

Washington Update February 14, 2020

Dear Colleagues:

Happy Valentine's Day. Education didn't get much love in the nation's capital this week, but there's still time!

1. Bad News for Education in President Trump's FY 2021 Budget Proposal

The FY 2021 appropriations process was officially launched with the release of the President's budget proposal on Monday. The budget is thematically similar to previous Trump budgets in that it calls for big spending cuts all around and proposes federal support for private schools in the form of a tax credit for donations to scholarship programs (called "Education Freedom Scholarships"). The proposal represents an overall 7.8% cut (\$5.6 Billion) to the Department of Education. Key features of the proposal include:

Elementary and Secondary Education:

- Consolidation of 29 K-12 grant programs into a single block grant ("Elementary and Secondary Education for the Disadvantaged Block Grant") designed to provide maximum flexibility for state and local systems at \$19.4 Billion – a \$4.7 Billion cut from current spending;
- The prized charter school grant program is consolidated into the block grant
- The big winner in the budget proposal is Career and Technical Education which is slated for \$763 million increase;
- Education Freedom Scholarships (tax credits for private schools) would cost \$46 Billion over 10 years;
- All IDEA programs are level funded; however, Part B of IDEA receives a \$100 million increase.

Higher Education:

- Student loan programs take a \$190.8 Billion cut over 10 years;
- Public Service Loan Forgiveness program is eliminated;
- Subsidized student loans eliminated;
- Graduate Assistance in Areas of National Need eliminated;
- Teacher Quality Partnership Grants eliminated and considered included in the "Elementary and Secondary Education for the Disadvantaged Block Grant" noted above;
- Model Transition Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities is level funded at \$11.8 million.

Institute for Education Sciences:

- An overall \$58 million cut mostly by eliminating the Regional Education Laboratories which are currently funded at \$56 million;
- Level funding for National Center for Special Education Research at \$57 million.

Office for Civil Rights:

- The Office for Civil Rights is level funded at \$130 million

The President’s budget calls for greater cuts than are required by the budget agreement reached in the Congress last year. Majority Leader in the Senate, Mitch McConnell (R-KY), said that the Senate will follow the budget agreement, not the more drastic reductions called for by the President. The budget agreement allows for a \$5 billion increase in Non-Defense Discretionary spending, of which education is a small portion. It is sure to be a challenging year for education funding, even with the rejection of the President’s budget.

There is little to no chance that the voucher tax credit proposal or the consolidated block grant will be supported on the Hill. As Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) put it: “As with his previous budgets, this one is going nowhere.”

From the Department of Education:

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget21/index.html>

For more detail see the Department of Education’s Budget Justification:

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/budget/budget21/justifications/index.html>

For a Democratic response: <https://edlabor.house.gov/media/press-releases/chairman-scott-statement-on-president-trumps-fy-2021-budget-proposal>

2. House Democrats Push Pause on Restoring Earmarks

For the last few weeks, House Democrats have been discussing the possibility of bringing back the once-popular practice of earmarking in appropriations bills. Earmarks were funds directed to specific entities in the Districts/States of Members for projects they deemed worthy. They were controversial, often described as “pork”, in that the projects which were funded were at times of questionable value. However, they were known for “greasing the wheels” of legislation. Members of Congress who might not otherwise vote to support a bill would do so if their earmarks, which brought money directly to their districts, were included. Some attribute the increased stalemates in Congress to the loss of earmarks.

There is bi-partisan support for restoring earmarks in the House, but only if new rules are designed to keep the process in check and add accountability and transparency. One proposal is that for-profits would be banned from receiving earmarks. While there is “near-unanimous” support among Democrats to return to earmarks, that will not happen

in the 2021 fiscal year which is under consideration now. However, look for a push to return the practice in 2022.

Rep. Marcy Kaptur (D-OH) noted “we have to restore some balance between what the executive deems to be an important project and members of Congress representing the pieces of the American puzzle, what they represent in their areas... You just can’t expect somebody over there at OMB, who knows nothing about the areas we represent, to have all the knowledge. We have to have some kind of restoration of legislative authority.” Rep. Tom Cole (R-OK), ranking member of the Labor/HHS/Education Appropriations Subcommittee, said earmarks would allow Congress to reassert its “power of the purse.”

See: <https://www.rollcall.com/2020/02/07/house-democrats-wont-resurrect-earmarks-this-year/>

3. **President Trump’s State of the Union Promise for Girl to Attend the School of Her Choice Becomes a Curiosity**

One of the many made for TV moments in President Trump’s SOTU last week was that he would provide a scholarship for a young girl so that she could attend the school of her choice. Noting that thousands of students are “trapped in failing government schools” the President told her that “your long wait is over... you will soon be headed to the school of your choice.” It was later reported that the scholarship would be personally funded by Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. Further investigation determined that the young student attends a popular charter school, Math Science and Technology Community Charter School (MaST III) in Philadelphia. When asked about whether she would change schools her mother, Stephanie Davis, said “I don’t view MaST as a school you want to get out of at all. I view it as a great opportunity.”

So this leaves one to wonder, are charter schools “failing government schools?”

See: <https://www.inquirer.com/news/donald-trump-school-choice-philadelphia-janiyah-davis-mast-charter-20200208.html>

4. **New Resources for Educators**

- **Learning Policy Institute** released Inequitable *Opportunity to Learn: Student Access to Certified and Experienced Teachers*. Key findings include:
 - In 2016 schools with high enrollment of students of color were four times as likely to employ uncertified teachers as were schools with low enrollment of students of color;
 - Nearly one in every 6 teachers is just beginning their career in schools with high enrollment of students in color, compared to one in 10 in schools with low enrollment of students of color.

See: <https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/crdc-teacher-access-report>

- **The Rand Corporation** is out with *Principals Could Use More Support to Help Students with Disabilities—Especially in Schools Serving Mostly Students of Color*.

Key findings include:

- According to a survey of 1679 principals, about 80% somewhat or strongly agreed that their schools could do a better job supporting students with disabilities;
- Among principals of schools serving primarily students of color 90% of principals agreed that their schools could do a better job supporting students with disabilities compared to 69% in mostly white schools.

See: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2575z13.html

Wishing you a joyful long holiday weekend!

See you on twitter @janewestdc

Best,

Jane