



The Consortium of State School Boards Associations Weekly Education Report

DECEMBER 15, 2025

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:**

COSSBA LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY ITEMS – Actions and items COSSBA has taken to advance our policy goals:

1. **COSSBA Letter to Members of the House of Representatives, December 8** – Advocating for passage of the Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act.

1. **News, Publications, & Updates on COSSBA Policy Priorities**

- **Funding**

- **House Approves Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act:** On Tuesday, the House of Representatives **approved** the “Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act” (**S. 356**) by an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 399–5, following the Senate’s unanimous passage earlier this summer.
- **Education Department Awards \$208 Million in Mental Health Grants:** On Thursday, the Department of Education **awarded** more than \$200 million in federal mental health grants, moving forward with new awards after the administration earlier this year canceled more than

200 school mental health grants it said conflicted with the administration's policies and interpretation of federal civil rights law.

2. **Budget and Appropriations Wrap-up**

- **Impact on State School Board Associations**

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

- **ED Launches New Earnings Indicator for Making College Decisions:** On Monday, the Department of Education **announced** the launch of a new earnings indicator within the Free Application for Federal Student Aid process, designed to provide students and families with clearer information about post-graduation earnings outcomes.
- **Brookings Reviews ESSA at 10, Future of School Accountability:** On Monday, the Brookings Institution's Hamilton Project **hosted a webinar** titled "K–12 Education: Accountability and Performance on the 10th Anniversary of ESSA," examining how the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has shaped state accountability systems and student outcomes over the past decade.
- **AEI Debates AI's Role in Driving School Improvement by 2035:** On Monday, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) **hosted a debate** examining whether achieving meaningful school improvement by 2035 requires integrating artificial intelligence into classrooms today, amid long-running declines in student achievement that predate the pandemic and disproportionately affect lower-performing students.
- **HELP Subcommittee Examines Workforce Shortages, Career Education:** On Tuesday, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Subcommittee on Education and the American Family, **held a hearing** to examine national workforce shortages and the role of career and technical education in expanding economic opportunity.
- **Senate Judiciary Holds Hearing on Children Online Safety:** On Tuesday, the Senate Judiciary Committee **held a hearing** titled, "Protecting Our Children Online Against the Evolving Offender," where senators and experts delivered a scathing assessment that the United States has "miserably failed our children" by not doing enough to address worsening online threats, particularly as social media and gaming platforms are exploited by criminals and extremist networks to harm minors.
- **Brookings Explores "Mattering" In The Age of Artificial Intelligence:** On Tuesday, the Brookings Institution's Center for Universal Education **hosted a webinar** on how individuals and institutions can "matter" in the age of artificial intelligence (AI), the fourth event in a year-long series leading to a global task force report on AI and education.
- **Reducing Health-Related Absences Through Cross-Sector Action:** On Tuesday, the Campaign for Grade Level Reading and AttendanceWorks **co-hosted a webinar** examining cross-sector strategies to reduce health-related absences, one of the most persistent barriers to regular school attendance in the post-pandemic era.

- **House Science Committee Reviews Talent Pipeline Challenges:** On Wednesday, the House Science and Technology Committee **held a hearing** on oversight of the Department of Energy’s newly launched **Genesis Mission**, where members examined the administration’s effort to accelerate U.S. scientific leadership through artificial intelligence, supercomputing, and quantum technologies, while raising concerns about governance, funding cuts, and workforce development.
- **House Higher Ed Panel Examines Workforce Pathway Modernization:** On Wednesday, the House Education and Workforce Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development **held a hearing** to examine the potential of Learning and Employment Records to modernize how education, skills, and work experience are documented and connected to jobs.
- **NTIA Gathers Input on Student Screen Time and Well-Being:** On Wednesday, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration **convened a public listening session** to gather input on excessive screen time in schools and its implications for children’s learning, health, and privacy.
- **House Commerce Panel Advances Kids Online Safety Bills:** On Thursday, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade **advanced a package of online safety bills** aimed at protecting children and teens, sending them to the full committee for consideration.

