

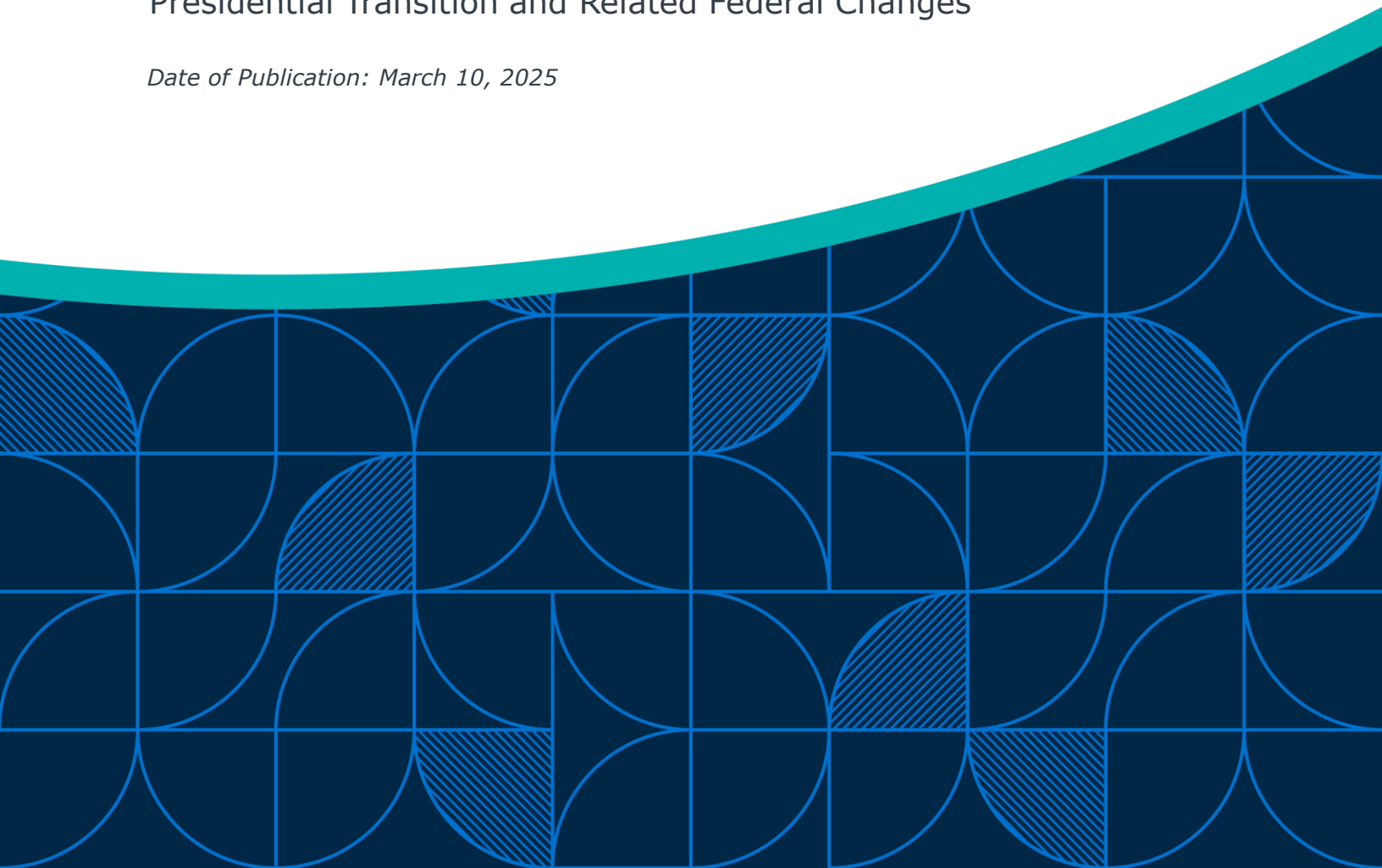


DISTRICT LEADERSHIP FORUM

Federal Policy Primer and Discussion Guide

A Guide to Help District Leaders Navigate the 2025
Presidential Transition and Related Federal Changes

