# California school districts resist federal deadline on civil rights compliance amid DEI tensions



The U.S. Department of Education has set a deadline of Thursday, 24 April, for K-12 school districts to certify their compliance with federal civil rights laws as interpreted by the Trump administration, under the threat of losing federal funding. This directive specifically targets schools’ diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programmes, which the administration claims may discriminate against certain groups by favouring others. The enforcement stems from Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, colour, or national origin.

The federal government’s recent push to clamp down on DEI initiatives includes the launch of an “End DEI Portal” in February, allowing parents to report schools allegedly discriminating based on race or sex. Acting assistant secretary for civil rights, Craig Trainor, stated earlier this month that numerous schools have failed to meet their legal obligations, accusing some DEI programmes of discriminating “against one group of Americans to favour another.”

However, California state officials have firmly countered these federal moves. In an April 11 letter, the California Department of Education declared that the state has already certified its compliance with federal civil rights laws for the 2024–25 school year. The letter also described the federal government’s threats to withhold funding as illegal. Representatives of several Southern California school districts echoed California’s position, with some indicating they had not even received the federal certification request.

The U.S. Department of Education’s certification notice, issued on 3 April, demands that states and school leaders acknowledge their receipt of federal funds comes with the condition of compliance with Title VI and an attached multi-page legal analysis by the administration. This follows a February 14 memo that declared any school policy that treats students or staff differently based on race to be unlawful, citing concerns of alleged discrimination often against White and Asian American students.

Among Southern California districts, the Chino Valley Unified School District in San Bernardino County complied by signing and returning the certification documents. Spokesperson Andrea Johnston noted the district, which is governed by a conservative majority on its board led by President Sonja Shaw, will receive more than $18 million in federal funding for the upcoming school year. The Chino Valley board has drawn national attention for conservative policies, including a parent notification rule concerning students’ changes to school records, such as pronoun changes.

Meanwhile, the largest school districts in Orange County, such as Capistrano Unified and Orange Unified, have reported no formal requests to certify compliance or directives to modify their DEI programmes. Capistrano’s spokesperson Ryan Burris stated they had not received any correspondence and would require additional details before taking action. Similarly, Hana Brake, spokesperson for Orange Unified, said the district follows state and county education department guidance and focuses on supporting “the academic success and well-being of all students,” adding, “If any official guidance is issued, we will thoroughly review it to ensure our practices comply with all relevant laws and regulations.”

The Orange County Department of Education confirmed its awareness of the federal request but noted it did not receive the certification letter directly. Superintendent Stefan Bean said the department “regularly certifies that it complies with federal laws as a condition of receiving funding” and that assurances have already been submitted for the 2024–25 year. The department’s legal office has provided guidance reaffirming that existing assurances remain valid.

In the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the largest in California with over 640,000 students, a spokesperson indicated the district would continue to align with the state’s lead regarding the certification. Similarly, districts in the Inland Empire, such as Riverside Unified, acknowledged receipt of the federal letter but generally deferred to the California Department of Education. Riverside Unified’s spokesperson Liz Pinney-Muglia explained the district believed state officials would address the matter. Riverside County Office of Education spokesperson Craig Petinak confirmed they had been communicating with the state to ensure their practices comply with California’s Education Code.

The developments come amid growing tensions between federal and state authorities over the scope and implementation of civil rights protections in education, specifically concerning race-based approaches in school policy and programming. The controversy highlights differing interpretations of the Civil Rights Act and varying responses from school districts across California to federal demands. The Associated Press contributed to this report.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/ed-requires-k-12-school-districts-certify-compliance-title-vi-and-students-v-harvard-condition-of-receiving-federal-financial-assistance> - This official U.S. Department of Education press release from April 3, 2025, confirms the directive requiring K-12 school districts to certify compliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act to continue receiving federal funding, matching the article's claim about the federal certification deadline and conditions tied to funding.
2. <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/see-which-states-are-telling-trump-their-schools-dont-use-illegal-dei/2025/04> - This article details the April 24 certification deadline for states and school districts to affirm non-use of 'illegal DEI practices' under Title VI, and the Department's interpretation of DEI as potentially violating anti-discrimination laws, corroborating the article’s description of the federal government’s stance and extended deadline.
3. <https://www.k12dive.com/news/education-department-title-vi-anti-dei-certification-federal-funding-requirement/744931/> - This source discusses the postponement and legal challenges related to the DEI certification deadline, the launch of the 'End DEI Portal,' and the Department’s anti-DEI efforts being temporarily curbed, supporting the article's mention of the portal and ongoing litigation influencing enforcement timelines.
4. <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/quick-takes/2025/04/11/education-dept-agrees-push-dei-compliance-deadline> - This piece verifies the April 3 notice by the Department and the agreement to extend the initial short compliance deadline to April 24, consistent with the article’s timeline and federal communication about the certification and compliance deadline.
5. <https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2025-04-15/california-department-of-education-declares-federal-anti-dei-efforts-illegal> - An authoritative California news report detailing the California Department of Education’s official letter dated April 11, 2025, rejecting the federal threats to withhold funding on anti-DEI compliance grounds, corroborating the article’s point about California’s formal resistance and legal position.
6. <https://www.ocregister.com/2025/04/20/orange-county-school-districts-respond-to-federal-dei-certification/> - This local Orange County Register article provides statements from Capistrano and Orange Unified school districts indicating no receipt of federal certification requests and adherence to state guidelines, supporting the article’s note on these districts’ responses and their positions pending federal directives.
7. <https://www.ocregister.com/2025/04/23/california-fights-u-s-threat-to-end-school-funding-over-diversity/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data