



# The Consortium of State School Boards Associations Weekly Education Report

**FEBRUARY 3, 2025**

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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**
  - **Funding**
    - **Federal Judge Temporarily Blocks Trump Administration’s Funding Freeze:** A federal judge in Rhode Island temporarily blocked the Trump administration from freezing federal assistance after a group of 22 states and the District of Columbia challenged a memo from the White House budget office ordering a pause of federal funding.
2. **Budget and Appropriations Wrap-up**
  - **Impact on State School Board Associations**
3. **In Brief – Last Week in Washington**
  - **President Trump Issues Multiple Education-Related Executive Orders:** President Donald Trump issued three executive orders on Wednesday aimed at reshaping education policy, addressing key campaign promises related to K-12 education and higher education.
  - **New Report Card Shows Students Struggling to Recover Learning Loss:** On Wednesday, the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or “The Nation’s Report Card,” published its 2024 Mathematics and Reading scores for Grades 4 and 8. The results reveal that U.S. fourth- and eighth-grade students have yet to recover from pandemic-related learning losses.
  - **Senate HELP Committee Hears Testimony from HHS Nominee RFK Jr.:** On Thursday, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions held

a hearing on Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s nomination for Secretary of Health and Human Services.

- **ED Reinstates 2020 Title IX Rule After Court Ruling:** On Friday, the Department of Education announced that it will enforce the Trump Administration's 2020 Title IX Rule following a federal court ruling that deemed the Biden Administration's 2024 rewrite unlawful and unenforceable.

#### 4. **New Publications**

- **Testing Theories of Why: Four Keys to Interpreting US Student Achievement Trends**

*American Enterprise Institute (January 2025)*

Average U.S. student assessment scores rose through the 2000s, plateaued in the 2010s, and then dropped sharply during the pandemic, but a deeper look reveals that declines began around 2013 and were primarily driven by lower-performing students. These trends, along with widening achievement gaps and similar declines in adult performance, suggest broader societal influences beyond school-related factors.

#### 5. **In the News**

- **Trump Issues Orders on K-12 'Indoctrination,' School Choice and Campus Protests**

*Politico Pro (January 29, 2025)*

- **Trump White House Rescinds Memo Freezing Federal Money After Widespread Confusion**

*The Associated Press (January 29, 2025)*

- **Nearly 5 Years After Schools Closed, The Nation Gets A New Report Card**

*NPR (January 29, 2025)*

- **Trump Offering Buyouts To All Federal Workers**

*Axios (January 28, 2025)*

- **Trump Fires Independent Inspectors General In Friday Night Purge**

*Politico (January 25, 2025)*

- **Republican Proposal Would Make College Scholarships Taxable Income**

*Forbes (January 25, 2025)*

- **Education Department Rescinds Biden-Era Book Ban Guidance**

*K-12 Dive (January 24, 2025)*

- **State Lawmakers Ask Education Agency For Guidance On How Texas Schools Can Respond To Trump's Immigration Plans**

*Crossroads Today (January 24, 2025)*

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

- **Creating a Blueprint for America's Workforce:** The Bipartisan Policy Center will hold a summit on "America's Workforce: Creating a Blueprint for the Future."

*Tuesday at 1pm ET*

- **Developing Curriculum for Deep Thinking:** The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research will hold a discussion on "Developing Curriculum for Deep Thinking: The Knowledge Revival."

*Tuesday at 4pm ET*

- **Senate Commerce Committee Markup**: The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee will hold a markup of the “Rural Broadband Protection Act” (S. 98), the “Strengthening Support for American Manufacturing Act” (S. 99); the “She DRIVES Act (S. 161), the “Kids Off Social Media Act” (S. 278); and vote on the nomination of Howard Lutnick to be Commerce secretary.

*Wednesday at 10am ET*

- **House Science Committee Hearing**: The House Science, Space, and Technology Committee will hold a hearing on “The State of U.S. Science and Technology: Ensuring U.S. Global Leadership.”

*Wednesday at 10am ET*

- **House Education and Workforce Committee Hearing**: The House Education and the Workforce Committee will hold a hearing on “The State of American Education.”

*Wednesday at 10:15am ET*

- **Future of College Admissions**: The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research will hold a discussion on “The Future of College Admissions.”

*Wednesday at 4:30pm ET*

- **Supporting the Mental and Emotional Health of Black Students**: The Brookings Institution's Race, Prosperity, and Inclusion Initiative will hold a virtual discussion on “Supporting the Mental and Emotional Health of Black Students in Schools.”

