



AESA State Examiner

August 2026

A monthly, national look at State-by-State legislative issues, trends, and tips, empowering AESA members as education advocates

The *State Examiner* is a monthly, state-level advocacy report from the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA). It provides legislative monitoring, curated news articles, and related content gathered from across the fifty states. The purpose of the monthly report is to ensure AESA members are aware of the latest state-level education policy, funding issues and trends, and state-level news that are impacting educational service agencies (ESAs), their client schools and districts. ***Each report also concludes with action-oriented advocacy tips to activate and empower our members to be informed, effective education advocates.***

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STATE LEGISLATIVE ISSUE MONITORING

In each edition of the *State Examiner*, AESA monitors state-level legislation and legislative trends impacting ESAs and their client schools and districts. This month's report for August 2026 examines evolving state high school graduation requirements.

The Diploma Reimagined. States redefine what it means to graduate; regional implementation capacity can amplify expanded opportunity.

Across the country, states are reexamining what a high school diploma should represent. The traditional formula—accumulate required course credits and, in some states, clear a state assessment hurdle—is giving way to a more expansive question: ***Can a graduate demonstrate the academic knowledge, durable skills, career awareness, civic preparation, and postsecondary readiness needed for life after high school?***

According to data from the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), current state-level legislative sessions around the United States have seen 48 bills related to graduation requirements introduced in 21 states (11 were passed and enacted, 19 failed, 18 are still pending). State activity ranged from enacted course requirements to major state-board redesigns and still-developing proposals. The common direction is toward diplomas that remain anchored in academic content but

provide more varied evidence of readiness for college, employment, military service, civic life, and adult responsibilities. The movement is significant, but not yet a national consensus: states continue to differ sharply in the role of statewide tests, credits, credentials, capstones, and local discretion.

From Seat Time to Readiness

The emerging policy shift has several dimensions. States are broadening the evidence students may use to show they are prepared for next steps. Rather than relying solely on Carnegie units or a single high-stakes test, newer systems may combine core coursework with performance assessments, capstones, credentials, dual enrollment, work-based learning, postsecondary plans, and documented readiness skills.

States are also adding content they view as essential for contemporary adulthood. Personal finance is the most visible example; Education Week reports that 39 states have passed laws requiring a personal-finance course for high school graduation, up from eight states in 2021. Computer science, artificial intelligence and digital literacy, climate education, civics, and career exploration are also increasingly entering graduation policy conversations.

Policymakers are seeking closer alignment between graduation and workforce or postsecondary transitions. NCSL has emphasized career-connected learning as a strategy that combines academic preparation with real-world skill development and employer engagement. In practice, that can mean apprenticeships, internships, CTE pathways, dual-credit coursework, industry-recognized credentials, and individual career-and-academic plans.

The changes place new demands on state agencies, districts, and regional service organizations. A revised diploma policy can alter master schedules, counseling, teacher preparation, transportation, CTE access, transcript design, assessment administration, employer partnerships, and data reporting. The central implementation question is whether every student—not only those in large, well-resourced systems—will be able to access and complete the new options.

State Activity at-a-Glance

State	Status	Change and timeline	Why it matters
Washington	Proposal / active development	FutureReady draft released July 2026; final recommendations anticipated in fall 2026 for possible 2027 legislative consideration. Earliest implementation could be the Class of 2031.	A multiyear redesign focused on modernization, access, equity, and a more coherent statewide framework.
Indiana	Adopted redesign / implementation	New Indiana Diploma is required statewide for the Class of 2029; districts could opt in in 2025–26. Includes Enrollment, Employment, and Enlistment/Service seals, plus Honors distinctions.	Makes college, workforce, and service preparation more visible within the diploma and accountability structure.
New York	Regulations adopted; broader redesign developing	Portrait of a Graduate adopted July 2025. Personal-finance and climate-education regulations phase in from 2026–27; NY Inspires outlines a longer-term competency-based diploma transition.	Pairs immediate curricular change with a potential shift from time-based credits to demonstrated competencies and authentic learning.

