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## Federal Funding Freeze Disrupts Education Services Nationwide

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Educators across the U.S. were left scrambling this summer after the Trump administration abruptly froze more than \$6.8 billion in federal K–12 education funding, impacting districts in both rural and urban communities. The funds, part of one of the largest federal education grant programs, support critical services such as after-school programs, teacher training, and English-language learning initiatives.

In North Dakota, a heavily Republican state, local school leaders expressed frustration over the delay. Superintendent Kirsten Baesler, who has since been nominated to a senior role at the U.S. Department of Education, told school officials the funds were finally released, writing, “Thank you for your advocacy, patience, professionalism, and persistence.”

The delay, which began on June 30, caught districts off guard. Many had already factored the funds into their annual budgets. Steven Johnson, superintendent of Fort Ransom School District, criticized the move, saying, “You can’t freeze money that was already allocated and expect us to just be grateful when it finally shows up. Rural folks don’t like being jerked around.”

The Department of Education gave little explanation at first, sending states a brief email claiming the review was necessary “given the change in Administrations.” Later, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) justified the freeze by alleging the funds had previously supported “radical left-wing” causes, including LGBTQ programming and advocacy for illegal immigrants. However, most districts use the funds for widely accepted programs such as math tutoring, summer school, and staff development.

Districts in Cincinnati, Fargo, and Los Angeles reported canceled curriculum orders, paused English-learner services, and potential layoffs. In California, teacher training programs halted. In Phoenix, school board member Ed Hermes pointed out the funds supported local youth programs like Girl Scouts and after-school math help.

Pressure quickly mounted. Lawmakers from both parties, many from states that strongly backed Trump, urged the administration to release the funds. On July 16, 10 Republican senators, including Senator Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia, sent a letter to OMB calling for immediate disbursement. A few days later, a lawsuit was filed by school districts and unions representing educators from Alaska to Ohio.

By late July, the Department of Education released all withheld funds, starting with \$1.4 billion for after-school programs and eventually the remaining \$5 billion. While no detailed findings from the review were shared, officials warned schools about future compliance with federal civil-rights laws.

The incident highlighted a growing divide over education policy. The Trump administration aims to reduce the federal role in education, proposing additional budget cuts and

promoting school-choice measures. Yet, as this funding pause showed, communities across the political spectrum rely on federal support to keep schools running.

Whether Baesler, if confirmed, will support these cuts or advocate for schools remains to be seen. In the meantime, educators nationwide continue to navigate uncertain funding landscapes as the new school year approaches.