2025-26
National Student Council Federal Legislative Agenda

NASSP™ National Association of Secondary School Principals

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STUDENT COUNCILS



The National Student Council (NSC), administered by the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP), is led by 12 officers and 22 state representatives who are middle and high school students from across the country. The officers and state representatives are humbled to represent over a million students, 30,000 school leaders, and 16,000 advisers across the country through various programs. This school year, the NSC's top advocacy priorities are increased federal support for K–12 schools, school safety, and student mental health and wellness.

The NSC believes that the strength of our nation lies in the quality of the education we provide for all students. We support the American promise of an education system that is open to all and meets the needs of every student to help us fulfill our potential. We urge members of Congress to focus on strengthening our public school systems to meet increased global competition for a well-educated and well-trained workforce. Congress and the administration should uphold their commitment to students by bolstering investment in public schools and the educator workforce.

As Congress considers Fiscal Year 2026 appropriations, we request support for the critical Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) programs below that **will provide effective and high-quality educators students need, increase student academic achievement and career readiness, and improve school safety and training.**



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NSC Federal K–12 Education Budget Priorities

TITLE I GRANTS TO LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES

- **FY26 request: $18.4 billion** (FY25 received $18.4 billion)
  - » Provides financial support to local education agencies and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to ensure all children receive support. Any reduction to Title I grants would hurt the most vulnerable students and school districts.
  - » The NSC strongly supports maintaining or increasing Title I funding as the pillar of federal support to K–12 schools.

TITLE II, PART A

- **FY26 request: $2.19 billion** (FY25 received $2.19 billion)
  - » Provides formula grants to states and districts to strengthen professional development opportunities for teachers and principals, making them more effective educators and also likely to remain in the profession.
  - » Can be used by school districts to provide in-service training for school personnel on how to refer students affected by trauma, how to use referral mechanisms for appropriate treatment and intervention services, and how to establish partnerships between schools and mental health providers.
  - » Provides key federal support for trauma-informed instruction to mitigate behavioral health issues, identify threats and prevent violence, and provide mental health assistance to students.

TITLE III, ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION GRANTS

- **FY26 request: $890 million** (FY25 received $890 million)
  - » Supplements local and state funds for bilingual education to ensure that children who are English language learners develop high levels of academic achievement and English proficiency. The program is designed to help these students meet the same challenging academic standards as all children.

TITLE IV, PART A, STUDENT SUPPORT AND ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT GRANTS

- **FY26 request: $1.38 billion** (FY25 received $1.38 billion)
  - » This flexible ESSA block grant program supports schools in funding activities which serve the whole child across three broad areas: 1) Providing students with a well-rounded education, including music, the arts, social studies, and computer science, 2) Supporting the safety and health of students, and 3) Encouraging the effective use of technology in schools.
  - » Title IV has become a key source of funding for school-based mental health and safety funding in recent years and is critical to ongoing violence prevention efforts.

IDEA STATE GRANTS

- **FY26 request: $14.2 billion** (FY25 received $14.2 billion)
  - » Assists state and local education agencies in educating children with disabilities.
  - » Supports implementing, expanding, and improving access to high-quality special education services.
  - » Current funding is only 13% of the national average per-pupil expenditure, far below the 40% goal when IDEA was enacted. It is time for Congress to fulfill its promise and pass the IDEA Full Funding Act.
  - » The NSC also supports continued funding for Special Olympics education within IDEA which received $36 million in FY25.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) STATE GRANTS

- **FY26 request: $1.44 billion** (FY25 received $1.44 billion)
  - » Provides support for states and communities to implement high-quality CTE programs to meet the demands of the 21st century economy and workforce.
  - » According to U.S. Department of Education statistics, almost all high school students participate in CTE, and more than half take three or more credits. Data show that students participating in CTE programs have graduation rates of more than 90%

In addition to maintaining adequate funding for these critical ESSA programs, the NSC urges Congress to take additional action to address these challenges facing our nation's public schools:

School Safety

- Violence and bullying in schools continue to present a critical threat that must be addressed by federal legislative action.
  - » The K–12 School Shooting Database has found a 715% increase in the number of injuries or deaths in school shootings from 2004 to 2024 and that 2023 and 2024 had the first and second highest numbers of school shootings since 1966.
  - » It also found that among children ages 5-11, 25% have expressed fear about school safety rising to 29% for 12- to 17-year-olds, parents reported.
  - » According to a Pew Research Center survey in 2022, more than half of U.S. teens report that online harassment and bullying is a major problem and students who identify as lesbian, gay, or bisexual are more than twice as likely to report experiencing bullying at school and 2.5 times as likely to report experiencing online bullying.
  - » The Pew Research Center also reports that more than one out of every teen (57%) age 13–17 worries about a school shooting occurring at their school.
- Congress can address these challenges by:
  - » Increasing Title II and Title IV funding that directly supports school safety training, threat assessments, safety personnel, and infrastructure.
  - » Increasing funding for Project SERV (School Emergency Response to Violence) grants in FY26 from $5 million to $25 million. Project SERV grants fund critical, immediate emergency support to schools that have suffered shootings and other violent or traumatic events.
  - » Provide additional support to school districts for safe firearm storage education to parents and families which can reduce violence and suicide.

Improving School Mental Health and Wellness Resources

- Student and educator mental health and wellness continue to be a defining issue across the country.
  - » According to NASSP's 2022 survey of students and school leaders, three-quarters of school leaders (73%) and students (74%) reported they needed help with their mental or emotional health the previous year. One-half of school leaders also reported student behavior is worse than before the pandemic, with more than 80% concerned about bullying and/or drug use in their school.
  - » The National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics finds that by 12th grade, more than 1 in 3 U.S. teens will have tried illicit drugs and by 12th grade, nearly half of teenagers will have abused alcohol.
  - » In 2021, results from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey showed that 4 in 10 students felt persistently sad or hopeless and one-third experienced poor mental health, with 22% of students seriously considering suicide. In comparison to previous years, the suicidal ideation rate is a 17% increase from 2019.
  - » According to the Child Mind Institute and its research in 2025 on neurodivergent kids and screen time, screen use can be beneficial for students with learning disabilities, anxiety, or accessibility needs that may be met through technology (e.g., alternative communication devices). However, a recent survey conducted by the Institute also reveals that parents of tweens and teens are now more concerned about internet addiction than substance addiction. Studies have shown individuals with attention- deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) may be at a higher risk for screen-related addiction, and that in turn excessive screen time may exacerbate ADHD symptoms.
  - » Additionally, preteens age 8–12 use or watch screens approximately 5 1/2 hours per day with teens spending up to 9 hours per day.
  - » Similarly, experts have shared that increased anxiety and mental health challenges impact chronic absenteeism with rates climbing post-pandemic. Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) survey in 2024 show a 30% rate of chronic absenteeism for 4th and 8th graders. Since 2019, this rate has increased from 26% to 31% for 12th graders.
  - » Schools with large concentrations of students eligible for free and reduced-price meals (FARMS) also have rates of chronic absenteeism above 30%.
- Congress can address this crisis by:
  - » Significantly increasing federal support to promote the physical and emotional well-being of educators and students as critically important to the safety, security, and comprehensive success of students.
  - » Increasing funding for principal training since principals are uniquely positioned to leverage trauma-informed schoolwide strategies to address the enormous wave of social, emotional, and mental health needs of students and staff.
  - » Increasing the number of school counselors, psychologists, and social workers, and supporting parent, student, and family engagement opportunities along with after-school programs.
  - » Maintaining funding in FY26 appropriations for the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) at $7.15 billion.



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