



SAN FELIPE DEL RIO CISD

Press Release – February 4, 2020

SFDR CISD TRUSTEE ADVOCATING LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES FOR THE 116TH CONGRESS MEETS WITH KEY LEGISLATORS ON CAPITOL HILL TODAY

Washington, D.C. - School board trustee Diana Gonzales, representing Region 15, is joining hundreds of school board advocates from across the state and the nation to help shape the decisions made on Capitol Hill that directly impact our students. The National School Board Association (NSBA) initiated the 2020 Advocacy Institute on Sunday, Feb. 2, and has provided school board members with insight on the most critical issues affecting public education and has prepared them with advocacy tools for their meetings with state representatives today.

Ms. Gonzales, who will be meeting with Rachel Gill, Education Aide to District 23 Representative Will Hurd and Senator John Cornyn states, “It is an honor and a privilege to meet with lawmakers to let them know the concerns of voters regarding educational issues. Our students deserve a quality education and safer schools; and teachers deserve better pay. We need everyone’s effort towards an accurate count on the 2020 census to ensure equitable distribution of financial resources for programs critical to student achievement. All these are vital – and these are among the priorities I will convey to our representatives.”

NSBA’s Legislative Priorities

On behalf of the nation’s state school boards associations and more than 90,000 local school board members, the National School Boards Association is advocating the following legislative priorities in the second session of the 116th Congress:

Full Funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

NSBA urges Congress to advance the national dialogue about increasing the federal share of funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, so that school districts can expand their work to ensure that all students with disabilities achieve their full potential. NSBA’s advocacy to strengthen the federal investment in special education for the almost seven million students who receive educational services through IDEA is now focused on the bipartisan, bicameral IDEA Full Funding Act (H.R. 1878 and S. 866). This legislation would establish a ten-year authorization for full funding of the federal share of IDEA (40 percent). Further, NSBA urges Congress to pass two additional measures that will strengthen the federal investment in IDEA: the Funding Early Childhood Is the Right IDEA Act (H.R. 4107) and the High Cost Pools Act (H.R. 4673).

Chiefly, the federal government must begin providing the level of dedicated annual funding for students with disabilities that is commensurate not only with IDEA's vision and goals, but also with our moral commitment to these vitally important students and their families.

Higher Education Act Reauthorization

NSBA urges Congress to use the Higher Education Act (HEA) reauthorization to strengthen and build the educator and school leader workforce and support other strategies to promote equity, college access, and success.

The next HEA must place a higher priority on strengthening educator preparation systems, including cultivating and supporting strong induction and other partnerships between educator preparation programs and school districts, encourage high performing students to enter the teaching profession, including a focus on preparing a new generation of special education and preschool educators. The next HEA must also encourage and support local innovation, research, and implementation of strategies designed to improve teacher and principal effectiveness consistent with the locally driven framework of ESSA that focuses on:

- Evidence-based evaluation systems that include, in part, student performance;
- Alternative certification programs that meet workforce needs;
- State and school district flexibility regarding credentials for small and/or rural schools, special education programs, English learners, and specialized programs such as science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics; and
- Locally-determined compensation and teacher and principal assignment policies.

The next HEA should also authorize new investments in dual and concurrent enrollment programs to ensure that more students—especially low-income students—have access to learning opportunities that deliver postsecondary credit and promote college access and success.

As the HEA reauthorization process continues, NSBA urges Congress to include the PREP Act in a final bill. The bipartisan Preparing and Retaining Education Professionals (PREP) Act is co-sponsored by Senators Tim Kaine (D-VA) and Susan Collins (R-ME), and would help address teacher and principal shortages, especially in rural communities. This legislation also would target the need for more teachers in special education and in STEM subject areas, including programs of study such as cybersecurity. The PREP Act also would promote partnerships with school districts to provide targeted professional development and other supports to help teachers in high-need subject areas succeed.

Improving the Nation's Infrastructure

As Congress and the Administration explore opportunities to improve the nation's infrastructure, NSBA encourages the adoption of new incentives and investments focused on modernizing and building educational facilities that are designed to meet the needs of students, families, and communities. Teaching and learning requires well designed classrooms, state-of-the-art science laboratories, high capacity broadband connectivity, and other facilities that meet students' educational needs. Many students are forced to attend classes in failing buildings and other depleted and outdated educational infrastructure. Recent estimates place total school facility needs, including technology, at well over \$500 billion, which is beyond the capacity of many communities and states to address. Any infrastructure legislation considered by Congress should prioritize grants for schools in underserved communities, create a new school infrastructure tax-exempt bond program, promote green building design, and support digital infrastructure.

