

[https://tulsaworld.com/news/local/education/article\\_c35fe3ac-8a4d-48bb-9cff-a30393d3b65f.html](https://tulsaworld.com/news/local/education/article_c35fe3ac-8a4d-48bb-9cff-a30393d3b65f.html)

TOP STORY

## After-school programs, districts feeling impact of federal funding freeze: 'It's a mess'

Jul 6, 2025



The Tulsa Debate |  
June 4 debate at t  
expanding into del  
Courtesy, National A

ding for the new fiscal year has been withheld  
ation for Urban Debate Leagues chose the Tul

By Lenzy Kre

## Tulsa World Reporter

---

Lenzy Krehbiel-Burton

**R**oss Faith is not sure any more what the coming school year is going to look like.

Faith is the executive director of the Tulsa Debate League, one of 54 Oklahoma recipients of a 21st Century Community Learning Center federal grant to provide academic enrichment opportunities for students before or after school. During the 2024-25 school year, the organization had staff at Rogers Middle and High School, plus supported debate programs at multiple schools across the Tulsa metro area.

However, on Tuesday Faith found out via an advocacy organization for after-school programs that the Tulsa Debate League is among those whose federal funding for the new fiscal year has been withheld by the Trump administration.

“There was no warning, really,” he said.

In a notice issued last Monday afternoon by the U.S. Department of Education, **the Trump administration announced that it was withholding \$6.8 billion in federal education grants** for the fiscal year that started on Tuesday for Oklahoma school districts, including \$1.4 billion for 21st Century Community Learning Center grants, which serve an estimated 1.4 million children nationwide.

---

## People are also reading...

- 1 **Venables' retention of players is a bonanza for OU football | Berry Tramel's ScissorTales**
- 2 **Cops led fatal chase over car's paper tag. Body cam raises questions about why.**
- 3 **New CEO taking charge today of Williams, a \$73 billion company with a long history in Tulsa**
- 4 **Oklahoma Supreme Court rules against tribal citizen fighting state income tax**

The other four federal programs whose funding is being withheld by the Trump administration pay for a wide range of services, including professional development for teachers, adult literacy initiatives, and instructional supports for migrant children and English language learners.

According to an analysis by the Learning Policy Institute, \$70.8 million earmarked for Oklahoma has been withheld across all impacted programs. That's 11.5% of the state's federal education funds.

## **'I just don't know yet what's next'**

Faith said he and other organizations were already on alert about the possibility of federal funding cuts in future fiscal years, but the possibility of starting the new fiscal year without a previously awarded grant caught him off guard. The Tulsa Debate League has been a 21st Century Community Learning Center grant recipient since 2017.

Although the freeze includes multi-year grants that were previously awarded, the memo said "decisions have not yet been made" about the upcoming school year and did not provide a timeline for when those funds will be released.

"If you telegraph that a program is ending or sunseting, that gives organizations time to plan for how to sustain that program beyond the life of those funds or make other plans," Faith said. "When you tell people the day that the fiscal year starts that the program's over when they've already spent the funds, how can they expect schools and nonprofit organizations to adapt that quickly?"

Some Tulsa-area school districts start classes as early as Aug. 6, which means the Tulsa Debate League and other grant recipients are already having to figure out what adjustments are needed and how quickly they'll have to be made.

Faith said the Tulsa Debate League will still proceed with its summer debate camp later this month, but beyond that, he and the organization's Board of Directors are still figuring out what 2025-26 will look like if the grant is not restored quickly.

"I just don't know," he said. "That's what so hard about this. If you tell me June 30 that there's no funding for the thing you planned three months ago or a year ago after given five years of funding, ... I just don't know yet what's next."

## 'Everything feels unbalanced'

Sara Framel is also already facing some uncertainty due to the funding freeze. Framel is the president and chief executive officer of Youth at Heart, a 49-year-old nonprofit organization that works with up to 1,200 Tulsa-area students each year. Similar to the Tulsa Debate League, grant funding makes it possible for her organization to offer its programming to families for free.

Framel said Youth at Heart will feel the direct financial impact in a few weeks when it begins submitting invoices for reimbursement. However, with budgeting and planning already underway for the coming school year, she and her team are having to make decisions for the fall based on the information at hand.

"Without the promised funding, everything feels unbalanced," she said. "We're being forced to make real-time decisions — cutting staff hours, scaling back enrichment activities and potentially serving fewer kids."

"This isn't a future concern. It's happening now. And it's impacting families who rely on us every day."

