

SENATE HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS COMMITTEE HEARING ON THE NOMINATION OF LINDA MCMAHON TO SERVE AS SECRETARY OF THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Jennifer Castagna and Elysa Cash, EducationCounsel LLC | February 20, 2025

KEY TAKEAWAYS

On February 13, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a [hearing](#) to consider the nomination of Linda McMahon to serve as the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education (USED).

Key takeaways from the hearing included:

- Republican and Democratic Committee members made clear that McMahon will need to work with Congress in order to reorganize or dismantle the USED where statute has established the functions of the Department or created specific offices within the agency. Similarly, bipartisan Committee members sought assurances regarding the implementation, oversight, and funding of key federal education programs given the Trump Administration's plans to dismantle the USED.
- McMahon consistently acknowledged that congressional action would be required to close the USED. Additionally, in response to bipartisan concerns regarding continued funding for key federal education programs should the Trump Administration move forward with efforts to dismantle the USED, McMahon repeatedly asserted that it is not President Trump's goal to defund programs, but to ensure programs operate more efficiently.
- Republican and Democratic Committee members, joined McMahon, in expressing support for alternative career pathways, including the need to increase investments in career and technical education to apprenticeships and internships, and the alignment of education and workforce programs to the needs of the public and private sector.
- Republican Committee members called attention to their support for the expansion of school choice initiatives and strengthening local control of education, as well as addressing antisemitism on college campuses and prohibiting "biological men" from participating in women's sports. McMahon emphasized that President Trump's goals for reforming the education system are in alignment with these Republican priorities.
- Democratic Committee members focused their questioning on a range of early actions by the Trump Administration related to civil rights protections of students and confusion among schools surrounding the implementation of an Executive Order (EO) prohibiting support of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, which have not been defined. Democratic Committee members also defended the need for the Department's role in strengthening the public education system.

BACKGROUND ON LINDA MCMAHON

On November 19, President-elect Donald Trump nominated Linda McMahon to serve as USED Secretary. McMahon served as the Co-Chair of the Trump-Vance Transition Team. Previously, McMahon served as Administrator of the Small Business Administration (SBA) during the first Trump Administration until 2019, when she stepped down to help lead the America First Action, a Super PAC (Political Action Committee). She then helped found the [America First Policy Institute](#), which provided support in the development of

the education platform for President Trump's 2024 campaign. The AFPI has advocated for broad expansion of school choice programs to include public funding for private and religious schools and for parental rights, as well as against diversity, equity and inclusion.

McMahon's previous education experience includes serving on the Connecticut State Board of Education in 2009. She has also served on the Board of Trustees at Sacred Heart University, a private, Catholic university in Connecticut. McMahon has expressed support for school choice initiatives, including support of charter schools and the use of public funds to attend private schools. McMahon has been supportive of apprenticeship programs and expanding Pell Grant eligibility to short-term workforce training programs. Additionally, McMahon served as CEO of the World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), where she launched the company's Get R.E.A.L. program to deliver positive messages about education to young adults. The program was created in collaboration with the American Library Association and encouraged literacy through public service announcements, posters, and bookmarks featuring wrestling superstars.

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OPENING STATEMENTS

Senate HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA) [opened](#) the hearing by calling attention to the most recent results of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) – also known as the Nation's Report Card – which show that students' reading and math scores have not improved since the COVID-19 pandemic. Chair Cassidy asserted that the "Department's bloated bureaucracy" was a key reason for the lack of improvement, raising questions as to whether the USED should be eliminated. He emphasized that "only about 10 percent of public funds that go toward educating your child comes from the federal taxpayer," while the federal government is "responsible for the vast majority of bureaucracy and red tape, preventing communities from improving educational success." Chair Cassidy added that postsecondary education is not preparing students for today's workforce and the increase in costs is leaving student borrowers with "overwhelming debt." Chair Cassidy then went on to say, "The status quo is not working... The Department needs to get out of the way of states and local communities, who are best positioned to actually address students' needs." He concluded, "We need to empower parents, so they have a voice in their child's education. This includes increasing access to school choice."

