

Cuts hit community colleges, despite Trump's praise for skilled trades training

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A spate of federal cuts are hurting a pillar of the higher-education system: community colleges. The schools, which educate about 40 percent of the nation's college students, are contending with millions of dollars in lost funding for services such as campus-based [child care](#), student advisement and academic support.

The Trump administration has hailed the career and technical training that community colleges provide, [emphasizing](#) the need for greater investment in skilled trades. Congressional Republicans, meanwhile, have expanded the use of the federal Pell Grant to more short-term programs, which [policy experts say](#) could be a boon for community colleges in coming years.

But for now, the Trump administration's policy on cutting discretionary grants to programs that serve diverse student populations is disrupting the very type of college education that the administration says is critical for the nation's workforce.

Cuts to higher education this year have been spread across a variety of federal programs, but policy experts say community colleges can least afford to absorb the losses. Schools such as Pima Community College in Arizona, Green River College in Washington and Chemeketa Community College in Oregon have lost millions in discretionary grants that they say cannot be easily replaced.

“This is an assault on our students, it’s an assault on our democracy because those students will not have the same opportunities for success as they would have just a couple of years ago,” said Mike Gavin, founder of [Education for All](#), a grassroots group of community college administrators.

The Education Department, which governs many of the grant programs at issue, has said the agency needed to review all higher-education spending to ensure it serves the priorities of President Donald Trump.

“The Trump Administration is no longer allowing taxpayer dollars to go out the door on autopilot — we are evaluating every federal grant to ensure that they are in line with the Administration’s policy of prioritizing merit, fairness, and excellence in education,” said Ellen Keast, a spokesperson for the Education Department.

There is no comprehensive accounting of the funding community colleges have lost. The impact, nonetheless, is evident in programs that are key sources of federal dollars.

Take the move to end [\\$350 million in discretionary grant funding](#) that Congress allocated for minority-serving institutions — colleges that educate a disproportionate number of students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups. Roughly 40 percent of grant recipients are community colleges, according to the most recent data from the Education Department.

In September, the department [said](#) the grant programs, some dating back more than 30 years, are discriminatory because they provide benefits “exclusively to institutions that meet racial or ethnic quotas.” Colleges are eligible for minority-serving funding based on a host of criteria, including financial need and an enrollment threshold.

Within days of the announcement, the Trump administration said it would [reroute](#) the money to charter schools, civics programs, tribal colleges and historically Black colleges and universities. Schools learned of the abrupt funding cut weeks before the end of the fiscal year, leaving them scrambling to keep services going.

Community college leaders say the mixed messages on federal funding make it difficult to plan. Although the Education Department scrapped discretionary funding for minority-serving institutions, Trump’s fiscal 2026 proposal [includes money](#) for the schools. At the same time, the

administration is [refusing](#) to defend the constitutionality of Hispanic-Serving Institutions in a lawsuit seeking to end the designation. The Education Department used that rationale to abruptly pull funding from other minority-serving institutions.

“The MSI reprogramming had a profound impact on our colleges,” said David Baime, senior vice president for government relations at the American Association of Community Colleges, referring to minority-serving institutions. “The timing of it added to the disruption. I don’t anticipate our schools will fully bounce back, given how tight their budgets are.”

At Bunker Hill Community College in Boston, the grants have been one of the largest sources of funding for academic advisement and tutoring, said President Pam Eddinger. The college is losing \$450,000 in grants designated for schools serving large numbers of Hispanic, Asian American and Pacific Islander students.

Eddinger said the money broadly benefited the Bunker Hill community, not just students from certain ethnic or racial groups, as is also the case at other minority-serving institutions. She said many of her students are the first in their families to attend college and need guidance to succeed as nurses and in other skilled trades that are a core function of community colleges. Without the federal investment, the college may have to dial back career-advising services, she said.

“It’s possible to raise money for small things, but you can’t raise money for a sustainable budget,” Eddinger said. “Some folks will say, ‘Well, your state will make up for it.’ Well, no. The state can’t make up for it. The reason why we have federal funding is because it is a complement to state funding.”

The financial pressure is acute for schools that are losing multiple streams of federal funding at once. Pima Community College in Arizona is grappling with a nearly \$7 million reduction in funding through three separate grant programs, including money for campus-based child care and colleges with large populations of Hispanic students.

At a [governing board meeting](#) in September, Pima Community College officials said the loss of federal dollars was compounded by Arizona’s defunding of community colleges in Pima and Maricopa counties since the 2008 Great Recession. That disinvestment has made federal dollars a critical resource. College officials said they were in talks with potential donors but could not rule out program cuts and layoffs.

“There is no realistic way that we ... can just sustain all of these programs without federal dollars,” Pima Community College Governing Board Chairman Greg Taylor said during the September [board meeting](#). “We’re going to be in a place where we have to make some difficult decisions. It’s just so discouraging and disheartening to see disinvestments in really effective programs in driving economic mobility.”

In Auburn, Washington, Green River College is set to lose \$1.2 million in funding for schools with large populations of Asian American and Pacific Islander students. The community college, with an enrollment of 15,000 students, was entering its third year of a five-year grant when the Education Department pulled the money.

Green River also took a hit when the department refused to renew \$1.8 million in funding for Student Support Services, one of seven initiatives for students from low-income families and veterans in a federal program known as TRIO. A cancellation letter from department officials, reviewed by The Washington Post, said Green River's proposed activities "take account of race in ways that conflict with the Department's policy of prioritizing merit, fairness and excellence in education."

The Council for Opportunity in Education filed a [lawsuit](#) in September accusing the Trump administration of unfairly penalizing colleges for including diversity, equity and inclusion language that was previously required to receive funding. When Student Support Services applications were submitted in 2024, the department [required](#) colleges to describe the steps they would take to ensure equitable access to their proposed projects.

The council filed two separate lawsuits against the Education Department for violating long-standing legal procedures by depriving a range of colleges of approximately \$40 million in TRIO funding that served some 40,000 students.

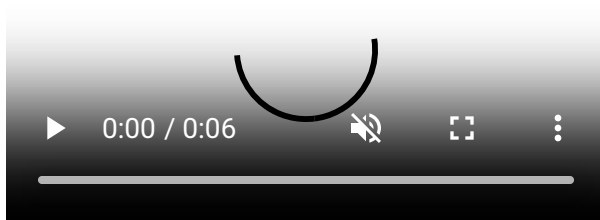
Green River is appealing the department's decision to reject its application for TRIO grant funding that the college has received for nearly 30 years. President Suzanne Johnson said she is asking the campus community to remain hopeful.

"These programs are attempting to help low-income students, first-generation students, students who may not have any experience with navigating college," Johnson said. "This isn't about one program or one college, it's about whether higher education, and the community colleges in particular, whether we remain within reach for low-income and first-generation students across the country."

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