

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 30, 2026

The Honorable Linda McMahon
Secretary of Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20202

Dear Secretary McMahon,

We write with great concern regarding the grant announcements posted in March 2026 for the TRIO Talent Search and Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) programs. Although these announcements came after months of advocacy from stakeholders and legislators, the content of the announcements themselves represent a fundamental shift in the mission of the programs. For this reason, I/We strongly urge you to rescind and reissue the announcements under previous requirements and extend the current grant for another year to avoid lapses in service to students.

Federal TRIO Programs (TRIO) are outreach and student services programs that identify and support first-generation students, low-income students, and students with disabilities, providing opportunities from middle school through postgraduate education. TRIO has led to higher rates of college enrollment, completion, employment, and compensation for more than 6 million graduates since 1964.¹ Talent Search is designed to reach students in grades 6 through 12. Its primary purpose is to establish expectations for college attendance long before a student reaches their senior year.² EOC focuses on adults, displaced workers, and veterans seeking to enter or return to postsecondary education. Because of TRIO, both populations have opportunities they would not otherwise have to explore higher education.

Elevating non-college pathways within a program historically designed to increase college enrollment and completion conflicts with TRIO's established statutory purpose and does a disservice to the students facing barriers to higher education that the programs are intended to serve. The announcements in their current form fundamentally alter the programs' purpose, reduce their capacity, destabilize long-standing practices, and risk service interruptions for current program participants. This current announcement is a direct assault on college access and fundamentally alters Talent Search and EOC's missions in the following ways:

1. The new applications shift the programs' focus away from TRIO's statutory mission of promoting college access for low-income and first-generation students. Instead, the requirements emphasize apprenticeships and technical education as alternative routes to economic mobility.

¹ U.S. Department of Education. (2026, February 4). TRIO Home Page. Retrieved April 7, 2026, from <https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/grants-higher-education/federal-trio-programs>

² Edgerton, A. K. (2025, January 6). The TRIO Programs: A primer (CRS Report No. R42724). Congressional Research Service. <https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/R42724>

2. The proposed framework slashes the programs' national capacity by more than half. The Department plans to award only 175 Talent Search grants (down from 517) and 55 EOC grants (down from 160).³ This massive reduction would markedly shrink the program's footprint, creating "service deserts" and eliminating essential college-going support in rural and underserved communities where these services are needed most.
3. The applications remove the traditional guarantee that high-performing grantees receive renewal awards equivalent to previous funding. By eliminating the stability of prior experience points, the Department introduces volatility into a system that has long prioritized continuity of services. This effectively creates a pseudo-lottery for life-changing educational support.
4. The applications introduce a five-point competitive preference for large state educational and workforce agencies, which may apply for "mega-grants" of up to \$10 million. This shift potentially centralizes control at the state level and erodes local access by diverting resources away from the community-based organizations and local colleges that have proven effective for over 60 years.
5. The current grants are set to expire on August 31, 2026, raising the imminent risk of service lapses. If the applications are not adjusted or reissued immediately, the potential expiration of current grants poses an immediate threat to the academic and financial guidance that students and adult learners depend on, particularly as they navigate the critical fall enrollment window.

The grant announcements posted in March 2026 alter the core mission of both Talent Search and EOC. For this reason, we ask that you support our nation's students and strongly urge you to rescind and reissue the announcements under previous requirements and extend the current grant for another year.

Sincerely,



Kirsten Gillibrand
Kirsten Gillibrand
United States Senator



Charles E. Schumer
Charles E. Schumer
United States Senator

³ U.S. Department of Education. (n.d.). *Educational Opportunity Centers (84.066A)*. Retrieved April 7, 2026, from <https://www.ed.gov/grants-and-programs/grants-higher-education/federal-trio-programs/educational-opportunity-centers-84066a>