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. **COSSBA Priorities**
   - **Funding**
     - **ED Highlights Federal Funding Flexibility to Support Teachers:** The Department of Education announced on Monday new guidance reminding states and school districts that existing federal funding—particularly Title II, Part A funds authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—can be used flexibly to support innovative teacher workforce strategies.

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

3. **In Brief – Last Week in Washington**
   - **Webinar Highlights State Career-Connected Learning Strategies**: On Monday, KnowledgeWorks hosted a webinar titled, "Career Readiness By Way of Student-Centered Learning: A 2026 Legislative Kick-Off," convening education leaders from Arizona, Delaware, and Montana to discuss state-level strategies advancing career-connected learning.
   - **House Appropriators Examine "Science of Reading**": On Tuesday, the House Appropriations Committee's Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee held a hearing titled, "The Science of Reading."
   - **House Panel Examines *Mahmoud v. Taylor* Decision, School Compliance**: On Tuesday, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce's Subcommittee

on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education held a hearing titled, "Defending Faith and Families Against Government Overreach: Mahmoud v. Taylor" to examine the implications of the Supreme Court's 2025 decision and school district compliance with notice and opt-out requirements.

- **Public Schools, University Faculty File Lawsuit Against ICE**: On Wednesday, a coalition of Minnesota school districts and an education union sued the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) over its policy allowing immigration enforcement actions at or near schools, arguing that the change disrupts education and harms students and educators.
- **Panel Highlights Economic, Workforce Impacts of Childcare Crisis**: On Wednesday, ReadyNation hosted a panel discussion examining its recent report, "The Child Care Crisis Costs the U.S. Economy $172 Billion Each Year."

4. New Publications

- **STEM Talent: Education, Training, and Workforce**
  National Science Foundation (February 2026)
  This report presents indicators of the STEM workforce, pathways to STEM employment, persistence and attrition in STEM, and international comparisons of U.S. STEM competitiveness.

5. In the News

- **RIP Education Dept.? Not quite. Trump struggles in bid to kill agency.**
  USA Today (February 8, 2026)
- **Democrats Call on McMahon to Explain Civil Rights Complaints Backlog**
  The Hill (February 9, 2026)
- **Progress on Chronic Absenteeism Has Slowed, Some Say McMahon Should Speak Up**
  The 74 Million (February 11, 2026)
- **Services cut, staff laid off. New Trump cuts hit schools in 11 states, D.C.**
  The Washington Post (February 13, 2026)

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

- **Are Schools Caught in Digital Delusion?** The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research will hold a virtual discussion on "Are Schools Caught in a Digital Delusion?"
  Tuesday at 3:30pm ET

7. Weekly Calendar – Future Events

- **Supporting STEM Teachers: Insights from Noyce**: The Brookings Institution will hold a discussion on "Supporting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) teachers: Insights from the Noyce program."
  February 23 at 2pm ET
- **House Small Business Committee Hearing on Career and Technical Education**: The House Small Business Committee will hold a hearing on "Career and Technical Education: Developing the Future of Main Street Success."
  February 24 at 10am ET

- **Future of AI and Computer Science in K-8 Classrooms**: LEGO Education and Code.Org will hold a webinar on what's next for computer science (CS) and AI in K-8 classrooms and how your school or district can keep pace.
  February 24 at 12pm ET

8. **On The Floor of Congress This Week**
   - The House and Senate are in recess.

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

10. **About BPAG**

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1. COSSBA Priorities

FUNDING

ED HIGHLIGHTS FEDERAL FUNDING FLEXIBILITY TO SUPPORT TEACHERS

The Department of Education announced on Monday new guidance reminding states and school districts that existing federal funding—particularly Title II, Part A funds authorized by the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—can be used flexibly to support innovative teacher workforce strategies, including team-based "strategic staffing" models designed to improve student outcomes and strengthen educator support. These approaches may include creating differentiated roles and compensation for effective teachers, expanding mentoring and induction programs for new educators, building teacher pipelines through residencies and apprenticeships, supporting collaborative professional learning, and developing school leadership capacity. The Department emphasized that these funding flexibilities allow schools to redesign traditional one-teacher-per-classroom structures, helping teachers grow professionally while improving instruction and student achievement, and noted that Title I funds can also support such initiatives in eligible schoolwide programs.

