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.

The *COSSBA Education Report* will go on a two-week hiatus during the Congressional Easter/Spring Break. However, we will report relevant breaking news such as the release of President Trump's FY 2027 federal budget submission.

Please use the bookmarks below to navigate to your area of interest:

1. **News, Publications, & Updates on COSSBA Policy Priorities**
   - **Funding**
     - **ESSER Pandemic Spending is Over. What Will Its Legacy Be?** Education finance experts say the effectiveness of relief funds is hard to measure — but schools would be worse off without the money.

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

3. **In Brief – Last Week in Washington**
   - **Global Summit Advances AI and Technology Collaboration in Education**: First Lady Melania Trump's "Fostering the Future Together" Summit, held Tuesday at the Department of State, convened leaders from 45 nations and representatives from 28 technology companies to launch a long-term global initiative focused on advancing education through technology.
   - **Webinar Explores Youth Mental Health, Technology, Policy Responses:** The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Center for Scientific Evidence in Public Issues, in partnership with The Council of State Governments and Our Minds Matter, hosted a webinar on Wednesday focused on

youth mental health, social media, and artificial intelligence, as well as the role of federal and state policy in mitigating negative outcomes.

- **Science of Reading Briefing Highlights Implementation Gaps, National Momentum:** On Thursday, the National Parents Union and the George W. Bush Institute on the Science of Reading (SOR) held a joint briefing focused on key implementation strategies used in states with high growth rates in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores, as well as national trends that could inform future policy changes.
- **ED to Vacate LBJ Headquarters in Cost-Saving Federal Realignment:** The Department of Education announced it will relocate from the Washington, DC, Lyndon B. Johnson Department of Education Building to a smaller facility at 500 D Street SW by August 2026, a move expected to save about $4.8 million annually and reduce underused space in a building currently 70% vacant.

4. New Publications

- **Struggling Readers in Secondary Schools: Results of a National Survey**
  EdWeek Research Center (March 2026)
  The *EdWeek* Research Center surveyed teachers, principals, and district leaders to better understand their views on this issue. Results of the survey reveal broad concerns about secondary students' reading skills, particularly among educators working in higher-poverty school systems.

5. In the News

- **White House AI Framework Calls for Preemption of State Laws**
  Roll Call (March 20, 2026)
- **Breaking Down ED's Interagency Agreements**
  Inside Higher Ed (March 24, 2026)
- **Meta and YouTube Designed Addictive Products that Harmed Young People, Jury Finds**
  The Guardian (March 25, 2026)
- **White House Urges Congress to Protect Children on AI Platforms**
  K-12 Dive (March 24, 2026)
- **Bipartisan Science of Reading Bill Passes House Committee**
  The 74 Million (March 17, 2026)

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

- **State of STEM Ecosystems in 2026**: The Teaching Institute for Excellence in STEM (TIES) will hold a webinar to explore the future of the STEM Ecosystem movement and the next decade of community-driven innovation in STEM education and workforce development.
  Tuesday at 12pm ET

7. On The Floor of Congress This Week

- The House and Senate are in recess.

8. Important U.S. House and Senate Links

9. **About BPAG**

1. COSSBA Policy Priorities

FUNDING

ESSER PANDEMIC SPENDING AND ITS LEGACY

K-12 Dive explains that the roughly $189.5 billion in federal COVID-19 relief for K-12 schools (ESSER funds) had meaningful but uneven impacts, and its full legacy remains difficult to measure. While many districts used the funding to improve academic outcomes, student engagement, mental health supports, and school infrastructure—and research shows increased spending modestly boosted test scores—experts say the program's flexibility and shifting priorities over time make nationwide results hard to generalize. The funds were critical for enabling remote learning early in the pandemic and later supporting recovery efforts like tutoring and technology upgrades, and they also drove lasting operational changes such as virtual parent-teacher conferences. However, the one-time investment was likely insufficient to fully address pandemic learning loss, especially for disadvantaged students, and questions remain about long-term return on investment as the funding expires and districts face sustaining or scaling programs without continued federal support. Read more here.

Back to top

2. Budget and Appropriations Wrap-Up

Congress closed last week before their scheduled two-week recess still grappling with one of the last unresolved pieces of the fiscal year 2026 appropriations process: funding for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The DHS bill remains unsigned, prolonging a partial shutdown that has stretched on since mid-February and underscores the deep policy divide over immigration and enforcement authorities.

