



The Consortium of State School Boards Associations Weekly Education Report

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Jared Solomon, Editor

jsolomon@bosepublicaffairs.com

Della Cronin, Editor

dcronin@bosepublicaffairs.com

Bob Moran, Editor

rmoran@bosepublicaffairs.com

Sarah Lamson, Deputy Editor

slamson@bosepublicaffairs.com

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**
 - **IDEA**
 - **RIFs Rip Through Federal Office of Special Education Programs:** The administration issued reduction-in-force notices across the federal government, including at the Education Department. Court filings show that 466 employees at the Education Department were impacted, and several special education association leaders say most of the OSEP staff was laid off.
2. **Budget and Appropriations Wrap-up**
 - **Impact on State School Board Associations**
3. **In Brief – Last Week in Washington**
 - **Senate Confirms North Dakota’s Baesler to Education Department:** On Tuesday, the Senate confirmed Kirsten Baesler, the longtime North Dakota Superintendent of Public Instruction, to serve as Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education in the U.S. Department of Education.
 - **Senate HELP Hearing Highlights Responsible AI Integration:** On Thursday, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee examined artificial intelligence’s (AI) potential to transform the workforce, education, health care, and family life, while underscoring the need for balanced oversight.
4. **New Publications**

- **The Normalization of Book Banning**

PEN America (October 2025)

This report offers a window into the complex and extensive climate of censorship between July 1, 2024 through June 30, 2025.

- **Who's On Board? School Boards and Political Representation in an Age of Conflict**

Thomas Fordham Institute (October 2025)

This national survey of school board members gathers responses from more than 5,000 board members across 3,000 districts. It compared members' political and demographic identities, as well as their views on controversial education issues, to those of the communities they serve.

5. **In the News**

- **The Government Has Long Researched High School Experiences. Then DOGE Cut The Effort**

NPR (October 7, 2025)

- **H-1B Visa Lawsuit Alleges \$100K Fee Will Worsen Teacher Shortages**

K-12 Dive (October 6, 2025)

- **What School Leaders Should Expect in the 2025-26 Supreme Court**

K-12 Dive (October 6, 2025)

- **ED Pushes Workforce Readiness as a Priority**

Inside Higher Ed (October 6, 2025)

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

- **Are School Boards Out of Touch with Their Constituents?** Join the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and School Boards for Academic Excellence on October 14 at 3:00 p.m. ET to explore the findings from Fordham's forthcoming study, *Who's on Board? School Boards and Political Representation in an Age of Conflict*.

Tuesday at 3pm ET

- **How Children Spend the Critical Hours After School:** The Afterschool Alliance will hold a discussion on the national release of America After 3PM, the nation's most comprehensive survey looking at "how children spend the critical hours after school."

Wednesday at 11:30am ET

- **Libraries, Schools, and Telehealth: How Anchor Institutions Bridge Gaps:**

Broadband Breakfast will hold a virtual discussion on "Libraries, Schools, and Telehealth: How Anchor Institutions Bridge Gaps."

Wednesday at 12pm ET

- **The Big Returns to Early Investments in Foundational Literacy and**

Numeracy: The Center for Global Development will hold a discussion on "The Big Returns to Early Investments in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy."

Friday at 10:30am ET

7. **Future Hearings & Events**

- **Cell Phones in Schools and Ties to Academic Performance:** The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) will hold a virtual discussion on "Are Cell Phones in Schools to Blame for Poor Academic Outcomes?"

October 20 at 4:30pm ET

8. [On The Floor of Congress This Week](#)
 - [Senate floor](#): Potential consideration of continuing appropriations bill
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9. [Important U.S. House and Senate Links](#)
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1. COSSBA Policy Priorities

IDEA

RIFS RIP THROUGH FEDERAL OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Over the weekend, the administration issued widespread reduction-in-force (RIF) notices across federal agencies, including the Department of Education. According to internal court documents, about 466 employees from the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) were included in those cuts. Reports from the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) suggest that only the agency's top two officials remain at OSEP, and just one employee remains in the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), a related office. Observers and advocacy groups warn that this "decimation" of staffing severely undermines the department's ability to fulfill its legal and oversight responsibilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Read more from *K-12 Dive* [here](#).

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2. Budget and Appropriations Wrap-Up

The federal government shutdown, which began at midnight on October 1, continues with no resolution in sight. With the House remaining out of session, the Senate is deadlocked over two competing stopgap funding proposals. The upper chamber has now voted seven times on each version; neither has cleared the 60-vote threshold needed to advance.

