The Consortium of State School Boards Associations Weekly Education Report

JULY 27, 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**
   - **School Nutrition**
     - **Federal School Meal Reimbursements Increase Slightly for 2026-27**: Most school lunch payments will see a 1 cent increase in 2026-27 from last year's rates under the U.S. Department of Agriculture's annual adjustment.

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

3. **In Brief – Last Week in Washington**
   - **House Education Panel Advances Education, Student Privacy Bills**: On Tuesday, On Tuesday, July 21, the House Committee on Education & Workforce held a markup to consider ten bills, including several measures affecting K–12 schools, student privacy, artificial intelligence regulation, and education-to-workforce data systems.
   - **ED Announces Elimination of Unnecessary Burdens on CTE Programs:** On Wednesday, the Department of Education announced a final rule eliminating the Methods of Administration (MOA) program, a federal oversight framework that required states to conduct specialized civil-rights compliance reviews of career and technical education (CTE) programs.
   - **Microschools Emerge as Community-Driven, Student-Centered Option:** On Wednesday, Democrats for Education Reform hosted microschool leaders for a

discussion on the growing interest in microschools and other nontraditional learning models.

- **ED Removes Disparate-Impact From Title VI Regulations:** On Thursday, the Department of Education announced that its Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is rescinding provisions in the Title VI regulations that permit schools and other federally funded educational institutions to be held liable for policies that are facially neutral but disproportionately affect students of a particular race, color, or national origin.
- **States Respond to AI's Growing Role in the Classroom:** The American Association for the Advancement of Science hosted a webinar on Thursday examining the opportunities and risks associated with artificial intelligence in the classroom, as well as the state policy responses it has prompted.
- **ED Approves South Dakota's "Returning Education To The States" Waiver:** On Friday, the Department of Education granted South Dakota a Returning Education to the States (RES) waiver and approved its Ed-Flex application, giving the state greater authority to align federal education funding with its priorities.

4. New Publications

- **What Works In Career Exploration: An Assessment of the K-12 Evidence Base**
  Project Evident (July 2026)
  What Works in Career Exploration is a body of research spanning career development, youth development, education, and workforce fields that provides a strong rationale for early and sustained career exploration as a developmental priority.
- **Study of High-Quality Youth Apprenticeship**
  Mathematica (July 2026)
  This four-year study (2024–2028) includes an outcomes study to assess how apprentices and employers benefit from participation and an implementation study to understand how programs operate, how partners work together, and the experiences of implementors, apprentices, and employers.
- **Career and Technical Education Policy: A Multistate Case Study on Employment Outcomes**
  Center for American Progress (July 2026)
  There is growing interest in scaling career and technical education, yet barriers to advancement remain. This report offers policy recommendations and case studies from states to expand these opportunities for more students.
- **Calculated Barriers: Examining the History Behind Math Inequities Facing Black Students**
  Just Equations (June 2026)
  Providing access to a quality math education for all Black students requires a transformation of our entire math education system, including dismantling the gatekeepers that perpetuate inequity. It must be grounded in the belief that all students are capable of math success when provided with the proper support. In addition to helping Black students, such changes stand to benefit other groups that also have been excluded from math opportunity.

5. **In the News**
   - **U.S. Judge Rejects Trump's Justification For Terminating Thousands Of Grants**
     Science.org (July 20, 2026)
   - **Education Dept. Eliminates Tool Used To Prove Racial Discrimination**
     The Washington Post (July 23, 2026)
   - **In First School Visit, President Urges Atlanta Crowd to Support 'Trump Accounts'**
     The 74 Million (July 22, 2026)

6. **Weekly Calendar - What's coming up this week?**
   - **Webinar: Cybersecurity for Schools and Libraries**: The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition will hold a webinar discussing the FCC's Schools and Libraries Cybersecurity Pilot Program — what has been funded, what services are supported, and what comes next for long-term cybersecurity funding for anchor institutions.
     Wednesday at 2pm ET
   - **Senate HELP Committee Labor Secretary Vote and Markup on Education-Related Legislation**: The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee will hold a markup of several bills: Special Education Administration Protection Act; To prohibit the transfer of certain offices and functions of the Department of Education to other Federal agencies, and for other purposes; College Transparency Act; 21st Century Dyslexia Act; RISE Act; State-Based Loan Awareness Act; READ Act; Emergency Savings Enhancement Act; Railroad Retirement Board Stability Act; Health Information Privacy Reform Act.
     Thursday at 9:45am ET

