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# Charting Change: The 2024 Election Results and its Implications for Education

Prepared by Education First

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# Summary

- **At the federal level, Republicans won unified control** of the presidency, Senate and House. However, their margins in the House are historically narrow.
- **At the state level, there were few changes** from the prior party balance. Moderate education candidates and ballot initiatives supporting funding public schools did well in most states.
- We expect the likely education policy impacts of the Trump Administration will be related to **immigration crackdowns, funding cuts, “culture war” issues and reducing the administrative capacity of agencies. Career pathways may be a bipartisan policy opportunity.** Other policy proposals from the campaign, such as eliminating the Department of Education or zeroing out Title I funding, are less likely.
- Depending on the education policy area, **the new administration may choose to be either “assertive” or “absent.”** The administration’s decision about which approach to take will dictate organizations’ best response.

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# Federal election results



# Republicans won the presidency, Senate and House, gaining unified control of the federal government

## Presidency

Donald Trump won a second term, giving him powers to control the executive branch, appoint judges and issue executive orders.

## Senate

Republicans have a majority of 53 seats to Democrats' 47 seats. This is enough to approve judges and appointments, but not to pass partisan bills over a Democratic filibuster. Budget-related bills can pass by "reconciliation" with a simple majority.

## House

Republicans hold 220 seats versus the Democrats' 215 seats. This five-seat House majority is the most narrow in nearly 100 years. Trump's nominations of three current House members to his Cabinet may temporarily further narrow this majority to two seats.

## Judiciary

Trump will have the power to appoint federal judges at all levels. In the coming years, we expect the federal judiciary to weigh on education issues including affirmative action, race-based policies, religion in schools and educating undocumented students.

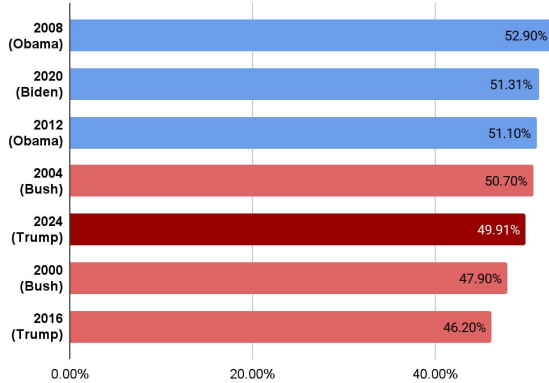
## Republican Powers

- ✓ Appointment
- ✓ Executive orders
- ✓ Pass budget-related bills via reconciliation
- ✗ Pass partisan legislation (override a Democratic filibuster)

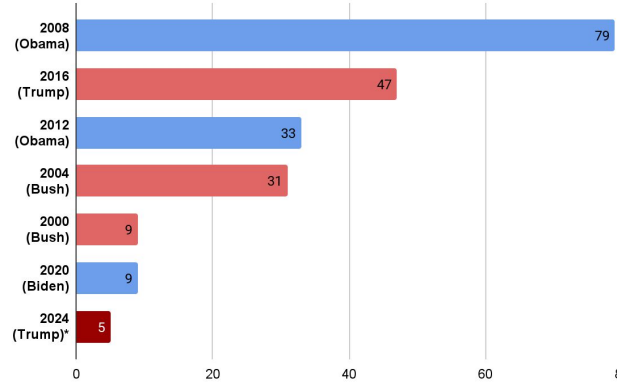
Source(s): [Ballotpedia](#) (2024); [Florida Politics](#) (2024); [Foran et al.](#) (2025); [New York Times](#) (2024); [Associated Press](#) (2024)

# Trump is beginning his term with a slightly narrower margin in Congress than other recent incoming presidents

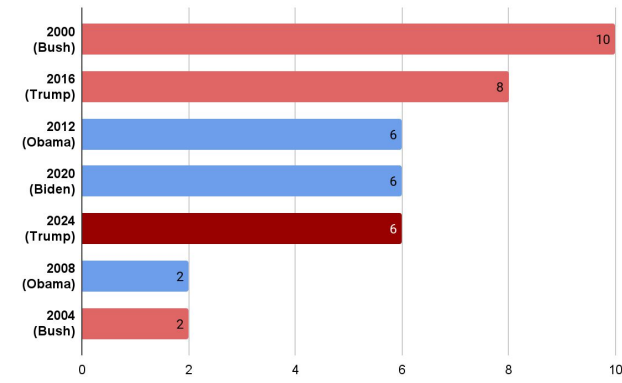
President Popular Vote Margins



House Seat Margins



Senate Seat Margins



*Prior presidents with similar Congressional margins to Trump's were able to move forward one or two major legislative policy priorities in the two years before the midterm elections.*

