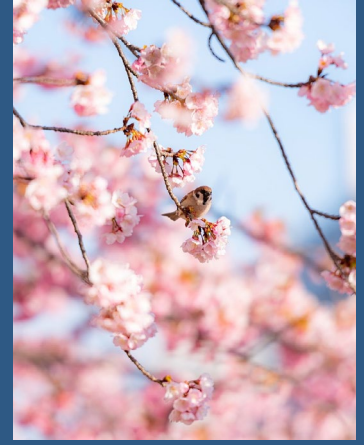


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The Ever-Changing Education Landscape

Spring 2025

IMPACT

Since the 2025 NAFIS Spring Conference concluded on March 11, the federal education landscape has been in a period of rapid and far-reaching change. In a matter of weeks, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has halved its workforce, reversed key funding decisions, and begun dismantling long-standing programs—leaving school leaders nationwide searching for stability and guidance.

While Impact Aid remains intact, other developments could still affect federally impacted districts. Below are key updates from the past month.

Large-Scale Reduction in Force at U.S. Department of Education

On March 11, the Department announced a reduction in force (RIF) that, combined with other federal employment actions, eliminated nearly half its workforce. Although the move is being challenged in court, operations continue with significantly reduced capacity. Education experts warn the cuts could delay technical assistance, data reporting, civil rights investigations, and distribution of federal funds.



Photo by Architect of the Capitol

NAFIS is pleased that Impact Aid Program staff were not affected by the RIF; however, we are concerned that broader staffing reductions could cause delays in the distribution of Impact Aid funds. In particular, the program relies on the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to calculate the Local Contribution Rates needed for payment determinations each year, and layoffs at NCES could significantly delay payments for FY 2026 and beyond.

Executive Order Aims to Dismantle U.S. Department of Education

On March 20, President Trump signed an [executive order](#) directing U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon to “take all necessary steps to facilitate the closure of the Department of Education and return education authority to the states,” while maintaining the delivery of essential services.

Combined with the RIF, office closures, and contract reductions, this move advances the administration’s broader goal of eliminating the Department of Education. NAFIS strongly opposes the order and any efforts to dismantle the Department.

It is important to note that only Congress can formally abolish the Department, which would require 60 Senate votes—an unlikely threshold in the current political climate. The administration acknowledges Congress’s role in this process while working to minimize federal involvement in education. Core programs like Title I, IDEA, Pell Grants, and student loans—along with Impact Aid—are protected by law and cannot be eliminated without congressional action.

Continued on page 4...

Not a Typical Spring

In a typical spring edition of IMPACT, we summarize the valuable content, opportunities to connect with peers from around the country, and of course advocacy resources and legislative expertise shared at the annual NAFIS Spring Conference. This publication still has all of that (see, for example, breakout session roundups on pages 7-9). These are not typical times, however.

I feel like I've lived a lifetime since we gathered just four short weeks ago. At our conference ending reception, we heard from the Impact Aid Program (IAP) office that a large-scale Reduction in Force (RIF) went into effect and U.S. Department of Education (ED) employees were sent home, not knowing if they had a job the very next day. IAP was safe but many dedicated public servants were not, including the General Counsel's office, longtime staff of National Center for Education Statistics, and others who work hand-in-hand with IAP and other grant programs that benefit our public schools.

Busy Legislative Season

NAFIS got fired up and called upon legislators to oppose the elimination of ED and protect the federal workers who ensure Impact Aid payments continue to be delivered efficiently and directly to school districts. Thank you to our community of advocates who contacted your representatives to make your voices heard.

Right after the conference, NAFIS hosted a briefing on the Impact Aid program for congressional staff on Capitol Hill. Staff from more than 20 congressional offices and committees attended, representing at least 16 different states, and questioned how the RIF would impact the program.

NAFIS has clarified in recent weeks that we are not entertaining any hypothetical scenario in which ED is eliminated and Impact Aid is moved elsewhere. Frankly, it's not going to happen based on the current political

dynamics. The Administration can't take this action unilaterally, and such an effort would require two-thirds majority vote in the Senate. I can tell you right now—there are many Republicans in office who support ED and will not vote for its elimination.

Speaking of Republicans who support the valuable programs at ED, Senator Lisa Murkowski (AK), Chair of the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs (SCIA), called for an oversight hearing entitled "Native American Education – Examining Federal Programs at the U.S. Department of Education" in early April. Committee Vice Chairman Brian Schatz (D-HI) invited me to testify on behalf of NAFIS. At the hearing I, along with



Testifying Before the SCIA

the other witnesses, discussed the important ED programs that benefit Native American students and communities. The bipartisan support for these programs that was evident at the hearing was impactful, particularly when we're hearing about the partisan efforts to dismantle ED. To educators across the country—I hope you feel supported. Know there are so many advocates who have your back, fighting to get you the resources needed to provide the best possible education for your students.

We saw FY 2025 Appropriations finally pass on March 14, days after the conference. We're anticipating those funds reach the U.S. Department of Education soon, and we've been advocating to expedite them to you, knowing many school districts could encounter seri-

ous cash flow issues if federal funding doesn't reach you before the end of the school year.

