Good Friday Afternoon. At the conclusion of this message is the Federal Advocacy & Public Policy Update for January 7, 2022. If you have any questions regarding the information found in this report, please do not hesitate to contact me.

In addition to the federal advocacy report, I am reminding you that the Virginia General Assembly will convene on Wednesday January 12. Please be sure to check out the VSBA Legislative Update Blog and monitor VSBA on Facebook and Twitter daily for real time information from the general assembly, as well as responding to any Legislative Action Alerts from the VSBA Government Relations team during the session.

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

Best,

J.T.

Federal Advocacy & Public Policy Update

January 7, 2022
Congressional Update
Congress Returns with Funding Deadline Looming

Earlier this week, the Senate formally reconvened to begin the second session of the 117th Congress. The House is scheduled to follow suit next Monday, January 10. As lawmakers return to Capitol Hill this week and next, they will be confronted with a number of important agenda items. Chief among these is the fast-approaching date of February 18, which is when funding for the current 2022 federal fiscal year (FY22) is set to expire. Last year, Congress enacted a short-term extension of FY21 funding levels to keep the federal government open and related federal programs funded. This extension was intended to provide lawmakers additional time to find agreement on a full-year FY22 funding bill, which would last through September 30 of this year.
Administration Update
FCC Launches New Connectivity Program and Grants New Waiver Flexibilities

On New Year's Eve, December 31, 2021, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) officially launched the Affordable Connectivity Program-an initiative authorized by the recently passed bipartisan infrastructure legislation (known also as the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act). The program allots $14.2 billion in supplementary funding for eligible individuals to acquire subsidies for internet service bills and one-time discounts for certain internet capable devices. More on the

announcement can be found here.
In addition to these efforts, the FCC also issued an order on Monday, January 4, responding to seven requests to waive the Emergency Connectivity Fund's (ECF) $400 cap for the purchasing of connected devices. The $7.2 billion ECF program was authorized as part of the American Rescue Plan and allows eligible schools and libraries to apply for financial support to purchase connected devices like laptops and tablets, Wi-Fi hotspots, modems, routers, and broadband connectivity to serve unmet needs of students, school staff, and library patrons at home during the ongoing pandemic. This week's order granted five out of the seven requested waivers capping the allowable cost of these devices.

USED Unveils New Proposed MOEq Requirements

On Monday, January 3, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) published newly proposed requirements for states and local school districts regarding the implementation of "Maintenance of Equity" (MOEq) provisions contained in the American Rescue Plan (ARP). This announcement follows earlier guidance from USED on this topic. Published in the Federal Register, the proposal details a series of new reporting requirements that states, and school districts would need to complete by December 31, 2022. The Department is seeking feedback from the public on this proposal and comments are due to the Department by February 2, 2022. Additional information on the announcement can be found here.

School Bus Driver Certification Waivers Announced

On Tuesday, January 4, the U.S. Departments of Education (USED) and Transportation (USDOT) announced a series of actions to address the nation's ongoing shortage of school bus drivers. Among these planned responses, USED and USDOT jointly committed to waiving certain requirements from commercial driver's licenses (CDLs) to reduce the entry requirements to train new bus drivers. The waiver took effect Monday, January 3, and is set to expire March 31 of this year. Bus operators receiving a CDL under this temporary waiver will only be permitted to work within states. More information regarding this announcement can be found here.

USED Approves Last Round of State ARP Plans

The American Rescue Plan (ARP), passed exclusively by Congressional Democrats in the spring of 2021, authorized $122 billion in additional pandemic aid funding to be disbursed to K-12 schools over the last year. The U.S. Department of Education (USED) distributed two-thirds of this funding to states via a formula detailed in the legislation during 2021. However, USED held back the remaining third of these funds until states and territories submitted plans detailing how they would make use of these resources to support students as they recover from the impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Over the last few weeks in December, the Department approved the remaining state ARP plans that were awaiting review by USED, including those for Florida, Mississippi, and Vermont. All state ARP plans, including highlights and related press releases, can be found here.

New Legislation

R.6349 - 117th Congress (2021-2022) Teachers Are Leaders Act Sponsor: Rep. Neguse, Joe [D-CO-2]

R.6324 - 117th Congress (2021-2022) Saving America's Future by Educating Kids Act of 2021 Sponsor: Rep. Vela, Filemon [D-TX-34]

R.6312 - 117th Congress (2021-2022) Preventing Mandates on Toddlers Act Sponsor: Rep. McClain, Lisa C. [R-MI-10]