



# PROGRAM GUIDE

# Gala2025

Wednesday, September 10, 2025

6:00pm - 9:15pm

The National Press Club

Washington, DC





## Education Healthcare Public Services

On behalf of the 1.8 million members of the **AFT**, we are proud to support the **Committee for Education Funding** and its mission to provide a unified voice in support of increasing federal investment in education.

We stand with you as champions of **great schools and colleges** that fulfill the promise of public education, **good jobs** that support a middle-class life, **affordable healthcare** for all, the **fight against discrimination and hate**, and the **defense of democracy**.

The AFT is a union of professionals that champions fairness; democracy; economic opportunity; and high-quality public education, healthcare and public services for our students, their families and our communities. We are committed to advancing these principles through community engagement, organizing, collective bargaining and political activism, and especially through the work our members do.

Randi Weingarten  
PRESIDENT

Fedrick C. Ingram  
SECRETARY-TREASURER

Evelyn DeJesus  
EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

AFT, AFL-CIO | 555 New Jersey Ave. N.W. | Washington, DC 20001 | [www.aft.org](http://www.aft.org)



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# Gala2025

Wednesday, September 10th, 6:00-9:15pm

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## ~ Menu ~

### FIRST COURSE

#### Caprese Salad

*Fresh mozzarella and heirloom tomato Caprese salad, bibb lettuce and extra virgin olive oil (CONTAINS NUTS)*

Locally made Artisan Rolls and Butter

### ENTRÉE

#### Grilled Herb Marinated Chicken Breast

*Saffron scallion couscous, peppers and zucchini sauté*

**Vegan and Gluten-free Option** (available upon request):

*Eggplant Provençale, almonds and saffron rice, Romesco sauce, and lemon garlic artichokes*

### DESSERT

#### Passion Fruit Tart

Coffee, Decaf, Hot Tea

# CEF PRESIDENT MESSAGE

**Steve Voytek**

*Federal Policy Advisor*  
**Advance CTE**



Dear Friends and Colleagues:

Welcome to the Committee for Education Funding's Annual Gala. Each year, this event brings together advocates, policymakers, and champions throughout the education community to celebrate and recognize our shared commitment to strengthening federal investments needed for every learner to succeed.

We are gathered here tonight at a moment of profound challenge for education funding. From withheld funding of already enacted investments to looming threats of new rescissions and proposals that would roll back funding to levels not seen in more than a decade, our field faces unprecedented strain. The wider uncertainty that has characterized much of this year adds yet another layer of complexity to our work. Though federal education dollars represent a small fraction of the overall budget they remain indispensable to our students, our educators, and our future as a nation.

As we acknowledge these enormous headwinds, we must also recognize what surrounds us tonight—a room filled with colleagues and allies who understand that every federal dollar for education is a direct investment in our democracy, our workforce, and our shared prosperity. This gathering itself is cause for hope. As a coalition of more than 110 organizations spanning the full education continuum, CEF has never been more united, more determined, or more essential to the cause we serve.

Tonight, we honor those who embody this commitment to students and learning. This evening is a celebration of you—our members and other tireless advocates—whose dedication makes CEF an indispensable voice for federal education funding. We also extend our deep gratitude to our gala sponsors and the ACG Advocacy staff who have made this evening possible, creating this vital opportunity to remind ourselves why we do this work each and every day. In this room, we see proof that even in difficult times, uniting around shared values enables us to work towards a common purpose.

So let us celebrate this evening but let us also leave renewed in our collective mission. The road ahead will not be easy and it will demand our best efforts, but it is one that we travel together as a community—and that makes all the difference.