Date of Publication: March 10, 2025



Introducing the District Leadership Forum

School systems nationwide are all trying to address the same challenges, but few—if any—have the resources to solve those problems alone. The District Leadership Forum serves as a shared research department for a network of more than 200 districts nationwide, finding innovative, practical solutions to current challenges. Our goal is simple: *Help school systems get further, faster, together.*



EAB Helps Partners Accelerate Progress by:

Finding practical solutions to K-12's up-at-night challenges

- Annual Forum research agenda
- Custom reports on district-specific issues
- Online library with research briefs and insight papers

Equipping leaders with essential insights and expertise

- Executive roundtables for superintendents
- On-site presentations and workshops
- Executive skill trainings

Helping each district turn research into reality and results

- Personalized implementation planning pathways
- Implementation planning cohorts, toolkits, and resources
- Unlimited access to strategic advising from EAB experts

Benefits of Partnering with EAB



Expand the capacity and effectiveness of your team



Accelerate progress on key issues



Avoid costly missteps and wasted effort



Stay ahead of the curve

Hear why superintendents love working with EAB



Navigating a New Federal Policy Landscape

Key Considerations for Leaders in K-12 School Districts

The second Trump administration has introduced a sweeping policy agenda with significant implications for K-12 education. District leaders must navigate these policy directives while considering consequences for district funding, staffing, community support, and – most importantly – student success. Successful navigation of policy changes will require superintendents to engage constituents in informed, efficient, and productive discussion on “what’s changed,” the implications for their schools, and how their district will respond.

This primer is designed to equip district leadership teams and boards with a succinct summary of key changes in federal policy, strategic actions to consider, and essential questions for discussion. Sections of this document address the following topics:



Efforts to Dismantle Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Education

Key takeaways from the Executive Order, Dear Colleague Letter



Changes in Gender Recognition and Protections

How recent orders will change transgender students’ experiences at school



Changes in Immigration Enforcement Practices

How recent orders and legislation may change immigrants’ experiences at school



Anticipated Changes in Federal Funding and Support for K-12 Education

How changes in funding may impact programs and data available to schools



NOTE: This document is not to be construed as legal advice. The implications mentioned may vary between states and institutions. Information and analysis in this document are current as of the date of publication and are subject to change. Consult with legal counsel before taking responsive action.

Efforts to Dismantle DEI in Education

Summary of Changes

Early Executive Orders Aim to End All “Illegal DEI” Programs, Including Those In K12 Education

EOs 14151 and 14173—issued January 20 and 21—mandate public schools to eliminate DEI programs that violate federal civil rights laws.¹

However, the EOs provide no clear definition of “DEI preferences, mandates, policies, programs, and activities,” leaving schools to interpret its vague language under the threat of federal investigation.

“Dear Colleague Letter” (DCL) Uses Legal Precedent to Argue All Race-Based Practices Are Illegal

On February 14, 2025, the Department of Education (ED) released a DCL detailing the administration’s interpretation of the Supreme Court’s 2023 decision in *Students for Fair Admissions v. Harvard*², which ruled that the race-conscious admissions policies in higher education are unconstitutional.

Based on that ruling, the DCL asserts that, “If an educational institution [including schools] treats a person of one race differently than it treats another person because of that person’s race, the educational institution violates the law.” Therefore, they view all race-based practices as illegal.

A subsequent FAQ³, released on March 1, clarified that:

- Schools would have an opportunity to correct compliance violations before facing loss of funding
- Any use of racial classifications must meet strict scrutiny under the Fourteenth Amendment
- Cultural events, such as Black History Month, are permissible if they are open to all students.

Two points are important to note:

1. The DCL does not create new law. A court ruling would be needed for the administration’s interpretation to become binding.
2. While lawsuits are pending, the administration is free to enforce its interpretation of the law until a court rules otherwise.

ED Launches the “End DEI” Portal, Where School Stakeholders Can Report “Illegal” School Practices

On February 27, ED launched the End DEI Portal⁴ as a way for parents, students, teachers, and the community to submit reports of discrimination based on race or sex in K12 schools.