NAFIS advocacy has pivoted to the FY 2026 Appropriations cycle, and we have been working tirelessly all calendar year to introduce priority legislation. We are happy to report the re-introduction of the Impact Aid Infrastructure Partnership Act. Read about our advocacy efforts on page 5.

NAFIS, along with our coalition partners, continues to oppose efforts to voucherize public education dollars for military-connected students, and for all students. The National Defense Authorization Act will be drafted soon, and we are prepared to fight any amendments to create voucher or other school choice programs at the expense of public school revenue. NAFIS opposes any efforts to remove public dollars from public schools.

Month of the Military Child

In April we honor the military child. Having two military kids myself, I know firsthand how hard the transitions are when moving from one state to the next, or when a parent is deployed for an extended period of time.

These kids didn't ask for this life, and they make sacrifices too. Military children are often called "resilient," but let's also acknowledge their families are just in survival mode much of the time. Many children will be PCSing this summer, moving from one duty station to the next—my family included. We appreciate the village that helps the children adjust, the educators and community leaders who make life easier.

As we continue to navigate these challenging times, NAFIS remains committed to advocating for Impact Aid and the resources that support our school districts. With the dedication of our members and legislative allies, we will continue to protect and strengthen the program. Thank you for your ongoing support and commitment. ~

Nicole's Bookshelf

Currently on my nightstand:

- *Art Hiding in New York* by Lori Zimmer
- *These Are My Big Girl Pants* by Amber Vittoria
- *NYC Walks: Guide to New Architecture School* by John Hill



Purple Up for Military Kids!



IMPACT AID DIRECTOR'S UPDATE

Happy Spring! The Impact Aid Program (IAP) Office remains fully engaged in the monitoring process for fiscal year (FY) 2026. The deadline for local educational agencies (LEAs) to submit their monitoring documents was March 28.

The program office would like to remind LEAs that **the deadline to amend FY 2026 Impact Aid applications is June 30, 2025**. We advise LEAs to regularly visit our [website](#) for available resources and details on upcoming [trainings](#). Attendance at trainings is highly encouraged, particularly for those who have not participated recently.

Keep an eye out for the Impact Aid Director's Quarterly Update in the coming days for more payment and program updates. If you need assistance, contact your Impact Aid state analyst directly. Find their name and contact information at impactaid.ed.gov/iap_staff/.

Department Staff Share Expertise at NAFIS Conference

NAFIS extends sincere appreciation to the IAP Office for their continued partnership. At the 2025 NAFIS Spring Conference, program analysts Kisha Spruill and Michael Thomas delivered an informative and highly rated breakout session on FY 2026 Impact Aid application monitoring. IAP staff also connected directly with attendees during Department Office Hours (pictured right), offering valuable one-on-one guidance. Additionally, IAP Director Faatimah Muhammad provided important program updates during the Second General Session. Thank you, IAP, for your hard work and commitment to federally impacted school districts.



NAFIS Honors Outgoing President Keith Mispagel



(L to R) NAFIS President Quincy Natay; Mispagel

At the 2025 Spring Conference, NAFIS recognized **Keith Mispagel**, Superintendent of Fort Leavenworth Unified School District 207 (KS) and outgoing NAFIS President, for his leadership. As President of the NAFIS Board, and now continuing as Past President, he is a leading national advocate for school districts that receive Impact Aid and the students they serve. He has also played a key role in shaping the association's public policy priorities and leading a strategic planning process.

"As NAFIS President, Keith set the organization on course for the future, grounded in a strategic vision of unity, inclusivity, stability, and efficiency," said NAFIS Executive Director Nicole Russell. "He led with courage and clarity, creating space for honest, sometimes difficult conversations, and ensuring every member felt heard and empowered. Thanks to his leadership, NAFIS was reinvigorated and successfully advanced funding and legislative priorities in the face of a challenging fiscal and political landscape."

FLISA Celebrates Longtime Leaders

During the NAFIS Spring Conference, the Federal Lands Impacted Schools Association (FLISA, a NAFIS subgroup) honored two outstanding leaders for their dedication and impact: **Wes Eversole**, retired Deputy Superintendent of Lake Dallas ISD (TX), and **Mark Naugle**, Superintendent of Custer School District 16-1 (SD), retiring later this year. In addition to their leadership roles in FLISA, both are longtime champions for the broader NAFIS community. NAFIS extends its deepest gratitude and best wishes for the next chapter.



(L to R) FLISA Executive Director Tom Schneider; Eversole



(L to R) Schneider; Naugle

Ever-Changing Landscape...

...from page 1

Although the Department's full closure is unlikely in the near term, NAFIS anticipates legislation to restructure or eliminate it, which could transfer Impact Aid to another agency or split the program, risking reduced funding, significant program changes, administrative delays, and added complexity for school districts that depend on it.

COVID-Relief Funds Pulled Back

On March 28, Secretary McMahon canceled all previously approved extensions for COVID-relief fund liquidation. States had only until that same day to spend remaining funds. Follow-up guidance on requesting limited project-specific extensions was released April 3.

According to [Education Week](#), confusion remains about which funds are affected, and school districts across the nation are already cutting programs and services in response to the change. [K-12 Dive](#) reports that most states had been approved to use these funds through March 2026 and that the reversal could jeopardize \$4.4 billion in expected reimbursements, some of which have already been spent. Several states are suing the Department over the rescission action.

