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WAITING GAME CONTINUES FOR FY 2011 APPROPRIATIONS: Short-Term Spending Measure Averts Government Shutdown, Postpones Decisions on Larger Spending Cuts; Senate Likely to Hold Key Votes on March 8

Unable to come to an agreement on final Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 spending levels prior to the expiration of the short-term continuing resolution (CR) that was keeping the government funded until March 4, Congress passed another short-term CR that will cut \$4 billion from the federal budget while buying time for House and Senate leaders to reach a compromise that would fund the government through the end of the fiscal year on September 30.

The new CR cuts \$1.2 billion from eight programs that had been targeted for elimination in President Obama's FY 2012 budget, but half of these programs fall under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Department of Education. Included in the program terminations are Striving Readers (\$250 million), Smaller Learning Communities (\$88 million), Even Start (\$66 million), and the Leveraging Educational Assistance Partnership (LEAP) (\$64 million). The CR will also eliminate \$2.7 billion worth of earmarks originally approved for FY 2010.

Although the most recent CR cuts \$4 billion in federal spending, it falls far short of the House-passed long-term measure, the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations Act, or H.R. 1, which would make an additional \$57.5 billion in cuts.¹ Senate Democrats have made clear their opposition to H.R. 1, not only because of the large spending cuts, but also because it contains provisions that would block environmental regulations and the implementation of the health care overhaul that was signed into law last year. The new CR expires on March 18, leaving the House and Senate only two weeks to bridge the difference or once again face the possibility of a government shutdown.

In an effort to bring some urgency to the negotiations, President Obama called on congressional leaders from both parties to begin meeting immediately with Vice President Joe Biden, **White House Chief of Staff William M. Daley** and **Office of Management and Budget Director Jacob J. Lew** to find common ground on a long-term budget solution. "This agreement should cut spending and reduce deficits without damaging economic growth or gutting investments in education, research, and development that will create jobs and secure our future," Obama said in a [March 2 statement](#). "This agreement should be bipartisan, it should be free of any party's social or political agenda, and it should be reached without delay."

¹ For more information on the cuts included in H.R. 1, go to http://www.all4ed.org/publication_material/straight_as/02222011#1.

The following day, on March 3, the White House proposed an additional \$6.5 billion in cuts on top of the \$4 billion that were included in the most recently enacted CR. The \$6.5 billion in new cuts were included into legislation unveiled by **Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI)**. The Senate bill would fund the government through September 30, 2011 and is seen as Senate Democrats' alternative to H.R. 1.

According to an [analysis by the Senate Appropriations Committee](#), the Senate bill would restore funding for several programs that would be cut under H.R. 1, including many impacting education. While H.R. 1 would cut funding for Title I by nearly \$700 million, Inouye's bill would increase funding for Title I by \$100 million. Inouye would also provide \$545 million for School Improvement Grants versus \$209 million in H.R. 1; \$200 million for Striving Readers, which was eliminated in the House bill; and \$450 million and \$300 million, respectively, for Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation (I3), both of which were eliminated in the House bill.

Bob Wise, president of the Alliance for Excellent Education and former governor of West Virginia, acknowledged the tough budget environment, but said that "cutting the dropout rate is even more important than cutting the budget," adding that whether America "sails or fails in the knowledge-based economy of the twenty-first century will depend on the education students receive today." Wise especially noted the Senate bill's restoration of funding for a comprehensive Striving Readers program that supports statewide, research-based literacy instruction and interventions for children from birth through grade twelve. "A student who cannot read is a student who cannot succeed. I call on the Congress to enact a responsible budget that prioritizes education reform," Wise said in a [statement](#).

House Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) was less impressed with the Senate bill. He issued a [statement](#) calling it "little more than the status quo," and said that the status quo is "indefensible and unacceptable." **Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL), Top Republican on the Senate Budget Committee**, [called](#) the plan "stunningly inadequate." He said that "efforts to sustain our bloated government will be strongly resisted next week as Republicans continue pushing for spending restraint that grows the economy, creates jobs, and strengthens the foundation for our future."

Both the Senate bill and H.R. 1 are scheduled for consideration on the Senate floor on Tuesday, March 8, but neither measure is expected to reach the sixty votes necessary to avoid a filibuster. Instead, the votes are seen as a test to demonstrate the need for compromise while also determining Senators' appetites for spending cuts.

