



Insight

Education in the President's FY 2015 Budget

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Included in President Obama's FY2015 budget proposal is \$68.6 billion for the U.S. Department of Education, a roughly \$1.3 billion increase over FY2014.

The budget calls for level funding for the two largest formula programs that go out to every district, which includes \$14.4 billion for Title I grants to districts for disadvantaged students, and \$11.5 billion for state grants for special education.

The budget also calls for level funding for charter school programs, financed at more than \$240 million and the School Improvement Grant (SIG) program, financed at about \$505 million. In the budget proposal the administration has once again rolled the existing Charter Schools Programs into a new Expanding Educational Options program that would allow school districts to tap these dollars for autonomous public schools. A move that could further restrict the growth of charter schools at a time when more than nearly one million students sit on waitlists. The continued investment in the SIG program could also face tough questions in Congress considering a recent report released by the Department of Education that showed one-third of the more than 1,500 schools participating actually decreased in proficiency rates. This after nearly \$5.9 billion has been spent on the program.

On the positive side, the budget request calls for a boost in funding, from \$288 million to \$320 million, for the Teacher Incentive Fund, which offers grants to districts to create pay-for-performance options needed to attract quality teachers in high need subjects such as science and math.

For higher education the administration has asked for an \$11 billion increase over ten years for new programs targeted at increasing graduation rates for Pell grant recipients enticing states into "performance-based budgeting"—which would reward state institutions of higher education for improving completion rates.

Once again the budget reflects the administration's priority for early childhood development calling for \$75 billion over 10 years for an initiative to encourage states to expand pre-kindergarten programs to more 4-year-olds, as well as \$500 million for preschool development grants, also targeting states to improve their early childhood education programs. Still the Department of Education has yet to fully explain how it would use the money.

Overall the administration's 2015 budget request calls for billions of dollars to create new federal programs in areas ranging from early childhood learning to higher education. These new programs, if enacted, add to the hundreds of existing programs that perplex states and school districts, and often provide little flexibility and support desperately needed at the local level to improve student achievement.