With gratitude and resolve,

Steve Voytek  
President, Committee for Education Funding



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# Gala2025

## ~ Tonight's Program ~

RECEPTION - 6:00PM-7:30PM

BANQUET - 7:30PM-9:15PM

WELCOME

Sarah Abernathy, CEF Executive Director

DINNER

REMARKS

Steve Voytek, CEF President

GUEST SPEAKERS

Lisa Wells Harris, Sligo Law Group and  
former Department of Education attorney

Sophie Rodosky, Georgetown University Student  
Missy Testerman, 2024 National Teacher of the Year

CONCLUDING REMARKS

# Gala2025

## “STRAIGHT A’S” & STAR STUDENT SPONSORS

### “STRAIGHT A” SPONSOR



*A Union of Professionals*

### STAR STUDENT SPONSORS



# ABOUT CEF

The [Committee for Education Funding \(CEF\)](#) is the nation's oldest and largest education coalition, a non-partisan, non-profit organization whose core mission is to increase federal funding for all education programs to ensure our students' success.

CEF has 118 members representing the continuum of education — early childhood education, elementary and secondary education, higher education, adult and workforce education, and out-of-school educational services such as libraries, museums, research, and afterschool programs. Members include students and families, teachers and faculty, administrators, specialized instructional support personnel and other school employees, school board members, librarians, and education-related organizations.

Federal education funding has been cut this year despite growing needs. Congress has cut the level of appropriations provided for the last two years and this summer enacted steep cuts to student loans and to other programs that support students and families. Administration actions have dramatically reduced Education and other federal agency employees, services, and funding for programs at schools, universities, libraries, museums, and more. Congress has yet to pass legislation funding education programs for next year but the options include the president's request to cut more than \$12 billion (15%) from the Department of Education while the Senate Appropriations Committee's bipartisan bill cuts Education funding just a bit below the level enacted for this year and the previous year.

CEF continues to make the case to Congress and the Administration that federal support for education is among the best investments the government can make. CEF meets with congressional offices, writes [letters](#), publishes our annual [education budget book](#), convenes [briefings](#), and shares information on [education funding](#). This July on the [#CEFHillDay](#), CEF members met in person and in virtual meetings with 49 congressional offices. CEF is exploring new approaches to reach more people and make it easier for them to tell leaders why education funding matters, including a [“Don't Flunk the Future campaign”](#) and a [paid media campaign](#), a [#HearOurEdStories social media toolkit](#) and sharing information on LinkedIn, among others activities. This year, CEF has held briefings for congressional staff and the education community on the [president's 2026 education budget, what's at stake when we underfund education](#), and a Capitol Hill briefing on the importance and value of federal investments in education. We have another briefing scheduled for mid-September on federal education changes so far this year, and on the damage of delaying federal education funding.

## How you can be involved.

Join CEF and our members in supporting increased investments in education! CEF's website ([www.cef.org](http://www.cef.org)) has information on congressional funding action and how to share your views with Congress. Please follow our advocacy and informational resources at @edfunding on [X](#) and [Instagram](#), on [LinkedIn](#), and at Cmte4edfunding on [Facebook](#).





# GUEST SPEAKER

## Lisa Wells Harris

### Attorney

*Formerly with the Department of Education Office of General Counsel*



Lisa Wells Harris has dedicated her career to federal education and administrative law. Over the past three decades, she served as an attorney in the Office of General Counsel at the U.S. Department of Education providing statutory and regulatory interpretation to support policy development and implementation. She focused on grantee compliance and also handled administrative appeals, drafted regulations and guidance documents, served on an interagency team engaged in joint administration of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and coordinated a team of attorneys working to collaboratively resolve investigations into the reporting of foreign gifts and contracts under Section 117 of the Higher Education Act.

Ms. Harris advised Department officials and staff in the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education and the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education on a wide range of formula and discretionary grant programs. These included Title IV, Part A of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act; supporting school-based mental health services; literacy programs for children and youth; COVID-19 and disaster relief programs; programs to help school districts and institutions of higher education recover from traumatic or violent events that disrupted the learning environment; and other school and student safety programs.

She is now with Sligo Law Group, PLLC, a firm of former U.S. Department of Education attorneys with decades of experience, who support clients by offering comprehensive, creative, and efficient legal guidance and advocacy tailored to the evolving needs of the education sector.