Multiple Senate votes earlier in the week again failed to advance a funding package, reflecting entrenched disagreements over conditions tied to immigration enforcement and oversight reforms. Democrats have insisted on changes to ICE operations, while Republicans have pushed for full funding without new restrictions, leaving negotiators at an impasse. As Senate Appropriations Committee Chair Patty Murray (D-WA) put it, "Democrats have been very clear what we are asking for… and our asks have not changed."

By Friday, however, there were signs—albeit tentative—of forward movement. The Senate ultimately approved a measure to fund most DHS components, signaling a potential off-ramp from the standoff even as the bill faced an uncertain path in the House. The vote followed mounting operational pressure, particularly at the Transportation Security Administration, where staffing shortages and missed paychecks have caused widespread airport disruptions.

Despite that progress, the legislation did not clear Congress. House Republicans raised objections to the Senate approach, particularly because it excludes funding for key immigration enforcement agencies such as ICE and Customs and Border Protection. The House instead voted on an alternative 60-day funding measure that cannot pass the Senate. With Congress now in a two-week recess, the issue likely won't be resolved until the next legislative window. Following the impasse, President Donald Trump signed an Executive Order directing DHS to "use funds that have a

reasonable and logical nexus to TSA operations to provide TSA employees with the compensation and benefits that would have accrued to them if not for the Democrat-led DHS shutdown." DHS said TSA agents could start seeing paychecks as early as today.

Looking ahead, the White House is expected to release its fiscal year 2027 budget request this Friday—on Good Friday and during the middle of Congress's scheduled two-week recess. The timing would make it the latest presidential budget submission since 2013, reflecting a series of delays tied to internal deliberations over defense spending levels and ongoing efforts to finalize topline funding numbers for both FY 2025 and FY 2026.

That delay will compress an already challenging timeline for lawmakers, who are still working to complete current-year appropriations while preparing to begin the FY 2027 process. Office of Management and Budget Director Russ Vought is scheduled to testify before the House Budget Committee on April 15, offering lawmakers their first formal opportunity to question the administration's fiscal priorities in detail.

How does this impact State School Board Associations?

Although the Department of Homeland Security funding standoff does not directly affect K–12 education accounts, it creates broader federal budget uncertainty that could complicate school district budget planning. In addition, disruptions at the Department of Homeland Security could also impact school safety, cybersecurity, and emergency preparedness coordination. With the President expected to release a delayed FY2027 budget request while FY2026 remains unresolved, school boards are likely to face a compressed and unpredictable federal funding timeline.

Back to top.

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3. In Brief – Last Week in Washington

GLOBAL SUMMIT ADVANCES AI AND TECHNOLOGY COLLABORATION IN EDUCATION

First Lady Melania Trump's "Fostering the Future Together" Summit, held Tuesday at the Department of State, convened leaders from 45 nations and representatives from 28 technology companies to launch a long-term global initiative focused on advancing education through technology. The event brought together first spouses and major tech firms—including OpenAI, Microsoft, Meta, Google, and others—to showcase innovative tools such as AI-assisted learning, virtual reality instruction, and digital collaboration platforms, while emphasizing international cooperation. In opening remarks, the First Lady called for expanded partnerships and encouraged participating nations to replicate similar efforts domestically. The summit's workshop sessions focused on four shared priorities—AI in education, education technology, digital literacy, and online safety—with participants stressing the need to balance innovation with safeguards, expand digital access and infrastructure, invest in educator training, and promote responsible technology use. Administration officials also highlighted a new national AI policy framework and ongoing federal investments to support AI integration in schools. The event concluded with encouraging continued engagement among participants and plans for further collaboration, including follow-up discussions at the White House. A recording of the First Lady's remarks can be found here.

WEBINAR EXPLORES YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH, TECHNOLOGY, POLICY RESPONSES

The American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) Center for Scientific Evidence in Public Issues, in partnership with The Council of State Governments and Our Minds

Matter, hosted a webinar on Wednesday focused on youth mental health, social media, and artificial intelligence. The session also looked at the role of federal and state policy in mitigating negative outcomes. Moderated by Indiana Senator Jeff Raatz (R), the discussion examined current scientific evidence on the relationship between youth well-being and digital technologies. Speakers highlighted a range of policy developments, including changes to social media algorithms, parental consent requirements, online warning labels, digital literacy instruction, cell phone restrictions in schools, and proposals governing youth use of AI tools, noting that many of these efforts remain under active debate and, in some cases, face First Amendment-related legal challenges. Panelists emphasized that adolescent brain development can make youth particularly sensitive to features such as likes, notifications, and comments, while raising concerns about cyberbullying, sleep disruption, classroom distraction, and the potential for AI chatbots to replace human interaction. At the same time, they cautioned against overly broad restrictions, noting benefits such as improved parent communication and geolocation tools, as well as the promise of digital mental health supports, including single-session interventions embedded in online platforms. Speakers also stressed the importance of including students in shaping policies and programs that affect their technology use. Overall, the webinar provided a comprehensive overview of the evolving policy landscape at the intersection of youth, mental health, and technology.