State	Status	Change and timeline	Why it matters
Louisiana	Adopted assessment change; policy debate continues	High-school assessments will decline from six to four for students entering grade 9 in 2026–27. The change streamlines testing but does not itself end graduation-linked assessment requirements.	Shows how a state may reduce testing burden while retaining statewide measures and debating exit-test policy.
Georgia	Enacted law	SB 179 makes computer science a graduation requirement beginning in 2031–32.	Treats computer science as core preparation and provides a long runway for staffing, access, and course development.
Massachusetts	Final recommendations; future action needed	Final statewide framework recommendations released June 2026 include MassCore, end-of-course assessments, planning, work-based learning, civics, financial literacy, and AI/digital literacy.	A comprehensive post-MCAS proposal whose statewide requirements, validation methods, and funding will require further action.

Leading Models and Policy Tensions

Washington. Washington’s FutureReady process is notable not because it has already changed law, but because it illustrates a deliberate, multiyear redesign. The State Board of Education is using task-force work and public engagement to develop recommendations for the 2027 Legislature. The long runway recognizes that a policy changing what students must demonstrate at graduation must be matched by course access, staffing, guidance, and assessment capacity.

Indiana. Indiana provides a clear example of a pathway-and-seal approach. The Class of 2029 will earn the new Indiana Diploma, with seals that communicate preparation for enrollment, employment, or enlistment/service. The model retains common statewide expectations while providing students a clearer way to signal different forms of readiness.

New York. New York is pursuing a longer-term shift in philosophy. Its Portrait of a Graduate establishes a common vision of the skills and dispositions students should develop for college, careers, and civic life. Current diploma requirements have not yet been replaced, but NY Inspires points toward a competency-based framework using project-based, career-connected, and performance-based demonstrations of readiness.

Louisiana and Georgia. Louisiana’s approach is primarily assessment modernization: streamlining the high school testing experience without, at this point, eliminating graduation-linked assessment requirements. Georgia has taken a targeted approach by making computer science a future graduation expectation. Both examples demonstrate that “modernization” can mean revising one component of a diploma rather than rebuilding the entire structure.

Massachusetts. Massachusetts offers one of the broadest current proposals. Its final framework combines academic coursework, end-of-course assessment, a capstone or other demonstration of learning, postsecondary planning, work-based learning, civic readiness, financial literacy, and AI/digital literacy. Its breadth is also its challenge: policymakers will need to decide which elements are mandatory, how they are validated, how much local flexibility remains, and what resources are required for equitable implementation.

Implementation Is the Policy

Graduation redesign does not occur only in statehouses and state-board meetings. It occurs in high school schedules, counselor offices, CTE labs, regional employer networks, special education transition plans, virtual classrooms, and student-information systems.

- **Access and equity.** Dual enrollment, credentials, capstones, work-based learning, and specialized courses cannot become meaningful graduation options unless students in rural, small, high-poverty, and geographically isolated districts have comparable access.
- **Educator capacity.** New computer science, personal-finance, AI-literacy, and performance-assessment expectations require teacher preparation, professional learning, and—in many regions—shared staffing strategies.
- **Student advising.** More pathways can create more opportunity, but also more complexity. Students and families need timely, understandable advising well before senior year.
- **Quality assurance.** States must decide how to define and validate a capstone, work-based-learning experience, credential, or readiness demonstration without creating a paperwork-heavy compliance system.
- **Data and reporting.** States and districts need data systems that document pathway participation, credential attainment, seal completion, access gaps, and outcomes after graduation—not simply whether a student earned a diploma.

What This Means for ESAs

Bottom line: Modernized graduation requirements will be successful only if states and districts build the regional capacity to make new pathways real and equitable for every student. Educational service agencies (ESAs) are well positioned to provide that capacity.

ESAs can bridge state policy design and district-level execution. They can convene state agencies, districts, employers, higher education institutions, workforce boards, CTE centers, and community organizations to create regional systems rather than leaving each district to solve the same implementation challenges independently.

Practical ESA roles include developing shared access to high-demand courses such as computer science, financial literacy, and advanced CTE; coordinating regional work-based-learning and employer-partnership systems; providing professional learning on capstones, competency-based assessment, diploma seals, and student portfolios; and creating common tools for academic-and-career plans, pathway tracking, family communication, and transcript documentation.

