The Consortium of State School Boards Associations
Weekly Education Report

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The COSSBA Education Report, a weekly publication, provides an executive summary of public policy issues affecting American K-12 education and employment. **Please use the bookmarks below to navigate to your area of interest:**

1. **News, Publications, & Updates on COSSBA Policy Priorities**
   - **COSSBA Legislative Advocacy Actions**
     - **COSSBA Applauds FY 2026 Education Funding**: The Consortium of State School Boards Associations (COSSBA) thanked bipartisan congressional leaders for advancing an FY 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) spending bill that rejects proposed cuts to federal K–12 programs and largely maintains level funding.
   - **Teacher Recruitment and Retention**
     - **Investing in Teachers and Families Through Paid Parental Leave**: The National Council on Teacher Quality released a report finding that paid parental leave strengthens families and the workforce.

2. **Budget and Appropriations Wrap-up**
   - **Impact on State School Board Associations**

3. **In Brief – Last Week in Washington**
   - **HELP Chair Cassidy Issues RFI on Improving Academic Growth**: On Monday, Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA) issued a Request for Information titled, "Informing Parents and Policymakers Through School-Level Academic Growth Indicators," highlighting that U.S. student achievement has been declining since before COVID-19.

- **Rahm Emanual on Supporting Students over Politics:** On Wednesday, former Ambassador to Japan and former Mayor of Chicago Rahm Emanuel was featured as a guest in the Center for American Progress' flagship speaker series, *What's Next: Conversations on the Path Forward*.
- **House Education Committee Marks Up Charter School, Facilities Bills:** On Wednesday, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce **marked up** three bills, two of which focused on facilitating charter school growth.
- **Hunt Institute Reviews 2026 Across the Aisle Opinion Survey Results:** On Thursday, the Hunt Institute held a webinar examining its **2026 Across the Aisle public opinion survey**, conducted in conjunction with Burson Insights.
- **Parental Rights Experts Discuss Post-*Mahmoud* Classrooms:** On Thursday, the American Enterprise Institute and Catholic University of America's Center for Law & the Human Person convened two panels of legal and philosophical experts for a discussion entitled, "**Parental Rights in Education after *Mahmoud v. Taylor*: Legal and Cultural Assessments**."

4. New Publications

- **Transferring K-12 Programs to Labor: Why Costs and Logistics Could Be a Problem for States and Schools**
  Bipartisan Policy Center (December 2025)
  This issue brief explores questions and potential challenges surrounding the transfer of functions of one of the program offices, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, to the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Agency, as well as the potential impact on states and schools.

5. In the News

- **U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon Celebrates President Trump's Historic First Year**
  U.S. Department of Education (January 20, 2026)
- **Bipartisan K-12 Budget Proposal Would Stall Gutting Of Education Department**
  K-12 Dive (January 20, 2026)

6. Weekly Calendar - What's coming up this week?

- **Examining School-Level Poverty Rates:** The Urban Institute will hold a webinar on "Using MEPS (Model Estimates of Poverty in Schools) 2.0 to Study School-Level Student Poverty Rates Over Time."
  Tuesday at 2pm ET
- **Forward with Families:** Ascend at the Aspen Institute will hold its 2026 Aspen Forum on Children and Families."
  Wednesday from 9am-4pm ET
- **Empowering Families Through Educational Choice in America:** The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee holds a hearing on "Empowering Families Through Educational Choice in America."
  Wednesday at 11am ET

7. **Weekly Calendar – Future Events**
- **Bullying in Public Schools:** The Heritage Foundation will hold a discussion on "Policy Answers to Bullying in Public Schools."
  February 5 at 11am ET

8. **On The Floor of Congress This Week**
- **Senate floor**: Potential consideration of further appropriations legislation
- **House floor (in recess)**: Consideration of items related to Fiscal Year 2026 Appropriations are possible.

