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. **As a reminder, due to Congressional Recess – the Ed Report will next be distributed on Monday, May 18.**

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

1. **News, Publications, & Updates on COSSBA Policy Priorities**
   - **COSSBA Advocacy Actions: Sign-on Letter Opposing E-Rate Bidding Portal (*April 23, 2026*) –** A coalition of education, library, and broadband organizations, including COSSBA, urged the Federal Communications Commission to reconsider its proposal to create a centralized E-Rate competitive bidding portal.

   - **Funding**
     - **Sec. McMahon testifies in front of LHHS-ED Appropriations Subcommittee:** On Tuesday, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies held a hearing on President Trump's FY2027 budget request for the Department of Education.
     - **Urban Institute on federal policy changes reshaping education funding:** On Wednesday, the Urban Institute hosted a panel discussion titled, "Federal Policy Changes and Their Impacts on Education." The

event examined how upcoming changes under the One Big Beautiful Bill are reshaping the financial landscape for K–12 schools.

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

3. **In Brief – Last Week in Washington**
   - **AEI Panel Examines Mississippi's "Marathon" In Literacy Reform:** On Monday, the American Enterprise Institute hosted a panel of education policy experts to examine the factors behind Mississippi's sustained gains in fourth grade reading scores and the lessons the state's experience offers for national literacy reform.
   - **Brookings Panel Warnes of AI's Impact on Early Childhood Development:** On Monday, the Brookings Institution hosted a panel discussion titled "Raising Young Children in an AI World," the first event in its Generation AI Starts Early series.
   - **House Hearing Highlights Divide Over Equity Policies in K-12 Education:** On Tuesday, the House Committee on Education and Workforce's Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education held a hearing titled "Leveling Down: How Equity Policies Undermine Excellence and Harm Students."
   - **Senate Judiciary Committee Advances Guardrails on AI Chatbots**: On Thursday, the Senate Judiciary Committee held an executive business meeting to consider a slate of federal judiciary nominees and markup three pieces of legislation drafted by Committee members related to AI chatbots.

4. **New Publications**
   - **Unraveling the Case for Credentials in High School**
     New America (April 2026)
     New research from Ohio and Texas finds that non-degree credentials earned in high school can boost earnings when they are high-quality and aligned with a student's CTE program of study, but misaligned credentials can reduce wages by up to 30%, with uneven benefits across demographic groups underscoring the need for states to prioritize quality, alignment, and equity over simply counting credentials.

5. **In the News**
   - **We're Adrift': Arne Duncan on Democrats' Education Agenda**
     The 74 Million (April 30, 2026)
   - **Inside the new math wars: Navigating division over teaching approaches**
     K-12 Dive (April 28, 2026)
   - **How the Science of Reading Is Reshaping Teaching: What the Data Say**
     EdWeek (April 29, 2026)
   - **Education Groups Say New E-Rate Bidding Portal Will Hurt Small Districts Hardest**
     EdWeek (May 1, 2026)

6. **Weekly Calendar - What's coming up this week?**
   - **Making AI Work in Schools**: EdWeek will hold a webinar to explore how districts can move from early experimentation to purposeful, systemwide AI practice.
     Tuesday at 2pm ET
   - **Strategies to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism**: The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading will hold a webinar to examine how Raising Attendance and Improving Student Engagement (RAISE) teams are using data to drive decisions, adapting strategies to local contexts, and focusing on outcomes to reduce chronic absenteeism.
     Tuesday at 3pm ET

7. **Weekly Calendar -Future Events**
   - **Schools Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition Webinar: Making Sense of the New E-Rate Bidding Portal**
     June 3at 2pm 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 Policy Priorities

COSSBA ADVOCACY ACTIONS

STAKEHOLDERS URGE FCC TO DELAY, RECONSIDER E-RATE BIDDING PROPOSAL

A coalition of education, library, and broadband organizations, including COSSBA, urged the Federal Communications Commission to reconsider its proposal to create a centralized E-Rate competitive bidding portal, arguing it would add unnecessary complexity, administrative burden, and potential conflicts with state and local procurement laws. The letter highlights that the current E-Rate program already has strong safeguards against fraud and abuse, as recognized by the Government Accountability Office, and warns that the proposed changes could deter participation—especially among small and rural institutions. While supporting certain streamlining measures in the draft order, the coalition recommended delaying implementation until at least 2029 and incorporating stakeholder input, testing, and training if the portal moves forward. The letter can be read here.

