Good Morning. At the conclusion of this message is the September 27, 2021 Federal Advocacy & Public Policy Update. Lawmakers are in D.C. working on budget bills leading up to the end of the fiscal year on Thursday. If a budget deal is not reached, Congress will have to pass a continuing resolution to keep the government open as negotiations between the Senate and House of Representatives continue around the budget and infrastructure legislation.

VSBA will keep you informed on any pertinent developments from Washington, D.C. via the blog, social media, and email. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have.

Thank you for all you do on behalf of public education in the Commonwealth. Have a good day.

Best,

J.T.

Federal Advocacy & Public Policy Update

Congressional Update

House Approves Continuing Resolution and Suspension of Debt Limit

The House and Senate face several fast-approaching deadlines including funding government operations beyond the end of the current fiscal year which is September 30, 2021, increasing the federal debt ceiling before authorized borrowing levels are ~~reached in October, and~~ continuing to move the two major infrastructure bills forward. On Tuesday, September 21, the House approved a bill (220-211) that would provide temporary funding for federal operations until December 3, 2021, as well as provide a debt limit suspension until December 2022. The Treasury Department projects a debt default sometime in October if Congress fails to increase the debt limit.

Nearly every Senate Republican has indicated that they will not support a debt limit increase, so the House's decision to couple the issue with the temporary funding required to continue government operations after September 30 has triggered a standoff that could lead to a government shutdown. Senate Republicans argued this week that Democrats should pass the debt limit increase as part of the $3.5 trillion reconciliation package they plan to pass without Republican support. With neither side budging, Congressional leaders must find a compromise over the next few days. A government shut down can still be avoided, but school districts should note that a short term shut down is not likely to have significant implications for the nation's

schools.

Fiscal Year 2022 Appropriations Process Slows in the Senate

This week, Senate Democrats scrapped plans – at least temporarily – to mark-up the remaining fiscal year 2022 appropriations bills, including the draft Labor Health and Human Services and Related Agencies bill that funds the U.S. Department of Education and the agency's programs. Senate Republicans said they are withholding support from any spending bills until topline allocations are provided for both defense and non-defense spending for the coming fiscal year. Given this impasse, Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Leahy (VT) may soon release the twelve draft fiscal year 2022 spending bills publicly with plans to use the drafts as the baseline for starting discussions with the House about an Omnibus spending package. Democrats aim to complete negotiations on an omnibus spending bill – including the Department of Education's budget – prior to the early December deadline included in the continuing resolution approved by the House this week and awaiting further action in the Senate. That deadline could shift before Congress approves the continuing resolution for the president's signature and Congress could also delay the FY22 appropriations process a second time by adopting another continuing resolution. NSBA will continue monitoring the process and encouraging Congress to provide the funding schools need to support their students.

House Budget Committee to Vote on $3.5 Trillion Reconciliation Bill

On Saturday, the House Budget Committee is expected to mark up the $3.5 trillion reconciliation bill, including significant new investments in education. As a reminder, this package, crafted to enact President Biden's "Build Back Better" agenda, may be passed by simple majorities in both chambers of Congress. If enacted, the bill would provide: $450 billion for universal pre-K and childcare subsidies for eligible families, $111 billion to provide two years of free community college and a $500 increase to Pell grants, $82 billion for K-12 school infrastructure, $80 billion for workforce development programs, $198 million for teacher residency programs, $198 million school leadership programs, $197 million for "Grow Your Own" teacher preparation programs meant to increase teacher workforce diversity, and $297 million for Part D of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Along with the above education priorities, the measure also includes $4 billion to continue the Emergency Connectivity Fund for connecting students and staff to home broadband and devices. Following approval by the Budget Committee, House Speaker Pelosi must set a date for the bill's consideration by the full House. This decision is complicated by divisions with the House Democratic Caucus about whether the body should first vote on the $3.5 trillion Build Back Better bill, or the smaller bipartisan infrastructure bill already approved by the Senate. The House is scheduled to vote on the bipartisan bill on Monday, but that date could slip if the Speaker does not have the votes required to approve the measure. NSBA expects to learn more over the weekend about both bills and will update members when new insights are available.

Senate Employment Subcommittee Holds Hearing on Apprenticeships

Earlier this week, the Senate HELP Subcommittee on Employment and Workplace

Safety held a hearing titled "Getting America Ready to Work – Successful on the job, apprenticeship training programs to help workers and business get ready to work." The discussion was part of the Congress's work to update the National Apprenticeship Act, including finding ways to ensure that federal apprenticeship programs benefit parts of the workforce – such as early childhood education – that may not have traditionally taken advantage of the program. The hearing included witnesses from Toyota, CareerWise, and Pinnacol Insurance and emphasized the importance of apprenticeships and the need for skilled workers. Subcommittee Chairman Hickenlooper (D-CO) noted in his opening remarks that there is a need to build a bipartisan coalition to advocate for the investment needed for a highly skilled workforce not just for the careers of today, but for the careers of the future. Ranking Member Braun (R-IN) discussed the possible reauthorization of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and noted that apprenticeships are a topic of bipartisan agreement. Witnesses and members alike highlighted the importance of workforce and education working together with an industry led approach for success. The hearing also emphasized the need to reach students early in middle school to provide insights and experiences on career opportunities.