Recommendations for Districts

Define and Educate Staff on What is Legally Required for Your District

While many states have implemented anti-DEI legislation, the DCL is simply the administration’s interpretation of an existing legal decision and does not create new law. Several lawsuits⁵, filed by associations such as the American Federation of Teachers, are currently working through the courts, and the timeline for Supreme Court involvement is uncertain. However, there is currently no court order blocking the administration from implementing their interpretation. To avoid confusion in your community, work with your district’s attorney to establish clear definitions of the DEI-related policies that the district is legally required to adopt and how the district intends to implement related practices.

Define “At Risk” Practices and Changes That May Become Necessary

Identify practices, policies, or programs that may be deemed “illegal” under the Trump administration’s interpretation and determine how those practices should be altered if deemed illegal in their current form. Consider using the practices listed in the DCL FAQ as a guide to identify programs that may need to change.

Consider Scaling Crucial Equity Practices for the Benefit of All Students

Practices that benefit students needing additional support frequently benefit all. Therefore, one way to avoid engaging in race-based practices is to make high-impact practices available to all students in the district. Leaders should establish committees to discuss which practices previously used for equity purposes are worthy and viable to expand district-wide.

Strategic Question

How can we sustain practices that support success for historically marginalized groups of students without making those practices contingent on a student’s race?

Changes in Gender Recognition and Protections

Summary of Changes

Courts Blocked the Biden Administration’s Amendments to Title IX, Including Protections for Transgender Students

On January 9, 2025, a federal judge invalidated the Biden administration's 2024 Title IX rule that extended many protections to transgender students.

Therefore, 2020 Title IX regulations and compliance requirements⁷ have been restored. Notably, rights and protections for transgender students, including restroom access and participation in female athletic competitions, have been removed.

The Federal Government Now Recognizes Only Two Biological Sexes (Male and Female)

In January 2025, the new administration issued an EO⁸ defining biological sex as male or female, based on immutable characteristics at conception. This reverses previous policies that recognized gender identity as distinct from biological sex and instructs federal agencies to enforce laws accordingly. Additionally, there has been a change in reporting options on federal forms; the use of gender-neutral or nonbinary markers (e.g., “X” designations) may no longer be recognized in federal education databases.

Teachers and School Officials May Face Increased Legal Risk When Affirming “Social Transition” for Students

On January 20, the administration published “Ending Radical Indoctrination.” This order directs the Attorney General to collaborate with state Attorneys General and local district attorneys in their efforts to address K-12 teachers and school officials unlawfully facilitating the social transition of a minor student.

The order states that actions supporting “social transition” include psychological counseling, modifying a name, and allowing students to use intimate facilities or participate in sports that are aligned with their gender identity rather than biological sex.

Recommendations for Districts

Educate teachers and staff on changes in federal reporting forms and how to support affected students

Ensure all school staff reporting federal data are aware of the new regulations.

Equip staff with information to use when working with impacted students and families, such as how to explain implications of federal form reporting options when taking students on trips.

Ensure the availability of single-use facilities to avoid issues in use of “intimate spaces”

To avoid potential legal action related to Title IX, a single-use facility should not replace a single-sex facility.¹¹ See ED’s Title IX guidance [here](#) and consult with your legal team about following Title IX guidance.

Define and communicate supports available to affected students and staff

Leaders should anticipate an increase in mental health challenges among nonbinary and transgender students and staff, as well as those indirectly affected by these directives.¹⁰ Therefore, we recommend compiling and distributing an inventory of relevant resources and mental health services available within your district and region.

Strategic Question

How can we sustain an inclusive environment for non-cisgender students while complying with required changes in reporting and Title IX?

Changes in Immigration Enforcement Practices

Summary of Policy Changes

Immigration Enforcement Officials May Now Conduct Operations in Schools

On January 21, 2025, the Department of Homeland Security issued a directive rescinding the Obama-era “protected areas” policy,¹² which prevented immigration officials from conducting operations in areas such as hospitals, churches, and schools. Officials still need a judicial warrant to enter non-public areas.¹³

The head of ICE later issued a directive that requires officers get supervisor approval to make immigration arrests in protected areas.¹⁴

Local Police May Conduct Immigration Operations

In *Protecting the American People Against Invasion*,¹⁵ President Trump directed the Department of Homeland Security to establish 287(g) agreements with state and local law enforcement agencies, allowing local officers to perform the duties of immigration agents.

