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## Would Weighted Student Funding be Good for Your School?

Last week, in a rare moment of bipartisanship, the Congress significantly increased the caps on federal spending that they imposed on themselves in 2011. In reaction to this many observers noted that the only thing Republicans and Democrats seem to be able to agree on right now is increasing their ability to spend taxpayer dollars.

The new caps allowed for increases over the next two years of \$165 billion in military spending and \$124 billion on domestic programs. The Republicans who supported the measure and the President who signed it said they felt it was necessary to allow rebuilding of the military after years of sequester-induced cuts. Democrats who supported the measure did so primarily because of the increased spending levels for domestic programs.

It was not a surprise that the Trump budget proposal for 2019, which was released this week, did not spend all the \$124 billion increase on increases in current programs. As a matter of fact, many domestic programs under the President's budget would see cuts—including public education.

Specifically, the [Trump 2019 education budget proposal](#), if adopted by Congress, would reduce federal education spending by over 5%. Most of the \$3.6 billion funding cut would be borne by the complete elimination of Title II teacher grants and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers. But 37 other programs would be either eliminated or pared down. The big programs that most impact children, Title I funding for disadvantaged children, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), and the Perkins Career and Technical Education program, would all be level-funded.

There were also some education increases in the President's proposal. This included increases in STEM funding and a new program funding grants to assist children and families impacted by the opioid crisis. Also funding for school choice would increase by \$1.5 billion, with \$1 billion allocated for school choice Opportunity Grants, and \$500 million for federal charter school funding. The school choice Opportunity Grants could be used in one of two ways: either by states to supplement school choice programs they already have in place; or by districts to create Weighted Student Funding (WSF) programs to drive student needs-based funding down to the local school level.

The WSF program was created without funding a year ago in the Every Student Succeeds Act. It allows up to fifty pilot districts to bundle all sources of revenue—local, state and federal—together and tie the funding to individual students. In the past federal funding could not be treated this way. Weighting factors would allocate extra money to students from low-income families, English language learners, migratory children, and children who are neglected, delinquent, or at risk. The Department of Education [released the program application](#) earlier this month and the added \$1 billion, if approved by Congress, may make it attractive for districts to apply for it.

Currently school districts do receive additional funding for needier students through various funding mechanisms. However, these funds do not go to individual schools, but provide funding for specific programs to address student needs.

The promise of this new funding concept is that it would tie increased funding to specific children to carry to their schools rather than allocating it to specific district, state or federal programs. Perhaps students with extra needs would become valued by their local schools because of the extra funding they bring with them. Add to this an open enrollment program in the district (which is not required by the law) and you could envision schools taking an interest in attracting students with specific needs to their school by offering unique programs that would address their unique needs. Taking this a little further,

perhaps individual schools would also recruit teachers to their schools with the gifts and experience necessary to address the specific needs.

The current federal WSF pilot program does not allow the funding to go to private schools. It would only require an amendment by Congress to open the program up to include private school options. However, within the current limits of the program some of the benefits of private schools such as competing for students, designing unique student need-centered programs, and viewing students and their families as valued customers, could become integral parts of the public-school culture. These might be enough to eliminate the pressure for private school options.

A few school districts have been experimenting with WSF in recent years with [some good results](#). While [not everyone agrees](#) that WSF shows promise, I think it is worth trying because it may provide a spark and accompanying resources to individual schools to reach students that, despite hard work by many, are currently not achieving at acceptable levels.

Scripture makes it clear that we should reach out to the disadvantaged in our society and do what we can to be a blessing to them. Countless Christian teachers answer a personal call to do this with little consideration for their salary or the relatively low status that our society confers on those who serve the least among us. I am confident that the Lord will continue to call Christians to this work. However, WSF might help schools attract teachers with this calling to the right place for them to serve—and provide the resources they need to succeed.

**This month's prayer for the President** is a [prayer for integrity](#) based on Proverbs 29:4, "By justice a king gives a country stability, but one who is greedy for bribes tears it down."

**CEAI is interested in your thoughts.** Members are encouraged to enter comments below. Personal comments may be addressed to the author at [JMitchell@ceai.org](mailto:JMitchell@ceai.org). John Mitchell is the Washington, DC Area Director for the Christian Educators Association.

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