



Legislative Impact Report *In Brief*

2025



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*2025 Legislative
Impact Report.*

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A MESSAGE FROM Our Executive Director



Transformative policies in education are designed to accelerate student achievement. From improving students' skills in reading and math to ensuring graduates are college, career or military ready, dozens of states this year took action to achieve just that.

The most notable was the groundswell of bipartisan support for creating distraction-free learning environments. More than a dozen states passed policies this year establishing phone-free schools or classrooms, enabling children and teens to focus more fully on their teachers, their assignments and, ultimately, their academic success.

That success is grounded in reading and math, performance in which is stagnant or declining in far too many states. Following January's release of NAEP results, states responded with a continued focus on literacy policy and, thankfully, stronger attention on math policy. One component of ExcelinEd's comprehensive math policy accelerates progress for high-performing students by auto-enrolling them in advanced math courses. Indiana and Virginia took the lead this year by enacting an auto-enrollment policy, while Maryland advanced both math and literacy comprehensive policies through its executive branch.

Indiana also created value for its new high school diploma by providing students who earn diploma seals with automatic admission to all seven of the state's universities, a faster path into the Indiana National Guard or guaranteed interviews and apprenticeship opportunities among Indiana's largest employers. These high-value incentives are tied to the state's groundbreaking redesign of the high school experience. Indiana also broke ground with an improved funding mechanism for charter schools, requiring local dollars to support charter operations, not just the school's facilities as other states do.

Highlights of 2025 would not be complete without recognizing the work in multiple states to protect school accountability. Despite efforts to tear down standards, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Louisiana, Missouri, Tennessee, Texas and West Virginia stood firm in protecting this foundational policy, essential to student academic growth and success. Further, Iowa improved protocols for student assessments, a key element in accountability systems, and Oklahoma's Office of Educational Quality and Accountability reinstated stronger assessment cut scores that had been weakened by the Department of Education last year.

We continue pushing forward on every front to advance student-centered policy. Your support is invaluable, keeping our mission on track and helping transform education in states nationwide. I'm deeply grateful to all who partner with us as we continue to make education reform a reality.

Patricia Levesque

Patricia Levesque
Executive Director, ExcelinEd in Action

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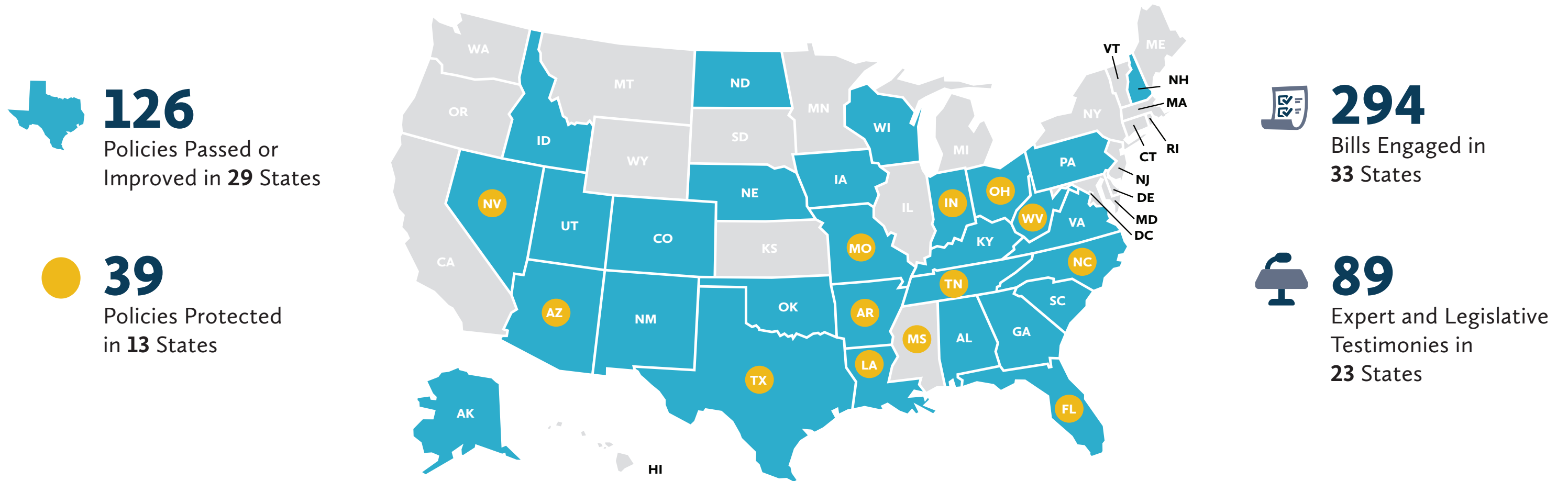
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Our National Impact in 2025



