



United States Department of the Treasury
Office of Consumer Policy
1500 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20220

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To whom it may concern:

The [National Endowment for Financial Education](#) (NEFE), which has long championed effective financial education, is pleased to provide input to inform the interagency Financial Literacy and Education Commission (FLEC) review of the U.S. National Strategy for Financial Literacy (National Strategy) (Docket number TREAS-DO-2026-0001).

NEFE has been leading in financial education for over 30 years, and we are a nonprofit foundation, entirely independent, noncommercial and nonpartisan. As a prominent research organization, we focus on quality interventions and using data to [make the case for financial education](#) and support broader economic well-being initiatives. By leading and encouraging best practices and knowledge sharing, we are committed to improving the effectiveness of financial education and raising awareness of the other factors affecting financial well-being for all Americans. NEFE has served on the [President's Advisory Council on Financial Literacy](#) under President George W. Bush and both the [President's Advisory Council on Financial Capability](#) and the [President's Advisory Council on Financial Capability for Young Americans](#) under President Barack Obama, and has been proud to participate in, and support the work of, FLEC since its inception in 2003. Through this public comment, we hope to provide FLEC with important context and perspective on the state of financial education and financial well-being in the United States, as well as offer specific recommendations for the federal government as it supports and improves financial literacy and education efforts nationwide. Our response focuses primarily on issues impacting K-12 and postsecondary education, reflecting our current research and policy priorities.

The Importance of Financial Education

A [December 2025 national poll](#) conducted by NEFE found that 88% of U.S. adults felt some form of financial stress as they began the new year and 77% reported experiencing a financial setback in 2025. Both results are among the highest percentages seen throughout polling NEFE has conducted on financial well-being over the past several years. The same poll found 38% of American adults view the quality of their financial life as “worse than expected.” These data reflect the reality that Americans continue to face significant financial challenges even after the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the rapid evolution of cryptocurrency, prediction markets and sports betting, new types of scams and fraud (especially those targeting [older Americans, servicemembers and veterans](#)), artificial intelligence and other tools and products have made it far more difficult for individuals to understand and navigate financial systems. In this challenging environment, consumers need help finding, understanding and acting upon trustworthy financial information and guidance.

The [2020 National Strategy](#) draws an important distinction between financial *literacy* and financial *education*, noting that financial literacy “describes the skills, knowledge and tools that equip people to make individual financial decisions,” while financial education “is the process by which people gain

information, skills, confidence and motivation to act.” NEFE agrees with this distinction and believes it is important to emphasize the role of financial education in empowering individuals to successfully understand and make decisions about their financial well-being. NEFE’s [Personal Finance Ecosystem](#) (PFE), a framework developed to assist policymakers, researchers and other stakeholders, helps to place financial education in the broader context of individual and systemic factors that influence a person’s financial journey. The PFE demonstrates how a range of variables, including foundational factors such as access to financial services and products, as well as individual experiences and values, work together to determine a person’s definition of, and ability to pursue, financial well-being. Research conducted by NEFE and our partners illustrates the ways the PFE factors can vary across groups and individuals, including [indigenous populations](#), [rural communities](#) and Americans who have [experienced financial trauma](#), to name a few. Finally, the PFE highlights the importance of *continuous* financial education throughout an individual’s life as other factors change.

Financial Education Momentum is Building

Public opinion and policy momentum demonstrate a nationwide agreement about the importance of investing in financial education. Over eight in 10 (83%) U.S. adults say that their state should require a semester-long or year-long course focused on personal finance education for high school graduation, and 82% whose high schools did not offer such a course say they wish they had been required to take one in order to graduate, according to [polling conducted by NEFE in March 2025](#). These results were consistent across party lines, with 84% of Republicans, 83% of Democrats and 85% of independents expressing support for a state-level financial education requirement. A [separate 2025 NEFE poll](#) found that younger adults (aged 18 to 49 years old), Black adults, Hispanic adults, parents of K-12 students and those with household incomes under \$50k are more likely than their demographic counterparts to believe the quality of their financial life would be better had they received financial education in school. Finally, [NEFE found](#) that 25% of people in multigenerational households who took financial education in secondary school and found it useful report a quality of financial life that is better than they expected, compared to 11% of those who did not take financial education in secondary school.

