



The Consortium of State School Boards Associations Weekly Education Report

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The COSSBA Education Report, a weekly publication, provides an executive summary of public policy issues affecting American K-12 education and employment. **Please use the bookmarks below to navigate to your area of interest:**

1. **News, Publications, & Updates on COSSBA Policy Priorities**

• **Funding**

- **Senators Hold Contentious HHS Budget Hearing with Secretary Kennedy:** On Tuesday, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies held a hearing titled, “A Review of the President’s Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Request for the Department of Health and Human Services.”
- **ED Releases Secretary McMahon’s Supplemental Grant Priorities:** On Tuesday, Secretary of Education Linda McMahon released her first three proposed priorities for the Department of Education’s (ED) discretionary grant programs: evidence-based literacy, expanding education choice, and returning education to the states.
- **Appropriators Examine FY26 Education Budget, Plans to Dismantle ED:** On Wednesday, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies held a

hearing on the Trump administration's Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26)
Department of Education (ED) budget request.

2. **Budget and Appropriations Wrap-up**

- **Impact on State School Board Associations**

3. **In Brief – Last Week in Washington**

- **House Education Panel Debates Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Efforts**: On Wednesday, the House Education and Workforce Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development held a highly polarized hearing titled, “Restoring Excellence: The Case Against DEI.”
- **Policy Shifts Spur Advocacy to Protect Summer Learning Programs**: On Wednesday, the National Summer Learning Association (NSLA) hosted a webinar examining recent federal policy changes and their implications for summer learning programs.
- **Split SCOTUS Decision Denies Opening of OK Religious Charter School**: On Thursday, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a 4-4 split decision in a pivotal case concerning the intersection of religion and public education, effectively blocking the creation of the nation's first faith-based charter school—St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School in Oklahoma.

4. **New Publications**

- **SUN Meals To-Go: Addressing Summer Child Hunger in Rural America**
Urban Institute (May 2025)
The report highlights the SUN Meals To-Go program, made permanent in 2023, and notes that implementation has faced challenges due to late federal guidance and shifting rules. The report recommends enhancing funding, staffing flexibility, clearer pickup policies, and expanding eligibility to urban areas to improve future program uptake and effectiveness.

5. **In the News**

- **Senate HELP Committee Advances President Trump's Labor, Education Nominees**
US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (May 22, 2025)
- **Judge Halts Dismantling of Education Department, Orders Fired Workers to be Reinstated**
NBC News (May 22, 2025)
- **Educators Fear Their Homeless Students Could Become a Target for Trump Cuts**
NPR (May 22, 2025)
- **Head Start May Have Gotten a Reprieve, but It's Not Out of the Woods**
The 74 (May 19, 2025)

6. **Weekly Calendar - What's coming up this week?**

- **Disparate Impact and Why We Need It**: The American Association of People With Disabilities will hold a virtual discussion on "Protecting Disabled Students Part 2: What is Disparate Impact and Why Do We Need It?"

Tuesday at 3pm ET

- **State of the Parents Rights Movement**: The Cato Institute will hold a conference on "The State of Parental Rights, 100 Years After Pierce v. Society of Sisters."

Thursday at 9am ET

- **Addressing Chronic Absenteeism**: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research will hold a discussion on "Addressing the Attendance Crisis: New Research on Chronic Absenteeism Since the Pandemic."

Friday at 2pm ET

7. **On The Floor of Congress This Week**

- The House and Senate are in recess.

