AACTE

2025-26

State Legislation Round-Up

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This is the first in a planned series of annual reports summarizing major trends in state education legislation. This report reviews legislation that was enacted or took effect from April 2025 through July 2026, with a special focus on bills directly addressing the educator workforce and educator preparation. Future reports will track changes in the education issues occupying state legislatures.

The information in this report is drawn from the state legislation database produced by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). In some cases, the issue topics were reclassified from the scheme used by ECS. Because bills often include multiple topics, the figures presented in this report represent the number of times particular topics were addressed in enacted legislation, not the total number of bills introduced or passed. When specific bills are referenced, a link is provided to the bill text. All links are current as of August 2026.

Top 10 Education Legislative Issues

Topic	Number of Bills
Teacher Workforce	115
Student Mental & Physical Health, Nutrition	112
Charter Schools	105
Postsecondary Affordability and Finance	74
School Safety	68
School Choice	60
K-12 Finance	53
Curriculum	47
High School Graduation Requirements	28
Technology - General	21
Social Media and Cell Phones	13
Artificial Intelligence	12

In 2025-26, many of the issues legislatures addressed were of perennial concern, including postsecondary affordability and financing, K-12 financing, the teacher workforce, school curricula, high school graduation requirements, and school safety. Others, however, reflect recent issues in education such as artificial intelligence and student use of social media. Bills on the teacher workforce, which include bills addressing educator preparation as well as certification and licensure, are reviewed in detail in the next section.



It is notable — and concerning — that student mental health, physical health, and nutrition were addressed by legislatures as frequently as policies related to teaching and teachers. Much of the legislation addressed expanding health services, access to medications, and free meal programs. Examples of legislation in this area include a bill in Massachusetts to expand a pilot program for K-12 schools and community behavioral health centers to provide services to students with urgent needs and a bill in Nebraska establishing a six-year pilot program to provide free school meals to students who qualify for reduced-price meals. The Nebraska bill and similar efforts elsewhere appear to be, at least in part, a reaction to cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and related federal programs enacted in the 2025 One Big Beautiful Bill.

The third most common topic of legislative activity was charter schools. Bills primarily address charter school funding, facilities, governance, and school choice policies, but many other aspects of charter school operations were also part of state legislation.

School choice was an active area for policymaking. In several cases, legislation addressed participation in the new federal tax credit scholarship program, with some states mandating participation and others prohibiting or establishing conditions for participation. Many other bills addressed vouchers and state tax credits, participation in public school extracurricular programs by homeschooled and other non-public school students, and various aspects of home schooling. For example, a Louisiana bill established a definition for parent-driven “micro-schools” and prohibited state and local agencies from requiring such schools to register or report to them.

Bills on curricula are of interest to educator preparation programs because they often influence program design. By 2025-26, most states had already passed bills related to literacy and the Science of Reading, so only a few states passed new requirements on this topic during the year studied. Notably, several states enacted bills requiring high schools to offer a course on financial literacy, and a few states mandated instruction on cursive handwriting. Finally, several states passed bills governing how schools address health topics in their curricula, including sex and drug use.

Lastly, it is not surprising that technology, cell phone and social media use, and artificial intelligence each made the top 10. Bills in the general technology category appropriated funds or set policies related to school technology. Bills on social media and cell phone use established or extended existing prohibitions. Bills on artificial intelligence typically set — or required state and/or local agencies to set — policies on acceptable and prohibited use of AI. However, some bills took a more supportive approach, mandating professional development for teachers on the use of artificial intelligence and inclusion of AI literacy in school curricula.



Top Teacher Workforce Issues

Topic	Number of Bills
Certification and Licensure	**37**
Conduct and Background Checks	10
New Licensure Types & Requirements	10
Alternative Pathways to Licensure	8
Special Pathways for CTE Teachers	5
Licensure without Preparation	3
Interstate Teacher Compact Adoption	2
Recruitment and Retention	**19**
Compensation	**16**
Educator Preparation	**14**
Professional Development	**10**

Certification and Licensure

Within the teacher workforce category, the largest number of bills addressed teacher certification or licensure. One of the most common types of bills within this area addressed requirements and penalties related to teacher ethics and conduct, especially regarding relationships with students. For example, a bill in Virginia would automatically revoke the teaching license of an individual convicted under the Sex Offender and Crimes Against Minors Registry Act. Several of the bills within this category tightened background check requirements.

Also popular within this category were bills adding or modifying licensure requirements and creating specialized licenses or endorsements. These bills most typically addressed math and special education. For example, a Georgia bill required the state's Professional Standards Commission to revise the elementary teacher requirements to include preparation on evidence-based math instruction. A Tennessee bill created a qualified dyslexia interventionist endorsement.

While 10 bills added to or modified licensure requirements, in 16 instances, bills reduced or eliminated licensure requirements or created new alternative pathways to licensure. Seven bills created new or expanded existing alternative pathways to licensure. For example, a Florida bill established a temporary certificate and alternative pathway to full licensure for military veterans. A Michigan bill created a new pathway for individuals to earn an interim teaching certificate and progress toward a full teaching certificate. Reacting to persistent shortages in career and technical education (CTE), five states eliminated requirements and/or created expedited pathways to licensure for prospective CTE teachers.

