

AESA State Examiner

The State Examiner: December 2025

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 includes advocacy tips to activate and empower our members to be informed, effective education advocates.

Inside this Edition

- State Legislative & Policy Issues Monitoring
- State Budget & Finance Monitoring
- Statehouse News: Education Policy
- National Education Policy Reports
- Advocacy Tips

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 December 2025 examines state responses to the Teacher Workforce challenge.

States Rise to the Teacher Workforce Challenge

The quality of the teacher in front of a classroom continues to be one of the top three contributors or predictors of student achievement. While individual student factors are crucial, the environment created by educators and support networks plays a substantial role in academic achievement. Yet the challenge of identifying, recruiting, and retaining K-12 teachers and support staff has become increasingly difficult, particularly in the post-COVID era. This challenge has impacted all 50 states and prompted a variety of policy and funding responses from state legislatures across the United States.

Compensation & Recruitment The Focus in 2025

Teacher workforce issues were front and center in state policy agendas throughout 2025, with at least 26 governors prioritizing educator recruitment, retention, and compensation in their legislative sessions. From

substantial salary increases to innovative housing solutions, states demonstrated a renewed commitment to strengthening the teaching profession amid persistent nationwide shortages.

According to the Education Commission of the State's Education Policy Tracking Database, 1,036 education-specific policy or appropriation bills made it through the legislative process in 2025 in the United States and three territories. That represents 17.8% of all bills introduced in state legislatures in 2025 (5,788). Of those education-oriented measures, eighty bills from 31 states (approximately 8% of bills passed) dealt specifically with the teaching profession on issues ranging from licensure to recruitment, educator preparation programs to teacher compensation, and more.

A National Groundswell for Teacher Pay

The momentum for competitive teacher compensation reached unprecedented levels in 2025. Governors across the political spectrum acknowledged that competitive salaries remain fundamental to building a stable educator workforce. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis highlighted his state's record \$4.6 billion investment in teacher salaries, while Texas Governor Greg Abbott championed pathways to six-figure salaries for exemplary teachers. In West Virginia, Governor Patrick Morrissey emphasized the strategic importance of outpacing neighboring states' compensation to attract high-quality educators.

Several states confronted unique workforce challenges requiring creative solutions. Hawaii Governor Josh Green directly connected his state's teacher shortage to the affordable housing crisis, prioritizing housing construction for educators. Maryland Governor Wes Moore announced plans for a national recruitment campaign and debt-free pathways into teaching, recognizing that traditional in-state pipelines alone cannot meet demand.

Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro celebrated the expansion of student teacher stipends, acknowledging that financial barriers during clinical preparation deter many candidates from pursuing education careers.

Spotlight States: Five Lead the Way

Indiana's Comprehensive Compensation Reform (SB 146): Indiana enacted one of the most significant teacher compensation packages in the nation through Senate Bill 146, which passed with overwhelming bipartisan support—47-0 in the Senate and 90-1 in the House. Effective June 30, 2025, the legislation increased the state's minimum teacher salary from \$40,000 to \$45,000 and elevated the required school expenditure threshold for teacher compensation from 62% to 65% of state tuition support. The bill also established the Indiana Teacher Recruitment Program and removed prohibitions on ranking teacher preparation programs, creating greater transparency in educator training quality. The legislation reflected Governor Mike Braun's commitment to making teaching financially viable for early-career educators while ensuring that state funding directly benefits classroom professionals rather than administrative costs.

Texas Delivers Historic Investment (HB 2): Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed House Bill 2 into law in June 2025, authorizing a record \$8.5 billion investment in public education with \$4 billion dedicated specifically to teacher compensation. The centerpiece of the legislation is the Teacher Retention Allotment (TRA), which provides tiered salary increases based on years of experience and district size. Teachers with five or more years of experience in small districts (fewer than 5,000 students) receive \$10,000 annual increases, while those in larger districts receive \$5,500 increases. The legislation also expanded the Teacher Incentive Allotment, Texas's performance-based compensation system, raising stipends for master teachers from \$32,000 to \$36,000 annually and creating a new "acknowledged" designation worth \$3,000. Importantly, the bill prioritizes rural and high-poverty communities by providing higher compensation multipliers for educators serving in these critical areas.