In a [March 4 speech on the Senate floor](#), **Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV)** explained the rationale behind holding a vote on both bills. "We know neither [proposal] will reach the president's desk as written," Reid said. "So once these votes are behind us and everyone's voice is heard, I hope each Senator and member of Congress will find renewed motivation to do what we've needed to do since the beginning—come together, negotiate in good faith, and compromise. We have to acknowledge that the answer that will allow us to move forward lies somewhere between our two positions."

A [March 4 article in the Washington Post](#) explained that aides in both parties believe such an impasse would be progress because it will allow Democratic leaders to "press reluctant liberals

to support additional spending cuts” while Republican leaders will have “fresh leverage with the independent-minded bloc of House conservatives who forced them to pursue far more ambitious cuts than were first proposed.”

What happens next after the Senate votes on the two competing proposals is anyone’s guess. Democrats have called the spending cuts in H.R. 1 excessive but show a willingness to support some spending reductions—even though those cuts fall short of the House Republicans’ goal. Alternately, Democrats have refused to consider the policy proposals in H.R. 1, including the provision to exclude funding for the health care overhaul. But that provision is important to House conservatives, many of whom campaigned on a promise to repeal the health care law.

Meeting somewhere in the middle on the spending figure would seem to be an obvious solution, but House Republicans could lose support from some members in their caucus if they move too far away from the spending goal set in H.R. 1. However, if House Republicans lowered the demands for spending cuts while also removing the policy proposals from consideration, they could possibly draw enough support from House Democrats to send a bill to the Senate. Case in point: The most recent CR did not contain the policy proposals and drew support from over one hundred House Democrats. Were the health care provision to remain in a long-term CR, however, it is unlikely that many Democrats would support it. Indeed, when the [House voted to repeal the law in mid-January](#), only three Democrats supported the move.

But how much in additional spending cuts would the Senate support? Four Democrats in the Senate voted against the most recent CR, and President Obama’s proposal to cut an additional \$6.5 billion has drawn further criticism from some Senate Democrats. **Tom Harkin, a senior Senate appropriator and chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee**, said the White House should have focused on taxes and mandatory spending rather than spending cuts to discretionary programs.

“How many people know that the CR ... cuts out all federal literacy programs in this country? We just wiped them all out,” [said Harkin](#), who voted against the most recent CR.² “I’m disappointed in the White House—I’m greatly disappointed, so far, in what they have been advocating, which basically is sort of buying into ‘We’ve got to cut everything out of discretionary. The White House is wrong on that.’”

On the other end of the political spectrum, some Senate Republicans voted against the most recent CR because they thought the spending cuts were too small and did not come close enough to the spending cuts that passed the House. “The cuts in this bill are a start, but don’t go far enough to bring fiscal sanity back to Washington,” [said Senator Orrin Hatch \(R-UT\)](#), one of five Republicans in the Senate who voted against the most recent CR.

Another option would be to pass another short-term CR that would extend the debate for another few weeks. In late February, Boehner sounded content to pass a series of additional CRs as long as they continued to cut spending. “If they won’t eat the whole loaf at one time, we’ll make them eat it one slice at a time,” he said in a [February 27 speech](#).

² To learn more about how the budget negotiations taking place on Capitol Hill will affect funding for the new comprehensive Striving Readers program, register for the Alliance’s [March 9 webinar](#).



BACK TO THE FUTURE: Secretary Duncan Defends Obama's FY 2012 Budget Before Senate Budget Committee

While Congress continues to negotiate the spending levels for Fiscal Year (FY) 2011, **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** appeared before the Senate Budget Committee on March 1 to discuss President Obama's FY 2012 budget request, which proposes a 4.6 percent increase for the U.S. Department of Education compared to FY 2010. Although Senators from both parties on the committee recognized the importance of education to the country's future, they pressed Duncan on the education budget, saying it also had to be part of the economic solution.

In his [opening statement](#), **Senate Budget Chairman Kent Conrad (D-ND)** noted that the federal government is spending less on education as a percentage of the economy than it did in the 1960s due to growth in mandatory spending on entitlements such as Social Security and Medicaid.

“Even as we look to cut spending to bring down the deficit, which we must do, we also need to ensure that we get our priorities right,” Conrad said. “And education needs to be a priority as we proceed with reducing government expenditure. We need to be careful not to cut education in a way that would come back to hurt the nation's long-term economic growth and security. We simply must maintain a strong education system if we want to keep pace with our global competitors.”

