



# Teachers Hold Onto the Promise of Equal Opportunity Amid Disruption

*How Federal Policy is Showing Up in Classrooms in 2026*

As Washington fundamentally reconsiders its role in education, teachers are calling on the federal government to do its part to deliver on America's promise of educational opportunity for every student.

*Voices from the Classroom*, Educators for Excellence's (E4E) national teacher survey of more than 2,000 public school teachers, suggests that teachers do not want federal policymakers running their classrooms. But they do want federal policy to help fulfill responsibilities that states and districts cannot fulfill alone. Instead of immigration raids, budget cuts, and private school vouchers, teachers say the federal government should protect students' rights and direct resources toward students with the greatest needs. What follows, in teachers' own words and data, is a clear portrait of where they invite federal action and where they draw the line.

1

**Finding 1: The federal government has a fundamental responsibility to protect educational opportunities, especially for students who have historically had the least access to them. 89% believe the federal government has an obligation to support states and districts in educating students with disabilities.**

Teachers overwhelmingly believe the federal government has an obligation to ensure that students facing the greatest barriers have access to a strong public education. Teachers see Washington as having a unique responsibility to provide funding for groups of students who face the greatest obstacles to achievement and to investigate violations of students' foundational right to public education.

**87%**

believe the federal government has an obligation to support states and districts in educating **students from low-income households**

**89%**

believe the federal government has an obligation to support states and districts in educating **students with disabilities**

**88%**

believe the federal government has an obligation to support states and districts in educating **students experiencing homelessness**

That helps explain why teachers so strongly reject efforts to reduce the federal government's capacity to fulfill those responsibilities. Teachers oppose the current administration's efforts to reduce or redirect funding, to shrink the scope and size of the U.S. Department of Education (USED) offices that ensure students are not discriminated against, or to otherwise dismantle the department.

- **Just 8% support disruptions or reductions at the USED**, including its Office of Special Education Programs and the Office for Civil Rights.
- **Only 11% support plans to close or reduce** the size and scope of the USED.
- **Just 3% support federal funding cuts to K-12 grant programs**, such as for English Learners, after-school programming, and teacher professional development.

For teachers, the future of the USED is not simply about a department or a building. It is about whether, at this moment, the federal government will keep protecting students' rights and directing resources to the students who need them most.

2

**Finding 2: Federal immigration enforcement is disrupting students' ability to learn.** 65% of teachers who serve multilingual students (MLLs), and 42% of teachers overall, say student attendance has worsened as a result.