4. **New Publications**

- **Learning Curves: Post-Covid Learning Trajectories by Cohort, Subject, and State**
Brookings (December 2025)
This data interactive data platform allows users to see the proficiency trajectories for each COVID-impacted grade in English and math for every state and D.C. Users can select and compare proficiency data for each state by the subject and grade cohort.

5. **In the News**

- **Supreme Court Turns Down Book Ban Case**
K-12 Dive (December 9, 2025)
- **Better Schools Start with Better School Board Elections**
The 74 Million (December 8, 2025)
- **OCR Staff Told to Temporarily Return to Work**
K-12 Dive (December 8, 2025)

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

- **Reaching Their Full Potential: Patching the Leaky Pipeline for High-Achieving, Low-Income Students:** The Thomas B. Fordham Institute will hold a virtual discussion on “Reaching Their Full Potential: Patching the Leaky Pipeline for High-Achieving, Low-Income Students.”
Tuesday at 3pm ET
- **Aligning K-12, Postsecondary and Workforce Data:** The Education Commission of the States will hold a webinar to examine how states across the country are working to better connect their education and workforce systems so

that every student has a clear pathway from school to career. This webinar will spotlight how Alabama and New Mexico are leading the way by incorporating both college-readiness and workforce-readiness assessments into their accountability systems.

Wednesday at 3pm ET

7. On The Floor of Congress This Week

- Senate floor

- Consideration of nominations
- Consideration of NDAA

- House floor

- **H.R. 4371** – Kayla Hamilton Act
- **H.R. 3632** – Power Plant Reliability Act of 2025
- **H.R. ____** – Lower Health Care Premiums for All Americans Act
- **H.R. 3492** – Protect Children's Innocence Act
- **H.R. 1366** – Mining Regulatory Clarity Act
- **H.R. 4776** – SPEED Act
- **H.R. 845** – Pet and Livestock Protection Act
- **H.R. 498** – Do No Harm in Medicaid Act
- **H.R. 3616** – Reliable Power Act
- **H. Con. Res. 61** – Directing the President, pursuant to section 5(c) of the War Powers Resolution, to remove United States Armed Forces from hostilities with presidentially designated terrorist organizations in the Western Hemisphere.
- **H. Con. Res. 64** – To direct the removal of United States Armed Forces from hostilities within or against Venezuela that have not been authorized by Congress.

8. Important U.S. House and Senate Links

9. About BPAG

1. COSSBA Policy Priorities

FUNDING

HOUSE APPROVES SECURE RURAL SCHOOLS REAUTHORIZATION ACT

On Tuesday, the House of Representatives approved the “Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act” (**S. 356**) by an overwhelming bipartisan vote of 399–5, following the Senate’s unanimous passage earlier this summer. Led by Senators Mike Crapo (R-ID) and Ron Wyden (D-OR), along with Representatives Doug LaMalfa (R-CA) and Joe Neguse (D-CO), the legislation reauthorizes the Secure Rural Schools (SRS) program for fiscal year (FY) 2026 and includes back payments for FY 2024 and FY 2025, restoring critical federal funding that rural communities and school districts rely on. Originally established to provide stable funding to communities that lost local revenue as federal national forest holdings expanded, the SRS program remains a vital support for rural education and local services. With House passage complete, S. 356 now heads to the President’s desk to be signed into law. The education community overwhelmingly supports this legislation, including the School Superintendents Association. House Committee on Agriculture

Chairman GT Thompson (R-PA) and House Agriculture Subcommittee on Forestry and Horticulture Chairman Doug LaMalfa (R-CA) jointly stated, “Today’s bipartisan passage of the Secure Rural Schools Reauthorization Act delivers long-overdue certainty for rural communities, schools, and public services that depend on these funds to survive,” For too long, counties with federal land have seen an unfair decline in timber revenue through no fault of their own. This legislation ensures rural students and families aren’t left behind simply because of where they live.” We look forward to working with our rural members and Congress in the new year to advocate for a long-term SRS reauthorization beyond FY 2026 that provides stable and dependable funding for communities and school districts impacted by national forests.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT AWARDS \$208 MILLION IN MENTAL HEALTH GRANTS

