



2026-2027

NATIONAL PRINCIPALS ASSOCIATION FEDERAL LEGISLATIVE AGENDA



NATIONAL
PRINCIPALS
ASSOCIATION™

THE VOICE OF SCHOOL LEADERS



For 110 years, the National Principals Association has represented the leaders of America's public schools—through wars, recessions, desegregation, and a pandemic that tested school leadership like nothing before it. Today, we represent thousands of PreK–12 school leaders, millions of students across the country, and advocates on behalf of all students, educators, and schools.

The National Principals Association also administers the National Honor Society, the National Junior Honor Society, the National Elementary Honor Society, and the National Association of Student Councils, and is committed to advancing the policy and advocacy positions of our nation's students from early learning through high school and college and career readiness. This legislative agenda outlines the priorities of the National Principals Association, and actions federally elected officials must take to better support all schools.

School leaders believe in the promise of an American education system that is open to all and meets the needs of every student. The federal government plays a critical role in achieving that promise by providing guidance, oversight, and necessary resources to ensure that we have high-quality educators in every school and district.

To produce a well-educated and well-trained workforce amid increased global competition, Congress and the administration must invest in the public school system, bring respect back to the profession, and reject any proposals to further marginalize the U.S. Department of Education. We are opposed to reducing or transitioning the funding of federal PreK–12 grants away from public education. We urge members of Congress to strengthen our public schools, which serve 90% of all students.

As representatives and senators consider Fiscal Year 2027 and 2028 appropriations, the National Principals Association requests increased support for critical Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) programs that will reduce shortages in the PreK–12 educator professions, improve the effectiveness and quality of educators, increase student academic achievement and career readiness, and improve professional development and training for school safety, education and artificial intelligence (AI), and mental health and trauma-informed services.

See the full list of National Principals Association positions and policy recommendations at principals.org/briefs.

For questions or further information, please contact our Policy and Advocacy team at advocacy@principals.org.

Professional Development, Educator Shortages, and the Principal Pipeline

Supporting Evidence, Data and Research

- Widespread shortages among principals, teachers, and school support staff professionals continue to grow.
 - » A [2026 GAO analysis](#) of recent studies on the impacts of professional development programs concluded that “professional development is associated with higher student test scores.” Some of the studies found that collaboration, coaching, subject-matter focus, and curriculum-aligned professional development were positively associated with student achievement. Additionally, approximately 70% of K–12 teachers reported that collaborative learning opportunities improved their teaching or students’ learning.
 - » A [study](#) by the Economic Policy Institute found that high-quality professional learning and teacher retention are strongly correlated: On average, teachers who receive no professional development in a school year had only a 60% chance of retention, while teachers with over 20 hours of professional development demonstrated an 85% chance of retention.
 - » Over 1 in 3 public schools reported having one or more teaching vacancies and 1 out of 2 public schools reported their schools as understaffed according to the [2024-25 school year data](#) by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) “School Pulse Panel”.
 - » Principal turnover more than doubled to 16% by the end of the 2021–22 school year, with roughly 19,000 more school leaders leaving than the previous year. Departure rates were even higher for high poverty (23%) and rural districts (32%), according to a [2023 RAND research brief survey](#).
 - » In 2022, a [meta-analysis](#) by Learning Forward in partnership with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) found that high-quality professional learning led to improved instruction, which in turn led to higher student achievement.
 - » In 2021, the Wallace Foundation report, [“How Principals Affect Students and Schools,”](#) stated that a “review of two decades of evidence—including six quantitative, longitudinal studies involving 22,000 principals—found that ‘principals have large effects on student learning, comparable even to the effects of individual teachers.’” In addition, evidence demonstrates fairly conclusively that teacher turnover rates are lower under more effective principals.
- Congress can address these challenges by:
 - » Bolstering investments in the educator pipeline to attract educators to the profession, strengthening pre-service preparation, and expanding professional development opportunities to retain high-quality principals.
 - » Improving financial incentives for principals by ensuring school leaders are eligible for existing public service loan forgiveness programs.
 - » Increasing the Title II, Part A, funding that supports on-the-job coaching and other professional development opportunities for principals.
 - » Enacting legislation and new federal funding that will support states and districts’ ability to increase teacher and school leader compensation.