# Congressional leadership is changing, and there are tensions among members of the Republican party

## Senate

- John Thune (R-SD) replaced Mitch McConnell as majority leader. He is an institutionalist previously at odds with Trump. However, he has promised to be more responsive to the requests of his Republican caucus.
- Bill Cassidy (R-LA) will lead the Senate education committee. He was one of three current Republican senators who voted to impeach Donald Trump after January 6.

## House

- Mike Johnson (R-LA) was re-elected as speaker of the House, by a slim three-vote margin.
- Republicans' current five-seat margin in the House may be temporarily narrowed by three members' nominations to Trump's Cabinet.
- Tim Walberg (R-MI) has replaced Virginia Foxx (R-NC) as chair of the House's education committee. Walberg has announced the new and returning Republican committee members.

***There are tensions between the Republican party's Trump-aligned MAGA wing and its establishment wing. The establishment wing had previously collaborated with Democrats on education issues. It will take some time to determine the relative power of these groups in the new Congress.***

# Trump tapped his transition co-chair Linda McMahon as his pick to serve as the next secretary of education

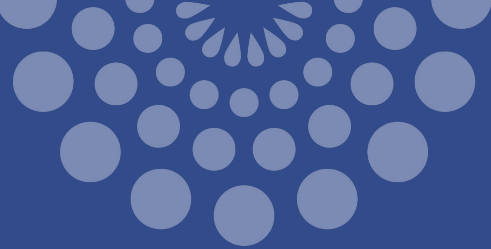


Matt Rourke/AP Photo

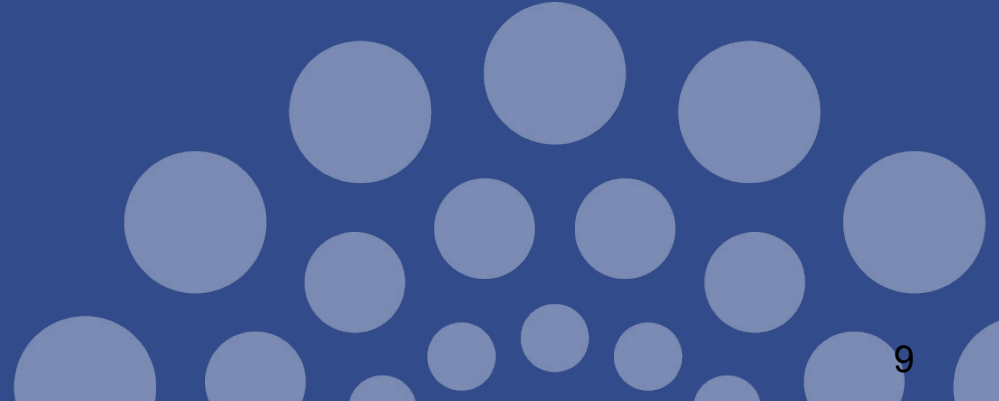
- **Close friend, early donor and key booster of Trump**
  - + Former pro-wrestling executive with World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE)
  - + Chair, America First Action, a pro-Trump super PAC; Board chair, America First Policy Institute, a pro-Trump think tank formed in 2021
  - + Ran the Small Business Administration during Trump's first term (2017-2019)
- **Limited traditional experience in education**
  - + Connecticut State Board of Education (2009-10)
  - + Trustee at Sacred Heart University, a private Catholic school in Fairfield, CT
- **Anticipated priorities and issues**
  - + Though little is known about McMahon's education policy priorities, she has expressed support for apprenticeship programs, charter schools and school choice generally; as such, we can reasonably expect McMahon to pick up where Betsy DeVos left off.
  - + McMahon will also be tasked with any restructuring of the US Dept. of Education (ED).

***Because this appointment is neither a high-profile culture warrior nor a recognized education reformer, it suggests that education will not be a priority for the incoming administration, though it will align broadly with the Trump agenda.***





# State-level elections and ballot initiatives



# Unlike the federal election, state-level elections did not lead to major changes in party control

- No governorships changed partisan control.
  - + There were 11 governor's races on the ballot, and none flipped party control. This has not happened since 2000.
  - + There are still 27 Republican governors and 23 Democratic governors.
- Two state legislative chambers switched control; this is below the historical trend of 11-12 flipped chambers.

