



# ALABAMA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL BOARDS

## Federal Newsletter on Education as shared by COSSBA – May 31, 2022

### **Budget and Appropriations**

Last week was marked by the tragedy of yet another school shooting. The Robb Elementary School massacre took the lives of 19 children and two adults and as the week comes to an end, the facts around law enforcement response and the detailed timeline of the event remain in question. While the country mourned, the event provoked responses from lawmakers on Capitol Hill during a week filled with education-related hearings.

Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona was scheduled to appear before the Senate Labor, Health and Human Services and Education (LHHS) Appropriations Subcommittee on Tuesday. That hearing was postponed. Wednesday saw a House LHHS Subcommittee hearing on teacher shortages. Chairwoman Rosa DeLauro (D-CT), Ranking Member Tom Cole (R-OK) and their colleagues voiced their anguish about Tuesday's events before discussing the issues that are affecting the teaching workforce. On Thursday, Secretary Cardona appeared before the House Education and Labor Committee to discuss the Department of Education's policies and priorities. That three-hour hearing featured remarks from Democrats about the need for reform of gun control laws. Their Republican colleagues argued that more law enforcement presence at schools and protections such as magnetometers, single point of entry, and bullet proof doors and windows, should be supported by federal dollars. The debate of this year's spending bill that supports the Department of Education could very well be a venue to continue discussing these issues and the varying points of view.

As for progress on the FY 2023 appropriations process, there wasn't much news last week other than rumors that leaders of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees will meet to discuss numbers after the Memorial Day recess. Both chambers will be back in session the week of June 6.

### **HOUSE ED AND LABOR SUBCOMMITTEE EXAMINES JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM**

On Tuesday, May 17, the House Civil Rights and Human Services Subcommittee held a hearing titled, "Examining Ways to Improve the Juvenile Justice System and Support America's Young People." Witnesses included Lisette Burton, chief policy and practice advisor at the Association of Children's Residential and Community Services; A. Hasan Davis, founder and director of Hasan Davis Solutions LLC.; Dr. Karen Kolivoski, associate professor at Howard University School of Social Work; and Alan Loux, president and CEO of Rawhide Youth Services. In her [opening remarks](#), Chairwoman Suzanne Bonamici

(D-OR) noted the 2018 federal reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice Delinquency and Prevention Act (JJDP), which she says strengthened core protections for children and addressed racial disparities. However, a lack of coordination between local, state and federal agencies resulted in abuse of vulnerable children at residential facilities, according to a recent Government Accountability Office report, Bonamici stated. She directly asked for additional funding and oversight and urged the Senate to pass the Stronger Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act. Ranking Member Russ Fulcher (R-ID) asserted in his [remarks](#) that working with local partners on prevention is key to reducing delinquency and argued that the JJDP provided flexible funding to states and local governments for these efforts. Burton noted the links between juvenile delinquency and mental health and encouraged the committee to look at high-quality intervention and aftercare across silos. She stressed that while the JJDP is critical to transforming the system, it is underfunded. Davis spoke to alarming disparities within the system and testified to the social and emotional supports that enabled him to become a productive adult after being arrested at age 11, and Loux described his organization's faith-based community and residential treatment facilities for at-risk youth and its public-private partnerships. Finally, Dr. Kolivoski discussed research on "crossover kids," intersecting the child welfare and juvenile justice systems and how research can inform policy and practice changes to promote better outcomes. A recording of the hearing and witness testimonies is available [here](#).