9. **Important U.S. House and Senate Links**

10. **About BPAG**

1. COSSBA Policy Priorities

COSSBA LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY ACTIONS

COSSBA APPLAUDS FY 2026 EDUCATION FUNDING

In a January 22 **letter**, the Consortium of State School Boards Associations (COSSBA) thanks bipartisan congressional leaders for advancing an FY 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) spending bill that rejects proposed cuts to federal K–12 programs and largely maintains level funding. The COSSBA letter emphasizes the importance of robust federal investments and proper, timely disbursement of funds as directed by statute. The letter highlights three priority programs: Title I, for supporting low-income students and closing achievement gaps; Title IV–Part A (Student Support and Academic Enrichment Grants), for flexible funding including mental health services and student well-being; and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), noting longstanding federal underfunding and the need to relieve financial burdens on states and districts. COSSBA concludes that sustained investment in these programs is essential to educational equity, student success, and long-term national benefits, and expresses appreciation for Congress's continued support. Read the letter **here**.

TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

INVESTING IN TEACHERS, FAMILIES THROUGH PAID PARENTAL LEAVE

The National Council on Teacher Quality **released a report** finding that paid parental leave strengthens families and the workforce. It improves health outcomes for parents and infants, reduces postpartum depression, and encourages greater parental engagement—especially among fathers—leading to more stable families. For teachers, paid leave helps them return to the classroom focused and ready to support student success. It also boosts workforce stability by increasing the likelihood that employees return to their jobs instead of leaving the labor force. Finally, stronger benefits like paid family leave can help attract more talented and diverse candidates into teaching. Read the report **here**.

Back to top

2. Budget and Appropriations Wrap-Up

The House approved a Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 appropriations mini-bus on January 22, 2026, following floor debate that focused heavily on education funding priorities—particularly K-12 programs—in the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education portion of the bill.

Debate over K-12 funding largely centered on how the final agreement compared with earlier House Republican proposals and the administration's budget request. Democrats argued the bill represented a clear rejection of previously proposed cuts to core K-12 formula programs, while Republicans emphasized fiscal restraint and framed the package as a targeted investment in skills development and workforce readiness rather than an expansion of federal education spending.

Republicans managing the bill highlighted these funding levels as evidence that the House was prioritizing core education programs while keeping overall discretionary spending in check. House Appropriations Chair Tom Cole (R-OK), the floor manager for the package, argued that the legislation "invests in students gaining skills, workers finding opportunity, and communities staying healthy," while allowing Congress to complete its work on FY 2026 appropriations before the looming funding deadline, which is four months into FY 2026.

Democrats countered that the bill was notable less for expanding education spending than for preventing deeper cuts and constraining executive branch proposals. House Appropriations Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) said the agreement reversed administration efforts to eliminate key education programs, stating that "where the White House attempted to eliminate entire programs, we chose to increase their funding." Of course, DeLauro and her Democratic colleagues were disappointed that the bill did not include language that resisted the Administration's intentions to implement Interagency Agreements between the Department of Education (ED) and other agencies that would significantly diminish the size and role of the agency in an effort to fulfill White House plans to "dismantle" it.

With House passage complete, the focus now shifts to the Senate, where lawmakers must take up the Labor-HHS-Education bill as part of the broader mini-bus package. Winter weather could prevent travel early this week, and complicating matters further, the Senate is setting up for **another standoff over government funding** after federal agents shot and killed a Minneapolis resident on Saturday, which has led to disputes over Department of Homeland Security (DHS) funding. The funding for DHS is included in the package of funding for ED. The current continuing resolution funding the federal government expires on January 30, 2026. Any Senate amendments would require additional House action, and the House is in recess this week.

If the Senate passes the House-approved measure without changes, the legislation would presumably be sent directly to President Donald Trump for signature ahead of the January 30 deadline. Advocates will hardly have time to catch their breath before the FY 2027 process gets started with the February 24th State of the Union Address that will presumably offer a preview of the White House's budget plans for FY 2027. A budget request will follow, and the process will once again begin, with lawmakers almost certainly wanting to not make any difficult budgeting decisions too close to the midterm elections. More continuing resolutions are likely ahead.