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2. Budget and Appropriations Wrap-Up

After months of stopgap patches and continuing resolutions, the enactment of full-year FY 2026 appropriations for the Departments of Education, Labor, and Health and Human Services, as well as the National Science Foundation—has given those agencies clear authority to spend through the remainder of the fiscal year.

For grantees, universities, school districts, workforce boards, researchers, and nonprofits, that shift from short-term funding to a full-year deal is more than procedural. It means competitions can proceed on schedule, award sizes can be set with confidence, and agencies can finalize operating plans without the caveats that typically accompany continuing resolutions.

That clarity is particularly consequential for competitive grant programs administered by Education, Labor, HHS, and NSF. Under continuing resolutions, agencies often delay program solicitations, reduce award amounts, or issue conditional awards. With full-year appropriations

enacted, program offices can accelerate peer review schedules, make more predictable multi-year commitments, and reduce administrative delays.

Yet even as most of the federal government shifts into execution mode, one department is headed in the opposite direction. The Department of Homeland Security is officially in a partial shutdown amid a high-stakes dispute over Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) policies and enforcement procedures. Since DHS funding has lapsed, many frontline functions—such as border operations and certain law enforcement activities—will continue under shutdown protocols, but thousands of employees could be furloughed or required to work without pay. Administrative functions, grant processing, and support activities across FEMA, TSA, and other DHS components are facing disruption.

How long might the impasse last? Historically, department-specific shutdowns tend to resolve more quickly than government-wide lapses. With Congress scheduled to reconvene next week and political pressure mounting—especially with President Trump set to deliver his State of the Union address on February 24—negotiators have incentives to reach at least a temporary deal.

The looming State of the Union also raises another budgetary milestone: the President's FY 2027 budget request. Budget observers expect the administration to preview key priorities in the February 24 address and submit the detailed request later in February or in March.

How does this impact State School Board Associations?

At the Department of Education, discretionary competitions—ranging from innovation grants to educator preparation and student support initiatives—are now more likely to move on regular timelines. Labor can more confidently administer competitive workforce and apprenticeship grants without hedging on funding availability. And at NSF, which received its funding earlier under the Commerce-Justice-Science measure, directorates can align solicitations and review cycles with enacted funding levels rather than operating under provisional assumptions.

What might President Trump's budget proposal include for the Department of Education? While specifics remain unknown, the administration is expected to emphasize workforce alignment, accountability, and program consolidation. Discretionary education programs could face continued scrutiny, particularly those not closely tied to workforce development or measurable outcomes. At the same time, politically popular or formula-driven programs may see more protection than competitive discretionary initiatives as Washington pivots to FY 2027 and a new round of debates over federal funding priorities.

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3. In Brief – Last Week in Washington

WEBINAR HIGHLIGHTS STATE CAREER-CONNECTED LEARNING STRATEGIES

On Monday, KnowledgeWorks hosted a webinar titled, "Career Readiness By Way of Student-Centered Learning: A 2026 Legislative Kick-Off," convening education leaders from Arizona, Delaware, and Montana to discuss state-level strategies advancing career-connected learning. Moderated by KnowledgeWorks' Emily Briley, the event highlighted how states are prioritizing student-centered education systems that emphasize workforce readiness, particularly as 2026 state legislative sessions begin. The discussion featured contributions from representatives of Advance CTE and the Education Commission of the States, who explained emerging legislative trends

supporting career readiness and emphasized the need for personalization and stable funding. Panelists underscored that effective career-connected learning depends on learner voice and choice, flexible pathways, and strong alignment between education and workforce systems. State leaders and educators shared concrete examples of policy in action. John Wickert of Delaware highlighted his state's commitment to embedding student voice directly into CTE program design, approval, and implementation. Shannon Boswell of Montana focused on early exposure through middle school CTE expansion and the importance of strong, consistent education-industry partnerships. Peter Boyle of Arizona showcased the state's statutorily authorized Career Technical Education Districts (CTEDs) and its statewide "Graduate Profile" program. Across states, speakers emphasized the critical role of policy in setting expectations and priorities but noted that it must be paired with adequate resources and time to be effective. Overall, the webinar demonstrated how student-centered, career-connected learning is shaping high-quality state education agendas nationwide.