***This suggests that, despite the impact of the federal election, the state-level policy landscape is largely unchanged. Stability could mean that current state policies and legislative priorities are likely to continue on their current path.***

# State superintendent elections also suggest more stability with current state policy, particularly in North Carolina

State	State Superintendent Election	Result and Notes
NC	Mo Green (D) ✓ Michele Morrow (R)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the nation's most impactful state superintendent race, moderate Democrat Mo Green beat Michele Morrow, a right-wing Republican.</li> <li>Morrow, a highly-controversial homeschool advocate, had previously beaten the incumbent moderate Republican in the primary.</li> </ul>
MT	Susie Hedalen (R) ✓ Shannon O'Brien (D)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hedalen, the current vice chair of the state board of education and a school district leader, won an open seat after the incumbent was term-limited.</li> </ul>
ND	Kirsten Baesler (incumbent) ✓ Jason Heitkamp	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Baesler, a moderate incumbent, beat an ideologue in the primary.</li> <li>The race was nonpartisan, but both candidates are Republican.</li> </ul>
WA	Chris Reykdal (incumbent) ✓ David Olson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reykdal, a moderate, won reelection. His challenger advocated for a parents' bill of rights and to curtail "woke-ism." The race was nonpartisan, but Reykdal is a Democrat and Olson is a Republican.</li> </ul>

# Ballot initiatives to expand school funding passed in both red and blue states

- Arkansas voted to allow state lottery dollars to support career pathways.
- Utah voted to increase disbursements from a public education fund.
- California, New Mexico and Rhode Island approved bonds for education facilities.
- Colorado passed a new sales tax on firearms that can support school safety and behavioral health.

*This suggests that there may be some bipartisan state-level support for increased education funding, which could offset any cuts to federal education funding.*

# Voucher and education savings account (ESA) initiatives failed in both red and blue states

- Kentucky, Nebraska and Colorado failed to pass ESA ballot initiatives.
- Republican governors are continuing attempts to expand them.
  - + In Tennessee, Gov. Bill Lee may call a special legislative session to push through proposed ESA legislation.
  - + As Texas heads into its legislative session, Gov. Greg Abbott believes has enough support to push through school choice legislation.
- As of April 2024, 17 states already have ESA programs.

***This suggests there are divisions among Republicans about ESAs. Some are floating including ESAs in legislation to replace the expiring tax cuts. School choice is a key talking point for some in the new Administration.***

# Accountability and testing requirements continue to divide voters nationally

- Massachusetts removed its state test requirement for graduation.
  - + A ballot initiative removed the current requirement that students pass the MCAS state test to graduate. The teachers union supported this change, but the governor and education secretary opposed it.
- The only remaining states with mandatory exit exams for graduation are Florida, Ohio, Louisiana, New Jersey, Texas and Virginia.

***This suggests that there are ideological differences about the role of the current standardized testing system, and that left-leaning states may be moving away from test-based graduation requirements.***

# Ballot initiatives to increase partisanship in education failed

- Florida's proposal to require partisan identification of school board candidates failed.
  - + It earned 55% of the vote, but that fell short of the 60% needed to pass.
- Nevada's proposal to transfer control of its universities from the Board of Regents to the state legislature failed.

*This suggests that voters may see a separation between politics and education and may value non-partisan considerations and expertise over political ideology.*



# **Background: Federal role in education policy**





# States set most education policies, but the federal government manages important funding and regulations

## Federal role

### Funding

- **K12:** Provides 14% of K12 education funding. Key programs include: Title I (aid to disadvantaged students); Title II (teacher and principal training and support); IDEA (support for students with disabilities); National School Lunch Program; Perkins and WIOA (career education and workforce development)
- **Postsecondary:** Manages the federal student loan system, Pell grants for low-income students and federal research grants to universities

### Regulations

- **K12 & postsecondary:** Enforces federal protections related to: gender (Title IX), civil rights (Civil Rights Act), special education services (IDEA and ADA), etc.

