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a Better Future Now

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Saundra Sorenson
Reporter

Monica J. Foster
Seattle Office Coordinator

Susan Fried
Photographer

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P.O. Box 5455
Portland, OR 97228

Telephone (503) 285-5555
Fax: (503) 285-2900

info@theskanner.com
www.TheSkanner.com

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Opinion

FY 2026 Budget Plan Cuts and Guts Education

‘Skinny Budget’ continues effort to shutter the agency

In the first 100 days of the current Trump Administration term, over 250,000 federal employees have had their jobs cut, planned to be cut, or have taken a buyout, according to a recent New York Times tally. With a 46 percent staff reduction – 1,380 employees - the Department of Education is among the hardest hit agencies.

The recently released FY 2026 budget plan underscores the administration’s determination to shutter the agency and eliminate programs that support the nation’s strides to remain educationally competitive and economically viable in a global economy.

“The President’s Skinny Budget reflects funding levels for an agency that is responsibly winding down, shifting some responsibilities to the states, and thoughtfully preparing a plan to delegate other critical functions to more appropriate entities,” said Education Secretary Linda McMahon in a related statement. “The federal government has invested trillions of taxpayer dollars into an education system that is not driving improved student outcomes – we must change course and reorient taxpayer dollars toward proven programs that generate results for American students.”

For the fiscal year that begins October 01, an additional 15.3 percent agency cut



Charlene Crowell
Responsible Lending

would drop education funding another \$12 billion from FY 2025’ \$78.7 billion. Among these proposed cuts are programs that speak to 21st Century dynamics affecting higher education:

“Forty percent of Black women in college are raising children.

- \$980 million – an 80 percent reduction to the Federal Work-Study (FWS) program;
 - \$75 million for Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) for campus-based childcare services to parents of low-income parents enrolled in postsecondary education;
 - \$64 million cut to Howard University, only federally chartered Historically Black College and University; and
 - \$49 million from its Office of Civil Rights, a 35 percent reduction to the office that investigates claims of race, sex and other discrimination in schools.
- These specific and modest programs respond to the needs of today’s college stu-

dents that are quite different from those of yesteryear. The historical 4-year completion rate for an undergraduate degree at a young age has been shrinking for several years. Instead, the growing percentage of college students trend older in age, take longer to graduate, and in the case of Black students, often have children to care for as well. Even after graduation, today’s marketplace demands an ongoing challenge to update skills and education to remain competitive.

According to, Black Student Parents’ Access to Affordable Child Care Support at Community Colleges, a recent policy brief by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Development:

“Black college students are more likely to be parents than other racial groups at both community colleges and four-year institutions. Over one in three (36 percent) of Black students enrolled in community colleges in 2020 were parents. Forty percent of Black women in college are raising children. Black single mothers comprise 30 percent of undergraduate students who are single mothers, and nearly 70 percent of Black single-mother students are first-generation college students. Black fathers make up 19 percent of student parents and are less likely to have access to childcare assistance than fathers of other races.”

CCAMPIS is designed to address this growing need. Competitive federal grant administered by the U.S. Department of Education, help

colleges fund on-campus childcare for Pell-eligible students. Unfortunately, the program’s funding has never been enough to meet student parents’ needs. Fewer than 4,000 parent students have benefitted from the program when there are approximately 1.5 million student parents who have children under the age of six, according to the D.C.-based New America.

For now, the popular Pell Grant program continues to serve more than 6 million students from low-income households. But its maximum award per student is \$7,395 for the 2025-2026 school year – not enough to cover the anticipated family contribution many schools expect for tuition and other expenses.

With this kind of demonstrated need for college assistance, it’s hard to understand why the Federal Work Study program would face the budget ax. Through its part-time jobs for undergraduate and graduate students with financial need, the monies earned lessen the need to borrow loans, while also encouraging work related to the student’s course of study or community service – with a very modest government investment.

When 78 percent of Black student parents have no family financial support for college, as the Joint Center report found, funding college financial support is not only good for Black America – it’s in the nation’s long-term interest.

The budget bottom line should recognize the huge difference between a handout and a hand up.

RFK Jr.’s Food Coloring Policies: A Hill To Dye On?

US Health and Human Services Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. says that HHS and the US Food and Drug Administration will phase out the use of petroleum-based food dyes over the next two years to “Make America Healthy Again.”

Of all the policy changes coming out of Washington DC, this is probably the most visible – literally.

If the changes go as planned, a lot of the foods you eat, liquids you drink, and medications you take will probably look a lot different than you’ve become used to.

Is that a good thing or a bad thing? Well, it depends on who you ask.

For decades, scientists have researched – and lobbyists and activists have fought over – the effects of those artificial colorants on Americans’ health. Some researchers and advocates claim links between artificial food colorings and various disorders.



Thomas L. Knapp
Guest Columnist

The companies using those colorings, naturally, deny such links.

In the 1990s, I knew a couple who did everything they could to keep Red Dye 40 out

“What’s not fine is him just deciding for all of us, whether we like it or not.

of their son’s diet. He’d been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder. They believed (upon observation I had to agree) that getting the food coloring out of

his diet greatly relieved his inability to sit still, concentrate, etc. That’s just anecdotal, of course, but the differences did seem dramatic.

Chicken or egg? Did consumers nudge food makers to give their products the “pop” of more brilliant colors, or did that “pop” condition consumers to associate bright hues with quality?

Would we buy fruit-flavored cereal if it didn’t come in a mix of reds, yellows, purples, and green?

Would we want those gummy bears or shell-covered candies if they were off-white? I don’t claim to know, but color’s what they’re selling and we buy a LOT of it.

I don’t support a ban.

As long as sellers truthfully disclose what they’re putting in their products, we’re free to buy or not buy – and one positive outcome of the “information age” is that we have instant access to both scientific information and others’ opinion (well-informed or

not) on the ingredients in our food.

In the normal course of things, I might or might not give credence to RFK Jr.’s opinion on the matter when deciding what to put in my shopping cart and in my body. You might or might not as well. That’s fine. What’s not fine is him just deciding for all of us, whether we like it or not.

Most of us aren’t old enough to remember, but at one time many states required margarine to be dyed bright pink as a way of discouraging its use versus butter (as you might guess, the dairy industry lobby backed such laws).

It’s not a hill to dye on (see what I did there?), I guess. I’m sure we’ll get used to the changes in how our food looks. Maybe we really will get healthier physically – who knows? But letting a politician control our choices this way is a worse disease than any malady associated with food coloring.