FUNDING

SEC. MCMAHON TESTIFIES IN FRONT OF LHHS-ED APPROPRIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

Last Tuesday, the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies held a hearing on President Trump's Fiscal Year 2027 budget request for the Department of Education (ED), with Secretary of Education Linda McMahon as the sole witness. The hearing covered a wide range of education policy topics, including the administration's proposed consolidation of K-12 programs into a block grant, ongoing

restructuring and downsizing of ED, student loan repayment reforms, and the future of TRIO and other student support programs. McMahon testified to ED's recent achievements, which she characterized as including the development of 10 interagency partnerships, the award of the first "Returning Education to the States" waiver to Iowa, and the launch of the Education Freedom Tax Credit. She also supported the proposed budget, offering $18 billion in Title I-A grants, a $33 billion Pell Grant request, $2 billion in new "Make Education Great Again" (MEGA) grants focused on literacy and numeracy, and $16 billion for IDEA programs as key highlights. Republicans largely praised the administration's emphasis on returning education authority to the states, while Democrats sharply criticized what they characterized as a dismantling of ED, illegal and abrupt funding cuts, and the gutting of the Office of Civil Rights. You can watch the full hearing here. A full summary prepared by BPAG is here.

URBAN INSTITUTE ON FEDERAL POLICY CHANGES RESHAPING EDUCATION FUNDING

Last Wednesday, the Urban Institute hosted a panel discussion titled, "Federal Policy Changes and Their Impacts on Education." The event brought together an initial group of internal researchers, followed by a panel of industry experts, to examine how upcoming changes under the One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB) are reshaping the financial landscape for K–12 schools. The discussion focused particularly on state budgets, school meals, and Medicaid in schools. Maggie Reeves (Urban Institute) opened by framing schools as stabilizing community institutions that absorb the effects of policy changes at every level of government. She emphasized that the federal government's role in education extends beyond direct spending to include data collection, research, and civil rights enforcement. Reeves noted that changes to programs like Medicaid and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)—not traditionally considered education policy—can significantly affect state budgets and school funding formulas. Emily Gutierrez explained that OBBB-related cuts to Medicaid and SNAP will shift costs to states and reduce the number of students directly certified for free school meals. This change is expected to increase administrative burdens and exacerbate stigma for families who must apply individually. She highlighted research showing that universal free meal programs improve test scores, graduation rates, and overall school climate, and warned that mounting budget pressure could threaten these widely used programs and negatively impact student outcomes. Karishma Furtado (Urban Institute) examined school-based Medicaid funding, noting that the program accounts for at least $8.1 billion annually in school health services. She argued that OBBB's most significant risk to schools may not be direct service cuts, but rather increased competition for limited state funds as states attempt to offset federal reductions. The panel discussion highlighted significant variation in state readiness to respond to these changes. Sasha Pudelski of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) noted that many superintendents remain unaware of the full fiscal implications. Meanwhile, Kathryn White of the National Association of State Budget Officers cautioned that COVID-era revenue surpluses have largely been exhausted, leaving states with little financial cushion. Panelists urged state and local leaders to proactively evaluate funding formulas, explore alternative measures of child poverty for service eligibility, and improve coordination across agencies before the full impact of these policy changes is realized.

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2. Budget and Appropriations Wrap-Up

Congress moved forward on multiple fiscal fronts last week, as appropriators dug into the administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 budget request. House Republicans advanced a closely

contested budget resolution to unlock reconciliation and committees continued laying the groundwork for upcoming spending bills.