Advancing School Safety

NSBA supports congressional action to increase the funding and flexibility of grants that are provided to states and local school districts to make school safety improvements. However, as the number of deadly school

violence incidents has increased, more must be done. NSBA encourages Congress and the Administration to take the necessary actions to ensure that all children have a safe and secure learning environment, including the adoption of the following recommendations included in the Federal Commission on School Safety report:

- Provide greater and sustained resources for locally determined programs that are critical to school safety, such as school resource officers, school counseling, emergency preparedness and response training, and interagency coordination.
- Federal resources for school safety are spread across many agencies; and, a comprehensive guide should be published to reference where schools can access funding opportunities and/or technical assistance for disaster preparedness and emergency response operations.
- Provide greater and sustained federal resources that expand access to mental health services and support comprehensive “wrap-around” services to schools that include a range of community resources to address safety and intervention.
- Increase resources that focus on the social, emotional, physical, and mental health of students.

Violence of any sort has no place in American classrooms. As the nation and elected leaders grapple with potential solutions to reduce gun violence in our schools, students are rightly demanding action. All students deserve access to safe and supportive learning environments that support their opportunities to learn and are free of abuse, violence, bullying, weapons, and harmful substances. NSBA has long encouraged local school boards to recognize that prevention, preparedness, mitigation, and emergency response and recovery plans are critical to protect the safety and health of students and employees. These plans work best when school districts have the resources they need to work in coordination with the appropriate local, state, and federal agencies, including public health officials and first responders, and address environmental, health, and safety risks along with potential security breaches. Further, NSBA urges local school boards to continue to analyze data with regards to student discipline and engage in restorative practices to reduce suspensions and expulsions.

In addition, NSBA urges Congress to pass legislation that will help our nation’s school districts address the epidemic of vaping among students that has impacted many communities. The Reversing the Youth Tobacco Epidemic Act (H.R. 2339) that has been reported by the House Committee on Energy and Commerce would help mitigate this crisis in our schools.

Supporting Efforts to Ensure an Accurate Count for the 2020 Census

The United States Constitution requires the federal government to count “the whole number of persons in each state” every ten years. The U.S. Census count serves as the basic data set for enumerable federal, state, and local policies, programs, and elections. An under-count of the “persons in each state,” would result in inaccurate data on which to base important governmental apportionment and funding decisions.

NSBA urges the Administration, specifically the U.S. Department of Commerce, to refrain from policy decisions that would result in a census under-count, which could lead to potentially devastating ramifications for public educational entities that depend on funding streams and other programs tied to Census data.

Additionally, NSBA supports the work of state and local Complete Census Count Committees that are engaged in greater outreach to students and their families. An accurate Census count this year will help ensure equitable distribution of resources for programs that are critical to student achievement, such as Title I grants for disadvantaged students, special education, Head Start expansion funds, school-based Medicaid services, and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP).

Educational Choice: Supporting America’s Public Schools

NSBA opposes any legislation that diverts public funds from K-12 education directly through voucher programs, or indirectly through tax credits or related proposals to fund private, religious, or home school education. NSBA encourages federal lawmakers to provide greater support for the innovative programs and educational choices offered by our nation’s public school districts which educate more than 50 million students each day.

The diversion of funds away from public education makes it difficult for local schools to transform and improve learning for their students, and to modernize their education through innovations such as personalized learning that can help better prepare students and give them the real-world and life skills they need to be successful. Every local school can be an incubator of positive change for their communities if they receive the support and resources required to further their mission to educate the children they serve.

Many public schools are offering student-centered innovation including personalized learning, project-based learning, career and technical education, dual enrollment, magnet and charter schools authorized by local school boards, and other programs designed to prepare students for success in the modern world and those efforts could grow with strong federal support. However, diversion of funding away from local schools for private education harms those efforts. Federal policies and programs must be strengthened to support local magnet schools, public military academies, and other schools that provide educational opportunities through specialized curricula and unique learning experiences in science, technology, engineering, the arts, mathematics, and other areas related to a well-rounded education.