HOUSE APPROPRIATORS EXAMINE "SCIENCE OF READING"

On Tuesday, the House Appropriations Committee's Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies Subcommittee held a hearing titled, "The Science of Reading." A panel of education experts answered questions on the phonics-based approach to teaching reading known as the "science of reading" (SoR), which has contributed to significant literacy improvements in states such as Mississippi and Louisiana, after years of disappointing reading results arguably due to the use of ineffective curricula. Other topics included how parents can best support students at home, the value of professional development programs, and the federal government's role in educational research and standards. Bonnie Short, Director of the Alabama Reading Initiative, and Larry Saulsberry, Director of Teaching and Learning for Literacy at Huntsville City Schools, testified about the success of Alabama's SoR program. They noted that the state improved from 49th in 2019 to 34th in 2024 in fourth-grade NAEP reading scores and was one of only two states to return to pre-pandemic reading levels last year. Dr. Holly Lane of the University of Florida Literacy Institute highlighted the decades of federally funded research underpinning the SoR approach and emphasized the importance of safeguards in selecting educational programs. Members from both parties expressed support for the SoR approach and concern about its historically limited adoption but differed on the federal government's role. Republicans, led by Chair Robert Aderholt (R-AL), emphasized what they considered to be the advantages of state-level control rather than what they described as a "top-down mandate from Washington." Democrats, led by Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), pointed to last year's DOGE cuts to federal education programs and Republican-led efforts to reduce funding for various programs, including Title IIA, as harmful to SoR implementation. The hearing is available online.

HOUSE PANEL EXAMINES *MAHMOUD V. TAYLOR* DECISION, SCHOOL COMPLIANCE

On Tuesday, the House Committee on Education and the Workforce's Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education held a hearing titled, "Defending Faith and Families Against Government Overreach: Mahmoud v. Taylor" to examine the implications of the Supreme Court's 2025 decision and school district compliance with notice and opt-out requirements. Chairman Kevin Kiley (R-CA) characterized *Mahmoud* as a "common sense" affirmation of parental rights, stating that parents should not have to surrender their religious freedom when enrolling children in public school, and emphasizing the Court's finding that certain policies imposed a substantial burden by requiring participation in instruction that posed a "very

real threat" to parents' ability to direct their children's religious upbringing. Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) argued that the hearing diverted attention from urgent school safety and student well-being issues and warned that expanded opt-outs could contribute to censorship and increase administrative burdens. Witness Eric Baxter of the Becket Fund described the Montgomery County LGBTQ-themed storybook curriculum at issue and the district's decision to withdraw notice and opt-out options, arguing that *Mahmoud* requires broader accommodations and may strengthen free exercise protections nationwide. Donald Daugherty of the Defense of Freedom Institute emphasized transparency tools, such as advance curriculum notice enabling opt-outs, and suggested courts may further clarify how these rights apply beyond religious claims. Zalman Rothschild, a Cardozo School of Law professor, cautioned that *Mahmoud* departs from longstanding legal distinctions between compelled affirmation and exposure to instructional content and raised concerns about potential effects on public health and broader curriculum disputes. Sarah Parshall Perry of Defending Education praised the ruling as reinforcing parental rights and criticized school districts she said continue to resist opt-out policies. The hearing reflected sharp disagreement over the scope and consequences of *Mahmoud v. Taylor*, alongside bipartisan acknowledgment that its implementation will shape ongoing debates over parental rights, religious liberty, and the balance between constitutional protections and public education.

PUBLIC SCHOOLS, UNIVERSITY FACULTY FILE LAWSUIT AGAINST ICE

On Wednesday, a coalition of Minnesota school districts and an education union sued the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) over its policy allowing immigration enforcement actions at or near schools, arguing that the change disrupts education and harms students and educators. The complaint emphasizes that for decades the federal government restricted enforcement in "sensitive locations," recognizing it could enforce immigration laws without "denying or limiting . . . children access to their schools." Plaintiffs argue that the administration "abruptly reversed course and abandoned these longstanding protections," instead allowing agents to decide whether to conduct enforcement near schools based on individual discretion and "common sense." The lawsuit alleges the policy has caused fear and operational disruptions, stating that "parents, children, and teachers, regardless of immigration status, reasonably fear going to school," and that enforcement activity has directly harmed districts' ability "to educate children and to provide access to educational services and a safe learning environment." Plaintiffs contend the policy change violates administrative law because it was implemented without proper justification or public rulemaking and seek a court order blocking enforcement action near schools absent extraordinary circumstances.

