

NATIONAL NEWS

# Federal education policy update: How to prepare for FY27

By Dr. Dana Godek and Michael Moore May 6, 2025



The U.S. The Department of Education announced its senior leadership team last month. But this isn't business as usual. The newly appointed officials don't just represent a personnel change—they signal a strategic pivot in how federal education policy might be enforced, interpreted and communicated in the years ahead.



*For state leaders planning now for FY27, this matters.*

The new team includes professionals from the Department of Justice, Homeland Security, and the EPA, alongside veterans of state education agencies and national policy institutes. Taken together, their backgrounds suggest a department poised to emphasize legal oversight, workforce alignment and narrative-shaping—rather than sweeping new legislation or top-down regulation.

Federal dollars may still flow, but how they're governed, communicated, and steered toward outcomes is shifting. Below, we break down their backgrounds by category to help executive leaders anticipate changes:

## Legal lens on oversight and enforcement

Take Paul Moore, the new assistant general counsel and chief investigative counsel. Before joining the department, he led federal probes into foreign influence in higher education. In a 2023 congressional testimony, he emphasized the importance of transparency in foreign funding at U.S. universities:

*“The Department’s general initial findings included that Section 117 reporting had been generally underinclusive and inaccurate.”*

His appointment signals continued scrutiny over transparency and governance, particularly for colleges and universities. Expect tighter documentation and possible revisions to guidance language across multiple program areas.

Similarly, Deputy General Counsel Benjamin May brings a background in national security and litigation. For state leaders, this means compliance is likely to take on a sharper legal tone. Monitoring how guidance documents are written and enforced—especially around school safety, civil rights and data-sharing—will be critical in the coming fiscal years.



## Strategic push for workforce and learning innovation

Not every signal points to enforcement. The appointment of Sarah Wilson as deputy assistant secretary in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education offers a roadmap for opportunity. Wilson's prior work in Ohio included scaling high-dosage tutoring and preparing students for college and career pathways—two areas where states can expect favorable alignment and potential new flexibilities in how funds are used.

Similarly, Michael Brickman's return to the department, with a background in competency-based education and employer partnerships, suggests more attention to nontraditional credentialing, CTE expansion and links between high school learning and the labor market.

State teams that have struggled to braid federal funds for postsecondary and workforce preparation may find new traction—and potentially more latitude—in this environment.

## Strategic communications is the new compliance

Perhaps most telling is the appointment of Brandy Brown, formerly of the Department of Homeland Security and a strategic communications advisor in Washington. Her role as deputy assistant secretary for legislation and congressional affairs may be as much about storytelling as it is about policy.

Expect a push to shape public narratives around education—particularly in areas like parent engagement, school safety and student outcomes. This shift could create new expectations for how state leaders communicate their use of federal funds and justify programmatic decisions to the public.



## Moment of opportunity—and new norms

From a bipartisan lens, this reshuffling reflects a tension familiar to state leaders: the law itself may remain unchanged, but how it's applied, interpreted and messaged can vary greatly. And for those navigating competing political demands, fiscal pressure and urgent academic needs, this signals one thing clearly—start preparing now.

That doesn't mean panic or rewriting everything. It means reviewing your current federal program design through three lenses:

- **Legal defensibility:** Are your policies and implementation practices audit-ready
- **Workforce alignment:** If you aren't already, can your Title funds be braided with career pathways?
- **Narrative readiness:** Could you explain your program strategy—and its value—in two sentences to school districts and stakeholders?

## Albuquerque Public Schools: Planning with agility

Albuquerque Public Schools offers a compelling model for this moment. Rather than waiting for directives to change, the district has approached FY27 planning with elasticity and foresight. Their federal programs team, in collaboration with school-based leaders, has mapped multiple scenarios to ensure alignment regardless of shifts in Washington.

Albuquerque Public Schools is streamlining compliance procedures, investing in continuous improvement tools and embedding federal funds into broader strategic initiatives—like key investments in core instruction, high dosage tutoring and supportive communications with parents so they have more information on 'choice.'



But what sets them apart is communication: Albuquerque has made it a priority to help principals, families and cabinet leaders understand the “why” behind federal investments. The result? Fewer surprises. More trust. And a system ready to flex with future guidance changes.

“We’re not waiting for change—we’re planning for it. By collaborating across teams and streamlining processes, we’re ensuring every decision aligns with our broader vision. Through clear communication and strategic investments, we’re building a system of trust and flexibility that can adapt to whatever comes next,” Superintendent Gabriella Duran Blakey says.

## What state and district leaders can do now

Preparing for FY27 means more than projecting budgets or watching Capitol Hill. It’s about recalibrating your internal systems, guidance and relationships to match a shifting federal landscape.

Here are our top three actions for state and district leaders to take now to get ahead and bring others along:

### 1. Audit your assumptions

What federal expectations are you relying on that may soon change? Take a hard look at guidance documents, program designs and internal operating procedures. Ask your leadership teams and compliance officers: Are we preparing for what’s written—or for how it might be interpreted next year?

Build in time for policy reviews and scenario planning. Invite input from legal counsel, cross-program directors and school-based stakeholders who must ultimately operationalize those interpretations.

### 2. Explicitly connect to workforce goals



Now is the time to revisit your Perkins, Title I, and ESSER carryover strategies with postsecondary and employer outcomes in mind. Are you investing in interventions that support academic achievement and also reflect real-world relevance?

Engage your state's workforce boards, CTE directors and regional economic development leaders to strengthen alignment. Some states are even hosting joint planning sessions between LEAs, chambers of commerce and higher education partners to co-design workforce pathways. These aren't compliance exercises—they're opportunity accelerators.

### 3. Update your compliance story

Compliance isn't just about documentation—it's about clarity, credibility, and cohesion. Ask yourself: Can our documentation tell a clear, compelling narrative—not just check a box? What evidence do we have that our guidance to districts is timely, high-quality, and stakeholder-informed?

Now is the time to engage LEAs in two-way feedback cycles. Consider hosting virtual office hours, launching spring and summer policy roadshows or developing annotated guidance templates co-designed with districts. The goal is not to create more paperwork—but to equip schools with practical, aligned tools that build trust and reduce audit risk.

## New cornerstones in federal education policy

FY27 may feel far off, but the groundwork must begin now. The federal landscape is not just changing—it's maturing. Strategic oversight, public narrative and workforce relevance are not just talking points; they are becoming the new cornerstones of federal program success.

Leaders who prepare today, like those in Albuquerque, won't just comply. They will lead.



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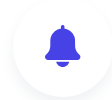
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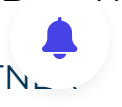
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