

News & Notes

Before the Easter recess, the Senate (65-32) and House (256-167) approved a massive \$1.3 trillion spending bill to bring the fiscal year 2018 spending process to a close. The compromise bill provides a \$2.6 billion increase for the U.S. Department of Education (see table). Given that the omnibus spending bill may be the last major legislation Congress will approve before the midterms, the measure also included notable new policy provisions with implications for school districts:

- **Stop School Violence Act:** The Bureau of Justice Assistance in the Department of Justice is authorized to make grants to states, units of local government, and Indian tribes to support evidence-based programs, violence prevention efforts, and anonymous reporting systems. Funds may also be used to support physical security upgrades for schools like metal detectors, locks, lighting, and other deterrents. Subawards may be made to school districts, nonprofits, and other units of local government or tribal organizations. The bill reallocates \$75 million from the Comprehensive School Safety Initiative.
- **Secure Rural Schools Program:** Congress provided two years of support for the lapsed Secure Rural Schools

program, which offers formula payments to qualified “forest counties.” SRS payments go to counties nationwide, but they mainly go to rural, Western counties with high presence of Bureau of Land Management or National Forest System lands.

- **Rural Utility Service Broadband Pilot:** The bill authorizes the Rural Utility Service in the Department of Agriculture to launch a \$600 million distance learning, telemedicine broadband program. The bill notes that funding should be prioritized to areas lacking access to broadband service.

The Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee voted March 14 to approve Frank Brogan to serve as assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education and Mark Schneider to serve as director of the Institute for Education Sciences. Schneider has since been confirmed by the full Senate, but Senate leaders had not at press time established a date for the full body to consider Brogan nomination. President Trump in March announced his intent to nominate Mark Schultz of Nebraska to be commissioner of the Department of Education’s

Rehabilitation Services Administration. Diane Auer Jones has joined the Department of Education as a senior policy advisor to the secretary of education.

■
The Department of Agriculture released a proposed rule to add flexibility to the hiring standards for new school nutrition program directors in small school districts. Under the rule, food service experience rather than school nutrition program experience would be required, with volunteer work in food service counting toward this experience, and the number of years of required experience is reduced in very small districts where other qualifications are met.

■
Four school districts and the Puerto Rico Department of Education have applied for a new pilot program for experimenting with weighted-student funding formulas. The four for the coming school year are Wilsona School District (CA), Indianapolis Public Schools (IN), Salem-Keizer School District 24J (OR), and Upper Adams School District (PA). School districts interested in applying for flexibility in the 2019–20 school year must file applications on or before July 15, 2018. ■

Table 1. Funding for Child-Related Programs in Fiscal 2018 Budget

	Budget Item	Funding	Change
Major K-12 Formula Programs	ESSA, Title I	\$15.7 billion	+\$300 million
	ESSA, Title II	\$2.0 billion	level funding
	ESSA, Title IV	\$1.1 billion	+\$700 million
	IDEA State Grants	\$12.2 billion	+\$275 million
	Perkins Career and Technical Education	\$1.19 billion	+\$75 million
Other Key K-12 Programs	Teacher Quality Partnerships	\$43.09 million	level funding
	21st Century Community Learning Centers	\$1.212 billion	+\$20 million
	State Assessments	\$378 million	+\$8.9 million
	Education, Innovation, and Research Grants	\$120 million	+\$20 million
	Supporting Effective Educator Development	\$75 million	+\$10 million
	School Safety National Activities	\$90 million	+\$22 million
	Office for Civil Rights	\$117 million	+\$8.5 million
	Statewide Family Engagement Centers	\$10 million	new funding
	Statewide Longitudinal Data Systems	\$32.28 million	level funding