### Data & accountability

- **K12:** Sets parameters for state-run accountability and testing programs
- **Postsecondary:** Sets rules for the accrediting bodies overseeing colleges and universities
- **K12 & postsecondary:** Collects and publish national education data

*All education policymaking authority not determined by federal law lies with state and local governments.*

# A change in administration can bring about a change in current policy and practice without legislative action

*Major policy changes require legislation, which would likely face a Democratic filibuster.*

*However, Republicans can enact policy using executive authority, such as:*

1

**Regulatory change** to revise or rescind existing regulations and guidance (e.g., Title IX enforcement, accountability standards under ESSA or civil rights protections). This includes review of rules within the Congressional Review Act window (e.g., Postsecondary Student Success Grant). However, the Supreme Court's *Loper Bright* case last year reduced federal agencies' regulatory authority in interpreting laws.

2

**Budget priorities** to reflect new goals (e.g., reducing funding for Title I, cutting discretionary grants or changing the availability of Pell Grants). Congress can pass a new budget with a simple majority (i.e., only Republican votes) via reconciliation.

3

**Executive orders** that do not require rulemaking (e.g., school discipline or equity initiatives).

4

**"Bully pulpit"** to use the Administration's national platform to encourage policy changes that it cannot directly control (e.g., Trump's opposition to DEI initiatives may have a chilling effect beyond any formal policymaking).



# Expected education policy implications



# Trump's priorities include immigration, funding, culture issues, career pathways and school choice



## Expand career pathways

Support bipartisan initiatives for career education, apprenticeships and career-connected learning. De-emphasize higher education.

## Increase immigration enforcement and deportations

Increase deportation of undocumented immigrants, potentially including families and children.

## Cut federal funding

Cut federal funding, reduce the federal government's role in education and reverse Biden's student loan policies.

## Advance the "culture war"

Advance conservative positions related to gender identity, race and other topics through rulemaking, executive orders and selective enforcement.

## Expand school choice and "parents' rights"

Support vouchers, education savings accounts (ESAs) and charter schools. Advocate for an increased role for parents in school governance.

## Weaken or politicize the US Department of Education

Politicize agency staff, cut data collection and reporting and retract agency fact sheets and guidance.

# Career pathways is a rare area of bipartisan agreement and popular with voters



## Career Pathways

- **Advance bipartisan career pathways legislation or budget increases.** This is likely the only opportunity for bipartisan education legislation in the next administration. Republicans are likely to:
  - + Increase federal funding dedicated to career and technical education (CTE) programs and workforce readiness through programs authorized by Perkins and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
  - + Attempt to reauthorize WIOA
  - + Expand federal apprenticeship programs for youth
  - + Continue workforce development programs related to semiconductors to counter China
- Although there is general bipartisan agreement around career pathways, Republican bills may differ from Democrats' policies by opposing college pathways, union-affiliated apprenticeships and Biden's clean energy workforce programs.

# Immigration is Trump's top priority, and it may have significant impacts on students



## Immigration

- **Immigration is one Trump's top priorities, and his projected immigration policies would likely impact many children in public education.**
- Trump has promised to deport undocumented immigrants, which could lead to significant impacts on immigrant children, regardless of documentation status, including:
  - + Anxiety and stress from fear of family separation and uncertain futures
  - + Decreased enrollment and irregular attendance due to legal proceedings or fear of being detained
  - + Disruption of learning and reduction of services to non-English speaking students
- Pew estimates that 4.4 million U.S.-born children under 18 live with an undocumented immigrant parent. The highest shares are in Nevada (9% of households), California, New Jersey and Texas (8% each).
- Tighter immigration policies might reduce the number of international or undocumented students enrolled at postsecondary institutions as well.
- Current Supreme Court precedent (*Plyer v. Doe*) requires that states provide undocumented students with free education. That ruling may be challenged.

# Trump will likely cut education funding and reverse Biden's student loan programs



## Funding

### ■ Reduce federal education funding

- + We expect Congress to use the reconciliation process (which allows budget-related to pass Congress with a simple majority) to advance tax cut legislation in 2025. Republicans will likely look to cut federal spending in other areas to offset these costs. The new “Department of Government Efficiency” (DOGE) will also encourage spending cuts, likely including education.
- + In his first term, Trump’s proposals to significantly cut the federal education budget and merge programs into block grants did not get congressional support. In this term, wholesale elimination of federal funding programs are still unlikely to pass, but reductions to federal formula and competitive grants (including out-years for awarded grants that have not yet been appropriated) are a significant possibility.

