

## President's FY 2026 Budget Proposal Threatens Student Access to Higher Education

The National Association for College Admission Counseling (NACAC) is deeply concerned by the president's expanded [fiscal year 2026 budget request](#), which proposes a \$12 billion, or 15.3 percent reduction in discretionary funding for the U.S. Department of Education. Following the [president's initial topline request](#), the administration submitted a full FY 2026 proposal, notably without key economic projections, which the Office of Management and Budget has withheld pending Congressional action on the reconciliation bill. At a time when students, families, and educators are navigating unprecedented challenges in the wake of pandemic disruptions, rising college costs, and financial aid system instability, this proposal undermines the federal commitment to equitable college access and success.

The administration frames this reduction as a "responsible wind-down" of the Department of Education, consistent with its stated goal of eliminating the agency and returning all education responsibilities to states. However, this vision neglects the foundational role of the federal government in safeguarding educational opportunity, particularly for students who have historically been underserved.

### Key concerns include:

- **A 22 percent cut to the maximum Pell Grant** — a reduction of \$1,685 from FY 2024 — which jeopardizes affordability for low- and moderate-income students. The move threatens a bipartisan program long considered the cornerstone of college access.
- **The elimination of the Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG)** and a \$986 billion (80 percent) reduction to Federal Work-Study, both of which provide critical need-based aid that helps students stay enrolled and meet basic needs.
- **The proposed elimination of TRIO and GEAR UP** programs, which offer vital academic and support services for first-generation and low-income students. These programs have long helped millions of students prepare for and persist in higher education.
- **The termination of programs like CCAMPIS, GAANN, and IEFLS** disregards the needs of student parents, graduate students in critical fields, and international education, respectively.
- **The consolidation and reduction of 18 K-12 programs** (including Title IV-A) into a single \$2 billion block grant, representing a \$4.5 billion (69 percent) cut. This includes programs like Title IV-A that support well-rounded educational opportunities.
- **A 67 percent cut to the Institute of Education Sciences (IES)**, severely diminishing our nation's capacity to produce evidence-based research and data that inform education policy and practice.
- **Reductions to the Office for Civil Rights and Departmental staffing**, which would hinder federal oversight and enforcement of civil rights protections in education.

## **Sustaining Postsecondary Pathways Demands Federal Responsibility**

This budget proposal sends a troubling message: That the federal government is retreating from its role in advancing educational equity and opportunity. By shifting critical responsibilities to states without adequate funding, the proposal threatens to dismantle longstanding support structures for students who rely on federal financial aid to access and complete higher education.

As countries around the world are making meaningful strides in education access and attainment, this budget would leave American students in disarray. It would force many to take on insurmountable debt simply to pursue a degree or credential. Rather than turning its back on students and families, particularly those from low-income, first-generation, and historically marginalized backgrounds, Congress should take action. Lawmakers should reject this proposal and extend a hand of support to students striving to reach their full potential. Postsecondary pathways must remain viable, affordable, and accessible to ensure opportunity, economic mobility, and a more equitable future for all.