



Working for You

Legislative news and information

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Legislative Updates

U.S. Innovation and Competition Act and The America Competes Act

If you tuned into the State of the Union on last week, you probably heard the President speak about the “Innovation Act.” He was referring to the Senate’s bipartisan U.S. Innovation and Competition Act (USICA) which was approved last June.

On February 2, the House passed The America COMPETES Act, which is their response to USICA. The House and Senate will now begin to reconcile the two different bills with the goal to move a final legislative package soon.

Most notably for K-12 education, both proposals include two grant programs: Improving access to elementary and secondary computer science education grants—A competitive grant program for school districts to increase equitable access to computer science education and computational thinking skills. State education agencies (SEAs) will apply for the grants then subgrant them to school districts. Priority will be given to districts with high percentages of students from low-income families and who partner with HBCUs or minority-serving institutions.

Funds can be used to:

- 1) develop and implement a data-driven plan to provide equitable access to computer science education and the development of computational thinking skills, particularly for students from groups that are underrepresented in computer science fields;
- 2) support and diversify the computer science educator workforce;
- 3) implement evidence-based instructional practices; and
- 4) expose students to computer science career pathways through the development of extracurricular opportunities, career exploration and advising opportunities, and high-quality work-based learning opportunities

Postsecondary STEM Pathway Grants for SEAs, two or more school districts and the state's public higher education system to support the development and implementation of postsecondary STEM pathways. These pathways would consist of a sequence of high school courses focused on STEM education that provide at least 12 credit hours—or the equivalent coursework—toward a recognized postsecondary credential, and may include advanced coursework, a dual or concurrent enrollment program, or an early college high school program. The public higher education system is included in the grant to ensure that the pathways created provide credits that fully transfer to all institutions in the system. Both proposals also include investments in research on preK-12 STEM education and workforce development in rural areas and engaging rural educators to enhance STEM knowledge.

Two additional provisions that were included in the House's version that AESA was pleased to see:

- 1) The creation of short-term Pell Grants for qualified job-training programs and
- 2) The College Transparency Act—which establishes a secure, privacy-protected system to provide prospective students with customizable information such as how likely they are to graduate from a particular school or program and how much their future earnings potential will be. This information is disaggregated by race, ethnicity, and gender to identify inequities in students' success, and allows prospective students and families to shop for programs that meet their needs. Unfortunately, these programs are not included in the Senate version, so it is unclear whether they will be included in the final package.