### ■ Reverse Biden’s loan forgiveness and student repayment programs

- + Trump opposed Biden’s student loan initiatives, and will likely attempt to reverse them. This may reduce Public Service Loan Forgiveness.
- + These changes would have implications for matriculation at postsecondary institutions and may impact programs such as teacher training programs.

# Trump will likely weaken or politicize the US Department of Education



## Agency Administration

- **Politicize federal agencies and refashion ED as an “enforcer”**
  - + Trump may revive Schedule F, a policy from the end of his first term that removes civil service protections for federal staff and makes it easier to replace nonpartisan civil servants with political appointees.
  - + Trump may use ED’s administrative authority to hinder Biden-era programs, such as by requesting financial audits or investigating certain programs.
- **Cut data collection and reporting, including the National Report Card, EDFacts, Civil Rights Data Collection and ESSER spending**
  - + Without continued data, the system will be less informed, less transparent and less accountable. This is a particular concern with evaluating critical investments, such as the major ESSER program for COVID recovery.
- **Retract guidance, FAQs and fact sheets**
  - + Removing guidance may create confusion and uncertainty regarding compliance and best practices. (However, state and local governments can continue to use rescinded ED guidance without penalty.)



# Trump will likely advance “culture war” issues and roll back Biden’s anti-discrimination efforts



## Culture War

- **Roll back Biden’s Title IX protections for transgender students**
  - + A court ruling in January 2025 upheld Republican objections to the Title IX rule, blocking its implementation. Trump will likely initiate the formal rulemaking process to permanently reverse it.
- **Reduce civil rights enforcement**
  - + ED has discretion over how it enforces civil rights protections in schools. Trump will likely reverse Democrats’ efforts to curtail school disciplinary actions that have a disproportionate racial impact.
- **Advance culture war issues in the classroom**
  - + Trump is likely to issue an executive order limiting “DEI” initiatives at publicly-funded institutions. While this would likely face legal challenges, it may have a chilling effect regardless.
- **Use Congressional hearings to advance culture war agenda**
  - + Republicans may call university and philanthropic leaders to testify to Congressional committees, as happened with Israel-Palestine college protests in 2023. This may have a chilling effect and lead to self-censorship.

# ESAs may advance as part of Republicans' planned tax cut bill



## ESAs

- **Create a federal education savings account (ESA) tax credit program**
  - + Republicans are very likely to advance tax cut legislation, which may include a tax incentive supporting ESAs. Republicans in the House have previously drafted legislative language to this effect.
  - + Trump has voiced support for a federal ESA tax credit program, but its future is uncertain. It may face opposition within the Republican party. Prior ESA proposals did not advance in Congress, and state ballot initiatives in 2024 showed mixed Republican support for ESAs (particularly in rural areas).

# Trump's other education proposals are less likely to advance



## Unlikely Proposals

- **Eliminate the U.S. Department of Education (ED)**
  - + Eliminating ED would require legislation that is unlikely to exceed the Senate's 60-vote filibuster threshold. Even if ED was eliminated, its programs would likely remain and be transferred to other agencies.
- **Establish culture war curricula in schools or punish schools/colleges for perceived liberal bias**
  - + Trump may reinstate the *1776 Commission*, which advocated for civics education that "promote[s] love of country." He may also push for banning books or curricula related to "DEI" or "Critical Race Theory." However, the federal government has no direct authority over school curricula, so these are unlikely to take effect.
  - + Trump has also threatened to change the rules regarding the accreditation of higher education institutions. This would be difficult, since federal authority over accreditation is constrained by statute and regulations.
  - + Republicans may push for an expanded role for religion in school. This will face legal challenges from Democrats but may receive sympathetic treatment from an increasingly-conservative judiciary.



# Advice for organizations



# Organizations are facing a new policy environment and need to determine how they will respond

**Assess the potential impact to your organization**

## **How is your core work likely to experience change under the new administration?**

- Assess how much of your organization's work could change as a result of elections at the federal and state levels.
- Consider the implications to your organization upstream (your funding sources), downstream (the people you serve) and within (your organization's culture).