*Friday at 1pm ET*

## 7. **On The Floor of Congress This Week**

- **Senate floor**
  - Consider the nomination of Christopher Wright, of Colorado, to be Secretary of Energy
  - Consider the nomination of Pamela Bondi, of Florida, to be Attorney General
  - Consider the nomination of Eric Turner, of Texas, to be Secretary of Housing and Urban Development
  - Consider the nomination of Russell Vought, of Virginia, to be Director of the Office of Management and Budget
- **House floor**
  - **H.R. 27** – HALT Fentanyl Act (Sponsored by Rep. Griffith / Energy and Commerce Committee)
  - **H.R. 26** – Protecting American Energy Production Act (Sponsored by Rep. Pfluger / Natural Resources Committee)

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

## 9. **About BPAG**

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## 1. COSSBA Policy Priorities

### FUNDING

#### FEDERAL JUDGE BLOCKS TRUMP ADMINISTRATION FUNDING FREEZE

Last week, the Trump administration's Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued a memo directing federal agencies to temporarily halt the disbursement of federal financial assistance across various programs, including foreign aid and initiatives related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. This directive led to widespread confusion among government employees, lawmakers, local and state organizations, and nonprofit organizations across the country with concerns about its potential impact on numerous federal programs. In response, immediate legal challenges were filed against the funding freeze. On January 28, U.S. District Judge Loren AliKhan issued a temporary stay, blocking the implementation of the freeze until a scheduled hearing on February 3. Subsequently, on January 31, U.S. District Judge John J. McConnell Jr. extended the block indefinitely in 22 states and the District of Columbia, stating that “no federal law would authorize the executive's unilateral action here.” Judge McConnell further criticized the OMB memo as “wide-ranging, all-encompassing, and ambiguous,” noting that it “cites no legal authority” and contravenes “the separation of powers.” Despite the OMB's withdrawal of the initial memo on January 29, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt indicated that the federal funding freeze would continue, leading to ongoing legal disputes and uncertainty regarding the administration's authority to unilaterally pause federal financial assistance.

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## 2. Budget and Appropriations Wrap-Up

Last week, House Republicans met in Florida for a three-day retreat to discuss legislative strategies, including the pursuit of one reconciliation package that would embody President Trump's priorities related to tax policy, border enforcement, energy and other issues. Education advocates expect school choice initiatives to be part of that effort. The retreat was also meant to serve as a venue for discussing how to resolve Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 spending as a mid-March expiration of the continuing resolution (CR) that is keeping federal operations funded at the previous year's levels approaches. Last week's spending freeze rollercoaster arguably upended at least some of those plans, and Republicans returned to Washington, DC, without resolving topline funding numbers to guide an agreement on FY 2025 spending. Presumably, they will work on determining those figures this week.

So what happened last week? The Trump administration issued a directive to pause federal funding for programs, aiming to reassess spending and potentially reduce government expenditures. The overly broad guidance caused a lot of confusion for individuals who rely on federal assistance, organizations that receive grants, researchers relying on federal funds, federal employees who faced lots of questions, and many others.

By the end of Tuesday, the directive faced legal challenges and opposition from educators, lawmakers, and advocacy groups, leading to courts blocking or pausing its implementation. The next day, the Administration unceremoniously rescinded the directive. While the action was celebrated by supporters of myriad programs government-wide, there was increasing sentiment

that the chaos sown by President Trump’s many Executive Orders and other directives could be the Administration’s goal.

### **How does this impact State School Board Associations?**

After some additional clarification for education stakeholders, it seemed that a funding pause would not affect K-12 formula programs such as Titles I, II and IV of the *Every Student Succeeds Act*. Since these programs are “forward funded,” states have already received their FY 2025 funds and wouldn’t be due to receive more money until July 1. The pause likely would have affected competitive grant funds, however, and had a significant effect at the Institute of Education Sciences. The reaction to last week’s directive, though rescinded, could very well inform the Administration’s next effort to disrupt what they consider to be the overreach of the federal government. The education advocacy community is bracing for what’s next.