8. **Important U.S. House and Senate Links**

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1. **COSSBA Policy Priorities**

FUNDING

SENATORS HOLD CONTENTIOUS HHS BUDGET HEARING WITH SECRETARY KENNEDY

Last Tuesday, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies **held a hearing** titled, "A Review of the President's Fiscal Year 2026 Budget Request for the Department of Health and Human Services." Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr. appeared as the sole witness, **providing testimony** in support of the Trump administration's Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) budget proposal for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). In his opening remarks, Secretary Kennedy outlined his vision for restructuring the department, including the creation of a new Administration for a Healthy America (AHA), and a shift in administrative priorities toward addressing chronic disease, promoting safe and clean food, and tackling the root causes of illness in the U.S. healthcare system. Chaired by Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), the hearing was marked by bipartisan criticism of recent HHS actions. A primary concern was the decision to cap indirect costs at 15% for NIH-funded research institutions, an issue repeatedly raised by Chair Capito and others. Due to temporary restraining orders pending on certain agency actions, Secretary Kennedy was limited in his ability to address some matters. Nevertheless, he largely defended the administration's actions and pledged to work directly with individual Senators on state-specific concerns. Several lawmakers also raised issues related to Head Start, to which Kennedy reaffirmed his commitment to strengthening the program to better serve families.

ED RELEASES SECRETARY MCMAHON'S SUPPLEMENTAL GRANT PRIORITIES

On Tuesday, Secretary of Education Linda McMahon **released** her first three proposed priorities for the Department of Education's (ED) discretionary grant programs: evidence-based literacy, expanding education choice, and returning education to the states. These priorities are intended to guide future grant competitions and align with the ED's stated focus on academic fundamentals and local decision-making. The proposals are now **open for a 30-day public comment period**, after which a final version will be published to inform grantmaking. The evidence-based literacy priority emphasizes instruction grounded in the science of reading, including phonics and

comprehension strategies, to improve student outcomes. The education choice priority aims to broaden access to various learning options, such as charter schools, home-based education, apprenticeships, and distance learning. The third priority—returning education to the states—focuses on reducing federal oversight and promoting state leadership in program implementation. According to the ED, these priorities represent a shift from prior administrations' emphasis on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in grantmaking. ED contends that previous DEI-aligned initiatives introduced race-based policies and ideological content into education grants. Secretary McMahon has stated that the new priorities aim to refocus on academic achievement and provide states and families with greater control over educational decisions. Additional priorities may be announced later this year.

APPROPRIATORS EXAMINE FY26 EDUCATION BUDGET, PLANS TO DISMANTLE ED

On Wednesday, the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies held a hearing on the Trump administration's Fiscal Year 2026 (FY26) Department of Education (ED) budget request, featuring testimony from Education Secretary Linda McMahon. The agency's proposed \$66.7 billion budget represents a 15.3% reduction and signals the administration's intent to phase out ED, consolidate programs into block grants, and return education control to states. Secretary McMahon defended the plan as a lawful effort to eliminate waste and bureaucratic overhead while preserving funding for Title I and IDEA. Republican lawmakers generally praised the administration's school choice emphasis and efforts to reduce federal overreach, with many highlighting declining test scores and rising costs as justification for reform. Several raised concerns about student loan repayment, Chinese influence in higher education, and administrative inefficiency. Democrats, led by Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), sharply criticized the proposed cuts as an attack on public education, accusing the administration of bypassing congressional authority, unlawfully withholding funds, and undermining civil rights enforcement. DeLauro and others warned that eliminating programs like TRIO, GEAR-UP, and school-based mental health initiatives would disproportionately harm low-income and minority students. Tensions escalated over McMahon's comments referring to her role in ED's "final mission," and several Democratic members questioned the legality of the department's actions, particularly concerning program funding, staffing, and civil rights enforcement. The hearing highlighted deep partisan divides over federal education policy, with Republicans advocating decentralization and Democrats defending the ED's role in promoting equity and access. While McMahon committed to following the law and working with Congress, her remarks confirmed the administration's intention to dismantle the department unless stopped legislatively. While the White House's budget request might find some support among Hill Republicans, appropriations bills will require Senate Democratic support. That factor, plus the expectation that this year's appropriations process will most likely be resolved via a continuing resolution, reduces the relevance of the White House's request for the Department of Education's programs. House Appropriations Committee Chairman Tom Cole (R-OK) has announced that he would like to mark up spending bills in June, but many assume that the Labor, Health and Human Services and Education spending bill will be so large and contentious that it will not be marked up and most likely negotiated with the Senate at the staff level, before Members decide spending

levels for the fiscal year that begins October 1, 2025. A comprehensive summary of the hearing is [linked here](#).