SOR BRIEFING HIGHLIGHTS IMPLEMENTATION GAPS, NATIONAL MOMENTUM

On Thursday, the National Parents Union and the George W. Bush Institute on the Science of Reading (SOR) held a joint briefing focused on key implementation strategies used in states with high growth rates in National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores, as well as national trends that could inform future policy changes. The briefing opened with remarks from Representative Josh Harder (D-CA), who praised the impact of state and local SOR policies in states like Mississippi and Tennessee. He also called for a renewed focus on equitable implementation nationwide to expand opportunity for more students. McKenzie Snow, Director of the Iowa Department of Education, outlined efforts in Iowa to codify SOR in a way that makes it actionable rather than a buzzword. She emphasized that SOR is meaningfully different from three-cueing or balanced literacy approaches, highlighting its reliance on phonics and comprehension assessments. Dr. Kymyona Burk (ExcelinED) and Tennessee Commissioner on Education Lizzette Reynolds described a significant disconnect between teacher training and the classroom practices—such as SOR—that are known to produce strong outcomes. They called for stronger partnerships between higher education and K–12 systems, greater involvement from parents and other stakeholders, and more unified standardized testing across states to generate usable data. Dr. Lewis Ferebee, Chancellor of District of Columbia Public Schools, noted that many teachers ultimately rely on peer learning once on the job, underscoring the need for more structured training and instructional coaching to modernize classroom practices. Fran Dundoor, Director of Georgia's Office of Student Achievement, highlighted the importance of high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), stressing that tools are only effective when educators are properly trained to understand and use them. Panelists called on the federal government to support clearer standards for SOR implementation, strengthen teacher retention efforts, examine the current composition of NAEP, and prioritize policies focused on achievement rather than growth alone. While acknowledging that these shifts will require bipartisan support, speakers agreed that

growing national attention—from parent advocacy groups to congressional education committees—signals meaningful momentum toward lasting change.

ED TO VACATE LBJ HEADQUARTERS IN COST-SAVING FEDERAL REALIGNMENT

The Department of Education announced it will relocate from the Washington, DC, Lyndon B. Johnson Department of Education Building to a smaller facility at 500 D Street SW by August 2026, a move expected to save about $4.8 million annually and reduce underused space in a building currently 70% vacant. Local education advocates are familiar with the number of buildings across the District that house various offices of the Department of Education; those who have visited the LBJ building know that its offices and halls are quite empty and have been so since the pandemic. The transition is part of a broader federal realignment involving the Department of Energy, which will take over the LBJ building and avoid more than $350 million in deferred maintenance costs tied to its current headquarters. Education Secretary Linda McMahon framed the move as part of a broader effort to "reduce the federal education footprint," calling it "an important step in our efforts to forge brighter futures for our nation's students," while Energy Secretary Chris Wright emphasized that the relocation "will deliver significant taxpayer savings." General Services Administration Administrator Edward Forst added that the shift reflects "the government working smarter for the American people," aligning agency needs with more efficient use of federal space. A fact sheet on frequently asked questions can be viewed here.

Back to top.

4. New Publications

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Back to top.

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K-12 Dive (March 24, 2026)

Bipartisan Science of Reading Bill Passes House Committee
The 74 Million (March 17, 2026)

Back to top.

THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON

6. Weekly Calendar

Tuesday, March 31, 2026

Webinar: State of STEM Ecosystems in 2026

Subject: The Teaching Institute for Excellence in STEM (TIES) will hold a webinar to explore the future of the STEM Ecosystem movement and the next decade of community-driven innovation in STEM education and workforce development.
Time: 12:00 p.m.
Contact: Register **here.**

Back to top.

7. On The Floor of Congress This Week

The House and Senate are in recess.

Back to top.

8. 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.

9. **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:

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- Research and Analysis

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

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