

Statement from the California School Boards Association on the proposed closure of the U.S. Department of Education

On March 20, President Donald J. Trump issued an executive order titled, “Improving Education Outcomes by Empowering Parents, States, and Communities,” that, among other objectives, calls for closing the U.S. Department of Education. This action has raised questions about the role and utility of the agency, and the impact its potential dissolution might have on education at the state and local level.

The executive order ventures into uncharted territory and would require Congressional approval as that body established the federal Department of Education in 1979. It may also be subject to legal challenges, but regardless of the resolution, the discussion should center around one fundamental value: the education and betterment of the nation’s students.

Whatever changes take place at the Department of Education, the federal government should retain core functions that promote student success. Ensuring students receive the support they need to reach their full potential and realize positive scholastic, career and life outcomes is essential to maintain and expand America’s scientific, technological and financial leadership position in a competitive global economy.

Determining which federal services are most effective at supporting and enhancing the work local educational agencies perform to accelerate student achievement, and which might reasonably be discarded, supports the emphasis CSBA places on the principle of local control. Local control is a core value for CSBA, and we are ardent believers in building the capacity of school districts and county offices of education instead of relying on state and federal mandates to drive student achievement. We believe a comprehensive evaluation of the Department of Education, coupled with input from end-users, could identify unnecessary or duplicative activities while providing a holistic picture of federal impact on student achievement.

CSBA is focused on ensuring schools have the necessary funding, services and support required for all students to thrive. The federal government’s financial contribution to this effort typically accounts for 6 to 9 percent of California’s TK-12 education expenditures. This is funding that largely serves our most vulnerable pupils, such as low-income students and students with disabilities. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education performs research and provides assessments that can help guide improvements in instructional practice, student support and student achievement. This is critical work that should be maintained in the interest of accelerating ongoing efforts to improve public schools.

Protecting and enhancing tools that LEAs use to boost academic performance is the paramount objective. The executive order directs the U.S Secretary of Education to ensure any potential closure does not affect the “effective and uninterrupted delivery of services, programs and benefits on which Americans rely.” CSBA supports the goal of preserving critical services and looks forward to continued engagement with our representatives at the state and federal level on how to best support public schools and the students they serve.

