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Tell Congress not to axe AmeriCorps education money that funds Teach for America

The AmeriCorps Segal Grant is a crucial lever, as it provides the financial support these teachers will need to choose the classroom.

Stephen Santellan Guest columnist

Published 7:02 a.m. CT Dec. 26, 2023 | Updated 7:02 a.m. CT Dec. 26, 2023

Teach For America (TFA) finds, develops, and supports a diverse network of leaders dedicated to expanding access and opportunity for children. We recruit these leaders to become teachers or “corps members” as we call them. Our corps members commit to at least two years of teaching, contributing to a dynamic network of nearly 70,000 leaders catalyzing systemic change both inside and outside the classroom.

Over the last 10 years, TFA placed on average approximately 160 teachers each year in the heart of our communities, directly impacting over 100,000 students. Our commitment, however, does not end in the classroom; our growing network of more than 1,000 TFA alumni continue to lead in various sectors across our communities, from education to government, non-profits, and healthcare, shaping the future of our region.

Alumni like Lagra Newman, the founder and head of school at Purpose Preparatory Academy in North Nashville, which serves predominantly economically-disadvantaged students and is steering them toward unprecedented success. Purpose Preparatory Academy was the first-ever elementary school in North Nashville to receive the honor of Reward School status for academic performance, and is known as one of the top performing schools in Nashville.

But this impact could be put at risk if AmeriCorps funding, including the Segal AmeriCorps Education Award, is eliminated from the federal budget. This funding serves as a crucial tool in alleviating the financial burdens associated with teaching. The AmeriCorps Education Award helps new teachers pay for teacher certification and alleviates some of the burden of student debt. The proposed cuts to AmeriCorps — nearly 50% below current levels — would decimate the program and severely impact TFA’s ability to serve the most vulnerable students.

Congress must not let AmeriCorps funding run out for teachers and students alike

Students in Nashville, Chattanooga, and beyond deserve educators who are not restrained by economic barriers or student loan burdens.

The diversity of our teaching force, as studies have shown, is an asset enriching the educational experience for all students.

Imagine a teaching force that mirrors the diversity of our students — a force unencumbered by financial constraints. AmeriCorps funding makes this vision a reality.

The proposed elimination of the AmeriCorps Trust in the Fiscal Year 2024 budget jeopardizes this invaluable support, putting at risk the future of education in our communities.

We urge Congress to champion AmeriCorps funding, ensuring that the transformative work of Teach For America continues to flourish in communities like ours. Together, let's invest in the potential of our students and educators, unlocking a brighter future for Nashville, Chattanooga, and the state of Tennessee.

This Tennessee Congressman can help influence education funding decisions in Washington

Our 2030 goal is ambitious, but achievable: to create a future where every child, regardless of their background, receives a high-quality education by doubling the number of student achievements in third grade reading and eighth grade math for students in Nashville and Chattanooga.

This vision aligns seamlessly with our local initiatives, where partnerships with community leaders, schools, elected officials, and organizations are the backbone of our impact.

Notably, our Ignite tutoring program is a testament to our commitment to innovative and responsive education, designed to help students recover from any lost learning. Our belief (and the early data is promising) is that Ignite not only serves as a catalyst for educational resurgence, but also attracts aspiring educators to our vibrant communities in Nashville and Chattanooga who wish to be teachers.

The AmeriCorps Segal Grant is a crucial lever, as it provides the financial support these teachers will need to choose the classroom. Please alert Rep. Chuck Fleischmann, R-District 3, who serves on the Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies

subcommittee, that you want to see AmeriCorps funding continue, so that together we may continue to eliminate financial barriers to the next generation of teachers.

Stephan Santellan is executive director of Teach For America Nashville-Chattanooga.