President’s Proposed Budget Undermines Public Education System

Bethesda, MD—The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) believes that President Trump’s proposed FY21 budget for the U.S. Department of Education poses significant risk to the United States public education system and students. This proposal represents an unacceptable $6 billion cut in federal education funding. While we are not surprised by the President’s failure to provide adequate investments in K–12 public education, we are deeply concerned that his proposal to consolidate all discretionary K–12 spending authorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act into one block grant, under the false pretense of flexibility and freedom, is a violation of Congressional intent.

Consolidating ESSA Into a Block Grant

The Administration proposes consolidating into one large block grant 29 programs that support comprehensive school safety, effective teaching, availability of comprehensive learning supports, overall student well-being, and critical technical assistance to help states meet the needs of their students. Consolidating these programs would result in a 20% reduction of funds, or a cut of $4.7 billion. Such a shortsighted funding cut dilutes already lean programs, asks states and districts to stretch even thinner, and will result in reduced services to the students who need them the most. These cuts threaten school districts’ ability to provide comprehensive mental and behavioral health services, social–emotional learning, and other critical services that directly contribute to the school and life success of millions of children and youth, and will force districts to make unreasonable choices about which of these valuable and needed programs to cut, at the expense of students. Furthermore, this consolidation undermines Congressional intent that states use federal dollars on specific initiatives like high-quality professional development and activities to improve school and student safety; efforts that we know improve student outcomes. Importantly, the elimination of the Safe Schools National Activities Program ends a grant program specifically targeted at improving the pipeline of school psychologists and other school-employed mental health professionals to underserved districts. The Administration should be supporting efforts to improve comprehensive mental and behavioral health services, not cutting this critical and innovative new program. NASP fully intends to work with Congress to protect existing funding structures and to ensure states and districts have the funding, and necessary technical support, needed to meet the needs of all students.
Underfunding IDEA

Despite the rise in the number of students in poverty and the increase in the number of students with disabilities, the Administration proposes a miniscule $100 million increase to IDEA Grants to States, with no increases in funding for programs intended to address the needs of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with disabilities. This is unacceptable. When IDEA was authorized, Congress promised to provide 40% of the additional cost associated with educating students with disabilities. The current budget request represents less than 15% of the cost, leaving states and local school districts to make up for the shortfall. We have a responsibility to help states meet the needs of our nation’s most vulnerable students and to help them improve low performing schools. This budget completely ignores that responsibility.

Expanding Ineffective School Choice Options

NASP opposes efforts in this budget to create a federal “school choice” or voucher system that funnels public education dollars to pre-K–12 schools that may lack public accountability, require the loss or declination of rights afforded to students or families, or enable discriminatory practices. Public schools educate all students, and we should be investing public financial and human resources in improving public schools, not siphoning off critical federal dollars for private education. We are greatly disappointed that the President's budget calls for $50 billion, in the form of federal tax credits, over the next 10 years to support school choice, despite an evidence base that shows schools that participate in voucher programs do not demonstrate improved academic outcomes for students when compared to traditional public schools. We believe that the Administration should be focused on strengthening our public schools, which educate 90% of our students, rather than promoting ineffective private school vouchers.

Eliminating Public Service Loan Forgiveness

The budget puts at risk the nation’s ability to attract a skilled education workforce by eliminating public service loan forgiveness for teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, and other educators. Critical workforce shortages that already exist in these professions will only worsen as the cost of appropriate training becomes untenable. This proposal also eliminates subsidized loans, which means students would have to pay interest on loans while in school, further increasing the cost of higher education and boxing many students out of the opportunity to pursue the education needed to serve students and communities. The federal government should be working on expanding, not decreasing, access to higher education in these essential areas of service.

The bottom line is that the President’s proposed budget poses a real threat to one of our nation’s most critical resources: our public education system. In doing so, the Administration is increasing the risk threshold for hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of American children and their futures as productive, contributing citizens. NASP is committed to working with Congress to ensure that FY2021 federal appropriations maintain critical investments in education to provide a high-quality public education, in an environment that is safe and supportive for all students.

NASP represents 25,000 school psychologists throughout the United States and abroad. NASP empowers school psychologists by advancing effective practices to improve students’ learning, behavior, and mental health. Learn more at www.nasponline.org.

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