

# Trump's budget threatens Mass. English learner, college transition programs

By [Christopher Huffaker](#) and [Marcela Rodrigues](#) Globe Staff, Updated May 14, 2025, 11:11 a.m.



First grade students raised their hands during a lesson at Alfred J. Gomes Elementary School in New Bedford. The school's language programs, which could be affected by proposed cuts to federal English Language Acquisition funding, have helped New Bedford students develop bilingual skills for years. ERIN CLARK/GLOBE STAFF

NEW BEDFORD — Students at Alfred J. Gomes Elementary School didn't hesitate when teacher Natalia Gioni asked them to sing along.

“Somos como las flores, necesitamos la lluvia y el sol,” the first-graders sang as they learned what plants need to grow and survive. Water, sunlight, and air, they told Gioni in

Spanish.

As bilingualism is celebrated at the New Bedford school, superintendent Andrew O'Leary is concerned President Trump's proposed budget for 2026 would eliminate federal funding that supports English language acquisition programs.

The \$890 million cut nationwide would translate to the loss of three or four staff members in New Bedford, where the district receives about half a million dollars for these programs.

"It would be the federal government turning its back on the community," O'Leary said.

Similar scenes are playing out across the state as school districts, higher education institutions, and education advocates grapple with the potential impact of billions in cuts proposed for federal funding streams ranging from schooling for migrant farmworkers and their children to programs that help high school students from disadvantaged backgrounds transition to college.

The president's proposed budget is a wish list of sorts and is unlikely to be implemented as written. However, it emphasizes the priorities of the administration and reflects other federal actions already underway, such as the cutting in half of the Education Department workforce. Congress ultimately sets the budget, often via stopgap spending bills in recent years, but Republicans control the legislature and tend to be closely aligned with the president's priorities.

As part of the roughly \$12 billion proposed cut to the Education Department, the Trump proposal would eliminate a number of key funding streams, including Title III, the English language instruction money at issue in New Bedford. Other spending, such as on the Office for Civil Rights, would see partial cuts.

The two biggest federal sources of K-12 funds appear safe: Title I, which goes to schools serving low-income students, and IDEA, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act,



which supports students with disabilities. Each would be consolidated with related funding streams into [simpler single grants](#).



Gomes Elementary School Principal Ellyn Gallant embraced a first grade student in a dual language classroom in New Bedford. ERIN CLARK/GLOBE STAFF

The White House Office of Management and Budget did not respond to a request for comment on the president's budget. Education Secretary Linda McMahon said the budget reflects her mandate to be the last to hold her position.

"The President's Skinny Budget reflects funding levels for an agency that is responsibly winding down, shifting some responsibilities to the states, and thoughtfully preparing a plan to delegate other critical functions to more appropriate entities," McMahon said. "It supports the President's vision of expanding school choice and ensuring every American has access to an excellent education."

The only type of federal education spending that would get a boost is charter schools, with Trump proposing a \$60 million boost to \$500 million in annual spending to help

start and expand charter schools. Tim Nicolette, executive director of the Massachusetts Charter Public School Association, said he expects the proposal to get bipartisan support.

“Ultimately, these funds will support high-quality educational options for children and families across the country as well as the two-way sharing of proven practices between charter and district public schools,” Nicolette said.

The second largest education cut would be to TRIO and GEAR UP programs — federal grants that support low-income and first-generation students in getting ready for college.

One beneficiary, Marlenny Anziani of Boston, was 8 years old when she moved to the US from the Dominican Republic. At 13, as a freshman at BPS’s English High School, she learned about Boston University’s TRIO-funded Upward Bound program.

Upward Bound welcomes students like Anziani to spend summers living on BU’s campus and taking rigorous academic courses. During the school year, students go to campus after school for academic tutoring and college prep.

The program challenged Anziani academically and encouraged her to pursue her college dreams, she said. It also expanded her world: She took Latin, participated in Shakespeare plays, and went canoeing for the first time.

“They helped me way more than anyone at my school,” she said. “My dad always knew that I had it in me, and he just assumed that I would figure it out. But Upward Bound gave me the tools, and they were there with me every step of the way.”

While her school counselor was hesitant about her decision to apply to Brown University, Upward Board mentors supported her. She got in — likely the first student in her school to do so, she said.

She worries about children from marginalized backgrounds who need such programs.



“This is happening at the same time that we’re talking about cutting out all of the DEI programs as well,” Anziani said. “I don’t know where we’re going. It just makes me sad.”



Two first grade students worked together on a laptop assignment in a dual language classroom at Alfred J. Gomes Elementary School in New Bedford. ERIN CLARK/GLOBE STAFF

TRIO-funded programs, which help students navigate academic and financial barriers, has had bipartisan support in Congress, said Michael Dennehy, executive director for college access and student success at BU’s Wheelock College of Education & Human Development.

“I’m hopeful that our supporters in Congress will stand by these programs because they are really important and they make a difference,” he said.

Across three programs, BU serves 1,036 students annually with around \$1.2 million in TRIO and GEAR UP grants.

Another program that would be wiped out is Migrant Education, which educates migratory farm and fishery workers and their children, including American citizens, and serves about 600 to 700 students each year in districts across Massachusetts.

Emily Hoffman, who leads the Massachusetts program housed at the Northampton-based Collaborative for Educational Services, said her program depends entirely on federal funds. Their role is to ensure migratory students get needed educational services, including by directly providing language classes, transporting students, hiring English language support for districts, and helping students find other opportunities.

“If this money goes away, we no longer exist,” she said. “Our program is very valuable.”

Hoffman said she is not too worried about the budget proposal, as Migrant Education funding is part of the bedrock federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act and the whole act would have to be reauthorized to change the funding formula.

“I have a hard time thinking that would happen,” she said. “There’s a little bit more buffer of protection.”

Still, Hoffman has other reasons to be worried, she said. Heightened immigration enforcement means families are afraid to meet with her staff and fill out paperwork, she said. Some don’t want their children to leave the home, while others are sending them back to their home countries.

“I am concerned [about] other efforts and policies that impact our ability to identify and recruit people,” Hoffman said.

Elsewhere in the state, the English language acquisition funding on the line in New Bedford is producing similar concerns. Chelsea Public Schools, for example, gets about \$500,000 to help [educate thousands of English learner students](#). Losing those funds would require substantial cuts, Superintendent Almudena Abeyta said, especially after she already had to close a \$1.3 million budget hole for next year.

“At this point, I would have to start cutting staff at schools, which I don’t want to do,” she said. “I try to stay away from cutting direct services to children.”

In New Bedford, the lead ESL teacher was a newcomer herself after her family moved to the area from Cape Verde when she was 12 years old.

Ivone Spencer credits her multilanguage skills, acquired through the district’s language programs, for her career in education.

Immigrant children like Spencer enrich the experience of all students, said Ellyn Gallant-Bland, principal of Alfred J. Gomes Elementary School.

“Being bilingual, biliterate, or multilingual is such a beautiful gift. We’re just trying to foster that the best we can,” Gallant-Bland said.

In the proposed budget, the Trump administration wrote the English language acquisition program “deemphasizes English primacy by funding NGOs and States to encourage bilingualism.”

Superintendent O’Leary said that characterization is incorrect.

“Bilingualism does not undermine English language acquisition. [It actually enhances it](#),” O’Leary said. “It actually supports early literacy instruction.”

No matter what, O’Leary said, the state’s and district’s commitment to multilingual students wouldn’t go away.

“What’s going away is the partnership with the federal government,” he said.

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