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Congress of the United States
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December 30, 2025

Brandy Brown
Deputy Assistant Secretary for K-12
Education
US Department of Education
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Washington, DC 20202

Mary Christina Riley
Assistant Secretary for Legislation and
Congressional Affairs
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Deputy Assistant Secretary Brown and Assistant Secretary Riley:

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today to discuss the Department of Education's decision to terminate Paterson School District's Full Service Community School ("FSCS") grants, resulting in a devastating loss of \$7.9 million to our schools.

As we discussed, on December 12, 2025, the Department sent two notices to Paterson that its FSCS grant funding was being terminated.¹ The notice informed Paterson that it had just one week to file an appeal of the Department's decision.² On Friday, December 19, Paterson School District filed its appeal to prevent the loss of these funds—funds that are critical in providing after school programming, tutoring, and academic counseling, among other things.³ In an attempt to understand the rationale and process behind the decision, my office contacted and spoke with you on December 22. But just yesterday, on December 29, the Department sent Paterson and my office notice stating that it was denying Paterson's appeal.⁴

¹ Letter from Murray Bessette, Principal Dep'y Asst. Sec'y, Off. of Planning, Evaluation & Policy Dev., U.S. Dep't of Educ., to Kristy Wellins, Assoc. Proj. Dir., Paterson Pub. Sch., regarding Notice of Non-Continuation of Grant Award S215J220151 (Dec. 12, 2025) (on file with office); Letter from Murray Bessette, Principal Dep'y Asst. Sec'y, Off. of Planning, Evaluation & Policy Dev., U.S. Dep't of Educ., to Kristy Wellins, Assoc. Proj. Dir., Paterson Pub. Sch., regarding Notice of Non-Continuation of Grant Award S215J230159 (Dec. 12, 2025) (on file with office).

² *Id.*

³ See Gabriella Dragone, *Paterson Schools Appeal Federal Decision to End Community Schools Funding, Citing Impact on Students and Families*, TapInto Paterson (Dec. 26, 2025), www.tapinto.net/towns/paterson/sections/education/articles/paterson-schools-appeal-federal-decision-to-end-community-schools-funding-citing-impact-on-students-and-families.

⁴ Letter from Lindsey M. Burke, Dep'y Chief of Staff for Policy & Programs, U.S. Dep't of Educ., to Dr. Laurie W. Newell, Superintendent, Paterson Sch. Dist., re Response to Reconsideration Request of the Non-Continuation of

At no point during this process does it appear that the Department *ever* attempted to directly contact Paterson informing it that it was at risk of losing its \$7.9 Million. The only basis that the Department pointed to was a notice published in the U.S. Federal Register stating that the Department was placing new priorities on discretionary grants.⁵ When asked whether the Department provided this federal register notice to Paterson or other grant awardees, you stated you did not have the answer to this question. Instead, the Department claimed it was on the grant awardees to conduct outreach. This responsibility inherently assumes, however, that grant awardees would be aware that there is a risk or concern about their specific programming. Yet, given that awardees such as Paterson were never informed at any point prior to this termination that there was a conflict, they would have no reason to believe that their programming was in contravention to the Administration's priorities and were at risk of losing their funds.

During our conversation I repeatedly expressed my dismay over the Department's failure to provide any opportunity to Paterson to remedy concerns that the Department had with its programming. Paterson and my office have repeatedly notified the Department during this two-week process that Paterson was willing to address and modify its programming to be in compliance with the Department priorities and interpretation of civil rights laws. Nevertheless, Paterson was given no chance to alter its resources and assistance. As a result, hundreds of Paterson and Passaic City students risk falling behind and may lose future employment opportunities because all programming will be forced to close—including academic support, tutoring assistance, priorities that the Department itself believes are critical as spelled out in its September Federal Register notice.⁶

The academic support and tutoring resources Paterson is providing to the eight schools has a proven record of success. As you are aware, FSCS grant recipients are required to provide reports on the impact and success of their programming.⁷ For 2025, Paterson's data shows that these programs improve student academic success. For example, at Public School 10, students who participated in FSCS after school and/or mentoring programming, compared to non-participating peers, were 9% less chronically absent, experienced fewer absent days, achieved 32% higher scores in math and 31% higher scores in literacy.⁸ Additionally, students at Passaic High School who participated in FSCS afterschool and/or mentoring programming, compared to those who did not participate, were also 9% less likely to be chronically absent, also experienced fewer absent days, and received 9% higher average scores in math and 3% higher average scores in literacy.⁹ Terminating Paterson's FSCS grants will undoubtedly hang students out to dry—an action that is in complete contradiction to the Department's mission to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness.

Grant PR/Award Number S215J230159 (Dec. 29, 2025) (on file with office). Letter from Lindsey M. Burke, Dep't Chief of Staff for Policy & Programs, U.S. Dep't of Educ., to Dr. Laurie W. Newell, Superintendent, Paterson Sch. Dist., re Response to Reconsideration Request of the Non-Continuation of Grant PR/Award Number S215J220151 (Dec. 29, 2025) (on file with office).

⁵ 90 Fed. Reg. 43514 (Sept. 9, 2025).

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ 20 U.S.C. § 7275(g).

⁸ *See* Paterson Public School 2025 FSCS Data (on file with office, available upon request).

⁹ *Id.*


Given the severe lack of notice, opportunity, and communication throughout this process and the lasting harm this decision will cause to students in New Jersey's 9th Congressional District, I am requesting a meeting with Dr. Lindsey Burke who had final sign-off on these grant terminations and am requesting written responses to the following questions.

- 1) Did the Department ever contact Paterson School District regarding concerns over its FSCS grant programming? If yes, please provide dates, the name of the department official who contacted Paterson, and information as to the means in which the outreach was made (e.g., email, written mail, phone call). If no, please provide a detailed explanation for why not.
- 2) Did the Department provide Paterson School District a copy of the Federal Register Notice identifying the Department's priorities as it pertains to discretionary grant funding programming? If yes, please provide the date, the name of the department official who contacted Paterson, and information as to the means in which the outreach was made (e.g., email, written mail, phone call).
- 3) Will the Department provide Paterson the opportunity to modify its programming in order to become compliant with the Department's priorities so as to retain their FSCS grant funding? If no, please provide a detailed explanation for why not.
- 4) Will the Department commit to providing current and future discretionary grant awardees advanced communication regarding potential concerns regarding grant programming that may jeopardize a grant awardees loss of federal funding? If yes, please provide the process in which the Department intends to review and notify recipients. If no, please provide a detailed explanation for why not.
- 5) Will the Department commit to providing current and future discretionary grant awardees future opportunities to modify its programming prior to giving a notice of funding termination to prevent any loss of federal funds? If yes, please provide the process in which recipients will be allowed to modify programming to become compliant with the Department. If no, please provide a detailed explanation for why not.

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with me today. I am making myself available, day or night, to speak with Dr. Burke to discuss this urgent matter, as well as speak with Secretary McMahon as initially requested in my Dec 17th letter.¹⁰

¹⁰ Letter from Nellie Pou, Member of Congress, U.S. House of Rep, to Linda McMahon, Sec'y, U.S. Dept of Educ. (Dec. 17th, 2025)
<https://pou.house.gov/sites/evo-subsites/pou.house.gov/files/evo-media-document/rep-pou-letter-to-sec-mcmahon-12-17-2025.pdf>.

Sincerely,



Nellie Pou
Member of Congress
New Jersey's Ninth District

Cc:

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary
U.S. Department of Education

Lindsey M. Burke, Ph.D.
Deputy Chief of Staff for Policy and Programs
U.S. Department of Education