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2. Budget and Appropriations Wrap-Up

Last week, the U.S. House of Representatives narrowly passed the "One Big Beautiful Bill Act of 2025" by a 215–214 vote, marking a significant step in pursuing President Trump's legislative agenda. The bill proposes extending the 2017 tax cuts and enacting substantial reductions in federal spending. Key provisions include imposing work requirements for Medicaid, potentially affecting up to 7 million beneficiaries, and cutting food stamp programs, which could impact approximately 11 million people. The legislation also bans Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) from covering gender-affirming care for individuals of all ages.

The bill now advances to the Senate, where it faces significant challenges. Several Republican senators have expressed concerns over the bill's provisions, including the Medicaid cuts and the requirement for states to partially fund federal food aid, which could burden states like Alaska and South Carolina. Senate Republicans are expected to propose substantial amendments, and if the Senate passes a different version, there will need to be negotiations with the House. The GOP aims to finalize the bill by July 4 to avoid a looming debt crisis, but significant obstacles remain before it can be signed into law.

After this week's recess, the Senate will return to Washington, DC, and turn to reconciliation, while House Appropriations Committee Chair Tom Cole (R-OK) is eager to start developing and debating FY 2026 spending bills, despite the general sentiment that funding will ultimately be resolved via a continuing resolution. He has released [a schedule of mark-ups](#). The Labor, Health and Human Services and Education spending bill—the largest and arguably most contentious of the measures—is scheduled for Subcommittee and full Committee action the week of July 21. Rumors already suggest that the bill won't be marked up at all and will likely undergo House-Senate negotiations at the staff level before appropriators decide how to resolve FY 2026 spending. Those same rumors suggest that another continuing resolution is ahead.

The White House shared some of its thinking on FY 2026 with Capitol Hill earlier this month, when it released its "skinny budget." That proposal revealed a desire to cut Education Department spending by 15% and start consolidating programs and moving them to other agencies. The full budget request has been delayed repeatedly but could come late next week. While the Administration will presumably share more details of its budgetary wish list then, Congress seems ready to proceed without much regard for that request. The power of the purse remains on Capitol Hill.

The House and Senate are in recess this week as the country marked Memorial Day and the unofficial start of the summer. Temperatures will be rising. Up and down Pennsylvania Avenue and all around the nation's capital.

How does this impact State School Board Associations?

While the House Budget Reconciliation bill does not directly cut federal education or child nutrition programs, it includes \$330 billion in mandated savings from the Education and Workforce Committee, affecting higher education initiatives such as Pell Grants and student loans. Additionally, proposed cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and

Medicaid could indirectly reduce access to free school meals, as many children qualify for these programs through their families' participation in SNAP and Medicaid. Reductions in these programs may decrease the number of schools eligible for the Community Eligibility Provision, which allows schools to offer free meals to all students. (See more [here](#).)

The bill also includes provisions for scholarships to private K–12 schools. Specifically, it incorporates the Educational Choice for Children Act, a federal tax-credit scholarship program designed to provide up to \$5 billion annually in scholarships for families to send their children to private and religious schools. Under this program, individuals and businesses can make charitable contributions to nonprofit scholarship-granting organizations and receive a dollar-for-dollar federal tax credit for their donations. These organizations then distribute the funds to eligible families to cover tuition and other educational expenses. Eligibility for these scholarships is generally limited to households earning less than three times the local median income, aiming to assist low- and middle-income families.

