



## Federal Advocacy & Public Policy Team

October 15, 2021

# NSBA Weekly Update

## Congressional Update

### Short-term Debt Limit Extension Enacted

On Tuesday, October 12, the House formally voted on and approved a short-term increase of the nation's borrowing authority, known as the debt limit. Lawmakers passed this measure along party lines by a margin of 219-206. Following passage, President Biden signed the legislation into law, which provides \$480 billion in additional borrowing authority for the U.S. Treasury Department. This extension is estimated to go through early December—a time when Congress must also act to pass a full-year funding measure for the current federal fiscal year (FY22) for programs like the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

Prior to this vote, however, Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) sent a [letter](#) to President Biden making clear that his party will likely filibuster future Congressional efforts to pass a longer-term measure that would extend or suspend the current debt limit. Republicans' opposition tees up a high-stakes set of decisions that lawmakers must navigate simultaneously by early December both on this issue as well as regular FY22 funding for the federal government.

Nevertheless, the short-term agreement provides more time for Congressional Democrats who are currently negotiating over the size and scope of a forthcoming domestic spending package, one that could potentially provide additional resources to the K-12 community in the form of dedicated funding for school facility construction and improvements, as well as additional funds to support ongoing broadband connectivity efforts. As these discussions continue, NSBA's advocacy team is working to ensure the needs of K-12 schools and students are adequately addressed in a final package.

### FCC Approves Additional Emergency Connectivity Fund Applications

On Tuesday, October 12, the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) [announced](#) \$1.1 Billion in new commitments as part of the Emergency Connectivity Fund's second wave. The funding will cover 2.4 million Devices and 1.9 million broadband connections. The approved projects will benefit students and staff at 2,471 schools, and the patrons of 205 libraries. The FCC has approved over half of the applications filed during the program's first application window and we expect the remaining qualified applications to be approved in the coming weeks. Securing initial funding for the ECF was one of NSBA's advocacy priorities and we are now working with other national groups to obtain resources to continue the program as part of our initiative to close the "homework gap."

## Administration Update

### New Members Added to Assessment Governing Board as Test Scores Drop

On Wednesday, October 13, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona formally [appointed](#) five board members to the National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB)—the entity responsible for overseeing and setting policy for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), more commonly known as the

nation's report card. Dana Boyd, an elementary school principal, Tyler Cramer, a local business leader, and Beverly Perdue, former Governor of North Carolina were each reappointed to the 26-member governing board. In addition, Scott Marion, a testing and measurement expert, along with Viola Garcia, a local school board member, were newly appointed.

This announcement came just before the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES) [released](#) new findings indicating declines in reading and math scores since 2012 for 13 year-olds. "This was the first time in the almost 50-year history of the long-term trend assessments that we observed declines among 13-year-olds," said NCES Commissioner Peggy G. Carr, who went on to note that "These performance drops are especially notable among lower-performing students, who no longer demonstrate competency in skills that students were able to do almost a decade ago in both subjects and age groups."

### **USED Approves Four More ARP Plans**

This past spring, Congressional Democrats passed the American Rescue Plan (ARP), which authorized \$122 billion in supplementary funding for K-12 school districts. Since that time, the U.S. Department of Education (USED) distributed two-thirds of this funding via formula to help schools and states respond to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The Department, however, held back the remaining third of this funding requiring that states and territories submit plans detailing how these new financial resources would be used to support learners cope with the impacts of the public health crisis and related disruptions to schooling. As part of this ongoing effort, USED has been periodically reviewing and approving state ARP plans for this purpose. On Thursday, October 14, the Department approved four more of these plans for Guam, Maryland, Nebraska, and Virginia. Seven states and Puerto Rico are still awaiting approval from the Department, along with the release of these remaining ARP funds. The current status of all state ARP plans, including highlights of plans approved by USED so far, can be found [here](#).

### **USED Roundtables**

The U.S. Department of Education is hosting Community Conversations, a series of education roundtables. The department invited NSBA to have local school board members participate in meetings where senior department officials can hear first-hand about the challenges around reopening schools. They currently have three scheduled in Raleigh, Charlotte, and Atlanta, on Oct. 19, 20, and 22 respectively.

## **New K-12 Bills**

The President signed the [S.1917 - K-12 Cybersecurity Act of 2021](#) which requires the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) to study the cybersecurity risks facing elementary and secondary schools and develop recommendations that include cybersecurity guidelines designed to assist schools in facing those risks. The study will evaluate the challenges that schools face in securing systems and sensitive student and employee records. The agency has 120 days to complete the review and report back to Congress and also requires CISA to develop online training tools for school officials.

## **NSBA Update**

### **NSBAC Elects Officers**

The National School Boards Action Center (NSBAC) elected new officers this week. Kathleen Gebhardt will serve as President, Beverly Slough will serve as Secretary, and Sonja McKenzie will serve as Treasurer. NSBAC provides grassroots advocacy on issues important to school board members and public education.

**CSALS**

There is no CSALS meeting next week.

**Advocacy Institute**

Registration is open for Advocacy Institute which is scheduled as an in-person meeting in Washington, DC, for January 23-25, 2022.