Pennsylvania Expands Student Teacher Support: Pennsylvania's 2025-26 budget, signed into law on November 12, 2025, allocated \$30 million to the Pennsylvania Student Teacher Support Program—a 50% increase over the previous year. The program provides \$10,000 stipends to eligible student teachers during their required 12-week placements, with additional \$2,500 grants available for cooperating teachers who supervise them. Despite the increased appropriation, approximately 3,500 student teachers applied for stipends during the 2025-26 academic year, exceeding available funding. The Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA) is working to determine provisional eligibility and distribute funds to school districts for remittance to qualifying candidates. Advocacy organizations, including the Pennsylvania State Education Association and Teach Plus Pennsylvania, continue pushing for full funding at \$50 million to ensure universal access to this career-entry support. The program addresses a critical barrier to teacher recruitment: student teachers typically cannot maintain paid employment during their full-time clinical placements, creating financial hardship that disproportionately impacts candidates from lower-income backgrounds. This is an issue that a number of other states are looking to tackle including neighboring Ohio.

Maryland Accelerates "Grow Your Own" Initiatives: In December 2025, Maryland Governor Wes Moore announced \$19 million in grants to expand the state's Grow-Your-Own Educators Program, a cornerstone of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future education reform package. The initiative recruits aspiring teachers from within school communities—paraprofessionals, support staff, and community members—providing financial support and preparation pathways to earn teaching credentials while remaining employed in their districts. Maryland's comprehensive approach to the teacher shortage has shown measurable results: teacher vacancies declined from 1,619 in the 2024-25 school year to 886 in 2025-26, a reduction of nearly 50%. In November 2025, the Maryland Board of Public Works approved a \$2.8 million contract with [TEACH.org](https://teach.org) to launch a statewide and national recruitment campaign targeting high-quality educators. The state's Blueprint legislation also established a teacher career ladder with performance-based advancement and salary increases, though implementation of some components—including expanded teacher collaborative planning time—has been adjusted to address current workforce capacity constraints.

Hawaii Invests in Educator Housing: Hawaii took an unconventional but essential approach to teacher retention by directly addressing the state's housing affordability crisis. In May 2025, the Hawaii State Department of Education broke ground on a \$20 million, 47-unit rental housing development in Lahaina, Maui, specifically for educators. The project, scheduled for completion in December 2025, prioritizes teachers displaced by the devastating 2023 wildfires and those working in West Maui schools. The state's employee survey revealed that nearly one-third of Maui educators faced housing displacement following the fires, and more than 20% of Lahaina teachers considered leaving Hawaii entirely due to housing costs. While two bills proposing \$500 monthly housing vouchers for teachers (HB 89 and HB 323) failed to pass during the 2025 legislative session, the Lahaina project represents a concrete commitment to linking educator retention with housing stability. According to online news sources, a second teacher housing project in Mililani is progressing toward a 2029 opening.

Broader State Actions and Emerging Trends to Monitor

Beyond the five highlighted states, numerous others advanced teacher workforce legislation:

- **South Dakota** (though passed in 2024) implemented its minimum \$45,000 teacher salary requirement beginning in fiscal year 2025, with future increases tied directly to state aid funding growth. The law includes accountability provisions beginning in fiscal year 2026-27, with \$500 penalties per teacher for districts failing to meet compensation requirements. Find more information [here](#).
- **Colorado** passed Senate Bill 25-154, creating flexible pathways for licensed secondary teachers to earn early childhood and elementary endorsements through demonstrated competencies rather than solely

through traditional coursework. This approach expands the pool of qualified educators in high-demand areas while recognizing the expertise of experienced teachers. Find more information [here](#).

- **Oklahoma** enacted multiple workforce bills during its 2025 session, including Senate Bill 235, which established a Grow-Your-Own Educator Program providing matching funds for school districts to support paraprofessionals and support staff in earning teaching degrees. The legislature also passed House Bill 1087, extending salary step increases for 10 additional years beyond the previous 25-year ceiling, rewarding veteran educators who remain in the classroom. Click the following links for [SB 235](#) and [HB 1087](#).
- **Florida** maintained its commitment to teacher pay, budgeting \$1.36 billion for salary increases in fiscal year 2025-26—an increase of nearly \$101.6 million over the previous year—while preserving the state's \$47,500 minimum starting salary established in 2020.

Next Steps: The Road Ahead

While significant progress occurred in 2025, challenges remain. According to reports, teacher attrition continues to drive 90% of annual hiring demand, with fewer than one-fifth of departures due to retirement. Declining enrollment in teacher preparation programs nationwide compounds recruitment difficulties. Several states—including North Carolina, Arizona, and Kentucky—debated substantial compensation increases but had not finalized legislation as of December 2025. ESA advocates should continue to monitor these issues in their respective states.

