

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF
GRADUATE-PROFESSIONAL STUDENTS

Legislative Letters

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Updates in Higher Education



Image Credit: Kaylynne Glover, "The Capitol"

While additional money is beginning to become available for higher education institutions, a debate has risen about which students may obtain federal relief grants. Particularly, if DACA students are allowed. President Trump has also released his plans for major cuts to STEM education programs across multiple agencies. Students are beginning to sue their universities, since they paid a semester's fees and campuses were closed beginning in March.

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THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

On April 21st, a few days after \$6 billion was released to higher education institutions for emergency cash grants, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos announced another [\\$6.2 billion](#) became available for continuing learning. The funding was given to all forms of education as part of the CARES Act. However, the original \$6 billion had not been distributed to colleges. [Politico](#) reported the day before that only \$6 million had been given to eligible colleges and universities; though by April 30th, about [75% of the money](#) had been given to over 2,000 schools. Several schools, such as Stanford, Princeton, Harvard Universities, Duke, and Pennsylvania University (President Trump's alma mater) are [not accepting the money from the government](#). And while many schools are struggling with a major financial loss, Secretary DeVos has asked that those with large endowments not apply for additional funding.

On April 28th, the [Education Department](#) restricted who can receive money from the colleges and universities' stimulus packages. Only students who participate in federal student aid programs can receive money. This change will not allow money to go to undocumented or international students, which is around 1.5 million students at the last count. This may include the [DACA recipients](#), as well, and many within government are debating the issue. The Education Department [does not plan](#) on considering DACA students as eligible, though.

WHITE HOUSE AND OTHER AGENCIES

President Trump released his latest budget request and it includes [major cuts for STEM education programs](#) across federal agencies. To do this, the Education Department would merge 30 programs for elementary and secondary schools into a single grant formula. However, the plan also looks to increase the career and technical training grants funding by around \$700 million, totaling at around \$2 billion, and to expand the number of programs. In order to help pay for this, they are asking the fees for assessing H-1B visas also be doubled. It also called for a 5% decrease in the National Science Foundation budget, mostly impacting the Education and Human Resources Directorate. The budget request calls for NASA closing its Office of STEM Engagement, though Congress has rejected this idea for several years and has increased its budget. Other offices that have been asked to decrease or eliminate their STEM education programs include the Department of Defense, Department of Energy, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

LEGISLATION

Congress is still being asked to provide another [\\$14 billion for relief grants](#) within higher education institutes. Several large schools have asked for an allocation of \$26 billion across federal science agencies, too, in order to ensure research can continue.

The Judicial Branch

Litigation

Several universities have been [sued](#) since asking students to leave campus. The complaints believe that they are owed some of their tuition back, since many classes have been moved to online and many housing and meal plan cost were supposed to encompass an entire semester. Since many schools have switched to a pass/ fail grading system, people believe that this will lessen the value of their degrees. One lawsuit against the Arizona university system and Liberty University points out that many of these student fees (i.e. recreation, health services) should be at least partially refunded, since these services were not available throughout the entire semester due to the coronavirus. However, Liberty University did allow students to return to campus after spring break and provided \$1000 to students who moved out of campus housing.

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