Senate HELP Committee Ranking Member Bernie Sanders (I-VT) expressed support for the vital role of the USED noting, "It is the responsibility of the federal government to say that every kid in America, whether you're poor, middle class rich, gets a quality education." Additionally, Ranking Member Sanders pointed to critical investments within the Department for students in high-poverty school districts, students with disabilities, students with emotional problems, and low-income students who receive Pell Grants. He continued that we cannot allow "a government by billionaires and for billionaires" to privatize public education, which he asserted will result in public schools not only being segregated by race, but by class. Ranking Member Sanders emphasized, "Our job is not to take away money from public schools and give it to private schools. It is to strengthen public education in America." He further said the goal should be not to abolish the USED, but to "make it more effective." According to Ranking Member Sanders, this will require an Education Secretary who understands that as "the wealthiest nation in the history of the world, we should have the best educational system on this planet – from child care to graduate school." He concluded by saying we need an Education Secretary who attracts the best and the brightest to the teaching profession, supports after and summer school programs, invests in mental health, and understands the need to fully fund the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

TESTIMONY OF LINDA MCMAHON

In her [opening statement](#), McMahon affirmed her support for President Trump’s campaign commitments to “make American education the best in the world, return education to the states where it belongs, and free American students from the education bureaucracy through school choice.” Additionally, McMahon made the case for the Trump Administration’s education agenda saying, “We can do better,” in reference to the recent results from the NAEP which showed reading and math scores at their lowest levels since 1971.

McMahon made clear that as the U.S. Secretary of Education that her goal would be to counter the “excessive consolidation of power in our federal education establishment,” and highlighted the school choice movement as “an alternative to classrooms that are managed from Washington, D.C.” Specifically, McMahon outlined the need to “Fund education freedom, not government-run systems; Listen to parents, not politicians; Build up careers, not college debt; Empower states, not special interests; [and] Invest in teachers, not Washington bureaucrats.” Further expressing support for reorienting the Department toward “helping educators, not controlling them,” McMahon stated, “outstanding teachers are tired of political ideology in their curriculum and red tape on their desks.”

Additionally, McMahon emphasized that among her top priorities would be career-focused education, including support for more postsecondary pathways, career-aligned programs, and apprenticeships, and on-the-job training. For those students attending college, McMahon called for transparent costs and courses of study aligned to workforce demand, including in emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI). She further encouraged the development of smart accountability systems and removal of barriers to college entry, while not “saddling future families with insurmountable debt.”

If confirmed, McMahon also committed to addressing antisemitism, stopping schools from being required to “let boys and men into female sports and spaces,” and protecting the rights of parents to “direct the moral education of their children.”

KEY TOPICS DISCUSSED DURING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

During the hearing, Republican and Democratic Committee members primarily focused questions on the Trump Administration’s plans to dismantle the USED and the implications for federal education funding in that context. Other topics that received considerable attention included civil rights issues – combating antisemitism, diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, and Title IX – as well as the expansion of school choice initiatives. Bipartisan Committee members also asked questions on a range of topics related to workforce training and preparedness, student financial assistance and postsecondary education, and K-12 education issues. Below is a summary of Committee member questions, as well as responses by McMahon, organized by topic area.

I. Dismantling the U.S. Department of Education

Regarding reports that President Trump is drafting an executive order requiring the Secretary of Education to develop a plan for eliminating or dismantling the USED, Committee members from both sides of the aisle sought to understand from McMahon what actions the Trump Administration is considering. Additionally, bipartisan Committee members expressed to McMahon the need to work with Congress to implement any plans. Key Committee member questions and statements included:

A. Role of the U.S. Congress

- **Senate HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA)** kicked off questioning by asking McMahon whether she, “agreed that since the Department was created by Congress, it would need an act of Congress to actually close the Department of Education?”
 - **McMahon** responded, “President Trump understands that we’ll be working with Congress, we’d like to do this right.” Specifically, McMahon noted that the administration would like to present a plan to Congress to improve the functioning of the USED. She went on to say the plan, “certainly does require congressional action.”
- **Senate HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA)** then asked McMahon to describe the plan for downsizing other areas of the USED that would not require congressional approval.
 - **McMahon** acknowledged that certain offices within the USED are established by statute saying, “we would have to pay particular attention,” to those.
- **Senate HELP Committee Ranking Member Bernie Sanders (I-VT)** also asked McMahon if she should need to work with Congress on any effort to abolish the USED.
 - **McMahon** again responded, “It is set up by the United States Congress and we work with Congress. It clearly cannot be shut down without it.”
- **Senator Andy Kim (D-NJ)** also asked McMahon about which elements of the USED are protected by statute.
 - **McMahon** responded, “I believe IDEA is, I think Title I,” and that she would “like to look into it.”

