The Consortium of State School Boards Associations
Weekly Education Report

MARCH 23, 2026

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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**
   - **Child Nutrition**
     - **Districts Express Concerns Over Pending USDA Updates to Nutrition Standards**: As the Department of Agriculture gears up to propose regulations that align school meals with the latest federal nutrition standards, some school nutrition leaders are urging the agency to not increase meat or meat alternate requirements for schools.

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

3. **In Brief – Last Week in Washington**
   - **White House Launches Task Force to Eliminate Fraud in Federal Programs:** The White House on Monday announced a new executive order establishing the Task Force to Eliminate Fraud, a multi-agency initiative aimed at cracking down on fraud across federal programs and improving coordination between agencies.
   - **House Education Committee Advances Education Measures:** During a House Education and Workforce Committee markup Tuesday, Members advanced a package of seven education and workforce bills focused on literacy, student safety, and federal student aid integrity, though the proceedings highlighted clear partisan divisions over both substance and scope.
   - **Lawmakers, Industry Leaders Highlight Digital Safety Protections:** On Wednesday, Punchbowl News hosted an event on the digital well-being of

children, featuring Rep. Erin Houchin (R-IN) and Dr. Garth Graham, head of YouTube Health.

- **HELP Member Day Highlights Education, Student Support Policies:** The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a Member Day hearing, where lawmakers from both parties emphasized a range of education-related priorities focused on affordability, access, workforce alignment, and student support.
- **Global Benchmarking Highlights Keys to High-Performing Ed Systems:** On Thursday, the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) convened a webinar titled, "What the World's Best Systems Get Right."

4. New Publications

- **Report | A Nation at Risk to A Nation at Work: The Case for a National Talent Strategy**
  Bipartisan Policy Center (March 2026)
  This report lays out bold but achievable actions that modernize the federal role in education and the workforce while relying on state and local leaders across sectors to do the work closest to their communities.

5. In the News

- **House Strips Rep. Kiley of Committee After GOP Exit**
  News Max (March 19, 2026)
- **Poverty, School Size Can Hinder Improvement Odds, GAO Reports**
  K-12 Dive (March 18, 2026)

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

- **Youth Mental Health and Technology: What Does the Science Say?**: The American Association for the Advancement of Science's Center for Scientific Evidence in Public Issues will hold a virtual discussion on "Youth Mental Health and Technology: What does the science say?"
  Wednesday at 2pm ET
- **Science of Reading:** The National Parents Union and the George W. Bush Institute will hold a briefing to discuss the science of reading and national commitment to literacy.
  Thursday at 2pm

7. On The Floor of Congress This Week

- **Senate floor:** Consideration of nominations
- **House floor**
  - **H. H.R. 8029** – Pay Our Homeland Defenders Act
  - **H. Res. 1128** – Expressing the support of the House of Representatives for the Department of Homeland Security
  - **H.R. 7084** – Defending American Property Abroad Act of 2026
  - **H.R. 5103** – Make the District of Columbia Safe and Beautiful Act of 2026

8. Important U.S. House and Senate Links

9. About BPAG

1. COSSBA Policy Priorities

CHILD NUTRITION

DISTRCTS EXPRESS CONCERNS OVER PENDING USDA UPDATES TO NUTRITION STANDARDS

As the Department of Agriculture gears up to propose regulations that align school meals with the latest federal nutrition standards, some school nutrition leaders are urging the agency to not increase meat or meat alternate requirements for schools. In a March 9, 2026 letter to Agriculture Secretary Brooke Rollins, over 900 school districts, school nutrition professionals and organizations wrote that such a measure would add financial strain on school nutrition programs and risk missing out on other dietary components that are more likely to be under consumed. Read more by *K-12 Dive* here.

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2. Budget and Appropriations Wrap-Up

Congress wrapped up last week still mired in a familiar but increasingly consequential problem: it has yet to complete its work on fiscal year (FY) 2026 appropriations, with the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) bill remaining a visible—and unresolved—flashpoint. Despite weeks of negotiations, lawmakers remain divided over policy provisions tied to immigration enforcement and border security, leaving the department without a clear path forward for full-year funding.

Republicans have grown more vocal about the national security implications of the delay, particularly in light of escalating tensions abroad. Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) warned that "there are always threats to the homeland…but the stakes are higher now," arguing that the current geopolitical environment only heightens the need for a fully funded DHS. House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) struck a similar tone, saying it is "all the more urgent…to have a fully funded Department of Homeland Security" given ongoing military operations.

Even as lawmakers struggle to finalize FY 2026 work, attention is shifting to the next budget cycle. The White House is expected to release its FY 2027 budget request during the week of March 30, though many on Capitol Hill anticipate it could arrive at the end of that week, just ahead of Easter. Such timing would give appropriators little breathing room to absorb the proposal, setting up a compressed and potentially chaotic start to the FY 2027 process.