The 2025 legislative year demonstrated that states recognize teacher compensation and workforce stability as non-negotiable investments in educational quality. As competition for talented professionals intensifies across all sectors, the question for state policymakers is not whether to act, but whether current investments will prove sufficient to build the stable, highly qualified teacher workforce that students deserve. The evidence from Maryland's dramatic reduction in vacancies and the overwhelming demand for Pennsylvania's student teacher stipends suggests that when states commit meaningful resources to comprehensive workforce strategies, measurable progress follows. ESA advocates should incorporate this into their messaging.

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 December 2025 follows below.

[MARESA school districts reject state per pupil funding due to concerns about state budget language](#)
TV6 Michigan

[Public school funding nears \\$1 trillion, Reason Foundation finds](#)
K12 Dive

[Wyoming Legislators Advance Plan to Kill All Residential Property Taxes](#)
Cowboy State Daily

[Nebraska tax revenues rise above projections ahead of 60-day legislative session](#)
Nebraska Examiner

[Indiana Leads Republican Push To Cut ‘Red Tape’ of Federal Grants](#)
The74

[After big November changes, Ohio lawmakers push more property tax fixes](#)
Cleveland.com

[Updated Look at State Budgets Suggests Tougher Future For K-12 Education Spending](#)
EdWeek

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:

[Policy expert, district superintendent weigh in on Oregon’s push to improve reading scores](#)
Oregon Public Broadcasting

[Montana judge blocks education savings accounts for students with special needs for lack of funding](#)
Associated Press

[Wisconsin school districts spent more on special education, now they’ll be reimbursed less](#)
Wisconsin Public Radio

[Democratic lawmakers propose bill to ensure schools get special education funding at estimated rates](#)
Wisconsin Examiner

[State lawmakers gear up for AI regulation battles in ‘26](#)
Pluribus News

[Southern implementing “YOU Matter Here” campaign in Partnership with ESC](#)
Morning Journal News

[County Office of Education to decide on a countywide charter school proposal](#)
Monterrey County Now

[Michigan schools lose court battle over controversial waiver for safety funding](#)
Michigan Live

[Judge rules K-12 mental health funding with strings attached is constitutional](#)
Lansing State Journal

[Some rural, low-income Oregon families struggle to access after-school amid funding uncertainty](#)
Oregon Capital Chronicle

[These local education service agency workers voted to unionize. What comes next?](#)
Centre Daily Times

[Homeless youth say they need more from schools, social services](#)

Stateline

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 from the Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, Education Commission of the States, Learning Policy Institute, NASBO, and the Hechinger Report.

[State of Early Care and Education in Pennsylvania](#). A comprehensive report released by Pennsylvania Partnerships for Children, a principal partner of the Early Learning PA coalition, reveals that Pennsylvania's early care and education system is facing a critical crisis, one that threatens the well-being of children, families, and the state's economy. The 2025 State of Early Care and Education in Pennsylvania outlines the urgent need for investment in child care and pre-kindergarten programs, citing widespread workforce shortages, unaffordable costs, and limited access to high-quality care. This report takes a deeper look into the complexities within Pennsylvania's child care and pre-k system and makes recommendations on improvements that are necessary to ensure the system functions equitably and increases access and affordability for all families in the commonwealth.

[State Level Efforts to Support School Leaders](#). This Education Commission of the States Policy Brief identifies recruitment and professional development as two main focus areas for states interested in supporting their principal pipelines and developing effective school leaders. It also offers strategies to improve school leader recruitment and retention through innovative state-level examples.

[Teacher Residencies in Texas: Supporting Successful Implementation](#). In 2021, the Texas Education Agency launched a large-scale, statewide effort to establish and sustain teacher residencies. The High-Quality, Sustainable Residencies Program was funded as part of the \$1.4 billion Texas COVID Learning Acceleration Supports (TCLAS) initiative, underwritten by federal COVID-19 relief funds. From 2021 to 2024, this program provided funding for more than 85 residency programs, offered by school districts in partnership with state-designated educator preparation programs (EPPs), with paid placements for more than 2,000 residents. This report from the Learning Policy Institute examines policy development and sustainability and includes specific recommendations.

[NASBO State Expenditure Report](#). The National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO) released the latest [State Expenditure Report](#) which includes data from estimated fiscal 2025, actual fiscal 2024, and actual fiscal 2023. The report provides 50-state data broken down by fund source and program area, as well as data from three U.S. territories (Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) and the District of Columbia. K12 education can be found [here](#).