New Directive Ties Federal Aid to Race-Neutral Policies

On April 3, the Department ordered states and school districts to certify that they will not use race in any education-related decision-making, including admissions, hiring, discipline, and financial aid. This directive expands the Supreme Court ruling against race-conscious college admissions to K-12 education as part of the administration's broad interpretation of federal anti-discrimination law.

State Education Agencies (SEAs) are to report on their state overall and collect certifications from Local Education Agencies (LEAs). Original-

ly, they had 10 days to sign the certification; the deadline has been extended to April 24. Those not complying could lose federal education funding, including Title I. Several school districts have already rolled back diversity initiatives, even as a major teachers union challenges the directive in court and some states indicate they will not comply.

Beyond the U.S. Department of Education

Federal changes affecting schools are not limited to the Department of Education. In early March, the USDA canceled two grant programs—worth an estimated \$1 billion—supporting school food purchases from local producers. On April 1, the Department of Health and Human Services furloughed many Head Start staff and closed at least five of its 12 regional offices, leaving program operators with little direction. Potential Medicaid changes also raise concerns for school-based services, as do other possible changes to programs across the federal government that could further impact schools in the months to come.

Looking Ahead

These rapidly unfolding events highlight just how quickly the federal policy landscape can shift. While Impact Aid remains protected for now, ongoing restructuring, budget reversals, and program changes have introduced new uncertainty for federally impacted districts.

NAFIS remains committed to ensuring your voices are heard in Washington, D.C. We are working with lawmakers across the aisle to safeguard Impact Aid and support federally connected students.

As always, NAFIS will continue to monitor developments and provide timely updates. Now more than ever, our collective advocacy is key to protecting the programs and stability our students deserve. ~

Carol Ratcliff Honored with Friend of NAFIS Award

NAFIS was proud to recognize **Carol Ratcliff**, Military Impacted Schools Association (MISA, a NAFIS subgroup) Executive Assistant, with the Friend of NAFIS Award. The award, which celebrates recipients for outstanding contributions to the Impact Aid program, was presented at the 2025 NAFIS Spring Conference.

Carol has been a cornerstone of MISA since its earliest days, playing a crucial role in its growth from 17 to 60 school districts. As secretary at Bellevue Public Schools—MISA's original home—she oversaw the nonprofit's administrative groundwork and expansion. When MISA later separated from the district, her strong dedication to its mission inspired her to retire from Bellevue and devote herself to Impact Aid.

Since 1999, Carol has played a key role in elevating the MISA and NAFIS presence in Washington, D.C.—coordinating events, building relationships, and mentoring new advocates. Her dedication extends beyond her formal roles; she has consistently stepped in to support NAFIS conferences and initiatives whenever needed. Having attended more than 45 NAFIS conferences and 70 MISA events, she has been a steady, invaluable presence, always ready to lend a hand and strengthen the organizations she has helped shape.

The entire NAFIS Family joins together in thanking Carol Ratcliff for her support of, and advocacy for, Impact Aid. ~



(L to R) MISA Executive Director Kyle Fairbairn; Ratcliff; MISA President & NAFIS Past President Keith Mispagel

Legislative Update

Government Funded at FY24 Levels for Remainder of FY25

In mid-March, President Trump signed a full-year continuing resolution that kept all government funding, with a few exceptions, at FY 2024 levels through the end of FY 2025. Most Democrats objected to the bill because it cut non-defense funding and did not explicitly require the administration to fund programs as Congress specified in the detailed explanatory statement from the conference that created the FY 2024 bill (for reference, there is no such detailed conference agreement accompanying the FY 2025 continuing resolution). The House passed the bill on an almost entirely party-line vote. The Senate, after much internal debate among Democrats, passed it with more bipartisan support.

The government had been operating at FY 2024 levels since FY 2025 started on October 1, 2024. Impact Aid is among the programs receiving level funding, meaning it will receive the same amount in FY 2025 as it did in FY 2024. However, payments to individual school districts will change due to shifts in student counts, a projected decrease in the LOT payout rate, and other factors.

NAFIS Requests \$71.5 Million Impact Aid Increase for FY26

Earlier this spring, NAFIS sent our [FY 2026 appropriations request](#) to Congress. The letter urges leaders of the House and Senate Appropriations Subcommittees on Labor-Health and Human Services-Education to continue to recognize Impact Aid as a critical federal investment through increased funding.

Noting that federally impacted school districts cannot afford stagnant appropriations or a loss of funding given their continuing high student needs and high inflation, NAFIS requests at least a \$71.5 million increase for the program in FY 2026. Specifically, we ask for increases of \$3.5 million for Section 7002 Federal Property, \$65 million for Section 7003 Basic Support, \$1.5 million for Section 7003(d) Children with Disabilities, and \$1.5 million for Section 7007 Construction.



