

Funding like Impact Aid for Public Education Targeted for Elimination in Favor of Vouchers in FY2018 Budget

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With the Released FY2018 Budget Outline by the Trump Administration called “America First: A Budget Blueprint to Make America Great Again”, proposed cuts for the Department of Education has been projected at \$68.28 Billion (-\$9.28 Billion, -13%) with increases for School Choice Programs by \$1.2 Billion. The Budget also calls to eliminate the \$2.4 Billion for Supporting Effective Instruction State Programs and \$1.2 Billion for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program.

The Trump Administration FY18 proposed budget seeks to cut the Non-Defense Discretionary Programs and replace Impact Aid funds with the “Voucher System” in the School of Choice program. Current programs that will be affected by the vouchers will be Impact Aid, Bureau of Indian Education and the DoD. It will also affect the Portability- (Title I and Portability) which we depend on for the Native Language Immersion Program and our Apache Language teachers. Education Savings Accounts and Tuition Tax credits are included in the legislative priorities as well which prevents schools like SCUSD which reside on Federal Trust Lands to utilize these educational options due to the nonexistence of a tax base on the reservations. In other words, the Elementary and Secondary School Act of 1965 is targeted to be dismantled and replaced by the School of Choice Program.

San Carlos Unified School District #20 and other rural public school districts have vested interest and concern on the budget elimination of Impact Aid Support Payments for Federal Property, Striving Readers, Teacher Quality Partnerships and International Education Programs. These massive cuts will ultimately cause a devastating impact on the Public Schools within Indian Country. President Trump’s legislative priorities support the School of Choice Program and tax credit scholarships with increased funding for school vouchers to be used in private and charter schools across the country.

According to the Non- partisan Impact Aid Organization, the Legislative Priorities are to reduce the size of Federal Education Department to State and local control. The executive orders prevent and repeal regulations of the Hiring Freeze.

Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos chaired an advocacy group to support school vouchers and tax credit scholarships prior to being selected to her current position within the Trump Administration. The legislative priorities under the Trump Administration increased the federally funded School of Choice Program to allow the voucher system with favorable results for private or charter school education. On the flip side, for the rural public school district, the proposed voucher program in the FY2018 budget outline would be virtually useless for public school districts that have only one public school institution within a community. The option for students to take a voucher and go to another school nearby is not

available which then highlights how Indian reservation schools are forgotten and basically eliminated from the use and the benefit of the proposed School of Choice Program.

For these rural schools and public schools that reside on federal trust land, the School of Choice Program, using vouchers in these areas becomes increasingly obvious that this system is not even an option for the public school student. The Impact Aid Coalition calls for continued Impact Aid funds to voice their concern to the lack of support and educational funding for students who attend rural public schools. This brings to light issues not addressed in the federal government educational process to take into account the public schools located on federal trust lands that simply fall through the cracks of the legislative priorities to support the School of Choice Program.

San Carlos Unified School District #20 depends on Impact Aid funds to provide a quality education for each student and that includes the ability to hire and retain highly qualified teachers, with a higher salary base, classified support staff, and Personal Development. Impact Aid funds all athletic funding, IT development district wide, infra-structure, maintenance of buildings, transportation, classroom supplies with curriculum material, the free lunch program, special education services and teacher housing.

In recent years, funding from the state and federal government has not kept up with proposed spending for public schools, which has often led for these institutions to receive fewer dollars per year that impact the ability to maintain a level of quality programs designed for students. Public Schools on the reservations that reside on Federal trust lands, often depend solely on Impact Aid Funds and must adjust to an ever shrinking budget with a growing student population.

Unlike non-federal lands where tax levies, overrides & bonds can supplement to help fulfill these needs. Public schools that reside on federal trust lands are at the mercy of federal funds because our lands have no assessed value and 100% of our students reside on reservation lands.