# GUEST SPEAKER

## Sophie Rodosky

### PhD Student



Sophie Rodosky is a third-year graduate student pursuing a PhD in Human Development and Public Policy at Georgetown University. She is interested in harnessing child development research to make early childhood education programs and policies more inclusive and effective for children of all backgrounds and abilities.

Prior to coming to Georgetown, Ms. Rodosky taught K-6 special education in Chicago public charter schools primarily serving students from low-income communities of color. This experience deeply informs her research and commitment to promoting educational equity through evidence-based policy.

In addition to her studies, Ms. Rodosky is currently a graduate research assistant at Georgetown's Context, Development & Social Policy Lab. She has also served as a part-time tutor and academic support teacher at Capital City Public Charter School in DC and this fall will begin teaching a preschool class through the Northern Virginia nonprofit All Ages Read Together.

She recently earned her M.P.P. from the Georgetown McCourt School of Public Policy. She previously earned her M.A. in Special Education from the Relay Graduate School of Education with generous funding from AmeriCorps, and her B.S. in Education & Social Policy from Northwestern University. She is also a proud graduate of K-12 public schools in her hometown of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.



# GUEST SPEAKER



## Missy Testerman

### 2024 National Teacher of the Year

Missy Testerman served as a first and second grade teacher in Rogersville, Tennessee, for three decades before taking advantage of the state's Grown Your Own initiative and adding an ESL endorsement three years ago. She then worked as the ESL specialist and program director at her school, a PreK-8th district where she also coordinated the system's summer programs and served on the district leadership team. She was considered to be a staunch advocate for her students, their families, and her fellow teachers.

Ms. Testerman prioritizes instruction that ensures her students have the skills and knowledge necessary to achieve. As a Tennessee native and first-generation college graduate who takes great pride in seeing her former students succeed in life, she considers her greatest contributions to her profession to be the love and desire for learning that she has instilled in countless students over the past 30 years.

Ms. Testerman used her year of service as National Teacher of the Year to empower teachers to advocate for students and fellow educators by using their voices and sharing their experiences with those outside the classroom. She believes strongly in teachers embracing their role as education experts to inform decision-makers of today's classroom experiences to meet all students' needs.

*The National Teacher of the Year Program (NTOY) is the nation's most prestigious teacher recognition program, annually honoring a single, exceptional educator from a cohort of state Teachers of the Year. Sponsored by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the program provides the selected National Teacher of the Year with a year of professional development and serves as an ambassador and advocate for the teaching profession, speaking at events nationwide and working to promote excellence in education.*



# 2025 CEF LEADERSHIP

## 2025 Gala Committee

### Co-Chairs

**Kuna Tavalin**

*Council for Exceptional Children/Stride Policy Solutions*

**Zach Curtis**

*National Board for Professional Teaching Standards*

## 2025 CEF Board of Directors

### President

**Steve Voytek**

*Advance CTE*

### Vice President

**Frank Ballmann**

*National Association of State Student Grant and Aid Programs*

### Treasurer

**Nicole Fuller**

*National Center for Learning Disabilities*

### Past President

**Emily Crawford**

*Vectis DC*

*NOTE: 2025 Board Members continued on next page*



# 2025 CEF LEADERSHIP

## 2025 CEF Board Members, continued

### Directors

**Sarah Cohen**

*American Federation of Teachers*

**Zach Curtis**

*National Board for Professional Teaching Standards*

**David Griffith**

*National Association of Elementary School Principals*

**Becky Levin**

*American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees*

**Kevin Maher**

*American Library Association*

**Tiffany Miller**

*Learning Policy Institute*

**Kenneth Polishchuk**

*American Psychological Association Services*

**Rachel Rotunda**

*National Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators*

**Stephanie Salvador**

*National Education Association*

**LaKeisha Steele**

*CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning*

**Tara Thomas**

*AASA, the School Superintendents Association*

**John Patrick Walsh**

*American Association of State Colleges and Universities*



# CEF STAFF

## Executive Director

**Sarah Abernathy**

## Senior Advisor

**Sheryl Cohen**

## Staff

**Jamie Panarites**

**Robin Weiner**

For more information about CEF's [members](#), [advocacy](#) efforts, research on the importance and impact of education investments, and [charts and data](#) on current federal funding, please visit [CEF's website](#) or follow CEF at @edfunding on [X](#) and [Instagram](#), and at Cmte4edfunding on [Facebook](#) or on [LinkedIn](#).



