

NELLIE POU
9th District, New Jersey

1007 LONGWORTH HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-5751

100 HAMILTON PLAZA, SUITE 1400
PATERSON, NJ 07505
(973) 523-5152
<http://pou.house.gov>



COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORTATION AND
INFRASTRUCTURE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON AVIATION,
VICE RANKING MEMBER
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HIGHWAYS AND TRANSIT
SUBCOMMITTEE ON WATER RESOURCES
AND ENVIRONMENT

COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COUNTERTERRORISM
AND INTELLIGENCE

January 21, 2026

The Honorable Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General of the United States
United States Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Acting Comptroller Brown:

I write to request that the Government Accountability Office (“GAO”) conduct an investigation into the actions taken by the Department of Education (“Department”) in terminating roughly \$170 Million in Full-Service Community School (“FSCS”) grant awards. This independent investigation into the processes and decision-making of the Department by the GAO is critical to determine whether the officials there or at other various offices across the Trump Administration may have engaged in misconduct or acted illegally in this process.

Congress established the FSCS grant program in 2008 to improve coordination of educational, developmental, family, health, and other services through partnerships between (1) public elementary and secondary schools and (2) community-based organizations and public or private to provide comprehensive educational, social, and health services for students, families, and communities.¹ These grants help “provide support for the planning, implementation, and operation of full-service community schools that improve the coordination, integration, accessibility, and effectiveness of services for children and families, particularly for children attending high-poverty schools.”² This program has consistently been supported by Congress, increasing its initial \$5 Million funding in Fiscal Year 2008 to \$150 in Fiscal Year 2025.

When grantees are awarded FSCS support, the Department will award funds on an initial one-year budget period and then subsequently fund continuation awards thereafter. Grantees are not required to reapply for continuation of these awards each year—rather, grantees seeking a continuation must submit a performance report that includes the most current performance and financial expenditure information.³ The decision to continue funding these awards are based on the grantee’s performance, which is determined by reports, performance measurement data, and

¹ 73 Fed. Reg. 8984.

² U.S. Dep’t of Educ., *About: Full-Service Community Schools Program*, www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/grants/birth-grade-12/school-and-community-improvement-grants/full-service-community-schools-program-fscs (last accessed Jan. 12, 2025).

³ 34 C.F.R. § 75.118.

financial reporting and compliance.⁴ It is important to note that terminating FSCS awards by the Department is extremely rare. As the Department recently stated, “[the Department] do[es] not deny a large number of non-competing continuation awards *and, if that does happen, grantees are often aware of the likelihood of the decision well in advance and often cite no concerns if they do not receive a continuation award.*”⁵ It is because of these requirements and positions that I am deeply concerned that the Department engaged in misconducted or acted illegally.

On Friday, December 12th, 2025, the Department issued non-continuation notices for 19 FSCS grants, resulting in a loss of roughly \$170 Million across multiple years for primary and secondary schools.⁶ Grantees were informed that they had just one week to file an appeal regarding the Department’s non-continuation decision—placing the appeal deadline the Friday before Christmas.⁷ In justifying its decisions, the Department provided grantees vague, template explanations, stating it

“determined that the grant specified above provides funding for programs that reflect the prior Administration’s priorities and policy preferences and conflict with those of the current Administration, in that the programs: violate the letter or purpose of Federal civil rights law; conflict with the Department’s policy of prioritizing merit, fairness, and excellence in education; undermine the well-being of the students these programs are intended to help; *or* constitute an inappropriate use of federal funds. The grant is therefore inconsistent with, and no longer effectuates, the best interest of the Federal Government”⁸

In the case of Paterson School District, for example, the Department never cited any deficiencies in any key performance metrics such as student attendance, improvements in student reading and literacy, or academic improvement in math scores.⁹ Rather, the Department cited

⁴ 34 C.F.R. §§ 75.118(b), 75.590, 75.720; *see also* 2 C.F.R. § 200.329.

⁵ 89 Fed. Reg. 70300, at 70316 (emphasis added).

⁶ *Educator Layoffs Loom as Canceled Community Schools Grants Remain in Limbo*, Education Week (Jan. 6, 2026), www.edweek.org/policy-politics/educator-layoffs-loom-as-canceled-community-schools-grants-remain-in-limbo/2026/01; *see also* Letter from Murray Bessette, Principal Dep’t 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) (hereinafter “FY2023 Paterson FSCS Termination Letter”); Letter from Murray Bessette, Principal Dep’t 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) (hereinafter “FY2022 Paterson FSCS Termination Letter”).

⁷ *See supra* note 6, FY2022 Paterson FSCS Termination Letter, at 2; FY2023 Paterson FSCS Termination Letter, at 2.

⁸ *Supra* note 6, FY2022 Paterson FSCS Termination Letter, at 1 (emphasis added); *supra* note 6, FY2023 Paterson FSCS Termination Letter, at 1. It is important to note the Department failed to specify which specific reason it had for terminating grants. Instead, as written, the Department claims it could be *any one* of the reasons provided. Consequently, grantees failed to receive an individualized reason for why their grants were in non-compliance with the Administration.