Deportation Without a Formal Hearing Thorough Expedited Removal Is Now Possible Anywhere in the United States

The administration broadened the application of expedited removal, allowing DHS to deport individuals without a hearing before an immigration judge if they cannot prove continuous US presence for at least two years.¹⁷ School and district leaders should be aware of this change, because it increases the risk of accelerated deportation for undocumented individuals and families in many communities.

Recommendations for Districts

Establish or revisit policies and protocols managing immigration enforcement events in schools

While the likelihood of such events occurring on campuses is low, the risk for disruption and flashpoints is high. Being prepared will build confidence and reduce anxiety among school staff and teachers. Plans should include communications templates that can be used to provide accurate and timely messages to the board and community.

Watch for changes in attendance and community engagement among undocumented students

ICE raids in communities can cause rates of student absenteeism to rise,¹⁸ so many districts are communicating to students and families their commitment to creating a safe space.¹⁹

Ensure that principals and central office leaders are aware of changes in immigration law.

Because these changes are likely to impact many communities across the country, school principals should be aware of new conditions that could affect the well-being of students, staff, and families connected to their school. We are not recommending that principals should be equipped to provide legal information or advice. Rather, awareness of these changes will help school leaders to make informed and empathetic choices in their day-to-day work.

Strategic Question

What policies, guidelines, and values will we adhere to when navigating issues related to undocumented students, families, and workers throughout the Trump administration?

Changes in Federal Funding and Sponsored Programs

Summary of Policy Changes

Federal Grants Related to Teacher Training, Recruitment, and Retention Have Been Canceled

In February 2025, ED terminated over \$600M in grants to institutions and nonprofits training educators and education agencies on “divisive ideologies.”²¹ including grants to support recruitment in high-need schools and hard-to-fill subject areas,²² as well as to recruit and train future educators from underrepresented communities.²³

ED also cancelled \$595M²⁴ in contracts and grants with three key programs: Regional Educational Laboratories²⁵, four Equity Assistance Centers²⁶, and the Comprehensive Centers Program²⁷. These programs aimed to improve student outcomes, ensure equitable access to education, and provide capacity-building services to various educational agencies.

The cancellation of the above contracts and grants are facing legal challenges: On March 18, 2025, a federal judge ordered ED to restore grants provided through three congressionally appropriated programs²⁸ — the Supporting Effective Educator Development Grant Program, the Teacher Quality Partnership Program, and the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program. As of March 26-27, 2025, the Trump administration has asked the Supreme Court to intervene and allow the cancellation of \$65 million in teacher-training grants.²⁹

DOGE Made Large Cuts to the Institute for Education Sciences

In February 2025, DOGE canceled \$881M in contracts \$101M³⁰ in grants, primarily affecting the Institute of Education Sciences, which focuses on education research.³¹ Programs potentially affected include IPEDS, What Works Clearinghouse, and the Common Core of Data.³² Despite initial assurances, the planned administration of the long-term trend NAEP assessment for 17-year-olds was canceled in February³³

Recommendations for Districts

Focus on methods of teacher recruitment, retention, and training funded at the state and local levels

For recruitment, leverage alternative certification routes and “grow your own” programs to proactively secure qualified talent. For retention, apply practices from EAB’s [Teacher Morale Implementation Guide](#) to diagnose low causes of teacher morale.

Begin to explore alternative funding sources and support partnerships at the local and state level

Learn about district fundraising laws to ensure compliance in fundraising activities at the federal, state, and local level.³⁴ Use [EAB’s Fundraising Brief](#) and connect with an EAB Subject Matter Expert to analyze fundraising opportunities and establish best practices.