Research indicates that requiring a minimum of one semester of financial education content—specifically as a one-semester standalone course—is the most effective way to deliver this instruction to high school students, and that doing so does not significantly increase district spending or staffing needs (Wright et al., 2025; Urban, 2020; Urban, 2025). The [Next Gen Personal Finance](#) Annual Report highlights how requiring personal finance increases access and uptake among students across racial and socioeconomic lines, and findings from the [Jump\\$tart Coalition for Personal Financial Literacy](#) (Jump\$tart Coalition) capture how preparing educators to offer financial education can improve their own financial well-being. Taken together, these findings help to articulate the value and importance of financial education in the K-12 educational system. And forthcoming research from NEFE captures the positive economic impact these financial education policies can have on broader communities.

In response to the data and public demand, as of March 2026, 30 states have enacted policies requiring high school students to take a personal finance course prior to graduation, up from just five states in 2020. In every case, these policies were adopted with overwhelming bipartisan support. As a result, the [Champlain College Center for Financial Literacy](#) reports that more than 11 million students, representing more than 70% of high school students in the United States, will benefit from financial education instruction by 2031.

While adoption of these policies is an important step forward, the U.S. must make a meaningful effort to develop and strengthen the infrastructure needed to deliver effective financial education to those who need it. A [2025 NEFE white paper](#) emphasizes the importance of equipping teachers to offer personal finance, and Champlain College estimates that states will need more than 30,000 well-trained teachers to successfully implement new high school graduation requirements (a number that is expected to grow as more states adopt financial education requirements over the coming years). Yet, according to a recent RAND study, teachers report being unprepared to deliver this mandated content (Mulhern et al., 2024). Adding to this challenge is the lack of a nationally agreed-upon set of standards or delivery system for teacher training in personal finance instruction. And while many states are aligning their academic standards with the [National Standards for Personal Financial Education](#), which were updated by the Jump\$tart Coalition and the Council for Economic Education (in partnership with NEFE) in 2021, few are conducting meaningful evaluation of their programs. Investment in the underlying systems that support financial education delivery, and continued research and evaluation to measure impact and understand outcomes, is critical to the long-term success of the field.

NEFE is encouraged by the progress being made nationwide to ensure all K-12 students receive effective financial education and advocates for similar momentum for efforts in postsecondary education and the workforce. Studies and polls conducted by the [FINRA Foundation](#), the [Federal Reserve](#), NEFE and many others offer ample evidence that U.S. adults need more support as they manage financial challenges and pursue meaningful economic opportunities. Of particular concern to NEFE are the nearly 43 million federal student loan borrowers holding more than \$1.7 trillion in debt, millions of whom are at risk of delinquency and default in the coming years, according to the [Congressional Research Service](#). We hope investments by the federal government continue, in partnership with states and the financial education field, to support and advocate for the financial well-being of U.S. youths and adults alike.

NEFE Recommendations

Questions 3-4 of the U.S. Treasury's request for information seek input on the role of FLEC in supporting financial education, and opportunities for federal engagement with the broader financial education field to further our collective goals. NEFE believes the federal government plays two critical roles in the financial education movement:

- First, as noted in the 2020 National Strategy, the federal government supports the broader financial education field “through policy development, research coordination, and focused program and resource development.” This includes: targeted investments in areas of critical need for the field through grant programs and funding to state, tribal and local governments, the private sector, local service providers and community organizations, research conducted by federal agencies and their partners to evaluate and understand effective financial education practices, and broader federal policy improvements impacting other factors within the Personal Finance Ecosystem such as financial services access and inclusion.
- Second, the federal government provides direct financial education to consumers through a host of individual programs, including direct consumer education regarding Trump/530A Accounts, Federal Student Aid borrower education efforts, Housing and Urban Development homebuyer counseling initiatives, Department of Defense programming for new and transitioning servicemembers, and many others captured in the FLEC annual reports to

Congress. These programs offer FLEC member agencies an opportunity to test, enhance and role model effective financial education delivery for the broader field.