### **ED HOSTS VIRTUAL SUMMIT ON MENTAL HEALTH, STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

On Monday, May 23, the Department of Education (ED) hosted a first-of-its-kind virtual summit titled, "Recovery to Thriving: Supporting Mental Health and Students with Disabilities." The summit featured an impressive lineup of presenters, including remarks from U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona; Congressman Bobby Scott (D-VA); Day Al-Mohamed, director of disability policy for the White House Domestic Policy Council; Assistant Secretary of Labor for Disability Employment Policy Taryn Mackenzie Williams; U.S. Deputy Secretary of Education Cindy Marten, and several more ED leaders. The half-day event highlighted steps schools, colleges and communities can take to support students with disabilities and mental health needs, as well as some of ED's [latest announcements and resources](#). "The department stands ready to help educators, school and program staff, and families thoughtfully design learning experiences — and to ensure students with disabilities continue to have equal access to in-person instruction... Today's summit demonstrates the ongoing commitment of the Biden-Harris administration to protecting our students' social-emotional well-being." said Cardona. The summit additionally featured a TED-style talk with Jeff Deickman, a disabled Army veteran and doctoral student at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs. During Monday's event, the agency also highlighted the essential partnership between schools and families to ensure effective implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and announced the release of new resources to promote mental health and social and emotional well-being, such as an [FAQ document](#) on disability-related rights of student veterans and a new series of "how-to" [videos](#) on website accessibility. Learn more about the ED's efforts [here](#).

### **SIIA DISCUSSES 21ST CENTURY LEARNERS IN A BROADBAND-ENHANCED WORLD**

On Monday, May 23, the Software and Information Industry Association (SIIA) held a virtual discussion titled, "The Diamond in the Rough: Chiseling 21st Century Learners in a Broadband-Enhanced World."

Speakers included Senator John Thune (R-SD); Michael Calabrese, Wireless Future Program director and senior research fellow at New America Foundation; Nicole Ferraro, site editor of Broadband World News and host of *The Divide*; Heather Gate, chair of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) Communications, Equity and Diversity Council (CEDC); Larry Irving, president of the Irving Group; Rosemary Lahasky, senior director of government affairs at Cengage Group; and Ji Soo Song, broadband advisor at the U.S. Department of Education. The event focused on ways the United States is using Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) funding to close the digital divide for students. Senator Thune opened the event by saying, “There’s a lot of money in the pipeline for building out broadband in this country, and we need to make sure it’s spent wisely and well, and that means making sure it’s used to serve underserved areas, that we’re not over-building with these dollars, and that we’re not imposing overly burdensome regulations.” Following Thune’s opening comments, much of the conversation centered on digital equity, a popular, and certainly important, talking point among today’s education policy experts. “40% of rural black southerners don’t have access to broadband,” Irving stressed. He added that when looking at Tribal lands, “we’re looking at 50 to 70% that don’t have access to broadband.” Ferraro shared additional statistics that highlighted the state of digital divide in America. Ferraro stated that an estimated 16 million students lack access to a broadband connection, yet “it’s fair to assume that number is larger” due to outdated data. Lahasky turned to the digital skills gap and its impact on students over time. “There is no question that digital skills are becoming increasingly necessary in all industries,” she said. She noted that although industry is seeing massive workforce shortages, automation and technology also bring opportunity for those who have historically been left on the sidelines, such as people with disabilities. In closing the event, panelists addressed their concerns around IIJA and what they hope to see avoided. Calabrese expressed concern for the sustainability of programs once funding runs out, while Lahasky hopes to see more coordination among all levels of government. Learn more about SIIA [here](#).

### **HELP COMMITTEE ADVANCES ED, EEOC, HHS NOMINEES**

On Wednesday, May 25, the Senate Health, Education Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee held a markup to advance the nominations of Kalpana Kotagal to be a member of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; LaWanda Amaker Toney to be assistant education secretary for communications and outreach; Nasser H. Paydar to be assistant education secretary for postsecondary education; and Rita M. Landgraf to be assistant HHS secretary for aging. While the committee vote for President Biden’s Equal Employment Opportunity Commission pick was deadlocked, both of Biden’s picks for the Department of Education each received a [bipartisan vote](#). Toney currently serves as the director of strategic communications at the National Parent Teacher Association. Paydar has most recently served as chancellor emeritus at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis and executive vice president of Indiana University. President Biden’s HHS nomination also received a bipartisan vote from committee. “The nominees we voted on today are highly qualified and ready to hit the ground running to protect workers’ rights and foster equal opportunity in the workplace, support older adults and people with disabilities, and help ensure every student can get a high-quality education,” said Chairwoman Patty Murray (D-WA).