One of those proposals is the House-passed "clean" continuing resolution (CR), which would fund the government through November 21, but does not include extensions of expiring Affordable Care Act (ACA) tax credits. The other is a Democratic counterproposal, funding the government through Halloween and including ACA subsidy extensions. On Thursday, the Senate again rejected both: the GOP version failed 54–45, and the Democratic version fell 47–50.

Senate Republicans, led by Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD), have repeatedly urged Democrats to support reopening the government before health-care provisions are negotiated. Thune has stated: "We're open to thoughts and ideas ... subject to reopening of the government." House Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) has accused Democrats of blocking relief: "Pass the clean CR, end the shutdown today," he said.

On the Democratic side, leaders have strongly pushed back. House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY) dismissed Republican persistence as "legislative insanity," accusing them of "doing the same thing over and over ... expecting a different result." Senate Minority Leader

Chuck Schumer (D-NY) has said Democrats will not give in to vague promises on subsidies; he has urged Republicans to “back away from their corner” and negotiate in earnest.

Analysts and forecasters warn the shutdown may not be short. Some economists see the economic drag growing over time, as delayed programs and uncertainty ripple outward.

Over the weekend, it was apparent that the government shutdown impact is deepening, with President Trump ordering the Pentagon to divert \$8 billion in research and development funds to pay troops on October 15. While this eases one major pressure point, it also risks prolonging the stalemate. Hundreds of thousands of federal employees remain furloughed without pay, and contractors are facing similar hardships, and the administration has begun mass firings across agencies, including the Education Department.

In terms of scheduling, the Senate has adjourned until Tuesday. The House remains out of session; Speaker Johnson has not yet committed to recalling members this week, maintaining that the House’s work is already done so long as the Senate continues its standoff.

In short: the shutdown shows no signs of abating this week. With Senate leaders back in session tomorrow, a breakthrough may hinge on mounting pressure from missed paychecks, federal agency strain, and public frustration. Whether Republicans will accept a sidecar vote on healthcare subsidies—or Democrats will relent on their demand for health policy inclusion—remains the central question.

How does this impact State School Board Associations?

Regarding federal K-12 education investments and programs, most districts can continue operations because their federal funds (Title I, IDEA, etc.) are already obligated or funded in advance. However, Impact Aid—a key source of support for districts serving military bases, federal land, or Native lands—is not forward-financed, so reimbursement payments may be delayed under a prolonged shutdown. The National Association of Federally Impacted Schools (NAFIS) has cautioned that while a short shutdown would have “minimal impact,” continuing delays could force high-need districts to make difficult budget cuts.

Other disruptions are already visible: the Department of Education’s grant-making and civil rights compliance investigations are largely on pause, and new program support is halted. The Education Department reports that core student aid programs—such as Pell Grants and federal student loans—are expected to continue through the shutdown, since they are funded through mandatory spending or prior appropriations. But, as the shutdown drags on, support services, oversight, and problem resolution functions may falter as staff remain furloughed.

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3. In Brief – Last Week in Washington

SENATE CONFIRMS NORTH DAKOTA’S BAESLER TO EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

On Tuesday, the Senate **confirmed** Kirsten Baesler, the longtime North Dakota Superintendent of Public Instruction, to serve as Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education in the U.S. Department of Education. Her confirmation came via a 51–47 party-line vote, as part of a broader set of over 100 executive nominations approved by the Senate. Baesler, first elected to her nonpartisan state post in 2012 and most recently reelected in 2024, has served as one of the nation’s longest-tenured state education chiefs. In her state role, she has lead initiatives in competency-

based instruction and computer science, and she has held leadership in the Council of Chief State School Officers. In her new federal role, Baesler will head the Department's Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, a core unit overseeing formula programs like Title I and implementation of the *Every Student Succeeds Act* (ESSA). Her nomination advanced without a Senate HELP Committee hearing. She has previously proposed reorganizing or eliminating functions within both the state and federal education bureaucracies, ideas aligned with aspects of the conservative Project 2025 agenda. Alongside Baesler, Kimberly Richey was confirmed to lead the department's Office for Civil Rights, a unit that has become central in enforcing K-12 policy directives.

