

K-12 Education

The Republican Labor-HHS-Education appropriations subcommittee bill includes an irresponsible cut of \$1.7 billion, or 7 percent below current funding levels, for Elementary and Secondary Education Act programs, far outweighing the welcome \$500 million increase provided for Special Education grants. A large share of the reduction in the Republican bill is accomplished by zeroing the President's signature reform efforts, such as Race to the Top, Investing in Innovation (I3) and School Improvement Grants. Together, these programs received \$1.2 billion in last year's appropriation.

School Improvement Grants (SIG) and I3 funds provide critical resources for schools with the greatest challenges. More, not fewer resources are needed to ensure every struggling, eligible school gets the help it needs. SIG funds are awarded to the nation's lowest performing schools for the explicit purpose of implementing aggressive turnaround strategies. Grants are capped at \$2 million per school and limited to a three year period. Presently, far less than half the schools eligible for SIG assistance are receiving it. Eliminating this funding entirely will severely undermine efforts to turnaround the schools that need the most help and it will take us backward in our fight to ensure great public schools for every student.

The bill also rescinds \$400 million from the 2012 appropriation for Race to the Top, leaving available less than a third of the funds from the enacted legislation. The Education Department has already engaged the public and made significant progress in designing this year's Race to the Top competition in which, for the first time, individual school districts will be eligible to apply for grants.

But the damage is not limited to the innovative and relatively new efforts described above. In addition to the reform initiatives listed above, the Republican bill also immediately terminates numerous other proven programs. In the report accompanying the subcommittee bill, the majority hides behind a false premise that these programs were also proposed for elimination in the President's budget. In reality, the President's budget is based on the administration's proposal to reauthorize the ESEA. In that context, the budget includes a reorganization of current programs whereby many activities are consolidated into newly named accounts, but the activities themselves are nonetheless preserved. In contrast, the Republican bill takes the reckless and irresponsible step of simply terminating at least a dozen of those programs, along with their associated funding, totaling more than \$550 million. Examples of such programs include (among others):

- Elimination of *Math and Science Partnerships*, which received \$150 million in 2012 and which support efforts to improve student achievement in math and science through teacher education and professional development;

- Elimination of *High School Graduation Initiative*, which received \$49 million in 2012 and which supports dropout prevention and re-entry programs in high schools with high dropout rates;
- Elimination of the *Libraries and Literacy Initiative*, which received \$29 million in 2012 and which offers assistance to school libraries and non-profit organizations that provide books and childhood literacy activities to families in high-need communities;
- Elimination of *School Counseling*, which received \$52 million in 2012 and which provides grants to high need schools for establishing or expanding a school counseling program;
- Elimination of *Teach for America*, which received \$8 million in 2012 and which recruits, trains and places thousands of new teachers in high-need schools every year.
- Elimination of *Arts in Education*, which received \$25 million in 2012 and which supports the integration of the arts into school curriculum, and also provides awards to a national organization that sponsors arts programs for children with disabilities;
- Elimination of *Advanced Placement (AP)*, which received \$30 million in 2012 and which supports efforts to increase access to AP and International Baccalaureate courses for low-income students;

To make matters worse, even in cases where the Republican bill maintains the current funding level for a given program – or provides a modest increase, the resources provided still fail to meet the need in our nation’s schools. For example, Title I grants to school districts, which is the largest single source of federal support for public schools, receive \$14.5 billion in the Republican bill – an equal amount to last year’s appropriation. Yet, the majority of school districts nationwide will have fewer Title I dollars under such a funding level. This is because the number of Title I students has jumped 1.2 million, or six percent, since 2010 and because relatively flat funding for the past three years has failed to keep pace with inflation. Since 2010, inflation has averaged about 2 percent, but funding for Title I remained flat in 2010; declined 0.3 percent in 2011; and, increased 0.5 percent in 2012.

Local school districts are in no position to absorb increased costs at a time when shrinking state and local budgets have already led to steep reductions in education services for all students. Over the past four years, states have already been forced to close budget shortfalls totaling more than \$530 billion. Funding for schools makes up a large share of most state budgets and is therefore hit especially hard by budget cuts at the state level. While some states are beginning to see increased revenue, more than half of states are already reporting shortfalls totaling \$44 billion for 2013.

A recent survey of school superintendents found that among other cost-cutting strategies such as staff layoffs, eliminating summer school, and reducing instructional materials and academic interventions:

- 54% increased class size in the 2011-2012 school year and 57% plan to do so in the upcoming school year;
- 40% eliminated or delayed instructional improvement initiatives in 2011-12 and 48% anticipate doing so in 2012-13;

The current funding level for Title I Grants to school districts represents just 38% of the authorized level in the No Child Left Behind Act. Recent census data reveals that the number of children living in poverty has grown to a rate of more than one in five. Many schools in distressed areas lack even the basic tools and resources to help these students succeed. The Republican bill is a disservice to the millions of public elementary and secondary students who arrive at school every day seeking a quality education to prepare them for a competitive future.

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Subcommittee on Labor-HHS-Ed Appropriations***