7. **On The Floor of Congress This Week**
   - **Senate floor**
     - **HR 5334**, vehicle for sanctions legislation
     - Consideration of nominees
     - Potential consideration of continuing resolution
   - **House floor**: In recess

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

9. **About BPAG**

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1. COSSBA Policy Priorities

SCHOOL NUTRITION

FEDERAL SCHOOL MEAL REIMBURSEMENTS INCREASE SLIGHTLY FOR 2026-27

Federal reimbursement rates will increase by 3.54% for school breakfasts and lunches in the upcoming school year compared to 2025-26, the Department of Agriculture announced last week. The national average reimbursement rates are adjusted annually based on the Food Away from Home series Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers, which is overseen by the Bureau of

Labor Statistics. The latest update applies from July 1, 2026, through June 30, 2027. Read more on the new rates breakdown for schools, depending on the portion of free and reduced-price meals served, for the National School Lunch Program and the School Breakfast Program in the 2026-27 school year.

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2. Budget and Appropriations Wrap-Up

Congress moved closer last week to acknowledging that the regular Fiscal Year 2027 appropriations process will not be completed before government funding expires September 30, with the House approving a continuing resolution as senators began negotiating their own version of a stopgap measure.

The House voted 220-205 on Tuesday to extend federal funding generally at current levels through December 4. Six Democrats supported the measure, while one Republican opposed it. House leaders argued that acting well before the deadline would reduce the risk of another shutdown and give Congress additional time to complete the 12 annual appropriations bills. House Appropriations Committee Chairman Tom Cole (R-OK) pointed to the two funding lapses Congress has already experienced, saying, "I'm not willing to risk a third time if we can avoid that."

Democrats voiced objections to the development of the measure, which was done without bipartisan negotiations and before the White House had provided Congress with a complete list of requested funding adjustments. House Appropriations Committee Ranking Member Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) said lawmakers were "scrambling to jam through a one-sided stopgap measure two days before everyone leaves for the August recess."

The House bill is unlikely to pass the Senate without changes. Because most legislation requires 60 votes to advance in the Senate, Republicans will need Democratic support. Senate appropriators are engaged in bipartisan discussions about a measure that could incorporate funding adjustments omitted from the House bill, including additional resources sought by the Administration for defense and other priorities.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD said last week that he intends to bring a funding measure to the Senate floor "before the August break" and described conversations between the parties as productive. "We've had conversations, productive conversations, on both sides of the aisle on a funding resolution that would carry us past the November election," he said.

That schedule, however, does not guarantee that Congress will send a final bill to the President before recess. The House left Washington last week, while the Senate is scheduled to remain for two additional weeks. Any Senate changes would have to be accepted by the House, potentially leaving final action until lawmakers return in September. Senator Mike Rounds (R-SD) predicted the Senate would modify the House measure to attract Democratic votes and then return it to the House as "the best we can do."

Concerns about another shutdown also framed a House Appropriations Committee hearing Wednesday titled "Funding Lapses: Analyzing Shutdown Reform." Members and witnesses examined automatic continuing resolutions, changes to the congressional budget process and reforms governing how agencies apportion funds during a lapse. Much of the discussion was

bipartisan, although participants disagreed about whether automatic funding extensions would encourage negotiations or allow Congress to avoid completing its work.

Senator James Lankford (R-OK) promoted a proposal providing renewable 14-day funding extensions while requiring lawmakers to remain in Washington. DeLauro cautioned that "auto-CRs are permission never to finish the process at all," warning that permanent stopgaps could harden negotiating positions.

Meanwhile, the Senate made no discernible progress this week on its 12 individual FY 2027 appropriations bills. Appropriations Chair Susan Collins (R-ME) and Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA) remain divided over overall defense and non-defense spending levels, and without a bipartisan topline agreement the committee lacks a viable route for advancing bills that ultimately require Democratic support.