On Thursday, the Department of Education (ED) awarded more than \$200 million in federal mental health grants, moving forward with new awards after the Trump administration earlier this year canceled more than 200 school mental health grants it said conflicted with the administration’s policies and interpretation of federal civil rights law. The new funding comes amid ongoing uncertainty for school leaders and mental health advocates, as the canceled grants had gained bipartisan support following the 2022 shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, Texas and were intended to help states and higher education institutions train mental health professionals for schools. Administration officials said the terminated grants improperly emphasized racial and gender identity considerations or failed to align with priorities of “merit, fairness, and excellence in education,” prompting the department to reset priorities and invite states and districts to reapply for roughly \$270 million in funding. Education Secretary Linda McMahon said the re-competition refocused resources on recruiting credentialed school psychologists to serve students during critical moments. ED announced it awarded 65 new grants, largely aimed at expanding the K–12 school psychology workforce, though it did not immediately release a full list of recipients. Documents indicate that funding will go to state education agencies and local school districts in both Democratic- and Republican-led states, with 33 grants totaling more than \$120 million directed to rural communities. In addition to the \$208 million awarded, ED confirmed it has reserved funds tied to some of the canceled grants while litigation brought by 16 states challenging the cancellations proceeds in federal court. A hearing in that case is scheduled for Thursday, with a ruling expected before the end of the month. A full list of the awards can be found [here](#).

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2. Budget and Appropriations Wrap-Up

Last week began with a flurry of hopes and dreams from the Two Appropriations Chairs, Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) and Representative Tom Cole (R-OK), but the week’s distractions interrupted any momentum that they thought they had. Both Chairs have indicated they have agreement on topline spending numbers for five of the remaining nine bills, but the two largest bills – Defense and Labor, HHS, and Education – have not been agreed upon. Senator Collins indicates she has offered topline numbers on all the bills and is waiting on the House response. Meanwhile Senate Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA) indicates that she has not seen or has

been privy to any of these numbers. She and Senate Democrats will be critical if they appropriations bills are to move in the Senate.

Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA) and House Leadership have been focused on successfully bringing the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) to the floor last week, which they were able to successfully manage. In addition, House Leadership is faced with various process concerns, mainly from conservative Freedom Caucus Members on several different bills. Both Chambers have also been focused on healthcare solutions with House Republicans internally debating a path forward that may or may not come to the floor after the Senate failed to pass dueling proposals. Senate Democrats, led by Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), proposed extending the ACA tax credits an additional three years. While the vote failed to reach the necessary 60 votes needed to move forward, four Republican Senators did vote in favor of the resolution. Contrast that with the Republican proposal, led by Senator Bill Cassidy (R-LA), to create federal health savings accounts. This measure also failed in the Senate.

Despite the challenges of the debate on healthcare affordability and the NDAA, which the Senate will take up this week, Chairman Cole was hoping to push a package of the five bills where they have agreement for House consideration. Senate Majority Leader John Thune (R-SD) stated a couple of weeks ago that he wanted to bring a combined Defense-Labor, HHS, and Education bill before the Senate. Chairman Cole argues that moving the smaller five bill package will bring more trust to the process in the House and in his mind lead to a more successful approach to the combined Defense – Labor, HHS, and Education approach.

How does this impact State School Board Associations?

Nothing is likely to occur until January now given that Congress has one week left before breaking for the holiday season and neither Chamber has appropriations on its target list for this week. However, nothing will occur until all the topline numbers are agreed to so that Senate Democrats will have more comfort understanding the larger picture.

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3. In Brief – Last Week in Washington

ED LAUNCHES NEW EARNINGS INDICATOR FOR MAKING COLLEGE DECISIONS

On Monday, the Department of Education **announced** the launch of a new earnings indicator within the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) process, designed to provide students and families with clearer information about post-graduation earnings outcomes. Using existing, publicly available ED data, the indicator displays institutional earnings information after a student completes the FAFSA and selects schools of interest. For institutions where average graduate earnings fall below those of the average high school graduate, the FAFSA will generate a “lower earnings” disclosure to flag this outcome for applicants. According to ED, the tool is intended to increase transparency at a key decision point by helping students better understand how postsecondary education outcomes may relate to earnings, alongside other considerations such as cost, location, mission, and personal interests. ED noted that more than 2 percent of undergraduates attend institutions whose graduates earn less on average than high school completers, and that these institutions collectively receive significant federal student aid. ED

indicated that the underlying data are available through the Federal Student Aid Data Center and will be updated as more recent earnings information becomes available.