So. What could be next? As of Friday afternoon, a rumor was circulating that President Trump is poised to sign an Executive Order that would aim to dismantle the Department of Education. Later rumors have the order potentially clarifying that it will direct Congress to consolidate and break-up the agency. Of course, for those who have been reading the orders, such a missive might include some disclaimers. Phrases such as “as applicable” and “as allowed by law” are familiar to order-readers, and any effort to shrink the agency would likely require some kind of review of its programs and responsibilities. In addition, there would be political and legal opposition to such an effort, and Congress would presumably need to go along with it. If the order materializes, it will certainly impact Secretary nominee Linda McMahon’s nomination hearing. While that hasn’t been scheduled, it has rumored it could be as soon as the week of February 10<sup>th</sup>.

Advocates for every cause are resting up. Coming weeks will be full of chaos.

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### **3. In Brief – Last Week in Washington**

#### **PRESIDENT TRUMP ISSUES MULTIPLE EDUCATION-RELATED EXECUTIVE ORDERS**

President Donald Trump issued three executive orders on Wednesday aimed at reshaping education policy and addressing key campaign promises related to K-12 and higher education. The actions focus on eliminating what the administration calls “indoctrination” in schools, promoting school choice, and combating antisemitism on college campuses. **The first executive order**, titled “Ending Radical Indoctrination in K-12 Schooling,” seeks to cut federal funding for schools that teach what the administration describes as “gender ideology and critical race theory.” It also directs the Attorney General to work with local officials to take legal action against educators and school officials accused of facilitating a minor’s gender transition. The order extends to teacher training and certification programs that support these concepts and calls for an “Ending Indoctrination Strategy” within 90 days. Additionally, it reinstates the 1776 Commission to promote patriotic education and influence civics lessons at national monuments and to prepare for America’s 250th anniversary. **The second order** prioritizes school choice, instructing the Department of Education to issue guidance on how states can support scholarship programs with federal funding. The order directs multiple federal agencies—including the Departments of Health and Human Services, Defense, and Interior—to expand access to private, faith-based, and alternative education options. This includes using the Defense Department funds for military families to choose schools outside of the Department’s system and allowing Bureau of Indian Education school families to use federal funds for alternative education. The order also mandates a review of federal grant programs to

ensure they align with the school choice agenda. **The third order** addresses antisemitism on college campuses, charging the Justice Department with prosecuting antisemitic crimes, including vandalism and intimidation. It directs the deportation and visa revocation of students found sympathetic to Hamas and calls for investigations into "anti-Jewish racism" at colleges deemed leftist or anti-American. Within 60 days, federal agencies must report their legal tools for combating antisemitism, and the Department of Education is required to list civil rights complaints related to antisemitic incidents since the October 7 Hamas attack on Israel. These actions underscore the administration's broader push to reshape federal education policy in alignment with its ideological stance.

### **NEW REPORT CARD SHOWS STUDENTS STRUGGLING TO RECOVER LEARNING LOSS**

On Wednesday, **the National Assessment of Educational Progress** (NAEP), or "The Nation's Report Card," published its **2024 Mathematics and Reading scores for Grades 4 and 8**. The results reveal that U.S. fourth- and eighth-grade students have yet to recover from pandemic-related learning losses. While fourth-grade mathematics scores improved slightly between 2022 and 2024, eighth-grade scores showed no significant change. Reading scores continued to decline at both grade levels, extending a downward trend that began in 2019. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) Commissioner Peggy Carr noted that improvements are primarily seen among higher-performing students, while lower-performing students continue to struggle, especially in reading. Despite overall challenges, there are positive trends in fourth-grade mathematics, with 15 states and 14 urban school districts improving since 2022. Alabama and Louisiana even surpassed their 2019 scores in specific subjects. However, absenteeism remains above pre-pandemic levels. Reading declines affected multiple racial and ethnic groups, with Hispanic eighth-graders seeing the largest drop. Regionally, reading scores fell in most areas, with city and suburban schools showing the most significant declines. In mathematics, fourth graders gained two points nationally since 2022, while eighth-grade scores remained unchanged. Among racial groups, Black, Hispanic, and White fourth graders improved, but Hispanic eighth graders saw a decline. State trends show that reading scores mostly declined or remained stagnant, while 15 states improved in fourth-grade math. Urban district results were mixed, with notable gains in fourth-grade math but minimal improvement in reading. Compared to 2019, national reading and mathematics scores remain lower, with reading dropping five points and math down three points for fourth graders and eight points for eighth graders. The NAEP assessment, which tested over 460,000 students in 2024, highlights the ongoing struggle to regain pre-pandemic academic performance.

