MSBA and COSSBA Federal Advocacy Update

June 27, 2024

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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 boards association members.

This week, the U.S. House was in session while the U.S. Senate was in recess (the opposite of last week). Because the House is driving the FY25 appropriations process, not much progress was made last week but they are back in action, marking up funding bills and trying to adhere to the ambitious schedule that has been set by the House Appropriations Committee Chair, Representative Tom Cole (R-OK). As a reminder, FY25 begins on October 1, 2024, and runs through September 30, 2025.

The House Labor, Health and Human Services and Education spending bill is scheduled for action on Thursday, June 27. In recent years, the action on this controversial bill has been repeatedly rescheduled, so education advocates will be watching for delays. When the bill is marked up, education advocates expect the panel to propose significant cuts to education and other non-defense investments.

In the U. S. Senate, there is evidence that they are already preparing to counter expected House-proposed funding cuts. The Senate Appropriations Committee Chair, Patty Murray (D-WA) released a fact sheet with details about the impact of the required Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA) spending caps on non-defense appropriations. Last summer, Congress signed the FRA into law which raised the debt ceiling and prevented default, but also imposed the aforementioned budget cuts for FY24 and FY25.

The Senate Health Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee (HELP) has been busy with hearings on a number of K-12 issues. Last week, they held a hearing that may be a precursor to a K-12 education bill from Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-VT). To watch the full hearing, visit this link. Bose Public Affairs Group has also prepared a detailed summary of the hearing for COSSBA members.

To read the complete COSSBA Weekly Education Report for June 24, 2024, please visit this link.
Top Three Federal Education Updates

1. Full Funding for the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) is Critical for Public Education

This week, the School Superintendents Association and the IDEA Full Funding Coalition held a webinar briefing titled “Invest in Everyone: IDEA and the Importance of Full Funding.” One of the authors of the IDEA Full Funding Act, Representative Jared Huffman (D-CA), encouraged education advocates to continue to put pressure on Congress to make good on its original commitment made in 1975 with the first iteration of IDEA.

With IDEA’s original passage in 1975, Congress realized the additional cost that would result from the implementation of mandated special education services for eligible students. They committed to making the investment of 40% of the additional costs incurred. Unfortunately, Congress has fallen short of its commitment with the highest allocation reaching 18% of additional costs in 2005. Presently, the federal allocation is less than 13% of the additional costs.

Noelle Ellerson Ng, the Associate Director of the School Superintendents Association commented that the current federal appropriations for IDEA are “not even 40% of 40%!”

The IDEA Full Funding Act has a history of bipartisan support in both the House and the Senate but is currently bipartisan only in the House. Minnesota cosponsors include Senator Klobuchar, Senator Smith, Representative Stauber, Representative Phillips, Representative Craig, Representative McCollum and Representative Omar.

2. Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee Examines Challenges facing Public School Teachers

The Senate HELP Committee has been busy with hearings on a number of K-12 issues. Last week, they held a hearing that may be a precursor to a K-12 education bill from Chairman Bernie Sanders (I-VT). The hearing examined immediate and long-term challenges facing public school teachers, including low pay, teacher shortages, and underfunded public schools.

In his opening remarks, Senator Sanders said the hearing gave Committee members the opportunity to “hear directly from educators from across our country about the enormous effort it takes to provide a quality public education for every child in our country.” He asserted that quality education for all is key to a “bright and hopeful future for our country,” but argued that, for decades, teachers “have been overworked, underpaid, understaffed, and maybe most importantly, underappreciated.”

Other topics discussed included challenges with staff retention, staff vacancies, and shortages, especially in special education. To watch the full hearing, visit this link. Bose Public Affairs Group has also prepared a detailed summary of the hearing for COSSBA members.
3. Report on the Condition of Education 2024 has been Released

This annual Report on the Condition of Education is mandated by the U.S. Congress. This year’s edition features the collection and analysis of data as well as reporting completed by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). The report summarizes this data on education in the U.S. spanning from early childhood education to postsecondary education. It covers a wide range of topics including enrollment, achievement, teachers, education funding and international comparisons. The data used in this report ranges from 2021 to 2023 and sheds new light on students’ learning recovery after the pandemic.

According to the NCES 2024 report, some key findings include:

- Private K-12 enrollment was 4.7 million students in both fall 2019 and 2021 while public school enrollment was 2% lower in fall of 2021 then in fall of 2019.
- Overall, in 2022, 59 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds were enrolled in school and some 20 percent of 3- to 5-year-olds were receiving a private education, including home schooling.
- Among 12th graders, the graduation rate for public school students was 87% in 2021-22.
- In 2020-21, among public schools hiring Career and Technical Education (CTE) teachers, 31 percent had difficulty or were unable to fill open positions in CTE.
- The percentage of public-school students in the U.S. who were English Learners (EL) has increased between fall 2011 at 9.4% to fall 2021 at 10.6%. In Minnesota, 8.8% of students are EL.

For access to the full 2024 Report on the Condition of Education, visit 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.