

EDITORIAL



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SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

In a story seemingly lost over the summer, Commissioner Candice McQueen went to bat for federal funding on behalf of Tennessee's 146 school districts, 70,000 educators and 1,000,000 public school students in Tennessee over federal funding. The federal government has proposed funding reductions and eliminations of key education programs in the FY2018 budget proposal.

McQueen, like our organization, has substantial fears concerning the proposed elimination of the Title II, Part A program. The program, which is officially called the "Supporting Effective Instruction State Grant," is the only funding source that is explicitly reserved for educators. Specifically, these funds provide federal dollars to recruit, retain, and train high-quality teachers, principals, and school leaders. These funds were cut by \$294 million in the FY 2017 budget and proposed for elimination in President Trump's FY 2018 budget. This funding elimination will also impact non-public schools in Tennessee, and perhaps other states.

Over the past decade, Tennessee has utilized its Title II funds to align with state priorities and support educators across the state. As a specific example, Tennessee has worked to empower districts by providing key human capital data to address equity and shine a spotlight on students' access to highly effective teachers. This data has also helped to strengthen and expand the teacher pipeline for our rural communities, which account for about two-thirds of our districts. "These kinds of initiatives must continue to be supported," according to Commissioner McQueen.

Criticism of this program is that it is inadequately structured to support activities that have a measurable impact on improving student outcomes. That argument could be made of many federal education programs. And even though that may be the case nationally, we believe that Tennessee has strategically aligned its support of effective instruction by tying it to our state priorities. Tennessee supports its educators more effectively than many other states and deserves this funding.

We share Commissioner McQueen's concern. We understand the importance of supporting our teachers and leaders with Title II, Part A across the education continuum. This funding helps improve educator preparation programs, establishing leadership pipelines in rural and urban communities, developing collaborative learning communities, ensuring effective classroom instruction, and also supporting students attending non-public schools by serving teachers through their participation in this vital grant program. In Tennessee, 98% of participating non-public schools participate in Title II, Part A. Based on current student data, the enrollment in these participating schools across the state exceeds 42,000.

Effective teachers are the major in-school factor in improving student achievement. Supporting our teachers and leaders from educator preparation programs, to the classroom, and through their careers is the only way to achieve success for all students. Title II funds have contributed to our state's success in becoming the fastest improving state over the past four years. We appreciate Commissioner McQueen's leadership on this issue, and shared commitment and concern on this issue. We hope the federal government will reconsider and continue to fund the "Supporting Effective Instruction State Grant."

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SUMMARY

Director of Professional Learning for Professional Educators of Tennessee shares her thoughts about the reduction of federal funding for public educational programs and public schools across Tennessee.