Administration Update

Education Secretary Cardona Travels the Midwest on School Tour

Education Secretary Cardona and Deputy Secretary Marten kicked off their Return to School Road Trip school tour on Monday, visiting schools in Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, and Michigan throughout this week to promote in person learning for students. Many of the schools and communities featured in the tour have successfully implemented the priorities within the Return to School Roadmap and have used federal pandemic relief funds to support these efforts. Learn more about the school visits, the Return to School Roadmap, and administration's back to school priorities here.

FCC Announces First Wave of Homework Gap Grants

Today, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) announced an initial wave of Emergency Connectivity Fund (ECF) Program funding commitments totaling over $1.2 billion. The approved commitments account for approximately 20% of the total amount requested during the initial application filing window and will fund 3,663 applications from 3,040 schools, 260 libraries, and 24 consortia across all 50 states, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. The FCC will continue to review applications and will be making additional commitments on a rolling basis in the coming weeks.

A second application filing window will open on September 28, 2021, and close on October 13, 2021. During this window, applicants will be able to submit requests for funding for purchases made between July 1, 2021, and June 30, 2022, to meet the needs of students, school staff, and library patrons who would otherwise lack access to basic educational opportunities and library services.

Additional information about the ECF applications filed in the first filing window is

available on the Universal Service Administrative Company's (USAC) Open Data platform and can be found at ECF FCC Form 471 dataset. This dataset contains detailed information from the ECF applications filed in the first filing window, which ran from June 29, 2021, to August 13, 2021, including applicant details, requested funds, individual product or service details, and funding commitment information.

U.S. Department of Education Awards First Project SAFE Grant

Earlier this month, the **Department of Education** announced **a new grant program-Project Supporting America's Families and Educators (Project SAFE)-to provide additional funding to schools and districts who have run afoul of these state-level restrictions, many of which are at odds with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's current guidance. This week t**he Department of Education announced the first Project SAFE award to Alachua County in Florida. Applications are reviewed on a rolling basis contingent on funding availability. The grant application can be found here. For more information on applying contact Amy Banks at ProjectSAFE@ed.gov.

U.S. Department of Education Announces 2021 National Blue Ribbon Schools

The Department of Education announced the 2021 cohort of National Blue Ribbon Schools. This year's 325 schools are recognized for either being exemplary high-performing schools and are among their state's highest performing schools as measured by state assessments or nationally normed tests or because of their exemplary achievement gap-closing schools are among their state's highest performing schools in closing achievement gaps between a school's student groups and all students. More details about the schools can be found here.

U.S. Department of Education Awards Promise Neighborhood Grants

On Wednesday, September 22 the Department of Education announced $40 million in new Promise Neighborhood Grants. The funding for these grants is authorized under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and are intended to "significantly improve academic and developmental outcomes for children living in communities of concentrated poverty." The grants assist by enabling education and community leaders to address the many interlocking impacts that concentrated poverty exerts on a child's educational journey. The services proposed in the grantee applications will provide services to support students from early childhood through the course of their K-12 education. The announcement includes seven grantees from the following states: California, Connecticut, Florida, Indiana, Mississippi, New Jersey, and South Carolina.

New Legislation

- R.5339 To clarify the requirements of authorized representatives under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, and for other purposes. **Sponsor:** Rep. Luetkemeyer, Blaine [R-MO-3]
- R.5337 To establish a National social emotional learning clearinghouse.

Sponsor: Rep. Larsen, Rick [D-WA-2]

- R.5336 To amend the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act to provide additional criteria for the Dislocated Worker Project, and for other purposes. **Sponsor:**Rep. Keller, Fred [R-PA-12]
- R.5328 To direct the Secretary of Education to establish a grant program to make grants to the parents of students served by local educational agencies that teach critical race theory, and for other purposes. **Sponsor:** Rep. Bishop, Dan [R-NC-9]
- R.5327 To direct the Secretary of Education to establish a grant program to make grants to the parents of students served by local educational agencies that require students to wear face masks during in-person instruction, and for other purposes. **Sponsor:**Rep. Bishop, Dan [R-NC-9]
- R.5308 To amend section 9A of the Richard B. Russell National School Lunch Act to require that local school wellness policies include a requirement that students receive 50 hours of school nutrition education per school year. **Sponsor:** Rep. Cartwright, Matt [D-PA-8]
- R.5288 Teaching Engaged Citizenship Act of 2021 **Sponsor:** Rep. Scanlon, Mary Gay [D-PA-5]