

## Memorandum

June 2019

TO: Sheryl Cohen and Sarah Abernathy, Committee for Education Funding (CEF)  
FR: American Continental Group staff  
RE: Summary of Democratic Presidential Candidates' Positions on Education Funding

---

The following is a compilation of publicly available information about candidates' statements and past records on education funding issues. It is not comprehensive but provides some useful links to statements and websites where the candidates' views are expressed.

### **Senator Michael Bennet, (CO)**

Michael Bennet is the former superintendent of schools for Denver, Colorado. Last year he introduced legislation in the Senate to make permanent the mandatory funding that supports minority-serving institutions. In the last Congress, he also co-introduced the [Fund for Innovation and Success in Higher Education Act](#) to authorize more grants to increase innovation. Bennet supports an increase in Pell Grants to expand access to college. He is against universal free college but wants to make sure no student is forced to leave college with student debt. His campaign has not yet released education funding specifics.

For further information, please refer to his campaign website [here](#) or his Senate website [here](#).

### **Former Vice President Joe Biden**

Joe Biden recently released his education platform that invests in a range of K-12 programs, including increasing teacher pay, forgiving teachers' student loans, providing universal pre-K, and leveling the playing field between rich and poor school districts. Biden aims to close a funding gap between majority white and non-white school districts by spending \$45 billion on Title I grants to low-income districts, which is nearly triple the current level. The additional money would first be used to give teachers in low-income districts "competitive" pay, provide 3- and 4-year-olds with access to preschool, and ensure districts put in place "rigorous coursework across all their schools, not just a few." He will increase funding for special education so that in 10 years, the federal government meets its commitment to cover 40% of the extra cost of special education services. He will provide unspecified increased funding to: double the number of health and mental health professionals in schools; expand community schools providing comprehensive services to 300,000 more students; provide vocational training and partnerships with employers; invest in Pell grants and allow high school students to use Pell grants for dual enrollment programs; work with states to provide free pre-kindergarten for all 3- and 4-year-olds; and include school renovation and construction in an infrastructure plan.

For further information, please refer to his website [here](#).

### **Senator Cory Booker, (NJ)**

As Mayor of Newark, Cory Booker collected \$200 million to launch initiatives that would help public schools meet their enormous obligations. Booker supports providing a federal match of \$3 for every \$1 invested by the state to waive community college tuition and fees for eligible students. He also advocates for establishing a new grant program to provide pathways to success at minority-serving

institutions by helping them cover a significant portion of tuition and fees for the first two years for low-income students. Finally, Booker supports making two years of community college free.

For further information, please refer to his website [here](#).

### **Governor Steve Bullock, (MT)**

As Governor of Montana, Steve Bullock oversaw a notable increase in K-12 public school funding since 2012, and in four out of the last six years, Bullock froze state college tuition. He also helped launch the “1-2-Free” Dual Enrollment program in 2018, which allows for high school students to take their first two college courses free of charge. Pushing for more money for higher education, he plans to help students “returning for retraining after losing their jobs.” He has also asked to increase Montana’s investment in K-12 education by \$30 million, special education by \$1.5 million, and schools’ internet capability by \$2 million. Under his leadership, Montana instituted the “STARS” Preschool pilot program, which saw 93% of the participating preschoolers ending the calendar year ready for kindergarten. In unison with “EducationSuperHighway,” the governor made it a priority to update Montana schools’ broadband infrastructure. After implementing this bill, it is believed that 98% of Montana’s districts are now connected to high-speed internet, up from 78% in 2015.

For more information, please refer to the Governor’s official [website](#), [On the Issues article](#), and [CNBC’s article](#).

### **Mayor Pete Buttigieg, (South Bend, IN)**

Pete Buttigieg wants to increase the pay of teachers at Title I schools and provide free lunches for students at these schools, which serve a high proportion of students from low-income families). His focus on lower income families includes debt-free public college. However, Buttigieg does not support universal free college because he does not want to tax non-college graduates more for something they were unable to access themselves. He supports middle-income families paying zero tuition at public universities. To accomplish this Buttigieg supports a “large increase” for Pell grants that are adjusted to inflation. Finally, Buttigieg supports increasing funds for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority-Serving Institutions.

