

Dear Members of Congress:

We, the national and state offices of EdTrust and our aligned partners write to request that the Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 L-HHS-ED bills contain substantial investments to ensure that essential education programs have the resources they need to ensure the greatest impact for underserved students, particularly students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

These investments remain critical in light of actions taken by the Trump administration to severely limit the federal role in protecting public education and the students it serves over the past 14 months. Since assuming office in January 2025, the Trump administration has taken numerous actions to undermine public education, including unlawful steps to dismantle the U.S. Department of Education (ED) in contradiction to bipartisan laws passed by Congress, alongside proposals like the FY26 President's Budget that cut and eliminated dozens of federal education programs. Significant reductions in force at ED have substantially undermined the agency's ability to fulfill its responsibilities to America's students and families, including enforcing students' civil rights and consumer protections, administering grants that support schools and districts, and ensuring the legally required collection and dissemination of education research.

We've seen the President propose draconian cuts to public education and ED's capacity to protect and serve our students, including slashing resources for K-12, college access programs, the Office for Civil Rights, and substantially lowering the maximum Pell award. We commend Congress for its wholesale rejection of this vision for public education by passing a strong, bipartisan spending law that maintained level funding for nearly all education programs, and we urge the same approach in FY27. The nation's students and families need and [support Congress increasing, not decreasing, education funding.](#)

We also support the continued inclusion of statutory prohibitions that render the transfer of programs out of ED unlawful, and report language that clearly and directly asserts that the administration has "no authority" to dismantle the Department of Education in the manner they are pursuing. We also urge Congress to go even further, as detailed below.

To that end, while there are many programs that are critical in facilitating the achievement of students of color and students from low-income backgrounds, EdTrust is focused on the following in FY27:

- Congress must address the looming Pell Grant funding shortfall by providing an additional emergency investment to maintain existing Pell benefits and eligibility. While doing so, Congress should continue to invest in the Pell Grant program by increasing the maximum award to keep pace with inflation, at a minimum.

- Supporting teachers and school leaders by asserting Congress' constitutional power of the purse, rejecting the unilateral elimination of bipartisan programs, and increasing investments in the following:
 - ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) Title I-A (\$22.12 billion)
 - ESSA Title II-A (\$3 billion)
 - The Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program (TSLIP) (\$200 million)
 - The Supporting Effective Educator Development Program (SEED) (\$200 million)
 - HEA (Higher Education Act) Title II's Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grants (\$300 million)
 - Including FY23 omnibus report language supporting improved representation in access to advanced coursework
 - Full-Service Community Schools Program (\$210 million)
 - Comprehensive Literacy State Development Grant Program (\$165 million)
- Enabling enhanced preparation for teaching candidates at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and minority-serving institutions (MSIs) by allocating at least \$45 million in funding for the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Grant program
- Developing and strengthening evidence-based student success programs by allocating at least \$55 million in funding for the Post Secondary Student Success Grant program
- Supporting student-parents by allocating at least \$500 million in funding for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) program
- Protecting students and families by including language to prevent and reverse the unlawful transfers of educational programs out of the Department of Education

We urge increased support for these crucial programs to help meet the needs of all of the nation's students, including students of color and students from low-income backgrounds.

Strengthening the Pell Grant Program

The Pell Grant program is the cornerstone of federal financial aid. The program [benefits](#) around [7 million students](#) annually and continues to serve as the primary federal investment designed to allow students from low-income backgrounds to access higher education. Roughly one-third of white students, almost 60% of Black students, and nearly half of Latino students, [rely on Pell Grants every year](#). Pell Grant dollars are [well-targeted to those in need](#): 88% of Pell recipients

come from families with annual incomes at or below \$40,000; and 46% of recipients come from households with annual incomes at or below \$15,000.

Fixing the Pell Shortfall

[Recent projections](#) from the Congressional Budget Office show the Pell Grant program faces a significant budget gap — with an estimated \$5.45 billion shortfall in FY26 and an \$11.5 billion gap projected for FY27. This \$16.95 billion shortfall represents a looming threat to students' ability to attend and afford higher education if not addressed promptly.

