MSBA and COSSBA Federal Advocacy Update

March 6, 2024
By Andrea Cuene, MSBA Federal Advocacy Liaison

The MSBA and COSSBA Federal Advocacy Update is your 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.

Late last week, the U.S. House and Senate passed another continuing resolution (CR) that prevents federal agencies from shutting down while lawmakers continue to work on the fiscal year (FY) 2024 spending bills. This fourth CR was passed overwhelmingly by both chambers and sets the stage for the collaboration needed to approve all the appropriations bills including the Health, Human Services and Education spending bill which must be approved by March 22 to avoid any agency closures.

While education advocates are still analyzing the full impact, overall, these bills represent a small 0.3% increase in funding levels over the FY 2023 funding. The most important impact for children and families is the full funding of the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program (SNAP) for Women, Infant, and Children also known as the WIC Program, which will ensure no families in the program lose critical support for food aid.

The CR also increased the funding for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to address the issues that have resulted from the late release of the revamped application and delays in the Department of Education’s (ED) ability to process financial aid data.

To read the full COSSBA Federal Education Report dated March 4, 2024, visit this link. You can also read the most recent COSSBA Court Report here.
Top Three Federal Education Updates

1. U.S. Department of Education Urges Schools to Help Students Register to Vote

A new, nonpartisan guide has been released by the U.S. Department of Education to help schools encourage students to register to vote. According to U.S. Secretary of Education, Miguel Cardona, “Voting is fundamental to our democracy, and our schools and colleges play an important role in helping our students become active participants in our democratic society, from providing civic education during a student's elementary and secondary school years to facilitating the voting process for all students during their postsecondary educational experience, our education system helps students engage in the electoral process. I’m proud that the resources we are releasing today will help reduce the barriers and obstacles many students — especially our underserved students — face in participating fully in our democracy.”

To access this new resource, visit: U.S. Department of Education Toolkit for the Promotion of Voter Participation for Students.

2. U.S. Department of Education Opens School-Based Mental Health Support Grant Applications

Last week, U.S. Department of Education opened applications to help increase numbers of mental health professionals and available services serving students in school-based programs. The two grant programs — School-Based Mental Health Services Grant Program (SBMH) and the Mental Health Service Professional Demonstration Grant Program (MHSP) — align with the Biden Administration’s commitment to address the mental health crisis, particularly among youth, as outlined in the President’s National Mental Health Strategy. Approximately $38 million has been appropriated to address the shortages in schools across the country.

Applications for SBMH can be accessed here, and are due on April 30, 2024. Applications for MHSP can be accessed here, and are due on May 15, 2024.

3. U.S. Department of Education Opens Grant Applications for Educational Technology Media and Materials for Individuals with Disabilities Program

The U.S. Department of Education issued a notice inviting applications for new awards for fiscal year 2024 for Stepping-up Technology Implementation for students with disabilities. The purpose of this program is to improve outcomes for students who receive special education services. The four priority areas include (1) promoting the development, demonstration, and use of technology; (2) supporting educational activities designed to be of educational value in the classroom for children with disabilities; (3) providing support for captioning and video description that is appropriate for use in the classroom; and (4) providing accessible educational materials to children with disabilities in a timely manner.
This award opportunity is particularly focused on improved student outcomes using technology that integrates artificial intelligence (AI).

To access more detailed information about this grant opportunity, please visit this link.

**Watch this update for future advocacy opportunities!** If you’re unsure who represents you in Washington DC, visit this link. For more information on the Minnesota delegation in Washington, see this directory for Minnesota Members of Congress.