Outside the appropriations process, the House Education and Workforce Committee advanced 10 bills addressing education, workforce and labor policy, including measures involving Title IX, parental consent, artificial-intelligence literacy and workforce-data systems. The Senate HELP Committee announced that it will mark up another package on July 30, including the College Transparency Act, the RISE Act, dyslexia legislation and competing proposals concerning the transfer of Education Department offices and responsibilities. It's not clear how many of these bills will get anywhere near the president's desk before the end of the 119th Congress.

House lawmakers are gone for five weeks; Senate lawmakers are eager to follow them.

How does this impact State School Board Associations?

For school boards, a continuing resolution would provide short-term stability by keeping federal education programs funded at approximately current levels through December 4, reducing the immediate risk of a government shutdown. However, districts may face continued uncertainty when developing budgets and staffing plans because Congress is unlikely to finalize FY 2027 funding levels until late in the calendar year, if not into the New Year. School boards should also expect limited near-term impact from the education bills moving through Congress, as many face an uncertain path to enactment before the end of the 119th Congress.

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3. In Brief – Last Week in Washington

HOUSE EDUCATION PANEL ADVANCES EDUCATION, STUDENT PRIVACY BILLS

On Tuesday, On Tuesday, July 21, the House Committee on Education & Workforce held a markup to consider ten bills, including several measures affecting K–12 schools, student privacy, artificial intelligence regulation, and education-to-workforce data systems. The discussion centered on how Congress should balance parental authority, student privacy protections, and the use of sensitive information in schools. The Committee advanced H.R. 8781, the Title IX Clarification Act of 2026, which would define sex under Title IX by reference to biological sex. Supporters described the bill as codifying the statute's original meaning, while opponents argued that it could weaken protections for transgender students beyond the context of school athletics. Members also debated H.R. 4986, the Parents Opt-in Protection Act, which would amend the

Protection of Pupil Rights Amendment (PPRA) to require written consent for each school survey involving sensitive topics. Republicans argued that the bill would strengthen parental control over the collection of information related to mental health, political or religious beliefs, sexual behavior, and other protected subjects. Democrats responded that PPRA already provides survey-inspection rights and consent standards and warned that repeated opt-in requirements could reduce student participation in important data-collection surveys. The Committee also discussed H.R. 8747, the K–12 AI Literacy and Readiness Act of 2026, which would expressly allow Title IV-A funding to support AI instruction and educator professional development. Although the Committee broadly supported stronger AI literacy, several Members argued that the bill lacked sufficient safeguards addressing student privacy, age-appropriate use, and responsible implementation. Finally, the MATCH Act of 2026 (H.R. 8183) would support state talent marketplaces using learning and employment records (LER), with revisions requiring individual consent before personal information may be disclosed. Together, the bills highlighted continuing congressional interest in modernizing federal education policy while defining clearer boundaries around consent, data collection, and student privacy.

ED ANNOUNCES ELIMINATION OF UNNECESSARY BURDENS ON CTE PROGRAMS

On Wednesday, the Department of Education announced a final rule eliminating the Methods of Administration (MOA) program, a federal oversight framework that required states to conduct specialized civil-rights compliance reviews of career and technical education (CTE) programs. Created in 1979, the MOA program required state agencies to proactively review CTE providers for compliance with federal civil-rights laws. The Department characterized these reviews as burdensome and duplicative because CTE programs remain subject to OCR's broader compliance, complaint-investigation, and enforcement processes—just like other federally funded education programs. The final rule rescinds Appendix B to 34 C.F.R. Part 100. States may continue conducting similar reviews voluntarily, but the federal government will no longer require them. Importantly, the change does not alter the substantive civil-rights obligations of CTE programs. Institutions receiving federal funding must still comply with all laws enforced by OCR, and students, parents, and advocates may continue filing discrimination or retaliation complaints. Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Kimberly Richey described the action as "a win-win for state agencies and schools that administer CTE programs." In practical terms, states will no longer have to maintain the separate MOA review process and may redirect the associated staff time and resources. However, CTE programs remain fully accountable under Title VI and other federal civil-rights laws, and OCR retains its existing investigative and enforcement authority.