ESAs can also help state agencies and districts monitor whether redesigned requirements are producing equitable opportunity. Regional data analysis can identify where students lack access to credential programs, dual-credit options, internships, specialized teachers, transportation, or counseling support. That information can guide resource allocation before gaps become embedded in a new graduation system.

The practical question is no longer simply how many credits students need to earn. It is whether every student can access the learning, guidance, experiences, and supports needed to demonstrate genuine readiness. ESAs can be central partners in answering that question for schools, families and students.

STATE BUDGET & FINANCE MONITORING

AESA monitors state level budget and finance news impacting preschool and primary and secondary education. These curated articles (with links) can provide insights into what is happening in your state and collectively across the U.S. The latest state budget and finance-related news for August 2026 follows below.

August 2026 saw state leaders and national media spotlighting how tightening budgets, evolving tax policy, and shifting enrollment patterns are reshaping the fiscal and operational landscape for K–12 education. See the following articles for greater detail on these finance and tax policy related issues:

- [Schools spend billions on AI, but struggle to figure out what’s worth buying](#)
Stateline
- [State Consider Ending Data Center Tax Breaks](#)
The Bond Buyer
- [Education Department hands more states flexibility with federal dollars](#)
Stateline
- [States try new measures to get chronically absent students back to class](#)
Stateline
- [The Pa. budget included additional funding for a handful of school districts for third year in a row](#)
The Express
- [States Want to Take the Rich Less. They’re taxing Your Purchases More.](#)
Business Insider
- [Nebraska Lawmakers on Track to Fill 2 Separate Deficits in 2027 Session](#)
Nebraska Examiner
- [The Rising Cost of Special Education is Straining School Budgets](#)

Governing

Key Takeaways for ESAs:

An emerging theme from review of these articles is that districts could benefit from more **shared capacity**—for careful AI procurement, attendance intervention, and high-cost special-education services—at the same time state and local revenue outlooks are becoming less predictable. ESAs can be especially valuable as regional conveners: creating vetted AI/privacy contracts and pilots, pooling specialized personnel and in-district programs, coordinating attendance data and family supports, and helping districts document needs and outcomes for flexible federal, state, and supplemental funding. Fiscal advocacy and planning should emphasize both opportunity and risk: new federal waivers may let states consolidate education funds around statewide priorities, but safeguards, transparency, and continuity of grant payments remain essential; meanwhile, tax-policy shifts, data-center incentive rollbacks, and projected state deficits underscore the need for conservative budgeting and clear evidence of the return on regional services.

STATEHOUSE NEWS: EDUCATION POLICY

Each month AESA finds representative examples (with links) of news items coming out of the states or impacting the states that may be of interest to ESAs and their client schools and districts:

- [NEIU 19 expands services with new autism support program set to open at the Hawley Center](#)
Fox 56 WOLF
- [Governors and lawmakers say they're getting serious about states' rights](#)
Stateline
- [DeSantis administration moving to regulate AI from pre-K to Ph.D.](#)
Route Fifty
- [Budget shortfalls, declining enrollment top district leaders' concerns](#)
K12 Dive
- [Arkansas legislative panel approves study of proposed \\$100 million school choice tax credit](#)
Arkansas Democrat Gazette
- [New Hampshire's effort to overturn the Claremont school funding rulings, explained](#)
New Hampshire Bulletin
- [Special Education Access Case Appealed to the U.S. Supreme Court](#)
K12 Dive
- [New \\$70 million special needs education center opens in Sterling Heights for Macomb County students](#)
WXYZ Detroit

- [Vermont education transformation gets underway: CESAs form, merger committees are on the horizon](#)
St. Albans Messenger
- [NEWYA recognized at 2026 Wisconsin Career Readiness Summit](#)
Press Times

Key Takeaways for ESAs:

These articles highlight the ESA value proposition is becoming more central: districts facing enrollment declines, budget pressure, expanding choice programs, and escalating student needs will need regional partners that can pool specialized staff, deliver high-quality shared programs, and help districts make difficult service and facilities decisions. The NEIU 19 autism expansion and Macomb ISD's \$70 million special-needs center demonstrate the practical payoff of regional, accessible, purpose-built services, while Vermont's emerging CESAs point to a broader trend toward formal regional capacity and governance. ESAs should identify ways to strengthen their role in state-policy implementation and advocacy: states are asserting more control over education and AI policy, while school-choice tax credits and litigation over services for privately enrolled students could complicate enrollment, finance, accountability, and special-education obligations. ESAs should be ready to provide clear, equitable access to specialized supports amid shifting state and federal rules and fiscal instability.