EMPOWER FAMILIES WITH OPPORTUNITY
CLOSE LEARNING GAPS
STRENGTHEN PATHWAYS TO COLLEGE + CAREER
BUILDING DIGITAL SKILLS

<p>\$1.7 Billion New Funding for ESAs (8 States)</p>	<p>\$76 Million New Funding for Math (AL, FL, SC, TX)</p>	<p>22.5 Million Students Benefit from Phone-Free Classrooms/Schools (24 States)</p>	<p>4.3 Million Students Benefit from Early Literacy Policy (9 States)</p>	<p>855K Students Expanded Access to Pathways Programs (AR, IA, GA)</p>	<p>3.9 Million Students Benefit from Math Policy (6 States²)</p>
<p>\$62 Million New Funding for Early Literacy (7 States)</p>	<p>290K Students Newly Eligible for Private Choice (10 States¹)</p>	<p>12 States Strengthened College + Career Pathways</p>	<p>\$251 Million New Funding for Charter School Facilities (5 States)</p>	<p>161K Teachers Improved Benefits & Incentives (5 States)</p>	<p>47th State Allowing Charter Schools (North Dakota)</p>

¹Includes non-legislative action in UT ²Includes non-legislative action in MD

Top Policy Trend:



Phone-Free Classrooms & Schools

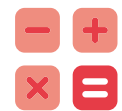
Amid concerns about the impact of cell phones and social media on youth mental health, leaders across the country championed policies to eliminate classroom distractions and improve students' ability to focus on learning. **More than half of all states** considered proposals this year to reduce the use of personal electronic devices in schools.

Alaska, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Georgia, Idaho, Missouri, Nebraska, New Hampshire, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina and **Texas** enacted phone-free school policies, while new laws in **Alabama, Iowa, Kentucky, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Tennessee, Utah** and **Wisconsin** provided for phone-free classrooms. **Florida** strengthened its phone-free classroom policy by creating phone-free schools for elementary & middle school students and a pilot program for select high schools. **Virginia** provided for phone-free schools via executive order.



Declining NAEP Scores Spur Literacy Progress...

Declining and stagnant student scores on the 2024 NAEP prompted states to continue taking action to turn around reading achievement. **Georgia** banned harmful three-cueing practices in classroom instruction and, along with **Nevada**, aligned educator preparation programs with the science of reading. **Arizona** required teachers to have training in the science of reading as well as in dyslexia instruction, while **Colorado** added dyslexia screening for K-3 students.



...and Advances in Math Policy

Virginia and **Indiana** were the first states to enact ExcelinEd's guaranteed-access math policy, establishing criteria for higher performing students in grades 5-8 to enroll in advanced or accelerated mathematics. **Oklahoma's** comprehensive math policy provides for student screenings, interventions for struggling students, advanced learning for high achievers, summer math academies and professional development for teachers. **Maryland** took executive action with comprehensive PreK-12 math policy, including minimum daily instructional time, educator training, interventions for struggling students and guaranteed access to advanced coursework. **Iowa** and **Indiana** added math assessments for elementary students and, along with **Louisiana** and **Texas**, strengthened math instruction training for educators.



Pathways Policies Improve Access, Alignment & Outcomes

To support students' postsecondary success and workforce readiness, **Arkansas** adopted Gov. Sarah Sanders' ACCESS Act, which creates a statewide common college application, expands scholarship programs, facilitates credit transfers and increases the availability of accelerated coursework. **Georgia** Gov. Brian Kemp's Top State for Talent Act will better connect education to workforce needs, while **Ohio** guaranteed CTE students access to earning credentials. **Indiana's** new and groundbreaking diploma structure allows high school students to earn diploma seals that provide specific benefits, such as automatic admission to all seven of the state's universities, a faster path into the Indiana National Guard or guaranteed interviews and apprenticeship opportunities among Indiana's largest employers.