BROOKINGS REVIEWS ESSA AT 10, FUTURE OF SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY

On Monday, the Brookings Institution's Hamilton Project hosted a webinar titled "K–12 Education: Accountability and Performance on the 10th Anniversary of ESSA," examining how the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) has shaped state accountability systems and student outcomes over the past decade. Panelists discussed how ESSA recalibrated the federal role following No Child Left Behind by reducing prescriptive federal mandates while continuing to require states to identify low-performing schools and implement improvement strategies. Speakers noted that ESSA gave states significant flexibility to design accountability systems that go beyond standardized test scores, incorporating indicators such as chronic absenteeism, graduation rates, access to advanced coursework, and measures of student growth. However, panelists emphasized that states have taken widely varying approaches, resulting in uneven implementation and comparability across systems. Several participants underscored that the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted accountability, stalled school improvement efforts, and exacerbated achievement gaps, leaving states to balance ESSA requirements with declining test scores and attendance. Panelists highlighted that state accountability dashboards have improved transparency but are often difficult for families to navigate or interpret. They stressed the need for clearer, more accessible information that allows parents and communities to understand school performance and compare outcomes across districts. Speakers also pointed to persistent inconsistencies in how states identify schools for comprehensive or targeted support, leading to uneven intervention strategies and varying levels of rigor in improvement efforts. Looking ahead, panelists agreed that the next phase of ESSA implementation should prioritize clarity in reporting, stronger measures of student learning growth, and more effective support for schools struggling to implement improvement plans.

AEI DEBATES AI'S ROLE IN DRIVING SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT BY 2035

On Monday, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) hosted a debate examining whether achieving meaningful school improvement by 2035 requires integrating artificial intelligence (AI) into classrooms today, amid long-running declines in student achievement that predate the pandemic and disproportionately affect lower-performing students. Proponents argued that AI integration is inevitable and urgent, noting that 86 percent of students already use AI tools outside of school and that roughly 75 percent of job postings now require AI-related skills. They contended that AI literacy will be a baseline expectation for students entering the 2035 workforce, comparable to internet literacy in the mid-2000s. Supporters also emphasized AI's potential to address systemic challenges such as teacher burnout, heavy administrative workloads, and the difficulty of differentiating instruction for diverse learners. They cited examples in which AI-enabled early warning systems dramatically improved graduation rates and reduced teacher administrative time, arguing that "human-in-the-loop" models can enhance educators by freeing time for relationship-building and social-emotional support. Opponents raised three primary concerns. First, they cautioned against urgency, pointing to education technology's history of overpromising results while national math and reading scores have remained largely flat since the 1970s. Second, they warned that heavy AI reliance could hinder novice teacher development by removing the cognitive struggle necessary to build instructional expertise, potentially widening inequities. Third, they raised philosophical objections, arguing that education's purpose is human formation, not

workforce preparation, and that AI risks displacing higher-order thinking skills central to learning. Critics also cited limited empirical evidence of AI's effectiveness, referencing studies suggesting cognitive deskilling from AI-assisted writing and weak results from many business AI pilots, while highlighting proven alternatives such as high-dosage tutoring and science-of-reading reforms. While both sides agreed on the value of careful experimentation, they diverged sharply on timing—whether to proceed now to avoid leaving students behind or wait for stronger evidence before widespread adoption.