For further information, please refer to his website [here](#).

### **Former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro**

Julian Castro has unveiled a \$1 trillion proposal that would create a “national, federally funded prekindergarten program, eliminate tuition at public universities and community colleges and alter the student-debt repayment process.” This plan would be carried out in a way where the borrowers would not have to pay anything until they earned at least 250% of the federal poverty level. He also plans to invest \$150 billion to update pre-K through high schools’ facilities and infrastructure. Reflecting his venture in creating a citywide pre-K program as the mayor of San Antonio, he wants to take a similar route on a national scale. He would also implement a federal tax credit which would be used to help increase teacher pay by a maximum of \$10,000 per year.

For further information, please refer to his campaign website [here](#) or this [New York Times article](#).

**Mayor Bill de Blasio, (New York, NY)**

Bill de Blasio had not announced a plan on education as of early June. As Mayor of New York City, one of his biggest accomplishments was the implementation of a universal pre-K program which cost about \$700 million from federal and state governments. About 70,000 New York City kids are now enrolled in the city's pre-K system, up from roughly 20,000 before de Blasio took office.

For further information, please refer to this PBS article [here](#).

**Former Representative John Delaney, (MD)**

John Delaney believes Pre-K through 14 education (two-year community college or technical training) is the new K-12 and would guarantee it through federal funding by a surtax on high-income earners of 1.5% on income over \$500,000. He proposes increased federal investment in STEM education and encouraging technical training and apprenticeships. Delaney also is an advocate for making higher education more affordable by reducing the costs of student loans and providing more grants to help students from lower income families. Finally, Delaney introduced legislation in the past to allow borrowers to discharge public and private student loan debt in bankruptcy proceedings.

For further information, please refer to his website [here](#).

**Representative Tulsi Gabbard, (HI)**

Tulsi Gabbard has not outlined specific education policy goals for her presidency, but in the past has fought for education funding on many levels, including free college, improving flexibility and support for teachers and education, funding for Native Hawaiian education programs, and increased funding for Hawaii's schools. She has advocated for or introduced legislation to support innovation, teacher quality, and STEM education, and supported the College for All Act, which would eliminate tuition and fees at four-year public colleges and universities for families that make up to \$125,000 a year, and make community college tuition fee-free for everyone.

For further information, please refer to her website [here](#).

**Senator Kristen Gillibrand, (NY)**

One of Kristen Gillibrand's biggest proposals is her Family Bill of Rights which includes universal pre-k education. She also wants to pay teachers more and give them more resources but does not offer specifics. Gillibrand supported [Federal Student Loan Refinancing Act](#) in the last Congress to allow those with student loans with an interest rate above 4% to refinance to 4%, which would save students in her home state of New York an average of \$10,000. The bill would also allow the Secretary of Education to lower the interest rates on all federal loans. Gillibrand has not endorsed universal free college but supports a public service-based pathway to free college. Her plan would give two years of free community or state college for those who give a year of public service and four years for those who give two years of public service.

For further information, please refer to her [website](#) or her editorial on Fox News [here](#).

### **Senator Kamala Harris, (CA)**

Kamala Harris has not released many specifics about her education platform but has provided general ideas. She would start by nationally increasing teachers' salary by an average of \$13,500. She also supports a national pre-k program. Harris has many of the same higher education plans as Sanders, including the [College for All Act](#) that promises free college for anyone with an income below \$125,000. She promises to work towards making community colleges free. For individuals who currently have student loan debt she would allow for refinancing in addition to expanding Income Based Repayment.

For further information, please refer to her [website](#).

### **Former Governor John Hickenlooper, (CO)**

John Hickenlooper implemented universal pre-k when he was the Mayor of, and as Mayor and then Governor he oversaw education policies that promoted charter school alternatives. He also introduced pay incentives for teachers who raised their students test scores. As Governor after the recession he cut education funding \$332 million; voters rejected his proposed tax increases to benefit education. Hickenlooper would lower student loan interest rates to 2.5% to help those burdened with student debt. While he supports free community college, Hickenlooper is not for free college. He has expressed support for public service being an alternative to paying for college or to pay off student loans.

