

Written Testimony for the Record

U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies

Submitted by Dr. Joan Wade, Executive Director, Association of Educational Service Agencies

April 16, 2026

Chairman Aderholt, Ranking Member DeLauro, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA), representing more than 500 regional educational service agencies across the country, thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony for the record as you begin work on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) appropriations bill.

First, we thank Congress for the FY26 final allocations, and its rejection of the drastic cuts put forward in the initial FY26 proposals from the President and this committee. We were pleased to see the final, bipartisan FY26 LHHS spending bill that preserved and protected education investments. As you embark on the FY27 appropriations process, we urge the committee to continue to provide support for students, teachers and school leaders and once again reject the proposed cuts and consolidations put forth by the President's FY27 proposal. Specifically, we urge the Committee to provide robust investments in the following programs:

- **IDEA, Part B (IDEA):** IDEA defines the role of the federal government in K-12 special education. The scope and severity of physical, cognitive, and emotional needs that ESAs and LEAs must address for the students they serve under IDEA only continues to grow. Congress's failure to fully fund IDEA represents an unfunded mandate on state and local communities that impacts both our most vulnerable children and the ability of ESAs to implement the law. While Congress has made incremental progress in recent years, the federal government continues to fall far short of its long-standing commitment to fund 40 percent of the additional cost associated with educating students with special needs. We greatly appreciate the President's recognition of the importance of IDEA and proposed \$1.167 billion for the program. However, investments in IDEA cannot come at the cost of other IDEA and K-12 programs. Congress must provide actual investments in IDEA—not simply shift and consolidate funding. We urge the committee to provide the maximum increase possible in funding for IDEA without cutting education funding elsewhere.
- **Head Start:** Head Start is an essential program that serves more than 700,000 families across the country, providing our nation's youngest, most vulnerable kids with a strong foundation that sets them up for a lifetime of learning. The Head Start model is built on evidence-based practices and is constantly adapting—using the best available science and teaching techniques to meet the needs of local communities. Head Start programs offer education, health, and nutrition services to eligible children – those living in poverty, in foster care, or experiencing homelessness – as well as parenting, employment, and educational support to their parents. Head Start serves as a critical part of a strong education continuum by ensuring students are academically, emotionally, and socially ready to learn when they enter kindergarten.

- **Title I, Part A (Title I):** Title I remains the primary federal investment in closing opportunity gaps for students from low-income families. The breadth and depth of Title I make it uniquely positioned for supporting districts in their work to support children—particularly those in poverty—in meeting challenging state academic content and achievement standards. Districts rely on Title I funds for critical supports like teachers, reading programs, additional direct instructional services for students and family engagement efforts. Any reduction or instability in Title I funding would disproportionately impact communities already facing significant economic and educational challenges.
- **Title II, Part A (Title II):** Title II is the only K-12 formula program dedicated to educator professional development. Research continues to find that teachers are the most important in-school factor contributing to students’ academic achievement. Title II provides critical funding to improve instruction and ensure students have greater access to high-quality, effective educators. Many school districts rely on Title II funding to grow the skills and expertise of current teachers in essential subjects like literacy, math and English or provide additional certification for teachers to expand learning opportunities for students. These investments also allow for districts to provide important induction and mentoring programs for new educators that keep them in the classroom. Eliminating Title II would eliminate many districts’ ability to improve instruction in their classrooms and address staff shortages through retention strategies.

Every day, educational service agencies (ESAs) and the schools they support are working hard to support academic recovery, deliver vital mental health services, build a high-quality educator workforce and combat chronic absenteeism—all while facing severe staffing shortages and rising operational costs. Investing in education is always important, but in this time of heightened demands and limited resources, consistent and stable federal funding is more critical than ever to ensure students and educators get the support they need.

As your committee begins its important work on FY27, we urge you to reject proposals that consolidate, eliminate, or destabilize education investment. Critical programs like Title I, IDEA, Head Start, Title I, and Title II are proven investments that allow public schools to meet federal obligations, respond to local needs, and support student success.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We welcome the opportunity to work with the committee as they begin the FY27 appropriations process.

Sincerely,

Dr. Joan Wade

Executive Director

Association of Educational Service Agencies