Over the past five years, lawmakers from both parties supported, and President Trump signed into law, provisions that have increased the maximum award and overall number of recipients for the grant, expanded eligibility for students who are incarcerated, and established Workforce Pell for short-term, high-quality training programs. These changes reflect a shared understanding that Pell Grants are a vital education policy tool, capable of helping various student populations gain essential skills and knowledge. The same bipartisan spirit that enabled those expansions should guide action to stabilize the program's finances today. After addressing the immediate shortfall, Congress should also consider transitioning the program to a funding model that is fully mandatory to prevent any future shortfalls.

In FY27, Congress must provide sufficient funding to fully cover the projected Pell Grant shortfall for the current and upcoming fiscal years so that students do not experience sudden reductions in aid, which could prevent them from completing their degree or pursuing higher education.

Increase the Maximum Pell Grant Award

The maximum Pell Grant award has failed to keep pace with the rapidly rising cost of college over the past several decades. In 1980, the maximum Pell Grant award [covered](#) 77% of the cost of attendance at a public university. Today, [it covers](#) just over 26%, the lowest portion in over 40 years. Bold action must be taken to halt and reverse this damaging trend.

While we appreciate increases to the maximum award in prior appropriations bills, we remain concerned that it has not been increased since 2023. [Nearly 1,200 organizations](#) have gone on record supporting the doubling of the Pell Grant, and Congress should restore annual increases to the award.

In FY27, Congress should, at a minimum, increase the maximum award upward from \$7,395 to keep pace with inflation.

Supporting Students, Families, Teachers, and School Leaders

Increase funding for ESSA's Title I-A; ESSA's Title II-A (Supporting Effective Instruction); the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Program (TSLIP), the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program, and HEA's Title II Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grants; incentivize states and localities to evaluate their education funding formulas and policies and implement equitable reforms; and maintain FY23 report language supporting increased equity in advanced coursework.

EdTrust supports a \$2.2 billion funding increase, to \$22.12B overall, in FY27 for ESSA's Title I-A program. We reject previous proposals to distribute Title I funding as block grants to states, which would be devastating for students, particularly those who are most underserved. Funding Title I-A at this level would match its inflation-adjusted level from FY2011 onward, before fiscal austerity and budget caps severely hampered federal education funding. Title I-A provides critical funding to nearly 90% of school districts across the country to improve K-12 education for students from low-income backgrounds. Research shows that increased school funding can improve student outcomes, and a [study](#) of the long-term effects of Title I found increased educational attainment, higher high school graduation rates, and improved earnings and work hours in adulthood.

However, it is important to note that most public education funding is distributed via state and local formulas. Therefore, any federal funding increases of this size should be accompanied by levers that encourage states and districts to address the inequities inherent in those formulas. This is a tremendous opportunity to spark systemic reform of the status quo, which [sends \\$23 billion more](#) to predominantly white school districts than to predominantly non-white school districts. Furthermore, [districts](#) with the most students of color receive, on average, 16% less in state and local revenue than districts with the fewest students of color, and high-poverty districts receive 5% less in state and local revenue than low-poverty districts. Additionally, districts with the most English learners receive 14% less in state and local revenue, compared with districts with the fewest English learners. We urge Congress to think boldly about how to make the education funding system more responsive to students facing structural barriers to education by including report language from prior Senate Labor-HHS-ED appropriations bills that reserves \$100 million for states and localities to examine their own funding formulas.

Furthermore, [research](#) and experience demonstrate the powerful impact that teachers and school leaders have on student learning. ESSA's Title II-A program provides grants to states and districts that can be used to invest in and develop educators. These funds can address inequities in access to effective teachers and school leaders, provide professional development, and improve teacher recruitment and retention. States and districts can also apply for additional competitive grant dollars for programs like TSLIP and SEED, which target specific, evidence-based strategies for improving teacher and school leader effectiveness and increasing educator

diversity. Additionally, HEA's Title II TQP grants, awarded to partnerships between high-need districts and teacher preparation programs at institutions of higher education, can be used to recruit underrepresented populations to the teaching profession. As EdTrust's [work continues to demonstrate](#) the positive impact that diverse teachers and school leaders of color can have on the academic achievement of all students, we remain supportive of federal dollars to increase and bolster the diversity of the educator pipeline.

