



## A Unified Voice for Youth Entrepreneurship: National Coalition Takes to Capitol Hill



Collective action turns ideas into impact. That spirit powered the April 2025 visit to Capitol Hill by a national coalition of youth entrepreneurship organizations. The Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE), along with BUILD.org, NAF, the CAPS Network, Project Lead the Way, The Possible Zone, and Virtual Enterprises International Inc. came together in Washington, D.C. to advocate for the inclusion of entrepreneurship education into federal education and workforce policy. Collectively, the coalition reaches over 2.8 million students nationwide, representing diverse geographies, lived experiences, and career aspirations. The coalition was joined by American Student Assistance® (ASA), a national leader in youth career readiness and a key supporter of many coalition members, further amplifying the collective call for action.



Meeting with members of Congress and staff from both parties, the coalition made a compelling case for deeper investment in work-based and skills-based learning. Their shared message: entrepreneurship education is a vital strategy for preparing young people to thrive in the future economy, and it should be a standard part of the American education system.

**Pictured from left to right: Gus Halwani (Chief Innovation Officer, The Possible Zone), Corey Mohn (President & Executive Director, CAPS Network), Thais Rezende (President & Interim CEO, BUILD), Lisa Dughi (CEO, NAF), Dr. J.D. LaRock (President & CEO, NFTE), Liz Texeira (VP of Social Impact, American Student Assistance), and Tom Smith (President & CEO, Virtual Enterprises, Inc.).**

### Coalition Members



#### About NFTE

The Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE) is a global education nonprofit that empowers partners to integrate entrepreneurial education across curricula and equips youth in under-resourced communities with the skills, connections, credentials, and real-world experiences needed to lead change and own their futures. Since 1987, NFTE has reached more than a million learners worldwide.

# Bringing Youth Entrepreneurship to the Forefront of Federal Policy

Over two action-packed days in Washington, D.C., the coalition delivered a clear vision for youth entrepreneurship to Capitol Hill, starting with a Congressional briefing and followed by a series of meetings with bipartisan lawmakers and staff across both chambers.

“It is clear that students and parents are looking for new ideas when it comes to American education,” said Dr. J.D. LaRock, President and CEO of NFTE. “They’re calling for learning that’s relevant, practical, and tied to the ability to make a good living and live a fulfilling life. We know from our collective experience that entrepreneurship education achieves all these things. That’s why it must be a strong federal priority.”

The visit began with a powerful briefing featuring coalition leaders and supporting voices, including Darius Davie, a NFTE alum and CEO of Groom Guys, and Thomas Penny, President of Donohoe Hospitality Services and NAF Board Member. Their stories illustrated the real-world impact of entrepreneurship education. The event drew 25 attendees, including Congressional staffers, advocates and education reporters, and set the tone for two days of energized advocacy.

From there, the coalition met with staff from the offices of:

- Rep. Jasmine Crockett (TX)
- Rep. John Mannion (NY)
- Rep. André Carson (IN)
- Rep. Claudia Tenney (NY)
- Rep. Bobby Scott (VA)
- Sen. Bill Cassidy (LA)
- Sen. Andy Kim (NJ)
- Sen. Lisa Blunt Rochester (DE)

At each stop, the coalition shared its collective priorities and underscored how entrepreneurship education builds the adaptive skills, confidence, and career readiness young people need to thrive in today’s workforce.



**The two-day trip in Washington, D.C. started with a briefing hosted by the coalition.**

In every meeting, the coalition elevated three core recommendations for federal policy:

- Continue funding for Career and Technical Education (CTE): Hold steady the Perkins Basic State Grant to provide high-quality CTE programs that integrate entrepreneurship and work-based learning.
- Reauthorize the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA): Update the legislation to include “entrepreneurial skills development programs” and recognize “fundamental workforce readiness skills” as eligible components of youth workforce programs.
- Expand Pell Grant eligibility to short-term credentials: Enable more students to access fast, flexible, and workforce-aligned educational opportunities that prepare them for immediate career pathways.

This two-day visit showcased the strength of collective advocacy, the urgency of modernizing education policy, and the growing momentum behind a simple yet powerful idea: entrepreneurship education belongs in every student’s learning journey.



# Advancing Entrepreneurship Education: What We Learned in Washington

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The coalition's visit to Capitol Hill came at a pivotal moment, when conversations about the future of education and workforce readiness are gaining new urgency. Over two days of briefings and meetings with Congressional leaders, coalition members shared a powerful case for why youth entrepreneurship matters. Across discussions with policymakers and allies, several key themes consistently rose to the surface—offering insight into the growing momentum behind entrepreneurship education as a national priority.

