



BlackEconomics.org®

“Would Black America Benefit from Biden’s Proposed FY 2022 Education Program?”

Last week, President Joe Biden released his fiscal year (FY) 2022 Budget that proposes a large increase in education spending.¹ While Biden proposes new, sizeable, and potentially helpful spending at the post-secondary level, here we are concerned with a completely new \$20 billion expenditure in so-called Title I “Equity Grants” for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade education. We should not get too excited about any aspect of the proposal yet because the US Congress will have its say in determining actual spending. However, we should certainly scrutinize the proposal of interest to see what it portends for Black America. Of course, we must always be cognizant that, like President Barack Obama before him, President Biden will not be a President for Black America and that the proposed spending is designed to be stimulative in nature and ensure Biden’s successful manipulation of the political business cycle.

Education is all about outcomes. We engage in education to obtain knowledge, skills, and abilities that will ultimately ensure our well-being. Clearly, our current and future world concerns science and technology with emphasis on, *inter alia*, vaccines to protect against ever evolving viruses, healthcare bots, green energy forms and related electric and driverless vehicles, space tourism and travel to Venus, and the colonization of Earth’s Moon and Mars. Therefore, if we are not STEMAIR (science, technology, engineering, mathematics, artificial intelligence, and robotization) proficient, then opportunities to experience a well-being-filled life and to contribute to the evolution of the national and global society will be limited.

Now let us turn to the aforementioned proposed new \$20 billion in Title I Equity Grant spending to determine its potential efficacy for Black America. Consider the following statistics:

- According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Black students account for about 21 percent of all students who participate in Title I school-wide and targeted programs.²
- Disregarding costs associated with administering the program, the \$20 billion expenditure would mean about \$760 of new spending for all students (some 26.4 million in school year (SY) 2018-19) who participate in school-wide and targeted Title I programs.

¹ All FY 2022 Budget documents are available [here](#). A summary of Biden’s proposal for spending by the Department of Education is available [here](#).

² The NCES’s [ED Data Express](#) indicates that, for school year 2018-19, 5,446,628 of the 26,402,041 total number of students enrolled in Title I (Part A) school-wide and targeted programs were Black.

Now consider the primary objective of the program. Title I programs are designed to help generate equality in educational proficiency. According to NCES's National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), there is a large and persistent gap between Black and White proficiency in reading, science, and mathematics.^{3,4} Generally, the average gap between non-economically-disadvantaged and economically-disadvantaged students (about 68 percent of all Black students are economically-disadvantaged) is 20 percent or greater in all three subjects.^{5,6} Theoretically, one might expect that the new Title I spending could help close the gap. However, we highlight four important reasons why the new spending may not produce expected outcomes:

- While students are viewed as the ultimate beneficiaries, a significant amount of the new spending will be used to increase the salaries and improve the skills of teachers. Stated simply, much of the new spending can be interpreted as a payoff to teachers (members of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Educational Association (NEA)), who helped produce Biden's 2020 election victory. It could be that increased compensation will motivate teachers to redouble their efforts to assist Black students in increasing their proficiency, but past increases in Title I spending have not reduced proficiency gaps considerably. Keep in mind that nonBlack students stand to continue increasing their educational proficiency under the program.
- This one-time increase in Title I Equity Grant spending would not impact effectively two especially important indicators of high educational proficiency: (1) Students residing in a two-parent household; and (2) the availability of Black teachers.⁷
- The spending will not transform materially the non-school environment in which Title I students reside. Transformation of an economically-disadvantaged-environment or relocation out of such an environment could contribute significantly to reorienting favorably students' attitudes, motivations, and achievements.
- This one-time expenditure does not constitute a sustained effort to close the proficiency gap. Just as it takes many years to achieve full educational proficiency, plans and efforts to close the educational proficiency gap should be sustained over a long period.

A priori, the \$20 billion Equity Grant spending proposal sounds promising. In reality it is likely to be just more stimulus spending to help boost economic growth. Unfortunately, because Black teachers comprise such a small percentage of all teachers, and because most Black businesses do not supply the goods and services that might be acquired under the proposed educational program, Black Americans are not likely to derive sizeable economic benefits from the program.

³ For information on the proficiency gap, see the NAEP Report, [Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018](#).

⁴ It is important to note that BlackEconomics.org has reservations about certain aspects of the NAEP's computational procedures. In addition, given the innate abilities of all students to learn, it is difficult to accept the lack of convergence of assessment scores over the many decades of NAEP operations. Otherwise, the NAEP's results may signal certain failures of the US educational system.

⁵ The 68 percent is an estimate based on the number of Black students in Title I programs (5.4 million) as a percent of the total number of Black students enrolled in public and private schools (7.9 million) as indicated by these two sources (enrollment in [public](#) and [private](#) schools).

⁶ The [ED Data Express](#) source provides information on average proficiency gaps.

⁷ For 2016, only 33 percent of Black students resided in a two-parent household. Also, recent research indicates that having a teacher of the same race/ethnicity can have positive impacts on the attitudes, motivation, and achievement of students. While Black students comprise 15 percent of all public-school enrollment, Black teachers comprise just 7 percent of public-school teachers. See [Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Groups 2018](#).

From an educational perspective, some Black students may benefit at the margin from the program. However, because the educational proficiency gap is not likely to be reduced in any substantial way due to all of the reasons outlined above, we suggest that Black America take the following actions in response to the Biden proposal:

- Black US Congresspersons should oppose the spending because the proposed program and related spending are inadequate.
- Black US Congresspersons, members of the AFT and NEA, other interested Black parties, and Department of Education officials should form a Select Committee to develop a long-term strategic plan and budget for resolving the educational proficiency gap specifically with respect to Black students.⁸
 - One key aspect of the plan should feature training and hiring of more Black teachers, particularly male teachers. Before desegregation, Black males comprised a large proportion of academic teachers in Black schools—especially at the high school level. In many school districts today, Black students can complete their entire pre-K through 12 education without encountering a Black male teacher except as a physical education instructor or as an athletic coach.
 - Another key aspect of the plan should be a program that engages parents of poverty-stricken families to ensure that their pre-kindergarteners are able to read and count before they enter kindergarten.
- The just-mentioned plan and budget should be presented to President Biden for action. Part or all of the \$20 billion in Equity Grants should be used to implement the plan. If required, additional funds should be provided to execute the plan. This is not to dissuade President Biden from identifying other funds to reward teachers with higher compensation.

If Black America does not take the suggested or similar action, then we will continue to languish in lower educational and economic strata of the American society, which does not bode well for our future well-being.

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06/07/21

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⁸ As a partial, potential strategy, we offer a BlackEconomics.org proposal, “[Mobilizing Black Religious Organizations to Elevate Black STEMAIR Educational Performance.](#)”