### **COMMERCE NOMINEE HEARING HIGHLIGHTS STEM-DRIVEN INNOVATION**

On Wednesday, the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation **held a hearing** to consider the nomination of Howard Lutnick to be the U.S. Secretary of Commerce. The hearing showcased relevant discussions on STEM education and the implementation of the *CHIPS and Science Act*. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) emphasized the importance of the *CHIPS and Science Act* in revitalizing the American semiconductor manufacturing industry and stressed that the *CHIPS and Science Act* was a bipartisan effort aimed at responding to global competition, particularly from China, and that its implementation required collaboration between the government and private sector. Additionally, Senator Amy Klobuchar (D-MN) reinforced the significance of the CHIPS program in maintaining U.S. leadership in technology and innovation. She underscored that funds still need to be distributed effectively, and that the Commerce Secretary

would play a crucial role in ensuring that manufacturing and innovation remain in the United States. Lutnick affirmed his commitment to executing the CHIPS program effectively and said the legislation was an important “downpayment” for strengthening domestic industry. Although there was no extensive discussion specifically on STEM education programs, the broader themes of technological innovation, AI regulation, and semiconductor manufacturing imply a strong link to the need for a skilled workforce. Overall, the hearing underscored bipartisan commitment to ensuring that *CHIPS and Science Act* funding reaches the intended recipients, bolsters domestic technology manufacturing, and positions the United States as a leader in global innovation.

#### **SENATE HELP COMMITTEE HEARS TESTIMONY FROM HHS NOMINEE RFK JR.**

On Thursday, the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) held a hearing on Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s nomination for Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS). Chairman Bill Cassidy (R-LA) praised Kennedy’s advocacy on nutrition and chronic disease but questioned his past skepticism on vaccines. Ranking Member Bernie Sanders (I-VT) pushed for stronger healthcare reforms, including paid leave. Kennedy defended his record, stating he is “pro-health” and committed to science-based policies. He apologized for past vaccine-related comments but hesitated to fully endorse the COVID-19 vaccine’s effectiveness. There was some discussion about vaccine mandates and their implications for schools. Several senators raised concerns about childhood vaccination policies, questioning whether Kennedy’s past positions on vaccines would influence HHS policies on school vaccine requirements. Kennedy responded by expressing support for vaccine safety but also reiterated his stance on questioning the necessity and number of vaccinations given to children, which has implications for school immunization mandates. Additionally, there was discussion regarding the health and well-being of children in relation to food safety and public health policies. Kennedy criticized the presence of artificial dyes and additives in American food products, including those commonly consumed by children. While the hearing primarily focused on healthcare policy, the discussion reflected the intersection of health policies with education, particularly in areas concerning student health, school-related medical requirements, and the broader implications of public health initiatives on learning environments. A comprehensive summary prepared by BPAG is here.

#### **ED REINSTATES 2020 TITLE IX RULE AFTER COURT RULING**

On Friday, the Department of Education (ED) announced that it will enforce the Trump Administration’s 2020 Title IX Rule following a federal court ruling that deemed the Biden Administration’s 2024 rewrite unlawful and unenforceable. In a “Dear Colleague” letter sent to K-12 schools and higher education institutions, the department confirmed that Title IX protections will be based on biological sex, reinforcing campus free speech, and due process rights in Title IX proceedings. Acting Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights Craig Trainor stated that the reinstated rule upholds equal opportunity and safeguards separate facilities and activities for women and girls. Resources pertaining to the 2020 Title IX Rule are available here.

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#### **4. New Publications**

##### **Testing Theories of Why: Four Keys to Interpreting US Student Achievement Trends**

*American Enterprise Institute (January 2025)*

Average U.S. student assessment scores rose through the 2000s, plateaued in the 2010s, and then dropped sharply during the pandemic, but a deeper look reveals that declines began around 2013 and were primarily driven by lower-performing students. These trends, along with widening achievement gaps and similar declines in adult performance, suggest broader societal influences beyond school-related factors.

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#### **5. In the News**

##### **Trump Issues Orders on K-12 ‘Indoctrination,’ School Choice and Campus Protests**

*Politico Pro (January 29, 2025)*

##### **Trump White House Rescinds Memo Freezing Federal Money After Widespread Confusion**

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*Crossroads Today (January 24, 2025)*

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### **THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON**

#### **6. Weekly Calendar**

**Tuesday, February 4, 2025**

**Webinar: Creating a Blueprint for America’s Workforce**

**Subject:** The Bipartisan Policy Center will hold a summit on “America's Workforce: Creating a Blueprint for the Future.”

