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[Education](#)

Obama meets with city school chiefs, outlines education spending priorities

During a meeting with the Council of the Great City Schools leadership, President Obama said improvements are being made in U.S. education, but more needs to be done at a federal level. (Reuters)

By [Emma Brown](#) March 16 at 2:56 PM

President Obama on Monday praised recent academic gains in the nation's urban public school systems and warned of a fight if the Republican-led Congress fails to provide adequate funds for the neediest students.

House and Senate Republicans are expected to unveil their budget blueprints this week. Obama said that if funding remains at sequester levels, the federal government will be spending less on pre-K through 12th-grade education than it did in 2000.

“The notion that we would be going backwards instead of forwards in how we’re devoting resources to educating our kids makes absolutely no sense,” Obama said at the White House after meeting with a group of urban school superintendents. The president also spoke about focusing dollars on the lowest-performing schools, ensuring that teachers have the resources they need to meet higher academic standards, and continuing to test children each year.

If the Republican budget does not include those principles, Obama said, “then we’re going to have to have a major debate.”

He spoke shortly after his meeting with members of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of urban school systems that has its annual conference in Washington this week. They discussed not only the federal budget but also the pending revision of No Child Left Behind, the main federal education law.

As Congress works to rewrite the law, a key sticking point has been how to allocate Title I funds, which are meant to provide additional services for poor children.

Democrats favor the current policy, in which Title I funds are directed to schools with the highest concentrations of poverty. Republicans are seeking “Title I portability,” which would allow the money to follow a child to a different school.

The Obama administration has said that portability would devastate schools in the poorest neighborhoods. On Monday, superintendents said they appreciated the president's position.

“Will we continue to want equity for all of our children and all of our schools, or will we turn back the clock so some children don't have as much?” said Barbara Jenkins, superintendent of Florida's Orange County Public Schools, which includes Orlando.

Rep. John Kline (R-Minn.), the chairman of the House education committee, previously responded to criticisms of Title I portability with this statement:

“Encouraging good schools to serve more low-income students is the right thing to do. Ensuring low-income children receive the best possible education and their fair share of federal assistance is the right thing to do.”