



Other Education Issues

Often times, AESA is tracking federal policies that ‘pop up’ and need attention but are not organizational priorities or issues that need a full page of talking points. They still warrant member feedback, though, and may come up in your meetings on Capitol Hill. We have a handful of such issues this year and will continue to monitor through the fall and into the new Congress. As such, we have collected a brief summary and talking point for each on this page.

Anti-Integration Language: This is in follow up to the item referenced in the appropriations page. The FY19 LHHHS bill removed the problematic provisions from sections 301 and 302 of the appropriations text. Our work is not over, though. We still need Congress to vote for the final FY19 package, and we need to remove section 426 of GEPA. These outdated statutes, which acts as an anti-integration provision. This problematic language bars the use of federal funds to transport students for purposes of racial integration. This prohibition undercuts Congress’ intent in reauthorizing the Magnet School Assistance Program (MSAP), constrains school improvement strategies, and undermines the ability of education innovators to implement new school improvement techniques. These provisions reduce state and local district efforts to flexibly implement the education program that best serves the needs of their students and communities. We applaud the House and Senate for the steps they have taken to remove sections 301 and 302 and ask that work will be completed with the removal of 426 from GEPA. This is a relatively easy GEPA fix, and this is something we hope to see action on in the new year and new Congress.

WiFi on Buses Act: In late June, AESA was pleased to sponsor the introduction of a brand new bill which would provide wireless internet on school buses to help close the homework gap. Currently, millions of students need access to the internet to complete their school assignments but lack access at home. This gap especially impacts low-income, rural and tribal students who must find other ways to get online to complete their homework. This bill would allow the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) to update the list of allowable services in the E-Rate program to include reimbursement to schools that place WiFi technology on school buses carrying students. The bill is co-sponsored by Rep. Peter Welch (D-VT) and corresponding legislation has been introduced in the Senate by Sens. Tom Udall (D-NM) and Cory Gardner (R-CO). Ask your Senators to support S 2958 and your Representative to support HR 6286.

Vouchers: The Trump Administration as well as many Republicans in Congress are laser focused on finding ways to send public dollars to private schools. It would be a disservice to our democracy and the goal of providing equitable educational opportunities for children if we siphon limited federal resources away from public schools and into unaccountable private schools that can pick and choose who they educate. We must enhance federal funding for our signature federal education programs that level the playing field for students in poverty, not siphon resources away from them to provide alternative and unaccountable education options for a select few students. Attempts earlier this Congress to voucherize Impact Aid funding and allow families who homeschool or attend private school to receive federal funding are strongly opposed.

Nutrition: Both the House and Senate have passed bills to reauthorize the Farm Bill this year and are currently working to conference the two bills together. While we do not take a stand on most elements of the bills, the House bill removes the ability for states to broaden categorical eligibility, through which families enrolled in TANF, SSI, or state General Assistance can be enrolled in SNAP and school meals. In removing broad-based categorical eligibility, the House bill would eliminate 265,000 students from the school meal program. In doing so, district FRPL numbers would be impacted and eligibility for the Community Eligibility Provision may also be harmed for many schools and districts. Tell your members of Congress to urge the conference committee to follow the Senate and continue to allow states to provide this flexibility.

Medicaid: We remain concerned about the ability of school leaders to receive Medicaid funding in this political climate. Specifically, Republicans in the House have expressed interest in a renewed Medicaid debate if they retain the House. Medicaid is the third largest funding stream for schools and many district leaders use Medicaid to provide critical mental health services for students. In light of the need to address the mental and physical needs of our students, we think Congress and the Trump administration should be doing more to improve Medicaid billing that enables districts to meet the diverse healthcare needs of students and attempts that will undermine reimbursement to districts should be soundly rejected.

Infrastructure: President Trump's FY19 budget proposal included his Infrastructure Plan. AESA is very interested in an infrastructure plan but are concerned that the President's plan has no explicit provision to include public education. There is no traction on Capitol Hill right now for an Infrastructure Plan (there is no money to pay for the plan and there is no floor time). That said, we are being diligent in our outreach and have made inroads with Congress so that should they decide to move on an infrastructure proposal, their plan would provide an explicit role for public schools. If you are asked about infrastructure, you can say that we are interested in an infrastructure proposal, that the nation's public schools are one of the oldest and largest forms of public infrastructure in the nation, and as such, any plan coming out of Congress must include an explicit provision to support schools. This could include funds directly supporting renovation, repair and new build, as well as financing and tax policy and bonding options.

Federal School Safety Commission: The Federal School Safety Commission, convened after the Parkland school massacre earlier this year, convened a series of meetings and field hearings to listen to experts and stakeholders on a variety of topics important to the discussion around securing school safety, addressing mental health, and ending school shootings. The premise of the commission side stepped any discussion related to guns and their role in school safety. Even with this omission, though, the work is relevant. You shouldn't receive any questions on the hill about the commission, but if you should, here are two items to be aware of: We support funding of the STOP Act. This program was created in the FY18 omnibus and included again in the FY19 funding. Commend Congress for their work to support this program and to continue to fund this program as it is authorized. The other big topic deals with the interplay between school/student safety and student data and privacy. We believe that if there is any fix identified as necessary through the commission, the work should come through Congress and a reauthorization of the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), as opposed to regulations or guidance from the Trump administration. It is not likely you will be asked about this.

Secure Rural Schools and Forest Counties: Earlier this summer, wildfires devastated California, Oregon, Alaska, Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Idaho and states across the country. Congress did fund Forest Counties for FY17 and FY18, providing support for 9 million students and county citizens in 4,400 school districts in 775 forest counties in 41 states. It is critical Congress not only provide funding in FY19, but work to update the underlying authorizing statute. Forest communities are suffering human and economic devastation as the SRS safety net continues to unravel. Forest counties, communities, schools and students continue to pay the price as extremely dangerous fires devastate local communities while also suffering loss of irreplaceable essential fire, police, road and bridge, community and educational services. The Administration and Congress must act this year on viable forest management and economic development programs and continue the historic SRS commitment to rural counties, communities, schools, students and citizens. Specific talking points can include: Congress must act on forest management, fire control and long term SRS funding as forest communities and schools fight for economic survival; SRS is critical to support essential safety, fire, police, road and bridge, and education services; Tell your Members what SRS funds mean for students, roads and essential public safety services in his/her communities and give examples of what the loss of SRS means to education, roads, bridges, police, fire, and safety programs.