### **HOUSE LHHS-ED SUBCOMMITTEE EXAMINES NATIONAL TEACHER SHORTAGES**

On Wednesday, May 25, the House Appropriations Labor, Health and Human Services, Education and Related Agencies (LHHS-ED) Subcommittee hosted a virtual hearing titled, "Tackling Teacher Shortages." Witnesses included Desiree Carver-Thomas, research and policy analyst at the Learning Policy Institute; Dr. Lindsey Burke, director of the Heritage Foundation's Center for Education Policy; Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT); and Dr. Jane West, an education policy consultant. The hearing came the day after the devastating shooting at Robb Elementary School in Uvalde, TX, that took the lives of 19 children and two adults. The hearing intended to examine the teacher shortages that are affecting schools and districts nationwide, but reactions to the shooting from both the subcommittee and witnesses consumed portions of the hearing. As it relates to teacher shortages, Carver-Thomas noted the importance of diversity in the teaching workforce. She suggested that the increasing debt burden of college might play a role in the declining interest in education careers, particularly for Black students. Weingarten asserted that "the United States falls woefully short in its recruitment, preparation and retention of ...vital staff to meet the needs of all our students." She suggested that educator school time be restructured, and overall compensation and benefits be improved. West's testimony focused on the critical shortage of special education teachers, pointing to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and the positive effect it has had on the work of special educators. "There is a direct link between well prepared special educators and ensuring that students with disabilities receive the services they are entitled to under IDEA," she stated. Burke took issue with the premise of the hearing, saying, "Public school districts have been on a hiring spree for decades. Although there has been teacher turnover as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, there is no shortage of school staff across the country." The archived video of the hearing and witness testimony can be found [here](#).

### **HOUSE ED AND LABOR COMMITTEE EXAMINES POLICIES, PRIORITIES OF ED**

On Thursday, May 26, the House and Education Labor Committee held a hearing titled, "Examining the Policies and Priorities of the U.S. Department of Education." The three-hour hearing, which featured Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona, examined the Department of Education's (ED) budget request for fiscal year 2023 and its priorities to support students, educators and communities. "The president's fiscal year 2023 request calls for a significant increase in federal support for education from birth through college and career," Cardona stated. He continued, "The 2023 budget would make historic investments in the nation's future prosperity by prioritizing funding for five core themes that are at the heart of this administration's vision for education in America." According to Cardona, the administration's themes include: 1) supporting students through pandemic response and recovery over the long term; 2) addressing opportunity and achievement gaps; 3) supporting a talented and diverse educator workforce; 4) making higher education inclusive and affordable; and 5) building pathways through postsecondary education that lead to successful careers. Following Cardona's testimony, member questions tackled expected and important topics, including school shootings, critical race theory, career pathways, the use of COVID relief funding in schools, and the nation's student debt crisis, among others. Democrats focused on how the substantial funding increases provided by the proposed budget create the opportunity to remedy inequities in public education, address persistent education achievement gaps, restore access to education for students with disabilities and lower the cost of college. Republicans on the committee focused on issues with student loan repayment and cautioned

against teaching critical race theory in schools and the influence of adversarial governments in American higher education. The archived video of the hearing and witness testimony can be found [here](#).



## MEMORANDUM

**TO: AASB MEMBERS**

**FROM: SALLY SMITH, J.D.**   
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

**DATE: APRIL 14, 2022**

**SUBJECT: COSSBA (CONSORTIUM OF STATE SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATIONS)**

On April 10, 2022, in Raleigh, North Carolina, our association, along with 21 other founding school boards associations, signed a resolution to officially form the Consortium of State School Boards Associations (COSSBA).

COSSBA is a voluntary, non-partisan, national alliance of state school boards associations. We believe that the governance of public schools by highly effective locally accountable public school boards is critical for the advancement and success of public education throughout the United States. COSSBA strives to provide member-focused information that is powered by collaboration and driven by shared commitment, shared resources, and shared responsibility. It is a consortium, founded by state school boards associations to support, promote, and strengthen each other as we serve our local school districts and board members so they can provide excellence in local school board governance resulting in access to high quality educational opportunities for ALL students.