On the appropriations side, agency leaders fanned out across Capitol Hill to defend their budget requests, including Education Secretary Linda McMahon, who appeared before lawmakers to outline the administration's vision for the Department of Education. Her testimony drew pointed questions from both parties, particularly around proposed structural changes at the agency and funding priorities. McMahon emphasized flexibility and efficiency in federal education programs, telling lawmakers that the administration is "looking at how to better align programs with outcomes for students and workers," while acknowledging that "no final decisions have been made" regarding the agency's reorganization.

Republicans on the panel largely welcomed efforts to streamline federal programs and shift toward workforce-focused investments. Democrats, however, raised concerns about potential disruptions to vulnerable populations. "We cannot support proposals that would weaken or scatter critical education programs, particularly those serving students with disabilities," said Sen. Patty Murray (D-WA), Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, warning that major changes require careful scrutiny and stakeholder input.

While hearings continued, the most consequential floor action came in the House, where Republicans narrowly passed a FY 2027 budget resolution, a key step toward advancing a reconciliation package. The measure cleared the chamber by a razor-thin 215–211 margin, underscoring the tight political dynamics facing the majority. Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) framed the vote as a necessary step to advance the party's fiscal agenda, stating, "This budget resolution puts us on a path to restore fiscal sanity and rein in Washington's spending." The narrow margin, however, highlighted ongoing divisions within the conference and foreshadowed challenges ahead. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) sharply criticized the measure, arguing that "this budget lays the groundwork for cuts that will hurt working families while doing little to address the real cost pressures Americans face." Even some Republicans acknowledged the difficulty of the road ahead. "This was the first test," said Rep. Chip Roy (R-TX). "The real challenge will be delivering a reconciliation bill that can get 218 votes."

That challenge is compounded by the legislative calendar. With limited floor time before the summer recess and a crowded agenda that includes annual appropriations bills, leadership will need to move quickly while maintaining near-unanimous support within its ranks. In the Senate, where reconciliation bills can pass with a simple majority, the House's thin margins still loom large, as any final package must first clear the lower chamber.

At the same time, appropriators are continuing their parallel track of work on FY 2027 spending bills. The House is preparing to mark up the Commerce, Justice, Science (CJS) appropriations bill. Work is also gearing up on the Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education (LHHS) bill, one of the most complex and politically sensitive measures in the appropriations portfolio. Lawmakers in both parties will face challenges in putting together a bill that invests in education,

workforce programs, health and research, and faces spending limitations that staff and Members circumvented last year.

"There's a lot of work to do, and not a lot of time to do it," said Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Ranking Member of the House Appropriations Committee and the LHHS Subcommittee. "We should be focused on bipartisan investments that strengthen our economy and support families, not partisan budget exercises that make the appropriations process harder."

For now, that work will pause briefly. Both the House and Senate are in recess this week, giving lawmakers time back in their districts before returning to Washington May 11th. When they do, they will face the dual challenge of advancing individual appropriations bills while also attempting to translate the newly adopted budget resolution into a viable reconciliation package—an effort that will test both the calendar and the cohesion of a narrowly divided Congress.

How does this impact State School Board Associations?

The uncertainty surrounding FY27 LHHS-Ed appropriations casts a shadow over key programs like Title I and IDEA, while proposed Department of Education reforms and a growing emphasis on workforce outcomes could shift priorities and program structure. For State School Board Associations, this means preparing districts for budget volatility, advocating to protect funding for vulnerable student populations, and engaging early with policymakers to shape both appropriations and broader policy changes in a compressed and highly partisan legislative environment.

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3. In Brief – Last Week in Washington