How does this impact State School Board Associations?

Under the negotiated agreement, funding for major K-12 programs was largely restored or increased compared with earlier House drafts. Title I grants to local educational agencies are funded at $18.4 billion, a $4.7 billion increase over last year's House Republican bill. Special education funding under IDEA is set at $15.5 billion, a modest increase over FY 2025. The bill restores funding for Title II-A teacher quality grants and the English Language Acquisition program, both of which had been eliminated in the prior House proposal, while maintaining level

funding for programs such as 21st Century Community Learning Centers and Student Support and Academic Enrichment grants.

Back to top.

3. In Brief – Last Week in Washington

HELP CHAIR CASSIDY ISSUES RFI ON IMPROVING ACADEMIC GROWTH

On Monday, Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA) **issued a Request for Information** (RFI) titled, "Informing Parents and Policymakers Through School-Level Academic Growth Indicators," highlighting that U.S. student achievement—especially among low-performing and low-income students—has been declining since before COVID-19, with large gaps persisting between students from low- and high-SES families. The Committee argues that school quality should be judged not only by average test scores but by how much students grow academically, noting that nearly all states now track some form of student growth, though methods and transparency vary widely. The RFI outlines three policy goals: creating fairer measures of school quality that reflect growth, empowering families by making growth data clear and accessible, and informing policymakers by improving how growth data are used for accountability and decision-making. It also points to limitations in current systems, including inconsistent state practices, lack of growth data in early grades, and the inability of NAEP to measure student growth over time. To inform potential bipartisan reforms, the Committee invites feedback on how federal policy can better support state innovation, improve communication of growth data, and remove barriers to using growth measures, with responses due by February 13, 2026 at K12Growth@help.senate.gov.

RAHM EMANUEL ON SUPPORTING STUDENTS OVER POLITICS

On Wednesday, former Ambassador to Japan and former Mayor of Chicago Rahm Emanuel was featured as a guest in the Center for American Progress' flagship speaker series, *What's Next: Conversations on the Path Forward*. At the event, entitled *Putting Students Before Politics*, Emanuel referenced the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) report, which found that **12th grade reading levels in the US hit a 30-year low**, with **similar trends in mathematics.** Emanuel expressed his belief that "both parties have walked away from public education," first characterizing Republican pushes for school waiver programs as lacking accountability, before criticizing policy that replaced the No Child Left Behind Act as "overshooting," promoting "teaching to a test," and allowing for lowered educational standards. He spoke in favor of pursuing grounded, proven strategies in place of political arguments, mentioning policies from his time as head of Chicago Public Schools, including proven reading initiatives, longer instructional time, and forward-focused graduation requirements. Emanuel detailed the success of Mississippi's **recent rise in NAEP scores**, climbing from 49th to 9th in fourth-grade reading and from 50th to 16th in fourth-grade math. In his view, Mississippi has succeeded by renewing its focus on teaching reading through phonics and the "science of reading," creating support systems for students who fall behind, and attaching consequences to ensure academic standards. Emanuel also described the success of neighboring school systems mirroring Mississippi's innovations. He spoke to the importance of bipartisan action in education, referencing successful efforts by Southern Democratic governors as well as Republican presidents,

and ultimately called on leaders to focus not on politics but on educational outcomes. A recording of the event is **here**.

HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE MARKS UP CHARTER SCHOOL, FACILITIES BILLS

On Wednesday, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce **marked up** three bills, two of which focused on facilitating charter school growth. The first bill, **H.R. 7082**, the "Fostering Learning and Excellence in Charter Schools (FLEX) Act," would increase flexibility in how Charter Schools Program (CSP) funds are allocated, allow resources to be used to expand programs within existing charter schools, and reduce compliance requirements for applicants. Supporters argued that it would cut bureaucratic red tape and empower high-performing schools to grow. Opponents, however, warned that it would weaken oversight, shift funding away from traditional public schools, and increase the risk of fraud. Several Democratic representatives offered amendments aimed at strengthening accountability, but the bill ultimately passed without any amendments. The committee also considered **H.R. 7086**, the "Equitable Access to School Facilities Act," which would restructure the CSP facilities program to help charter schools access financing options typically available to traditional public schools. Supporters framed the bill as addressing long-standing barriers to facilities funding; critics argued it would reduce transparency and favor charter-friendly states. An amendment to build in program evaluation and oversight was proposed; however, the bill ultimately passed as introduced. Looking ahead, these bills now head to the House Floor. Committee Republicans **lauded the passage of the legislation**.