NAICU and the nation’s private, nonprofit colleges and universities salute all those who lend their voice in support of increasing the federal investment in education.

Your commitment and dedication help support the educational goals of millions of students each year.

*Thank you!*



National Association of Independent  
Colleges and Universities  
[www.NAICU.edu](http://www.NAICU.edu)



**With heartfelt thanks to all educators, students,  
and the entire education ecosystem that has  
worked tirelessly to support education funding!**





ACG IS PROUD TO SUPPORT  
INCREASED FEDERAL FUNDING  
ACROSS THE EDUCATION  
CONTINUUM.

## CONTACT US

(202) 327-8100

507 CAPITOL COURT NE  
WASHINGTON, DC 20002

1800 M STREET NW  
SUITE 510 N.  
WASHINGTON, DC 20036



The American Council on Education is proud to be a sponsor of this year's Committee for Education Funding (CEF) Gala. As a founding member of CEF, we support increased investments in education that enable our current and future students to access and complete their postsecondary education.

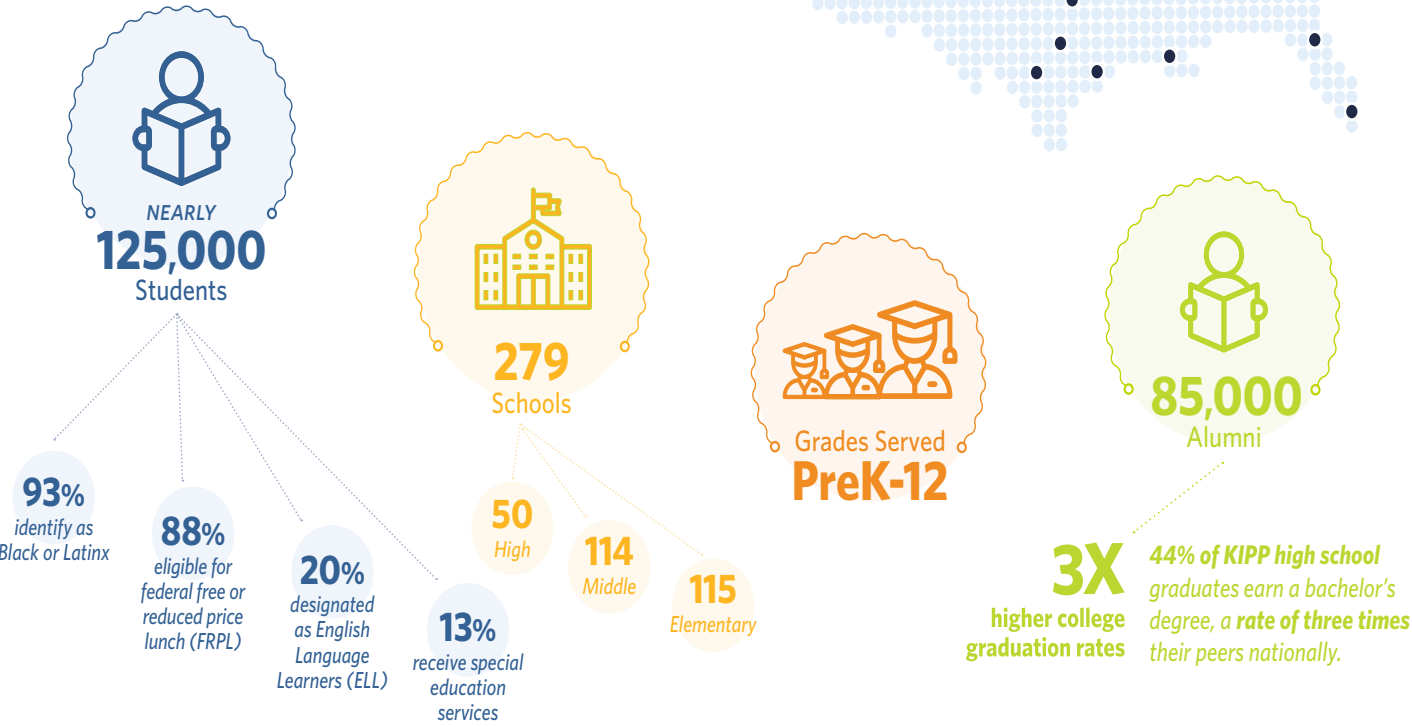
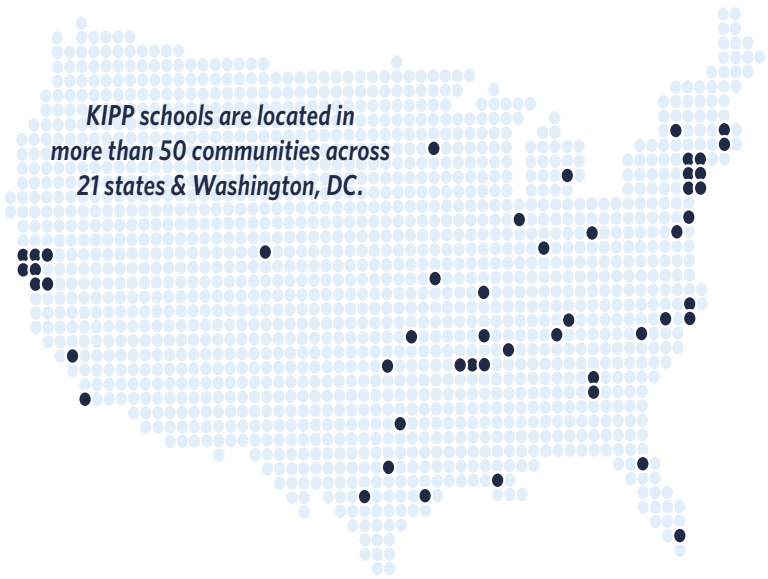




