

Trump proposes slashing public education by \$7 billion

By Shelley Connor
14 March 2019

Taking aim squarely and unapologetically at the children of the working class, the Trump administration released its proposed budget for fiscal year 2020, calling for cutting education spending by over \$7 billion. At the same time, the administration is asking for \$5 billion to fund “scholarship funds” for private and religious schools. The administration is also asking for an extra \$133 million to pursue young people who have defaulted on their student loans.

The American education system is already in a shambles. In 42 states, the average teacher salary has been cut, relative to inflation, since 2010. Average class sizes have grown in 35 states. Massive teacher shortages grip every state and increasingly students are “taught” by uncertified substitutes. Lead-in-water is found in schools around the country while school infrastructure crumbles. Teacher strikes continue to escalate in the face of what has been an unrelenting bipartisan war against public education.

Trump and his Education Secretary Betsy DeVos are picking up from where Barack Obama and Arne Duncan left off, deepening the defunding of education and promoting privatization. Among the programs to suffer from Trump’s proposed budget are teacher training, federally subsidized student loans, after school programs for impoverished students, and summer programs in impoverished schools.

Teacher training is covered by Title II funding and received about \$2 billion for fiscal year 2019. These funds are allocated for teachers’ professional development programs and were initially instituted to encourage a common standard of professionalism across the United States. The Trump budget would completely eliminate these funds.

Trump has proposed stripping away Title II funds in every budget he has proposed since taking office. These cuts do more than stymie the professional development of teachers—which is in and of itself an outrage—they also endanger schools’ abilities to meet the professional development benchmarks set by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). In addition, teachers who are not adequately supported in their professional development cannot be

expected to meet the instructional needs of their students, which impacts students’ test scores. ESSA ties grant money to professional development benchmarks and student test scores, so ending Title II funds will directly translate into further cuts especially in impoverished areas.

Teacher training is not the only area facing erasure under Trump’s proposals. Also at stake are funds for Title IV, Part A, The Student Support and Academic Enrichment (SSAE) program. This program is designed to “provide all students with access to a well-rounded education; improve school conditions for student learning; and improve the use of technology to improve the academic achievement and digital literacy of all students.”

The SSAE funds after-school care and summer learning programs in many districts where working parents do not have access to safe, affordable childcare when school is out. It also provides funding for classroom technology that assists in instruction and helps children stay abreast of important technological developments. In some schools, SSAE funding provides for mental health counseling and school safety equipment. Funding for SSAE is currently inadequate at just over \$1 billion. Trump would eliminate all of that funding, endangering the programs that depend upon it.

Another source of funding for after-school care, 21st Century Community Learning Centers, would, like the SSAE programs, be completely eliminated under Trump’s proposals. Schools in rural and urban districts rely upon these funds, sparse as they are, to create safe places for working-class children.

The administration has stressed that its budget does not touch current Title I or Special Education funding. However, neither does the administration add any funding to these important programs. Title I funds go to schools that are predominantly attended by children from low-income families. Those funds are supposed to go towards helping children in these schools succeed academically and perform well on tests. Title I funds would stagnate at just under \$16 million.

Special Education would not receive any extra funding in fiscal year 2020, either, and would stagnate at \$132 million. Special Education funds programs as diverse as reading remediation, occupational therapy for autistic students, and enrichment for gifted and talented students.

Neither Title I nor the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) have ever been fully funded, and both were slashed under the Obama administration. While the administration proudly boasts that these programs will not be cut, their funding up to this point has been little more than an insult to the nation's educators, parents, and students. In many school districts, there is simply not enough personnel to ensure that an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is created for every student who needs one.

That the administration should suggest that Special Education funds stagnate while the president attacks funding such as teacher training and SSAE programs—which would benefit Special Education students, in particular—reveals the deep disdain the Trump administration harbors for working class students.

A recent hearing by the House Education and Labor Committee revealed that US schools have been so defunded over decades that \$145 billion is needed every year to modernize and maintain public schools.

Funding for Indian Education programs remains despicably low, yet to add insult to injury, the administration proposes reducing the Indian Education budget from \$180 million to \$176 million. The education of indigenous children is mandated to the Federal Government by treaty, yet schools that serve Native Americans are chronically underfunded, understaffed, and inadequately maintained. The dropout rate for Native American high school students is twice the national average.

There are areas where the Trump administration is willing to spend education dollars. One such area is charter school grants, which he increased last year by nearly \$150 million. This year, he would increase spending on charter schools from \$440 million to an even \$500 million. This does not include Betsy DeVos' support for legislation that would earmark \$5 billion for "tax credit scholarships," in which individuals could donate 10 percent of their income (getting a dollar for dollar deduction in the process) to private school scholarship funds for students in impoverished school districts.

DeVos has requested \$1.8 billion for her Next Generation Financial Services Environment (NextGen), an endeavor to attack financial aid for working class college students and to bring student loan holders to heel. A \$133 million spending increase on pursuing the repayment of student loans is included with this amount. In the meantime, DeVos and Trump would put an end to student loan forgiveness for

public-sector workers; they would also cut college work-study programs by more than half.

The Education Department's assistant secretary for planning, evaluation and policy development, Jim Blew, told reporters last week that Trump's proposed education budget "is based on a desire to have some fiscal discipline and to address some higher-priority needs for the administration around the federal government."

Those "higher priority needs" are not the children of America's workers, but the gargantuan build-up of the US military and drive for war. In his budget proposal, Trump has asked for an exorbitant and record-breaking \$750 billion for the Pentagon, an increase nearly double that sought by the military establishment. Additional billions are slated to flow into domestic repression with the administration requesting an increase to the Department of Homeland Security's budget by 15 percent with \$8.6 billion slated for the construction of his militarized border wall with Mexico.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has noted, the Trump budget will set in motion a repeat of the time-honed and cynical charade by Democrats who will claim to be shocked by these cuts. Quickly, they will drop the pretense and sign onto a terrible deepening of the social counterrevolution against youth, students and the entire working class.

The author recommends:

A US budget for worldwide war
[12 March 2019]

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