Ensure your district has student achievement data necessary to improve student outcomes

Advocates are concerned that cuts to education research funding will lead to policymakers, researchers, and families having less information about how K-12 students and schools are performing, including identifying long-term education progress and identifying achievement gaps.^{33, 35} Inventory ways your district collects and analyzes student achievement data. Consider looking at state tests to monitor gaps in student achievement to ensure success for all students.

Strategic Question

In what ways can we leverage the current public sentiment toward these cuts and organize data collection and fundraising efforts around impact to generate funds, support, and student success information that are not tied to the federal government?

Discussion Questions and EAB Resources

As you review this policy primer and consider the implications of recent changes, we suggest engaging your cabinet and legal counsel with the following discussion questions to inform your district's next steps. Use the Flashpoints Communication Playbook to share next steps with your community.

Four Strategic Questions Every Team Should Be Discussing Right Now

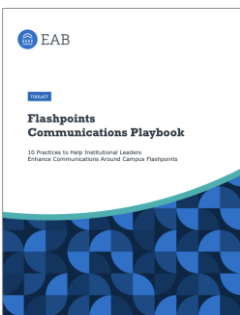
- Have we determined when and why we will change district practices in response to federal directives?
- How will we educate our community on changes in state and federal policy and the implications for our schools?
- Within our district's legal and societal context, what policies and practices will we deploy to support educational success for all students (including those affected by the executive orders)?
- In anticipation of potential reductions in federal funding, what alternative sources of revenue might we pursue to support necessary staffing and resources?

EAB Resources Available to All Leaders to Support Next Steps

- **Schedule an EAB-Facilitated Scenario Planning Workshop:** To learn more about EAB's scenario planning workshop, contact your dedicated advisor or email policy@hello.eab.com.
- **Engage with Peer Position Pulse-Checks:** To monitor peer positions and the intentions of peer districts to inform your strategic decisions about where to align or differentiate, visit the [Federal Policy Navigation Suite](#).

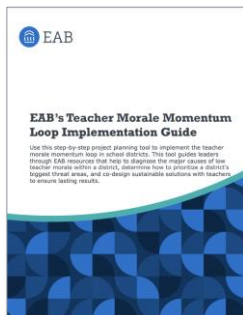
EAB Resources Available to EAB Partners to Support Next Steps

- **Build and Maintain Trust with School Community Members:** Use EAB's [Preparing for District Flashpoints Resource Center](#) to shift from a reactive to proactive approach when managing divisive flashpoints.
- **Use Specific Resources to Support Staffing, Fundraising, and Communication:**



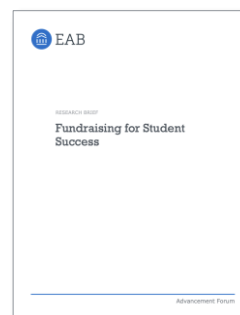
Flashpoints Playbook

- ❖ Flashpoint Statement Checklist
- ❖ Cabinet Risk Briefing Template
- ❖ Flashpoint FAQ Template



Teacher Morale Guide

- ❖ Diagnostic Tools and Templates
- ❖ Communication Templates
- ❖ Morale-Booster Compendium



Fundraising Brief

- ❖ Donor Engagement Strategies
- ❖ Marketing Strategies
- ❖ Communications Tools

EAB's Federal Policy Navigation Services

To help education leaders make informed strategic decisions amid a rapidly shifting policy landscape, EAB's Federal Policy Navigation Services offers a unique suite of resources and support. This includes **policy primers, scenario planning exercises, workshops, and peer position pulse checks**.

To **learn more** about EAB's Federal Policy Navigation Services, please contact your EAB Dedicated Advisor or email policy@hello.eab.com.

Endnotes

Compliance with Federal DEI Directives

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ABOUT EAB

At EAB, our mission is to make education smarter and our communities stronger. We work with thousands of institutions to drive transformative change through data-driven insights and best-in-class capabilities. From kindergarten to college to career, EAB partners with leaders and practitioners to accelerate progress and drive results across five major areas: enrollment, student success, institutional strategy, data analytics, and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). We work with each partner differently, tailoring our portfolio of research, technology, and marketing and enrollment solutions to meet the unique needs of every leadership team, as well as the students and employees they serve. Learn more at eab.com.