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 boards association members.

Both the U.S. House and Senate will be back in action next week with only about nine legislative weeks between now and the planned August recess. Bose Public Affairs Group, COSSBA’s government affairs firm, reported that it’s no secret that the FY 2025 budget and appropriations process is already behind schedule and likely will not be completed until after the November elections.

In the meantime, the House Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations Subcommittee will be accepting written testimony on the budget until May third. This subcommittee also heard from the Department of Labor (DOL) Acting Secretary Julie Su on the administration’s FY 2025 budget request and Resident Apprenticeship Programs. There was also a hearing in the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee to examine solutions to protect children online.

In the Senate Appropriations Committee on Labor, Health and Human Services and Education, testimony was heard from Health and Human Services Secretary (HHS) Xavier Becerra about the administration’s efforts to expand affordable childcare, increase HeadStart slots, and provide universal preschool for the nation’s four-year-olds.

To learn more about any of these hearings, please refer to the full COSSBA Weekly Education Report dated April 22, 2024.
Top Three Federal Education Updates

1. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has Released Final Rule on School Meals

Last week, the USDA issued the final rules on updates to the nutrition standards for school meals. According to the USDA, the new standards are part of the administration’s goal for improving the overall health of the almost 30 million American children who eat their meals at school each day. The rulemaking takes effect on July 1, 2024; however, the USDA has created a timeline that allows school districts to phase in the required changes over the next several school years. Noteworthy changes include:

- Starting July 1, 2025, breakfast cereals are limited to six grams of sugar per ounce and yogurt is limited to two grams of added sugar per ounce. Overall sugar will be limited to less than 10% of total calories starting in the 2027-2028 school year.
- Both unflavored and flavored milk will be allowed but the flavored milk will have a new limit for added sugar starting in the 2025-2026 school year. Both non-fat and low-fat milk will also be allowed.
- No changes to the present nutrition standards for whole grains.
- Sodium level limits will decrease by 15% in lunches and 10% in breakfasts starting in the 2027-2028 school year.

For more details, read the complete new rules published by the USDA's Food and Nutrition Service, or this summary document from the USDA. The USDA has also published helpful resources that compare the final rules to the 2023 proposed changes and provide a media toolkit for school district use. Find these resources at this link.

2. Minnesota Senators Announce Funding to Increase Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) Pipeline

Minnesota Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith announced two grants for Minnesota middle schools, high schools, colleges, and universities to strengthen Minnesota’s STEM talent pipeline. According to a Senator Smith press release, one award sponsors the North Star STEM Alliance, a program that supports public, private, and Tribal colleges and universities in their efforts to significantly increase the numbers of students enrolling into and successfully completing high quality degree programs in STEM disciplines.

The other award supports the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities campus to partner with Saint Paul Public Schools (SPPS) and Hamline University, among others, to expand professional development opportunities for 18 science teachers working in diverse schools.
The funding will be used to support this effort from middle school through secondary and postgraduate education. The goal of the funding provided to St. Paul Public Schools is to improve access to a science education for middle school and high school students. To read more details about this STEM funding, read the full press release.

3. The U.S. Department of Education (ED) Releases Title IX Rule

Last Friday, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) issued its long-awaited Title IX rule, which confirms protections for LGBTQI+ students and employees, as well as pregnant students and employees, under the civil rights law that prevents sex-based discrimination in federally funded education programs. According to ED, the new rule defines sex-based harassment as including harassment based on sex stereotypes, sex characteristics, pregnancy and related conditions, and gender identity and sexual orientation. Among other changes, the new regulations will also reinstate the single-investigator model, require schools to provide breastfeeding rooms for students and employees, and provide more discretion to schools and colleges to tailor Title IX policies based on their needs.

The new Title IX Rule is expected to be published in the Federal Register later this month, after which schools and colleges will have until August 1, 2024, to implement it. The Department has released a fact sheet which can be accessed using this link.

If you would like to learn more about the background and timeline of how Title IX has impacted public schools, K-12 Dive put together this timeline in anticipation of the new rulemaking.

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.