Expanding Public School Choice

Arkansas added new options for families by creating open enrollment for all public schools statewide, while **Georgia** added financial incentives for local districts to support charter school growth. **North Dakota** became the 47th state to allow public charter schools. In **Florida**, charter schools gained zoning flexibility for locating new or expanded school facilities in communities.



Strengthening the Teacher Pipeline

State leaders are shaping the future of the teaching profession with actions to increase retention, reduce turnover and create more stable, successful classrooms for students. **Indiana** raised the minimum teacher salary, while **South Carolina** allowed retired educators to keep their certifications and return to teaching. Both states as well as **Tennessee** and **Florida** increased flexibility for hiring and licensure, providing experienced non-educator professionals with pathways to become teachers. **Alabama** guaranteed paid parental leave up to 8 weeks for teachers and state employees.



Upholding School Accountability

States stood strong on assessments and school accountability. **Oklahoma** leaders successfully reversed last year's lowering of cut (passing) scores on student assessments, reverting to stronger 2017-2018 scores and launching a new standards validation study. In **Wisconsin**, the legislature similarly responded to last year's decision at the Department of Education to lower cut scores on student assessments by passing a bill to restore higher scores. While the bill sent a strong message on accountability and transparency, Gov. Tony Evers vetoed the measure. For a second year, the **Florida** House stood strong on Senate attempts to water down school accountability and graduation requirements.



Milestones for Universal ESAs

As private school choice continues to expand, **Tennessee** kicked off the year with the Education Freedom Act, creating K-12 scholarships with universal eligibility. The program will launch in the 2026-27 school year with \$149 million to fund 20,000 scholarships. **Texas** adopted its first private school choice program and the largest day one ESA in the country. With \$1 billion for the program, Texas became the 16th state to create near-universal private school choice for its students. **New Hampshire** expanded its Education Freedom Accounts to universal eligibility, and **South Carolina** expanded eligibility for its ESA program to serve 85% of all families statewide.



Fair Funding for Charter Schools

Indiana achieved a milestone in funding equity, going above and beyond other states by requiring local school districts to share property tax revenue with charters for their school operations. Further, charter schools in Indiana can now access state grants for teacher recruitment in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, while charters in **Florida** gained access to state grants for work-based learning programs. To support more equitable funding, **Idaho, Missouri, Ohio, Tennessee, Texas** and **Utah** created or expanded funding programs for charter school facilities.



Transformational Progress Across the Nation

ALABAMA

Established bell-to-bell **phone-free schools** benefiting **750,000 students**

Mandatory **social media safety course**

\$36 million for K-3 **literacy coaches** and **\$10 million** in literacy supports

\$27 million in new **math** funding

Created **weighted funding** to support students with additional needs

\$231 million for ESAs serving **15,000 students**

Guaranteed paid parental leave for **43,000 teachers** as well as state employees



ARIZONA

Established **phone-free schools** benefiting **+1.1 million students**

Required science of reading and dyslexia training for teachers

COLORADO

Established **phone-free schools** benefiting **881,000 students**

Required universal **dyslexia screenings** benefiting **245,000 K-3 students**

Adopted student-centered funding



FLORIDA

Established **bell-to-bell phone-free K-8 schools (1.8 million students)** and a **phone-free pilot** for high schools

Protected school accountability and comprehensive **early literacy** policy

Expanded Schools of Hope offering high-quality options to students currently in low-performing schools

Improved teacher prep programs with **science of reading** and high-quality instructional materials

Removed regulatory hurdles for **730 charter schools**

Gave charter schools access to **workforce program grants** and flexibility to focus on **work-based learning**



Protected the Family Empowerment Scholarship program

Protected charter schools from zoning and funding impacts

Strengthened early literacy with skilled teacher requirements

\$5 million for **computer science**

\$18.6 million in new funding for **charter school facilities**

\$597 million in school district incentives for students earning **college + career credentials**