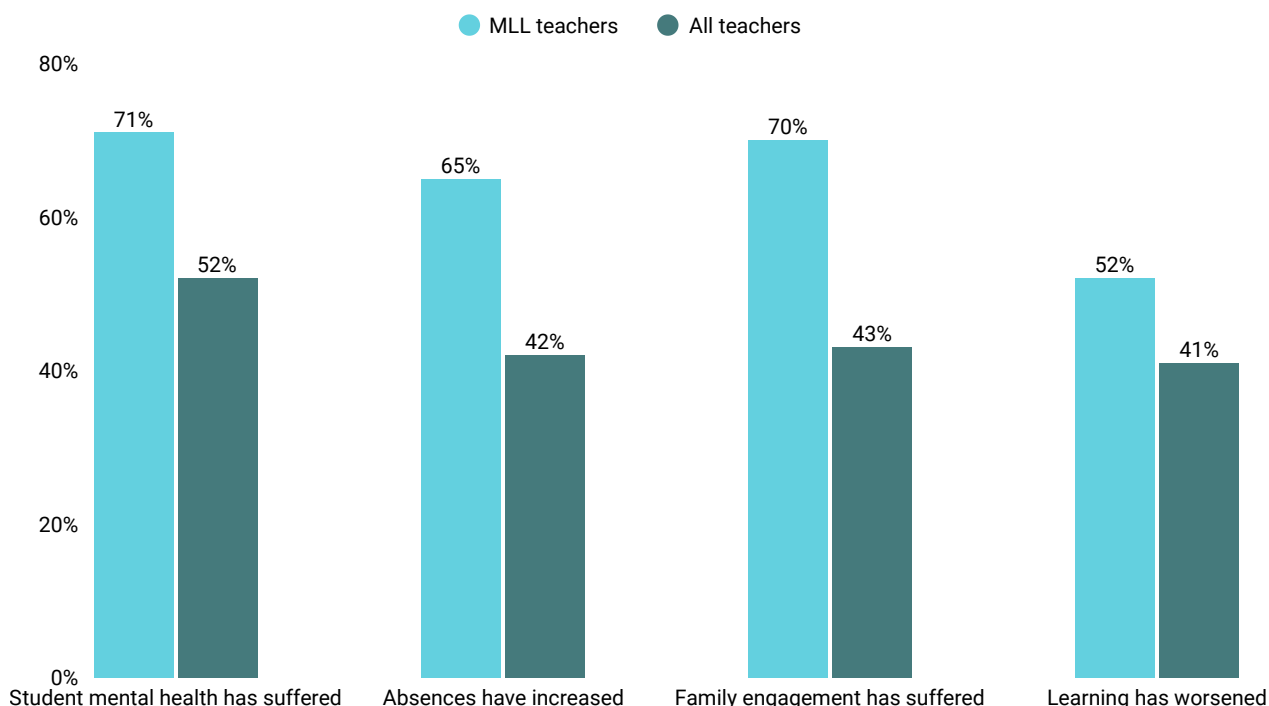


“ We started the year with 120 seniors, and by the end of the year, we were down to 107. Some self-deported, while some left with just a few days before they graduated. Every single day, out of our 540 multilingual learners, 125 are absent. - **Nazila Ramjan**, HS English as a New Language Teacher in Queens, NY

Federal policy reaches schools and classrooms in ways that extend well beyond the USED. Across the country, teachers report that Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) operations, or even just news and fear of those operations, are affecting whether students come to school, how students and families engage with schools, and how well students and teachers themselves are faring — ultimately shaping students' ability to learn.

**Federal immigration enforcement is disrupting classrooms nationwide. For teachers who serve mostly multilingual learners, the impact is especially stark.**

As a result of ICE operations or news of those activities...



Teachers remain steadfast in their commitment to their students, but at a high personal cost. **Just 13% say teacher attendance has suffered as a result of ICE operations, but half say that teachers' mental health has worsened.**

Taken together, these findings illustrate another dimension of the federal government's responsibility for educational opportunity: federal policies outside the education system can still profoundly shape what happens inside schools. When students are afraid to come to school, families pull back from engaging with educators, students arrive carrying fear and uncertainty, and their opportunity to learn is diminished.

3

**Finding 3: A chilling effect is keeping nearly one-third of teachers from addressing race and racism in their lessons.** *Just 13% say they've been told to limit discussions of race, racism, or the history of underrepresented groups, but another 17% say they have limited those discussions on their own.*

Although the federal government has no formal authority over curriculum, federal actions continue to have a downstream influence over classroom instruction. The survey results show some evidence of progress from previous years: just 13% of teachers – and 14% of teachers of color – report being told by a member of their school community to limit discussions about race, racism, or the history and experiences of underrepresented populations between 2025 and 2026. This is a sharp decline from 25% of all teachers and 46% of teachers of color in 2024.

Still, the assault on discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in schools nationwide continues to take its toll in less overt ways: **about one in six teachers (17%) say they have decided on their own to limit discussions about race, racism, or the history and experiences of underrepresented populations, even without being told to do so.**

Together, these findings suggest that the federal government's influence on classrooms extends beyond formal directives. Teachers need a clear line: the federal government's role is to protect students' rights, not dictate curriculum. Decisions about what and how to teach should stay where the law requires them to be – with states, districts, schools, and educators.

