

Trump administration education budget proposes \$10.6 billion in cuts

By Shelley Connor
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Documents obtained earlier this week by the *Washington Post* outline the Trump administration's first Department of Education (DoED) budget detail plans to dramatically slash federal funding for public education.

Among the most egregious measures included in the proposal is the complete elimination of a student loan forgiveness program designed to help teachers, social workers, and other public servants with their student debts.

The proposed budget takes aim at student borrowers in other ways, as well. For example, it would eliminate over \$700 million in Perkins Loans for disadvantaged students. The budget would also reduce funding for the work-study program, which allows students to work their way through college, by \$490 million. And it would put an end to subsidized federal loans, in which the government pays the interest on the loan while the student is still attending school.

Another cut affecting low income college students would eliminate a \$15 million program that provides childcare for low-income parents attending college. Funding for Pell Grants, based upon student need, would be maintained—but it would not be increased to meet the needs left by cuts to the Perkins Loan program. An estimated 12 million Americans depend upon financial aid to help with college; these cuts will affect them profoundly.

In K-12 education funding, 22 programs would be eliminated. Among these are a \$1.2 billion program for after school programs. These programs serve almost two million children, most of whom are from poor families. Other cuts include \$2.1 billion for teacher training and class-size reduction, a \$12 million program for gifted students, \$12 million allocated for Special Olympics programs, a \$27 million arts

program, \$72 million allocated for foreign language and international studies programs, and \$65 million allocated to programs for Alaskan and Hawaiian Native populations.

While other programs will continue, their funds will be cut significantly. Promise Neighborhoods, an initiative designed to support children in impoverished communities, would lose \$13 million. An adult literacy program would lose \$96 million. Grants for career and technical education would be cut by \$168 million; paired with the cuts to college financial aid, such cuts will drastically reduce options for a significant number of students who wish to pursue either a university degree or a career in the skilled trades.

The Trump administration budget also dedicates no money to a fund earmarked for student enrichment and support. This fund assists schools with mental health services, physical education, Advanced Placement courses and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) instruction. While Congress authorized up to \$1.65 billion for the fund, the Trump administration has budgeted zero dollars for the fund in the next fiscal year.

Title I funds, which help poor children, and special education funding will neither be increased nor cut by the budget. Yet while the budget does not explicitly cut these programs, impoverished schools will likely still see a reduction in Title I funding; new laws allow states to spend up to 7 percent of their Title I funding upon school improvements before they disburse the funds to qualifying districts.

In addition, the budget would channel \$1 billion of Title I funding to a new grant program. FOCUS, or Furthering Options for Children to Unlock Success, would channel these grants to school districts that allow families to choose which public schools their

children attend—the federal, state, and local funds set aside for those children would travel with them to the new school they choose. In such a way, Title I money, along with other school funds, will migrate into wealthier districts at the expense of the districts for which the program was designed.

As the budget makes brutal cuts to public education spending, it allocates \$500 million for charter schools—this represents an increase of 50 percent over the current charter school spending by the federal government. Another \$250 million will be spent on “Education Innovation and Research Grants,” which would be dedicated for expanding school vouchers for private schools and for studying the impacts of these vouchers. Thus far, the budget does not clarify how much of the \$250 million would go towards the studies as opposed to the actual vouchers.

Altogether, the proposed budget cuts \$10.6 billion from public education. At the same time, \$158 million is proposed for salaries and expenses at the DoED; among these expenses are expanded student loan “servicing” (i.e., collections) and increased security for education secretary Betsy DeVos, who spurned the in-house security team, contracting instead with the US Marshals.

In the meantime, the entire DoED will see workforce reductions of about 4 percent; about 150 positions will be scrapped by the proposed budget.

This budget demonstrates Trump and DeVos’ well-documented disdain for public education. DeVos has previously characterized federally-funded public education as “arcane” and ineffective; she has also headed an organization, the Acton Institute that advocated for the repeal of child labor laws. The Trump administration’s budget proposal is but a first, coordinated attack upon public education while benefiting the privatized school companies, for whom George W. Bush and Barack Obama opened the door, at the expense of quality education for working class children—and most especially for impoverished children.

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