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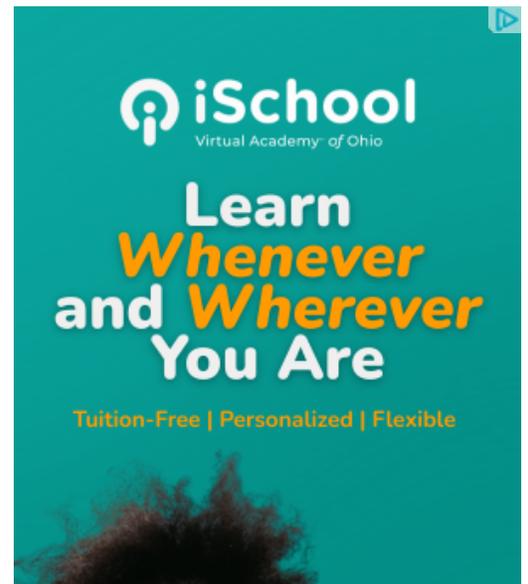
OPINION

Opinion: Trump bill targets the most vulnerable citizens

By **Dr. Eric J. Cooper**
Oct 9, 2025



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As an educator I have learned the importance of learning and teaching focused on broad and the targeted skills students will need in the 21st century: a mastery of reading, writing, mathematics, science, and the arts, while focused on classroom collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity. I have witnessed and participated in classroom instruction that enables improved and accelerated learning for all students across this state, region, nation, and in countries such as South Africa, Israel, Qatar and Mexico.

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Our organization, the National Urban Alliance for

Effective Education (NUA), celebrates the success of school districts that managed to avoid the learning loss caused by the necessary pivot to virtual learning and forced social and emotional isolation that many students experienced during the COVID pandemic. We cheer when learning and opportunity gaps are significantly diminished, where all students — white, Asian, children of color, and recent student immigrants — are given the opportunity to achieve in academics and engage in lifelong learning. We acknowledge and appreciate the importance of funding provided by federal and state governments as offsets meant to ameliorate the unique challenges teachers and administrators had to overcome and, to this day remain as hurdles to be cleared for broad student achievement.

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Yet, with all that educators have accomplished

together with their local, state, and federal partners, warning signs are rapidly developing due to shifting national policies and slashed federal budgets coming at the behest of the Trump administration and House of Representatives in the 2026 budget “one big, beautiful bill.” Tragically it would seem that the Trump administration is intentionally targeting the most vulnerable citizens in our society.

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Policies which will dramatically reduce education funding are highlighted in a new publication by Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, "[Why Fascists Fear Teachers, Public Education and the Future of Democracy.](#)" In it she predicts the following:

- 26 million vulnerable kids in every school districts-

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rural, suburban and urban-would lose critical services designed to get them ahead and on grade level.

- 7 and a half-million students with disabilities (15% of all students in public schools) in every community would lose access to special education services funded by the federal government.
- 10 million students from working-class families could lose much need-based Pell Grants or subsidized loans, increasing college costs for working families.
- 12 million students across all 50 states would lose access to career and technical education programs designed to master the skills and knowledge required for employment in today's rapidly changing economy.

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If that data is not sufficiently alarming, one can [Google](#) the withholding of federal funding in Connecticut, New York and Massachusetts, the cuts could be \$53 million, \$464 million, and \$106 million respectively. "Significant federal education funding

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cuts have affected Connecticut, New York, and Massachusetts, primarily due to recent administrative actions and the failure of Congress to pass a fiscal year (FY) 2026 budget. The current government shutdown has added further uncertainty and exacerbated funding freezes." Districts and schools work for months and years to develop budgets and staffing plans to meet the needs of all students -- these draconian cuts may cause irreparable harm to the teachers and those they serve in their school communities. The cuts to proposed programs will have a direct impact on children and are particularly egregious for those with special education needs, second-language learners, and those who are challenged by poverty.

Funding matters. It does not take a rocket scientist to discern the funding disparities between many urban and suburban school districts and the concomitant academic and opportunity gaps that exist between the two systems. In a seminal publication, ["Whither Opportunity?: Rising Inequality, Schools, and Children's Life Chances,"](#) Charles A. Nelson III and Margaret A. Sheridan wrote that by "...ensuring that early environments are more positive and more equitably distributed, we increase the chance of success that all children have. By ignoring early inequality, we risk potentially altering the chances that some children have to succeed. These early differences in environment are etched into the structure of our brains; the way we think, react, and feel in adulthood is necessarily related to the environmental exposures we did and

did not experience in our childhood." Funding is one of the few tangible things the government can provide to ensure that all children have access to a high-quality education, no matter where they live.

In the foreword for [Equitable Literacy Instruction for Students in Poverty](#) I write "...poverty is considered fundamentally wicked, as if those who struggle financially are in dire straits solely because of their inferior moral character. Such a belief readily leads those who are better off to look down on the poor and find reasons to denigrate them--reasons that lead too often to racist perspectives." This perspective is grossly misguided. As a nation we rely on all of our educational systems to develop students who can contribute to the common good: E pluribus unum (out of many one") a motto suggesting "the idea of forming a single nation from many diverse states or colonies."

Literacy development focused on equity, as explained by educators and highlighted in the publication we are a part, is guided by the individual needs of all students. Equitable literacy is the cultivation of the skills and consciousness that emerges from inclusive and diverse learning experiences. It "... means that every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they will need at the right moment in their education, across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/or family income."

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In his speech at the National Cathedral in 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. noted that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." We are living in a time in our nation where settled laws, moral truths, civil and human rights, extant held beliefs, and even science are under attack and questioned in our democracy. Yet justice can be found in the details of teaching and learning that embrace the social justice tenets that frame the American Constitution.

In a letter to James Madison, Thomas Jefferson wrote that, as a nation, we must "educate and inform the whole mass of the people ... they are the only sure reliance for the preservation of our liberty." I would hope a majority of Americans would wholeheartedly agree with Jefferson on that point.

Stamford resident Dr. Eric J. Cooper is president of the National Urban Alliance for Effective Education (NUA).