MICROSCHOOLS EMERGE AS COMMUNITY-DRIVEN, STUDENT-CENTERED OPTION

On Wednesday, Democrats for Education Reform hosted microschool leaders for a discussion on the growing interest in microschools and other nontraditional learning models. Panelists described an expanding ecosystem of small, flexible learning environments that respond directly to families' demand for personalized, community-rooted educational options. Don Soifer, who leads a nonprofit that supports microschool founders nationwide, emphasized that most founders are current or former licensed public school educators. He estimated that microschools now serve approximately 1.5 million students across diverse communities and income levels. Microschools take several forms, including independent models serving approximately 20 students, public-private partnerships, provider networks operating at scale in school-choice states, and public microschools established by districts or charter schools within existing regulatory frameworks.

Tiffany Thenor, a former public school teacher and founder of Wonder Here, described her project-based, play-based, and parent-driven microschool network. Launched in Central Florida in 2016, the network has expanded to six locations across Florida and South Carolina. Students participate in farm chores, gardening, cooking, and core academic instruction in nontraditional settings. Superintendent George Philhower explained that his rural Indiana district created public microschools after hearing from families seeking more personalized and flexible options. The district opened its first site in August 2025 and quickly experienced strong demand. Most participating students had previously been homeschooled, and the district now has a growing waitlist as it prepares to open four additional sites in 2026. Across these efforts, speakers emphasized that parents primarily choose microschools for active, personalized learning and stronger community connections. They also identified students' nonacademic growth and renewed enjoyment of learning as important outcomes. Panelists stressed that innovative district leadership will be critical to developing public-microschool partnerships as enrollment patterns and school budgets continue to shift.

ED REMOVES DISPARATE-IMPACT FROM TITLE VI REGULATIONS

On Thursday, the Department of Education announced that its Office for Civil Rights (OCR) is rescinding provisions in the Title VI regulations that permit schools and other federally funded educational institutions to be held liable for policies that are facially neutral but disproportionately affect students of a particular race, color, or national origin. The Department argues that disparate-impact enforcement improperly allowed demographic disparities alone to support a civil-rights violation without proof of discriminatory intent. According to the announcement, this approach pressured schools to consider race or pursue racial balancing, particularly when making student-discipline decisions. The change implements President Trump's April 2025 executive order directing federal agencies to eliminate disparate-impact liability and follows a similar December 2025 action by the Department of Justice. The affected provisions are contained in 34 C.F.R. Part 100. Importantly, Title VI's prohibition against intentional discrimination remains in place. OCR says it will continue investigating schools accused of treating students differently because of race, color, or national origin. The change narrows the basis for liability: a statistical disparity by itself will no longer establish a Title VI regulatory violation. Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Kimberly Richey framed the action as protecting classroom authority while preserving traditional civil-rights enforcement: "A child is so much more than a number in a data set." In practical terms, schools should face less federal exposure when a race-neutral policy produces unequal demographic outcomes, absent evidence that the institution intentionally discriminated. The Department specifically presents this as giving educators greater latitude to administer discipline without triggering an OCR violation solely because discipline rates differ across racial groups.

STATES RESPOND TO AI'S GROWING ROLE IN THE CLASSROOM

The American Association for the Advancement of Science hosted a webinar on Thursday examining the opportunities and risks associated with artificial intelligence in the classroom, as well as the state policy responses it has prompted. Panelists explored how generative AI has evolved over the past four years, including its growing presence in classrooms. This evolution has spurred legislative action in several states. During the current legislative session, Alabama, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Illinois, Iowa, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Utah, and Virginia have passed bills addressing AI in education. This legislation generally focuses on four areas: establishing guidelines for classroom AI use;

ensuring that education technology companies meet data transparency and privacy standards; commissioning studies to assess the current role of AI in education; and creating age-appropriate filters for AI-generated content. The current education system is built around a simple cycle: teachers assign work, and students complete it for a grade. This structure can inadvertently encourage students to offload their work entirely to AI rather than invest the time and effort an assignment requires. Although this may not be the intended outcome, teachers cannot fairly accuse students of cheating merely for using AI when expectations are unclear. Instead, teachers and students need to understand how AI works and how it can be integrated into curricula in ways that enhance learning rather than undermine it. AI in education remains a rapidly evolving landscape that will require creative solutions to increasingly complex challenges.