\$40 million for career pathways & college acceleration

\$3 million for **high-quality instructional materials** in K-2 early literacy

\$1 million for **math coaches**

\$6 million for **Schools of Hope** charter schools

IDAHO

Established **phone-free hours** in **+700 schools** benefiting **300,000+ students**

Created the state's **first educational choice program**: a refundable tax-credit serving up to **10,000 families**

Increased facilities funding for **+75 charter schools** benefiting **+28,500 students**

\$5 million for K-3 **literacy support**

IOWA

Established **phone-free hours** in **+1,300 schools** benefiting **478,000 students**

Strengthened math policy with K-6 assessments for nearly **250,000 students** and improved math training in educator prep programs

Improved career pathways with data collection and transparency on **industry-recognized credentials**

Improved accountability by allowing online student assessments for online courses



ALASKA

Required all schools to adopt a **wireless devices policy** benefiting **133,000 students**

ARKANSAS

Established **bell-to-bell phone-free environments** in **+1,000 schools**

Expanded public school choice with open enrollment benefiting **475,000 students**

Expanded and accelerated college + career pathways for **+150,000 high school students**

Protected accountability and A-F school grading

Protected families using **ESAs** from administrative burdens



GEORGIA

Established **phone-free elementary and middle schools**, creating distraction-free learning environments for nearly **1.1 million students**

Banned three-cueing reading instruction in classrooms and in educator prep programs

Added literacy support for students with dyslexia

\$18.5 million to fund **116 literacy coaches**

\$141 million for **ESAs** to serve **+20,000 students**

Expanded public school choice with **\$500,000** in incentives to grow charter schools

Required an ROI analysis to align college + career pathways with high-demand careers, benefiting **550,000 high school students**



INDIANA

Established **guaranteed access** to advanced math courses for high-performing students

Required math screenings for all K-2 students with interventions where needed

Strengthened math curriculum and content in teacher prep programs

Protected \$50 million for **early literacy** initiatives, including **high-quality instructional materials**

Increased funding for **+120 charter schools** by equitably sharing local property tax levies for operations, benefiting **50,000+ students**

Protected \$52.6 million in grants for **charter schools** and **innovation network schools**

Improved teacher compensation & bonuses benefiting **61,000 teachers**

Created licensure flexibility for teachers in STEM fields

Protected school accountability

\$90 million for expansion of universal vouchers benefiting **30,000 students**

Required return on investment analysis of **career & technical education** programs

Improved career pathways with market-driven **stackable credentials** for students

Protected ESAs for **special education students** and **\$10 million** for **Career Scholarship Accounts**



LOUISIANA

Strengthened math policy with K-8 educator training

Required a return on investment analysis of industry-based **credentials programs**

MISSISSIPPI

Protected school accountability & career pathways with transparency on industry-valued credentials

MISSOURI

- Established bell-to-bell phone-free schools benefiting **859,000 students**
- \$50 million** in first-time funding for tax-credit ESAs serving approximately **7,000 students**
- \$7 million** in new funding for charter school facilities
- Established a certificate program and tuition reimbursements for CTE students
- Protected school accountability

NEW HAMPSHIRE

- Established bell-to-bell phone-free environments for **+162,600 students**
- Expanded ESAs to universal eligibility benefiting **+73,000 students**
- Added alternative certification pathways for CTE instructors
- Improved flexibility for districts to hire adjunct teachers

OKLAHOMA

- Established phone-free schools benefiting **659,000 students**
- Created comprehensive math policy with student screeners, evidence-based instruction and intervention services
- Established math tutoring for lowest performing 9th graders
- Expanded eligibility for tax-credit scholarships serving students with special needs



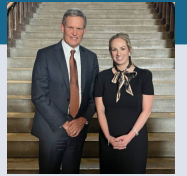
- Improved teacher workforce with mandatory field experience or an apprenticeship
- Strengthened teacher pipelines with tuition assistance for school employees pursuing teaching credentials
- Improved career pathways with expanded work-based learning

TENNESSEE

- Created a new ESA with universal eligibility **+\$149 million** to provide **20,000 students** with ESAs in the program's first year, prioritizing low-income families and students with disabilities
- Established phone-free classrooms in **+1,700 schools** benefiting **970,000 students**
- Protected early literacy promotion gates and screening requirements



