

Analysis of Budget Proposal for a Rescission of Funding for the Regional Educational Laboratories

The recently announced President's budget for fiscal year (FY) 2025 includes a proposal to rescind \$15 million in FY 2024 funding for the Regional Educational Laboratories (RELs). The Department of Education justification for this proposal is as follows:

The request also includes the rescission of \$15 million from the funds originally appropriated to the RELs in fiscal year 2024 and remaining available in fiscal year 2025. As a significant amount of carryover funding has built up over time, a \$15 million rescission would not have an impact on planned continuation awards.

The Department seems to describe the RELs program as if it operates and is financed much like Pell Grants, where the Congress can rescind surplus funds knowing that a rescission will not affect program operations. More specifically, the Department produces estimates, based on economic and other data, of the amount of funding that will be needed to fund Pell Grants for the coming year, and the Congress relies on those estimates in appropriating funds. As conditions change (for example, if fewer students than predicted apply for Pell), the estimates may turn out to have been too high and the program will run a surplus, which the Congress can dip into in order to fund other priorities. Congress can "raid the surplus" with complete confidence that, at least in the short- to medium-term, this action will have no impact on the number of students who receive Pell Grants or the size of the awards they receive.

There is no analogous situation with regard to the RELs. Unlike the situation with Pell Grants, every dollar rescinded for the RELs will result in a dollar less in services provided to States, school districts, and schools. The program does not run a surplus.

As with the other programs administered by the Institute of Education Sciences (IES), funding for the RELs is appropriated by Congress on a two-year basis. (As an example, the FY 2024 funds will be available to IES for obligation during both FY 2024 and FY 2025.) The IES staff who administer the program do not send the annual appropriations to the RELs all at once but, rather, dole the funds out strategically over the two-year period in a manner that allows them to address changing State, local, and national needs and priorities. In some years the amount of "carryover" from the first year to the second will be higher or lower than in other years. When a larger amount of funding is carried over, it does not mean that program needs less funding or that there is a surplus that can be raided without affecting the program; it merely means that the program staff have elected, for programmatic reasons, to carry over more money from year one and then obligate it in year two.

The bottom line, then, is that rescinding REL funding will simply mean reducing the operations of the RELs. Assuming level funding, the FY 2024 appropriation for the RELs is approximately \$58.7 million. A rescission of \$15 million would thus mean that the amount of applied research, product development, training, technical assistance, and other activities carried out by the RELs with FY 2024 funding would be reduced by some 26 percent.

Despite RELs critical work in partnership with SEAs and LEAs to generate and use evidence to improve student outcomes, the REL program (and all of IES RD&D) currently receives significantly less funding than similar RD&D programs at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the National Science Foundation (NSF). This chronic underfunding and lack of steady increases has not only led to lost opportunities but slowed down the pace by which RELs can generate evidence, innovate, and respond to the growing needs of their State and local partners.

BACKGROUND

The Education Sciences Research Act (ESRA) charges RELs with three main activities: (1) applied research; (2) dissemination of scientifically-valid research; and (3) technical assistance related to application and use of scientifically-valid research.

- **Applied Research:** Unlike basic research, RELs undertake applied research that seeks to solve practical problems and, to the extent possible, advance fundamental understandings of education problems and processes.
- **Dissemination of Scientifically-Valid Research:** RELs facilitate the flow of actionable, credible, up-to-date research evidence (and information, ideas, and approaches that are clearly based on credible research evidence) among researchers, practitioners, and policymakers.
- **Technical Assistance:** RELs support the use of research evidence in practice and policy, including work to select and test solutions, improve classroom instruction and student learning, and assess programs.

RELs engage in activities that increase the capacity of policymakers and practitioners in their regions to access, conduct, interpret, and apply research. Over the past decade, the REL program has contributed to a significant cultural change that continues to gain momentum in education – namely, the increasing focus on basing education decisions on high-quality research evidence.