For further information, please refer to his [website](#).

### **Governor Jay Inslee, (WA)**

As Governor of Washington, Jay Inslee's current budget for education includes an increased investment in social workers, counselors, teachers, and special education. He has pushed for continued support for apprenticeship and internship programs for students who do not plan to attend a four-year college. He has also put his budget towards the Washington College Compromise that uses state money to provide low income individuals with access to a 4-year education. His presidential campaign does not include many education funding specifics beyond "enacting a 'GI Bill' for impacted fossil fuel workers" and doubling the commitment to national apprenticeship programs.

For further information, please refer to his official Governor website [here](#) or his campaign website [here](#).

### **Senator Amy Klobuchar, (MN)**

Amy Klobuchar does not support making four-year college free for all but wants to expand Pell grants and increase student loan affordability to chip away student debt. She has cosponsored the America's College Promise Act to create a federal-state partnership that pays for two tuition-free years of school for students. She wants more STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) education in more schools, but has not commented on the necessary funds that would make it possible. As a Senator she has supported a \$275 million increase in Individuals with Disabilities Education Act grants to states.

For further information, please refer to her Senate website [here](#).

**Mayor Wayne Messam, (Miramar, FL)**

Wayne Messam wants everyone to have a chance at the American dream, and says that solving the student debt crisis is key. He wants to provide relief for the “1 out of 4” American adults who have student loan debt, and proposes a one-time, in full federal government debt cancellation plan. Everyone who has student loan debt would be forgiven their debt within 60 days. To do this, he plans to repeal President Trump’s 2017 tax cut package. He hopes that this can cover the \$1.5 trillion in student loan debt and save each of those Americans at least \$400 a month.

For further information, please refer to this Axios article [here](#).

**Representative Seth Moulton, (MA)**

Seth Moulton has not outlined a specific plan for K-12 education but has focused on higher education. Moulton would implement his [National Service Education Guarantee](#) to drive down the cost of college. For one year of national service Moulton would have the federal government pay for 60% of the cost of in-state tuition or a job training benefit of up to \$14,000. For two years of service the government would cover 80% of the cost of in-state tuition or provide a job training benefit of up to \$19,000. For three years of service the government would cover 100% of in-state tuition or a job training benefit of up to \$24,000. Moulton co-sponsored the [America’s College Promise Act of 2018](#) to make community college free for nine million students at 1,300 institutions across the country. The federal government would also match \$3 for every \$1 invested by the state to waive community college tuition and fees for eligible students. Moulton also would cover two years of tuition for any student attending a Historically Black College and University or Minority-Serving Institution.

For more information, please refer to his campaign website [here](#).

**Former Representative Beto O’Rourke, (TX)**

While in Congress, Beto O’Rourke supported the America’s College Promise Act to make two years of community college free. This bill uses \$3 of federal money to match every \$1 a state invests to waive community college tuition fees for eligible students. He also co-sponsored the “Real Education for Healthy Youth Act” that provides federal funding for sex education programs that use a fact based curriculum for their students. He is against “free college;” instead, he supports debt-free college that is publicly financed. When it comes to student loan debts, he wants to refinance the loans at lower rates. He wants to increase pre-K education funding, and to support math and science teachers by providing scholarships for individuals willing to commit 5 years of teaching after college.

For further information, please refer [here](#).

**Representative Tim Ryan, (OH)**

As a Member of Congress, Tim Ryan cosponsored the “Bank on Students Emergency Loan Refinancing Act” to allow borrowers with existing student loans to refinance at current interest rates. In addition, the “College for All Act” eliminates tuition and fees at public four-year colleges and universities for those making up to \$125,000, while also making community college tuition and fees free for everyone. This bill would cut student loan interest rates in half, allowing Americans to refinance student loans at the lowest available rates. Paid for by implementing a tax on Wall Street speculation, it provides the

necessary funding in order to “eliminate equity gaps in higher education attainment.” He supports the “Debt- Free College Partnerships Act” to allow for the construction of a voluntary state-federal partnership that would increase investment in public higher education to enable students to enroll in public colleges and universities completely debt-free.