Photo by Architect of the Capitol

Bipartisan Letter Seeks Clarity on Impact Aid's Future

On April 8, 2025, Rep. Marilyn Strickland (D-WA) led a [bipartisan letter](#) signed by more than 40 of her colleagues to U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon, expressing urgent concern about the future of the Impact Aid program following President Trump's Executive Order to dismantle the Department of Education. The letter stressed the critical role Impact Aid plays in supporting student success. The authors demanded clarity on how the program will function amid staffing cuts

and potential agency closure and requested specific information on oversight, funding timelines, and data continuity. They called for immediate reversal of any actions disrupting Impact Aid disbursement. NAFIS was asked to provide technical assistance and information on the letter for the Secretary, as well as to distribute it to members of the Congressional Impact Aid Caucus for signatures.

U.S. Supreme Court Hears Case Impacting E-Rate

The Supreme Court recently heard arguments in a case that could eliminate the Universal Service Fund (USF), a small fee added to phone bills for nearly 30 years. USF plays a critical role in funding the E-Rate program, which provides discounted broadband and telecommunications services to schools and libraries. E-Rate is essential in closing opportunity gaps, and many federally impacted schools depend on this funding for reliable internet.

The case centers on whether Congress violated the non-delegation doctrine (which holds that Congress cannot delegate its legislative authority to other entities) by granting the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) broad discretion over USF funding and administration. Most Justices appeared skeptical of the plaintiff's claims against the fund, expressing concern that its elimination could potentially cause devastating effects for millions of Americans. Some Justices also wondered about the long-term consequences of striking down the USF, noting that relying on Congress for a legislative fix may be challenging.

A decision is expected this summer. ~

Impact Aid Infrastructure Partnership Act Introduced

NAFIS **strongly supports** the **Impact Aid Infrastructure Partnership Act (IAIPA)**, bipartisan, bicameral legislation that takes a critical step toward improving infrastructure in federally impacted school districts. Introduced on April 3, 2025, by Senator Mazie Hirono (D-HI), Rep. John Garamendi (D-CA), and Rep. Jay Obernolte (R-CA), the bill allocates \$250 million annually for four years to the Impact Aid Construction program to address the urgent backlog of infrastructure projects in federally impacted school districts. Notably, the bill also allows funds to be used for teacher housing construction and renovation.

In addition, the legislation broadens eligibility beyond the current law, with 25% of the new funds distributed by formula to all eligible school districts. The remaining 75% would be awarded as competitive grants by the U.S. Department of Education.

A long-standing NAFIS priority, the bill provides a much-needed investment in school construction and modernization. It is already gaining traction. In the Senate, it has 10 co-sponsors: Sens. Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Dick Durbin (D-IL), Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), Martin Heinrich (D-NM), Mark Kelly (D-AZ), Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Alex Padilla (D-CA), Brian Schatz (D-HI), and Tina Smith (D-MN). The House version has seven co-sponsors in addition to the two leads: Reps. Eleanor Holmes Norton (D-DC), Julia Brownley (D-CA), Marilyn Strickland (D-WA), Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ), Don Davis (D-NC), Teresa Leger Fernández (D-NM), and Emily Randall (D-WA). Use the [NAFIS Action Center](#) to urge your representatives to co-sponsor this important legislation ~

NAFIS Family on the Hill

Editor's Note: This spring, NAFIS and our members have taken important steps to advocate for and raise awareness about the Impact Aid program on Capitol Hill. As always, we're deeply grateful to those who took time out of their busy schedules to travel to D.C. and speak directly with policy-makers. Below are a few key highlights from recent weeks.

2025 Leadership Fly-In

In February, NAFIS held our 2025 Leadership Fly-In, bringing together a diverse group of members from across our subgroups and federally impacted school districts nationwide. In addition to presentations by NAFIS staff, attendees heard updates from Impact Aid Director Faatimah Muhammad and got the latest on school choice proposals from National Coalition for Public Education Co-Chair Nicole Fuller.

The following day, participants took to Capitol Hill and met with 16 congressional offices, including direct meetings with Sen. Tim Sheehy (R-MT), Rep. Jack Bergman (R-MI), and Rep. Laura Friedman (D-CA). These meetings focused largely on the Freshman Class of the 119th Congress, offering NAFIS members the opportunity to introduce lawmakers and their staff to the Impact Aid program and its importance to their communities.

NAFIS Conference Hill Day

During the 2025 NAFIS Spring Conference, Hill Day provided attendees the opportunity to advocate for the Impact Aid program directly on Capitol Hill. In preparation for meetings with congressional offices, the conference program included a legislative update from NAFIS Policy & Advocacy Director Jayson Schimmenti, a congressional staff panel featuring Abigail Leonard (Rep. John Garamendi) and Katie Mertens (Sen. Ben Ray Lujan), and

an inspiring keynote address on advocacy and interactive breakout session on storytelling by Julie Jakopic. Equipped with this knowledge and insight, NAFIS members engaged with lawmakers to share local stories, discuss funding needs, and emphasize the vital role of Impact Aid in federally impacted school districts.



Silver Valley USD with Rep. Jay Obernolte (R-CA) (right)

NAFIS Hosts "Impact Aid 101" Briefing for Congressional Staff

The day after the 2025 Spring Conference, NAFIS hosted a congressional staff briefing on Capitol Hill, during which NAFIS Executive Director Nicole Russell provided an overview of the Impact Aid program to staff from more than 20 different congressional offices and committees, representing 16 states.

