



VSBA
Virginia School Boards Association
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Federal Advocacy Update



Good Friday Evening! Please find the June 12, 2020 Federal Advocacy & Public Policy Update at the conclusion of this message. If you have questions regarding this update, please do not hesitate to send them to me.

Thank you for all you do on behalf of public education in the Commonwealth. Stay safe and healthy and have a wonderful weekend!

Best,

J.T.

Federal Advocacy & Public Policy Update

June 12, 2020

Congressional Update

Senate Education Committee Focuses on Return to School

This week, the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee held a hearing about strategies for returning to school safely. The panel included the education commissioners from Tennessee and Nebraska, former Education Secretary John King, and the Superintendent of Denver Public Schools (DPS). Committee Chairman Lamar Alexander (R-TN) opened the hearing by saying that the key to reopening schools is testing and contact tracing. He also encouraged schools to develop emergency response plans that last at least one year, saying that it will likely be the fall of 2021 before schools approach some form of normalcy. In her opening remarks, committee Ranking Member Patty Murray (D-WA) noted that schools and districts are facing huge budget cuts and increased costs due to the pandemic. She also highlighted learning loss data and said we cannot allow that happen.

Witness Testimony Highlights:

Dr. Penny Schwinn, Tennessee's Commissioner of Education, noted that returning to school is complicated and costly, and that there are widespread differences between school districts and even individual schools.

Dr. Matthew Blomstedt, Nebraska's Commissioner of Education, focused on the pandemic's exacerbation of persistent inequities in the education system, and talked about the creation of *Launch Nebraska* to guide the state's return to school. The system is organized around leadership and planning, conditions for learning, and continuity of learning.

Ms. Susana Cordova, Superintendent of Denver Public Schools (DPS), said DPS has built a fully virtual system and student supports, including wraparound services, meals, and laptops, but noted that ensuring equitable internet access has been a big challenge. Denver is prioritizing health and wellness first, and then working to figure out how to get students back into the classroom.

Former education secretary, Dr. John King, Jr., President and CEO of the Education Trust, said that when students return to school buildings, they will need additional supports. He noted that students of color and minorities are disproportionately affected by racism, which impacts their safety, their family's finances due to COVID-19, and despite heroic efforts of educators, many of these at-risk students haven't received what they need with regard to educational resources.

An archived video of the virtual hearing and the witnesses' full written testimony is available [here](#).

Senate and House Appropriations Committees Plan Busy Summer Schedule

The Senate Appropriations Committee announced this week that the committee will vote on the twelve fiscal year 2021 appropriations bills beginning the week of June 22. The full Senate plans to complete the bills following the July 4 congressional recess. As announced last week, the House Appropriations Committee is planning a similarly aggressive schedule. The committee intends to hold subcommittee and full committee votes during the first half of July, followed by floor votes as early as the week of July 20. This work will occur on a parallel track with appropriators' efforts to develop another pandemic emergency response bill in July. NSBA's advocacy team plans to work hard in June and early July to ensure that both the fiscal year 2021 budget and the next pandemic response bill include significant funding for education.

House Education Committee Schedules Hearing to Examine the Pandemic's Impact

House Education and Labor Committee Chairman Bobby Scott (D-VA) announced that the committee will hold a virtual hearing on Monday, June 15, titled "Budget Cuts and Lost Learning: Assessing the Impact of COVID-19 on Public Education." The committee has not yet announced the witness list, but the hearing will be livestreamed [here](#).

Administration Update

U.S. Department of Education Hosts Forum about Remote Learning Practices

This week, the U.S. Department of Education [held](#) a virtual K-12 educator forum on remote learning best practices during COVID19. More than 2,000 education leaders tuned in from across the country.

Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education, Frank Brogan, moderated the discussion, which included the following participants:

Courtney Bauknecht, kindergarten – 4th grade science teacher, Brass City Charter School, Waterbury, Connecticut

Kara Heichelbech, innovation & learning manager for Indiana Online, Central Indiana Educational Service Center, Indianapolis, Indiana

Brady Johnson, superintendent, Iredell-Statesville Schools, North Carolina

Steven McCartney, upper school dean, Jackson Academy, Jackson, Mississippi

Hollis Milton, superintendent, West Feliciana Parish Schools, Louisiana

Julie Young, vice president of education outreach and student services for Arizona State

University (ASU), and managing director of ASU Prep Academy and ASU Prep Digital High School, Arizona

Participants discussed how they established innovative virtual learning capabilities to serve students and teachers during the pandemic and in the future.

Department of Agriculture Extends Key Waivers and Announces Program Approvals

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) [announced](#) an additional waiver extension with regard to area eligibility, which will allow all children in all areas to receive free meals through USDA's summer meals programs, rather than limiting eligibility to low income areas. The Department also [approved](#) Georgia and Iowa for operation of the pandemic program (Pandemic Electronic Benefit Transfer – EBT), which will allow families of children eligible for free or reduced-price meals additional assistance with meals during school closures.

Department of Education Invites Applications for Special Education Grants

The Department of Education's Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services invited applications for the "Personnel Development to Improve Services and Results for Children with Disabilities" grant program. The program seeks to address needs for personnel preparation in special education, early intervention, related services, and regular education to work with children as well as ensure that personnel have "necessary skills and knowledge, derived from practices that have been determined through scientifically based research, to be successful in serving those children." The estimated available funds for the competition are \$4,000,000, contingent upon the availability of funds and quality of applications. Applications are due August 17, 2020, and further information is available [here](#).

[NSBA Updates](#)

Impact of ED Proposed Equitable Guidance on Public Schools: NSBA expects the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to announce proposed regulations concerning equitable guidance in the coming days. The impact of the ED guidance, which calls for a change under the CARES Act in allocation distribution for non-public schools, will have a significant negative impact on public education. The Learning Policy Institute issued information this week in a blog post that the proposed ED guidance would provide an additional \$1.35 billion in funding for services to private schools which includes \$1.22 billion in CARES ESSERF funding and \$133 million in GEERF funding. This would mean an additional 10% of CARES Act funding would go to non-public schools. You can view the information [here](#). This issue is one of NSBA's top priorities going forward. When the proposed rules are published, we will be leading a grassroots effort urging school board members to provide comments on the proposed guidance and to contact their Congressional representatives.

Homework Gap Webinar Next Thursday: The National Coalition for Technology in Education and Training (NCTET) is holding a webinar next Thursday, June 18, 2020 from 1:00-2:00 pm eastern time entitled "A Virtual Convening: Addressing the Digital Divide in the Age of COVID-19." FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel and a panel of education leaders from a cross-section of school systems will discuss their viewpoints on closing the homework gap, strategies for ensuring all students have the resources to continue their education in a remote environment, and what they believe Washington's policymakers need to know about closing the Digital Divide. Other panelists include Dr. Lundy Brantley, Superintendent, Neshoba Central Schools, Mississippi; Emmanuel Stewart, Principal, Dr. George Washington Carver Academic Elementary School, San Francisco, California; and Carey Cunningham, School Administrator, St. Louis Public Schools, Missouri. You or your members can watch the webinar by following the [RSVP link](#). NSBA is an active participant in NCTET.

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