ED APPROVES SOUTH DAKOTA'S "RETURNING EDUCATION TO THE STATES" WAIVER

On Friday, the Department of Education granted South Dakota a Returning Education to the States (RES) waiver and approved its Ed-Flex application, giving the state greater authority to align federal education funding with its priorities. South Dakota is the sixth state to receive a RES waiver and the 22nd to receive Ed-Flex authority—the highest number of Ed-Flex states in the program's history. The RES waiver allows South Dakota to consolidate more than $19 million in federal funding through 2029 to support literacy, family engagement, mathematics instruction, and other academic priorities. Across the six states with RES waivers, more than $109 million can now be administered with greater state flexibility. South Dakota may consolidate state-level funds from federal programs covering assessments, educator support, English-language acquisition, student enrichment, and 21st Century Community Learning Centers. Ed-Flex authority also allows South Dakota to waive certain federal requirements for local educational agencies without first obtaining the Department's approval. Federal law requires waiver requests to explain how the proposed flexibility will improve student outcomes. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon said the waiver gives state leaders "more control over federal funding allocations" while keeping resources "closest to the child." South Dakota Gov. Larry Rhoden called the approvals "another step in the right direction to returning education to the states," while state Education Secretary Joseph Graves said the flexibility would help school districts use federal funding to better meet students' needs.

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4. New Publications

What Works In Career Exploration: An Assessment of the K-12 Evidence Base

Project Evident (July 2026)

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Study of High-Quality Youth Apprenticeship

Mathematica (July 2026)

This four-year study (2024–2028) includes an outcomes study to assess how apprentices and employers benefit from participation and an implementation study to understand how programs operate, how partners work together, and the experiences of implementors, apprentices, and employers.

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Calculated Barriers: Examining the History Behind Math Inequities Facing Black Students
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5. In the News

U.S. Judge Rejects Trump's Justification For Terminating Thousands Of Grants
Science.org (July 20, 2026)

Education Dept. Eliminates Tool Used To Prove Racial Discrimination
The Washington Post (July 23, 2026)

In First School Visit, President Urges Atlanta Crowd to Support 'Trump Accounts'
The 74 Million (July 22, 2026)

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THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON

6. Weekly Calendar

Wednesday, July 29, 2026

Webinar: Cybersecurity for Schools and Libraries
Subject: The Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband (SHLB) Coalition will hold a webinar discussing the FCC's Schools and Libraries Cybersecurity Pilot Program — what has been funded, what services are supported, and what comes next for long-term cybersecurity funding for anchor institutions.
Time: 2:00 p.m.
Contact: Register **here.**

Thursday, July 30, 2026

Markup: Senate HELP Committee
Subject: The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee will hold a markup of S. 5046, to prohibit the transfer of certain offices and functions of the Department of Education to other Federal agencies; S. 2511 , the "College Transparency Act"; S. 3010, the "21st Century Dyslexia Act"; S. 3589, the "Respond, Innovate, Succeed, and Empower Act";

S. 4097, the "State-Based Loan Awareness Act"; S. 4689, the "Reading Excellence and Achievement for Development Act"; S. 3333, the "Emergency Savings Enhancement Act"; S. 4965, the "Railroad Retirement Board Stability Act"; S. 3097, the "Health Information Privacy Reform Act"; the "Special Education Administration Protection Act"; and vote on the nominations of Sean Kaufman to be assistant HHS secretary for preparedness and response; and Keith Sonderling to be Labor secretary.
Time: 10:00 a.m.
Contact: Live stream available **here.**

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7. On The Floor of Congress This Week

Senate:

- **HR 5334**, vehicle for Sanctions legislation
- Consideration of nominees
- Potential consideration of continuing resolution

House: In recess

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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

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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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:

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

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