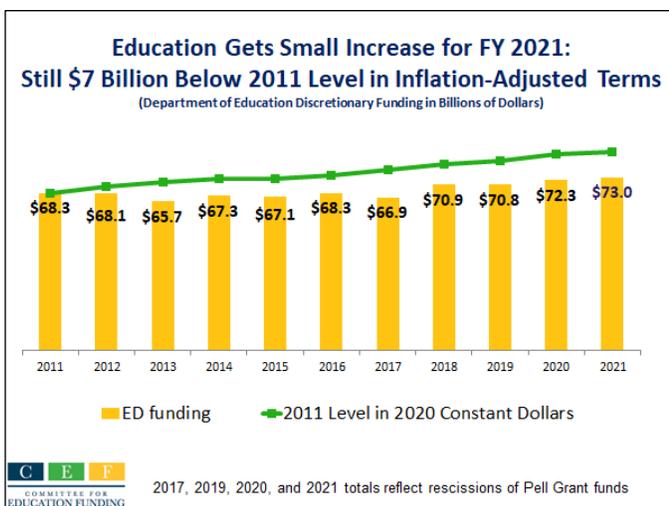
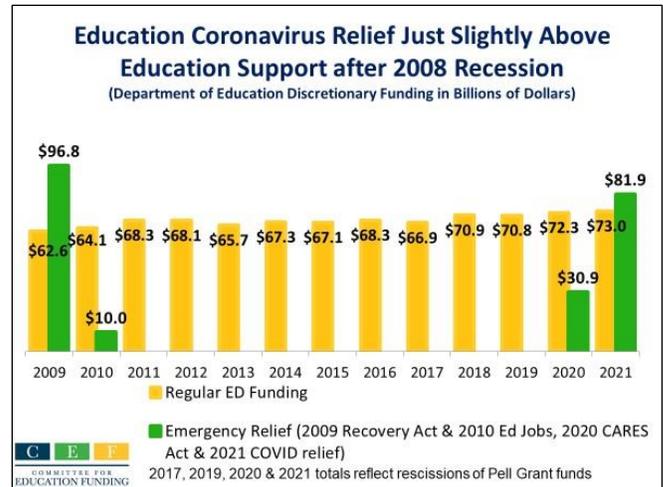


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The pandemic has highlighted the important role of education in society – to students, families, and the economy – while also underscoring the many needs and inequities that remain. These needs come with new costs on top of the ongoing federal investments in education. Some pandemic-related costs will continue to grow as students return to in-person learning facing learning loss, new social and emotional needs, and a changed landscape of socially distanced classrooms, child care centers, and other services. In 2020, Congress enacted \$113 billion in COVID-relief funds for education in addition to support for existing Department of Education programs, but that federal investment is not all that is necessary.

The federal investment in education is important to all yet the United States invests only about 2 percent of the regular federal budget on education. A larger investment would support a better educated workforce, leading to more research and innovation, economic growth, and better national security in many ways, not the least of which is a military ready for today’s challenges. A bigger federal education investment would help ensure access to high quality education from pre-school to higher education, fill gaps where local and state funding is insufficient or where new needs arise, and help with the costs of federally mandated services, such as special education. Federal funding is targeted to where it is most needed - almost two thirds of appropriations for the



Department of Education support teaching in low-income communities or aid for low-income college students. In addition, federal student loans are available to students at all income levels.

**Federal education investment is low** – Education programs have cut deeply in the past; Congress has eliminated 50 education programs since 2010. Federal funding was stagnant or cut for many years and despite welcome but modest recent increases, Department of Education funding is more than \$7 billion below what it was ten years ago in inflation-adjusted dollars, as shown in the chart to the left.

**Federal funding plays an important role** – Federal funding accounts for about 8 percent of all elementary and secondary education spending in the United States, but that small portion plays an outsized role. In some school districts, federal funding accounts for a far greater share of the total education budget, especially schools with a large percentage of poor students or students living on military bases or Native American lands. For example, 25 million students at nearly 60 percent of all public elementary schools receive extra academic support under Title I (Education for the Disadvantaged), the largest K-12 program at \$16.5 billion. And Impact Aid helps support nearly 10 million students where funding can comprise up to half of a school district’s income because the federal government – which pays no property taxes – owns much of the land in these communities. This federal funding can make a huge difference.

**Federal investments can address unmet needs** – Despite its intent, the US education system is not succeeding for all students, and well targeted investments could make a difference. For example, in [the latest international math assessment](#), American 15-year-olds continue to score below the average of the industrialized nations in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Nationally, 5.3 percent of high-school aged students have dropped out, but the rates are much higher for students with disabilities, who are Hispanic or African American, or who do not speak English well. Federal investments can address these and other specific issues to expand proven strategies to areas of need.

**Federal education investments benefit all students** – The federal investments in education benefit even those students who do not directly receive services paid for with federal dollars by targeting funding to meet specific needs and fill mandates. This frees up state and local dollars to cover other education costs, such as school construction and repair, specialized teacher training, transportation, etc. For example, federal law mandates that all students with disabilities have access to a free appropriate education and in return pledges to cover up to 40 percent of the additional cost associated with educating children with disabilities. However, the federal share of special education funding has never approached that level, so the vast majority is paid for by state and local education budgets. If the federal contribution rose, more of the state and local budgets could be used instead to meet other education needs.

**CEF information resources:**

- [CEF’s education “budget book”](#) describes the national education programs, shows their funding history, outlines existing needs, offers downloadable education charts, and provides contact information for a CEF-member expert to answer any questions.
- [CEF’s education funding table](#) shows current and past funding for federal education and related programs.