⁹ Had the Department conducted proper due diligence, it would have found grantees were maintaining compliance and programs were achieving their intended goals—goals that the Department continued to prioritize. For example, in 2025, data for the Paterson School District grantee academic and attendance data showed student success. For

specific words in its grant application—words such as “diversity” or “equity”—that simply appear to have triggered staff at the Department. Other FSCS grantees who also received these notices similarly received no individualized reasoning for why they would not receive continued funding.¹⁰ After grantees submitted their appeals by December 19th, the Department issued its reply notices one week later, on December 29th, denying these appeals.

At no point before December 12 did the Department attempt to contact grantees to inform them that their awards were at risk of termination due to non-compliance. In fact, the Department wrongly suggested it did not need to notify grantees of this change because the Department merely shifted priorities. However, any shift of this nature necessarily requires the Department to go through the proper notice and comment period for this program as required under the Administrative Procedural Act.¹¹ Unsurprisingly, no such notice and comment was provided. This lack of timely notice, paired with the Department’s absent justifications for its decisions, has stripped grantees the due process they are entitled to under federal law.

Given the severe consequences arising from the Department’s actions, an independent body is needed to assist Congress with its role to conduct proper oversight of the Department’s actions leading up to, and resulting in, non-continuation notices of these FSCS grants. Accordingly, I am requesting GAO investigate the Department’s recent actions regarding FSCS grant funding that includes the specific inquiry requests below and provide my office with findings. If applicable, I am also requesting GAO issue a legal opinion that is separate from any responses requiring an audit. The investigation should include, at minimum:

- 1) A detailed review of all actions taken by the Department of Education in identifying, reviewing, and determining what FSCS grantees would receive non-continuation notices. Such review should include:
 - a. A timeline of decisions and actions taken by the Department to issue non-continuation notices, including actions taken prior to, or after, non-continuation notices were sent to FSCS grantees;

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

¹⁰ See Press Release, North Carolina Off. of Att’y Gen, Attorney General Jeff Jackson Sues to Stop Unlawful Cut of Nearly \$50 Million from Rural North Carolina Schools (Dec. 31, 2025), www.ncdoj.gov/attorney-general-jeff-jackson-sues-to-stop-unlawful-cut-of-nearly-50-million-from-rural-north-carolina-schools/; *Illinois Groups Sue U.S. Department of Education After \$18M in Grants Cut in Middle of School Year*, WTTW (Jan. 7, 2026), www.news.wttw.com/2026/01/07/illinois-groups-sue-us-department-education-after-18m-grants-cut-middle-school-year.

¹¹ 20 U.S.C. § 1232(a), (d) (noting that regulation means any generally applicable rule, regulation, guideline, interpretation, or other requirement that is (a) prescribed by the Secretary and (b), has legally binding effect in connection with, or affecting, the provision of financial assistance under any applicable program).

- b. An accounting of the names, titles, and offices of individuals that decided which entities would receive non-continuation notices for FSCS grants;
- c. An accounting of the process and criteria, if any, used by the Department or officials located in other agencies, to determine which FSCS grantees would receive non-continuation notices; and
- d. An accounting of the justifications conveyed internally and externally by the Department or officials located in other agencies for issuing non-continuation notices to specific FSCS grantees.

2) A detailed review of all communications between the Department of Education and other officials within the Administration outside of the Department regarding its decision to issue non-continuation notices to specific FSCS grantees. Such review should include:

- a. An accounting of the names, titles, and offices of individuals engaged in discussions and decisions to issue non-continuation notices to FSCS grantees;
- b. A list, if any, of FSCS grantees that were initially identified to receive non-continuation notices but ultimately maintained FSCS grants funding;
 - i. All records detailing the justifications conveyed internally and externally for maintaining grant awards for grantees initially identified for non-continuation notices but who ultimately maintained funding, if any.

3) A detailed review of all actions taken by the Department of Education beginning on January 20, 2025 in transferring funds specifically appropriated for FSCS grants. Such review should include:

- a. A timeline of decisions and actions taken by the Department to redirect FSCS grant funds that received non-continuation notices, including actions taken prior to, or after, non-continuation notices were sent to FSCS grantees;
- b. An accounting of the names, titles, and offices of individuals that decided to redirect funding from FSCS grants that were sent non-continuation notices;
- c. All communications regarding redirecting FSCS grant funding prior to, or after, non-continuation notices were sent to FSCS grantees;
- d. An accounting of the process and criteria used by the Department, if any, to determine which entities would receive redirected FSCS grant funds;
- e. An accounting of where the Department redirected the non-continued FSCS grant funds, and what amounts were allocated to each entity; and
- f. An accounting of the justifications and basis provided by the Department, if any, in awarding redirected FSCS grant funds to entities.

4) An evaluation of any illegal acts or misconduct by the Department regarding its decision to discontinue FSCS grant awards.

* * * * *

Sincerely



Nellie Pou
Member of Congress
New Jersey's 9th Congressional District