STATE & NATIONAL REPORTS IMPACTING EDUCATION

AESA monitors state and national reports and policy briefs highlighting state-level information of interest to ESAs. As always, *it is important to view these reports through a critical lens with attention to research design, methodology, data sources and citations, peer review, and publication venue*. This month AESA spotlights reports, surveys and policy briefs from researchers at Stanford University's SCALE Initiative, the National Association of State Budget Officials, and the American Enterprise Institute (AEI).

- **[The Fiscal Consequences of School Closures in California: Evidence from a Statewide Synthetic Difference-in-Differences Design](#)**. This report examines whether school closures improve district finances. It offers evidence to inform more careful decision-making as districts respond to enrollment decline and community change. School closures are frequently justified as fiscal necessities for districts confronting enrollment decline, rising per-pupil fixed costs, and persistent budgetary challenges. Yet causal evidence on their financial consequences remains limited. Drawing on data from all public school districts in California between 2011 and 2019, this study estimates the effect of entering a closure regime on district finances using a synthetic difference-in-differences design. Access the full report [here](#).
- **[NASBO SPRING 2026 FISCAL SURVEY](#)**. This edition of the report contains data for states, territories, and the District of Columbia on general fund spending, revenue, ending balances, and rainy-day funds for fiscal 2025 (actual), fiscal 2026 (estimated), and fiscal 2027 (recommended). Information on recommended changes to taxes and fees and employment compensation for fiscal 2027 is also included. According to the report, most states are projected to maintain or increase the size of their rainy-day fund balances in dollars in fiscal 2026 and fiscal 2027, though the estimated median balance as a percentage of expenditures is projected to tick down slightly as spending is set to increase faster than reserves. Total balances (rainy day funds plus general fund ending balances) are projected to decline in fiscal 2026 and fiscal 2027 as states continue spending down prior-year surplus funds held in their general funds, largely for one-time purposes, but remain well above pre-pandemic historical highs. Access the full report [here](#).
- **[Social Studies, Meet the Science of Learning](#)**. Report authors argue the “science of reading” movement restored sound pedagogy to early literacy instruction and purged schools of discredited practices such as “balanced literacy.” K–12 social studies instruction is due for a similar revival. Further, they argue that sound social studies pedagogy treats students like novices, not experts, moving them explicitly and systematically toward expertise. Lastly, the authors promote the Four Question Method as a particularly promising approach to teaching social studies, arguing it starts with knowledge building and teaches students the specific intellectual procedures for scholarly inquiry. Read the full report [here](#).

Key Takeaways for ESAs:

For ESAs, these reports reinforce a practical two-part agenda: 1) help districts respond to enrollment decline with comprehensive, data-driven restructuring—not the assumption that closing buildings alone restores fiscal health—and, 2) offer regional planning, shared services, facilities analysis, and revenue/operating-cost modeling that can preserve educational access while reducing fixed costs. In business planning and advocacy, ESAs should prepare for a more constrained but not immediately crisis-level state fiscal environment: reserves remain historically elevated but are projected to fall as states spend down prior surpluses, so ESA budgets should favor sustainable recurring revenue, demonstrate measurable district value, and resist relying on temporary state dollars.

AUGUST 2026 MONTHLY ADVOCACY TIP

The 90-Day Advocacy Readiness Plan

How educational service agencies can prepare now for election season and the 2027 state-policy agenda

August is not an advocacy off-season. For educational service agencies (ESAs), it is the window to turn summer reflection into a disciplined plan for the months when elections, budget signals, legislative turnover, and pre-session agenda-setting begin to shape the next year of state education and budget policy. The organizations that wait for a bill to be introduced, a budget to be released, or a crisis to emerge are usually forced to react. The organizations that use the next 90 days well enter the fall with clearer priorities, stronger relationships, better evidence, and a more credible voice. Remember, **it is always easier to board the ship at port rather than when its already out at sea.**

A readiness plan does not require an extensive lobbying operation or a large communications staff. It requires leadership attention, a manageable calendar, and a shared commitment to connect ESA expertise with the needs of policymakers, districts, students, families, and communities. **ESAs sit squarely at the nexus of policy and practice and are uniquely positioned to shape public policy.** The goal is simple: by the end of the next 90 days, your ESA should know what it is trying to accomplish, who needs to hear from it, what proof it can provide, and what it will do when an opportunity—or a challenge—arrives.