## One Coalition, Many Voices, Shared Purpose

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This was the first time all seven coalition partners convened in Washington, D.C., and the presence of new coalition members like CAPS Network, Project Lead the Way, and The Possible Zone brought new geographic and programmatic perspectives to the table.

“Doing this together—not expecting one program to drive change—is what will move the needle,” said Lisa Dughi, CEO of NAF. “When we align our programs, we amplify outcomes. The whole becomes exponentially greater than the sum of its parts.”

Thais Rezende, CEO of BUILD.org, echoed the power of that collaboration: “The strength of our collective voice and the clarity of our shared purpose reminded me what’s possible when we come together. This coalition has the potential to help transform education in this country.”



The coalition meets with Ben Picciano from Representative John Mannion's office.

## Entrepreneurship Education Creates Agency and Engagement

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The coalition reaffirmed a key insight: entrepreneurship isn't just about business. It's about building self-efficacy, curiosity, and confidence, qualities that prepare students to lead in the future workforce.

Tom Smith, CEO of Virtual Enterprises International, shared an example of sixth-grade students in VE's program who taught themselves CAD software to design their product. “They were curious and motivated, because it mattered to them,” he said. “That’s what entrepreneurship does. It engages students in learning because it’s relevant, hands-on, and real.”

Corey Mohn, Executive Director of CAPS Network, added, “We help students try things out, rule things out, and discover who they are. It’s about self-discovery through action. That’s the heart of an entrepreneurial mindset.”

Members of the entrepreneurship education coalition gather in the Hart Senate Office Building.

## Policymakers Are Listening, and Ready to Act

Bipartisan consensus around workforce readiness gave coalition members renewed energy as they left Washington. Conversations with offices across both chambers and both parties confirmed that workforce readiness is a national concern and that entrepreneurship education should be recognized as part of the solution. The discussions were notably nonpartisan, highlighting that preparing students with adaptive skills, access to networks, and real-world learning opportunities resonates across the political spectrum.

Amy Lore, Senior Vice President of Government Relations at Project Lead the Way, emphasized the importance of expanding the policy conversation: “Look beyond your traditional committees. Science, technology, even armed services—they’re all thinking about the future of work, and there are real opportunities to align.”

Liz Texeira, VP of Social Impact at ASA. “There has never been a better time to promote career-connected learning, and entrepreneurial education specifically. All our systems, across K12, Higher Education, and the world of work and workforce, are in agreement that we must do a better job preparing our young people for careers that they are passionate about and help them achieve economic success. Entrepreneurship education does this and more, as it gives students tangible skills to chart their own path forward in whatever industry they feel called to – it is the ultimate opportunity multiplier.”

## Conclusion

The coalition left Washington with renewed purpose and a clear path forward. There is strong momentum behind the idea that entrepreneurship education should not be a privilege for some students, but a fundamental part of every young person’s learning experience. The work ahead includes continuing to educate policymakers about the benefits of entrepreneurial learning, engaging new stakeholders across the education, workforce, and economic development landscape, and advocating for meaningful policy changes that expand access to these opportunities nationwide.

As Gus Halwani, Chief Innovation Officer of The Possible Zone, shared, “Entrepreneurship is uniquely American. It’s about changing your life and your family’s life by going after your ideas and making them real. It should be at the foundation of how we educate every student in this country.”

### Coalition members on why entrepreneurship education is important:

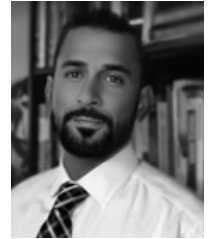


“[Students in our programs are] learning how to think for themselves, to make decisions. If they don’t know something, they have to go learn it, find it, fix it, do whatever it takes.”

**Tom Smith,**  
Virtual Enterprises, Inc.

“Entrepreneurship connects students’ existing interests and passions to what’s needed in the world — and to their accountabilities at school.”

**Gus Halwani**  
The Possible Project



“Look around any neighborhood and you will see dozens of small businesses—yet entrepreneurship education has never been taught in our schools. That needs to change.”

**Dr. J.D. LaRock**  
The Network for Teaching  
Entrepreneurship (NFTE)

“The whole idea of engaging in youth entrepreneurship is a no-brainer. It makes education engaging — and that’s what we should all be about.”

**Corey Mohn**  
CAPS Network



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