Finally, [research shows](#) that Black, Latino, and Native students, students with disabilities, and students from low-income backgrounds are under-represented in advanced programs and courses (gifted and talented, advanced placement, international baccalaureate, honors courses, dual enrollment, etc.). We supported the inclusion of report language in the FY23 omnibus that noted that funds under ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) may be used to implement open enrollment, automatic enrollment, and/or universal screening practices; to increase course access and success; to provide coaching and training for educators; to purchase materials; and/or cover exam fees for under-represented students. The language also encouraged the Department to resume collecting data on passing rates for all Advanced Placement subject areas. This language mirrors some of what we supported in the bicameral [Advanced Coursework Equity Act](#) (HR 6328/S 3279 in the 118th Congress).

Considering the nationwide attention to the need to invest in educators, especially as districts and schools work to combat [ongoing educator shortages](#), it was especially disheartening to see the administration decide to unilaterally cancel hundreds of millions of dollars in critical grant funding for TQP and SEED, and then illegally withhold funding for Title II for nearly a month in 2025. These decisions disrupted teacher workforce pipelines in rural and urban schools serving high-needs students. Participating districts and universities canceled scholarships for students, terminated school-based staff, eliminated positions that supported students in tutoring in math, reading, and special education, and discontinued programs that recruited and retained teachers to solve teacher shortages across the country. We salute Congress' action in the FY26 appropriations law to ensure funding continues for all of these educator preparation programs, rejecting the notion that these programs are ineffective or expendable. In FY27, in addition to increasing funding, Congress should do everything possible, including inserting specific funding requirements in statutory text, to prevent any delays, cancellations, and withholdings from happening again.

At a minimum, in FY27, Congress should: increase Title I-A to \$22.12B; increase Title II-A, TSLIP, SEED, and TQP beyond FY25 levels: \$3B, \$200M, \$140M, and \$300M, respectively; maintain report language supporting increasing equity in advanced coursework; and include language to ensure the proper allocation of teacher preparation programmatic funds.

Increase funding for the Full-Service Community Schools Grant Program

The Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) Grant Program was created to support a “community school” model that integrates academics with health and social services, youth and community development, and family engagement. This model necessitates partnerships with local nonprofits, health providers, and community organizations to address the broader needs of students and families. FSCS provides competitive funding to school districts and nonprofit partners to coordinate services such as mental health counseling, after-school enrichment, early childhood education, and family resource centers directly on school campuses.

[Research](#) on the community schools model supported by FSCS shows measurable positive impacts on student and school outcomes. For example, community schools have been associated with [significant reductions in chronic absenteeism](#), with some studies finding that attendance improvements were, on average, 30% greater than those of comparable non-community schools and equivalent to thousands of additional students attending regularly after one year of implementation. These gains are linked to coordinated services like healthcare, family supports, and expanded learning opportunities that help students stay engaged in school. Researchers have also documented reductions in [suspension rates](#) and modest but meaningful gains in academic achievement. Finally, evidence from nationwide studies suggests that community schools can especially benefit historically underserved student groups — including Black students, English learners, and students from low-income backgrounds — by narrowing attendance gaps and boosting performance. By addressing out-of-school factors, such as food insecurity, access to healthcare, and housing instability, the Full-Service Community Schools Grant Program promotes educational equity and strengthens entire communities, making schools hubs of opportunity and support.

In FY27, Congress should allocate at least \$210M for the Full-Service Community Schools Grant Program.

Increase funding for the Comprehensive State Literacy Grant Program

The Comprehensive Literacy State Development (CLSD) Grant Program helps states build and implement comprehensive literacy systems that support children from birth through high school, with particular emphasis on students living in poverty, English learners, and students with disabilities. States such as Iowa, Nebraska, California, and [Colorado](#) have been awarded multiyear CLSD grants totaling tens of millions of dollars to develop local literacy plans, support professional development, and align statewide literacy efforts with evidence-based practices. In addition to the bipartisan support shown for the program via dedicated congressional funding for this program and its predecessor since FY2010, [the Trump administration](#) has also designated evidence-based literacy as one of its new priorities.

