



The Education Report

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The Education Report, a weekly publication of BPAG, provides an executive summary of public policy issues affecting American education. **Please use the bookmarks below to navigate to your area of interest:**

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1. Budget and Appropriations

This week, Congress made measurable progress on the Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 appropriations process, advancing a key three-bill minibuss package and setting the stage for debate on one of the most consequential remaining spending plans. On Friday, January 16, the Senate passed a bipartisan three-bill spending package, which would fund the Commerce-Justice-Science (CJS); Energy and Water Development; and Interior and Environment appropriations bills through the end of FY 2026. The measure cleared the Senate by a strong bipartisan margin and, having already passed the House, is expected to be signed by the President, marking six of the 12 regular appropriations bills completed this cycle.

The three-bill minibus reflects bipartisan compromise on agency funding levels and rejects several deep cuts proposed in the Trump administration's FY 2026 budget request. For science and research agencies, the CJS bill provides funding significantly above the administration's proposed cuts, even as overall topline levels are slightly lower than FY 2025 levels. Notably, the National Science Foundation (NSF) would be funded near FY 2025 levels with its Research and Related Activities (R&RA) account maintained flat at approximately \$7.18 billion, preserving core research support, and the agency's STEM Education directorate. Lawmakers from both parties emphasized the importance of sustaining federal investments in scientific research, energy innovation, and land management, rejecting more drastic reorganizations and cuts while including protections against unilateral agency restructuring without advance notice to appropriators.

Attention now turns to what remains one of the most politically complex appropriations measures: the FY 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies (LHHS) bill. Congressional leaders could release the text of this bill as early as Sunday, January 18, as part of another three-bill minibus, with expectations that it will be considered on the House and Senate floors soon thereafter. The House is in session next week while the Senate is in recess; they trade

places the following week. As lawmakers and staff negotiate a bipartisan, bicameral agreement on the LHHS bill, they are expected to reject White House requests to significantly cut education investments and propose funding similar to what was included in the bipartisan Senate bill. That bill rejects efforts to dismantle the Department of Education or eliminate major programs such as Title I and IDEA, maintaining funding for K-12 and postsecondary education and protecting core health and human services funding.

Republican and Democratic lawmakers have exchanged measured remarks as the debate approaches. Senator Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), chair of the LHHS subcommittee, has emphasized the need for a responsible funding bill that meets the nation's needs without unsustainable growth, and has highlighted bipartisan cooperation at the committee level. Meanwhile, Senator Tammy Baldwin (D-WI), ranking member on the Senate Labor-HHS subcommittee, has praised the compromise bill's efforts to safeguard critical education and health research programs and support frontline services in communities across the country. Both sides have signaled a shared interest in advancing a bipartisan funding measure that maintains robust investments in education and health programs, while rejecting deeper cuts and preserving congressional prerogatives over agency priorities as the process moves toward final passage.

If enacted, the LHHS package — alongside the recently passed three-bill minibus — would represent further momentum toward completing the FY 2026 appropriations cycle ahead of the January 30 government funding deadline, helping avoid another continuing resolution and ensuring full-year funding for a broad array of federal agencies.

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2. In Brief

ED, INTERIOR, LABOR ANNOUNCE TRIBAL CONSULTATION ON INDIAN EDUCATION

The Department of Education (ED) announced on Friday, January 9, that Secretary Linda McMahon issued a [Dear Tribal Leader Letter](#) inviting Tribal leaders to a consultation in Washington, D.C., on February 10, 2026, regarding the [Indian Education Partnership Interagency Agreements](#) between the Departments of Education, Interior, and Labor. The consultation is intended to gather input from American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian leaders to inform implementation of the agreements, which are designed to strengthen coordination across federal agencies while maintaining ED's statutory and policymaking authority. Under the agreements, the Department of the Interior will play an expanded role in administering Indian education programs across K–12, higher education, and related services, while the Department of Labor will focus on aligning Tribal funding set-asides with workforce development and employment outcomes. The consultation, to be conducted by the Office of Indian Education and attended by senior federal officials, aligns with ED's Tribal Consultation Policy and is intended to ensure Tribal perspectives help shape federal actions affecting Native students and communities.

AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INST. CONVENES PANEL ON HELPING YOUTH “FLOURISH”

On Monday, the American Enterprise Institute (AEI) held a [webinar](#) titled, “How Do We Help Youth Flourish, Not Just Achieve?” The event was moderated by AEI Senior Fellow Robert Pondiscio and focused on “languishing teenagers,” defined as teens who historically participated in extracurricular and social activities but have since lost interest and become isolated. Mike Goldstein, co-founder of the Center for Teen Flourishing (CTF), highlighted that languishing teens

are shifting from in-person activities—such as sports, clubs, or part-time jobs—to extensive online, phone-oriented engagement. These teens, Goldstein said, are neither depressed nor flourishing, which often results in them being overlooked. He underscored that this phenomenon has grown more acute alongside increased technology use and declining social interaction. Volunteer Literacy Project Founder Larissa Phillips and School of Rock President Stacey Ryan described how their respective programs foster community and accountability, and how they encourage hard work, a desire to learn, and a sense of purpose—traits they argued are often lacking among languishing teens. Panelists emphasized the importance of social institutions in addressing this issue. While there was discussion of expanding public funding for programs like those led by Goldstein, Phillips, and Ryan, the panel did not offer a policy roadmap, instead highlighting what they view as an understudied problem and outlining the contours of a social institution-oriented approach.

COALITION SENDS LETTER OPPOSING ED INTERAGENCY AGREEMENTS

On Monday, a coalition of parents, educators, students, education and civil rights organizations, and public education supporters from across the United States [sent a letter](#) to Members of Congress expressing concern about the Trump administration’s actions to dismantle the Department of Education (ED). The coalition criticized how core ED programs and responsibilities are being transferred to multiple federal agencies, including the Departments of Labor (DOL), Health and Human Services (HHS), Interior, and State. According to the letter, these transfers exceed executive authority, violate appropriations law, and undermine Congress’s statutory role in overseeing federal education programs. Stakeholders warned that fragmenting programs across agencies could create confusion for states, weaken oversight, and disrupt services for vulnerable students, including students with disabilities, English learners, and students experiencing homelessness. The letter specifically cited the planned transfers of the Office for Civil Rights to the Department of Justice and the Office of Special Education Programs to HHS as examples of this fragmentation. The coalition urged Congress to reverse these actions, restore ED to full operation, and ensure that federal education programs are implemented lawfully, transparently, and in the best interests of students. The letter arrives on Capitol Hill as appropriators continue to negotiate a House-Senate negotiated FY 2026 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education spending bill that could include language resisting Administration efforts to implement the Interagency Agreements and the goal to “dismantle” the Department of Education. Such language would require affected agencies to ensure that they have sufficient staff and capacity to appropriately implement Congressionally-authorized programs. There was an effort to offer an amendment to the Senate funding bill in December with the same goals, but when action on that bill stalled, staff turned to trying to include such language in the negotiated funding bill.

HOUSE EDUCATION PANEL DISCUSSES APPROACHES TO CHILDCARE

On Tuesday, the House Education and Workforce Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education [held a hearing](#) to examine solutions to the nation’s child care crisis, focusing on the respective roles of federal investment and private-sector engagement. Republican members, led by Chair Kevin Kiley (R-CA), emphasized the limits of federal programs like the Child Care and Development Block Grant and highlighted employer-led childcare initiatives and expanded tax credits as ways to improve affordability, workforce retention, and economic growth. Democratic members, led by Ranking Member Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR), argued that childcare is essential economic infrastructure and stressed that employer-based solutions alone cannot address widespread affordability, workforce shortages, and low wages for early educators, calling

instead for robust public investment such as that proposed in the [Child Care for Working Families Act](#). Witnesses from small businesses and large employers described successful employer-supported childcare models that improved retention and productivity, while policy advocates underscored that the childcare market is fundamentally broken and requires large-scale federal action to expand supply, cap family costs, and raise wages. Across party lines, members acknowledged the severity of the childcare crisis, but differed on whether market-based, employer-driven approaches or comprehensive federal investment should serve as the primary solution.

HOUSE ENERGY AND COMMERCE PANEL HOLDS FCC OVERSIGHT HEARING

On Wednesday, the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications and Technology [held a hearing](#) on Federal Communications Commissions (FCC) oversight, during which, E-Rate and school connectivity emerged as a point of contention, with Commissioner Anna Gomez and several Democratic members sharply criticizing the FCC's decision to eliminate E-Rate support for school connectivity hotspots, including Wi-Fi on school buses and hotspot lending by schools and libraries. Representatives Kathy Castor (D-FL) and Paul Tonko (D-NY) argued that these E-Rate-supported initiatives were critical tools for closing the homework gap and ensuring students—particularly those in rural areas, low-income households, and communities with long commutes—could reliably access online learning, health care, and other essential services. Gomez echoed these concerns, emphasizing that affordability remains a central barrier to broadband access, especially following the expiration of the Affordable Connectivity Program, and that hotspots are often the only means for many students and families to participate fully in the digital economy. In contrast, Chair Brendan Carr and Commissioner Olivia Trusty focused their remarks on reducing regulatory barriers to broadband deployment and did not signal plans to restore the E-Rate hotspot support, framing the Commission's priorities around infrastructure buildout rather than program expansion. A comprehensive summary prepared by BPAG is [here](#).