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3. In Brief – Last Week in Washington

HOUSE EDUCATION PANEL DEBATES DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION EFFORTS

On Wednesday, the House Education and Workforce Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development [held a highly polarized hearing](#) titled, “Restoring Excellence: The Case Against DEI,” which examined diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices in higher education. Subcommittee Chair Burgess Owens (R-UT) framed DEI as a harmful ideology that undermines merit and perpetuates division, while Ranking Member Alma Adams (D-NC) defended DEIA (adding “accessibility”) as essential for equity, opportunity, and national competitiveness. Witnesses presented sharply divergent views. [Dan Morenoff](#) of the American Civil Rights Project argued for federal action to prohibit DEI, while Manhattan Institute fellow [Renu Mukherjee](#) and [Dr. Kurt Miceli](#) of Do No Harm criticized DEI as discriminatory and counterproductive, especially in medicine. In contrast, [Dr. Shaun Harper](#) of the University of Southern California defended DEI initiatives, highlighting their empirical benefits, particularly for student outcomes, and warning that politicized attacks on DEI rely on isolated anecdotes and misinformation. Tensions flared during questioning, with Republicans challenging the legality and value of race-conscious programs and emphasizing merit-based standards. Democrats countered that DEI enhances education quality, economic opportunity, and social cohesion, especially for underrepresented students, veterans, and students with disabilities. They expressed concern over the chilling effect of anti-DEI policies and proposed Department of Education closures. Testimony also touched on the Supreme Court’s affirmative action ruling, the role of standardized tests, and the effects of eliminating DEI on Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and minority-serving institutions (MSIs). The hearing ended with Chairman Owens vowing to dismantle DEI policies entirely, while Ranking Member Adams reaffirmed their foundational role in creating a just and inclusive education system. The hearing underscored the profound partisan divide over how U.S. education institutions should address race, equity, and access in the post-affirmative action era. A comprehensive summary of the hearing is [linked here](#).

POLICY SHIFTS SPUR ADVOCACY TO PROTECT SUMMER LEARNING PROGRAMS

Last Wednesday, the [National Summer Learning Association](#) (NSLA) hosted a webinar examining recent federal policy changes and their implications for summer learning programs. The

session featured policy experts Leslie Paluch (National PTA), Erik Peterson (Afterschool Alliance), and Brandis Stockman (National League of Cities). The panel focused on developments over the past four months, particularly as the Trump Administration advances its education agenda, and highlighted the growing importance of local advocacy as power shifts to state and local governments. Panelists expressed concern about the expiration of emergency relief funds, reductions to AmeriCorps and National Science Foundation (NSF) grants, and the elimination of programs such as school gardens. They also noted staffing cuts at the Departments of Health and Human Services and Education, warning of ripple effects on civil rights enforcement, mental health services, and public education support. Proposed cuts to SNAP and Medicaid—programs that help determine school meal eligibility—could further undermine access to essential nutrition services provided by schools and summer programs. The panel also warned of the potential consequences of school voucher expansions and broader efforts to privatize education, which could strain local budgets and threaten the viability of summer initiatives. While Fiscal Year 2025 funding appears stable, Fiscal Year 2026 remains uncertain. In response, panelists encouraged program leaders and families to engage in local advocacy: join PTAs, host site visits for policymakers, and share personal impact stories with national advocacy groups like the National Council for Nonprofits. Strengthening partnerships with local governments was emphasized as essential to sustaining youth programs. [National Summer Learning Week](#) (July 14–18) was identified as a critical moment to build public awareness and support. Overall, the webinar served as both an informative policy update and a call to action to protect equitable access to summer learning.

SPLIT SCOTUS DECISION DENIES OPENING OF OK RELIGIOUS CHARTER SCHOOL

On Thursday May 22nd, the U.S. Supreme Court [issued a 4-4 split decision](#) in a pivotal case concerning the intersection of religion and public education, effectively blocking the creation of the nation's first faith-based charter school—St. Isidore of Seville Catholic Virtual School in Oklahoma. The deadlock, caused by Justice Amy Coney Barrett's recusal due to a personal connection, leaves the Oklahoma Supreme Court's ruling against the school intact but sets no national precedent. Further, the verdict did not indicate how the justices voted. The decision preserves the status quo, allowing states to maintain secular charter school systems without funding religious institutions. Supporters, including the Trump Administration, argued that excluding St. Isidore amounted to unconstitutional religious discrimination, seeking to expand recent rulings favoring religious rights. However, opponents maintained that public charter schools must remain nonsectarian, as mandated by federal and many state laws. Chief Justice John Roberts, considered the swing vote, appeared to side with the court's liberal justices, citing greater government entanglement if religious charter schools were allowed. The ruling leaves unresolved the broader constitutional question, meaning similar cases could reach the Court again. The case had major implications for charter school policy nationwide, potentially impacting laws in 46 states and billions in federal education funding.