The advocacy moment

The period from August through October is especially consequential. **Election-year activity can reshape state legislative membership and committee leadership.** Candidates and returning legislators are increasingly accessible in their home communities. State agencies, governors' offices, and legislative staff are often beginning to frame the issues that will surface in the next session. At the same time, districts are confronting immediate operational challenges—staff shortages, enrollment changes, special education needs, student mental-health demands, transportation pressures, technology and data-security responsibilities, and constrained budgets—that ESAs are uniquely positioned to help solve.

This is the moment to make the ESA's value visible as regional public-service infrastructure. Rather than leading only with a request for funding or protection from a policy change, lead with a practical proposition: **when the state asks districts to deliver more, ESAs can help make implementation more equitable, more efficient, and more feasible—especially for small, rural, and capacity-constrained systems.** That framing gives policymakers a reason to see ESAs as partners in solving problems, not simply as another stakeholder asking to be heard.

What ESAs should watch

A 90-day plan begins with disciplined observation. Your team does not need to track every headline; it needs to identify the few signals most likely to affect your member districts and the services your ESA provides.

- **Election and turnover signals.** Open seats, retirements, competitive races, newly drawn districts, likely leadership changes, and prospective committee assignments. These developments identify where early relationship-building will matter most.
- **Budget and economic signals.** Revenue estimates, enrollment trends, state-agency budget requests, property-tax developments, workforce data, and other indicators that may shape the fiscal environment for education and regional services.

- **Policy and rulemaking signals.** Pre-filed concepts, draft rules, task-force recommendations, agency guidance, regulatory agendas, interim committee activity, and issues gaining attention in neighboring states.
- **District implementation signals.** The problems district leaders are raising repeatedly: staffing, service access, compliance burden, purchasing costs, student supports, or emerging technology needs. These are the raw material for credible advocacy.
- **Public narrative signals.** The terms and concerns appearing in local media, community meetings, parent conversations, and candidate events. Monitor not only what is being said, but what assumptions or misinformation need respectful correction. Pay particular attention to false narratives meant to distract, divert and divide.

Build the plan around five moves:

1. Refresh and narrow your priorities.

Review last year's legislative platform, board priorities, member feedback, and emerging state issues. Distill the list into three to five priorities that are specific enough to guide action but broad enough to remain relevant if the policy landscape changes. **For each priority, identify the problem, the desired state action or outcome, the beneficiaries, the likely implementation implications, and the evidence that supports your position.** A short list signals discipline; a long list signals that nothing is truly urgent.

2. Map the people behind the decisions.

Create a working relationship map that includes current legislators, candidates for open or competitive seats, legislative staff, education-agency officials, local government partners, business and community leaders, and trusted district messengers. Do not treat this as a list of names. Record what each person cares about, their connection to your ESA's region, the best messenger, and the next appropriate contact. Legislative staff deserve the same care as elected officials: they often carry the institutional knowledge, research questions, and follow-through that shape a policy decision.

3. Prepare evidence that travels.

Policymakers need information they can understand, remember, and use. Develop a compact evidence bank for each priority: one statewide fact, one regional or local fact, one short story, one visual or chart, and one clear statement of the action you want. Use plain language. Translate technical details into consequences for students, families, educators, and taxpayers. **If your evidence cannot be summarized in a one-page brief and explained in two minutes, it is not yet ready for a busy policymaker.**

4. Create a contact rhythm before you need it.

The most effective advocacy relationships are built outside a crisis. Schedule a fall rhythm of introductory meetings, ESA or district site visits, listening conversations, community events, and carefully timed follow-up. The immediate purpose of every interaction need not be a policy ask. Often the better first move is to learn: What are new or returning policymakers hearing from constituents? Which education concerns are they trying to understand? Where do they see

implementation barriers? **Listening earns credibility and improves the quality of later advocacy.**

5. Make internal readiness everyone's work.

Advocacy cannot live only with the executive director or government-relations lead. Identify a small internal readiness team that includes leadership, communications, program experts, and a board liaison. Establish who monitors legislation, who validates data, who approves messages, who coordinates district partners, and who responds to a time-sensitive request. **Train board members and key staff on a consistent elevator message, appropriate advocacy boundaries, and the process for sharing useful local stories.** A prepared organization can respond quickly without sacrificing accuracy or trust.