HELP SUBCOMMITTEE EXAMINES WORKFORCE SHORTAGES, CAREER EDUCATION

On Tuesday, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions (HELP) Subcommittee on Education and the American Family, held a hearing to examine national workforce shortages and the role of career and technical education (CTE) in expanding economic opportunity. Subcommittee Chair Tommy Tuberville (R-AL) emphasized the importance of building talent pipelines beginning in K–12 and extending through apprenticeships, stressing that “students do not have to go to a four-year university to have a successful career.” Ranking Member Lisa Blunt Rochester (D-DE) highlighted persistent workforce gaps across sectors including biotechnology, construction, and healthcare, and underscored that CTE must remain integrated with strong academic instruction. Witnesses and members from both parties framed workforce shortages as a threat to U.S. economic competitiveness and national security. A central focus of the hearing was the administration's ongoing transfer of certain federal education and workforce programs from the Department of Education (ED) to the Department of Labor (DOL). Senators from both parties criticized the transition, citing funding delays, insufficient guidance, and administrative confusion for states. Blunt Rochester warned that unilateral actions have already disrupted state administration of Perkins grants and risks expanding bureaucracy rather than streamlining it. Luke Rhine of the Rodel Foundation testified that states still lack clarity on grant administration and upcoming data-reporting deadlines, complicating program planning and implementation, including Workforce Pell. Chris Cox of the Alabama Community College System described rapid-training models such as the state's Skills for Success program, which delivers employer-designed training for high-demand careers—sometimes in as little as two weeks. Joel Stadlander of ArcelorMittal outlined apprenticeship programs that allow students to earn associate degrees debt-free while working in advanced manufacturing. SkillsUSA Executive Director Chelle Travis urged Congress to increase investment in CTE, work-based learning, instructors, and career and technical student organizations, calling them among the most effective strategies for strengthening the workforce pipeline.

SENATE JUDICIARY HOLDS HEARING ON CHILDREN ONLINE SAFETY

On Tuesday, the Senate Judiciary Committee held a hearing titled, “Protecting Our Children Online Against the Evolving Offender,” where senators and experts delivered a scathing assessment that the United States has “miserably failed our children” by not doing enough to address worsening online threats, particularly as social media and gaming platforms are exploited by criminals and extremist networks to harm minors. Senator Lindsey Graham (R-SC) asked witnesses, including a former federal prosecutor and the executive director of the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), whether the nation had failed to protect children online; all agreed it had, a sentiment Graham called “a damning indictment of all of us.” Experts warned of rising “sextortion,” in which scammers trick minors into sharing explicit images and then blackmail them, and of extremist networks like “764,” described as coercing vulnerable youth

into self-harm or violence for the purpose of streaming and spreading disturbing content. NCMEC said it has seen the most graphic exploitation in its history tied to 764 and similar networks, which the FBI is investigating as “modern-day terrorism,” with more than 2,000 reports in the first nine months of the year — double last year’s number. Testimony included emotional accounts like that of Tamia Woods, who said her 17-year-old son took his own life after being targeted in a sextortion scheme, and she urged Congress to act. Witnesses stressed that current federal laws are insufficient to address the unique harms of sextortion and coercive online conduct, with inconsistent charges across jurisdictions. In response, committee leaders Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) and Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) introduced legislation to explicitly criminalize coercion of minors to harm themselves or others and other bills to strengthen penalties, though prospects for passage remain uncertain.

BROOKINGS EXPLORES “MATTERING” IN THE AGE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

On Tuesday, the Brookings Institution’s Center for Universal Education hosted a webinar on how individuals and institutions can “matter” in the age of artificial intelligence (AI), the fourth event in a year-long series leading to a global task force report on AI and education. Panelists framed “mattering” as a fundamental human need—the sense of being valued and having opportunities to add value—warning that when unmet, it contributes to anxiety, depression, and disengagement. They noted that employee engagement is at a 10-year low, and that AI is entering schools at a time when roughly half of middle and high school students are already disengaged, often attending class physically but feeling school is irrelevant. The discussion highlighted both opportunities and risks associated with AI in education. Promising uses include adaptive explanations that support marginalized students, tools for neurodivergent learners, voice synthesis for students with aphasia, and automation that could reduce administrative burdens on teachers. At the same time, panelists raised serious concerns about AI chatbots, citing data that one-third of U.S. teenagers find AI companions as satisfying as human friendships. Speakers warned that frictionless, always-affirming AI interactions may undermine young people’s ability to disagree, compromise, and engage in democratic life. Panelists urged schools to adopt intentional, human-centered strategies, including creating tech-free spaces to foster direct interaction and shifting from task-based instruction to meaningful, contributory projects. Examples included chronically absent students reengaging when given real roles, such as serving as school greeters or working on community challenges like redesigning flood-damaged infrastructure. Policy recommendations discussed included banning AI chatbot interactions for minors, requiring bots to disclose their non-human status, notifying parents of concerning conversations, and holding technology companies to a clear duty of care before deploying tools in classrooms. The conversation also raised concerns about automation eliminating entry-level jobs critical for skill development and about young adults ages 18–25 falling outside existing regulatory protections despite ongoing brain development.