The signing of the resolution was an important step in formalizing the organization and allows the transitional governing body to move forward with full development of relevant programming and events through shared resources, federal advocacy, and alliance groups. More information about the services and focus of COSSBA can be found on our website at [www.cossba.org](http://www.cossba.org).

Planning is underway for a full complement of training and networking opportunities including a Spring 2023 inaugural conference, a late summer/early fall 2022 Urban Institute (see more below), association leadership event in the Winter of 2023 and a Federal Advocacy Conference in August/September 2023. These will provide networking opportunities for school board members and association leaders and will enhance the effectiveness of our work through training, peer-to-peer information sharing, and interactively engaging around the issues that directly impact boards' ability to govern, set policy, and improve educational outcomes.

As a complement and supplement to the professional development and training offered, COSSBA's Urban Boards Alliance (UBA) will provide a national program of training, resources, and networking that supports and equips school boards with the requisite knowledge, skills, training, and experiences to address and improve the educational outcomes of students in challenging environments. The recognition that these environments are not unique to urban school districts, but

also impact students in and out of the classroom in rural, urban, and suburban districts, is critical to the success of these students in our schools. COSSBA is planning an inaugural conference of the UBA in late Summer/early Fall 2022 that will help all school boards and governance teams to better understand the issues and share best practices to effectively support and serve all students. Participation in the UBA is included as a benefit of membership in COSSBA.

There is still much work underway that will require the collaboration and talents of each member association. The willingness of members to share resources and work together to build and fortify this Consortium has been refreshing as we strive to find common ground and to build effective coalitions.

The 22 founding state school boards associations of COSSBA recognize that what lies ahead of us must be met with the understanding that the challenges faced by today's students are not bound by geography, race, class, or socioeconomic status. Overcoming these challenges and empowering our students to excel in any environment requires us to move forward in a way that is focused and responsive, transparent, and efficient, reflective and relevant, representative and accountable, and unified. This is the path that we have chosen and the one that we believe leads to the advancement and success of public school education for students in the United States.

The next formal update on the progress of COSSBA will be released in early June. As the Consortium continues to evolve, updates and information about conferences, professional development events, advocacy, services, and resources, will be added to the website at [www.cossba.org](http://www.cossba.org).

Attachment (Frequently Asked Questions)

## Frequently Asked Questions

1. How is COSSBA different from any other national organization?
  - A. COSSBA is an alliance of state school boards associations formed by state school boards associations to support, promote, and strengthen each other in support of excellence in local school board governance resulting in high quality public education and access to educational opportunities for every student. Our focus is on building and maintaining a unified Consortium that is flexible, focused, responsive, relevant, collaborative, transparent, accountable, reflective, and representative of our members.
  
2. Who serves on the Transition Steering Committee?
  - A. Each of the 22 founding state school boards associations make up the TSC. The Illinois Association of School Boards was elected to serve as Chair of the TSC. This structure will remain in place until the launch of the permanent governance structure in January 2023.
  
3. What is COSSBA's position on [insert hot topic]?
  - A. COSSBA is a non-partisan consortium of state school boards associations. The purpose of the body is to enhance the work of state associations. Public policy and advocacy positions will be formulated and based on position statements and resolutions approved by the Annual Business Session during the annual convention planned for Spring 2023.
  
4. Is the Urban Boards Alliance (UBA) exclusive to a particular demographic or to only inner-city boards?
  - A. The UBA is not exclusive to a particular demographic or to only inner-city boards. UBA exists to provide support to rural, suburban, and urban boards that serve students in challenging environments and with issues such as:
    - equity, literacy, and student achievement
    - school infrastructure
    - bullying
    - broadband access
    - drugs and alcohol
    - gangs and violence
    - homelessness
    - human trafficking
    - mental health
    - poverty
    - food insecurity
    - suicide
    - trauma
    - socioeconomics
    - demographics