[5 early ed highlights from 2025](#). Despite a turbulent federal landscape in 2025, states and municipalities drove significant progress in early childhood education through local innovation and dedicated funding measures. This *Hechinger Report* identifies key highlights including New Mexico's implementation of universal child care and New Jersey's new accountability measures for special education inclusion, alongside expanded family leave and support policies in Illinois, Colorado, and Minnesota. The report also notes a resurgence of research-

backed play initiatives, such as Pittsburgh’s citywide program, as communities seek to counter pandemic-era learning deficits. Looking ahead, experts anticipate that 2026 will be defined by the tension between this bold state-level momentum and the increasing fiscal pressure of federal budget cuts.

These five reports underscore critical challenges and emerging opportunities that directly shape the environment in which ESAs operate and serve their member districts. The Pennsylvania early care and education crisis illustrates the systemic workforce and affordability barriers that ripple across state systems, creating urgent demand for the technical assistance, professional development, and coordinated planning services that ESAs are uniquely positioned to provide. Similarly, the ECS policy brief on school leader support and Texas’s teacher residency implementation model offer concrete, research-backed strategies that ESAs can leverage to strengthen educator pipelines and leadership development within their regions—particularly through collaborative partnerships with educator preparation programs and school districts. The Hechinger Report’s documentation of state and local innovation in early childhood education, coupled with recognition of emerging fiscal pressures at the federal level, reinforces that ESAs must position themselves as strategic intermediaries capable of maximizing local and state resources while building resilience against policy volatility. Collectively, these reports signal that ESAs’ value proposition—bringing data-informed coordination, shared services, and evidence-based implementation support to fragmented systems—aligns precisely with the systemic needs states and school systems are seeking to address in 2025 and beyond.

DECEMBER 2025 MONTHLY ADVOCACY TIP

Grassroots and Grasstops Advocacy: A Two-Pronged Approach to Effective Advocacy

Campaign research demonstrates that movements employing grassroots organizing strategies achieve win rates 13 percentage points above average, significantly outperforming policy-focused or analysis-driven approaches alone. But for educational service agencies (ESAs), integrating both strategies can create a force multiplier effect:

- **grassroots** demonstrations of broad public engagement and constituent concern establish a political imperative difficult for policymakers to ignore, and
- **grasstops** advocates provide access that might not otherwise be available and trusted voices that can navigate political complexities and secure decisive meetings at the most critical moments in the legislative and appropriations processes.

This approach is particularly important for an embattled public education sector that may not have the political capital of the business community, school choice advocates, or other influential special interest groups.

The framework proposed in this month’s tip provides actionable steps for identifying, recruiting, and deploying both advocate types within the ESA community. ESAs’ multi-district reach and institutional credibility position them uniquely to drive coordinated state-level advocacy campaigns; a skillset that can be used at the federal level as well.

We explore both advocate types below and include tools to assist ESAs in organizing successful advocacy campaigns.

Grassroots Advocacy: The Cornerstone of Democratic Pressure

Grassroots advocacy represents a bottom-up strategy that activates ordinary citizens personally affected by education policy decisions. These advocates get their collective power from volume rather than their own individual reputation which can often be overlooked by state policymakers. In the ESA context, grassroots

supporters typically include parents concerned about school funding, teachers advocating for professional development opportunities, district administrators seeking regional efficiencies, and community members supporting educational equity initiatives.

The defining characteristic of grassroots advocacy is **scale through authentic public engagement and collective action**. This is also a defining characteristic of ESAs. This becomes even more critical as traditional retail lobbying becomes more difficult and less effective for public education interests. Effective grassroots campaigns transform passive supporters into active participants who contact legislators, attend public hearings, share personal stories about how ESA services impact their schools, and demonstrate that education issues resonate across multiple districts within a legislator's region. This approach proves particularly potent during early campaign stages when building momentum and demonstrating broad public concern may be most crucial.

Grasstops Advocacy: A Catalyst for Strategic Access

Grasstops advocacy operates as a more top-down strategy that deploys influential individuals with pre-existing relationships to policymakers. These advocates possess **influence through proximity**—their value stems not from numbers but from credibility, access, and the ability to command a legislator's attention through established trust.

In the ESA community, grasstops advocates may likely include executive directors with state education agency relationships, governing board members, university leadership with higher education policy networks, business council members who serve on state workforce boards, and thought leaders published in education policy journals. Unlike grassroots supporters who generate pressure, grasstops advocates facilitate education and relationship building—they can make phone calls that will be answered, provide expert testimony during legislative hearings, and secure face-to-face meetings during critical legislative windows where few policy windows exist.