An illustration: moving from concern to readiness

Imagine that several districts in an ESA region are struggling to recruit and retain related-service providers. The issue is real, but a general message that “schools need more staff” is unlikely to distinguish the ESA’s perspective. A readiness plan helps turn that concern into an advocacy asset. First, the ESA gathers local vacancy and service-access data, along with examples of the effect on students and district operations. Next, it identifies how its regional model—shared specialists, coordinated recruitment, telepractice, professional learning, or pooled purchasing—can reduce the problem. The team then prepares a short brief that identifies the policy barrier or support needed, the number of districts affected, the cost of inaction, and the practical role the ESA can play. During fall meetings, the ESA asks policymakers what workforce concerns they are hearing and shares the brief as a solution-oriented resource. If a related bill or budget proposal appears months later, the relationship, data, message, and implementation proposal are already in place.

Measure readiness, not just activity

Do not confuse activity with accomplishment. A full calendar does not necessarily equal an effective advocacy strategy. At the end of 90 days, assess whether your organization is more prepared than it was in August. Can your leadership name the top priorities and explain why they matter? Have you identified new and influential policymakers? Are your core facts current and locally meaningful? Do board members and staff use consistent language? Do you have district partners ready to tell credible stories? Have you created an internal process for rapid response?

Those questions matter because **advocacy success is rarely the product of one meeting, one testimony, or one alert.** Policy making is incremental by nature. So is advocacy. It is the cumulative result of trusted relationships, clear evidence, disciplined communication, and organizational readiness. The coming fall is your opportunity to build that foundation. The “slow drip” process may be frustrating at times. But use it well, and your ESA will enter 2027 ready not merely to respond to the state-policy agenda, but to help shape it in meaningful and impactful ways.

Practical tools and takeaways

Use these tools as a 90-day working packet for your ESA advocacy team.

1. 30–60–90 Day Action Calendar

Timing	Primary objective	Suggested actions
Days 1–30	Set direction	Refresh 3–5 priorities; convene readiness team; identify policy, fiscal, and election signals; update core data; build policymaker/staff/candidate map.
Days 31–60	Build assets and relationships	Prepare one-page briefs; collect stories; schedule listening meetings and site visits; train board/staff messengers; confirm approval and rapid-response protocols.
Days 61–90	Test, refine, and activate	Use fall contacts to test messages; fill gaps in the relationship map; refine briefs; coordinate with allies; prepare a post-election/new-session outreach plan.

2. Priority-Setting Worksheet

For each proposed advocacy priority, answer the following before adding it to the ESA's short list:

- What specific problem are we trying to solve?
- What state action, decision, resource, or implementation outcome would help?
- Who is affected, and what local evidence demonstrates the need?
- How can the ESA contribute a practical, scalable solution?
- What is the fiscal, operational, or equity consequence of inaction?
- Who must be persuaded, informed, or mobilized?
- What is our one-sentence message and our two-minute explanation?

3. Policymaker Contact Brief

Name / role / district	
Relationship status	New contact / established relationship / key ally / needs follow-up
Likely interests or concerns	Support/ Leaning to Support / Neutral / Leaning to Oppose / Oppose
Position on your issue	
Best messenger from the ESA region	
Current opportunity	Meeting, event, site visit, briefing, testimony, or follow-up
Core message	
Local proof point or story	
Next action and owner	
Follow-up date	

4. The Two-Minute ESA Message

Use this simple structure in a meeting, site visit, or community conversation:

- Context: "Across our region, districts are experiencing ..."

- Consequence: “Without action, this means ... for students, families, educators, or taxpayers.”
- ESA solution: “Our ESA can help by ...”
- Policy connection: “The state can make that solution more effective by ...”
- Invitation: “We would welcome the opportunity to show you / connect you with / provide additional local information about ...”

