

Waste Land: General ED Policy Recommendations

NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION
of SCHOLARS

Core Functions

The Education Department (ED) should focus on its four core functions, which constitute the large majority of its fiscal responsibilities: Title I aid to disadvantaged school districts; Special Education; Pell Grants; and Federal Student Loans. A few other functions, such as support for English Language Acquisitions and State Standards, may be worth some support. Policymakers should eliminate virtually all other programs, to enable them to create proper accountability mechanisms for the simpler core of ED.

Depoliticization and Ending Discrimination

All ED programs that discriminate on grounds such as race or sex, such as Equity Requirements in IDEA, should be rescinded. So too should all performance measures of “equity” and similar concepts. Programs that fund politicized activities such as Social and Emotional Learning also should be rescinded.

Non-Educational Programs

ED funds activities such as mental health and social welfare. Some of these cannot be assessed objectively (mental health), others are susceptible to politicization, and all are activities that should be funded by departments such as Health and Human Services, if they are to be funded by the federal government at all. ED only should fund programs *directly* related to education.

Administrative Bloat

Total ED personnel has risen about 12%, from 2019 to 2023, from *ca.* 4,100 to 4,614. The public and policymakers should scrutinize ED generally for administrative bloat. They should examine particularly carefully the Office of Finance and Operations; Planning, Evaluation, and Program Development; the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education; and the Immediate Office of the Secretary of Education (IOSE), all of which have grown sharply in numbers in the last few years.

Transparent Budgeting

ED should provide the funding source, budget, and the personnel for each of its administrative units in a clear, easy-to-find portion of its website.

Objective Assessments

The public and policymakers should require ED to provide quantitative, objective, and precise assessments of its programs’ effectiveness, which provide comparisons between beneficiaries of ED funds and control groups who have not received ED funds, state explicitly the known relationship of proxies for educational attainment such as teacher certification, state explicitly when ED does not have information on the return on investment for ED spending in educational attainment, assess the presumptions of programs (e.g., that improving state assessment actually will improve educational attainment), and rely on research no more than 5 years old.

Efficiency Measures

ED should adopt efficiency measures—measures of its own administrators’ efficiency—throughout the department. Best existing practices should be standardized throughout ED, and an array of new efficiency measures should be introduced forthwith.