The briefing featured an introduction to NAFIS and Impact Aid, review of the FY 2024

[NAFIS Impact Aid Payments Overview](#), and discussion of our legislative priorities. Attendees also had the opportunity to engage with NAFIS staff one-on-one to discuss program specifics and voice concerns about staffing cuts at the U.S. Department of Education.



Illinois NAFIS Members with Rep. Bill Foster (D-IL) (third from right)

NAFIS Testifies Before Senate Committee on Indian Affairs

On April 2, 2025, NAFIS Executive Director Nicole Russell testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs at an oversight hearing titled "Native American Education – Examining Federal Programs at the U.S. Department of Education." Other witnesses

included Jason Dropik (National Indian Education Association), Sydna Yellowfish (Edmond Public Schools, OK), Dr. Rosita Worl (Sealaska Heritage Institute), and Ahniwake Rose (American Indian Higher Education Consortium).

Russell emphasized the critical role of Impact Aid in supporting schools on tribal lands, as well as the need for **increased Impact Aid funding** to keep up with growing student needs; the importance of **keeping Impact Aid in the U.S. Department of Education** to maintain efficient program administration; and the urgent infrastructure crisis in many schools serving Native students, as well as how the **Impact Aid Infrastructure Partnership Act** can help.

Coalition Advocacy

In addition to specific Impact Aid advocacy, NAFIS regularly joins coalition partners—including the National Coalition for Public Education (NCPE), Committee for Education Funding (CEF), Build America's School Infrastructure Coalition (BASIC), National Coalition for Technology in Education and Training (NCTET), and Children's Budget Coalition—in meetings with congressional offices to advocate on legislation directly impacting federally impacted school districts. This work includes opposing school voucher legislation, supporting increased funding for critical programs such as Title I and IDEA, and opposing administration efforts to restrict congressionally appropriated funds. With these partnerships, NAFIS continues to elevate the importance of Impact Aid while advancing policy priorities that benefit member districts. ~

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2025 Spring Conference Breakout Session Round-Up

Speak, Share, Inspire: Telling Your Story for Impact



Jakopic

Keynote speaker Julie Jakopic led an engaging, interactive session on the power of storytelling in advocacy and community engagement. Recognizing that effective advocacy extends beyond data and policy details, Jakopic emphasized the importance of personal and organizational narratives in shaping public perception, influencing decision-makers, and rallying support for Impact Aid and other critical issues.

simplify complex issues, humanize statistics, and create a lasting impression on stakeholders.

Attendees had the opportunity to practice their storytelling skills through guided exercises. They worked on identifying their most compelling stories and data—whether personal experiences, successes within their districts, or moments that exemplified the importance of federally impacted schools. Through peer discussions and feedback, participants refined their ability to structure stories for maximum impact, ensuring their messages were both persuasive and relatable.

Throughout the session, Jakopic provided practical tips on tailoring messages to different audiences, from policymakers to community members. She also addressed common challenges, such as overcoming nerves and adapting storytelling approaches to various platforms, including public speaking, social media, and written materials.

The session explored various models of effective storytelling, highlighting key elements that make stories memorable and impactful. Participants examined how to craft narratives that resonate with diverse audiences, driving action by incorporating emotion, clarity, and authenticity. Jakopic underscored that a well-told story can

Attendees left the workshop with a deeper understanding of storytelling as a powerful advocacy tool. Equipped with new strategies and increased confidence, they were ready to use their stories to inspire action, strengthen community connections, and enhance their advocacy for Impact Aid and their school districts. ~

Combating Chronic Absenteeism

In a packed room, Kamau Turner, Superintendent of Winnebago School District (NE), joined Maria Pierce-Ford, Executive Director of Federal Programs, and Dr. Natasha Scott, Executive Director of Student Services, both of Cumberland County Schools (NC), to share how their districts are tackling a common challenge: chronic absenteeism. All defined a chronically absent student as one who misses more than 10% of the school year, excused or unexcused, and emphasized that many absences stem from factors beyond students' control.

Turner began with a [video](#) showcasing the impactful work happening in Winnebago, where the focus is on creating a school environment where students want to be, using four key strategies:

- **Improving the environment** with a commitment to clean, safe, and inviting spaces, upgrading facilities when possible and teaching students to care for what they have.
- **Offering incentives**, including chosen activities (like bowling or movies), snacks, gifts, and engaging programs like sports, theater, dual language immersion, woodshop, and HoChunk culture.



(L to R) Pierce-Ford; Dr. Scott

- **Celebrating attendance** through individual and classroom-level awards, supported by local sponsors.

- **Hiring with intention**, based on the belief that students attend school when they feel val-

ued—and that it's easier to train a good person to teach than to teach someone to care.

Dr. Scott and Pierce-Ford shared details about the three-pronged attendance campaign at Cumberland County Schools (CCS). Each September, they observe **Attendance Awareness Month** with focused outreach and community engagement around “Making Every Minute Count.” They also launch grade-level and class campaigns and host events like Attendance Spirit Week.



Turner

CCS also introduced a **Truancy Mediation Council (TMC)**—a collaborative, non-punitive alternative to traditional court referrals. While schools still send 3-, 6-, and 10-day absence notices, families are now referred to TMC instead of social services or juvenile court. At these meetings, multiple stakeholders come together to create a support plan for a student, saving time and expanding reach.