Improving School Mental Health, Wellness, and Safety Resources

Supporting Evidence, Data and Research

- Student and educator mental health and school safety continues to be a defining issue across the country.
 - » An August [2025 Gallup survey](#) reported that 41% of K–12 parents fear for their child’s safety at school, and 15% of parents said their child had expressed fear for their safety ahead of back-to-school timeframe.
 - » The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) most recent [Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report](#) found that 13% of high school students did not go to school because they felt unsafe either at school or when traveling to and from school at least once during a 30-day period. Meanwhile, in 2024, 2.8 million adolescents ages 12–17 had serious thoughts of suicide, made a suicide plan, or attempted suicide. And since 2023, death by suicide has been the second leading cause of death in children ages 10–14 and the third leading cause of death in children ages 15–19. In addition, one in five high school students has considered suicide, and nearly one in 10 attempts suicide.
 - » According to the [U.S. Surgeon General](#), one in five children and adolescents will face a significant mental health condition during their school years. Symptoms can cause serious difficulties with daily functioning and affect our relationships with others, as in the case of conditions such as anxiety disorders, major depressive disorder, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, and eating disorders, among others.
 - » During the 2023–24 school year, there was only one school counselor for every 372 students [recommended ratio](#) from the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) is one school counselor for every 250 students. However, data from the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights indicates that since 2020, approximately one out of every five high schools lack a school counselor.
 - » While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and ESEA include programs and initiatives to address comprehensive support services in schools, since FY 2009 the funding for these programs, including the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act (SDFSCA) State and Local Grants Program, has been eliminated.
 - » According to the [National Principals Association’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.
 - » A [2022 RAND survey](#) found that 86% of principals named supporting their teachers’ mental health as a source of stress.
 - » According to the [2026 Surgeon General’s Warning on the Harms of Screen Use](#), higher screen use has been associated with lower academic achievement in foundational subjects like math and reading. In addition, it is linked to mental health effects, such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and body image concerns and has consistently been linked to physical health challenges and poor educational outcomes, tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana use.
 - » [Data](#) from the U.S. Department of Education illuminates chronic absenteeism rates reached about 31% in the 2021–2022 school year and decreased to 28% in the 2022–23 school year. It poses serious implications for students’ overall academic success and wellbeing. Students who are chronically absent for multiple years between preschool and second grade are much less likely to read at grade level by the third grade.

- Congress can address this crisis by:
 - » Significantly increasing federal support to promote the physical and emotional well-being of educators and students as a critically important factor in the safety, security, and comprehensive success of students.
 - » Empowering principals who are uniquely positioned to leverage trauma-informed schoolwide strategies to address the enormous wave of social, emotional, and mental health needs among students and staff.
 - » Increasing the reimbursement rates for school lunches by 40 cents and school breakfasts by 15 cents.
 - » Preserving existing Medicaid funding levels to provide medically necessary services to students with disabilities.
 - » Increasing the number of school counselors, psychologists, and social workers, and supporting parent, student, and family engagement opportunities along with after-school programs.

In addition to these critical challenges facing our nation's schools, the National Principals Association urges Congress to increase funding for these critical ESSA programs via congressional appropriations:

Federal K–12 Education Budget Priorities

TITLE I GRANTS TO LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES (LEAs)

- **FY27 request: \$19 billion** (FY26 received \$18.4 billion)
 - » Provides financial support to LEAs and schools with high numbers or high percentages of children from low-income families to help ensure that all children receive support. Any reduction to Title I grants would hurt the most vulnerable students and school districts.
 - » The National Principals Association strongly supports increasing Title I funding as the pillar of federal support to K–12 schools.

TITLE II, PART A

- **FY27 request: \$2.4 billion** (FY26 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 more likely to stay in the profession.
 - » Helps districts fund principal residencies, expand job-embedded and cohort-based professional learning, and boost mentorship opportunities for aspiring principals.
 - » Provides instructional training on essential needs such as mental health and school safety or AI technologies aligned with recently released federal guidance on AI.

TITLE III, ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION GRANTS

- **FY27 request: \$990 million** (FY26 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

- **FY27 request: \$1.6 billion** (FY26 received \$1.38 billion)
 - » This flexible ESSA block grant program supports schools in funding activities in 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

- **FY27 request: \$15 billion** (FY26 received \$14.2 billion)
 - » Assists state and LEAs 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.

CAREER AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION (CTE) STATE GRANTS

- **FY26 request: \$1.75 billion** (FY26 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. Additional data also shows that students participating in CTE programs have graduation rates of more than 90%.

HEAD START/EARLY HEAD START

- **FY27 request: \$13 billion** (FY26 received \$12.27 billion)
- Head Start helps prepare children to succeed in school by providing early learning, health, and development services to families with children from birth to age 5.
- Currently serves close to 800,000 children.
- Quality preschool programs provide the academic and social-emotional foundation for a strong start and students' long-term school success.

PROJECT SERV (SCHOOL EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO VIOLENCE) GRANTS

- **FY27 request: \$25 million** (FY26 received \$5 million)
- Project SERV grants fund critical, immediate emergency support to schools that have suffered shootings and other violent or traumatic events. While a small program, Project SERV funding has proved invaluable to school leaders who must lead recovery efforts after the unthinkable.

STOP SCHOOL VIOLENCE ACT (Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies)

- **FY27 request: \$86 million** (FY26 received \$82 million)
- The STOP School Violence Act authorizes grants at Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to make annual competitive grants available to states, municipalities, school districts, and tribes to bring evidence-based programs and strategies to schools to prevent acts of violence.
- Increases \$4 million for the BJA evidence-based school violence prevention offsetting a \$40 million cliff caused by the expiration of supplemental funding allotted by the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, which expires in FY 2026.
- Remains the only federal program dedicated to identifying the warning signs of youth violence and helping schools intervene before harm occurs.
- Through these programs, students, school personnel, and law enforcement are trained how to identify signs of violence or mental health crisis, and how to intervene to prevent people from hurting themselves or others.



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