



Policy Shifts, Executive Orders and the Legal Landscape

What School Communicators Need to Know

Thursday, March 20, 2025



NSPRA K-12 Federal Policy Tracker: Key Changes Impacting Schools

*NSPRA's **Key Changes Impacting Schools Federal Policy Tracker** highlights federal policy changes that may impact school operations, funding and student rights. It outlines recent executive orders and policies and their dates, key provisions and links to related NSPRA resources. NSPRA staff will regularly update this tool to help members navigate policy changes and effectively support their school communities.*

As federal policies and executive orders continue to impact K-12 education, school communicators are facing heightened challenges in navigating legal, political and community dynamics. To help unpack these complexities, NSPRA spoke with Mark W. Cherie Walz, partner at **Sweet, Stevens, Katz & Williams LLP**, who specializes in education law and regularly advises school districts on legal compliance and risk management.

What's Really Changing – and What's Not

For school communicators, it's become increasingly important to separate perception from legal reality. While there is plenty of attention on federal policy shifts and executive orders, Walz explains that these developments do not automatically alter the foundational laws that school districts must follow.

"There's a disconnect between what people think the law is versus what the law actually is," Walz says. "Executive orders are guidance for the federal agencies. But statutes and regulations are law, and they haven't really changed. What we're seeing is shifts in how the current administration is interpreting guidance, but by and large, laws are staying the same."

That said, not all impacts are purely interpretive. One of the most immediate and visible challenges districts are facing is the reduction or elimination of certain federal funds. Walz notes that recent cuts, such as grants that previously supported local food procurement for school meal programs, are already affecting district budgets. "If money you expected isn't coming in, I absolutely recommend communicating that to your community," he says. "Whether that means adjusting food service or cutting funding from somewhere else, your community needs to know."

Rather than reacting to headlines or political chatter, communicators should focus their attention on understanding where the law itself stands—and where budget realities may require explaining difficult trade-offs.

Walz encourages school PR professionals to engage in ongoing conversations with legal counsel and leadership teams to ensure that messaging decisions are based on clear legal footing and are transparent about how changes will affect students and families.

Grounding Communications in Legal Realities

“Most of the statements schools have on their websites about discrimination and inclusion are there because they’re required to be,” Walz says. “Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on race, color and national origin, and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, which prohibits discrimination based on disability—those haven’t changed and are still law. Just because there’s talk at the federal level about pushing back on DEI efforts doesn’t mean you should start stripping language off your website related to what you’re legally obligated to comply with.”

On the topic of immigration enforcement, Walz explains that how a district handles communication is a local decision, but internal clarity is critical. “It’s key that your internal procedures are understood. If someone shows up with an arrest warrant or just wants to speak to someone, staff need to know how to respond,” he says. “Some districts may also decide it’s helpful to share those procedures with the community.”

When it comes to Title IX and protections for LGBTQ+ students, Walz encourages a steady approach. “Title IX procedures have shifted so frequently from one administration to the next,” he explains. “I don’t think you need a press release every time guidance changes, but it should always be clear on your website what the procedure is—how to file a complaint and who is protected.”

Staying Ahead of Misinformation and Legal Missteps

Walz says misinformation is one of the growing challenges districts should be prepared to counter. “There’s so much misinformation on social media, like ‘no more ESL classes’ or ‘no more IEPs for my child,’” he says. “If you experience this type of swell of misinformation in local Facebook groups or in public meetings, it may be in the district’s best interest to proactively communicate what you do provide—and what hasn’t changed.”

He also emphasizes that legal risk tends to fall on the side of non-compliance. “I believe schools are more likely to be sued for discrimination or failure to accommodate a student as required by law than they would be for doing too much,” Walz adds. “We’ve seen lawsuits go the other way, sure—but your greater risk is on the side of not complying with the law.”

Building Stronger Partnerships with Legal Counsel

Finally, Walz encourages school PR professionals to regularly engage with their legal teams. “Your PR strategy and your legal strategy aren’t always the same thing,” he notes. “School solicitors are there to make sure schools are doing what they’re supposed to do, even if that might lead to a public comment or a news story.”

He adds that while attorneys may be focused on when statutes or regulations change, communicators should also be asking how evolving federal guidance might affect district messaging. “Ask questions,” Walz says. “The answers can guide your communication to parents and community members to help them understand what is going on in their community and not live in fear that everything has changed.”