In addition, CCS implemented a **revised attendance policy**, limiting parent notes and clarifying the process for excused absences. This consistency helps identify students at risk of chronic absenteeism earlier and ensures they receive timely support to stay engaged in learning.

While both districts acknowledge the work to be done, their innovative, student-centered approaches have resulted in meaningful progress. They are charting a promising path forward on attendance. ~

Round-up continues on page 8...

Building Media Literacy

A dynamic power session on media literacy, led by Pam McGorry and Zach Lowe from C-SPAN Classroom, provided practical tools to teach media literacy while emphasizing the importance of unbiased information consumption. The speakers, both former educators themselves, highlighted how C-SPAN's free, nonpartisan resources can be integrated into classrooms to foster critical thinking and analysis of media.

McGorry opened by introducing C-SPAN's mission to provide comprehensive, unfiltered coverage of the three branches of government. "We're not going to analyze things for you, or interpret things for you," she explained, underscoring the organization's commitment to letting viewers form their own opinions. She detailed the resources available on C-SPAN Classroom, including video archives, lesson plans, and interactive tools designed to help students evaluate news credibility and recognize misinformation.

Lowe elaborated on C-SPAN's approach to media literacy, emphasizing the value of multiple perspectives. He highlighted the "Washington Journal" program, which features balanced discussions on public affairs. "We ensure that you hear from both sides, whether it's a policy debate or a major political event," Lowe stated. He also introduced tools such as "Constitution Clips," which link constitutional provisions to real-life legislative debates, and classroom deliberations designed to engage students in evaluating controversial topics.

The session also addressed the growing influence of social media and the challenges it poses for media literacy. McGorry shared a conversation with a teacher who spends time debunking misinformation students encounter on platforms like TikTok, underscoring the need



(L to R) Lowe; McGorry

for critical evaluation of online sources. Lowe emphasized that emotionally charged content often signals misinformation, advising educators to teach students to "slow down and question sources" when confronted with sensational claims. They also offered a historical perspective, discussing the 1938 "War of the Worlds" radio broadcast, illustrating how media manipulation is not a new phenomenon and reinforcing the enduring need for media literacy education.

Overall, the session stressed that effective media literacy education requires access to unbiased resources, fostering critical thinking, and encouraging students to analyze information from multiple viewpoints. Through its extensive educational resources, C-SPAN supports educators in preparing students to navigate and critically assess the modern media environment. Access their resources on the C-SPAN Classroom website at www.c-span.org/classroom/.

Supporting Homeless Students

An important conference breakout session focused on supporting homeless students, featuring speakers Barbara Duffield, Executive Director of SchoolHouse Connection, and Irene Augare of Browning Public Schools (BPS), which is located on the Blackfeet Reservation in Montana. Augare serves many roles in her district, including as Parent Community Outreach Program Director and McKinney-Vento Program Director.

Duffield highlighted the numerous barriers homeless students face, which contribute to significantly lower educational outcomes and enrollment rates compared to their peers. Notably, she shared that

approximately one in five homeless students have an identified disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). She also outlined key aspects of the McKinney-Vento Act, which requires districts provide homeless students with equal access to appropriate education and mandates that every school district have a designated Homeless Liaison to support these students' needs.

Augare shared insights into BPS's *Åisspoōmmoōtsiyyō•p* ("we help each other") Program, which addresses the needs of a community where 39% of residents live below the poverty line and 100% of students qualify for free or reduced price lunch. Students experiencing homelessness face varied circumstances—they may be doubled up with relatives or friends, be unaccompanied youth, or live in motels, hotels, shelters, or structures unintended for housing.

With many students facing different types of homelessness, the district offers a Youth Homelessness Demonstration Project, school-based closets, resources for pregnant or parenting teens, and BPS childcare. Their culturally sensitive approach, supported by Impact Aid, allows them to meet student needs through recognizing early warning signs, community outreach, and providing coordinated services.

Attendees of this impactful session gained a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by homeless students and left with valuable insights on identifying and supporting these students. ~



(L to R) Augare; Duffield

Round-up continues on page 9...

Move to Learn

The "Move to Learn" breakout session, sponsored by Exergame, highlighted the connection between physical activity and academic performance. Led by Dr. SuAnn Grant (Fort Leavenworth Unified School District #207, KS), Shelly Swartz (Fort Leavenworth Unified School District #207, KS), and Jason Danley (North Hanover Township School District, NJ), the session explored how incorporating movement into the classroom through exergaming can enhance student engagement, focus, and overall learning outcomes.

Dr. Grant opened the session by discussing the foundational research supporting the relationship between movement and learning. She emphasized that physical activity benefits not just physical health but cognitive development as well, citing studies that show that movement increases blood flow to the brain, enhancing memory retention and improving students' ability to process and retain new information. She shared insights on how even brief physical activities during the school day can positively affect student focus, behavior, and academic achievement.



(L to R) Danley; Schwartz

Swartz presented additional research on the positive connection between physical activity and cognitive function, again highlighting how incorporating movement in the classroom enhances performance. She shared specific examples from a range of settings where increased physical activity resulted in better behavior, concentration, and test scores.

