

## AESA Federal Legislative Policy Priorities

### Introduction

*AESA represents its members on federal legislative issues. To do so, it operates with Federal Legislative Policy Priorities and an Annual Federal Legislative Agenda. The Federal Legislative Policy Priorities are subject to regular review by the federal advocacy committee and approved by the Executive Council. The Annual Federal Legislative Agenda allows the organization to identify, pivot, and respond to emerging federal discussions, especially those that affect ESAs and AESA's Federal Legislative Policy Priorities. The Annual Federal Legislative Agenda is recommended by the Federal Advocacy Committee to the Executive Council for approval each calendar year.*

### Policy Foundation: AESA's federal advocacy is premised on:

- equity in education and educational opportunity;
- the appropriate role of the federal government to support and strengthen public education;
- ensuring that a high-quality education is a viable option for all students and all communities.

### Equity in Education: Educational Opportunity in Funding and Policy

Federal funding represents, on average, roughly 10 percent of school districts' operating budget, and is a critical share of investment in education. As an entity, AESA is committed to equity. Federal funding must be allocated to schools and, as appropriate, educational service agencies, via formulae. Continued reliance on competitive allocation is inherently inequitable and exacerbates a system of winners and losers.

- Given that a child is more than a test score, federal supports (both funding and policy), as well as federal accountability must include both academic and non-academic factors, including (but not limited to) physical health, mental health, student engagement, and counseling.
- Given that 1 in 5 Americans struggle with mental health issues, federal policy must support equitable access to appropriate and quality mental health services for all students.
- Equitable access to affordable internet (broadband) connectivity is an important building block for education and learning. AESA supports the E-Rate program, for its ongoing role in providing internet access to schools and libraries, and the Lifeline program, for the work it does in providing internet access in low-income homes, an important step in addressing the "homework gap."
- To the extent that the rescission of network neutrality protections, especially in combination with proposed changes to E-Rate and Lifeline programs, represent a limit on the ability of schools and educational services agencies to continue to provide affordable, equitable access to broadband and content to students, AESA will monitor the proposed changes to ensure that federal policy allows 24-hour learners to have 24-hour access.
- Congress must meet its commitment to provide 40% of the additional cost associated with educating students with disabilities. AESA supports full funding of IDEA in both the short-term (through annual appropriations) and in the long-term (through stand-alone legislation providing a path to meet the 40% commitment). AESA supports a long-term coordinated campaign to fully fund federal IDEA legislation.

**The federal government's role is to support and strengthen the nation's public schools.**

- The financial burden for federal mandates should not be placed on ESAs or schools.
- AESA supports state and local education leaders exercising the flexibility and authority returned to them in ESSA. ESAs are uniquely positioned to support state and local education agencies in the implementation of federal law.
- Protect Medicaid in schools.
  - ESAs and the schools they serve may provide Medicaid eligible services and, as such, must remain eligible to receive reimbursement.
- Ensure new data collection requirements, burdensome regulations, and new guidance and policies issued by the U.S. Department of Education be examined in the context of what is statutorily required of schools and with consideration of current federal, state, and local education funding levels.
- In expanding and delivering early education, ensure public schools are a core partner in all stages of planning, implementation, and evaluation.
- All entities receiving public dollars will be subject to the same transparency, reporting, and accountability requirements.
- The role of the federal government in education policy must be premised on supporting and strengthening the nation's public education system. AESA remains opposed to any efforts to expand and support a privatization agenda, including vouchers and related proposals.

**Ensuring high-quality public education is a viable option for all students and all communities.**

- Federal policy must support the unique opportunities and obstacles facing our nation's rural schools and communities, including the REAP, Secure Rural Schools Act (SRSA)/ Forest Counties, and Impact Aid programs.
- Access to robust early education, particularly for students in high-need/low-income situations, is a critical component to building a strong education continuum.
- ESAs have a unique role to play in supporting expanded and effective implementation of the Carl Perkins (career/technical) education program, relating to fiduciary, professional development, and stackable credential responsibilities.
- Equitable access to effective educators is a critical element for educational opportunity.
  - ESAs can support educator preparation and licensure and supports the federal policy that ensures candidates are eligible for student grants and loans.
  - ESAs must be eligible entities for grants that relate to educator training, certification, and development.
  - ESAs support the full resolution to the end of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) protections to minimize and mitigate the educational impacts of federal immigration law, including its impact on educator shortages.
- Schools should be a safe and welcoming environment for all students