That process is likely to be further complicated by the mounting costs of the war with Iran. Large-scale military operations typically require supplemental appropriations, and while those funds are often designated as emergency spending, they inevitably shape the broader fiscal environment. As needs for defense funding grow, pressure increases on discretionary spending caps, forcing lawmakers to make difficult tradeoffs between military and domestic priorities or to accept higher overall spending levels.

The political ramifications are already evident. Republicans have pointed to the conflict as a reason to accelerate DHS funding and bolster national security investments, while Democrats have raised concerns about the scale and oversight of war-related spending. House Minority Leader Jakeem

Jeffries (D-NY) captured that tension, arguing that the administration is willing to spend "billions…to bomb Iran" even as domestic funding debates remain unresolved.

Taken together, the dynamics unfolding this week highlight the increasingly tangled nature of the appropriations process. Congress is attempting to finish one fiscal year while preparing for the next, all against the backdrop of an expanding overseas conflict that is reshaping budget priorities in real time. With deadlines approaching and divisions still entrenched, the path forward remains uncertain—and likely to grow more complicated in the weeks ahead.

How does this impact State School Board Associations?

Delays in FY 2026 appropriations and a compressed FY 2027 budget timeline could create uncertainty for school boards, particularly around federal education funding levels and timing. Increased defense spending may also put pressure on domestic programs, potentially limiting growth in key funding streams like Title I and IDEA. Together, these dynamics could complicate state and local budget planning, requiring school boards to prepare for delayed allocations, tighter resources, and shifting federal priorities.

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3. In Brief – Last Week in Washington

LAWMAKERS, INDUSTRY LEADERS HIGHLIGHT DIGITAL SAFETY PROTECTIONS

The White House on Monday announced a new executive order establishing the Task Force to Eliminate Fraud, a multi-agency initiative aimed at cracking down on fraud across federal programs and improving coordination between agencies. The task force will focus on identifying and preventing misuse of taxpayer-funded benefits, particularly in programs administered in partnership with states, while enhancing data-sharing, oversight, and enforcement efforts. The order highlights recent high-profile fraud cases, including a $250 million child nutrition case, as evidence of systemic vulnerabilities and directs the task force to develop a comprehensive national anti-fraud strategy within a set timeframe. The executive order emphasizes that "fraud and mismanagement…constitutes theft of taxpayer dollars," underscoring the broader goal of safeguarding public funds and restoring integrity to federal assistance programs. The Executive Order can be read here.

HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE ADVANCES EDUCATION MEASURES

During a House Education and Workforce Committee markup Tuesday, Members advanced a package of seven education and workforce bills focused on literacy, student safety, and federal student aid integrity, though the proceedings highlighted clear partisan divisions over both substance and scope. Chairman Tim Walberg (R-MI) framed the effort as a push to "strengthen literacy instruction, protect students, [and] crack down on federal student aid fraud," emphasizing concerns about identity theft schemes and classroom content. Republicans underscored issues like "ghost student" fraud—where bad actors exploit federal aid systems—and the need to prioritize phonics-based instruction through the Science of Reading Act, while also advancing proposals to restrict federally funded materials deemed inappropriate for minors. Democrats, led by Ranking Member Bobby Scott (D-VA), criticized the package as overly partisan and limited in addressing broader economic challenges, arguing that many of the bills "will do little to alleviate the anxieties of…Americans." Despite disagreements, there was some bipartisan alignment on literacy reforms, with members acknowledging that "literacy is not a partisan issue…[but] a national priority."

Overall, the markup advanced key Republican priorities on education policy and oversight, while foreshadowing continued debate as the legislation moves to the House floor.

LAWMAKERS, INDUSTRY LEADERS HIGHLIGHT DIGITAL SAFETY PROTECTIONS

On Wednesday, Punchbowl News hosted an event on the digital well-being of children, featuring Rep. Erin Houchin (R-IN) and Dr. Garth Graham, head of YouTube Health. Punchbowl CEO Anna Palmer opened the session with Rep. Houchin by soliciting her views on several recent news developments. Houchin emphasized that current law allows 13-year-olds to create online accounts without parental consent—a standard set 30 years ago that she argued is contributing to rising rates of eating disorders, suicide, and other mental health challenges among youth. She pushed back on the notion that responsibility lies solely with parents, arguing that existing laws limit their ability to effectively protect their children. Houchin highlighted the bipartisan Parents Over Platforms Act, introduced with Rep. Jake Auchincloss (D-MA), which would strengthen parental controls and safeguard minors' data, as well as the AWARE Act, which would require disclosure of AI-related risks to children and redirect self-harm-related content to trusted adults. She noted that the former was excluded from last week's markup in favor of Rep. James' App Store Accountability Act but expressed optimism that a compromise could emerge. Houchin also raised concerns about disappearing messages on platforms like Snapchat, which reduce parental visibility into potentially harmful interactions. Dr. Garth Graham, Director of YouTube Health, outlined the platform's approach to youth safety, including YouTube Kids, age-tiered settings, and restrictions on potentially triggering content. He also announced a $20 million teen well-being initiative and new open-source resources designed to support young users. Graham emphasized throughout his remarks that the goal should be "protecting kids in the digital world, not from the digital world," by equipping them with the tools to navigate online spaces safely.