KIPP:Public Schools

TOGETHER, A FUTURE WITHOUT LIMITS

KIPP Public Schools is a national network of public charter schools that prepares students with the skills and confidence to create the future they want for themselves, their communities, and us all.



OUR PROMISE

Affirmation

We see each student as an individual, matching what sparks their curiosity with what and how we teach.

Joyful Excellence

We challenge our students' minds while nurturing their joy of learning.

Optimism

Together, we are working toward a just world with no limits, and it starts at our school.

Community

We join together with families and communities, partnering to pursue the more just world we all want to see.

Collective Power

Together, our students are lighting ever-wider paths to opportunity and change. For themselves. For all those who will follow them. And for us all.

GOAL 2040

SEE OUR VISION

By 2040, 75 percent of adults in the U.S. labor force will have college degrees or other credentials of value leading to economic prosperity.



STRIDE POLICY SOLUTIONS

Is honored to join with CEF in the fight for education funding.



Developing creative solutions that strengthen the education and well-being of children, adults, and families.



# TONIGHT, WE CELEBRATE

*the educators, students, and advocates  
whose unwavering dedication to education  
funding lights the path to a brighter  
future for all learners.*

[www.bosepublicaffairs.com](http://www.bosepublicaffairs.com)



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consulting firm that  
helps mission driven  
organizations achieve  
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**Aplifying Voices of Impact**

**Collaborating for Good**

**Empowering Changemakers**

[alliedforprogress.com](http://alliedforprogress.com)

[info@alliedforprogress.com](mailto:info@alliedforprogress.com)

A photograph of four students smiling. From left to right: a young woman with curly hair wearing a white Loyola t-shirt, a young woman with dark hair wearing a blue t-shirt with "REGIS" on it, a young man with long hair wearing a grey sweatshirt with "Loyola University" and "New Orleans" on it, and a young woman with dark hair wearing a white t-shirt with "Saint Ignace" on it.