B. Oversight, Implementation, and Enforcement of Federal Education Programs

- **Senator Susan Collins (R-ME)** expressed concerns regarding how federal education programs – including Title I (provides funding to schools with high-percentages of low-income students), special education, and TRIO (which provides services to first-generation, low-income students to access postsecondary education) – will continue to be administered and receive continued oversight should the USED be abolished or substantially reorganized.
 - **McMahon** began her response by stating with regard to Title I and IDEA programs that the administration is “not looking to defund or reduce any of those amounts,” and noted those funds are appropriated by Congress.
 - **McMahon** then discussed whether the “concerns for disabilities and health issues with students may very well rest better within an agency that has more oversight over all those [issues].” She went on to say she would assess the programs and oversight, if confirmed, so, “we can really take the bureaucracy out of education and focus on teaching our children to read and to do math.”
- **Senators Maggie Hassan (D-NH) and Tim Kaine (D-VA)** asked specifically about how IDEA would be enforced if the USED was eliminated..
 - **McMahon** noted that prior to the USED being established, IDEA programs were administered by the former Department of Health, Education and Welfare and said, “I think it could very well go back to HHS where it started.” She also committed to ensuring funding for IDEA be continued. When both Senators reiterated their concerns about enforcement, McMahon responded, “the programs have to have accountability, all the programs do.”
- **Senator Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE)** asked whether McMahon intends to move the USED’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ).

- **McMahon** responded there may be “more appropriate places” and noted that there are civil rights attorneys also at the DOJ where the office could possibly be “better served.”

C. Support for the Role of States in Education

- **Republican Senators Katie Britt (R-AL), Jon Husted (R-OH), and Jim Banks (R-IN)** discussed the need to return education to states, rather than “unelected bureaucrats,” as stated by Senator Britt.
 - **McMahon**, in response to a question from Senator Banks, said both she and President Trump believe education should be returned to the states. She went on to say, “education is best handled closest to the child to understand what that child needs and what the community needs.”

II. Funding for Federal Education Programs

In the context of President Trump’s stated intent to eliminate the USED, bipartisan Committee members raised whether funding – which is appropriated by Congress – would continue to be provided for federal education programs. Additionally, Republican and Democratic Committee members sought answers regarding the recent cancelation of Institute for Education Sciences (IES) contracts and grants at the USED, in connection with the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) led by Elon Musk.¹ Key Committee member questions and statements included:

A. Congressionally Appropriated Funding

- **Senate HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA)** asked McMahon specifically whether states and localities would still receive their current funding.
 - **McMahon** emphasized, it “is not the President’s goal to defund the programs...only to have it operate more efficiently.”
- **Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)**, who is the Ranking Member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, emphasized, “when Congress appropriates money, it is the administration’s responsibility to put that out as directed by Congress, who has the power of the purse.” She then asked what McMahon would do if President Trump or Elon Musk directed her not to spend money Congress appropriated.
 - **McMahon** stated that she will expend funding appropriated by Congress, but added, “I do think it is worthwhile to take a look at the programs before money goes out the door.” **Senator Murray** responded, “We pass our appropriations bills, we expect those programs to come. If you have input [or] if you have programs you have looked at that you believe are not effective, then it is your job to come to us, explain why, and get the support for that.”
- **Senators Maggie Hassan (D-NH) and Angela Alsobrooks (D-MD)** raised concerns with the recent action by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to freeze funding for all grants, which was later withdrawn, following a court challenge.
 - **McMahon** reiterated, “If they’ve been appropriated by Congress, those funds should be disseminated.”

¹ On February 10, the USED with DOGE [canceled](#) 89 contracts, totaling \$881 million, which were administered by the Institute of Education Sciences (which is the nonpartisan, research arm of the USED). Additionally, DOGE [announced](#) that the USED terminated 29 diversity, equity, and inclusion training grants totaling \$101 million.

