**Federal Educational-Leadership Initiatives in a Budget 'Pickle'** As federal cuts loom, some weigh options **By** [Denisa R. Superville](http://www.edweek.org/ew/contributors/denisa.superville_7151043.html)September 5, 2017

When the new federal education law passed in 2015 with language allowing states to set aside money for programs that target principals, teacher-leaders, principal-supervisors, and leadership development, many in the education-leadership community were ecstatic.

It was the first time that federal law had been so explicit about school leadership—coming after mounting research in the last two decades on how high-quality leaders affect students' academic growth.

But some of the programs that states have signaled they intend to set up or expand as a result of this new flexibility may never see the light of day—or may have to be scaled back significantly—if Congress and the Trump administration [eliminate nearly $2 billion dollars in Title II](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2017/07/house_spending_bill_trump_budget.html), Part A funds that go toward educator effectiveness. That's the pot of money that many states were hoping to tap into to pay for the leadership programs.

"We are ... a little bit in a pickle, waiting to see what happens with the budget," said Amy Fowler, deputy secretary at the Vermont Agency of Education, which still intends to proceed with a leadership academy to help network principals and teacher-leaders who often work in small districts and have few opportunities to collaborate and share best practices with peers. "We're really hopeful that that commitment will stay, and if it doesn't we'll be making that amendment in our plan and working to figure out an alternative."

## States in a Bind

Vermont is not the only state in a bind. Several have indicated in their education plans required under the [Every Student Succeeds Act](http://www.edweek.org/ew/issues/every-student-succeeds-act/index.html?intc=content-exlaineressa) that they plan to use a new provision that allows states to keep an additional 3 percent of their Title II allocations for school leaders.

Tennessee, with an ESSA plan approved by Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos last week, is moving ahead with efforts on a program to funnel effective principals to all districts. Missouri has revamped its education department support system for school leaders, which was generally provided to new and early-career principals. The department now wants to make sure that all of its 2,200 principals have access to those resources.

Title II has had its share of critics. While district and state officials rely on the funds to hire new teachers and pay for professional-development opportunities for classroom teachers and principals, researchers and even education secretaries have questioned whether the money is used effectively. The Trump administration has said that it wants to end the program because it has not been shown to be effective. Arne Duncan, the first education secretary in the Obama administration, also questioned whether Title II, Part A dollars were getting the best bang for the buck. Studies have yielded mixed results.

But [professional organizations—such as the ones that represent elementary school principals and organizations that train principals—have pushed back](http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/District_Dossier/2017/07/principals_blast_TitleII_funding_cut_for_teachers_principals.html). Jay Nichols, the executive director of the Vermont Principals Association, said that in recent years Title II, Part A funds have gone toward helping educators address the state's opioid crisis.

"We have a great deal of disappointment with the way things are moving," said Michelle Young, the executive director of the University Council for Educational Administration. The organization was hoping that with Title II's added emphasis on leadership, states and districts would work more closely with universities to design training and mentoring programs that are tailored to specific district needs.

"This is the first time that we've had a significant focus on educational leadership," she continued. "It's like [getting] the toe in the door, if you will. There are so many reasons for doing this, and so many reasons not to back away from it. Yet, here we are. It's just really unfortunate."

The question for many states is what happens now?

The options are limited, said Jason Leahy, the executive director of the Illinois Principals Association.

Possibilities include relying on public-private partnerships, and dipping into other federal funding sources, such as Title I, which provides aid to high-poverty schools. Some state education departments may be able to lobby their legislatures for more money, but in some cases education funding has not returned to pre-Recession levels, and districts in Illinois are waiting on state aid that's owed to them, Leahy said.

"In education funding ... if you lose a bucket of money, there is not another bucket that you are just going to be able [to use] to pour money into that now empty bucket to make ends meet," he said. "It's just not there."

## Moving Forward

Tennessee's Principal Pipeline Partnership program will proceed this year, regardless of whether the federal government continues to fund Title II, said Sara Gast, a spokeswoman for the education department. The program is using Title II funds from the previous year, and it is structured in such a way that the state's portion will be reduced to 50 percent of the overall cost in the third and fourth years, she said.

"If future federal funding does not come through, we would most likely have to consider seeking additional philanthropic support to support this work," she said. "However, our strongest preference is to support our teachers through Title II, which has provided us with a stable and consistent funding source in the past."

The program will distribute about $1 million in matching funds to organizations and universities to work with school districts in nine regions to train and support 160 future school leaders. Part of the goal is to provide high-quality school leaders to fill the 260 to 270 principal vacancies that pop up annually.

"Our ESSA plan shows how we will use Title II to address teacher and leader supports across the full continuum—from educator preparation, to the classroom, and throughout their careers—and without that funding source, much of that work is jeopardized," Tennessee's Education Commissioner Candice McQueen said after the education department approved the state's ESSA plan.

"We are pleased to see that the U.S. Department of Education actually highlighted this work in their press release about Tennessee's ESSA plan, and we have continued to urge USED to maintain this critical funding."

Missouri, which has not yet submitted its ESSA plan, is among the states thinking about alternative funding sources.

But Paul Katnik, who oversees educator quality at the state's education department, said Missouri had no plans to change course or remove the programs from its ESSA plan before it's submitted this month.

"This is too important for us not to do absolutely everything we can," he said. "It's not like we are not sure that this is a good idea. We are sure about it, and I think it's incumbent upon us to exhaust every option we can to make it happen."

## Missouri Committed

The state plans to use the full 3 percent set-aside to improve and expand its leadership development and one-to-one mentoring programs, which it has had for more than 30 years. Both programs previously had cohorts of about 100 principals annually; the idea is to increase the number of early-career principals in the mentoring program and restructure the leadership development program so that eventually every principal in the state will be affected.

Katnik said the state potentially could use Title I funds for high-poverty schools to pay for a portion of the program, seek assistance from the business community, or from the legislature when elected officials return to the state capital in September. In the meantime, the program is funded for the full year, and Katnik is hoping that it will generate enough positive results to attract funding for future years if the federal Title II money disappears.

Until some definitive word comes down from Washington, Vermont is polishing its request for proposal to solicit bids from organizations that might be interested in running the leadership academy in the first year.

Officials are considering posting the request for proposals with a note saying that there might not be money to pay for the program.

"We are weighing the pros and cons," Fowler said. "We don't want to give up on the idea because we have such strong support from our stakeholders."

Vol. 37, Issue 03, Page 6

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