



Insight

Presidential Candidate Booker's Education Plan

TOM LEE | DECEMBER 18, 2019

Democratic presidential candidate and Senator Cory Booker (D-NJ) recently released his plan for pre-K and K-12 education. His [plan](#) includes several parts:

- Triple Title I funding for schools in low-income areas and create a new grant program to incentivize states to change their public-education funding systems;
- Provide at least \$200 billion in federal funding for school infrastructure;
- Pass the Respect, Advancement, and Increasing Support for Educators (RAISE) Act, which Booker introduced in the Senate;
- Increase federal funding for states under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act; and
- Increase federal support for public charter schools.

These reforms would dramatically increase the role of the federal government in public education—historically the role of state and local governments—without making needed structural reforms.

Increase Title I Funding and Create a New Grant System

Booker's plan calls for tripling funding for Title I schools over the next decade. Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act—the second iteration of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, following No Child Left Behind—is the largest federal K-12 education program. Through Title I, the federal government provides extra funding to states for local education agencies in low-income and high-poverty districts. The federal government appropriated \$15.3 billion for K-12 Title I funding in 2018, meaning funding under Booker's proposal will rise to roughly \$45 billion per year.^[1]

Booker's proposal to triple Title I funding matches that of South Bend, Indiana, Mayor Pete Buttigieg and Senator Bernie Sanders. ^[2], ^[3] It also closely follows Senator Elizabeth Warren's plan to quadruple Title I funding over the next decade.^[4]

Booker has further proposed creating a new federal grant program of at least \$10 billion that would reward states that change their current public-school funding formulas away from local property taxes and toward more equitable forms. It is difficult to imagine exactly what these incentives would be, and his proposal does not offer more specific details. In addition, the federal government already has a similar system under Title I: Education Finance Incentive Grants (EFIG), which base allocations upon the degree to which education expenditures among local education agencies within a state are equalized.^[5] EFIGs were allocated about \$4 billion for the 2018-2019 school year, or about 25 percent of total annual Title I funding.^[6] Since EFIGs already exist, Booker's new federal grant program appears to be a duplicate program.

Increase Federal Funding for School Infrastructure

Booker proposes spending at least \$200 billion on school infrastructure. Booker provides little additional detail about how these funds would be raised and specifically used. The \$200 billion proposal would, however, dramatically increase the role of the federal government in school infrastructure. From 1993 to 2014, federal, state, and local governments nationwide spent \$1.26 trillion on school infrastructure.[7] Of that \$1.26 trillion, only 0.2 percent or about \$2.5 billion came from the federal government, mostly through the Federal Emergency Management Agency for school districts that experienced natural disasters.

Booker's proposal to spend \$200 billion on school infrastructure is much larger than Senator Warren's proposal to spend \$50 billion on school infrastructure.[8] Senator Sanders has also proposed an increase in funding but provides few details.[9]

Pass the Respect, Advancement, and Increasing Support for Educators Act

During the 2019 legislative session, Senator Booker introduced the Respect, Advancement, and Increasing Support for Educators (RAISE) Act, with the primary goal being to boost teacher pay. The RAISE Act would provide a refundable tax credit of up to \$10,000, with the amount based on the poverty level of the district they teach in. If fully implemented, the RAISE Act would dramatically increase the federal government's role in compensating teachers and could cost up to \$300 billion over the next decade.

Booker also proposes "to incentivize all states to increase teacher compensation to close wage gaps." This proposal, without any further details, appears to be in tension with the RAISE Act. State governments already tend to push off their expenses to the federal government. As a result, if states were to see the federal government subsidize teacher pay through the RAISE Act, they would have little incentive to increase their own contributions to teacher salaries. In fact, the RAISE Act could encourage states to reduce their contributions to teacher pay.

Nearly every Democratic presidential candidate has indicated his or her support for the federal government subsidizing teacher pay. While Sen. Booker introduced the RAISE Act, former Vice President Joe Biden and Senator Warren have proposed increasing teacher salaries through their respective plans to triple and quadruple Title I funding.[10], [11] Senator Sanders has proposed working with states to set a \$60,000 salary floor for teachers.

Increase Funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Booker has also proposed increasing funding for students with disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). The federal government provided \$13.5 billion in funding for IDEA in 2019, or about 15 percent of the average cost per special-education pupil. In the law, Congress originally promised to fund 40 percent of the average cost per special-education pupil, or about \$33.2 billion a year.[12] Booker proposes bringing federal funding up to that originally promised level. Other candidates, including former Vice President Joe Biden, former Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julian Castro, Mayor Buttigieg, and Senators Sanders and Warren have similarly indicated their support for making the federal government reach the promised 40 percent.[13]

Increase Federal Support for Public Charter Schools

Booker proposes increasing federal support for public non-profit charter schools, but he has called for a ban on federal funding for for-profit charter schools. This proposal is largely similar to Mayor Buttigieg's stance on

charter schools.[14] In contrast, Senator Sanders has called for a freeze in federal funding of non-profit charters, while Senator Warren has called for a complete end to federal funding for all charter schools.[15]

Booker is the only Democratic presidential candidate so far to explicitly support the Federal Charter Schools Program (CSP). CSP, an amendment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), provides federal grants to state education agencies for charter schools. He has proposed ensuring that CSP grants federal funds not just for new charters, but to expand upon and improve already existing ones. It is difficult to project the exact changes these proposals would have on current federal funding for charter schools, as Booker's plan does not contain more details.

The Role of the Federal Government

The federal government has traditionally let state and local governments administer their own public education systems with relatively targeted interventions since the creation of the Department of Education. Under Senator Booker's education proposals, and the proposals of his fellow Democratic presidential candidates, the federal government could very well supplant local and state government responsibilities in public education. Not only would this shift in responsibility be expensive, but it remains unclear that increasing the federal government's role in public education results in necessary structural changes that improve student outcomes.

[1] https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d18/tables/dt18_401.70.asp

[2] <https://berniesanders.com/en/issues/reinvest-in-public-education/>

[3] <https://peteforamerica.com/policies/education/>

[4] <https://elizabethwarren.com/plans/public-education>

[5] <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html>

[6] <https://www.eseanetwork.org/news-and-resources/blogs/used/revised-fiscal-year-fy-2018-title-i-allocations>

[7] <http://www.21csf.org/csf-home/Documents/FederalStateSpendingNov2010/FederalSpendingPK12PublicSchoolFacilitiesNovember2010.pdf>

[8] Ibid

[9] Ibid

[10] <https://joebiden.com/education/>

[11] <https://joebiden.com/education/>

[12] <https://nclt.org/news/policy-and-advocacy/idea-full-funding-why-should-congress-invest-in-special-education/>

[13] Ibid

[14] Ibid

[15] Ibid