B. Cancellation of Contracts and Grants at the USED

- **Senator Susan Collins (R-ME)** raised concerns with the cancellation of IES grants, expressing that given the recent poor reading and math scores on the NAEP, “shouldn’t the USED continue to collect data and evaluate outcomes rather than [halting] these activities so that you can help states know what works.”
 - **McMahon** responded, if confirmed, that she wants to “get in and assess these kinds of programs, because I’m not sure yet what [is] the impact of all of those programs.” She went on to say, “I know that there are many worthwhile programs that we should keep. I want to study them.”
- **Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA)** expressed concerns with the cancellation of federal grants for teacher training programs and the National Board of Professional Teaching Standards – which is provided through the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program – due to concerns alleging support for ideologically-driven spending. Senator Kaine said the cancellations suggest that the administration is not concerned with helping states address teacher shortages and “[doesn’t] really prioritize having highly qualified teachers standing up in front of every classroom.”
- **Senators Edward Markey (D-MA) and Andy Kim (D-NJ)** also expressed concerns with the cancellation of approximately \$900 million in contracts and grants, including for IES. Senator Markey said, “They’re inside looking at it -- \$900 million [as] the down payment.”
 - **McMahon** defended the actions of DOGE saying they are trying to find “waste, fraud, and abuse,” and are reviewing the competitive bidding process to understand where funds are being spent; however, she noted, “I’m not there.”

III. School Choice

While several Republican Committee members expressed support for expanding school choice initiatives, Republican Committee member Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) raised concerns with expanding school choice at the detriment to public education, noting that in rural communities there may not be an alternative to public school. Democratic Committee members also raised questions regarding the effectiveness, implementation of, and impact of school choice efforts, as well as the role of income and wealth inequality on the nation’s education system. Key member questions and statements included:

A. Support for School Choice Initiatives

- **Senators Tim Scott (R-SC)**, in both his introduction of McMahon and his questions, spoke to his personal experience as someone who understands the need to “make sure that every parent has choice, so that the kids have the best chance at life.” He expressed support for the role of competition in improving educational outcomes before going on to note that public schools are part of school choice, citing the example of charter schools. Senator Scott said, “public schools, private schools, charter schools, virtual schools, homeschool, I want the parents to make that choice,” and then asked McMahon her thoughts.
 - **McMahon** responded “absolutely, I agree that competition is very key.” She then referenced her own experience visiting charter schools, calling them an opportunity for “public private partnership to make sure that the schools are offering choice and competitiveness.”
- **Senator John Husted (R-OH)** expressed that school choice is an “important element of fixing inequality,” and continued saying that, “if you don’t have the choice to go to a school that serves your needs, we basically have institutionalized a barrier against that opportunity.”

- **McMahon** highlighted school choice as a “cornerstone” to President Trump’s approach to education saying, “He certainly does believe in universal school choice.” She asserted that in states where there is school choice that public education has improved.

B. Concerns with School Choice Initiatives and Income and Wealth Inequality

- **Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)** emphasized that in the vast majority of communities in her home state of Alaska there is no school choice, due to 82% of communities not being connected by a road. She continued “our public education system is really what I have been focused on,” before asking McMahon whether she believes, “It is the primary role and responsibility as Secretary to support and strengthen our nation’s public schools?”
 - **McMahon** responded, “I absolutely do believe that our public schools are the bedrock of our education.” She went on to say, “I think we have to invest [in] our public education... where you don’t have a choice to go to another school.”
- **Senate HELP Committee Ranking Member Bernie Sanders (I-VT)** kicked off his questioning by asking McMahon her thoughts on the “massive level of income and wealth inequality” in the United States and the high rates of childhood poverty, as well as the impact on our educational system.
 - **McMahon** used the opportunity to lift up President Trump’s support for school choice policies as a way to address the needs of students attending low-performing schools. She went on to respond that, “we want to make sure that every child in our country has the opportunity to have equal access to quality education,” and should focus on educating children at the local level.
- **Senator Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE)** questioned McMahon whether in the context of school vouchers, “if private schools take federal dollars [whether they] can turn away a child based on a disability or religion or race?” Due to time constraints, McMahon did not respond fully, and Senator Blunt Rochester asked McMahon to follow up later with a response.

IV. Civil Rights

Republican and Democratic Committee members questioned McMahon on how the USED’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) would enforce policies related to antisemitism, Title IX, and diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. Republican and Democratic Senators expressed support for efforts to combat antisemitism and address recent incidents of violence against students on college campuses. Regarding Title IX, Republican Committee members sought commitments that the Trump Administration would continue efforts to prohibit “biological men” from competing in women’s sports, while Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI) questioned McMahon’s position on Title IX protections related to sexual harassment and assault. Republican Committee members voiced their opposition to diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, with only Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) using the opportunity to remind McMahon of Republican support for local control in deciding what and how to teach. Key member questions and statements included:

A. Combating Antisemitism

- **Senate HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA)** sought McMahon’s commitment to ensure that the backlog of antisemitism cases at the USED’s OCR is processed and “those responsible for illegal discrimination held accountable.”
 - **McMahon** responded that she “believe[s] in freedom of speech on campus and open debate.” However, she noted that we cannot allow violence on campuses and students to feel unsafe. If confirmed, she said that she would “make sure that the presidents of

those universities and those colleges are taking very strong measures not to allow this to happen.” McMahon went on to say, “they can do whatever they need to do to set standards, and to make sure those standards are upheld.”