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4. New Publications

[**SUN Meals To-Go: Addressing Summer Child Hunger in Rural America**](#)

Urban Institute (May 2025)

The report highlights the SUN Meals To-Go program, made permanent in 2023, and notes that implementation has faced challenges due to late federal guidance and shifting rules. The report recommends enhancing funding, staffing flexibility, clearer pickup policies, and expanding eligibility to urban areas to improve future program uptake and effectiveness.

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5. In the News

Senate HELP Committee Advances President Trump's Labor, Education Nominees

US Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (May 22, 2025)

Judge Halts Dismantling of Education Department, Orders Fired Workers to be Reinstated

NBC News (May 22, 2025)

Educators Fear Their Homeless Students Could Become a Target for Trump Cuts

NPR (May 22, 2025)

Head Start May Have Gotten a Reprieve, but It's Not Out of the Woods

The 74 (May 19, 2025)

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THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON

6. Weekly Calendar

Tuesday, May 27, 2025

Webinar: Disparate Impact and Why we Need It

Subject: The American Association of People With Disabilities will hold a virtual discussion on "Protecting Disabled Students Part 2: What is Disparate Impact and Why Do We Need It?"

Participants: Katherine Neas, CEO, Arc of the United States; Elijah Armstrong, disabled advocate, student, Stanford Law School, and founder, Equal Opportunities for Students; and Samuel Bagenstos, professor, University of Michigan Law School.

Time: 3:00 p.m.

Contact: Register [here.](#)

Thursday, May 29, 2025

Webinar: State of the Parents Rights Movement

Subject: The Cato Institute will hold a conference on "The State of Parental Rights, 100 Years After Pierce v. Society of Sisters."

Time: 9:00 a.m.

Contact: Register [here.](#)

Friday, May 30, 2025

Webinar: Addressing Chronic Absenteeism

Subject: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research will hold a discussion on "Addressing the Attendance Crisis: New Research on Chronic Absenteeism Since the Pandemic."

Participants: Sam Hollon, data analyst, AEI; Sarah Lenhoff, professor, Wayne State University; Nat Malkus, deputy director of education policy studies, AEI; and Jeremy Singer, associate director, Detroit Partnership for Education Equity & Research, Wayne State University.

Time: 2:00 p.m.

Contact: Register [here](#).

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7. On The Floor of Congress This Week

The House and Senate are in recess.

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8. Links for Up-to-Date Information on Hearings, Legislation, and Events

[U.S. House and Senate 2025 Schedule](#)

[U.S. Department of Education](#)

[U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions](#)

[U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor](#)

[U.S. Senate Budget Committee](#)

[U.S. House Budget Committee](#)

[Congressional Budget Office](#)

[Federal legislative information](#)

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9. About BPAG

Bose Public Affairs Group is a full-service government affairs and public relations consulting firm that has built a reputation for producing results. We partner with clients committed to excellence in education and other social services to achieve policy and advocacy success by:

- leveraging our expertise and passion;
- strategizing intelligent solutions; and,
- Creating meaningful impact.

Our team includes long-term insiders in education policy from Pre-K through higher education, innovative thinkers and savvy strategists that provide a comprehensive array of customized client services. We have the knowledge, skills, and relationships that are necessary for successful advocacy at all levels. From grassroots to grass tops and everything in between, our broad-based legislative practice approaches every project with the same degree of determination and professionalism. BPAG provides expertise in a variety of services:

- Government Relations
- Research and Analysis
- Advocacy Training
- Association Management
- Strategic Communications
- Policy Events

For more information, please visit our [website](#).

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