The logo for the Association of Jesuit Colleges & Universities (AJCU). It features a shield with a sunburst design and the letters "IHS" in the center. Below the shield is a box containing the letters "AJCU".

Association  
of **Jesuit**  
Colleges &  
Universities

*"For a Jesuit university, accompanying the young means forming students in hope,  
helping them to believe that a more just, peaceful, and sustainable world is possible,  
and encouraging them to play their role in building it."*

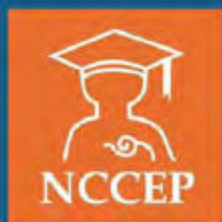
*Rev. Arturo Sosa, S.J., Superior General of the Society of Jesus*

**The Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities thanks the  
Committee for Education Funding for advocating on behalf of our nation's students.**



For more than 25 years, GEAR UP's success has been fueled by opportunity, determination, and those who believe in brighter futures for every student. To our fellow education advocates: **thank you!** You've helped millions of dreams take flight.

Let's keep moving forward together.



National Council for Community and Education Partnerships



Council of  
Administrators  
of Special Education

**Education is the foundation  
of possibility –  
when we lift up learners,  
we lift up communities!**

**CELEBRATING 50 YEARS**

**Individuals  
with Disabilities  
Education Act**

**IDEA**

**1975-2025**







# THANK YOU TO ALL EDUCATORS

WHO DEVOTE THEIR LIVES TO MAKING SURE EVERY CHILD HAS  
THE EDUCATION AND SUPPORT THEY NEED TO THRIVE—  
NO MATTER WHERE THEY ARE OR WHICH PATH THEY PURSUE.



## The Association of Latino Administrators & Superintendents



*Education funding is critical to supporting all  
students, including Latino and other historically  
marginalized students. We thank you for your  
advocacy and commitment to helping ALL  
students thrive.*

[www.alasedu.org](http://www.alasedu.org)

## Thank you CEF, Educators, and School Advocates!

AFSA, NAESP, and NASSP are proud to be  
CEF members and part of the largest and  
oldest national coalition advocating for  
increased federal investments in  
education.

Join us in celebrating outstanding school  
leaders during **National Principals Month**  
this October.

Visit [principalsmonth.org](http://principalsmonth.org).



#ThankPrincipal



# CONGRATULATIONS

FROM THE 1.4 MILLION MEMBERS OF

# AFSCME



BILLIONAIRES:  
BACK OFF!

BILLIONAIRES:  
BACK OFF!

#172-25 (AFSCME)

**Practical counsel.  
Strategic policy and  
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results.**

Partnering with leaders to  
strengthen public education

**FORESIGHT LAW+POLICY**

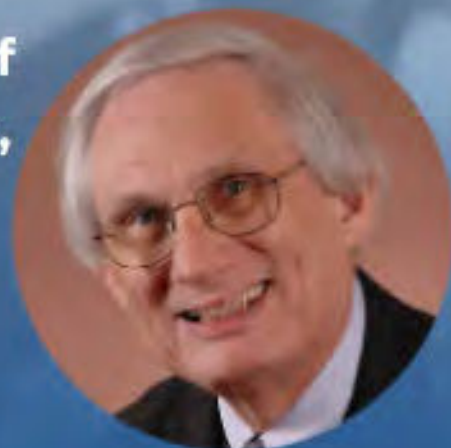


**National Association  
of Federally Impacted Schools**



**NAFIS congratulates CEF on its continued leadership in  
advancing federal investments in education.**

**As NAFIS commemorates the 75th anniversary of  
Impact Aid, we honor the late John Forkenbrock,  
who served as NAFIS Executive Director (1988-  
2015) and CEF President (1995), for his lasting  
contributions to federal education policy.**



[nafisdc.org](http://nafisdc.org)







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