

Who is Trump's education secretary nominee Linda McMahon?

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Trump has selected billionaire wrestling magnate Linda McMahon as the new Secretary of Education—her confirmation by the Senate is all but assured. Her mandate is no secret—the breakup of public education as we know it and the transfer of the billions presently spent on free schools into corporate-run training, private schools or other for-profit businesses.

Of equal importance to the ruling elites is the evisceration of the Enlightenment goals of public education—scientific pursuit, world knowledge and critical thinking. Thomas Jefferson, who viewed his contribution to universal education as his most important achievement, saw public education as a bulwark against tyranny and oppression.

In the drive towards war and authoritarianism, Trump and the ruling elite aim to usurp such democratic conceptions and replace them with American patriotism, xenophobia and jingoism, militarist conformism and Christian nationalism. Destroying the younger generation's access to history, art and culture is viewed as essential in Trump's war on democracy and, above all, socialism.

While millions of educators are horrified by these prospects, both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and the National Education Association (NEA) have expressed their willingness to work with McMahon, in line with the Democratic Party's willingness to "find common ground."

Even a brief look at Linda McMahon's history constitutes a warning of the need to prepare a struggle in defense of the principles of public education and First Amendment rights. This fight must, and will, emerge from educators, parents, students and workers themselves, not from a union apparatus prepared to "do business" with fascists.

World Wrestling Entertainment

McMahon spent 30 years leading World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE), formerly the World Wrestling Federation, with her husband, Vince McMahon. She was CEO from 1997 to 2009. Amassing extraordinary wealth (current net worth \$3.2 billion) she helped lead a vast expansion of the American wrestling industry.

American wrestling under the McMahons was fully transformed from sport into brutal "entertainment." WWE was characterized

by stunts designed to glorify violence, cruelty, exploitation, xenophobia and pro-war patriotism. WWE's corporate policies often overstepped even the lax regulations in place. It was the subject of numerous lawsuits for the sexual abuse of under-aged "ring boys" and the tacit promotion of steroids. The lack of drug testing at WWE is widely believed to have contributed to the death of Eddie Guerrero in 2005 and Chris Benoit's gruesome murder-suicide in 2007.

WWE's "story lines" were designed to promote extreme backwardness. Stunts often used hypersexualized women performing degrading acts on stage, mocked commentator Jim Ross or others for medical conditions, and featured McMahon herself performing violent acts, including repeatedly slapping her children.

WWE athletes often worked 300-plus days a year, with little time off. They were classified as "independent contractors" with no healthcare or pensions in a job that regularly caused major injuries.

Why has McMahon been selected for the nation's top education position?

It is hard to imagine a candidate *less* suited personally to serve as the guardian of the nation's public schools, the advancement of learning and culture, or the mandate to provide all children with a high-quality public education. But as with his other appointments, Trump selected McMahon for her undying personal loyalty and willingness to impose brutal attacks on the working class's social rights.

McMahon's admittedly "thin resume" in education primarily consists of her year on the Connecticut Board of Education (2009-2010). Even this brief stint highlighted her prioritization of business interests; she "promoted literacy" through WWE-branded initiatives. These "reading materials" were distributed by wrestlers. Critics noted that the materials "lacked alignment with state literacy standards" and "prioritized marketing."

In 2017, Trump named McMahon head of the Small Business Administration (SBA). She used the position as a platform—touring 68 cities—to support Trump's tax cuts, an unprecedented \$1.5 trillion handout to the wealthy. For her part, she slashed the SBA by 5 percent, cut rural development, enacted measures that benefited Walmart and other mega-franchises, and cut financial support to minority-owned businesses by 12 percent.

In 2019, she resigned from the SBA to chair America First Action, a pro-Trump Super PAC, to support Trump's 2020

election campaign.

After his defeat, the America First Policy Institute (AFPI) was founded in 2021 by Larry Kudlow, Trump's former chief economic adviser, and Brooke Rollins, the current Secretary of Agriculture. The Institute's roster included 63 former Trump officials and McMahon was placed in charge.

AFPI's outlook under McMahon reveals the scope of the Trump administration's plans.

America First Policy Institute: a blueprint for destroying public education

AFPI, sharing a large amount of overlap with the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025, has become the playbook for the Trump administration in education, laying the basis for his two Executive Orders of January 29, "Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling" and "Expanding Educational Freedom and Opportunity for Families."

Under McMahon, AFPI focused on effecting school privatization through vouchers, creating the "parental rights" movement to drive censorship and right wing curricula changes, and realigning policy to suit corporate-driven technical requirements.

AFPI calls for ending "government-run schools" through the use of voucher programs and charter school expansion: the Trump/McMahon plan. This was outlined in AFPI's 2022 America First Agenda, a 300-page manifesto that frames school choice as a "civil rights" issue. The manifesto falsely claims that 72 percent of Americans support vouchers, despite consistent ballot rejections and overwhelming support for public education across the US.

Targeting the Department of Education for destruction, deeming it a bastion of "wokeness," AFPI said vouchers would transfer power to the states. McMahon claims this would "empower parents, not politicians."

At its core, AFPI seeks to redefine education along the lines of patriotism, conformity and American nationalism. In a June 2021 policy statement, "Center for 1776: Fighting for a Pro-America, America," they write:

Unpatriotic elites and corporations across the country have used their power and money to create and normalize the narrative that America and the American founding are inherently bad—a narrative that to be patriotic is to be racist.

The screed continues:

Thousands of American schools have become systems of indoctrination where Marxist theory is commonly taught in the classroom, but ideas of capitalism are suppressed and neglected.

AFPI concludes that its mission would focus on "*Researching and developing policies focused on patriotic curriculum.*" One such example is the Florida state law adopted this year mandating the state's public schools to teach about the "evils of communism" beginning in kindergarten and extending through high school.

AFPI's 2023 position paper, "Give Every Parent the Right to See All Curriculum Materials," institutionalizes censorship. It requires schools to seek parental approval for lessons on race, gender, or US history. The policy is modeled after Florida's notorious "Don't Say Gay" law.

In 2023, AFPI began training 1,200 "parent activists" to disrupt school board meetings and advocate censorship, book bans and other fascistic policies.

Also that year, McMahon co-authored AFPI's Restoring American Education and called for shifting the Department of Education into Health and Human Services (HHS). Trump's current plan calls for moving the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) oversight from the Department of Education (DE) into HHS under Robert F. Kennedy Jr. and converting it into a block grant whose funding can be more easily cut.

In 2024, AFPI, in coordination with the extreme right-wing Moms for Liberty, helped pass 31 state laws restricting library books.

McMahon's conception of Career and Technical Education includes instituting "Workforce Pell" allowing federal Pell Grants to be funneled to for-profit coding boot camps, other forms of for-profit edubusinesses and directly to corporations—ostensibly for in-house training. Along these lines, McMahon recommended apprenticeship programs that would allow companies like Walmart to replace paid training with taxpayer-funded "learnerships."

It is notable that 40 percent of AFPI's funding in 2023, data from the last year available, came from for-profit charter management organizations (CMOs). For instance, K12 Inc.—a CMO fined \$168 million for fraudulent online schooling—donated \$4.7 million while lobbying against virtual charter regulations. Unsurprisingly, former US Education Secretary Betsy DeVos, an AFPI board member, has also invested some \$2.5 million in AFPI-aligned charter schools.

In 2024, McMahon concluded her service at the helm of AFPI. She resigned to serve as a Trump-Vance transition co-chair, raising \$200 million for his campaign while personally donating \$10 million.

In sum, McMahon is the face of the most fundamental attack on public education in American history.



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