

HOW THE RYAN BUDGET WOULD UNDERCUT AMERICAN EDUCATION

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Now that Congressman Paul Ryan of Wisconsin is his party's nominee for Vice President, extra scrutiny is focused on his plan to cut the U.S. federal government's domestic spending to pay for new tax cuts tilted toward the wealthy. Much of the debate centers on Ryan's plan to turn Medicare into vouchers for private health insurance. But his budget requires equally sweeping changes in educational efforts serving Americans from childhood to adulthood.

At a time when the United States is falling behind many other nations in preparing children to do well in school and helping young people gain a college education, Ryan's budget requires large cuts in pre-school programs, in elementary and middle school programs for needy students, in special education services for disabled children, and in grants and loans to make college affordable.

Let's look closely at what the Ryan cuts would mean, using the best available nonpartisan analyses from the American Council on Education, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Targeting Needy Schoolchildren

If the Ryan budget is passed in early 2013, it will hit children and youth from low-income families starting in 2014 – taking away help that allows youngsters to overcome adversity and achieve their full potential.

- Head Start (a federal program that provides comprehensive child development services and school readiness programs to children from low-income families from birth until kindergarten) would be cut in by \$1.5 billion – resulting in the elimination of services to over 1.5 million children.
- A federal program that gives funds to public and private schools to help them boost the achievement of poor children would be cut by 2.7 billion dollars – reducing or eliminating services to over four million needy children.
- Today's version of Food Stamps helps prevent hunger for over 44 million Americans, almost half of whom live in households with children age 17 or younger. Ryan plans cuts in Food Stamps of over \$133.5 billion during the next ten years. Millions more children would come to school hungry, making it harder for them to pay attention and learn.

Less Help for Disabled Youngsters

The Ryan budget would require deep cuts in special education for students with disabilities, starting in 2014.

- Services would be eliminated or greatly reduced for children and youth with disabilities such as mental retardation, autism, traumatic brain injuries, specific learning disabilities, or difficulties with sight, hearing, or speaking. Parents of such children already struggle to find the necessary services to let their offspring get the most out of school – and the Ryan cuts will make it worse.
- States and localities would get less federal funding to help meet legal mandates to give a free and appropriate education to disabled students from preschool through age nineteen. In order to serve all qualified students, already strapped local school districts would have to make up for \$2.3 billion in reduced federal funding. They would have to do less to help large numbers of students who now receive services.
- The Ryan GOP budget also cuts Medicaid by one-third over the next ten years. Because Medicaid now helps over 28 million low-income children with disabilities, Ryan’s proposal would reduce by more than two million the number of disabled poor children who receive assessments and necessary medical services.

Making It Harder to Afford College

The Ryan cuts would also hit low and middle-income student trying to get an affordable college education; the cuts would also make life harder for displaced workers and adults seeking more education to improve their job prospects.

- Pell grants, which currently provide tuition assistance to over nine million college students, would be cut by \$200 billion in 2014. Eligibility requirements would be tightened, eliminating one million students from the program. The maximum amount for Pell grants is now set at \$5500 – which pays on average less than half of the tuition at public universities and less than a quarter of the total costs including fees and living expenses. Under the Ryan plan, there would be no cost of living increases to offset rising costs.
- Many students take out Stafford Subsidized Student Loans – federally backed loans that charge 3.4% interest and exempt students from paying interest while they are in school. Ryan’s budget would eliminate this program and replace it with unsubsidized loans that require students to pay interest while in school and after they graduate at double the current rate. Over seven million students would be faced with having to pay much higher interest rates. An average debt of over \$25,250 (plus interest) would follow graduates into what are traditionally the first years of their working lives and the time when they begin to build families.

Why Do Less When More Education is Critical?

Langston Hughes once asked, “What happens to a dream deferred?” If the Ryan plan is implemented, too many of our citizens will find out. Young children will fall through the cracks and do less well in school. And millions of high school graduates and adults seeking higher education will face tougher choices: should they still try to attend college and build up higher debts? Or should they put college off, or not attend at all?

This approach to America’s future makes no sense, especially when other nations are doing more to foster the potential of all of their citizens. At a time when the United States needs all the talent it can get to boost our economy and build a stronger democracy, we cannot afford to undercut the prospects of our children or deny full educational opportunities to young people and adults. The radical Ryan plan is a blueprint for decline our nation cannot afford.