**Decide whether to "play offense or defense"**

## **How might you best position your organization to lead or respond to a new policy environment?**

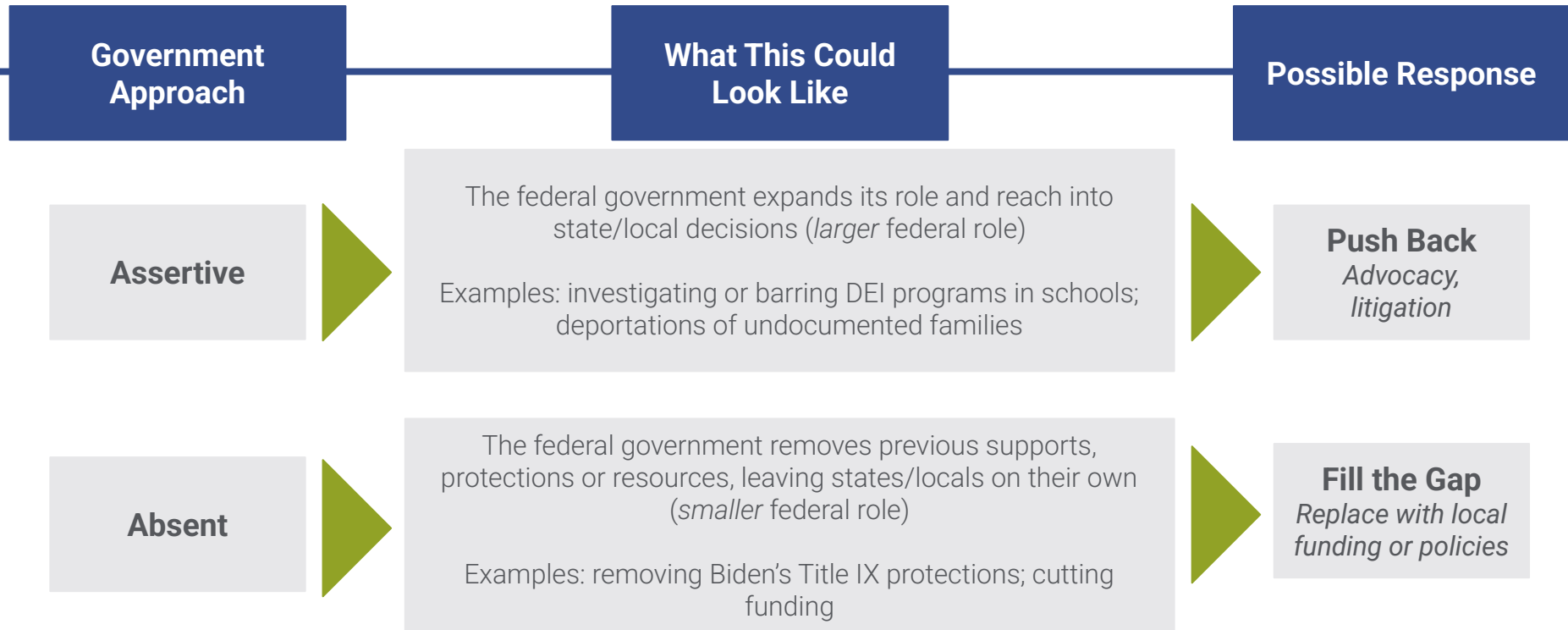
- Play offense: Take proactive steps to elevate and engage on aligned policies and/or fight unwanted changes by supporting litigation, advocacy or opposing initiatives. Consider new potential coalitions and partnerships.
- Play defense: Diversify your organization's strategies and funding sources to include more bipartisan or politically-insulated work so that you can be resilient to any changes.
- Carry on: Continue with your current strategy and clearly communicate your continued approach and activities to current partners.

**Explore & enact responsive strategies**

## **What is your appetite for change? What is your appetite for playing offense or defense on critical policies? Where do you have room to move in the new policy environment?**

- Consider new or additional activities aligned to your "theory of action," such as:
  - + Litigation strategies to slow down or accelerate policy implementation
  - + Deepen program or advocacy work in priority communities and states
  - + Create or expand partners/coalitions to support policy change or to play defense