Questions 1(a)-(c) seek input on the priority areas to be included in the forthcoming National Strategy. NEFE encourages FLEC to maintain the existing five priority areas while focusing each more explicitly on supporting the creation and expansion of the infrastructure needed to deliver effective financial education at scale. A non-exhaustive list of impactful adjustments FLEC can make to the National Strategy includes:

- The Basic Financial Capability priority area addresses “basic money management and financial skills” with an emphasis on financial inclusion and youth financial capability. FLEC can further these goals with targeted support for state-level efforts to adopt and implement K-12 personal finance standards and graduation requirements. This includes identifying federal strategies and resources to expand and improve teacher professional development, partnering with states to drive adoption of effective standards and curricula, and maintaining support for research and evaluation into program effectiveness and outcomes. NEFE's [white papers outlining effective strategies for state-level implementation of K-12 requirements](#) can serve as a helpful resource for federal agencies engaged in this work.
- The Postsecondary Education priority area calls on FLEC members to “[improve student and family] understanding of options for paying for postsecondary education, including student loans.” Considering changes enacted as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, FLEC should prioritize a sustained effort to provide timely education to new and existing borrowers as they navigate new repayment options and other rules being implemented through the complex student loan system. This includes ensuring prospective borrowers receive critical education before they choose to enroll in a postsecondary program and providing existing borrowers with the necessary support at key milestones throughout their repayment journey.

Questions 2(a)-(c) seek input on the eight best practices for financial education programs included in the 2020 National Strategy. NEFE encourages FLEC to ensure alignment between the National Strategy and the updated [NEFE Five Key Factors for Effective Financial Education](#) (Factors), which provide policymakers and practitioners with clear guidance on building and delivering financial education programming that reflects the unique needs and circumstances of every learner. The Factors emphasize the importance of ensuring every financial education opportunity includes:

1. Qualified Instructional Guidance
2. Validated Educational Materials
3. Appropriately Timed Instruction
4. Relevant Subject Matter
5. Impact Evaluation

Questions 5-7 seek input on research, best practices or other information regarding program evaluation that might be relevant to the National Strategy. NEFE’s review of the literature on impact evaluation not only reveals the positive effect of financial education on financial behaviors, but also that those effects may be more durable when evaluation efforts include rigorous designs, objective behavioral outcomes and longer follow-up (Kaiser & Menkhoff, 2017; Kaiser et al., 2022). High-quality evaluation of financial education programs has also captured the differences in impact by income level, age and other factors, especially when those programs are offered in ways that don’t meaningfully connect with an

individual's circumstances (Carlson & Eadens, 2023; Miller et al., 2015; Carpena et al., 2019; Harvey, 2019). Ensuring the inclusion of high-quality evaluation in financial education programs involves understanding whether they are serving people as intended. The [NEFE Financial Education Evaluation Toolkit](#), which we will update as part of our 2026-2028 strategic plan, is a useful resource for FLEC and other stakeholders in this effort.

Beyond evaluation of the effectiveness of individual programs on financial well-being, it is important to note the lack of evidence-based tools for *systemic* change (Gates & Vidueira, 2025). A holistic strategy for providing value to Americans through financial education requires a deep understanding of how individual programs and policies are shaped, influenced and constrained by the broader systems through which they are offered, as well as how to avoid any unintentional harm they might cause.

The 2020 National Strategy appropriately identifies evaluation as an area for increased focus and investment by FLEC and the broader field, noting the U.S. Treasury's [2019 finding](#) that "performance and outcome data have not been used systematically to assess the effectiveness of federal activities." The [FY2025 Strategy for Assuring Financial Empowerment \(SAFE\) Report](#) identified several federal agencies that have embedded impact measurement into their programs, including Federal Student Aid, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, as well as efforts by the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) and the Department of Defense to develop and validate effective measures of success for financial education programs.

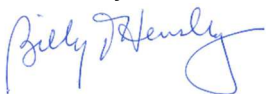
FLEC should continue to coordinate member agency activities through the updated National Strategy to ensure they conduct individual program evaluations and to maintain support for the federal role in research on effective financial education for all Americans. The federal government should also seek ways to improve resources and infrastructure for researchers, practitioners and policymakers to facilitate cross-sector collaboration and address this crucial gap. This includes, but is not limited to, sustained investment in existing federal research efforts, such as those conducted by the CFPB, alongside support for the broader research field.

Next Steps

The National Endowment for Financial Education is thrilled by the progress being made to improve the financial well-being of all Americans and grateful for the sustained support for this work by FLEC and its member agencies. Looking ahead to the next National Strategy on Financial Literacy, we encourage FLEC to consider how to target the federal government's resources, expertise and attention toward the most critical areas of need in the field.

As always, NEFE stands ready to partner with FLEC to ensure the success of the National Strategy and welcomes the opportunity to share more about the research and resources cited above. For more information, please contact me at bjh@nefe.org or reach out to NEFE's Managing Director of Policy and Advocacy, Taylor Stanek, at tstanek@nefe.org.

Sincerely,



Billy Hensley, Ph.D.
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