Perhaps of greatest concern, three states (Kentucky, West Virginia, and New Hampshire) set policies that enable individuals with no preparation to teach indefinitely without seeking any form of professional education in teaching. In Kentucky, designated "schools of innovation" are authorized to employ unlicensed individuals if these individuals do not exceed 25% of the school's faculty. A New Hampshire bill eliminates licensure requirements for part-time teachers. Finally, West Virginia has created an adjunct teaching license for individuals with at least four years of experience in the content area they intend to teach *or* a college degree in that field. It is notable that Oklahoma, which has a similar licensure type, enacted a bill in 2025-26 stating that individuals with these licenses may not teach core curriculum subjects in grades PK–5 and limiting the duration of these licenses to five years.

Despite all the state activity related to alternative pathways and licensure requirements, only two states enacted laws in 2025-26 adopting the Interstate Teacher Mobility Compact. This compact, which eases and expedites the process of gaining recognition for a teaching license issued by another state, was finalized in 2022 and has to date been enacted by only 15 states.

Recruitment and Retention

This set of bills pursued diverse strategies to improve teacher recruitment and retention. The most common strategy, included in 10 of the 24 bills, was to increase teachers' benefits. In some cases, bills expanded standard benefits for all teachers, such as a bill in Tennessee to increase the minimum amount of sick and personal leave that districts must provide teachers. Other bills targeted teachers in high-need specialties for specific support. Most notably, Alabama expanded its student loan repayment assistance program, which had been available to math and science teachers only, to include a broader array of educators in high-need specialties and communities and raised the amount of assistance available to $7,500 per year for four years, with an additional $3,000 per year for teachers working in a severe teacher shortage community. Alaska initiated a pilot program for student loan repayment assistance. Finally, a few bills provided support for teacher career advancement through Grow Your Own programs and support for teachers earning National Board certification. It is worth noting that not all of the bills in this category added or expanded programs; in a few cases, benefits or special programs were curtailed or phased out.

Compensation

Of the sixteen bills with provisions related to educator compensation,six legislated across-the-board increases in teacher pay and another three made changes to the salary schedule that would enable some or all teachers to qualify for higher pay more quickly. Missouri appropriated funds to increase full-time teacher salaries to a state-required minimum and Mississippi required districts to pay paraprofessionals a state minimum salary. Two states (Florida and Maine) authorized stipends for mentor teachers, while two others provided bonuses for special education teachers and for teachers who achieve National Board certification (Mississippi and Oklahoma). The most novel legislation on compensation came from Oklahoma, where the Teacher Effectiveness and Excellence Act established a Growth-Based Teacher Compensation pilot program. Under this program, teachers will receive supplemental compensation based on the measurable academic growth of their students.



Educator Preparation

As already noted, seven states passed legislation related to alternative pathways into teaching. Of these, four states (Florida, Indiana, Michigan, and Oklahoma) authorized new alternative pathways. For example, Oklahoma authorized alternative pathways programs run by public schools, regional service agencies, and not-for-profit organizations. Four states (Kentucky, New Mexico, Michigan, and Oklahoma) passed laws enacting new requirements for educator preparation programs related to the Science of Reading. Two states (Georgia and Washington) expanded or created performance measures for educator preparation programs.

Perhaps the most exciting legislation in this category relates to programs that provide support for teacher candidates. New Mexico made changes to its teacher residency program, requiring that the minimum stipend for teacher residents be no less than 65% of starting teacher salaries (and no less than 80% for residents who have already earned a bachelor's degree). California established the Student Teacher Stipend Program, which requires participating districts to provide stipends of $10,000 to teacher candidates during their clinical placement. Finally, Arizona expanded its Arizona Teacher Academy program to provide grants covering up to full tuition and fees for four years for undergraduate students at two- and four-year institutions as well as costs, such as exam fees, associated with obtaining licensure.

Professional Development

Reflecting prominent issues in current education policy, of the 10 states that passed bills related to educator professional development, three were focused on artificial intelligence and four on literacy. For example, as part of a broader bill on AI in education, Maryland required its state education agency to provide professional development to educators and school leaders.



Summary and Look Ahead

2025-26 was an active year in education policymaking, with legislatures addressing issues that have risen on the national agenda, such as student health and nutrition, technology, school choice, and teacher shortages along with perennial concerns such as school financing, postsecondary affordability, and school curricula.

Despite concerning trends for educator preparation, including the expansion of pathways into teaching that require little or no professional preparation, there were bright spots in several states related to teacher and teacher candidate compensation as well as expansion of financial aid so students can participate in high-quality preparation programs.

It is always difficult to predict the direction that policymaking will take, since legislators are often influenced by broader societal events and trends. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to predict that interest in topics such as artificial intelligence and social media will only grow. School choice will remain an active and contentious policy issue, especially as public schools in many communities absorb funding cuts due to reduced enrollment. In addition, increasingly active debates on the most effective methods of math instruction, coupled with disappointing results on the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) and state exams, suggest that we can expect more legislation addressing mathematics akin to what we have seen regarding literacy. Finally, as states grapple with the impact of cuts to federal programs on state budgets, we can expect heightened scrutiny of all education spending, including support for high-quality educator preparation.

These trends reinforce the need for educators at all levels to advocate on behalf of themselves, their students, and their institutions and programs. AACTE supports these efforts through its network of affiliated state associations, its federal advocacy, and an array of resources and professional learning experiences to help members hone their advocacy skills. To learn more, visit the Advocacy page on AACTE's website.