- **Senators Susan Collins (R-ME), Josh Hawley (R-MO), Tim Scott (R-SC), Roger Marshall (R-KS), and John Hickenlooper (D-CO)** also expressed support for ensuring the USED addresses antisemitism on college campuses. Additionally, Senator Marshall suggested the creation of a commission to evaluate the progress of the universities toward addressing antisemitism.
 - **McMahon**, in response to a question from Senator Hawley, confirmed that she would consider defunding institutions that receive federal funds if they do not address violent incidents on their campuses related to antisemitism.
- **Senator Andy Kim (D-NJ)** raised concerns that attorneys within the Office for Civil Rights have reportedly been put on administrative leave, asking McMahon, “Do you think that that’s the right actions that we should be taking at this time that we see such a surge in antisemitism?” Additionally, Senator Kim asked if McMahon would support a 25% cut to the OCR budget, as previously called for by Republicans.
 - **McMahon** responded that she has not yet been confirmed, so she cannot speak to people having been put on leave or funding, but that she wants to “look into that... assess the Department.”

B. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

- **Senator Chris Murphy (D-CT)** raised questions regarding an Executive Order (EO) issued by President Trump calling for the elimination of grants to organizations and entities that support diversity, equity, and inclusion programs and activities. He noted that there is confusion among schools as to whether they are in compliance or not with the EO and there is concern that schools could see their grants compromised, despite there not being clarity around how diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives are defined. Specifically, Senator Murphy pressed McMahon on whether schools allowing student clubs based on racial or ethnic identity or teaching African American history studies or about Black History Month would be violating the EO.
 - **McMahon** responded that she thinks diversity, equity, and inclusion is having the opposite effect and is causing “more segregating of our schools, instead of having more inclusion in our schools.” Regarding whether schools would risk losing federal funding for allowing a club for Vietnamese American or Black students, McMahon said that she would like to understand further the EO and look into “what those clubs are doing.” **Senator Murphy** responded, “That’s pretty chilling,” before asking if an African American history class would be in violation of the EO. McMahon replied, “I’m not quite certain. I would like to take a look at these programs and fully understand the breadth of the Executive Order and get back to you on that.”
- **Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK)** began by highlighting that Republicans have historically supported local control, but that some are suggesting now that public school curriculum not include diversity, equity, and inclusion. She went on to cite provisions in the Every Students Succeeds Act (ESSA) which prohibit any federal official from “mandating, directing, or controlling a state’s school districts or schools instructional content... or program of instruction.” Senator Murkowski then asked McMahon how she would comply with ESSA’s provisions even if that means she cannot condition the awarding of a grant on a school agreeing not to teach diversity, equity, and inclusion subjects.
 - **McMahon** stated that she understood that the requirements of ESSA were designed with the goal of returning education to the states; however, McMahon then stressed that she

believes we have “failed in our mission [and] we are not delivering the kind of education that we need to deliver to our children.”

- **Senator Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE)** asked McMahon if she would intervene if a student has been bullied or harassed on the basis of race or disability.
 - **McMahon** responded that civil rights are the “rights of everyone.” She went on to say bullying should not happen anywhere and we want to make sure schools are enforcing efforts against bullying, so no child should be made to feel uncomfortable; however, she concluded that the “Department of Education does not control that from Washington.”
- **Senator Jim Banks (R-IN)**, who raised the Biden Administration’s alleged allocation of \$1 billion in grants toward diversity, equity, and inclusion programs, asked McMahon to commit to “ending all racial discrimination in government programming at the Department of Education?”
 - **McMahon** responded that she wants to “take ideology out of education,” so students can focus on reading, writing, and arithmetic.
- **Senator Tim Scott (R-SC)** stated that he thinks diversity, equity, and inclusion is a “political movement” that has very little to do with the advancement of people based on merit and more to do with “gaining power and political position.”

