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.

The U.S. House was in recess this week while the U.S. Senate was in session. The opposite will be true next week, then both chambers will be in recess the week of Independence Day. Due to the Republican National Convention, both chambers will also be in recess the week of July 15. This leaves only three full weeks for spending bills to be approved before the August break.

Last week, the House Appropriations Committee approved the Homeland Security and State and Foreign Operations bills. The House Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (LHHS) bill must be developed by Subcommittee Chairman Robert Aderhold (R-AL). Full Committee debate on the bill is tentatively set for the second week of July.

According to COSSBA’s government relations team, Bose Public Affairs Group, House Appropriations Committee Chairman Tom Cole (R-OK) has served as chair of the LHHS Subcommittee himself and knows the bill’s challenges. Last week, he said he is relying on the panel’s current leader to produce a bill, saying to reporters that he is allowing the subcommittee chairs to write their own bills without him. Of the LHHS bill, he said, “I think the Department of Education, honestly, has been consistently overfunded and tries to regulate too much from Washington, D.C., and not allow the states with maximum flexibility on particularly the use of federal dollars …”

Outside of spending issues, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a hearing on the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Earlier this year, the House passed a bipartisan bill to revise WIOA. If the Senate develops its own bipartisan plan, there is a chance an update could be approved by the 118th Congress during what is expected to be a productive lame duck session.

To read the full COSSBA Weekly Education Report dated June 18, 2024, please visit this link.
Top Three Federal Education Updates

1. U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Funding will Impact Child Nutrition
Last week, the House Appropriations Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration approved its FY25 spending bill. The measure includes mandatory funding for the National School Lunch Program, the School Breakfast Program and Summer Food Programs, as well as funding for broadband.

The bill would provide $25.9 billion to agencies and programs it covers, $355 million below the Fiscal Year 2024 (FY24) enacted level and $2.69 billion below the president’s budget request. The bill provides $22 billion to USDA, $308 million less than FY24 and $2.5 billion below the President’s Budget Request. There was not bipartisan agreement on the overall impact of the spending bill. To read the Appropriation Committee’s summary of the bill, visit this link.

2. U.S. Surgeon General Calls for Warning Label on Social Media Platforms
The U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek Murthy, wrote an essay in the New York Times this week explaining his call for a warning label on social media platforms. He believes that student use of social media is contributing to a mental health crisis. According to the article, “a surgeon general’s warning label, which requires congressional action, would regularly remind parents and adolescents that social media has not been proved safe ... Schools should ensure that classroom learning, and social time are phone-free experiences.” To read the full article in the New York Times, visit this link.

This issue has been coming up in school districts across the country. In Minnesota, during the 2024 legislative session, a School Cell Phone Policy was part of the Education Policy bill. The new statute states that by March 15, 2025, school districts must adopt a policy regarding students’ possession and use of cell phones while in school. The Minnesota Principals Association is tasked with providing schools with best practices for managing cell phone use to reduce its negative effects on student behavior, mental health, and academic performance.

3. Updated Resources for Summer Meals for Minnesota Students
As reported in the May 31, 2024, MSBA and COSSBA Federal Advocacy Report, the USDA’s summer meal programs include three new initiatives to provide a permanent summer electronic benefits transfer (EBT) program. In response to these new initiatives, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) partnered with the Hunger Impact Partners to develop a mobile app, Free Meals for Kids, which will connect families to sites and information across the state where meals can be accessed. The app can be downloaded using a link on the Hunger Impact Partners website.

In addition, Hunger Impact Partners have compiled a list of flyers to display summer meal information in six different languages as well as videos from Second Harvest Heartland that explain meal options in English, Spanish, Hmong and Somali.

Finally, the MDE has recently updated their website to reflect the USDA’s summer meal programs. Visit this link to find a summer meal hotline, USDA Handbooks, fact sheets and other outreach and promotion resources.
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.