

Poor Prospects for Students and Teachers after the First 100 Days

The first 100 days of the Trump Administration were filled with curious incidents and whiplash-inducing statements and retractions regarding education. As the school year winds down, there is still uncertainty—as well as evidence that many programs and supports for students are under threat.

Our first offerings on this page raised concerns about school discipline policy, Title IX enforcement, and the influence of conservative groups on Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos's approach to curriculum and school choice. Since then, evidence has mounted that the Trump Administration will not become more “moderate” on policies that disproportionately impact gender, ability, and racial equity in education, from kindergarten to graduate school.

K-12: Trumpcare and Students with Disabilities

Trump's campaign promise to kill Obamacare may not have seemed like an education issue, but the version of the [American Health Care Act \(AHCA\) passed in the House](#) would cut the Medicaid funds that schools depend on to pay professionals involved in health screenings and support services for students with disabilities. In a [survey](#) of over 1,000 schools in 42 states, conducted by the Superintendents Association of America, 68% of respondents said they use Medicaid funds for these services. And according to researchers at [Georgetown University](#), the proposed cuts and block grant mechanisms in

the House plan would mean states could choose not to provide screenings for “hearing and vision problems, developmental delays and disabilities such as autism.”

Potential drops in screenings and support services would have significant gendered effects.

Boys are twice as likely as girls to be diagnosed with learning disabilities, so the AHCA would not only disproportionately harm boys (who are more likely to be receiving services), but also stymie attempts at [more effective screening of girls](#), who may be under-diagnosed due to differences in expression of symptoms and behaviors.

According to research by the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, [teen girls who are not diagnosed](#) or screened are more likely to become pregnant, drop out of school, and experience poverty. The potential impact of the AHCA on Medicaid funds for schools, paired with DeVos’s lack of concern about the Individuals with Disabilities Act and Title IX, would be to slash already-inadequate disability services and increase diagnostic gender gaps.

College Education Costs: HBCUs, Student Loans, & Loan Forgiveness

Though Trump’s campaign promised to make college more affordable, all of the policy proposals coming from the Executive Branch and Congress promote private lending institutions and cuts to programs that help low income students afford college (including Pell Grants). Low-income students of any gender—particularly students of color—will pay steeper prices for their education, and some will lose access entirely. That is, those who are already disadvantaged in education will become more so. A great many will be, as it

were, “left behind.”

HBCUs

In February, Republicans lauded President Trump for hosting presidents of Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) in the Oval Office for the signing of an [Executive Order](#) to “strengthen the capacity of HBCUs to provide the highest-quality education.” DeVos attracted condemnation when her statement on the Order praised HBCUs as pioneers in “school choice” rather than a necessity born of the Jim Crow segregation that allowed other colleges to exclude Black students from their campuses. And what did the attention the White House paid to HBCUs amount to in terms of policy? It turns out, the Executive Order was purely rhetorical; it did *nothing* to secure any funding or other support for HBCUs.

Instead, budget proposals from the Trump Administration and the GOP-led House suggest a not-so-positive relationship between the administration’s view of public education funds and the mission and impact of HBCUs on Black educational gains. [HBCUs service and graduate more low-income students](#) than historically white colleges and universities that admit similar types of students, and the Pell Grant program is a key component in the financial aid HBCUs can offer. Whether they attend Historically White Colleges and Universities (HWCUs) or HBCUs, [46% of Black students receive Pell Grants](#) and represent almost 25% of all Pell Grant recipients.

Women’s colleges also have been among the most successful in recruiting and graduating Pell Grant eligible students, providing low-income women and women returning to education with robust educational opportunities.

In the past decade, [GOP lawmakers have been hostile to expanding Pell Grants](#), favoring more expensive private student loans that have [not been shown to be more effective](#) in helping

students complete their degrees on time. Moreover, DeVos signed an April [order](#) to revoke the Obama Administration's reforms to private loan [guidelines meant to protect students from unfair and expensive practices](#). A former Deputy Treasury Secretary said the reversal would ["place the welfare of loan contractors above those of student debtors."](#)

Loan Forgiveness for Teachers & Social Workers

More recently, the administration suggested it would eliminate loan forgiveness programs for graduates who go to work in the public sector. These programs are widely used by students going into teaching and social work, [two professions that are overwhelmingly female](#) (at 76% of public school teachers and over 80% of social workers) and have low starting salaries. Ending loan forgiveness programs would remove a key incentive for students considering teaching and social work and disproportionately impact the incomes of women in these professions.

It could also worsen teacher deficits that already threaten to become serious shortages in the next decade. Department of Education data shows a steady decline in graduates from teacher preparation programs, and some states, like Nevada, have [described estimated teacher shortages as "horrific."](#) In 2015-16, [over 40 states reported shortages](#) in special education and math teachers, and over 30 reported needing more English teachers who can work with English Language Learning (ELL) programs.

If the Trump Administration eliminates loan forgiveness for teachers and social workers, how will schools fill openings left by retirees? How would a shortage in social workers impact schools' ability to provide services to students with disabilities, let alone implement strategies for implementing

less-punitive, more restorative school discipline processes?

Are there any possible silver linings?

Though Secretary DeVos has stocked her department with [staffers with ties to for-profit colleges](#), in April the [Trump Administration gave surprising support](#) to an Obama-era policy that [protects students at those schools from predatory loan practices](#).

And, if the [widespread public pushback against the AHCA](#) continues, perhaps the Senate version will be less savage in cuts to the Medicaid funds schools depend on for student well-being and staff support. Still, the [all-male](#) composition of the Senate committee does not bode well for their attention to gender equity, and few hold out hope that the next version of the AHCA will bring us any closer to closing gender and income gaps in disability services and screening for grade school students.

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