# The new administration may be “assertive” or “absent;” this will determine how organizations should respond



# Funders are in the unique position to build ideologically diverse spaces and lean in where there are gaps

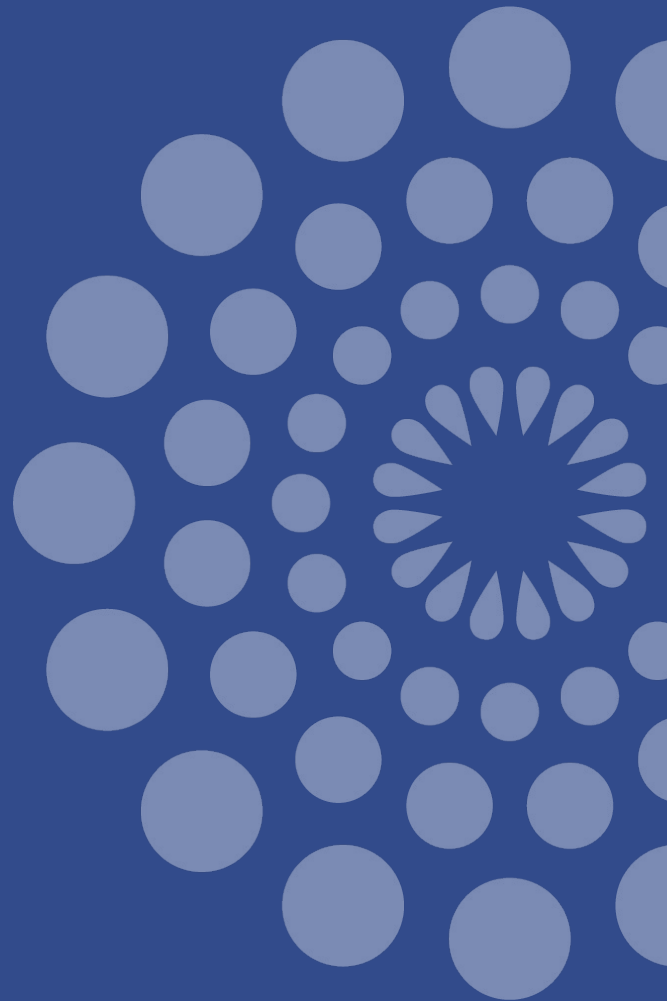
- **Stand up to threats:** Ensure organizations supporting marginalized students are well-resourced and lifted up to deepen their work.
  - + Expand and deepen support for newcomers, refugees and DACA recipients, anticipating gaps and urgent needs.
  - + Build coalitions to share the load, strengthen common ground and develop field leadership.
- **Deepen quality in civic education, high-quality instructional materials and culturally-responsive teaching.**
  - + Sustain and grow quality practices, support improvements to avoid backsliding and defend research funding.
  - + Create or elevate initiatives to address new needs in the field (e.g. civic education).
- **Engage with policymakers and advocates at the local and state levels** to educate them on program impacts, community needs and stakeholder interests.
- **Build capacity at state and local levels** to fill gaps that may be left from reduced support or resources from the federal government.



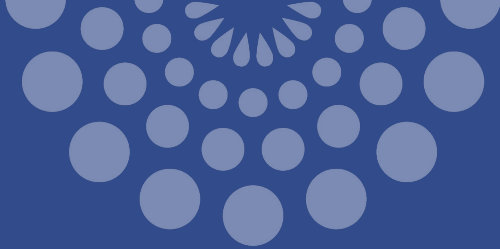


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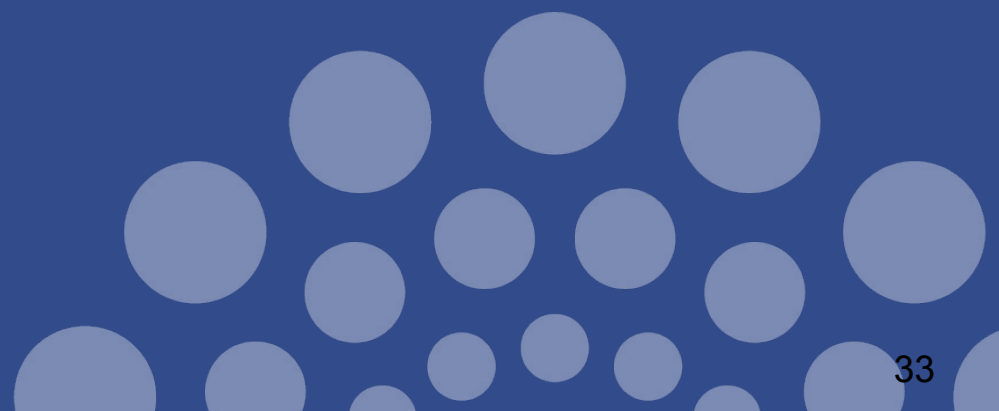
[education-first.com](https://www.education-first.com)







# Appendix



# Key sources to follow



- Inside Higher Ed: [Politics & Elections](#)
- Education Week: [Policy & Politics](#)
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