How each of these approaches is deployed and where they are most impactful is captured in the table below.

Strategic Advocacy Applications

DIMENSION	GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY	GRASSTOPS ADVOCACY
Core Power Source	Volume of constituent voices creating political imperative	Credibility and access through established relationships and campaign contributions
Optimal Timing	Early campaign stages for momentum building	Critical decision points (hearings, markups, floor votes)
Primary Methods	Petitions, rallies, social media campaigns, mass email campaigns, citizen-initiated ballot initiatives (See November Examiner)	Private meetings or phone calls, expert testimony, advisory board service
Advocate Profile	Directly affected individuals (parents, teachers, administrators)	Influential community and education leaders with political connections and history of supporting campaigns
Legislative Impact	Demonstrates constituent concern and electoral implications	Provides policy expertise and personal persuasion
ESA-Specific Application	Teachers and parents in ESA service regions engaged via surveys and events	Executive directors and board members with state/federal relationships

With the two approaches defined, it is time to shift attention toward identifying advocates in each group.

Identification Methodologies for Grassroots Advocates

Stakeholder Interest Surveys represent the most scalable identification method to find your grassroots supporters. Deploy targeted surveys asking educators, administrators, and community members about their education priorities, experiences with ESA services, and willingness to engage in advocacy. Effective surveys include:

- Issue importance ranking (e.g., *"Which education funding challenges most affect your district?"*)
- Past advocacy behavior (*"Have you contacted elected officials about education policy?"*)
- Relationship mapping (*"Do you know other educators or administrators who share your concerns?"*)
- Commitment level assessment (*"Would you attend a legislative hearing? Write to Congress members?"*)

This approach identifies both emerging constituencies and individuals ready for deeper engagement.

Identification Methodologies for Grasstops Advocates

Stakeholder Relationship Surveys specifically probe for political connections and influence. Ask board members, executive directors, and long-tenured administrators: *"Do you have personal or professional relationships with state education officials, state representatives or senators, or legislative education staff?"*, *"Do you donate to legislative campaigns?"*, and *"Would you be willing to leverage those relationships for ESA advocacy?"*. These targeted surveys identify the hidden network of influence already present within the ESA community.

Actionable Tools for State-Level Implementation

Once advocates are identified, it is time to implement actionable strategies. The following templates are designed so ESA leaders can move from abstract advocacy goals to concrete action plans.

Completing them with your team can produce a living relationship map and power map for your state that you update before each legislative session. These tools intentionally combine relationship mapping and power analysis—mirroring research that shows successful advocacy campaigns invest as much in understanding influence networks as they do in generating volume of communications. This gives readers something they can photocopy, drop into a shared spreadsheet, or adapt into a CRM or advocacy platform immediately.

State-Level Grassroots Relationship Mapping

Use this table to systematically identify and organize grassroots allies across your state who can be mobilized around ESA priorities.

Stakeholder Inventory (Who's in Your Network?)

Stakeholder Name / Group	Role / Affiliation (ESA, district, org)	Primary Constituency (educators, families, students, business, etc.)	Current Relationship Strength (None / Emerging / Established / Strong)	Current Engagement Level (Passive / Occasional / Active / Leader)	Issues They Care About Most (top 3)	Preferred Communication Channels (email, text, social, meetings)
Example: District Principal Association	Multi-district educator org	Teachers, administrators, and school leaders	Emerging	Occasional	Teacher retention, professional development, and funding equity	Email, monthly meetings

Suggested Use: Print or recreate this table and populate at least 25–50 entries statewide. Encourage your team to fill it out with a cross-functional group (ESA leadership, advocacy staff, and at least one district partner) to avoid blind spots.

Relationship Gaps and Opportunities

After completing the inventory, summarize what you see:

Area	Observations & Questions
Underrepresented Regions	Where do we lack grassroots contacts (rural, suburban, urban)?
Underrepresented Constituencies	Which voices are missing (families, students, special education, early childhood, CTE, rural districts)?
High-Potential but Under-Engaged Stakeholders	Who cares deeply about our issues but is only passively engaged today?
Partnership Opportunities	Which groups working on similar issues could be invited into a shared ESA advocacy effort?

Grasstops Interest/Access Matrix

The following matrix is designed so ESA leaders can visually sort potential grasstops advocates by both their interest in ESA policy issues and their access to key policymakers. Completing it with your team helps surface priority grasstops recruits you may be overlooking today. High-interest, high-access individuals in the upper-right quadrant should be your first calls for targeted advocacy outreach.