4

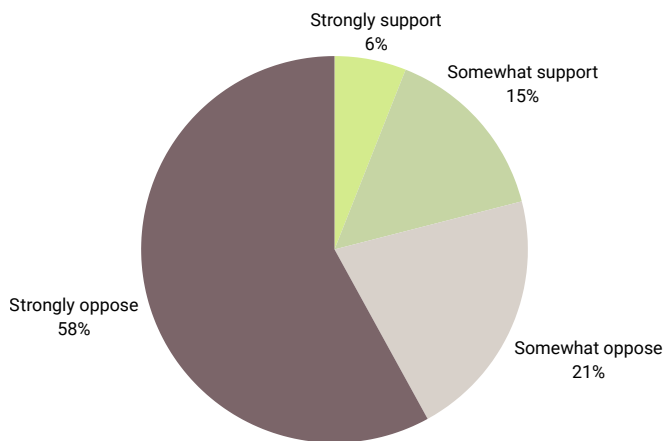
**Finding 4: Public dollars should not be diverted to private schools.** *79% oppose tax credits for donations to private school scholarship funds.*



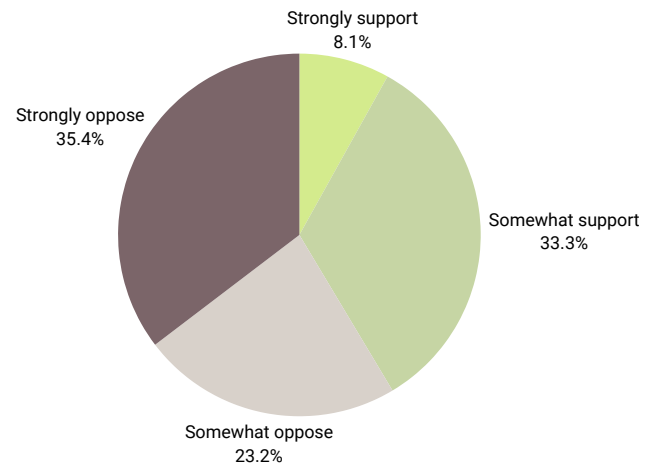
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Public schools serve every student regardless of ability to pay, offering services many private schools don't. That federal funding shouldn't be threatened, withheld, or redirected elsewhere.  
- **Jeremy McKeen**, ELA High School Teacher in MA

Teachers want federal investments to strengthen the public education system – particularly for the students and communities with the greatest needs – not to subsidize private school choice. A majority of teachers oppose the Trump administration's new tax credit program that, starting in 2027, would give individuals who donate to "scholarship granting organizations" a dollar-for-dollar credit for up to \$1,700 on their federal taxes. Even when it is made clear that these funds can be used to cover expenses beyond private school tuition, such as tutoring or learning materials, teachers still oppose this aspect of the program, though by a narrower margin.

**Q:** The federal government recently created a program that gives people who donate to organizations that award scholarships for private school attendance a federal tax credit up to \$1,700, thus using public tax dollars to fund private schools. **To what extent do you support this program?**



**Q:** These tax credits can also go to organizations that offer scholarships that can be used to cover other expenses outside the public school system, such as tutoring or materials. **To what extent do you support this aspect of the program?**



The survey did not directly ask whether teachers support public school students using these dollars to access supplemental learning opportunities. Given teachers' staunch support elsewhere in the survey for channeling funding toward students with the highest needs, support for these funds may be higher if the program had a lower income threshold for participation — the current law is 300% of the average median income — and if states were able to direct more of the money towards students in public schools.

**Across all four findings, teachers are calling on the federal government to fulfill its unique and indispensable role to ensure that every child, regardless of background or zip code, has access to a public school that provides them with a real opportunity to learn and to reach their potential.** This is the foundational promise America has made to its children, and teachers remain committed to upholding it.

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