Impact Aid is critical to San Carlos Unified School District #20 because:

- Arizona is near the bottom of the list and ranked 48th in the nation for state funding per student.
- Public Schools on Federal Trust lands are saddled with the reality of no assessed value or tax base to support bonding, overrides, or capital improvements within the school district.
- We have a yearly increase in our needs and requirements for academic, social, & high special education and behavioral needs of our students.
- As a rural reservation school located on Federal Trust land, SCUSD must have competing or higher teacher hire salaries than visually and environmentally lucrative areas where housing is abundant as in larger metropolitan cities.
- Our need for Impact Aid Funds for building housing for staff is critical with limited housing options and where housing simply doesn't exist in rural and reservation areas like San Carlos, Arizona.
- Impact Aid gives us funding for capital in IT, buildings, transportation, books, and assets we other wouldn't get from other funding.

San Carlos Unified School District #20 has created a safe haven for our students. Our buildings offer heat

In the winter, air conditioning for the warmer weather, a structured environment in a classroom with qualified teachers and paraprofessionals along with the necessary educational tools and materials to increase student learning.

Many of our students come from homes without electricity, running water and other common necessities people depend on to function in today's society. A high percentage of our children are living in a trauma filled environment with home drug abuse, alcoholism, domestic violence, physical or sexual abuse, homelessness or overcrowding in their current home situation and social ills which causes the student to be in survivor mode every day. Public school districts now see the effects of a growing truancy problem which has impacted the trauma affected students that now evident in the high absenteeism in one school communities.

Another critical area where Impact Aid is visible on a daily basis is our Free Breakfast and Lunch Program. Many of our students come from broken homes with limited income or federal state assistance programs which results in the lack of food in the home. Students depend on the school district to provide breakfast and lunch every week and that is one of the reasons why many attend school every day.

Now with the proposed budget cuts and changes for the Department of Education, it is evident that the possibility of Sequestration is among our imminent future as educators. The frightening reality of losing the funding we depend on to sustain and supply a working institution for the community through staffing and maintenance is in now causing concern among the school district.

Sequestration is being resurrected from the sequestration relief years of 2014-17. This will lead the planned budget cuts and these cuts will come from mostly the Non-Defense Discretionary Programs and at 17% which includes 3% for Education where our Impact and Title I funds are located within the Federal programs.

The cuts will eliminate teachers, classified support staff, classroom supplies, buses and other transportation, cut down in size of the Kindergarten classes and eliminate all athletic funding. Schools that faced the impact of the 2013 Sequestration with these cuts that proved to be devastating were Peach Springs School District in Arizona, Timber Lake School District in South Dakota and Hay/Lodge Pole School District in Montana which also had to reduce school to four days a week due to the budget cuts.

ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) will face elimination of competitive and project grants by the proposed budget cuts. It will also reduce the education formula by 10%. Programs under ESSA targeted for elimination are job training programs and Headstart along with many other federally funded programs.

The largest funding source for most of the 1300 public school districts located on federal trust lands is Impact Aid. For half of these school districts, they are funded 100% by Impact Aid funds as reported by NIEA (National Indian Education Association) studies.

The fight to stop the voucher system and support the Impact Aid funding for Indian Country is the most critical issue facing the Indian students across the nation. Most of these school districts are below the

poverty level and face the loss of a local stable functioning institution they have relied on for generations for the education of our youth. The public schools on reservations will be most affected by the cuts and education as we know it today will change for the worse during this administration. Our Indian Children will bear the brunt of the cuts and services they once depended on to survive every day once these are no longer be available with the cuts to Impact Aid.

Rural public schools are set to lose what little funding in place today and advocacy groups for Impact Aid must work together in Indian Country. The public must continue to voice concerns and place the responsibility back to the federal government to carry out their role of educating our children who live on Federal Trust land.

Our future leaders in Indian Country are dependent on the leaders of educational reform to ensure that all public school students will receive a quality education provided by the Federal government.

The time to act is now, and the education of our Indian students is at stake. It is our responsibility to educate the public on how our school district will be impacted by the cuts in Impact Aid by the School of Choice Program in the Trump Administration FY18 Budget for Education. The critical situation our school district faces today encourages the community and the public to join the Impact Aid Coalition to save the Impact Aid Funds for our students.

Sources cited – Bissonnette, J. (March 12, 2017). Legislative Update through NAFIS Talking Points and “Inside the Beltway” perspective on the Trump Administration Impact Aid Funding and the 115th Congress. Uncertain Future Impact Aid Funding under the Trump Administration/2017 NAFIS Spring Conference`

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