HUNT INSTITUTE REVIEWS 2026 ACROSS THE AISLE OPINION SURVEY RESULTS

On Thursday, the Hunt Institute held a webinar examining its **2026 Across the Aisle public opinion survey**, conducted in conjunction with Burson Insights. The survey yielded several surprising conclusions about the bipartisan nature of modern education priorities and concerns. Democrats, Republicans, and Independents were largely aligned on core education policy priorities, including hiring quality teachers, preparing students with real-world skills, and improving literacy outcomes for students reading below grade level. The results showed substantial bipartisan support for investment in schools, early childhood education, mental health resources, and values such as hard work, fairness, and freedom. 2024 National Teacher of the Year Missy Testerman touched on the alignment of voter priorities, saying she is encouraged by how strongly voters feel about the value of applied learning opportunities like apprenticeships, on-the-job training, and vocational schooling. Former Congressman and Governor of West Virginia Bob Wise pointed out a key dissonance in the survey: despite bipartisan support for increasing education funding, only 38% of respondents indicated they would pay additional taxes to help make this investment—the lowest result he has seen in the annual survey. While cognizant of widespread affordability concerns and state budget shortfalls, Wise cautioned that voters should understand what this investment could mean for their tax liability and the potential financial sacrifices in other areas of government that this shift would require. "Sixty-seven percent of voters believe elected officials talk too little about education," according to Burson Insights Vice President Jacqueline Scott-Douglas, "and there is an appetite, if not an expectation, that elected

officials need to elevate education in the national conversation." You can watch the event **here**, and access the related polling **here**.

PARENTAL RIGHTS EXPERTS DISCUSS POST-*MAHMOUD* CLASSROOMS

On Thursday, January 22nd, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) and Catholic University of America's Center for Law & the Human Person convened two panels of legal and philosophical experts for a discussion entitled, "**Parental Rights in Education after *Mahmoud v. Taylor*: Legal and Cultural Assessments**." Moderated by AEI's William Haun, the conversation focused on the 2025 Supreme Court case *Mahmoud v. Taylor* (***Mahmoud***), where justices ruled 6-3 that public schools must notify parents and allow them to opt out their children from instruction challenging religious beliefs. Both panels consisted of supporters of *Mahmoud*, including several authors of amici briefs before the Supreme Court. The first discussion, which featured Dr. Helen Alvare, Chair in Law and Liberty at Antonin Scalia Law School; Eric Baxter, Vice President of the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty; and CUA's Elizabeth Kirk, provided a legal overview of the history underpinning *Mahmoud*, including the foundational cases of ***Wisconsin v. Yoder*** and ***Pierce v. Society of Sisters***. The panelists discussed the welcome embrace of *Mahmoud* by many parents who felt lower courts were ruling against basic principles of religious liberty and free speech guaranteed by the Constitution. In response to growing concerns from parents and religious groups, particularly regarding books with LGBTQ or sexually explicit content, a number of state legislatures have enacted opt-out requirements for local schools and almost half have passed "**Parents Bill of Rights**." The second panel – including AEI's Timothy Carney, CUA's Dr. Sarah Gustafson, and Dr. Melissa Moschella, a Professor of Philosophy at Notre Dame – raised broader theoretical questions about the scope and limits of parental authority following the Court's decision. The experts explored the different avenues parental authority might be expanded further post-*Mahmoud*, while acknowledging the Court left many questions open for future litigation. To watch the entire discussion, click **here**.

Back to top.