C. Title IX

- **Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI)** questioned McMahon on whether she feels Title IX should be used to protect students from sexual harassment or assault. Specifically, Senator Baldwin sought to distinguish whether McMahon felt sexual harassment should need to meet the higher standard of being protected under Title IX only if it is “severe *and* pervasive” or if protections would apply if the sexual harassment was “severe *or* pervasive.” As background, regulations under the first Trump Administration narrowed the requirement to an incident of sexual assault needing to be both “severe *and* pervasive.”
 - **McMahon** responded that “I don’t believe there should be any acceptance of sexual harassment,” to which **Senator Baldwin** replied, “I hope that you will take your position and press for that to be the law. McMahon further stated in response to a follow up question from Senator Baldwin that, “You have my absolute commitment that I will uphold and protect those investigations to make sure that those students are treated fairly on both sides.”
- **Senators Roger Marshall (R-KS) and Josh Hawley (R-MO)** inquired as to whether “biological men” should be able to compete against women in sports.
 - **McMahon** expressed that she did not believe that should be the case and emphasized that President Trump campaigned on the issue, before also noting that the court has spoken.

V. Workforce Training and Preparedness

A key area of alignment between Republican and Democratic Committee members and McMahon was on the need to support alternative career pathways, including career and technical education in high schools, apprenticeships, and internships. Additionally, McMahon called attention to her support for workforce Pell Grants, which would allow students to use Pell Grants to enroll in high-quality, short-term education programs. Key member questions and statements included:

- **Senators Tommy Tuberville (R-AL) and John Hickenlooper (D-CO)** expressed support for workforce development programs beginning in high school and the importance of alternative career pathways, including apprenticeships.

- **McMahon** strongly agreed with both Senators emphasizing the need for vocational and skills-based training, saying it should be encouraged and is “not a default education.” She also highlighted the need for more apprenticeships, internships, and dual credit programs to allow high school students to earn credits toward completing college faster. McMahon recommended working with the public and private sector to make sure that curriculum is designed for the needs of communities and businesses. She concluded, “It’s not one size fits all.”
- **Senator Roger Marshall (R-KS)** asked McMahon for her thoughts on increasing flexibility in the use of Pell Grants.
 - **McMahon** spoke to how workforce Pell Grants could stimulate the economy and support students entering the workforce faster. In referring to her work as SBA Administrator, McMahon said she worked with the U.S. Department of Labor to expand apprenticeship programs, seeing them as “vital to the growth of not only our economy, but our businesses.”
- **Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA)** expressed his support of career and technical education recognizing that McMahon is also in favor of such programs.

VI. Student Financial Assistance and Postsecondary Education Issues

Republican and Democratic Committee members sought the commitment of McMahon to continue federal funding for Pell Grants, as well as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUS). Additionally, Republican Senators raised issues related to college accreditation and foreign influence of institutions of higher education (IHEs), while Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) expressed concerns with the need to ensure the security and privacy of student data. Key member questions and statements included:

A. Student Financial Assistance

- **Senate HELP Committee Ranking Member Bernie Sanders (I-VT)** asked McMahon to guarantee that if she was made USED Secretary that “no student in America will lose a Pell Grant.”
 - **McMahon** responded that defunding is not the goal with regard to Pell Grants. In contrast, McMahon said that, “I’d actually even like to see an expansion of Pell Grants,” related to, “short term certificates for Pell Grants for students who aren’t going on to four year universities.”
- **Senator Tim Kaine (D-VA)** sought a commitment that McMahon will fully implement the benefits of the Public Service Loan Forgiveness (PSLF) program – which provides debt forgiveness for individuals in public service jobs (e.g. teachers, first responders, etc.) who have made qualifying payments for 10 years – even if pressured by DOGE employees to not implement the program.
 - **McMahon** replied, “yes, because that is the law,” before going on to say that if the Senator wants stronger loan forgiveness programs than “Congress should pass those programs and then we would implement it.”
- **Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)** raised concerns that DOGE employees have received access to private student loan data (as well as data more broadly) held by the USED, noting there is potential for data to be abused or for student privacy to be placed in jeopardy. Specifically, she cited concerns that the information could be used to target the families of students or cut off access to Pell Grants for students attending colleges that oppose President Trump’s policies.
 - **McMahon** stated that it was her understanding that the employees were on-boarded as employees of the USED, meaning they were trained as to the restraints on the use of such information.

