

# The Push to End the Department of Education Is Gaining Momentum

The debate over the federal role in education has been going on for decades. Some say the feds should have a relatively large role while others say it should be relatively small. But while most people believe there should be at least some federal oversight, some believe there should be none at all.

Rep. Thomas Massie is one of those who believes there should be no federal involvement in education, and he is actively working to make that a reality. In February 2021, he introduced [H.R. 899](#), a bill that perfectly encapsulates his views on this issue. It consists of one sentence:

*This bill terminates the Department of Education on December 31, 2022.*

This position may seem radical, but Massie is not alone. The bill had eight cosponsors when it was introduced and has been gaining support ever since. On Monday, Massie [announced](#) that Rep. Mo Brooks (R-Ala.) decided to cosponsor the bill, bringing the [total number of cosponsors to 18](#).

Though it may be tempting to think Massie and his supporters just don't care about education, this is certainly not the case. If anything, they are pushing to end the federal Department of Education *precisely because* they care about educational outcomes. In their view, the Department is at best not helping and, at worst, may actually be part of the problem.

“Unelected bureaucrats in Washington, D.C. should not be in charge of our children’s intellectual and moral

development,” [said](#) Massie when he initially introduced the bill. “States and local communities are best positioned to shape curricula that meet the needs of their students.”

Massie is echoing sentiments expressed by President Ronald Reagan in 1981, who advocated dismantling the Department of Education even though it had just begun operating in 1980.

“By eliminating the Department of Education less than 2 years after it was created,” [said](#) Reagan, “we cannot only reduce the budget but ensure that local needs and preferences, rather than the wishes of Washington, determine the education of our children.”

Before we rush into a decision like this, however, it’s important to consider the consequences. As G. K. Chesterton famously [said](#), “don’t ever take a fence down until you know the reason it was put up.”

So, why was the federal Department of Education set up in the first place? What do they do with their [\\$68 billion budget](#)? Well, when it was initially established it was given [4 main roles](#), and these are the same roles it fulfills to this day. They are:

- Establishing policies on federal financial aid for education, and distributing as well as monitoring those funds (which comprise roughly 8 percent of elementary and secondary education spending).
- Collecting data on America’s schools and disseminating research.
- Focusing national attention on key educational issues.
- Prohibiting discrimination and ensuring equal access to education.

Now, some of these functions arguably shouldn’t exist at all. For instance, if you are opposed to federal funding or federal interference in education on principle, then there is no need for the first and fourth roles. As for the middle two roles,

it's clear that we need people collecting data, disseminating research, and pointing out educational issues. But the question here is not whether these initiatives should exist. The question is whether the federal government should pursue them.

On *that* question, there's a good case to be made that leaving these tasks to the state and local level is far more appropriate. Education needs vary from student to student, so educational decisions need to be made as close to the individual student as possible. Federal organizations simply can't account for the diverse array of educational contexts, which means their one-size-fits-all findings and recommendations will be poorly suited for many classrooms.

Teachers don't need national administrators telling them how to do their job. They need the freedom and flexibility to tailor their approach to meet the needs of students. It is the local teachers, schools, and districts that know their students' needs best, which is why *they* are best positioned to gather data, assess their options, and make decisions about how to meet those needs. Imposing top-down national ideas only gets in the way of these adaptive, customized, local processes.

The federal Department of Education has lofty goals when it comes to student success, but it is simply not the right institution for achieving them. If we really want to improve education, it's going to require a bottom-up, decentralized approach. So rather than continuing to fund yet another federal bureaucracy, perhaps it's time to let taxpayers keep their money, and let educators and parents pursue a better avenue for change.

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