HOUSE SCIENCE COMMITTEE EXAMINES AI ACTION PLAN

On Wednesday, the House Science, Space, and Technology Subcommittee [held a hearing](#) on “Assessing America's AI Action Plan,” with members repeatedly underscoring that U.S. leadership in artificial intelligence depends not only on infrastructure and innovation speed, but on how effectively AI is introduced to students and educators. Michael Kratsios, Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy was the sole witness and emphasized in his testimony that “AI education begins in K–12,” stressing the need to demystify AI for students while equipping teachers and parents to guide its responsible use, and pointing to federal efforts like the AI Education Task Force and hands-on student challenges to build early literacy. Chair Jay Obernolte (R-CA), who also led the House Bipartisan AI Task Force in the 118th Congress, reinforced that any future federal AI framework must still preserve state authority over child safety and government use, signaling that student protections remain a non-negotiable pillar even amid calls for national guardrails. Several members pressed this point further: Representative Suzanne Bonamici (D-OR) warned that the U.S. “can't lead in AI by building faster and training slower,” citing gaps in educator professional development, privacy safeguards, and parental involvement; Representative Luz Rivas (D-CA) highlighted both the promise and risks of AI in schools and her focus on improving AI literacy nationwide; Representative Mike Kennedy (R-UT) stressed the importance of supporting teachers—especially in rural communities—as part of a strong K-12 AI pipeline; and Representative Vince Fong (R-CA) pointed to the need for scalable education pathways aligned with federal AI initiatives. The hearing made clear that while the Science

Committee's lens is national competitiveness, members increasingly view K-12 education, educator capacity, and child safety as foundational infrastructure for responsible AI adoption—not downstream considerations. For more information, click [here](#).

BROOKINGS SEMINAR EXAMINES EDUCATION IN AN AI-DRIVEN FUTURE

On Wednesday, Rebecca Winthrop, Director of the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution, [hosted a seminar](#) to mark the launch of a new report, "[A New Direction for Students in an AI World: Prosper, Prepare, Protect](#)." The report argues that current education systems are not adequately preparing students for an AI-driven future, noting that while generative AI can save teachers time and enable new forms of assessment, it also poses significant risks, including shortcutting learning, weakening social skills through overreliance on AI companions, and eroding trust among students, teachers, and parents. The report highlights major equity concerns, warning that although AI has the potential to help underserved communities overcome longstanding barriers, unequal access to advanced tools could further widen socioeconomic divides. To address these challenges, the report outlines a three-part framework: reshaping learning so students can thrive in an AI age by training teachers to be AI-aware, AI-assisted, and AI-resistant; building AI literacy so students understand how AI works and its ethical implications; and establishing safeguards through clear federal and state criteria governing AI use in schools. Panelists underscored that AI should not be broadly deployed in education without appropriate safety measures, with Rida Karim, a University of Virginia student and report co-author, emphasizing the importance of teaching students to use AI responsibly as a skill rather than a shortcut; and Kara Swisher, New York Magazine editor-at-large, cautioning that society is currently adapting to AI instead of shaping the technology to meet societal needs. The discussion concluded that AI can enhance learning when it is used to guide rather than replace student effort, support inclusivity, and promote engagement, but warned that without clear policies and effective teacher integration, risks of inequity, mistrust, and diminished learning outcomes will remain.

PANEL EXAMINES REDRAWING SCHOOL DISTRICT BOUNDARIES, ADVANCING EQUITY

On Tuesday, New America [held a webinar](#) examining how improved school district boundaries can promote fairer school funding and greater diversity, thereby expanding access to high-quality education. The event was hosted by Zahava Stadler, Project Director of the Education Funding Equity Initiative, and centered on a [report](#) New America released in October that documents boundary-based inequities and proposes potential reforms. The report also includes an interactive map that illustrates existing disparities and models the projected effects of various boundary changes. The webinar emphasized the critical role school district boundaries play in shaping education quality, particularly through their connection to local property tax revenues, and traced many current inequities to historical discriminatory practices such as redlining and eminent domain. Panelists argued that because these policies were intentionally created, they can also be intentionally undone. Three approaches to redrawing boundaries were discussed: a blank-slate model that redesigns districts from the ground up to maximize equity; a county-based model that aligns school districts with existing jurisdictions; and merger redistricting, which consolidates smaller districts into larger ones. The discussion was grounded in practice through insights from Scott Menzel, a Michigan superintendent who helped lead a district consolidation, and who voiced support for intentional redistricting efforts while emphasizing the importance of statewide measures—such as debt forgiveness and targeted funding—to support equitable outcomes. Overall, the webinar highlighted school district boundaries as a central driver of educational equity.

and presented several pathways for reform, while acknowledging that no single solution will address all disparities.