In response to questions from the Tulsa World about the notification process and whether the Oklahoma State Department of Education is providing any support for grantees in light of the freeze, State Superintendent Ryan Walters issued a written statement through a spokesman, thanking the Trump administration for "working

diligently to ensure our taxpayer dollars are being stewarded with care” and encouraging districts to budget using only those federal funds that have already been awarded.

However, Oklahoma school districts are required to have a budget in place before the start of the new fiscal year, which means school districts have already approved budgets for the coming year that include those now-frozen funds.

Tulsa Public Schools’ Federal Programs Department did not find out about the freeze until Tuesday. The night before, that team had hosted a public consultation session to present the district’s proposed plans for federal dollars in 2025-26, including three of the five federal programs whose funding is now being withheld nationwide.

Among the affected programs included in that Monday night presentation was Title III — legally mandated supports and accommodations for students whose primary language is something other than English. During the 2024-25 school year, 38% of TPS students identified as multilingual learners.

TPS’ 2025-26 federal programs proposal included \$914,912 in Title III funds to support multilingual learners plus an additional \$175,149 in Title III funds to support immigrant students.

In a Wednesday email to TPS’ Language and Cultural Services staff that was obtained by the Tulsa World, Superintendent Ebony Johnson and Chief Teaching and Learning Officer Erin Armstrong wrote that the district is exploring alternative funding solutions and “remains dedicated” to finding a way to maintain services for multilingual, refugee and immigrant students and families.

“Our commitment to you remains strong,” the email reads in part. “Despite the funding challenges, we are dedicated to keeping our Language and Cultural Services Team whole and fully staffed for the upcoming school year.”

## 'We're all on edge'

Officials at Union Public Schools said they are already having to reassess plans due to the withheld funds.

"This whole thing concerns me on three levels," Superintendent John Federline said.

"First and foremost, it directly adversely impacts children. Some of the most vulnerable, disadvantaged populations we have in the state of Oklahoma — this directly, negatively impacts them.

"Second, I'm very concerned by the seemingly capricious nature of these cuts. This is money that's already been appropriated by Congress in last year's budget; then suddenly, out of the blue, this money's no longer coming to public schools.

"Third thing that concerns me is the timing of all this. The fact that it happened this week when the fiscal year switches over and it's July 4th weekend — so many people are out of town. Some district offices are closed for the week, and now they're trying to deal with this.

"It's a mess."

During the 2024-25 school year, Union received \$2.8 million for the programs covered by last Monday's announcement, with \$2 million going directly toward staffing costs.

Along with a \$240,000 21st Century Community Learning Center grant for programming at Ellen Ochoa Elementary School and \$1.2 million for adult education programs, the frozen funds include the bulk of Union's professional development budget.

With training events already scheduled for coming weeks that would have been paid for with the frozen funds, Federline said his district is now monitoring professional development expenses on a weekly basis and has asked employees to refrain from making any additional expense requests for training and travel until the district has a better idea as to if or when it will receive that money.

“That’s just a stopgap measure,” Federline said. “We don’t know what funds will and won’t be sent to us.

“We’re all on edge, waiting for the other shoe to drop.”

<rule>

## WHERE YOUR STORY LIVES: Lenzy Krehbiel-Burton



[lenzy.krehbiel-burton@tulsaworld.com](mailto:lenzy.krehbiel-burton@tulsaworld.com)



**Marketplace** Sell Your Items - Free to List

[Visit Full Marketplace](#)



### Vintage Hav-A-Hank Square

\$15

ELOISE E. | [sellwild.com](https://sellwild.com)



### Peanuts Snoopy Juniors Sz L

\$16

ELOISE E. | [sellwild.com](https://sellwild.com)



### Nike Air Jordan 1 Retro Varsity

\$55

ELOISE E. | [sellwild.com](https://sellwild.com)



### Tabletop Jewelry Box Spring

\$29

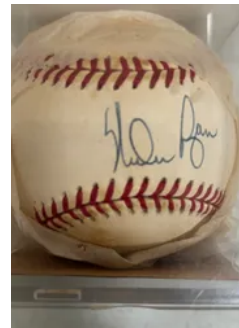
LIBBY B. | [sellwild.com](https://sellwild.com)



### 1930s Art Deco

\$27

NICOLE L. | [sellwild.com](https://sellwild.com)



### Nolan Ryan autographed

\$100

BILLY J. | [sellwild.com](https://sellwild.com)

Powered by [Sellwild](https://sellwild.com)

By Lenzy Krehbiel-Burton

Tulsa World Reporter