SENATE HELP HEARING HIGHLIGHTS RESPONSIBLE AI INTEGRATION

On Thursday, the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension Committee examined artificial intelligence's (AI) potential to transform the workforce, education, health care, and family life, while underscoring the need for balanced oversight. Lawmakers and expert witnesses agreed that AI presents both risks and opportunities, requiring federal leadership to guide responsible adoption. On workforce impacts, there was an emphasis on the potential for automation to displace certain jobs but create new ones demanding advanced skills. Witnesses urged investment in reskilling programs, stronger worker protections, and safeguards against algorithmic bias. Education and workforce should be prioritized, according to Harriet Pearson (Axia Advisory). "The best protection for workers is having skills. This is where government can make the biggest difference right now," she stated. Senators floated the idea of an interagency task force to coordinate labor, commerce, and education strategies. As for education specifically, the discussion highlighted AI's promise in personalized learning and credentialing reforms, alongside calls for stronger student privacy protections under the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* (FERPA) and the *Children's Online Privacy Protection Act* (COPPA). Committee Chair Bill Cassidy (R-LA) noted in his opening remarks that "AI can help teachers personalize students' education to meet unique needs," and witness John Bailey (American Enterprise Institute) stated that "Education offers one of the clearest examples of AI's potential to expand opportunity." Witnesses cautioned against over-regulation that could stifle innovation, and lawmakers stressed broadband investment as a prerequisite for widespread AI benefits. Overall, the Committee coalesced around near-term priorities: establishing a national AI task force, updating privacy laws, mandating algorithmic impact assessments, and ensuring equity-driven training programs. Long-term goals include sustained education funding, ethical research, and global cooperation.

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4. New Publications

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Inside Higher Ed (October 6, 2025)

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THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON

6. Weekly Calendar

Tuesday, October 14, 2025

Webinar: Are School Boards Out of Touch with Their Constituents?

Subject: Join the Thomas B. Fordham Institute and School Boards for Academic Excellence on October 14 at 3:00 p.m. ET to explore the findings from Fordham's forthcoming study, *Who's on Board? School Boards and Political Representation in an Age of Conflict*.

Participants: Ethan Ashley, School Board Partners; Michael Hartney, Stanford University; David Houston, George Mason University; David Hoyt, School Boards for Academic Excellence; Vladimir Kogan, The Ohio State University; Kelly Piacsek, School District of Waukesha Board of Education

Time: 3:00 pm – 4:00 pm

Contact: Register [here](#).

Wednesday, October 15, 2025

Event: How Children Spend the Critical Hours After School

Subject: The Afterschool Alliance will hold a discussion on the national release of *America After 3PM*, the nation's most comprehensive survey looking at "how children spend the critical hours after school."

Participants: Sen. Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV); Mayor Deanna Reed, Harrisonburg, VA; Joshua Michael, president, Maryland State Board of Education; D.J. Hilson, prosecuting attorney, Muskegon County, MI; Deborah Moroney, vice president, American Institutes for Research; and Manny Padia, recreation administrator, Parks and Recreation.

Time and Location: 11:30 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.; National Press Club, 529 14th Street, NW, Washington, DC

Contact: Register [here](#).

Event: Libraries, Schools, and Telehealth: How Anchor Institutions Bridge Gaps

Subject: Broadband Breakfast will hold a virtual discussion on "Libraries, Schools, and Telehealth: How Anchor Institutions Bridge Gaps."

Participants: Michael Wallace, associate director at the University of Arkansas Medical Sciences; Joseph Wender, executive director of the Schools, Health & Libraries Broadband Coalition; and others.

Time: 12:00 p.m.

Contact: Register [here](#).

Friday, October 17, 2025

Event: **The Big Returns to Early Investments in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy**

Subject: The Center for Global Development will hold a discussion on "The Big Returns to Early Investments in Foundational Literacy and Numeracy."

Participants: David Evans, director, CGD Global Education and Child Well-Being Program and CGD senior fellow; Lee Crawford, CGD senior research fellow; and others.

Time and Location: 10:30 a.m.; CGD, 2055 L St. NW, Fifth Floor.

Contact: In-person or virtual attendance register [here](#).

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7. Future Hearings and Events

Monday, October 20, 2025

Webinar: **Cell Phones in Schools and Ties to Academic Performance**

Subject: The American Enterprise Institute (AEI) will hold a virtual discussion on "Are Cell Phones in Schools to Blame for Poor Academic Outcomes?"

Participants: Virginia "Ginny" Gentles, education freedom and parental rights director, Defense of Freedom Institute; Robert Pondiscio, senior fellow, AEI; Martin West, academic dean, Harvard Graduate School of Education; and Alex Baron, middle school principal, E.L. Haynes Public Charter School.

Time: 4:30 p.m.

Contact: Register [here](#).

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8. On The Floor of Congress This Week

Senate Floor:

Potential consideration of continuing appropriations bill

House Floor:

Potential consideration of continuing appropriations bill

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9. 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](#)

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[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

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