- \$25 million** for charter school facilities benefiting **44,000+ students**
- Strengthened charter school policy with streamlined processes for school growth, benefiting **114 charter schools**
- Strengthened teacher pipelines with licensure flexibility and expanded educator pathways
- Protected end-of-course assessments and rigorous academic expectations for high school students
- Protected academic standards for CTE students



NORTH DAKOTA

- Expanded public school choice for **123,000+ students** with the state's first charter school policy
- Established phone-free classrooms with the option of bell-to-bell phone-free schools benefiting **116,000 students**

NEW MEXICO

- Established phone-free school hours benefiting **306,000+ students**
- Required science of reading in K-3 curriculum benefiting **83,000 students**

OHIO

- Created cell phone-free instructional days for **1.6 million students**
- \$12 million** for literacy coaches trained in the science of reading
- Required reading and math diagnostics for **475,000 K-3 students**
- Protected universal access to school choice vouchers
- \$90.2 million** for charter school facilities benefiting **116,000 charter students**
- Guaranteed access to earning credentials for CTE students
- Guaranteed postsecondary admission for high-performing students (pilot program)

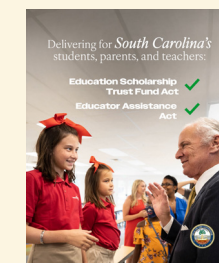
NEVADA

- Established phone-free schools benefiting **489,000 students**
- Required science of reading training for K-3 teachers and in teacher prep programs
- Strengthened teacher pipelines with apprenticeships, mentorship and recruitment support
- Created salary incentives for teachers in high-needs schools and subjects
- Expanded public school choice with intra-district open enrollment
- Protected against limits on charter school growth



SOUTH CAROLINA

- Renewed policy for phone-free schools
- \$75 million** for high-quality instructional materials in math
- Improved teacher pipelines with licensure flexibility and credit for relevant experience
- Retained certifications for retired teachers, allowing them to fill classroom vacancies
- Reinstated ESAs with expanded eligibility and a higher scholarship amount (**\$7,500**) benefiting **15,000 students** by 2026-27
- Expanded public school choice with inter-district open enrollment for all students



TEXAS

- \$1 Billion** for the state's first ESA program, featuring universal eligibility in the first year and serving **100,000 students**
- Established phone-free schools benefiting **5.5 million students**
- Strengthened literacy and math support for **1.5 million K-3 students** with screeners, progress monitoring, interventions and educator training
- \$3.3 million** for literacy and math academies
- \$4 billion** in new funding for teachers and teacher pipelines
- \$199 million** in new funding for charter school facilities benefiting **436,000 charter school students**
- Protected school accountability



UTAH

- Established phone-free classrooms in **+945 schools** benefiting **670,000 students**
- Expanded facilities funding for **139 charter schools** benefiting **78,000 students**
- Incentivized teaching excellence with bonuses and professional recognition to support **+31,000 public school teachers**
- Strengthened college + career pathways with a master list of industry-recognized credentials transferable to higher-ed
- Improved college + career pathways by evaluating underperforming programs

VIRGINIA

- Prioritized science of reading and high-quality instructional materials, with enhanced support for **222,000 students** struggling in reading
- Guaranteed access to advanced math for eligible students in grades 5-8





About ExcelinEd in Action

ExcelinEd in Action is the 501(c)(4) sister organization to the Foundation for Excellence in Education (ExcelinEd). ExcelinEd in Action works with state lawmakers and advocacy partners to pass legislation that empowers families with educational choice, prepares students for college and career, prioritizes early literacy and math, expands innovation and strengthens school performance.

STATEHOUSE SPOTLIGHTS



ExcelinEd in Action produces a weekly podcast, *Statehouse Spotlights*, to provide timely updates about K-12 education legislation across the country. Hosted by the organization's legislative team, Statehouse Spotlights tracks and reports on bills about student-centered policy, providing policymakers and advocates with an engaging resource to hear the latest education policy news and trends during state legislative sessions.

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For more information, please contact Jess Langhaim at (702) 277-2637 or Jess@ExcelinEd.org.




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