4. New Publications

Transferring K-12 Programs to Labor: Why Costs and Logistics Could Be a Problem for States and Schools

Bipartisan Policy Center (December 2025)

This issue brief explores questions and potential challenges surrounding the transfer of functions of one of the program offices, the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, to the Department of Labor's Employment and Training Agency, as well as the potential impact on states and schools.

Back to top.

5. In the News

U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon Celebrates President Trump's Historic First Year

U.S. Department of Education (January 20, 2026)

Bipartisan K-12 Budget Proposal Would Stall Gutting Of Education Department

K-12 Dive (January 20, 2026)

Back to top.

THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON

6. Weekly Calendar

Tuesday, January 27, 2026

Event: Examining School-Level Poverty Rates

Subject: The Urban Institute will hold a webinar on "Using MEPS (Model Estimates of Poverty in Schools) 2.0 to Study School-Level Student Poverty Rates Over Time."
Participants: Emily Gutierrez, senior research associate, Urban Institute's Work, Education and Labor Division; and Kristin Blagg, principal research associate, Urban Institute's Work, Education and Labor Division.
Time: 2:00 p.m.
Contact: Register **here.**

Wednesday, January 28, 2026

Event: Forward with Families

Subject: Ascend at the Aspen Institute will hold its 2026 Aspen Forum on Children and Families.
Participants: Sen. Raphael Warnock, (D-GA); Aaron Pilkington, state representative (Arkansas); Dennis Olson, commissioner, Minnesota Office of Higher Education; Elizabeth Hertel, director, Michigan Department of Health and Human Services; Cherrell Campbell-Street, deputy commissioner for programs and services, Tennessee Department of Human Services; and Alex Mayer, cabinet secretary, West Virginia Department of Human Services.
Time: 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.
Contact: Register **here.**

Hearing: Empowering Families Through Educational Choice in America

Subject: The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee holds a hearing on "Empowering Families Through Educational Choice in America."
Witnesses: Chris Gulacy-Worrel, vice president, Oakmont Education; John Kirtley, chairman, Step Up for Students; and Marisol Garcia, president, Arizona Education Association.
Time: 10:00 a.m.
Contact: Watch online **here.**

Back to top.

7. Future Hearings and Events

Thursday, February 5, 2026

Event: Bullying in Public Schools

Subject: The Heritage Foundation will hold a discussion on "Policy Answers to Bullying in Public Schools."
Participants: Stephen Gilchrist, commissioner, US Commission on Civil Rights; Jonathan Butcher, acting director, Heritage Center for Education; and Charles Stimson, former senior legal fellow and deputy director, Heritage Center for Legal and Judicial Studies.
Time: 11:00 a.m.

Contact: Register **here.**

Back to top.

8. On The Floor of Congress This Week

Senate Floor:
Potential consideration of further appropriations legislation

House Floor:
In recess
Consideration of items related to FY26 Appropriations are possible.

Back to top.

9. Links for Up-to-Date Information on Hearings, Legislation, and Events

U.S. House and Senate 2026 Schedule
U.S. Department of Education
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. Senate Budget Committee
U.S. House Budget Committee
Congressional Budget Office
Federal legislative information

Back to top.

10. About BPAG

Bose Public Affairs Group is a full-service government affairs and public relations consulting firm that has built a reputation for producing results. We partner with clients committed to excellence in education and other social services to achieve policy and advocacy success by:

- leveraging our expertise and passion;
- strategizing intelligent solutions; and,
- Creating meaningful impact.

Our team includes long-term insiders in education policy from Pre-K through higher education, innovative thinkers and savvy strategists that provide a comprehensive array of customized client services. We have the knowledge, skills, and relationships that are necessary for successful advocacy at all levels. From grassroots to grass tops and everything in between, our broad-based legislative practice approaches every project with the same degree of determination and professionalism. BPAG provides expertise in a variety of services:

- Government Relations
- Research and Analysis
- Advocacy Training
- Association Management
- Strategic Communications
- Policy Events

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