Obama Administration Releases 2015 Education Budget Proposal

The President’s fiscal year 2015 budget request to Congress was recently released and proposes an increase of $1.3 billion over the fiscal year 2014 level for U.S. Department of Education (Department) programs. The administration’s request for $69 billion in discretionary appropriations represents an increase of 2 percent over the previous year. Three-quarters of that funding goes to financial aid for students in college, special education, and high-poverty schools (Title I). The remaining 23 percent of the budget targets specific areas and reforms designed to leverage major changes in educational opportunity and excellence for all students. The majority of the 2015 request—nearly 90 percent of discretionary spending—goes to formula funds that address the needs of disadvantaged poor and minority students, students with disabilities, and English learners.

The budget request includes six major initiatives for the Department:
• Increasing equity and opportunity for all students;
• Strengthening support for teachers and school leaders;
• Expanding high-quality preschool programs;
• Affordability and quality in postsecondary education;
• Promoting educational innovation and improvement; and,
• Improving school safety and climate.

Of the $68.6 billion proposed for the Department, most of the $1.3 billion increase proposed would fund competitive grant programs. Also among the President’s proposals are $500 million to help states improve early childhood programs, and a $300 million Race to the Top-Equity and Opportunity (RTT-Opportunity) competition for states that would be targeted toward reducing the achievement gap between poor students and those from middle class and wealthy families.

An additional $200 million is proposed for a ConnectEDucators program to incorporate more technology into professional development. According to the Department, the new ConnectEDucators proposal would provide funding to help educators leverage technology and data to provide high-quality college-and-career-ready instruction that meets the needs of all students.

After reviewing the Department's budget request, NSBA Executive Director Thomas J. Gentzel stated that, “We applaud President Obama’s pledge to raise general education funding at a time when strong public schools are vitally important to America’s families and the nation’s global competitiveness. However, we are disappointed to see flat funding for IDEA and Title I despite the critical need for these programs and the tremendous burden that lack of federal funding for them is putting on school districts.”

“President Obama’s budget request reflects his strong belief that education is a vital investment in the nation’s economic competitiveness, in its people, and in its communities,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. “Despite the encouraging progress we’ve seen, wide opportunity and achievement gaps continue to hurt many families, which puts our nation’s economy and future at risk.”

To learn more about the budget, visit http://www.ed.gov/budget15.

UPDATED HANDBOOK AVAILABLE

NDSBA recently posted an update to the North Dakota Public School Employers Handbook to its website. The 2014 handbook includes updates in response to legislation and consolidated information from the North Dakota Public Employers Handbook. The handbook provides valuable information for hiring, evaluation, human resources, records, and termination. The North Dakota Insurance Reserve Fund (NDIRF) sponsors this publication.

A free copy can be downloaded at: http://www.ndsba.org/resources/2014_publicschoolememployeeshndbk_final.pdf
Standing Together: Dickinson Public and Trinity Catholic School

Students at Dickinson Trinity High School were displaced due to a fire at the school on March 4. Dickinson Public Schools, Dickinson State University, and TMI, a laminate manufacturer in Dickinson, have offered assistance in this time of need. Those offers were immediate. “The last three days, the outpouring of support has been phenomenal” said Dickinson Catholic Schools President Steve Glasser.

Dr. Doug Sullivan, superintendent of Dickinson Public Schools, developed a plan to provide classroom space for 174 students from Trinity that evolved quickly because the district had made preparations for next year’s increase in enrollment. Here is the plan:

- 87 junior high students (7 & 8 grade) will go to Prairie Rose Elementary School
- 47 freshmen will go to the professional development lab and teachers’ lounge at Berg Elementary School
- 40 sophomores are going to Hagen Junior High (same number of students they were planning for next year)
- Juniors and seniors are going to St. Joseph Church in south Dickinson

Sullivan learned about the fire at Trinity when one of his principals called in the morning. Shortly after that conversation, Steve Glasser, president of Dickinson Catholic Schools, called and invited Doug to a meeting with his board of directors to discuss their number one priority—teaching kids.

Presentations were made by school administrators from Dickinson Public to personnel in the buildings that were to be utilized. “Our faculty was fantastic,” Sullivan told me. “I told them about the space that had been offered and they were very supportive saying ‘we have to do something.’ Everyone knew we had to help,” said Sullivan.

