

# EDUCATION WEEK

## **Trump Budget Would Slash Education Dept. Spending, Boost School Choice**

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President Donald Trump's full budget proposal for the U.S. Department of Education, released on Tuesday, includes big shifts in funding priorities and makes cuts to spending for teacher development, after-school enrichment, and career and technical education, while ramping up investments in school choice.

A \$1 billion cash infusion for Title I's services for needy children would be earmarked as grants designed to promote public school choice, instead of going out by traditional formulas to school districts. These would be called Furthering Options for Children to Unlock Success (FOCUS) grants, according to a summary of the department's budget, that would provide money to school districts using weighted student funding formulas and open enrollment policies.

That would bring Title I grants up to \$15.9 billion in all. However, in Trump's budget, states would lose out on the \$550 million increase in formula-based funding that Congress approved in a budget deal earlier this year. Total Title I grants to districts through those formulas would be funded at \$14.9 billion in Trump's proposed budget.

And charter school grants, which currently get \$342 million in federal aid, would get nearly a 50 percent increase and get \$500 million. Finally, a program originally tailored to research innovative school practices would be retooled to research and promote vouchers, and get a funding boost of \$270 million, bringing it up to \$370 million.

Grants for special education, which also go out by formula, get \$12.7 billion in Trump's budget, a decline of about \$90 million from the amount in the fiscal 2017 budget deal. The biggest single line-item to be eliminated is \$2.1 billion for supporting teacher development and reducing class size under Title II.

Overall, Trump's detailed spending plan for K-12 mostly sticks to the preliminary budget his administration released in mid-March by cutting \$9.2 billion, or 13.5 percent, from the Education Department's current \$68.2 billion budget for fiscal 2017. It is the largest single-year cut that a president has looked to make to the Education Department's discretionary budget (by percentage) since President Ronald Reagan sought a 35.7 percent cut to the department in his proposed fiscal 1983 budget. Congress ultimately increased the department's budget for fiscal 1983. And this time around, Congress might very well end up disregarding many of Trump's budget proposals.

The budget would primarily impact the 2018-19 school year. Cuts would occur to higher education as well as K-12 programs.

Mick Mulvaney, the director of the Office of Management and Budget, said Tuesday the budget would provide "more money for school choice" and therefore deliver on one of Trump's campaign promises. (Last September, Trump pitched a \$20 billion plan to expand choice, but that's much bigger than what the budget proposes.)

The Education Innovation and Research Fund would get a budget boost from \$100 million to \$350 million, but a portion of this money would be repurposed to "support efforts to test and build evidence for the effectiveness of private school choice" as a strategy for helping parents who want to send their children to private schools, improving outcomes for students from low-income backgrounds, and increasing competition to improve all schools.

As he did in mid-March, Mulvaney on Tuesday specifically criticized the 21st Century Community Learning Centers, which provide after-school programs for needy students, for not being effective enough to justify its funding. A Brookings Institution report from 2015 took a broadly negative view of the program, but the Afterschool Alliance, an advocacy organization, has defended the centers.

A new block grant under Title IV, which got \$400 million in the fiscal 2017 budget deal that lasts through Sept. 30, is also eliminated under Trump's budget

Head Start, which is run by the Department of Health and Human Services, would get a small increase of \$17 million, up to \$9.17 billion, in Trump's budget plan. Elsewhere at HHS, the budget proposes just over \$1 billion for the National Center for Child Health and Human Development, a 23 percent cut from fiscal 2017. That's in keeping with the overall HHS budget

proposal, which would reduce research grants in general by more than \$3.7 billion, or about 21 percent.

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos is slated to discuss the budget proposal at a House appropriations subcommittee on Wednesday. It would be the first time she has met publicly with lawmakers since she was confirmed in February.

On Monday evening, in a speech at the American Federation for Children, a school choice advocacy group, DeVos said it would be a "terrible mistake" for states not to participate in Trump's proposed school choice initiative: "They will be hurting the children and families who can least afford it. If politicians in a state block education choice, it means those politicians do not support equal opportunity for all kids."

Trump's budget would also make changes to student loan repayments for higher education, and eliminate public service loan forgiveness and subsidized student loans for low-income students. The spending plan would institute year-round Pell Grants. There would also be a \$3.9 billion draw-down from the Pell Grant's surplus, although the total maximum individual Pell award is slated to remain level.

It's worth noting that in the fiscal 2017 spending agreement Congress reached earlier this year, lawmakers cut Title II teacher development grants by about \$200 million, but actually provided increases to a few programs Trump wants cut for fiscal 2018.

For example, Congress increased funding for 21st Century Community Learning Centers by \$25 million for this budget year. Impact Aid, GEAR UP, and TRIO programs also got small increases.

### Early Reaction

Some conservative analysts are skeptical about the budget's emphasis on choice, even when the cuts to many programs are included.

Meanwhile, several education groups had already decried the impact of Trump's budget when key details emerged last week, and Democratic lawmakers joined in.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., a harsh critic of DeVos during the secretary's confirmation hearing and a member of the Senate education committee, blasted away at the budget Tuesday

night on Twitter, saying, "The Trump-DeVos budget would push opportunities out of the reach of millions of students across the country."

And Rep. Jared Polis, D-Colo., told us in response to early reports about the budget last week that the budget undermines the congressional intent behind the Education Innovation and Research fund by turning it into a vehicle for private school choice.

The reaction wasn't all doom and gloom, however. Last week, the Heritage Foundation's Lindsey Burke, for example, said she liked the overall cut to the Education Department's budget and says if that were to mean more control for states and school districts, so much the better (Heritage favors limited federal government.)

However, both she and Neal McCluskey of the libertarian Cato Institute expressed concern about the general thrust of the choice-friendly initiatives in the budget. They said in general choice fans should be wary of having the federal government dictate too much of what's going on in states and schools.

Mike Petrilli of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, which favors school choice and a limited federal role in education, said the Trump budget might have a positive impact in some areas. For example, he said the proposed elimination of Title II might trigger states to rethink how they often spend that money on ineffective teacher development programs: "If you're going to pick on something, that's a pretty good place to pick on."

But in general, he said he expected the budget to be "completely ignored" in Congress. And he said conservatives should resist the school choice carrot being dangled by the Trump administration in the budget, since it would increase Washington's intrusion into K-12 and could be misused by a subsequent Democratic presidential administration.