HELP MEMBER DAY HIGHLIGHTS EDUCATION, STUDENT SUPPORT POLICIES

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a Member Day hearing, where lawmakers from both parties emphasized a range of education-related priorities focused on affordability, access, workforce alignment, and student support. Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA) underscored concerns about rising college costs and literacy challenges, highlighting legislation such as the 21st Century Dyslexia Act to improve early identification and support for students with learning differences and the College Transparency Act to help families make informed higher education decisions. Several senators stressed the importance of connecting education to workforce needs, with Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH) promoting career pathway programs that combine education and job training, noting the need to "ensure that America's businesses have the workforce to keep up and that workers are not left behind." Access and equity in education were recurring themes. Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-GA) highlighted the life-changing impact of federal education programs, stating, "without Pell Grants, I would not have been able to graduate," while advocating for continued investment in programs like Head Start and TRIO. Other lawmakers focused on higher education policy reforms, including efforts to address legacy admissions and expand research opportunities at historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs). Additionally, proposals to strengthen civics education, expand child care access to support working families, and integrate emerging technologies into community college and career training programs reflected a broader emphasis on preparing students for a changing economy. Across the hearing, members consistently framed education policy as central to economic mobility

and national competitiveness, with a bipartisan focus on improving outcomes for students and families.

GLOBAL BENCHMARKING HIGHLIGHTS KEYS TO HIGH-PERFORMING ED SYSTEMS

On Thursday, the National Center on Education and the Economy (NCEE) convened a webinar titled, "What the World's Best Systems Get Right." The event explored a new global benchmarking analysis of 83 education systems and examined policies used by top-performing jurisdictions. NCEE researchers outlined a three-pronged framework—excellence, equity, and efficiency—to describe the characteristics of a holistic education system that prioritizes well-being alongside academic outcomes. Speakers emphasized that high-performing systems are coherent, future-focused, and closely aligned with broader economic and societal goals. Finland, Singapore, Estonia, Canada, Japan, and Denmark were identified as leading systems, many of which have maintained their positions across multiple benchmarking cycles, suggesting that strong policies can produce durable and scalable student benefits. Panelists, including educators and policymakers from the United States and abroad, highlighted key strategies such as elevating the teaching profession, providing robust teacher training, and integrating digital and workforce skills into curricula. They also noted the importance of adapting to automation, economic change, and student mental health needs. The event concluded with a focus on the value of whole-child development approaches, supported by strong foundations in literacy and numeracy, as a pathway to improving education outcomes.

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4. New Publications

Report | A Nation at Risk to A Nation at Work: The Case for a National Talent Strategy
Bipartisan Policy Center (March 2026)
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5. In the News

House Strips Rep. Kiley of Committees After GOP Exit
News Max (March 19, 2026)

Poverty, School Size Can Hinder Improvement Odds, GAO Reports
K-12 Dive (March 18, 2026)

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THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON

6. Weekly Calendar

Wednesday, March 25, 2026
Webinar: Youth Mental Health and Technology: What Does the Science Say?

Subject: The American Association for the Advancement of Science's Center for Scientific Evidence in Public Issues will hold a virtual discussion on "Youth Mental Health and Technology: What does the science say?"
Participants: Jeff Raatz, state senator, Indiana; Jessica Schleider, associate professor of medical social sciences, Northwestern University; Mitchell Prinstein, psychology professor, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and Abhisneha Jones, member, Our Minds Matter's Teen Advisory Committee.
Time: 2:00 p.m.
Contact: Register **here.**

Thursday, March 26, 2026

Briefing: Science of Reading
Subject: The National Parents Union and the George W. Bush Institute will hold a briefing to discuss the science of reading and national commitment to literacy.
Time and Location: 2:00 p.m.; Hart Senate Office Building, Room 902, Washington, DC 20510
Contact: Register **here.**

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7. On The Floor of Congress This Week

Senate Floor:
Consideration of nominations

House Floor:
H.R. 8029 – Pay Our Homeland Defenders Act *(Sponsored by Rep. Ciscomani / Appropriations Committee)*

H. Res. 1128 – Expressing the support of the House of Representatives for the Department of Homeland Security *(Sponsored by Rep. Mackenzie / Homeland Security Committee)*

H.R. 7084 – Defending American Property Abroad Act of 2026 *(Sponsored by Rep. Pfluger / Transportation and Infrastructure Committee)*

H.R. 5103 – Make the District of Columbia Safe and Beautiful Act of 2026 *(Sponsored by Rep. McGuire / Oversight and Government Reform Committee)*

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

U.S. House and Senate 2026 Schedule
U.S. Department of Education
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U.S. House Committee on Education and Labor
U.S. Senate Budget Committee

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Federal legislative information

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9. 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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- Research and Analysis
- Advocacy Training
- Association Management
- Strategic Communications
- Policy Events

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