ED & WORKFORCE COMMITTEE DISCUSSES PREPARING AN AI-READY WORKFORCE

On Wednesday, the [House Committee on Education and Workforce](#) held a full committee hearing titled “[Building an AI-Ready America](#),” examining how artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping K–12 education, higher education, and workforce preparation. The hearing focused on the role of Congress in supporting both responsible and beneficial adoption, as well as protecting students and workers from the negative effects of AI expansion. Members from both parties highlighted how education systems are the primary entry point for building AI literacy, digital skills, and ethical awareness among young people. They also addressed how postsecondary institutions and certification programs can help students and workers grow alongside rapidly evolving technologies. Witnesses and Committee members discussed the growing use of generative AI in classrooms, student privacy and civil rights concerns, and the need for robust educator tools and training. Members raised questions about data privacy, algorithmic bias, mental health impacts, deepfake imagery targeting students, teacher preparedness, and the role of federal agencies—particularly the Department of Education—in setting guardrails and guidance for school districts and higher education institutions. Several lawmakers also discussed how AI is being used in Career and Technical Education (CTE) and special education programs to personalize instruction and expand access to accommodations. A central debate throughout the hearing was balancing the opportunities AI presents for personalized learning, faster feedback, and workforce development advancements with the need for educators to be adequately trained to address the serious challenges associated with AI in classrooms. Members of the Committee broadly agreed that education policy must adapt to technological change but were conflicted on the appropriate level of federal regulation, oversight of ed-tech vendors, and whether current efforts to limit or withdraw agency guidance weaken protections for students and educators.

SENATE COMMERCE COMMITTEE EXAMINES SCREEN TIME FOR STUDENTS

On Thursday, the [Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation](#) held a full committee hearing titled, “[Plugged Out: Examining the Impact of Technology on America’s Youth](#).” The hearing examined how smartphones, social media, AI, and school-issued devices are affecting children’s mental health and academic outcomes. Witnesses focused on the growing consensus that digital platforms are engineered to maximize engagement in ways that conflict with young children’s wellbeing and health development. Particular attention was given to COVID-era programs started under the Biden Administration to provide students with digital devices to use for at-home learning. Several witnesses—including Jared Cooney Horvath, Director of LME Global, and Emily Cherkin, Founder of The Screentime Consultant—argued that one-to-one device programs and unfiltered school laptops have contributed to classroom distraction and declining academic performance amongst school-aged children. Lawmakers were sharply divided over the fate of the FCC’s [E-Rate Program](#) and whether personal learning devices should be supported by federal dollars. Artificial intelligence also emerged as a major area of concern, particularly deep-fake imagery and AI chatbots, that may foster emotional dependence or blur healthy relationship boundaries for children. Throughout the hearing, witnesses urged Congress to shift responsibility upstream to technology companies through stronger age verification, privacy protections, and limits on engagement-based design. While Members agreed that technology can provide benefits in schools when used responsibly, the central debate focused on how to balance

classroom innovation with the urgent need to protect student's mental health. For additional information, click [here](#).

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3. New Publications

[A New Direction for Students In An AI World: Prosper, Prepare, Protect](#)

Brookings (January 2026)

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4. In the News

[Education Secretary McMahon Visits Kentucky Middle School](#)

Spectrum News (January 15, 2026)

[The Risks of AI in Schools Outweigh The Benefits, Report Says](#)

NPR (January 14, 2026)

[Trump Administration Opens 18 New Probes Over Trans Athletes](#)

The Washington Post (January 14, 2025)

[The Four States of AI Integration in Education](#)

US Department of Education | Blog (January 12, 2026)

[Head Start Providers Happy But Cautious After Federal Judge Halts DEI Ban](#)

The 74 Million (January 12, 2026)

[Congress OK'd Pell Grants for Workforce Training. Now, It's Up to The States](#)

The 74 Million (January 12, 2026)

[Trump Is Moving Forward with His Student-Loan Repayment Overhaul – This Time Focused on Unaffordable Debt](#)

Business Insider (January 10, 2026)

[Are Schools Underestimating How Badly The Pandemic Hurt Older K-12 Students?](#)

EdSurge (January 9, 2026)

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5. About BPAG

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- leveraging our expertise and passion;
- strategizing intelligent solutions; and,
- Creating meaningful impact.

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