AEI PANEL EXAMINES MISSISSIPPI'S "MARATHON" IN LITERACY REFORM

Last Monday, the American Enterprise Institute hosted a panel of education policy experts to examine the factors behind Mississippi's sustained gains in fourth-grade reading scores and the lessons the state's experience offers for national literacy reform. AEI Senior Fellow Robert Pondiscio framed the discussion around the idea that Mississippi's success is better understood as a "marathon," not a "miracle." All three panelists played significant roles in the state's policy changes and offered distinct perspectives on the reform effort. Rachel Canter (Progressive Policy Institute) presented her recent paper on the "Mississippi Marathon," outlining the state's rise from near the bottom of National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) rankings in the late 1990s to surpassing the national average in fourth-grade reading by 2019. She noted that these gains persisted through the COVID-19 pandemic and were evident across racial, socioeconomic, and ability groups. Canter attributed the progress to four key tenets: a coherent reform agenda built on rigorous standards and a high proficiency bar; growth-focused accountability; evidence-based instructional policies grounded in the Science of Reading; and a sustained commitment to teacher training and implementation support. Kymyona Burk (ExcelinEd) described the state-level work required to translate legislation into practice, including targeted professional development for literacy support schools, alignment of messaging and resources, and a shift within the state Department of Education from a compliance-oriented model to a service-oriented one. Kelly Butler (Reading Universe) highlighted the role of the Barksdale Reading Institute in building early infrastructure for scientifically based reading instruction beginning in 2000. Both emphasized that teacher knowledge—not just teacher effort—is the most critical factor in improving literacy outcomes and noted that educator preparation programs have historically operated outside

accountability systems in ways that can undermine reform. Panelists also addressed ongoing challenges, including sustaining momentum amid leadership turnover, declines in literacy coaching during the COVID-19 period, and persistent reading gaps between fourth and eighth grade—an issue Pondiscio described as a national, not Mississippi-specific, concern. The discussion concluded with a call for other states to view Mississippi's experience as a model for long-term, implementation-focused reform rather than a shortcut to rapid gains.

BROOKINGS PANEL WARNS OF AI'S IMPACT ON EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT

Also last Monday, the Brookings Institution hosted a panel discussion titled "Raising Young Children in an AI World," the first event in its Generation AI Starts Early series. The conversation explored how artificial intelligence is already entering the lives of young children through AI-enabled toys and learning tools, and what that means for children from birth through age eight. Panelists emphasized that early childhood—particularly the first five years—is a uniquely formative period when children develop the foundations for language, emotional regulation, social connection, and long-term learning. They highlighted that young children's brains develop through repeated, responsive interactions with caregivers, including conversation, play, and other back-and-forth exchanges that build the "infrastructure" for later cognitive and social growth. Speakers warned that AI may reshape the ecology of childhood at a time when families are increasingly dispersed and communities are less engaged in childrearing. In this context, panelists expressed concern that AI companions or human-like systems could further diminish the depth and quality of children's human relationships. While acknowledging that AI may offer useful tools, they stressed it should not replace human interaction. The discussion also underscored the importance of boredom, creativity, and imperfect social interactions in fostering resilience and healthy development—elements that AI could potentially undermine. Panelists further cautioned that young children may be particularly vulnerable to technologies that appear friendly or human, raising risks of misinformation, over-attachment, or harmful guidance. Overall, the panel concluded that the best preparation for an AI-driven future is a deeply human childhood, grounded in strong caregiver relationships, open-ended play, creativity, and rich social engagement.

HOUSE HEARING HIGHLIGHTS DIVIDE OVER EQUITY POLICIES IN K–12 EDUCATION

Last Tuesday, the House Committee on Education and Workforce's Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education held a hearing titled "Leveling Down: How Equity Policies Undermine Excellence and Harm Students," which exposed a sharp partisan divide over the role of equity in K–12 education. Republicans argued that equity-focused reforms lower academic standards, weaken accountability, and limit access to gifted programs, advanced coursework, and charter schools, while Democrats maintained that equity and excellence are complementary and that federal support and civil rights enforcement are essential to expanding opportunity. Witnesses reinforced these contrasting views, with Republican-aligned experts emphasizing merit, rigor, and parental demand for advanced programs, and the Democratic witness highlighting persistent disparities in funding, resources, and access to high-quality education. Members' questioning further underscored disagreements over grading practices, standardized testing, school choice, and federal oversight, though both sides acknowledged the importance of ensuring all students can access strong educational opportunities. Overall, the hearing reflected

ongoing tensions over how best to balance academic excellence, equity, and the federal role in education policy moving forward. A comprehensive summary prepared by BPAG is here.

SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE ADVANCES GUARDRAILS AI CHATBOTS

Last Thursday, the Senate Judiciary Committee held an executive business meeting to consider a slate of federal judiciary nominees and markup three pieces of legislation drafted by Committee members. Much of the legislative discussion focused on child safety, and particularly S. 3062, the Guidelines for User Age-verification and Responsible Dialogue Act of 2025, or GUARD Act. S. 3062 – introduced on a bipartisan basis by Senators Hawley (R-MO), Blumenthal (D-CT), Britt (R-AL), Warner (D-VA), Murphy (D-CT), and Kelly (D-AZ) – would establish liability for AI companies whose chatbots expose minors to sexually explicit content or encourage self-harm. It would require AI chatbots to implement age verification measures and additional disclosure requirements for its users. Senator Hawley spoke at length on behalf of the bill, arguing that current safeguards for minors are inadequate and that Congress must impose clearer standards and accountability on AI technologies. Hawley and others also emphasized the real-life implications stemming from the growing use of chatbots by teenagers and young children, highlighting multiple cases where minors either hurt themselves or developed dangerous relationships with AI chatbots. Members from both sides of the aisle supported the GUARD Act as a necessary measure to add guardrails to the rapid adoption of AI technologies, particularly amongst young children. Senator Padilla (D-CA), however, expressed concern with S. 3062's age verification requirements and concerns around privacy in implementing those protective measures. Senator Cruz also expressed his hope that the GUARD Act be revised to allow specific, regulated uses of conversational AI in learning environments, rather than an outright prohibition. Senator Hawley clarified that "this bill does not ban AI chatbots," but rather outlines clear guardrails for activity and material that *cannot* be promoted by chatbots, including self-harm, suicide, or sexually explicit material. S. 3062, the GUARD Act, was ultimately advanced unanimously out of the Committee.

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4. New Publications

Unraveling the Case for Credentials in High School

New America (April 2026)

New research from Ohio and Texas finds that non-degree credentials earned in high school can boost earnings, but only when they are high-quality and aligned with a student's career and technical education (CTE) program of study; misaligned credentials can reduce wages by up to 30%. The benefits are also uneven across demographic groups, suggesting states need to move beyond simply counting credentials and focus on quality, alignment, and equity.

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5. In the News

We're Adrift': Arne Duncan on Democrats' Education Agenda

The 74 Million (April 30, 2026)

Inside the new math wars: Navigating division over teaching approaches

K-12 Dive (April 28, 2026)

How the Science of Reading Is Reshaping Teaching: What the Data Say

EdWeek (April 29, 2026)

Education Groups Say New E-Rate Bidding Portal Will Hurt Small Districts Hardest
EdWeek (May 1, 2026)

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THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON

6. Weekly Calendar

Tuesday, May 5, 2026

Webinar: Making AI Work in Schools
Subject: EdWeek will hold a webinar to explore how districts can move from early experimentation to purposeful, systemwide AI practice.
Panelists: Amanda Bickerstaff, co-founder and CEO, AI for Education; Alex Lamb, assistant research professor, University of Connecticut; Susan Coleman, superintendent, Golf School District 67; David Norman, principal, Golf Middle School; and Ellen Agnello, marketing analyst, Frontline Education.
Time: 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.
Contact: Register **here.**

Webinar: Strategies to Reduce Chronic Absenteeism
Subject: The Campaign for Grade-Level Reading will hold a webinar to examine how Raising Attendance and Improvement Student Engagement (RAISE) teams are using data to drive decisions, adapting strategies to local contexts, and focusing on outcomes to reduce chronic absenteeism.
Panelists: Alicia Grunow, Improvement Collection; Cecelia Leong, Attendance Works; Kristi Napoli, Golden Hills Elementary School, California; Caitlin Webb, Palermo Union Elementary School District, California; and John Gomperts, Campaign for Grade-Level Reading.
Time: 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.
Contact: Register **here.**

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7. Future Hearings and Events

Wednesday, June 3, 2026

Webinar: Making Sense of the New E-Rate Bidding Portal
Subject: The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition will hold a webinar that dives into scenarios that schools and districts face and highlights PTAC's research on transparency.
Time: 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 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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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

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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

For more information, please visit our website.

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