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Is Ron Paul's plan to eliminate the Dept. of Education meritable?

BY [DI EDITORIAL STAFF](#) | OCTOBER 24, 2011

Yes

So what reasons could there possibly be for shutting down a federal department that helps kids get an education?

This was one of the topics U.S. Rep. Ron Paul, R-Texas, spoke on in the IMU on Oct. 21.

Paul turned heads last week after he [announced](#) his deficit plan, which would cut \$1 trillion from the federal budget and eliminate five federal departments in his first year in office. One of them is the U.S. Department of Education, which has caused big-government liberals dramatically flip out, crying over the poor little children who will be stupid and ill-prepared for the real world, and all because of those evil Republicans.

What has the Education Department done for you lately? Basically nothing, unless you consider wasting billions of taxpayer dollars an accomplishment.

The department's budget has exploded to six times its original amount from its inception in 1979. At the same time, [scores](#) in reading, math, and science have flatlined. For some reason, \$79 billion in just fiscal 2011 didn't do the job. It is unfathomable how the argument for increased federal education spending is a logical one.

An [analysis](#) of the department's budget by the Cato Institute shows that 97 percent of its outlays go back to the states as aid. Why must there be this shell game, just to have a small portion taken off the top for the 4,400 people employed and their unions?

And consider this: A family friend of mine (just trust me, please) is a former School Board member of the Dubuque School District. In one of our conversations, I had asked him what the influence of the Education Department was like on his day-to-day decisions. I was expecting some response as to how its claws restricted them from having any freedom in their choices for their schools, but what I got surprised me. "It has no influence at all," he told me.

The department is entirely superfluous bureaucracy.

I must admit I was shocked. It led me to do some more research on the topic and watch some great [documentaries](#) like *Waiting for Superman*. The data back up the position of abolition.

The states already have the infrastructure to absorb an elimination of the federal department.

Return the authority to the states, and you will see a positive change.

— *Joe Schueller*

No

The U.S. Department of Education, while currently flawed, is an invaluable tool in maintaining national curriculum standards and facilitating affordable higher education student-loans. [Education experts are skeptical](#) about Rep. Ron Paul's plan to eliminate the Education Department, and it's easy to see their point.

First and foremost, the department manages the logistics behind many subsidized student-loan programs. While many might ideologically and fundamentally detest this practice of government assistance, others will see an ever-growing need to make higher education an affordable offering through the form of government intervention. Thus, the department aids in making school loans more affordable, most specifically through Stafford Loan programs.

Perhaps more importantly, though, the department guides a loose set of national curriculum standards. While individual states are granted some freedom in setting curriculum and governing performance standards, the Education Department maintains a core national standard which prevents gross imbalances. This model guarantees that students in generally underachieving states still receive a quality education and at least a basic set of curricula.

Although the department clearly has its merits, it's still in dire need of reform and reorganization. Like many federal departments and agencies, the Education Department is bloated and muddled in meaningless bureaucracy. And while the existence of proficiency standards tests is presumably necessary, it's important we as a nation don't come to rely only upon them to gauge what young Americans need. This is eminently clear and remains a particularly glaring note for the Education Department, after years of pursuing a willfully ignorant policy under the misnomer "No Child Left Behind." Still, revile and revision would accurately reflect the dues owed to the Education Department rather than straightforward abolishment.

Clearly, there's a rational basis for discussion over the Constitutionality of the Education Department. This discussion, however, represents something of a Pandora's Box to a writer and simply cannot be argued succinctly neither for nor against. Put simply, make your own informed decision.

In any case, as it's now structured, the Education Department does exactly what it's supposed to do: make access to education easier for Americans of all ages. Unfortunately, it's just not as efficient as it should be at this point in time.

— *Matt Heinze*