Swartz also introduced the concept of exergaming—interactive video games that require physical movement—and explained its growing popularity. She shared practical strategies for incorporating exergames into the classroom, highlighting their ability to engage students who might struggle with traditional learning methods. By using exergames, schools can create an active learning environment that fosters both physical and cognitive development.



Dr. Grant

Danley took with a deeper dive into the practical application of exergaming programs. He outlined best practices for selecting age-appropriate and curriculum-aligned exergames, ensuring they complement educational goals. He also shared case studies from schools that have successfully integrated exergames, showcasing measurable improvements in student participation and academic outcomes.

He then addressed common challenges, such as funding and space constraints, offering creative solutions for schools with limited resources. He emphasized the importance of teacher training and administrative support to sustain movement-based learning initiatives.

The session ended with a call to rethink traditional classroom environments. Dr. Grant, Swartz, and Danley encouraged participants to view physical activity as a tool for enhancing academic success and student well-being. Attendees left with resources and strategies to bring movement-based learning into their own schools, equipped to implement the idea that when students move, they learn better. ~

Impact Aid at Work: Supporting Special Education in Military & Indian Lands Districts

One conference breakout session focused on how Impact Aid supports special education services in military and Indian lands school districts, featuring speakers Montina Romero, Deputy Superintendent of Colorado's Fountain-Fort Carson School District (FFC8), and Shawn Pietila, Assistant Superintendent at San Carlos Unified School District (AZ).



(L to R) Pietila; Romero

Romero shared how Impact Aid enables her military impacted school district, where 19.6% of children have disabilities, to provide essential services. To meet this high demand, FFC8 employs school psychologists, offers staff training, fosters family and community partnerships, collaborates with outside therapists, and has appointed an assistant principal in each building who is dedicated to overseeing special education. FFC8 effectively communicates automatic acceptance of IEPs for military children with parents/guardians, with evaluations adjusted or conducted later.

Pietila discussed the challenges faced by his district, which serves a 99% tribal community grappling with high unemployment and poverty. Between 2020 and 2025, the number of special education students in the district doubled. Pietila explained how Impact Aid has been essential for increasing staff and therapy services, implementing new technology, and enhancing accessibility to keep pace with the district's rapid growth.

The session stressed Impact Aid's vital role in special education, helping ensure students can access needed resources and supports. ~

Insights and Feedback from the 2025 NAFIS Spring Conference

The 2025 NAFIS Spring Conference survey was completed by 31 of the 310 attendees who joined us in Washington, D.C. Overall, 100% of respondents reported the conference covered material useful to their work. One standout: a **panel on the 50th anniversary of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)**, exploring its legacy and future. Ninety-two percent rated the session as good or excellent, leaving attendees informed and inspired.

At the conference, NAFIS officially introduced volunteer opportunities. These dedicated individuals played a crucial role in shaping a welcoming experience. Whether assisting at the registration desk or introducing session speakers, their efforts were deeply appreciated. They not only kept things running smoothly but also added a personal touch, reinforcing the spirit of community that defines NAFIS. A heartfelt thank you to our incredible volunteers: Brooke Hazael-Massieux (MI), Connie Alspach (SD), Max Schochenmaier (SD), Brian Holt (TX), Billy Walker (TX), Lonnie Morin (MT), Brent Gish (MN), Rebecca Rappold (MT), and Chad Wyen (OH). Your time, energy, and enthusiasm made a world of difference!

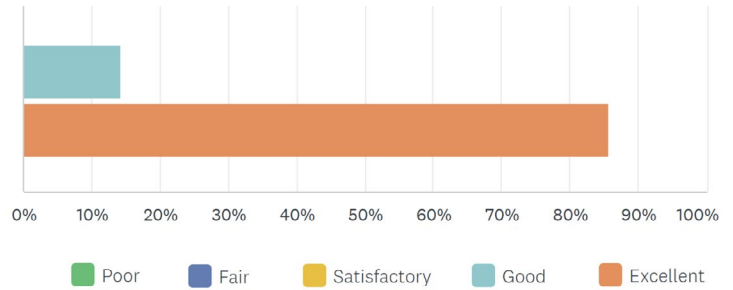
Want to get involved? Volunteering is a fantastic way to connect with fellow attendees, support speakers, and contribute behind the scenes. It offers a unique perspective and a rewarding way to engage with the NAFIS community. Be on the lookout for opportunities when registration for the 2025 Fall Conference opens.

This year, NAFIS also enhanced the integration between the conference website and our association management system, making it easier than ever for attendees to access critical information. The results spoke for themselves—87% of respondents rated the website



(L to R) NAFIS Comms Director Anne O'Brien; Gish; Alspach

Power Session: Maximizing Average Daily Attendance



excellent or good. The event app also saw full integration and received similarly high marks, with 84% rating it excellent or good.

The survey also made clear the importance of education on Impact Aid. One of the highest rated sessions was **Conference Orientation & The Basics of Impact Aid**, which drew an impressive crowd—likely because 22% of attendees were participating in their first NAFIS conference! All survey respondents—100%—rated it as good or excellent. A huge thank you to Lory DuFrain (SD) and Tom Schneider (IL) for delivering such an informative session.

