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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 AESAs 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: AESAs federal advocacy is premised on the following:

- ESAs are critical partners in educating our nation’s students and as such have a vested interest in ensuring that federal policy supports and strengthens the role of ESAs in their work to support and strengthen SEAs and LEAs;
- equity in education and educational opportunity;
- the appropriate role of the federal government in supporting and strengthening 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 (Updated 2022)

Federal funding represents, on average, roughly 10 percent of a school district’s 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.

- 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 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.
- Given that a child is more than a test score, federal supports (both funding and policy) and federal accountability must include academic and non-academic factors, including (but not limited to) physical health, mental health, student engagement, and counseling.
- One in five Americans struggle with mental health issues; therefore, federal policy must support equitable access to appropriate and quality mental health services for students and school staff.
- Equitable access to affordable internet (broadband) connectivity is essential for education and learning. Therefore, AESA supports the E-Rate program for its ongoing role in providing internet access to schools and libraries. AESA also supports the Lifeline program, its work in providing internet access

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in low-income homes, the connectivity fund to support learning access out of school, and leveraging other funding streams to better address remaining middle and final mile challenges to connectivity.

The federal government's role is to support and strengthen the nation's publicly-funded schools. **(Updated 2023)**

- The financial burden for federal mandates lies with the federal government and should not be passed down to ESAs, the schools they serve, or unfairly burden state budgets.
- AESA supports state and local education leaders exercising the flexibility and authority returned to them in ESSA. As a result, ESAs are uniquely positioned to support state and local education agencies in implementing 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 core partners in all planning, implementation, and evaluation stages.
- All entities receiving public dollars will be subject to the same transparency, reporting, and accountability requirements.
- The federal government's role in education policy must be premised on supporting and strengthening the nation's public education system. Therefore, 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. **(Updated 2024)**

- Federal policy must support the unique opportunities and obstacles facing our nation's rural schools and communities, including the E-Rate, REAP, Secure Rural Schools / Forest Counties, and Impact Aid programs.
- Access to robust early education, particularly for students in high-need/low-income situations, is critical to building a strong education continuum.
- ESAs have a unique role in supporting the expanded and effective implementation of the Carl Perkins (career/technical) education program, relating to regional fiscal agents, professional development, and stackable credential responsibilities.
- Equitable access to effective educators is a critical element of 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 safe and welcoming environments for all students.