PANEL HIGHLIGTHS ECONOMIC, WORKFORCE IMPACTS OF CHILDCARE CRISIS

On Wednesday, ReadyNation hosted a panel discussion examining its recent report, "The Child Care Crisis Costs the U.S. Economy $172 Billion Each Year." Panelists agreed that while they expected significant challenges, the report presented an even more severe outlook on the impact of the childcare market than anticipated. Economist Kathryn Edwards described the U.S. childcare crisis as a "categorical market failure," driven by scarcity, high prices, and a lack of natural market correction. These conditions constrain parents in the workforce, forcing them to miss work, turn down promotions, and strain professional relationships—an experience parent and EduCare DC member LaWanda White shared firsthand. Robert S. Carl, Jr., and Samantha Chivinski of the Schuylkill Chamber of Commerce highlighted the acute challenges in rural communities, noting that 63% of parents in Schuylkill County are on childcare waiting lists and 84% said they would

struggle to keep their jobs if their provider closed. Calvin Calhoun, Chair of the Institute for Child Success, emphasized a 28% supply-demand gap and said that limited access to capital prevents many prospective providers from entering the market. Kelly Davydov of the childcare platform TOOTRiS described the Tri-Share model, which splits childcare costs evenly among families, employers, and a government entity or philanthropic donor, citing a recent report from the Buffett Institute demonstrating the model's success in five states. She added that while businesses are increasingly offering stipends and advocating for childcare solutions, public policy must keep pace. The discussion closed on a note of optimism, with panelists agreeing that constituent voices will be essential to driving the systemic changes needed to address the crisis. Resources associated with ReadyNation's report are available here.

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4. New Publications

STEM Talent: Education, Training, and Workforce
National Science Foundation (February 2026)
This report presents indicators of the STEM workforce, pathways to STEM employment, persistence and attrition in STEM, and international comparisons of U.S. STEM competitiveness.

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5. In the News

RIP Education Dept.? Not quite. Trump struggles in bid to kill agency.
USA Today (February 8, 2026)

Democrats Call on McMahon to Explain Civil Rights Complaints Backlog
The Hill (February 9, 2026)

Progress on Chronic Absenteeism Has Slowed. Some Say McMahon Should Speak Up
The 74 Million (February 11, 2026)

Services cut. Staff laid off. New Trump cuts hit schools in 11 states, D.C.
The Washington Post (February 13, 2026)

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THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON

6. Weekly Calendar

Tuesday, February 17, 2026

Webinar: Are Schools Caught in Digital Delusion
Subject: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research will hold a virtual discussion on "Are Schools Caught in a Digital Delusion?"
Participants: Frederick Hess, director of education policy studies, AEI; and Jared Cooney Horvath, director, LME Global.
Time: 3:30 p.m.
Contact: Register **here.**

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7. Future Hearings and Events

Monday, February 23, 2026

Event: Supporting STEM Teachers: Insights from Noyce
Subject: The Brookings Institution will hold a discussion on "Supporting STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) teachers: Insights from the Noyce program."
Participants: Anna Petersen, director of STEM, Virginia Department of Education; Michael Hansen, senior fellow, Brown Center on Education Policy; Li Feng, professor of economics, Texas State University's Department of Finance and Economics; and Jhosse Prado Guerrero, teacher, Cesar Chavez Middle School's Math Department.
Time and Location: 2:00 p.m.; Brookings, 1775 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Falk Auditorium, Washington, D.C.
Contact: Register **here.**

Tuesday, February 24, 2026

Hearing: House Small Business on Career and Technical Education
Subject: The House Small Business Committee will hold a hearing on "Career and Technical Education: Developing the Future of Main Street Success."
Time: 10:00 a.m.
Contact: Watch online **here.**

Webinar: Future of AI and CS in K-8 Classrooms
Subject: LEGO Education and Code.Org will hold a webinar on what's next for computer science (CS) and AI in K-8 classrooms and how your school or district can keep pace.
Participants: Andrew Sliwinski, head of product experience, LEGO® Education; and Karim Meghji, chief product officer, Code.org.
Time: 2:00 p.m.
Contact: Register **here.**

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8. On The Floor of Congress This Week

The House and Senate are in recess.

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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

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10. About BPAG

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- 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:

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- Advocacy Training
- Association Management
- Strategic Communications
- Policy Events

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