**Participants:** Margret Spellings, president and CEO, Bipartisan Policy Center; Bill Haslem, governor of Tennessee; Deval Patrick, former governor of Massachusetts; Amna Nawaz, co-anchor, PBS NewsHour; Tim Walberg (R-MI), chair, House Committee on Education and Workforce; Katie Jenner, Indiana Secretary of Education; and others.

**Time:** 1:00 p.m.

**Contact:** Register [here](#).

### **Webinar: Developing Curriculum for Deep Thinking**

**Subject:** The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research will hold a discussion on “Developing Curriculum for Deep Thinking: The Knowledge Revival.”

**Participants:** Sonja Brookins Santelises, CEO, Baltimore City Public Schools; Robert Pondiscio, senior fellow, AEI; Claudio Vanhees, senior researcher, Thomas More Kempen; Kristen McQuillan, chief program officer, StandardsWork; Dylan Wiliam, emeritus professor of educational assessment, University College London's Institute of Education; and Paul Kirschner, emeritus professor, Open University of the Netherlands.

**Time:** 4:00 p.m.

**Contact:** Register [here](#).

### **Wednesday, February 5, 2025**

#### **Markup: Senate Commerce Committee**

**Subject:** The Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee will hold a markup of the “Rural Broadband Protection Act” (S. 98), the “Strengthening Support for American Manufacturing Act” (S. 99); the “She DRIVES Act (S. 161), the “Kids Off Social Media Act” (S. 278); and vote on the nomination of Howard Lutnick to be Commerce secretary.

**Time:** 10:00 a.m.

**Contact:** Live stream available [here](#).

#### **Hearing: House Science Committee**

**Subject:** The House Science, Space, and Technology Committee will hold a hearing on “The State of U.S. Science and Technology: Ensuring U.S. Global Leadership.”

**Witnesses:** Heather Wilson, president, University of Texas at El Paso; Walter Copan, vice president for research and technology transfer, Colorado School of Mines; and Sudip Parikh, CEO and executive publisher, American Association for the Advancement of Science.

**Time:** 10:00 a.m.

**Contact:** Live stream available [here](#).

#### **Hearing: House Education and Workforce Committee**

**Subject:** The House Education and the Workforce Committee will hold a hearing on “The State of American Education.”

**Time:** 10:15 a.m.

**Contact:** Live stream available [here](#).

#### **Webinar: Future of College Admissions**

**Subject:** The American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research will hold a discussion on “The Future of College Admissions.”

**Participants:** Edward Blum, president, Students for Fair Admissions; and Frederick Hess, director of education policy studies, AEI.

**Time:** 4:30 p.m.

**Contact:** Register [here](#).

## Friday, February 7, 2025

### **Webinar: Supporting the Mental and Emotional Health of Black Students**

**Subject:** The Brookings Institution's Race, Prosperity, and Inclusion Initiative will hold a virtual discussion on “Supporting the Mental and Emotional Health of Black Students in Schools.”

**Participants:** Camille Busette, vice president and director, Brookings Institution's Governance Studies Program and director of the Brookings Institution's Race, Prosperity, and Inclusion Initiative; Kristin Koenigsfest, executive director, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Central Arkansas; Rachel Perera, fellow, Brookings Institution's Governance Studies Program and the Brookings Institution's Brown Center on Education Policy; and Scott Hamilton, CEO and president, Urban League of the State of Arkansas.

**Time:** 1:00 p.m.

**Contact:** Register [here](#).

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## 7. On The Floor of Congress This Week

### **Senate Floor:**

Consider the nomination of Christopher Wright, of Colorado, to be Secretary of Energy

Consider the nomination of Pamela Bondi, of Florida, to be Attorney General

Consider the nomination of Eric Turner, of Texas, to be Secretary of Housing and Urban Development

Consider the nomination of Russell Vought, of Virginia, to be Director of the Office of Management and Budget

### **House Floor:**

**H.R. 27** – HALT Fentanyl Act (*Sponsored by Rep. Griffith / Energy and Commerce Committee*)

**H.R. 26** – Protecting American Energy Production Act (*Sponsored by Rep. Pfluger / Natural Resources Committee*)

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

[U.S. House and Senate 2025 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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