B. Postsecondary Education Issues

- **Senators Tim Scott (R-SC), Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE), and Angela Alsobrooks (D-MD)** emphasized the need for continued funding of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs).
- **Senator Ashley Moody (R-FL)** spoke to her experience as the Attorney General of Florida, including filing a lawsuit against the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, which oversees the accreditation of several IHEs in Florida. The lawsuit – which was later dismissed – challenged requirements that IHEs be approved by private accreditors to receive federal funding and stemmed from concerns that accreditors could threaten federal funding if IHEs took or did not take certain actions.
 - **McMahon** stated that she is aware of the issues raised regarding certain accreditors and said, “I think that needs to have a broad overview and review.” She also committed to looking into regulations and guidance documents that relate to IHEs being able to change their accreditors.
- **Senator Jim Banks (R-IN)** raised concerns with foreign influences – especially anti-American – influences on our college campuses.
 - **McMahon** responded that there “absolutely has to be more transparency and tracking that money.”

VII. Additional K-12 Education Issues

Beyond the issue of school choice, primarily Democratic Committee members sought to understand from McMahon her position on a range of K-12 education issues, including implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), federal funding for K-12 education programs, teacher pay, and the teaching of American history. Senate HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy – who has been a longtime champion for students with dyslexia (including his own daughter) – inquired as to how the USED could support early identification and interventions for students with dyslexia. Key member questions and statements included:

A. Implementation of the ESSA and Funding for K-12 Education

- **Senator Patty Murray (D-WA)**, as the former Chair of the Senate HELP Committee, called attention to how Congress came together in a bipartisan way to pass the ESSA, which she emphasized gives states more flexibility and eliminated one size fits all mandates. She also noted that the law includes federal guardrails to hold states and schools accountable. Senator Murray went on to say that she believes that the Department of Education should do more to implement the law, before asking McMahon if there are requirements in the ESSA that she would make sure as Secretary of Education to implement.
 - **McMahon** responded that she looks forward to working with the Committee more to understand the ESSA. When pressed further by Senator Murray about specific requirements she would implement, McMahon said, “No, I want to study it further and get back to you.”
- **Senator Edward Markey (D-MA)** sought a commitment from McMahon that she would not cut funding for public schools before going on to say, “if even \$1 flows away from an educator or student towards a billionaire tax break that will be immoral in our country.”
 - **McMahon** replied that, “the President is not saying that we should cut funding to public education,” to which **Senator Markey** responded, “Yes, he is.” Senator Markey further

noted that Elon Musk recently announced he would cut \$900 million from the USED, while standing with President Trump.

- **Senator Angela Alsobrooks (D-MD)** asked whether McMahon would protect funding for students who rely on Title I funding.
 - **McMahon** discussed that Title I funding flows from Congress to states and then to school districts without significant involvement in distribution by the USED.

B. Teacher Pay and Shortages

- **Senate HELP Committee Ranking Member Bernie Sanders (I-VT)**, who has authored legislation to raise the pay of teachers to a minimum of \$60,000 per year, asked McMahon whether she would support such a policy.
 - **McMahon** – who earlier during the hearing said, “teaching is one of the most noble professions that we have in our country, and we have so many good, dedicated teachers” – responded the pay for teachers should be up to the states where those teachers reside. However, she did say, “I do believe we should pay our teachers fairly... and they should be well compensated.”
- **Senator Tommy Tuberville (R-AL)** expressed that we need to be paying teachers more and less money to administrators who, “sit in an office with their feet propped up.” He asked McMahon to look into the number of teachers that we have now as compared to administrators.

C. Other Committee Member Priorities

- **Senate HELP Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA)** asked McMahon how she would ensure students are diagnosed at an early stage and receive interventions.
 - **McMahon** responded that she would like to work with the Chair on how school systems could improve early diagnosis of dyslexia.
- **Senator John Hickenlooper (D-CO)** expressed concerns with McMahon’s opening statement in which she said children are “no longer taught American values and true history.” He asked McMahon if she thought we should be teaching both positive and negative elements of our history, so that we could learn from our mistakes.
 - **McMahon** agreed with the Senator, while also noting that the “Department of Education does not establish curriculum, but that is handled at the state level.”

For additional information, please contact Jennifer Castagna at jennifer.castagna@educationcounsel.com or Elysa Cash at elysa.cash@educationcounsel.com.
EDUCATIONCOUNSEL