REDUCING HEALTH-RELATED ABSENCES THROUGH CROSS-SECTOR ACTION

On Tuesday, the Campaign for Grade Level Reading and AttendanceWorks co-hosted a webinar examining cross-sector strategies to reduce health-related absences, one of the most persistent barriers to regular school attendance in the post-pandemic era. The session previewed a forthcoming toolkit, developed by Johns Hopkins University, AttendanceWorks, the National Association of School Nurses, and Healthy Schools Campaign, scheduled for release in mid-January 2026. Speakers noted that chronic absenteeism nearly doubled during the pandemic to roughly 30 percent and, while improving, remains elevated at about 24 percent nationally, with

health-related factors accounting for more than half of absences in some urban districts. The toolkit outlines four core strategies: adopting evidence-based prevention policies such as adequate school nurse staffing; delivering consistent, positive messaging across schools, families, and community partners about when students should stay home; systematically identifying student health needs through data integration and screenings; and establishing multidisciplinary attendance teams—bringing together nurses, social workers, educators, and healthcare providers—to operate from unified plans rather than siloed initiatives. Panelists acknowledged significant implementation challenges, including widespread shortages of full-time school nurses, data-sharing barriers between health and education systems, confusion around excused absence policies that may discourage preventive mental health care, and limited resources for comprehensive student supports. The webinar highlighted practical examples of success across the country, and speakers emphasized that sustainable progress requires shifting from reactive responses to proactive prevention, noting that roughly 28 percent of chronically absent students miss school for health reasons that are addressable. Long-term solutions, they argued, depend on state-level policy reforms, including improved funding for school health services, alignment of excused absence policies to support preventive care, expanded telehealth for rural communities, and stronger coordination between school improvement efforts and community health planning.

HOUSE SCIENCE COMMITTEE REVIEWS TALENT PIPELINE CHALLENGES

On Wednesday, the House Science and Technology Committee held a hearing on oversight of the Department of Energy’s (DOE) newly launched Genesis Mission, where members examined the administration’s effort to accelerate U.S. scientific leadership through artificial intelligence (AI), supercomputing, and quantum technologies, while raising concerns about governance, funding cuts, and workforce development. Chair Brian Babin (R-TX) and Republican members framed the Genesis Mission—established by executive order—as a national initiative uniting DOE’s 17 national laboratories, universities, and industry to create an integrated AI-driven discovery platform capable of doubling U.S. research productivity and strengthening competitiveness against China. Under Secretary for Science Dario Gil emphasized that the mission is intended to augment, not replace scientists and described it as an “Apollo-scale” project spanning energy, national security, and fundamental science. Democrats, led by Ranking Member Zoe Lofgren (D-CA), criticized the administration for proceeding without testimony from the Energy Secretary and for terminating or freezing billions of dollars in previously awarded DOE projects, warning that workforce, grid modernization, and clean energy cuts could undermine the mission’s stated goals. Several members highlighted the central role of universities in the Genesis ecosystem, with Gil repeatedly stressing that higher education institutions are indispensable partners for research, training students, and developing future scientists through dual-degree programs, rotations at national laboratories, and extramural research funding. In response to questions about talent pipelines, Gil acknowledged serious challenges in K–12 education, stating bluntly that the United States is “not making progress” in K–12 STEM and mathematics and warning that long-term scientific leadership will suffer without reversing those trends. He also emphasized the need to balance attracting international students with investing more heavily in domestic talent, including students from underrepresented institutions.

