

## Washington Update April 23, 2021

Dear Colleagues,

The Biden Administration is setting new records for promoting massive investments in education – unprecedented investments that could transform American schooling. But Congress would have to agree, and therein lies the rub!

### 1. President Biden Unveils Massive “Skinny” Budget

Earlier this month, the White House unveiled President Biden’s budget proposal outline for FY 2022. Referred to as a "[skinny budget](#)", this [\\$1.5 trillion proposal](#) provides the rough contours of his vision for \$753 billion in defense spending and \$769 billion in non-defense discretionary spending – the latter representing a 16% increase driven in large part by major funding boosts to education programs. In fact, this proposal represents a 41% increase in pre-pandemic spending for the Department of Education – the largest request any President has made since the creation of the Department in 1979.

The full budget proposal, which will include more detail about proposed funding levels for specific programs, is expected before Memorial Day. When President Biden presents to a joint session of Congress next Wednesday – a “state of the union” of sorts – we may learn more about what his full proposal will include. Don’t confuse this budget proposal with the massive \$2.3 trillion infrastructure proposal that is currently on the table and the anticipated American Families Plan proposal – both of which would also invest in education. And these are on top of the already-enacted \$140 billion for education in the American Rescue Plan, and the previous two COVID relief bills passed earlier which add over \$50 billion for education.

The “skinny budget” proposes the following for education programs, with details on other programs to follow:

- \$36.5 billion for Title I aid to disadvantaged students, an increase of \$20 billion over current funding
- \$1 billion for K-12 schools to use to hire more counselors, nurses, and mental health professionals
- \$11.9 billion for Head Start early-education program at the Department of Health and Human Services, a \$1.2 billion bump
- \$100 million in a new grant program to foster increased diversity in schools.
- \$15.5 billion for Part B of IDEA, a \$2.6 billion increase
- \$732 million for early intervention and pre-school for students with disabilities, a \$250 million increase
- A \$3 billion increase for Pell grants, increasing the maximum award by \$400
- \$600 million increase for HBCU.s MSI’s and community colleges

The Congress will begin to consider President Biden’s budget request as they mark up their appropriations bills. The Congress has not yet adopted a spending budget which

will set the caps for what they will spend for FY 2022. That will provide an indication of Congress's appetite for massive new investments in education. There is likely to be a lot of debate about the impact of flooding the education system with so much money without changing the rules of the game to ensure that persistent challenges, such as inequitable distribution of resources, are addressed.

## **2. The Department of Education Issues Guidance on ARPA Funding for K-12 Schools**

Last week, the Department of Education released their second handbook, "Roadmap to Reopening Safely and Meeting All Students' Needs". [Volume 2](#) identifies strategies states, districts, schools, and communities can use when obligating funding they have received from the American Rescue Plan.

Volume 2 also aims to meet President Biden's call for communities and the country to "build back better." As states and districts continue to reopen schools safely, the Department is encouraging communities to implement strategies that address the social, emotional, and mental-health needs of students, including the disproportionate toll COVID-19 has had on underserved communities, as well as inequities in our education system that predate -- and have been exacerbated -- by the pandemic.

Strategies described in Volume 2 can be supported by funding under the American Rescue Plan. Each section provides strategies and considerations for meeting the needs of underserved students. The sections include:

- Providing school meals regardless of educational setting.
- Meeting the social, emotional, and mental-health needs of students.
- Providing all students with access to a safe and inclusive learning environment.
- Accelerating learning through in-classroom instructional approaches, tutoring, and expanded learning time.
- Supporting equitable access and effective use of technology for teaching and learning.
- Using data about students' opportunities to learn to help target resources and support.
- Addressing resource inequities.
- Stabilizing a diverse and qualified educator workforce.
- Supporting educator and staff well-being.

The Volume 2 handbook is an excellent resource for educator preparation programs at institutions of higher education and school districts to think outside of the box about how to maximize the use of ARPA funds to address the persistent shortage of teachers in areas like special education -- by investing in a diverse teacher pipeline.

## **3. Building the Biden Administration**

On Wednesday, Dr. Cindy Marten came [one step closer](#) to taking the second-highest education job in the country, Deputy Secretary of Education. With a bi-partisan endorsement, the Senate HELP Committee voted 14-8 to approve Marten's nomination - despite criticism about her district's disproportionate rates of suspensions and expulsions for Black students, treatment of students with disabilities and handling of sexual misconduct complaints. Marten currently serves as Superintendent of San Diego Unified School District. If confirmed by the full Senate, Marten would go from being the leader of California's second-largest school district with 97,000 students and a \$1.5 billion budget to being the chief operating officer of the U.S. Department of Education, which has a \$73.5 billion budget and serves about 50 million K-12 students and 12 million postsecondary students.

Also this week, President Biden's [nominee](#) for Under Secretary of Education, James Kvaal, was approved in a bi-partisan vote of 19-3. Kvaal currently leads The Institute for College Access and Success and was a former senior adviser on domestic policy and Deputy Undersecretary of Education during the Obama Administration. If confirmed by the full Senate, Kvaal would have a significant hand in developing and implementing higher education policy for the federal government. Just to date myself, I had the pleasure of working with James when he was a staffer for Sen. John Edwards (D-NC) years ago. Raise your hand if you remember Sen. Edwards!

#### 4. New Resources

- [The American Educational Research Journal](#) released a paper examining the impact of test-optional admissions on nearly 100 private colleges that adopted such policies between 2005-06 and 2015-16. Just about every competitive college chose a test-optional (or test blind) admissions policy for the current academic year. The push was the result of the pandemic, but many of the newly test-optional colleges are leaving open the possibility that they will stay test-optional indefinitely.
- [K-12 Dive](#) is out with a brief that looks at predicting and preventing teacher shortages through data analysis. Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, for example, uses a data-based dashboard to help districts and teacher preparation programs put resources toward effective teacher recruitment and retention strategies.
- [The NWEA](#) has issued a research brief looking at the potential impact of this year's decline in kindergarten enrollment.
- [OSEP](#) is out with a new interactive tool that offers a state-by-state breakdown of special education teacher qualifications and average number of students served.

Wishing you all a glorious spring weekend filled with blooming wisteria, redbud trees and iris – as well as vaccines!

Until next week,

Jane and Kait

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