The CLSD Grant program can be a powerful vehicle for advancing the science of reading, which is a body of research on how children learn to read that emphasizes explicit, systematic instruction in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Many CLSD-funded efforts focus on preparing educators to use evidence-based literacy instruction by developing professional learning opportunities, coaching systems, and leadership teams grounded in the Science of Reading. For example, in [Iowa](#), subgrants have been used to support professional development and local literacy plans specifically aligned with the science of reading to accelerate reading proficiency. By investing in teacher knowledge, high-quality instructional materials, and data-informed interventions, the CLSD program helps states translate research into classroom practice, ultimately improving literacy outcomes and reducing achievement gaps for traditionally underserved students.

In FY27, Congress should allocate at least \$165M for the Comprehensive State Literacy Grant Program.

Supporting College Students

Increase funding for the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Grant Program

Research has shown that students of color benefit tremendously from having teachers of color, particularly those of the same racial background: they are [less likely to be chronically absent or suspended from school](#), [more likely to be recommended for gifted and talented programs](#), and [Black students from low-income backgrounds who have a Black teacher for at least one year in elementary school are less likely to drop out of high school and more likely to consider college](#). Furthermore, even though students of color make up the majority of students in public schools, the [diversity gap for teachers](#) still exists across every state.

The nationwide impact of HBCUs, MSIs, Hispanic-serving institutions (HSIs), and tribal colleges and universities (TCUs) on producing diverse teachers to combat systemic teacher shortages and narrow equity gaps cannot be overstated. [Last year](#), 82% of public schools had more than one teacher vacancy, and 64% of public schools reported challenges in finding qualified applicants to step into those vacancies. As some states adopt four-day school weeks in response to these shortages, increasing the number of traditionally underrepresented people in the teaching profession is one way to help solve the problem. Shortages are also most acute in areas of concentrated poverty, and given that [teachers of color disproportionately serve in under-resourced school districts](#), Hawkins is uniquely valuable.

HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs collectively award only 11% of the nation's bachelor's degrees in education, yet they produce more than 50% of the bachelor's degrees [earned in education](#) by Hispanic, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander students, and 35% of all American Indian/Alaskan Native teachers and Asian teachers. [Approximately](#) 40% of the nation's Black teachers have

bachelor's degrees from these institutions as well. As noted above, the teacher workforce does not reflect the overall diversity of our country: only 20% of teachers are people of color, compared to 40% of the population and 50% of all K-12 students. The Hawkins program helps address the need for a strong and diverse teacher workforce.

Additionally, to ensure the maximum effectiveness of the program, we recommend the inclusion of the following report language:

“The Committee recognizes the importance of high-quality teacher preparation on student learning and teacher retention and therefore directs the Secretary to prioritize grants to eligible institutions that propose to establish or scale up high-quality teacher preparation pathways that offer extensive preservice clinical training and mentoring by exemplary teachers in grade and subject areas deemed high need by their state. The Committee also recognizes the value of a teacher workforce that looks like the students they serve and directs the Secretary to prioritize grants to eligible institutions that commit to increasing the diversity of our educator workforce by providing scholarships or grants based on financial need, as well as academic supports to help teacher candidates successfully complete the preparation program and state licensure requirements, and to publicly report on these efforts and outcomes.”

Increasing Congress' investment beyond the highly appreciated allocations made in the last five fiscal years would provide key funding to HBCUs, TCUs, and MSIs to enhance clinical experiences and increase financial aid for prospective teachers of color, who face [higher burdens in college access and affordability](#) than their peers.

In FY27, Congress should allocate at least \$45M for the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence Grant Program.

Increase funding for the Postsecondary Student Success Grant Program

Despite the gains made in high school graduation rates over the past several decades, the fact remains that [only 6 in 10 students](#) earn a college degree after six years of undergraduate study, and Black and Hispanic individuals have [a lower rate of degree](#) attainment than their white and Asian American peers. These challenges pose the risk of long-term negative effects on students, their families, state and national economies, and the country, and the Postsecondary Student Success Grant program is part of confronting those challenges.