HOUSE HIGHER ED PANEL EXAMINES WORKFORCE PATHWAY MODERNIZATION

On Wednesday, the House Education and Workforce Subcommittee on Higher Education and Workforce Development held a hearing to examine the potential of Learning and Employment

Records (LERs) to modernize how education, skills, and work experience are documented and connected to jobs. Chair Burgess Owens (R-UT) framed LERs as a “new data paradigm” that could replace fragmented resumes with secure, portable, and verifiable digital records capturing coursework, credentials, apprenticeships, and on-the-job learning, helping employers better identify skills and allow workers to more clearly signal their capabilities. Ranking Member Alma Adams (D-NC) agreed that LERs could support skills-based hiring and expand opportunity for the roughly two-thirds of working-age Americans without a four-year degree, while cautioning that adoption must address equity, data standards, digital infrastructure gaps, and worker privacy. Witnesses from Western Governors University, EBSCO Ed, Credential Engine, and the American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers highlighted state and institutional pilots—particularly Alabama’s statewide talent marketplace—that show how LERs can shorten hiring timelines, align training programs with employer needs, and support short-term credentials, apprenticeships, and lifelong upskilling. At the same time, members from both parties raised concerns about credential quality, uneven wage returns, the digital divide, and the risk that poorly designed systems could exacerbate discrimination or employer surveillance. Witnesses emphasized that LERs must be learner-owned, interoperable across states, and governed by strong privacy and security protections, with open data standards and federal leadership to ensure scale and consistency. Members also debated the relationship between LERs and traditional higher education, with some Republicans criticizing “college-for-all” approaches and Democrats stressing that degrees still matter while acknowledging that skills-based pathways are essential in a rapidly changing economy.

NTIA GATHERS INPUT ON STUDENT SCREEN TIME AND WELL-BEING

On Wednesday, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) convened a public listening session to gather input on excessive screen time in schools and its implications for children’s learning, health, and privacy. NTIA opened the discussion by noting concerns raised by parents and educators about the growing use of digital devices during the school day. Speakers observed that many students now spend several hours each day on school-issued devices, beginning as early as kindergarten, and pointed to emerging evidence of cognitive, developmental, and mental health impacts associated with prolonged or unstructured screen exposure. Parents, teachers, and child development advocates described challenges associated with one-to-one device programs, including increased distraction, reduced face-to-face interaction, and instances of students accessing inappropriate content despite filtering tools. Some speakers argued that heavy reliance on digital tools can undermine attention, memory, and deep reading skills, while others raised concerns about commercial incentives in the education technology market and the data collection practices of technology vendors. Other participants cautioned against broad restrictions, emphasizing the instructional benefits of well-designed educational technology and the importance of local decision-making. Industry and nonprofit representatives highlighted the distinction between recreational screen use and structured, curriculum-aligned digital learning, arguing that technology can support accessibility, differentiated instruction, and workforce-relevant digital skills when implemented intentionally and with appropriate safeguards. Several speakers also questioned whether federal subsidies—particularly through the E-Rate program—

may encourage device dependence without sufficient evaluation of educational outcomes or student well-being.

HOUSE COMMERCE PANEL ADVANCES KIDS ONLINE SAFETY BILLS

On Thursday, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Commerce, Manufacturing, and Trade **advanced a package of online safety bills** aimed at protecting children and teens, sending them to the full committee for consideration. The most prominent measure, a revised version of the “**Kids’ Online Safety Act**” (KOSA), would require social media platforms to adopt policies to prevent certain harms to minors, but it drops a broader “duty of care” requirement and limits the list of covered harms, a change its sponsor, Subcommittee Chair Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-FL), says is intended to avoid First Amendment legal challenges seen in state laws. Democrats on the panel, including full committee Ranking Member Frank Pallone Jr. (D-NJ), opposed the bill’s narrower standards and preemption of stronger state protections, arguing it weakens oversight of smaller platforms and could undercut existing state laws, and voted against it in a mostly party-line vote; the subcommittee approved KOSA 13-10 and while approving 16 other bills with bipartisan voice votes. Among the other measures is an update to the “**Children and Teens’ Online Privacy Protection Act**,” which also includes a federal preemption clause that drew criticism from Democrats for potentially displacing more protective state privacy rules. Subcommittee members debated additional proposals addressing risks on gaming and ephemeral messaging platforms and the balance between parental control and safety for minors in vulnerable situations. The legislative push reflects continued congressional focus on online child safety, with Republicans aiming to standardize protections nationally and Democrats pressing for stronger privacy and harm-mitigation measures, even as broader disagreements persist over the scope of federal authority, free speech concerns, and the role of state laws in protecting children online.