Dickinson State University has offered over a hundred desks for students to use and TMI offered space for Trinity High School administration offices.

Although there has been some criticism from a few community members about public and private schools sharing space, it has been minimal according to Sullivan. “If the roles were reversed, I am confident Trinity would be doing this for us.”

The challenge for the Dickinson school system is that they can offer space for the final 10 weeks of school, but next year they will need this space to accommodate their increased enrollment. Sullivan believes that this is a “short-term solution to a long-range problem for Trinity. In the meantime our goal is to get the kids back in school and getting normalcy back in their lives.

Central administration has devoted whatever time was necessary to get a plan in place to assist Trinity. This effort will make us both stronger and build the relationship.”

In addition to providing classrooms, other logistics are needed to accommodate students from Trinity such as ensuring adequate parking space, transportation to and from school, providing hot lunch, and offering guidance and counseling services.

Students, teachers, and administrators from Trinity are being welcomed by their counterparts at Dickinson Public Schools. The spirit of cooperation and support throughout the Dickinson community is heartwarming and serves as a model from which we can all learn.

Students at Berg Elementary made a sign to welcome Trinity students.
Why We Joined the North Dakotans for Common Sense Conservation Coalition

NDSBA joined a broad-based coalition supporting North Dakotans for Common Sense Conservation. Why? It’s the best way to defeat the ill-conceived proposed constitutional amendment that would commit five percent of North Dakota’s oil extraction tax—conservatively estimated as $300 to $400 million a biennium—to a new fund with no clear idea of how it would be spent, even though it mandates over $3 million a week (on average) to be spent on conservation projects.

We all support conservation efforts and safeguarding our environment, but this measure is the wrong approach. Here’s why we oppose it:

• Supporters of this proposed constitutional amendment are being funded by out-of-state special interest groups. A report filed with the Secretary of State’s office at the end of last year showed the group received 96 percent of its money from outside our state.

• It would divert billions of dollars of state funding that could otherwise be spent on schools, education, infrastructure, emergency services, and tax relief.

• Money from this fund can be granted to state agencies, tribal and local governments, political subdivisions, and non-profit groups. Some of the non-profits that will likely benefit from it would be the Sierra Club, the Nature Conservancy, the Dakota Resource Council, and other environmental and wilderness organizations.

• Putting this in our state’s Constitution is not the proper way to fund conservation programs. Any changes to this constitutional amendment could only be corrected by another statewide vote. As the only constitutionally mandated funding provision in the state constitution, passing this measure would set a dangerous precedent.

• With only one representative from agriculture and one from energy, the advisory board will be heavily tilted towards conservation groups without much consideration for land and mineral owners.

NDSBA is among more than 20 diverse groups that are part of this coalition backing the North Dakotans for Common Sense Conservation. We support the coalition because the state already invests over $130 million per biennium in preservation and conservation in North Dakota.

Supporting this effort is just common sense. There are better ways to support conservation programs than through an ill-advised constitutional amendment that would saddle our state with unnecessary mandated spending.

Speaking is Kelvin Hullet, president of the Bismarck-Mandan Chamber of Commerce.
Students Honored for Volunteer Spirit

Joanna Larson, 17, of Sheyenne, and Heidi Deplazes, 12, of Fargo, were named North Dakota’s top two youth volunteers of 2014 by The Prudential Spirit of Community Awards.

Joanna, a junior at New Rockford-Sheyenne High School in New Rockford, worked with a neighbor to establish a community garden and orchard to give their small community ready access to free and fresh fruits and vegetables.

Heidi, a sixth-grader at Shanley High-Sullivan Middle School in Fargo, organized an event that attracted donations worth nearly $5,000 to provide books and toys for a local homeless shelter, build a shed for the facility, and do an “extreme makeover” of its playground and family room.

As state honorees, Joanna and Heidi each will receive $1,000, an engraved silver medallion, and an all-expense-paid trip in early May to Washington, D.C., where they will join the top two honorees from each of the other states and the District of Columbia for four days of national recognition events. During the trip, 10 students will be named America’s top youth volunteers of 2014.

Two other North Dakota students were recognized as Distinguished Finalists for their impressive community service activities: Hannah Alto, 18, a senior at North Star Public School, and Morgan Uriell, 18, a senior at Lakota High School.