Impact Aid-focused power sessions also received outstanding feedback. The **Maximizing Average Daily Attendance** session, presented by Billy Walker (TX), was a major success, earning a 100% good or excellent rating. **It's a LOT! Understanding the Learning Opportunity Threshold**, presented by Chad Blotsky (SD), was also very well-received, with 92% of attendees rating it good or excellent. On the breakout side, the **U.S. Department of Education session on application monitoring** provided a clear overview of the FY 2026 monitoring process and offered valuable tips to help districts prepare for success. More than 90% of respondents ranked it good or excellent. These sessions offered valuable insights and meaningful takeaways, equipping members with knowledge they can apply in their districts to strengthen their Impact Aid efforts.

Another highly praised breakout session was **Impact Aid at Work: Supporting Special Education Services in Military and Indian Lands School Districts**. With 93% of respondents rating it good or excellent, attendees appreciated the chance to learn from peers on how to better serve students with disabilities.

We hope to see you at the 2025 Fall Conference, September 14-16, in D.C.! Be on the lookout for registration to open mid-summer. ~

We Ask, You Answer - and We Respond!

We asked attendees for topics and speakers they'd like to see at future NAFIS conferences. Here are some of the responses:

Superintendent: "Put out a call for proposals and see what the interest is . . . sessions could range from branding, leadership, survey results, school improvement, effective communication . . ."

NAFIS: We are excited to announce the 2025 Fall Conference will include new opportunities for members to submit session proposals and contribute to conference content. Stay tuned for our call for proposals—your voice can help shape the agenda.

Superintendent: "To see a motivational speaker who engages the crowd, shares dynamic information, and creates spark and enthusiasm for our continued work at home."

NAFIS: The 2025 Fall Conference will feature LaDawn Townsend, a renowned leadership expert known for her powerful storytelling and strategic insight. She brings the passion, purpose, and dedication that define the Impact Aid community.

Conference in Photos

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the 2025 NAFIS Spring Conference, **Many Stories, One Voice: Shaping an Inclusive Tomorrow**. At a time of uncertainty in federal education policy, it was inspiring to gather with so many members of the NAFIS Family in Washington, D.C. We hope those who came enjoyed the experience.

While NAFIS conferences are hard to put into words, a picture is worth 1,000 of them. Here are a few of our favorite snapshots that, along with the stories shared throughout this publication, represent key moments, sentiments, and energy from the gathering. Thanks to photographer Leron Ricks for documenting the event. Check out our [Flickr album](#) for more!

The work at NAFIS conferences is essential to protecting and advancing Impact Aid, helping ensure all students receive the resources they need to meet their full potential. We look forward to welcoming you back to D.C. for the 2025 NAFIS Fall Conference, September 14-16. ~



NAFIS Elects New Leaders, Welcomes New Board Members

At the 2025 Spring Conference, NAFIS members participated in an election to shape the organization's volunteer leadership. NAFIS is pleased to announce that Quincy Natay, Superintendent of Chinle Unified School District #24 (AZ), was elected President of the NAFIS Board of Directors.



NAFIS President Quincy Natay

A lifelong resident of the Navajo Nation, Natay was named superintendent of Chinle in 2013. At the time, it was one of the lowest-performing reservation districts in Arizona. Today, it is the highest, outperforming many non-reservation districts as well. One of the longest-tenured superintendents in Chinle's history, Natay overhauled the district's strategic plan, spearheaded a district-wide culture shift, and focused on upgrading academic and athletic facilities. He has been recognized as Arizona State Superintendent of the Year and was a finalist for National Superintendent of the Year. Prior to this role, he served 23 years as the district's Assistant Superintendent of Business.

Natay assumes the presidency after approximately a decade on the NAFIS Board, during which time he has served in a variety of capacities, including as Secretary and Vice President. He also served on the National Indian Impacted Schools Association (NIISA, a NAFIS subgroup) Board of Directors for many years, including as President.

"I am honored to serve as President of NAFIS and excited to continue our unified efforts advocating for the students, families, and communities who rely on Impact Aid. Our work is more important than ever," said Natay. "I look forward to collaborating with our members, partners, and policymakers to ensure that all Impact Aid districts receive the support they need to provide a high-quality education that every child deserves. Together, we will strengthen our collective voice and advance the mission of NAFIS."

Also at the conference, Craig Hutcheson, Superintendent of Kittatinny Regional School District (NJ), which receives Section 7002 Federal Property funds, was elected Vice President. Trista Olney, Business Manager of Douglas School District (SD), which serves Ellsworth Air Force Base and the surrounding community, was elected Secretary.

Hilary Bales, Superintendent of Waynesville R-VI School District (MO), was welcomed to the Board as Region III Director. Christine Walker, Superintendent of Hueneme Elementary School District (CA), was welcomed as At-Large Director 3.

In addition, Karen Magara (Assistant Superintendent for Finance & Operations, Salamanca City Central School District, NY), Deborah Jackson-Dennison (Superintendent, San Carlos Unified School District #20, AZ), Stephen Haynes (Superintendent, Briggs Public Schools, OK), and Brian Gallup (School Board Member, Browning Public Schools, MT) were re-elected to the NAFIS Board. ~

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Per the NAFIS bylaws, the Board consists of seven members representing military districts, seven members representing Indian lands districts, and two members representing Federal Property districts.

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Hutcheson

Olney

Bales

Walker