



# Straight A's:

## A Citizen's Update on Education

Volume 2 No. 3: February 4, 2002

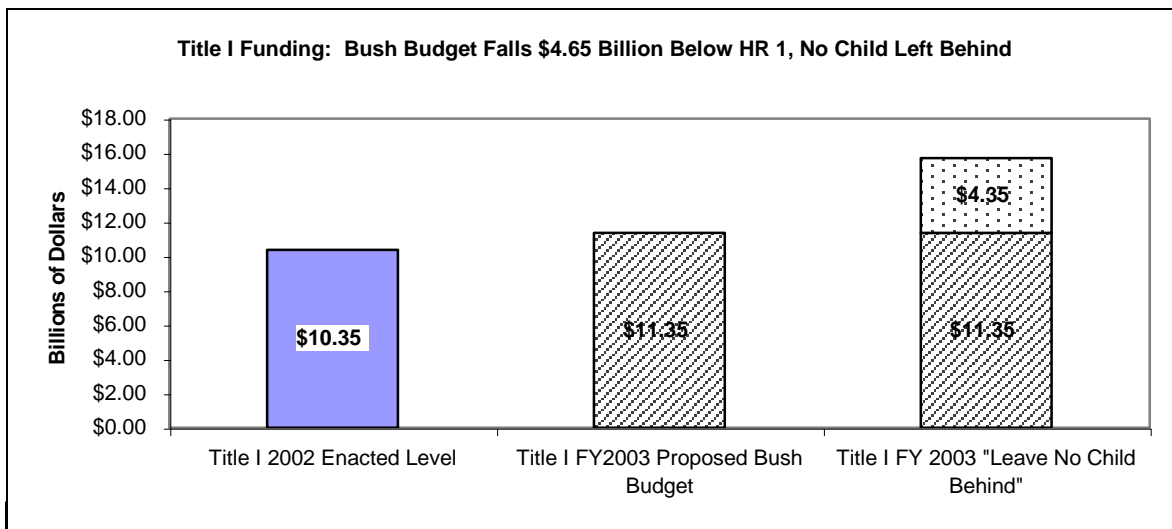
*Editor's Note: This issue of Straight A's contains a special insert that outlines President Bush's proposed budget for fiscal year 2003 and how it impacts programs that can help middle and high school students.*



### BUSH BUDGET PROPOSES \$1 BILLION INCREASE FOR TITLE I

President Bush proposed a return to deficit spending when he sent his fiscal year 2003 budget to Capitol Hill. The President's spending priorities focus on the war on terrorism both at home and abroad. The budget proposal freezes or cuts many domestic priorities.

The Bush budget includes a \$2 billion increase for both Title I and IDEA--\$1 billion each--but raises overall education funding only 1.0 percent over the enacted 2002 level. Increases in programs such as Title I are offset by cutting or eliminating more than \$1 billion in other education programs, including the Smaller Learning Communities program that benefits high schools. In fact, programs affected by the much-touted *No Child Left Behind Act* (HR 1) suffer a small net cut in fiscal year 2003—despite all the fanfare surrounding the signing of the bill into law less than one month ago.



The President's proposed \$1 billion increase for fiscal year 2003 still falls \$4.65 billion short of the authorized levels Congress and the President set for Title I in the "No Child Left Behind" Act just one month ago.



## **IN THE PRESIDENT'S PLAN, MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS MAY STILL BE LEFT BEHIND**

Currently, almost all of the available federal resources for at-risk students are concentrated in the early years--only 5 percent of Title I funds go to high schools. Federal funds for reducing class size have been targeted to the first three grades. The President's new Reading First initiative also only covers grades K-3. Without a greater commitment to provide full funding for Title I that will allow school districts to reach at-risk students at all grade levels, the President's budget will continue to leave some children behind.

Several factors make the President's budget for the Department of Education both disappointing and reason for concern. Enrollment increases across the country and shrinking state budgets are making it more difficult for state governments to fully serve their schoolchildren. These problems only magnify the difficulty that most states will encounter when trying to implement the federal mandate in *No Child Left Behind* for greater accountability and results.

In the several weeks following the January enactment of the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the President and Members of Congress promoted the bill as the best way to attack problems in our nation's schools. Without sufficient funding, school districts will continue to be forced to choose between older and younger students. Regardless of the choice ultimately made, it is doubtful that any school district will be able to meet the revolutionary changes that the supporters of the *No Child Left Behind Act* championed if the resources are not there.

### **President Bush Calls Education the Next Great Civil Rights Issue:**

*"Americans can proudly say that we have overcome the institutional bigotry that Dr. King fought. Now our challenge is to make sure that every child has a fair chance to succeed in life. That is why education is the great civil rights issue of our time."*

--President Bush, January 19, 2002

Full text of President Bush's Jan. 19<sup>th</sup> national radio address:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020119.html>



## **BRINGING UP THE REAR: EDUCATION INCREASE RANKS 9<sup>TH</sup> AMONG BUSH BUDGET PRIORITIES**

President Bush's budget proposes a 14 percent increase for defense spending and a nearly 50 percent increase in "homeland security." The Department of Education, slated to receive a 1 percent increase, managed a feeble ninth place in increases among the 14 departments outlined in the Bush Budget.

