

House Panel Votes for Another Year of Race to the Top

By **Alyson Klein** on July 15, 2010 7:54 PM | [4 Comments](#) | [No TrackBacks](#)

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It's still early in the congressional budget process, but it looks like the Obama administration's signature K-12 initiative—the \$4.35 billion Race to the Top program—has a better chance of being extended into fiscal year 2011, which begins Oct. 1.

The bill financing the U.S. Department of Education next year, which was approved on a party-line vote of 11 to 5 by a House appropriations subcommittee today, includes \$800 million for another year of Race to the Top. The program was originally created under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, the economic-stimulus program approved by Congress last year. That's not quite as much as the \$1.35 billion Obama asked for in his budget request—and in a [personal pitch](#).

But the extension may be a bit of a surprise to some, given that the bill's sponsor, Rep. David Obey, D-Wis., the chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, [recently championed](#) a bill that would cut \$500 million from the current pot for Race to the Top in order to help finance a \$10 billion measure aimed at staving off what supporters say could be hundreds of thousands of teacher layoffs. That measure [passed the House](#) earlier this month and is awaiting Senate action.

It's not clear yet whether the House subcommittee went along with Obama's plan to extend the Race to the Top program to districts. Right now, it's just for states.

In another win for the administration, the bill would also extend the now-\$650 million [Investing in Innovation](#) grant program for another year. The program, which was also created under the stimulus, would get another \$400 million in fiscal 2011, which is pretty close to the \$500 million the administration asked for.

Overall, the Education Department would get \$71.9 billion. That's less than the \$73.4 billion the President asked for, but an increase over last year's \$64.3 billion.

The bill would include modest hikes for special education and Title I grants to districts. Title I would get \$16.2 billion, a little more than the president's request of \$15.9 billion and a roughly 3 percent increase over last year. And the measure would include nearly \$13 billion for special education, about a 4 percent boost over last year.

Career and Adult Education was funded at the president's request of \$1.94 billion, a slight bump over last year's \$1.92 billion.

"The bill tries to strike a balance between maintaining broad-based federal assistance to schools and school children and advancing efforts to reform public education," Obey said.

Republicans, though, worried about the bill's price tag.

"We need to set priorities, we need to fund our must-do items, like Pell Grants and special education," said Rep. Todd Tiahrt, R-Kan., the top Republican on the education spending subcommittee. "We need to ask ourselves if those nice-to-do-programs can be eliminated."

There was mixed news for the Promise Neighborhood initiative to create schools that offer a range of support services to students and their families, such as health care and pre-kindergarten. That program would get \$60 million under the bill, a pretty steep increase over the \$10 million it got last year (which will be used for [planning grants](#)), but not nearly as much as the \$210 million the administration asked for.

And the Head Start program, which is administered through the Department of Health and Human Services, would see slightly less money than the president asked for, \$8.1 billion, compared with \$7.2 billion last year. That's \$124 million less than the president asked for.

To be sure, today's actions are just step one. The full committee must approve the bill, and the full House. And it's not clear if the Senate will share these priorities. Still, the fact that Obey is willing to extend Race to the Top next year is a good sign, if you're a fan of the program.

On the other hand, it appears as though the panel rejected the administration's [proposal](#) to consolidate many of the department's smaller programs into broader funding streams.

Reporters weren't given copies of the bill, just summary tables. So it's still unclear just how much money some key programs got, such as the Teacher Incentive Fund, which doles out pay-for-performance grants to districts and which is also a huge Obama priority.

During the markup, Tiahrt introduced some education amendments that ultimately weren't accepted, but were interesting from a policy and political perspective.

For instance, Race to the Top could have gotten even more money if an amendment by Tiahrt had passed. He wanted to increase funding for the program up to the level of the president's request of \$1.35 billion, but only if the money would have come out of the Americorps Program, which Rep. Tiahrt said has had management problems. But the amendment was defeated.

Another Tiahrt amendment would have dealt with merit pay. Under the bill, an unspecified merit pay program—probably the Teacher Incentive Fund?—would need to get 75 percent of teachers to agree to participate in order for that program to receive a grant. Tiahrt tried to get that number reduced to 50 percent.

But Obey said there needs to be strong teacher support if merit pay programs are to succeed.

"If you're going to change the system, that system has to have buy-in," Obey said. "You either work things out at the beginning or you get shredded at the end. And that produces no reform."

The amendment was defeated on a party-line vote, with 11 Democrats voting against it, and 5 Republicans voting for it.

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