MSBA and COSSBA Federal Advocacy Update

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The **MSBA and COSSBA Federal Advocacy Update** provides timely news about current public education issues affecting Minnesota Schools.

MSBA became a charter member of the Consortium of State School Boards Associations (COSSBA) in 2021. COSSBA is a nonpartisan, national alliance dedicated to sharing resources to support, promote, and strengthen state school boards associations as they serve their local school districts and board members. COSSBA works to advance federal congressional priorities on behalf of 25 state school board association members.

Congress is midway through the 118th United States Congress which convened in Washington, D.C., on January 3, 2023, and will end on January 3, 2025. A Congress lasts for two years with each year constituting a separate session. Congress has been split since the Republicans took control of the House in the 2022 midterm elections. The Republicans control 220 of the 435 seats in the House of Representatives. The Democrats control the U.S. Senate with a 51-49 split.

In the U.S. House, education policy is addressed in the **Education and the Workforce** committee while in the U.S. Senate, education policy work is done in the **Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP)** committee. The scope of education issues falls under the Federal Agency of the **US Department of Education (ED)** which is led by Dr. Miguel Cardona, the Secretary of Education.

Congress narrowly avoided a partial government shutdown last Friday, January 19, by approving a stopgap measure to continue government funding until early March. This short-term funding bill is the third continuing resolution (CR) passed by the 118th Congress to avoid shutdown. Lawmakers now have until early March to get their work done and come to agreement on the appropriations for 12 government funding bills.
Three Things to Know:

1. **Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) Guidance**
   
   As our Minnesota high school students are making plans for future career and college plans, Senator Tina Smith collaborated with her bipartisan colleagues to write a letter to Secretary Cardona advocating for clarity in the new FAFSA application.

   As a result of the 2020 FAFSA Simplification Act, the redesigned application is easier to complete with fewer questions and will allow more students to access the maximum Pell Grant award. While the FAFSA is typically available to students to complete in October, the modified FAFSA was not ready for students until early January, three months later than usual.

   The redesigned FAFSA is now available at [FAFSA.gov](https://www.fafsa.gov) and can be submitted until June 30, 2024. However, according to the letter, “processing delays will take place in the first few months of 2024, meaning that schools will not be able to generate financial aid offers for students in a timely fashion ... delays can be particularly burdensome to students who lack reliable broadband access, students in foster care, students experiencing homelessness, first generation students, students experiencing financial insecurity, and so many more.”

   The letter to Secretary Cardona requested clear timelines, adequate staffing of FAFSA help centers, clear application instructions, a modified timeline to accommodate the delays and several other items to support student success in the process. Visit this link to [read the full letter](https://www.fafsa.gov).

2. **Clean School Bus Funding**

   Minnesota has been chosen to receive Clean School Bus Funding from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), a program that was adopted under the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. According to the EPA, the Clean School Bus Program pays for electric buses that produce zero tailpipe emissions as well as propane and compressed natural gas buses which have lower emissions than older diesel buses. The aim of the Clean School Bus Program is to improve air quality and protect student and community health.

   This federal investment of over $68 million dollars will fund clean school buses in six midwestern states, including Minnesota, through partnerships with the transportation companies First Student Inc. and Highland CSB1.

   For more information on the EPA’s Clean School Bus Program, see the [Clean School Bus Program website](https://www.epa.gov).
3. **Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) Program**

   According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), a new permanent nutrition assistance program called Summer Electronic Benefits Transfer will be implemented in summer 2024. This program will provide $40 dollars per child monthly during the summer months for students who qualify for free and reduced priced meals. Funding for this program was approved by Congress in 2022 with approval of the Consolidated Appropriations Act.

   Minnesota is one of over 30 states that enrolled in this new USDA program which is separate from federally funded summer meal programs available in past years. The USDA is encouraging students to take advantage of all summer meal programs to improve nutrition and decrease food insecurity. For more details, visit the [USDA's Summer EBT Program website](#).

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How can Minnesota school board members be ready to advocate at the federal level? We hope that the [MSBA and COSSBA Federal Update](#) will keep you educated on the issues that are relevant to Minnesota schools. Watch this update for future advocacy opportunities!

If you’re unsure who represents you in Washington, D.C., visit this [link](#). For more information on the Minnesota delegation in Washington, see this directory for [Minnesota Members of Congress](#).