Rate Individuals (1–5 Scale)

- Interest in ESA Policy Issues
1 = low interest; 5 = consistently engaged, asks to be involved
- Access to Target Policymakers
1 = no real access; 5 = direct, trusted relationship with state legislators or agency directors

	Low Access (1–2)	High Access (4–5)
High Interest (4–5)	Quadrant A – Grassroots Leaders - Highly motivated but limited access. - Ideal for testimonies, stories, and mobilizing others.	Quadrant B – Priority Grasstops Recruits - High motivation and strong access. - Top targets for briefings, legislative meetings, and media quotes.
Low Interest (1–2)	Quadrant C – General Supporters - Minimal interest and limited access. - Keep informed; occasional low-lift actions.	Quadrant D – Strategic Relationships - Strong access but low current interest. - Focus on relationship-building and values alignment before hard asks.

Power Mapping for ESA Advocacy Campaigns

Use this template to help you visually and analytically map influence around a specific policy goal (e.g., "Increase state investment in regional ESA services" or "Protect ESA eligibility in a state or federal program").

Decision-Maker Profile

Element	Example	Template
Target Decision-Maker (Name & Role)	Senator Jones	
Body / Venue (Committee, agency, board)	Senate Education Committee	
Specific Decision / "Ask"	Protect ESA eligibility in a state "Grown Your Own" program	
Timeline / Key Dates (hearings, markups, votes, budget deadlines)	Committee vote scheduled for end of month	
Known Positions on ESA Issues (Supportive / Neutral / Opposed / Unknown)	Neutral	
Stated Priorities (from speeches, press releases, social media)	Supports increased opportunities for educators	
Known Concerns or Constraints	Generally, supports implementation at district vs. state or regional levels Unfamiliar with ESA work in this area	
Existing ESA Contacts (who already knows this person)	ESA Director and local superintendent	

Influence & Power Grid

Score and place individuals or organizations on this simple grid: **Influence (Low–High)** vs. **Support for ESA Position (Oppose–Support)**.

Stakeholder / Organization	State Budget Chair	
Type (person/organization)	State Legislator	
Influence on Decision-Maker (1–5)	4	
Level of Current Stance on ESA Issue (Oppose / Lean Oppose / Neutral / Lean Support / Support)	Lean Support	
Existing Relationship to ESA (None / Indirect / Direct)	Indirect	
Relationship Owner (who knows them)	ESA Executive Director	
Relationship Owner level of Influence	High	
Desired Future Role (Ally, Champion, Neutralized Opponent, Intel Source, Connector)	Champion	
Immediate Next Step (meet, brief, invite, ask, etc.)	Schedule briefing on ESA funding impact before markup	

Suggested Use: Start with 5-10 names and place each stakeholder on the grid (mentally or visually). Try using different colors or symbols when you sketch this grid (e.g., green for supporters, red for opponents, blue for undecided) to make patterns visible quickly.

Leveraging ESAs' Structural Advantages

Ultimately, Educational Service Agencies possess unique structural advantages for scaled advocate identification and mobilization:

- **Multi-district networks** provide natural grassroots reach across multiple school systems and geographic regions
- **Superintendent relationships** create grassroots access pathways to state legislators and education agency leadership
- **Professional development infrastructure** enables systematic surveying of educators and administrators
- **Regional presence** allows for locally tailored advocacy while maintaining coordinated state and national messaging
- **Shared services credibility** demonstrates concrete fiscal and operational impact on schools

Conclusion

For the educational service agency community nationally, the path to state policy influence runs through strategic integration of grassroots breadth and grassroots depth. ESAs, with their unique position spanning multiple districts, maintaining relationships with educators and state administrators, and serving as implementation hubs for state education programs, are ideally positioned to operationalize this framework.

Success requires treating advocate identification not as a one-time recruitment drive but as an ongoing system of **surveys, mapping, and relationship cultivation** that continuously replenishes both pipelines. That's why this month's article includes a multitude of tool and templates to assist.

By implementing systematic identification protocols and coordinating activation timing across states, AESA and its member agencies can build advocacy infrastructure that sustains itself across legislative cycles and administrations, ensuring state education policy reflects the voices of those positioned to implement it effectively: the educators, administrators, and service providers working within ESAs to strengthen schools and support every student.

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. 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. For those with limited time, the one-day workshop delivers essential advocacy skills and actionable insights in a focused format. 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 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

