



Analysis: Warren's higher ed plan would cost \$1.25 trillion over decade

Bethany Blankley

October 31, 2019

Democratic presidential candidate Elizabeth Warren's new education plan has both its supporters and its critics.

A broad spectrum of opponents argue it is unconstitutional, would institutionalize segregation and make the achievement gap permanent.

The proposal from the U.S. Senator from Massachusetts quadruples Title 1 funding over 10 years by infusing \$450 billion into the public school system, ends federal funding for charter schools, and bans for-profit charters.

The wealthiest taxpayers would pay for it: a 2-percent tax increase on individuals with a net worth of more than \$50 million and a 3-percent tax increase on those worth more than \$1 billion would raise \$2.75 trillion over 10 years, according to the plan.

Known as the "wealth tax," she proposes it will fund tuition-free public college education, abolish student loan debt and create a universal child-care program.

To create tuition-free public college education, the federal government would initially fund two-thirds of the cost – requiring states to cover the final third, according to an analysis by the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

The committee estimates tuition-free public college education will cost taxpayers more than \$460 billion over a decade.

Warren's plan also bans for-profit colleges from receiving any federal funding, requires public colleges to complete an annual audit identifying issues creating shortfalls in enrollment of low-income and minority students, and proposes steps to close those shortfalls, and bans public colleges from considering citizenship status or criminal history in admissions decisions, the committee notes.

Her higher education plan would cost the federal government \$1.25 trillion over 10 years, the committee reports.

Warren's plan also creates "excellence grants" totaling \$100 billion, with the goal of "25,000 public schools transition[ing] to the community school framework by 2030;" invests \$50 billion into school infrastructure without any specification of how or when this would be done, provides \$10 billion in "housing grants" to build parks and schools depending on local zoning laws, and dedicates \$25 billion to fund health-care access and expand services at existing clinics.

"For unions, this must feel like Christmas. For Democratic school reformers, Pearl Harbor," Chris Stewart, CEO of Education Post, a media project of the Results in Education Foundation, writes at the74million.org.

Stewart says Warren's plan "is exactly what we need – if our goal is to make the achievement gap permanent."

"I'll never understand how a plan to limit choices for families living in low-opportunity education deserts is a winner in a political campaign," he adds. "Further, why would any leader attack annual testing that produces the data that civil rights groups use to illustrate the disparities disadvantaging students?"

Stewart is not alone in his criticism.

"Like so many white progressives, Warren thinks she knows better than the parents actually in the fight to get their children into a school that is better for them," argues Citizen Education, a group dedicated "to amplifying a diverse set of voices around public education," focusing on eight million black students.

"... She implies that the choices for which black and brown parents are lining up are somehow misguided or uninformed," Citizen Education states in its analysis of Warren's plan. "She makes it abundantly clear that she is comfortable stripping parents of their agency, without ever knowing a single detail about why their child needs a different school environment."

The group details how Warren's plan will keep the most marginalized students trapped in failing public schools by eliminating school choice options for parents.

Warren's plan also comes at a time "when charter schools in Michigan are under attack," Ingrid Jacques, deputy editorial page editor at The Detroit News, writes. "The State Board of Education earlier this year attempted to block federal grant funds the state had already won from going toward deserving charter schools. And Gov. Gretchen Whitmer cut \$35 million in aid from the state's charters, which serve majority populations of poor children, even while all other public schools will see boosts in revenue."

Critics also note that Warren used to support school choice before she was against it, specifically in her 2003 book, "The Two-Income Trap."

Her plan won't help states that rely heavily on local property taxes to fund education, like New Hampshire, the New Hampshire Union Leader reported.

And throwing more money at failing schools has been proven not to help students, the Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty (WILL) argues. WILL's report on Wisconsin's historic increases in K-12 funding over the last several state budgets found "that more spending by the high-spending districts did not result in better results on state exams and the ACT relative to low-spending districts."

However, the ultimate problem with her proposal, critics note, is its emphasis on forced union representation, and a tax that will be challenged as unconstitutional.

"The primary problem with the Warren plan – other than its root failure to obey the Constitution – is its promise of massive increases in federal spending," argues Neal McCluskey, director of the Cato Institute's Center for Educational Freedom.

"There is little evidence that massive increases in federal spending will produce anything like commensurate improvements in outcomes," McCluskey said.

He also emphasizes that the U.S. Constitution "simply does not authorize the vast majority of what Warren wants to do."

If elected, Warren would have no presidential authority to "eliminate the ability of states to pass anti-union 'right to work' laws," which is also part of her proposal, McCluskey adds. Doing so would "seem to be a direct challenge to the recent Supreme Court Janus decision," he says, adding that, "forced unionization would be an even greater violation of freedom of association and speech."

In *Janus vs. AFSCME*, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public employees could not be compelled to pay fees to a union they don't want to join.

"The 'Ultra Millionaires Tax' should be a red flag for anyone who believes in personal responsibility, hard work, and private property," says Daniel Kowalski at FEE, the Foundation for Economic Freedom. The wealth tax would expand the IRS bureaucracy, Kowalski adds, creating a mandatory annual audit rate to make sure everyone pays.