own training and support mechanisms for these vulnerable groups. While this aligns with the administration's goal of decentralizing education, it could create gaps in expertise and equity, as not all states have the capacity to provide high-quality, targeted support.

For superintendents, this potential change highlights the urgency of proactively building state-level capacity and partnering with organizations that can fill the void left by reduced federal guidance. Without a deliberate focus on these populations, de-centralizing the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education's role risks leaving critical student groups behind in the broader push for workforce alignment and economic mobility.

Linda McMahon's tenure as secretary of education is poised to bring significant change. With a focus on the bipartisan issue of workforce development, school choice, and decentralizing federal control, she represents a pragmatic, business-first approach to education policy.

While her leadership may streamline certain processes and empower local decision-making, it also risks deepening inequities and challenging the stability of traditional public schools.

As we move into 2025, district leaders must prepare to adapt. By staying engaged with parents, community leaders, and policymakers, superintendents can ensure their schools remain resilient amidst this evolving landscape.



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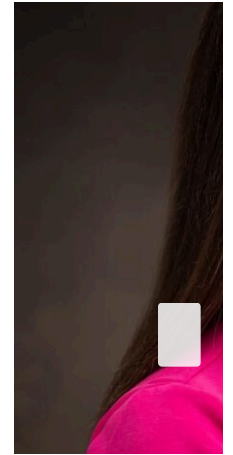
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