Senator Jeff Sessions (R-AL), Top Republican on the Senate Budget Committee, said that changes in technique, not changes in the budget, were what affected student outcomes. As evidence, he pointed to the Alabama Reading Initiative, a statewide K–12 literacy program that he said has transformed teaching, learning, and reading proficiency in Alabama at very little cost.

“All of us favor education, but we can't continue these large increases in spending—every dollar of which is borrowed,” Sessions said during his [opening remarks](#). “What we need is leadership that focuses on why our education system is not meeting our expectations. This funding crisis is an opportunity to challenge our education establishment, to thoroughly and honestly review the plain facts. What works and what does not. We owe that to our children for their education today. And we owe our children a country that is not burdened by crippling debt. The president says his budget is a plan for winning the future. But you cannot win the future for our children with borrowed money.”

During his [testimony](#), Duncan noted that the federal government contributes less than 10 percent of K–12 funding nationally, but acknowledged the need to be smart about the federal investment during a tight fiscal environment. (Click on the image to the right to watch video of the hearing).

“This proposed budget reflects the administration's dual commitment to reduce spending and to be more efficient while investing to secure our future.



And at the very top of that list of investments we must make is education,” Duncan said. “Americans know that even in challenging times, particularly in challenges in fiscal times like this. We must prepare our young people to compete in tomorrow’s economy. They know that, even the states face greater financial pressure than at anytime in recent history. We cannot put our children and our country’s future at risk.”

During the question-and-answer session that followed Duncan’s testimony, Senators focused on the growth in the Pell Grant program; low college completion rates; Race to the Top; the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, currently known as No Child Left Behind; and the unique problem of educating middle school students, among other topics.

Video of the complete hearing is available at <http://1.usa.gov/fgDwcl>.



TALKIN’ TURNAROUND: Joined by Former Governor Jeb Bush, Obama Highlights Need to Reform Nation’s Lowest-Performing Schools

On March 4, accompanied by **U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan** and former **Florida Governor Jeb Bush (R)**, President Obama visited Miami Central High School in Miami, Florida, to talk about turning around the nation’s lowest-performing schools.



“Right now, there are about 2,000 high schools in America—about 12 percent of the total number of high schools in America—that produce nearly half of the young people who drop out of school,” [Obama said](#). “And we know these schools are often found in rural areas or in big cities like Miami. Many of these schools have lots of Haitian Americans and African Americans, Latino and other minority students.”

As recently as a few years ago, Miami Central High School was in danger of closing because it scored an ‘F’ on the state exams for five years in a row. “Halls were literally littered with garbage. One of the buildings here was called the Fish Bowl because it was always flooded,” Obama said. “In one survey, only a third of all students said they felt safe at school.”

In the last five years, however, the school’s math scores have risen more than 60 percent while its math scores have increased by 40 percent. Graduation rates rose from 36 percent to 63 percent, Obama said.

“I expect [graduation rates] to be at 100 percent,” Obama said. “You can’t drop out. You can’t even think about dropping out. But it’s not going to be enough just to graduate from high school. You’re going to need some additional education.”

In his introductory remarks, Bush explained some of the reforms that went into the turnaround seen in Florida’s schools. “Because of Florida’s system of high expectations for students, a command focus on reading, accountability for schools, rigorous college prep courses, and the

broadest array of choices for families, Florida students are above the national average now in reading and math and more students are graduating than ever before,” he said, adding that there’s “a lot more to do.”

In an op-ed in the *Miami Herald* timed to coincide with the president’s visit, Duncan talked specifically about the changes that Miami Central High School underwent. “Working with the school district and teachers union, Central promoted a strong school leader to be principal and replaced more than half the staff,” he wrote. “It extended learning time after-school and during the summer, and engaged the community by offering Parent Academy classes for parents on graduation requirements and financial literacy. More than 80 percent of students are on free or reduced-price lunch. Yet academic performance is steadily improving—and students and teachers are showing that a committed school can beat the demographic odds.”

