



July 29, 2026

The Honorable Bill Cassidy
Chairman
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Cassidy and Ranking Member Sanders:

On behalf of AASA, The School Superintendents Association, representing more than 10,000 public school system leaders across the country, we write to share our views on the bills scheduled for consideration during the Committee's July 30th mark-up. It has been our organization's longstanding view that the Committee should not attempt to make piecemeal amendments or improvements to critically important, extensive, bipartisan reauthorization bills such as the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) outside of the full and robust reauthorization process. Regardless of the merit of the bills before the Committee, we owe it to the tens of millions of students, educators, administrators, and state and local education agency personnel to move beyond incremental changes to laws that have become outdated and insufficient for current challenges.

We also believe that changes to the administration of federal education programs should be evaluated with an open mind and a focus on whether they will improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and delivery of services to students. At the same time, successful implementation requires meaningful stakeholder engagement, thoughtful planning, and a commitment to minimizing disruption for the schools and students who rely on critical federal resources. AASA remains committed to working with the Administration and with policymakers on both sides of the aisle to advance solutions that strengthen public education, improve program and practice, and ensure that every student has access to the resources and supports necessary to succeed.

While we appreciate the Committee's decision to bring up new bipartisan legislation this week, we do not believe the bills amending ESEA and IDEA under consideration will produce better outcomes for students, improve access to high quality or more equitable educational opportunities for students, enhance the quality of learning that teachers provide, or positively shape practice and pedagogy in our schools. At best, these bills have a neutral impact. At worst, they inject confusion, create uncertainty about implementation and increase the number of unfunded mandates from Washington at a time when educators and administrators have fuller plates and fewer resources than ever before.

It is particularly disappointing that, for the first time in nearly two decades, the Committee has an opportunity to revisit the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, a clear indication of bipartisan interest at a pivotal moment in the law's history, but is failing to do so in a meaningful or comprehensive way. We urge the Committee to hold hearings on how IDEA is succeeding and where it is falling short; the persistent gaps in highly qualified teachers and staff that help educate students with disabilities, and the critical need to update our special education accountability system, so we can make more significant progress in educating all students with disabilities.

While *The 21st Century Dyslexia Act* attempts to make policy improvements to the identification of dyslexia, its policy changes lack the backing of any major education and disability organization. AASA joins them in opposing the addition of dyslexia as a new category under IDEA as it is already named as a subtype within the Specific Learning Disability. We urge the Committee to consider any changes to disability categories alongside more substantive discussions about how we evaluate and re-evaluate students and how we determine what should be mandated in IEP paperwork and meetings.

The *READ Act* is a well-intentioned, targeted approach to amending ESEA that would create new mandates for states that receive grants to align all of their educator preparation programs, professional development and teacher and licensure standards related to reading and literacy to ensure they are following the science of reading. While AASA is very supportive of efforts to ensure teacher preparation programs and teacher licensure is tied to mandating the use of evidence-based practices, we do not agree that the bill's definition of "comprehensive literacy instruction" will achieve that goal. Despite the goal of incentivizing evidence-based practices in literacy, this definition in the *READ Act* ironically takes a narrow, non-research-based approach that would be counterproductive to teaching English Learners and students with disabilities how to read. If an accurate, comprehensive definition of comprehensive literacy instruction was utilized for this bill, we would consider being neutral on the bill.

AASA believes that any changes to the federal administration of critical K-12 funding and programs currently overseen by the U.S. Department of Education must be supported by thoughtful implementation, adequate transition planning, clear guidance, and ongoing communication with local education leaders. Such changes should promote operational efficiency, predictability, and the timely delivery of resources and services to schools and students. Unfortunately, the Department's recent decision to transfer responsibility for issuing Title I and Title II allocations to the Department of Labor in the middle of an award year, without adequate notice, sufficient technical assistance, written guidance, or implementation planning, falls far short of these principles. This action raises significant concerns about districts' ability to access this critical funding—roughly \$12.4 billion—in a timely and predictable manner. Last year, district leaders were forced to quickly revise budgets and cut services to address the funding gaps created by the month-long withholding of \$6.9 billion in federal education funding. The Administration now risks a similar disruption involving some of the most important federal dollars on which school districts rely.

Consequently, AASA supports S.5046, which would halt the interagency agreements (IAA) for programs administered by the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and prohibit the movement of funding from the Department of Education to the Department of Labor as well as impede the IAA for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. Given the recent actions by the Department, our preference is that pending IAAs are re-examined closely if not halted entirely. However, if the Administration is determined to move the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, we would prefer that all critical K-12 formula programs are administered through one agency.

We appreciate that these policy debates are taking place during a period of significant change and uncertainty for both the nation and the federal government. While there may be differing perspectives on the appropriate federal role in education, we believe there is broad agreement at the local level that federal policymakers should remain focused on the core challenges facing students, schools, and communities. We urge both Congress and the Administration to work collaboratively to address persistent achievement gaps, resource inequities, workforce shortages, and other longstanding issues that affect educational opportunity and outcomes.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Sasha Pudelski".

Sasha Pudelski
Director of Advocacy