For further information, please refer to his [website](#).

#### **Senator Bernie Sanders, (VT)**

Bernie Sanders has outlined many education-related proposals. He would like to provide universal pre-k and universal school meals that would include breakfast, lunch, and snacks. Sanders also wants to bring equality to the education system by tripling Title I school funding, spending \$5 billion annually on afterschool and summer programs, and spending \$5 billion annually to improve community schools. He would end all public funding of charter schools and wants to instead increase funding for magnet schools to \$1 billion annually. He also wants to increase funding for school transportation programs and provide funding to modernize and green the nation’s schools. Sanders would also mandate that the federal government provide 50% of funding for special education resources. He would substantially decrease existing student loan debt in addition to lowering borrower interest rates and would then end student loans and debt by making all public colleges and trade schools tuition free. His plan would also fully fund all Historically Black Colleges and Universities.

For further information, please refer to his [website](#).

#### **Representative Eric Swalwell, (CA)**

Eric Swalwell supports no-interest federal student loans, tax-free employer contributions, and debt-free college for public university students who participate in Work-Study and commit to bettering their communities. However, he does not offer any specifics of implementation or cost. As a Member of Congress, he has sponsored and cosponsored legislation that has called for increased federal spending for education. Many of his proposals had to do with federal student loan relief/forgiveness, making two years of community college free, and offering assistance to preschoolers with lesser opportunities.

For further information, please refer to his campaign website [here](#) or to his House website [here](#).

#### **Senator Elizabeth Warren, (MA)**

Elizabeth Warren has proposed a \$1.25 trillion plan to reform how higher education is paid for that includes canceling the majority of student loan debt and eradicating tuition payments at every US public college. She would pay for the plan with the revenue generated by increasing the taxes of corporations and wealthy individuals. The total cost of the endeavor equates to \$2.75 trillion over ten years. Warren plans to invest an additional \$100 billion over ten years to expand Pell grants and eligibility and allow federal funding to be used for “non-tuition expenses.” As a result, she would eliminate up to \$50,000 in student loans if the individual’s household income was below \$100,000; those with income between \$100,000 and \$250,000 would be forgiven a portion of their debt. Warren stated that her plan would eliminate the total student loan debt of around 75% of borrowers. She also plans a fund of at least \$50 billion for Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Minority Serving Institutions.

For further information, please refer to the [New York Times](#) and [Forbes](#) articles.

## **Marianne Williamson**

Marianne Williamson has many policy goals related to education. She would push for universal pre-school for all children, increased funding for free and reduced-price lunches to cover breakfasts as well, and federal compensation for state school funding. She wants to invest in teacher education programs that provide best practices and developmentally appropriate models of education for our future teachers. Williamson says that if we cannot find an ideal offset for free college or technical school tuition for every qualified student, she would explore ways that students can repay some of these costs with a small payroll tax once they start working (based on Oregon's efforts) or through reasonable amounts of public service. She would explore student loan forgiveness, reduce required on-time repayments from 10 years to 5 years, and reduce the interest rate to a nominal, if not zero, percentage rate. Finally, Williamson would push for low-cost education for those in middle and older age who have been dropped from our economy who want more education.

For further information, please refer to her website [here](#).

## **Andrew Yang**

Andrew Yang has detailed plans for education. He wants to start the education system earlier with a universal pre-k program for all three and four-year-olds. He also wants to create a higher quality education system by paying teachers more and rewarding them for improving their education and skills. Yang would fund this by cutting administrative levels. He also wants to change the idea that everyone needs to seek higher education and would increase funds for vocational skills in high schools. He would like to see the number of higher education administrators significantly reduced and would withhold public funding for universities that do not comply. He does not want the government to profit from student loans. For individuals who currently have loans Yang would explore a variety of options including debt forgiveness, especially for those who never graduated. He would also like to change the way individuals pay back their debt by introducing his 10x10 plan, which would require graduates to pay 10% of their salary for 10 years and then their debt would be forgiven. Lastly Yang would like to drastically reduce the cost of community college so that anyone from the community can attend essentially for free.

For further information, please refer to his [website](#).