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4. New Publications

Learning Curves: Post-COVID Learning Trajectories by Cohort, Subject, and State

Brookings (December 2025)

This interactive data platform allows users to see the proficiency trajectories for each COVID-impacted grade in English and math for every state and D.C. Users can select and compare proficiency data for each state by the subject and grade cohort.

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5. In the News

Supreme Court Turns Down Book Ban Case

K-12 Dive (December 9, 2025)

Better Schools Start with Better School Board Elections

The 74 Million (December 8, 2025)

OCR Staff Told to Temporarily Return to Work

K-12 Dive (December 8, 2025)

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THIS WEEK IN WASHINGTON

6. Weekly Calendar

Tuesday, December 16, 2025

Discussion: Reaching Their Full Potential: Patching the Leaky Pipeline for High-Achieving, Low-Income Students

Subject: The Thomas B. Fordham Institute will hold a virtual discussion on “Reaching Their Full Potential: Patching the Leaky Pipeline for High-Achieving, Low-Income Students.”

Participants: Stéphane Lavertu, a public policy professor at Ohio State University and senior research fellow at the Thomas B. Fordham Institute; David Taylor, superintendent and CEO of the Dayton Early College Academy; and others.

Time: 3:00 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.

Contact: Register [here](#).

Wednesday, December 16, 2025

Event: Aligning K-12, Postsecondary and Workforce Data

Subject: The Education Commission of the States will hold a webinar to examine how states across the country are working to better connect their education and workforce systems so that every student has a clear pathway from school to career. This webinar will spotlight how Alabama and New Mexico are leading the way by incorporating both college-readiness and workforce-readiness assessments into their accountability systems.

Participants: Brenda Berg, Best NC; Aaron Churchill, Thomas B. Fordham Institute; Aaron Daffern, Dallas Independent School District, Texas; Stéphane Lavertu, Ph.D., John Glenn College of Public Affairs, The Ohio State University; Jonathan Plucker, Ph.D., Johns Hopkins University; and David Taylor, Dayton Early College Academy, Ohio. Moderator: Michael Petrilli, Thomas B. Fordham Institute.

Time: 3:00 p.m.

Contact: Register [here](#).

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7. On The Floor of Congress This Week

Senate Floor:

Consideration of nominations

Consideration of NDAA

House Floor:

[H.R. 4371](#) – Kayla Hamilton Act (*Sponsored by Rep. Fry / Judiciary Committee*)

[H.R. 3632](#) – Power Plant Reliability Act of 2025 (*Sponsored by Rep. Griffith / Energy and Commerce Committee*)

[H.R. ____](#) – Lower Health Care Premiums for All Americans Act (*Sponsored by Rep. Miller-Meeks / Energy and Commerce Committee*)

[H.R. 3492](#) – Protect Children's Innocence Act (*Sponsored by Rep. Greene (GA) / Judiciary Committee*)

[H.R. 1366](#) – Mining Regulatory Clarity Act (*Sponsored by Rep. Amodei / Natural Resources Committee*)

[H.R. 4776](#) – SPEED Act (*Sponsored by Rep. Westerman / Natural Resources Committee*)

[H.R. 845](#) – Pet and Livestock Protection Act (*Sponsored by Rep. Boebert / Natural Resources Committee*)

[H.R. 498](#) – Do No Harm in Medicaid Act (*Sponsored by Rep. Crenshaw / Energy and Commerce Committee*)

[H.R. 3616](#) – Reliable Power Act (*Sponsored by Rep. Balderson / Energy and Commerce Committee*)

[H. Con. Res. 61](#) – Directing the President, pursuant to section 5(c) of the War Powers Resolution, to remove United States Armed Forces from hostilities with presidentially designated terrorist organizations in the Western Hemisphere. (*Sponsored by Rep. Meeks / Foreign Affairs Committee*)

[H. Con. Res. 64](#) – To direct the removal of United States Armed Forces from hostilities within or against Venezuela that have not been authorized by Congress. (*Sponsored by Rep. McGovern / Foreign Affairs 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:

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- Research and Analysis
- Advocacy Training

- Association Management
- Strategic Communications
- Policy Events

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