5. End-of-90-Day Readiness Check

- ☐ We have a board- and leadership-aligned list of three to five advocacy priorities.
- ☐ We have a current map of legislators, candidates, staff, agency contacts, and potential allies.
- ☐ Each priority has a one-page brief, local data, a story, and a clear request or outcome.
- ☐ We have completed or scheduled proactive fall listening meetings, introductions, or site visits.
- ☐ Board members and key staff have received message and advocacy-process guidance.
- ☐ We have an internal rapid-response protocol for bills, rules, budget proposals, and media inquiries.
- ☐ We have a written plan for post-election outreach and new-session engagement.

AESA resources to consider

AESA’s Advocacy Toolkit includes guidance on audience analysis, message development, channels and content, and direct advocacy tactics. AESA’s state advocacy workshop materials also emphasize understanding the policy context, forecasting change, relationship-building, clear communication, and turning strategy into action.

CUSTOMIZED AESA ADVOCACY TRAINING

AESA empowers education leaders to become effective advocates through its customized advocacy trainings, designed to meet a variety of needs and schedules. Whether you’re seeking an in-depth exploration or a concise overview, AESA offers three levels of workshops to build your legislative knowledge and confidence:

- 1) The **comprehensive three-day workshop** provides a step-by-step immersion into state advocacy, covering the legislative landscape, policy and rule-making, and hands-on advocacy strategies.
- 2) For those with limited time, the **one-day workshop** delivers essential advocacy skills and actionable insights in a focused format.
- 3) Looking for a **customized training** solution? AESA can do that too. Additionally, AESA offers tailored, one-hour presentations ideal for regional or local events, with expert speakers addressing state-specific challenges in politics, finance, and education policy.

Each training is designed to equip participants with practical tools and strategies to make a meaningful impact in the state legislative process. For more information contact [Joan Wade, Executive Director](#).

AESA ADVOCACY IN ACTION CONFERENCE

Be the Voice of Education on Capitol Hill!

September 23-25, 2026 | Hyatt Regency Washington on Capitol Hill, Washington, D.C.

AESA invites you to Washington, D.C. for the [Advocacy in Action Conference](#), where educational service agency (ESA) leaders from across the country come together to influence national education policy. This is more than a conference—it’s your chance to bring your ESA’s voice directly to federal lawmakers.

This one-of-a-kind event is uniquely designed to stay flexible and timely, responding to the fast-moving world of federal legislation. The content reflects the most pressing policy issues affecting public education and the availability of key congressional and agency leaders.

Pre-Conference Option

Start your Advocacy in Action experience with the optional [Pre-Conference Session](#) on the afternoon of September 23. Focused on state-level advocacy, this session is ideal for those new to advocacy or looking to strengthen their work at the state level.

Register [Here](#).

AESA ADVOCACY GUIDE: Maximizing Impact

Educational Service Agencies play a critical role in supporting schools and districts, yet their unique needs and challenges often require tailored advocacy approaches. The recently released AESA Advocacy Guide recognizes the distinct position of ESAs and offers targeted strategies to help you navigate the complex landscape of education policy and funding.

Key Features of the toolkit include:

- Audience Analysis
- Message Development
- Channels & Content
- Advocacy Tactics

Advocacy is essential for ensuring that ESAs receive the support and recognition they deserve. With this specialized Advocacy Guide, you're equipped to lead impactful advocacy efforts that can make a real difference. [Download your copy today](#) and take the first step towards stronger, more effective advocacy for your ESA.

SHARE YOUR ADVOCACY SUCCESS STORIES

AESA would like to highlight successful state-level advocacy campaigns. Share your triumphs in state advocacy with fellow members! Contribute to our newsletter by submitting your success stories – your experiences can enlighten and inspire others in navigating the often-complex landscape of state advocacy. Together, we can amplify our collective knowledge for the benefit of the entire AESA membership. Send your stories to info@aesa.us

STAY CONNECTED & INVOLVED

Have feedback for the AESA state advocacy team? Would you like to see a particular issue area addressed in future issues? Send feedback to info@aesa.us

JOIN THE CONVERSATION