Duncan explained that the federal government will provide roughly \$4 billion over the next five years through the School Improvement Grants (SIG) program to help turn around the nation’s five thousand lowest-performing schools, including the nation’s two thousand lowest-performing high schools, which, Duncan said, have been “historically ineligible” for the SIG program. He said that the redesigned SIG program will provide up to \$6 million for each school targeted for turnaround over a period of three years.

[Watch video of Bush’s introductory remarks and Obama’s speech](#)



THE NATION’S REPORT CARD: Urban Districts Fall Behind National Average in Science Exam

Most of the seventeen urban school districts participating in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) 2009 science assessment scored below the national average, according to a new report from the National Center for Education Statistics. The report, *The Nation’s Report Card: Science 2009 Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA)*, finds that of the districts involved, Austin was the only one to break the urban mold and score on the same level as the national average in grade eight, as shown in the graphic to the right. In fourth grade, students in Austin, Charlotte, and Jefferson County (Louisville, KY), met the national average.

Released in January 2011, [The Nation’s Report Card: Science 2009](#), presents results of the 2009 NAEP in science at grades four, eight, and twelve, and reveals that too many students are still not deemed proficient. Nationally, 38 percent of students are performing below the basic level in eighth grade. Among the studied districts in the Science 2009 TUDA report, the eighth-grade results range from 80 percent of students scoring below basic in Detroit and Baltimore to 39 percent of students scoring below basic in Austin. In fourth grade, 29 percent of students perform below basic nationally the results in the urban districts

Jurisdiction	GRADE 4	GRADE 8
Nation	149	149
Large city¹	14	15
Atlanta	15	22
Austin	2	1
Baltimore City	31	35
Boston	10	19
Charlotte	1	8
Chicago	24	27
Cleveland	34	27
Detroit	38	35
Fresno	27	24
Houston	13	11
Jefferson County (KY)	1	3
Los Angeles	25	25
Miami-Dade	5	11
Milwaukee	23	26
New York City	13	19
Philadelphia	28	30
San Diego	5	11

Lower average score than the nation,
 No significant difference between the district and the nation,

range from 74 percent below basic in Detroit to 30 percent below basic in Charlotte.

In a recent *Education Week* [article](#), **Alan Friedman, a member of the National Assessment Governing Board**, said, “The situation is worse in the big cities. And, unfortunately, the achievement deficit in the cities is considerably greater in science than it is in reading or math.”

The TUDA report also examines how the participating urban districts stacked up against large cities, defined as cities with a population 250,000 or more people. Average scores for both fourth and eighth graders in Austin, Charlotte, Jefferson County, and Miami-Dade were higher than the scores for their respective peers in large cities overall. However, on the other end of the scale, Baltimore City, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Fresno, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, and Philadelphia had lower scores than the large city average in both grades.

Within each district, variations in performance often existed between student subgroups. Among the districts where overall scores were higher than the average score for all large cities in both grades, Austin was the only district to have higher scores for white, black, Hispanic, and low-income students in eighth grade as well. Houston also scored higher than the large city average for all of the aforementioned student subgroups in both grades; however, its overall fourth-grade science score was not significantly different. In another example, New York City’s average fourth-grade science score was not significantly different from the fourth-grade score in all large cities; however, low-income fourth-grade students in that district had a higher average score than their large city peers.

The TUDA report is careful to note that the student demographics are vastly different for the nation, as compared to demographics in the nation’s large cities and participating urban districts. Across the nation, there is a higher percentage of white students than minority students in both fourth and eighth grades, while the reverse is true for large cities and participating urban districts. The percentages of low-income students, as measured by eligibility in the National School Lunch Program, range from 47 to 100 percent across the districts. Nationally, 48 percent of fourth graders and 43 percent of eighth graders were low-income students.

In each of the participating districts, between 900 and 2,200 students were assessed at each grade. The assessment measured knowledge in the content areas of physical science, life science, and earth and space sciences.

To read the full report visit <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2011452>.

Straight A’s: Public Education Policy and Progress is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events in Washington, DC and around the country. The format makes information on federal education policy accessible to everyone from elected officials and policymakers to parents and community leaders. Contributors include Jason Amos, editor, Emily Kingsland, writer, and Kate Bradley, copyeditor.

The Alliance for Excellent Education is a national policy and advocacy organization that works to improve national and federal policy so that all students can achieve at high academic levels and graduate from high school ready for success in college, work, and citizenship in the twenty-first century. For more information about the Alliance, visit <http://www.all4ed.org>.