As more and more details of the budget became known, House and Senate leaders grew fearful that the Bush budget placed too much emphasis on “guns” (military spending) rather than “butter” (domestic spending). Prior to the release of the Bush budget, **Sen. Robert C. Byrd (D-WV)**, who serves as Chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, expressed concern that domestic spending would be sacrificed for increased defense spending:

*“I hope that this increase for the Pentagon does not come at the expense of education, health care, Social Security and job training initiatives that are so critical in these difficult economic times.”*

In the education community, many individuals had hope that the President would continue the commitment to education that he displayed at the DAR Constitution Hall in Washington, D.C. the day after he signed the *No Child Left Behind Act*:

*“Republicans and Democrats share the same basic commitments on education. We believe good public schools should not be islands of excellence. They should be found in every city and in every neighborhood in America. We believe that no child should ever be written off because every child is important and every child can learn. We believe education is a national priority and a local responsibility; that Washington should be giving our schools help, not giving them orders.”*

However, in the days leading up to Feb. 4, it became increasingly clear that the President would not maintain the course that he began with the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Echoing Sen. Byrd’s comments, **House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt (D-Mo.)** observed that the President’s budget “will put us further into deficit, use money from the Social Security and Medicare trust funds that both parties called off-limits, and cut education, health care, skills training, and rural programs.”



## **NOT VOUCHERS PER SE: BUSH BUDGET PROPOSES NEW EDUCATION TAX CREDITS**

In his budget for fiscal year 2003, President Bush proposed a refundable tax credit. Parents are eligible if they transfer a child from an identified failing public school to a private school, including those with a religious affiliation, or another public school. If enacted by Congress, the tax credit would refund up to 50 percent, or \$2,500, of the first \$5,000 in tuition, fees and transportation costs directly to the parent. The President estimates that the program will cost \$3.7 billion over five years.

The tax credit would work like a refund check and be available to any eligible parent, regardless of income bracket. Because the money goes directly to the parent, the program sidesteps the potential Constitutional question that a voucher program for private schools would raise, but could still have serious church-state implications.

This tax credit could hurt public education and undermine accountability for how public education dollars are spent. In fact, public schools and public school children could be victims, rather than beneficiaries. Rather than proposing the federal money promised in the *No Child Left Behind Act*, the President's budget takes money that could be used for public schools and the education of at-risk children and proposes to indirectly invest in private schools. Unlike public schools, private schools are not accountable to taxpayers and are certainly not subject to the accountability reforms enacted in the *No Child Left Behind Act*.

**Alliance Position:**

Instead of funding a new tax credit proposal, it would make more sense to spend the \$3.7 billion on Title I which has already been signed into law and has clear accountability measures in place. The process of achieving Congressional approval for the President's new tax credit will only delay the help students in failing schools need immediately. Congress cannot afford to entertain new proposals until the promises they have made in the *No Child Left Behind Act* have been kept.



**NATIONAL TITLE I CONFERENCE: Thousands of Education Leaders Gather in Tampa**

From Jan. 23-26 an estimated 2,500 education leaders from around the country met to learn about new challenges brought about by HR 1, the *No Child Left Behind Act*. Organized by the National Association of State Title I Directors, the conference marked the coming together of local Title I administrators, principals, superintendents, teachers, parents, and many others.

Title I continues to be the most effective funding mechanism for serving the educational needs of disadvantaged children. This success was seen firsthand during the recognition ceremony to honor Title I Distinguished Graduates. This year, the program recognized 48 graduates from 30 states.

**Broderick Stargell, 1989, LaGrange High School, LaGrange, Georgia**

“My Title I class had four students and one outstanding teacher. Mrs. Nelson's love for teaching and her patience allowed me to excel in reading and writing. I am convinced that the one-on-one attention I received in Title I was the foundation for my reading and writing success . . . Title I gave Mrs. Nelson the resources and she in turn gave us the educational tools for excellence.”

Mr. Stargell graduated from Tuskegee University with a bachelor of science degree and now works as a family support specialist with a local school district. More information on Mr. Stargell and the other 47 distinguished graduates is available from the National Association of State Title I Directors at [www.titleI.org](http://www.titleI.org) or by calling (202) 624-8911.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of the Title I conference was its focus on key challenges that school districts faced in implementing the new *No Child Left Behind Act*. It featured special sessions with experts who provided updates on changes to the Title I law and a preview of the regulatory process. Several representatives from the Department of Education led the sessions and offered guidance on the legislative intent of the new accountability provisions.

State and local Title I directors together with their local school boards and superintendents will now have to decide how to best spend the additional \$1.5 billion that Congress appropriated for Title I for the school year starting in September. For instance, California will see a \$268 million increase over its fiscal 2001 allocations. New York will receive a \$187 million increase, and Florida is set to receive over \$96 million more. Even smaller states are receiving big increases; Vermont is slated for \$4 million more, a 22 percent increase.

Although this increase will be important to intensify services to at-risk students, it will not be enough for school districts to cover all grade levels. Without full funding for Title I, school districts will again be forced to make a Sophie's choice between their elementary-age children and their adolescents--and repeatedly, they've shown that they prefer to put their limited funds toward early education. This forced choice means that very few middle and high school students will benefit from these increases and will ultimately be left behind.

The complete list of state-by-state allocations and increases can be found on the Alliance Web site at: <http://www.all4ed.org/report.htm> .

**Straight A's: A Citizen's Update on Education** is a biweekly newsletter that focuses on education news and events both in Washington, D.C. 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. The Alliance for Excellent Education is a non-profit organization working to make it possible for every child in America to receive an excellent education.