PSSG is distinguished by its evidence-based focus, with projects and funding levels selected based on their program and evaluation design and the research available to validate their effectiveness, among other factors. Several comprehensive support models have emerged, each backed by an increasingly robust body of evidence. These models include Bottom Line, College Forward, CUNY ASAP, InsideTrack, the National Institute for Student Success (NISS) at Georgia State University, One Million Degrees, Project QUEST, and Stay the Course. These programs have

been evaluated using randomized controlled trials, which are considered the gold standard in program evaluation. The resulting strong body of evidence shows that these models positively affect student outcomes such as persistence, course credit accumulation, and other leading indicators of graduation rates. [Twenty-two grants](#) have been awarded through the first two competition cycles, supporting innovative projects at colleges in 10 geographically diverse states: California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Oklahoma, South Carolina, and Texas.

Bipartisan majorities in Congress have invested \$45M annually in Postsecondary Student Success Grants via the FY24 omnibus, FY25 Continuing Resolution, and FY26 funding law. The most recent appropriations law also protected the program by inserting statutory text requiring that the funding provided for PSSG be spent on PSSG. We thank Congress for its continued support and ask that it increase funding via statutory language to allow for additional grants in FY27.

In FY27, Congress should allocate at least \$55M for the Postsecondary Student Success Grant Program.

Increase funding for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) Program

Over 20% of undergraduate students are parents of dependent children, and within that cohort, 1.7 million are single mothers. As detailed further [in this letter](#) from organizations and individuals supporting this funding request, including EdTrust, increasing the funding for CCAMPIS would provide child-care support for approximately 100,000 more student-parents, giving them access to the services they need to get to and through college. This population is growing year after year, [reaching over 5 million this year](#), and in a survey by the Hope Center of over 20,000 student-parents, 70% indicated their current child-care arrangement was unaffordable. Furthermore, [on average](#), a student-parent would need to work 52 hours a week to cover child-care and tuition costs at a four-year public college or university, with out-of-pocket costs for attending public college being markedly higher compared to their childless peers. It is essential that Congress scale up the only program specifically designed to deliver on-campus child-care to Pell-eligible student-parents, which would dramatically enhance their chances of achieving educational success and financial stability.

In FY27, Congress should allocate at least \$500M for the Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) Program.

Protecting Programs Students Rely On and Respecting Congress' Constitutional Role

Preventing and Reversing the Unlawful Transfer of ED Programs Via Interagency Agreements (IAAs)

As noted above, EdTrust stands with [national partners](#) in opposition to the unlawful transfer of education programs out of the Department of Education. We appreciate and thank appropriators for their bipartisan work in FY26 to maintain language preventing funds from being used to transfer programs and for inserting new report language asserting that there is no authority for the transfer actions, via IAAs or any other mechanisms, that the administration is taking or has taken.

Unfortunately, since that bill became law, the Department has signed additional IAAs transferring programs to other agencies, and more are expected to follow soon. As noted in the law, transferring programmatic responsibilities to other agencies fragments oversight, creates inefficiencies, increases taxpayer costs, delays funds from reaching states and school districts, and weakens federal support for students' rights under education law.

Therefore, in FY27, we request the inclusion of unambiguous statutory language that would bar the creation of any IAAs that transfer significant responsibilities related to any Department of Education program, project, or activity to other agencies; reverse the transfers now being implemented; and restore the Department of Education to its full operation.

We appreciate your consideration. The undersigned national and state offices of EdTrust, and our coalition partners, look forward to working with Congress to allocate federal funds in a way that addresses the critical equity gaps faced by our nation's students from low-income backgrounds and students of color. We are happy to respond to any questions or concerns that you may have on these topics and look forward to speaking with congressional offices during our Hill Day in May.

Sincerely,

EdTrust

EdTrust-National

EdTrust-Midwest (Michigan)

EdTrust-New York

EdTrust-Tennessee

EdTrust-West (California)

EdTrust in Louisiana

EdTrust in Massachusetts

EdTrust in Texas

State Coalition Partners

MAREE: Maryland Alliance for Racial Equity in Education

Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence (Kentucky)

Rodel (Delaware)