MSBA and COSSBA Federal Advocacy Update

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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.

The FY2025 appropriations process is well underway. Last week, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona presented the Department of Education’s (ED) FY 2025 budget request in the House Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (LHHS) Committee. The request is a $500 million (0.63%) increase over FY 2024 which adheres to the Fiscal Responsibility Act budget caps. Secretary Cardona’s testimony was met with questions about Title IX regulation, charter school support, concerns about Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) processing, campus safety, free speech, and recovery from the pandemic. The hearing can be viewed at this link.

Also of note, the LHHS committee has a new chair, Representative Tom Cole (R-OK). Representative Cole has a history of working across the aisle as a member of the LHHS Committee.

For more details, you can read the full COSSBA Weekly Education Report dated April 15 and the most recent COSSBA Court Report.

Top Three Federal Education Updates

1. Department of Education (ED) launches the Cybersecurity Government Coordinating Council
Unfortunately, Minnesota school districts are well aware of the threats that ransomware attacks and other cybersecurity breaches can pose on district operations and student learning. In partnership with the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA), ED has launched the Government Coordinating Council (GCC) to enhance cybersecurity across all K-12 education institutions. School districts across the country are experiencing ransomware attacks that shut down schools and data breaches that expose sensitive health, financial, and educational data on students, families, and staff. The formation of the GCC is a direct response to these challenges,
aiming to foster a more resilient and secure K-12 digital infrastructure through structured dialogue and shared best practices.

According to ED, the GCC will provide an unprecedented level of collaboration between federal, state, tribal, and local governments to protect schools from cybersecurity threats. To learn more about the ED’s plan to strengthen cybersecurity in schools, visit this link.

2. Federal Efforts to Expand Pathways into Teaching
The Department of Education (ED), and the Department of Labor (DOL), announced new efforts to expand high-quality and affordable pathways into teaching, as well as to increase pay and strengthen working conditions across the early childhood, K-12, and higher education workforce.

As part of this initiative, ED and DOL announced availability of new funding to support the expansion of pathways into careers in education, addressing a key factor driving educator shortages. ED will invest nearly $50 million to expand high-quality and affordable educator preparation programs including $25 million in the Teacher Quality Partnership Grant program, $8 million in the National Professional Development program, and $15 million for the Augustus F. Hawkins Centers of Excellence program. In addition, DOL will invest nearly $200 million to support Registered Apprenticeships, which includes K-12 teachers as a priority occupation.

While a majority of the funding described will flow to higher education institutions, the $8 million invested in the National Professional Development program will support K-12 teachers with an emphasis on effective instruction for English Learners (EL).

3. Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) “Week of Action” Held by the Department of Education (ED)
As our Minnesota high school students are making decisions for upcoming career and college planning, the rollout of the new, revamped FAFSA application has continued to present challenges. According to the College Attainment Network, compared to this time last year, FAFSA applications are down by over 36% across the country. In Minnesota, FAFSA applications are down by 30%. In addition, ED announced that up to 20% of the FAFSAs submitted in 2024 will need to be reprocessed because of tax miscalculations. In response to these issues, ED and the administration declared April 15-19 to be a “Week of Action” to encourage and support students in FAFSA completion.

According to ED, recommended actions include collaboration between all high school staff, parent groups, nonprofit groups, libraries, and elected officials to provide events that support FAFSA completion. Examples include in-person or virtual submission workshops, in-school FAFSA clinics, text reminders, and promotion on social media. ED has prepared a document to describe these efforts.

If you would like to access the most recent updates from ED on students’ ability to make corrections on their FAFSA as well as processing and reprocessing timelines, please see this link.

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.