



AESA State Examiner

The State Examiner: August 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 report curated by the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA). It provides legislative monitoring, news articles, and related content gathered from 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.

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STATE LEGISLATIVE ISSUE MONITORING

In each edition of the *State Examiner*, AESA monitors state-level legislation and legislative trends impacting educational service agencies and their client schools and districts. This month's report for August 2025 examines state-level legislation to address expanding workforce development and career technical education pathways for high-demand careers.

States Tackle College & Career Readiness: Expanding Workforce Development & CTE Pathways for High-Demand Careers

States nationwide are acting quickly in 2025 to expand college and career readiness by investing in **workforce development and Career & Technical Education (CTE) pathways for high-demand careers**. Fresh funding models, integrated policies, and employer-driven reforms are advancing in legislatures, signaling a focus on meeting changing economic and labor market needs.

Policy Trends and Pending Legislation

2025 legislative sessions are seeing a surge in **apprenticeships, dual enrollment, and work-based learning** as key tools for elevating college and career readiness. States such as Colorado and Kentucky have enacted significant policies:

- **Colorado's** SB 315 creates funding streams for readiness programs and centralizes pathways (SB 315 can be viewed [here](#);
- **Kentucky's** HB 193 broadens scholarship access for dual enrollment in both CTE and general education, without penalty for course withdrawal (for more information go the [Kentucky General Assembly](#)).
- **Indiana** and **Ohio** are revamping CTE credentialing, increasing flexibility for high school diplomas, and incentivizing real-world skills acquisition through readiness seals and work-based learning hours. Ohio, for example, uses public libraries as career resource centers and invests in fields like advanced tech and cybersecurity.

Recent examples from other states:

- **Illinois:** Proposed Senate Bill 2482 and House Bill 3717 would allow community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees in high-demand fields, increasing affordable access for working adults and rural communities while meeting workforce needs in industries such as healthcare, education, and IT.
- **Georgia:** The recently approved High Demand Career List aligns career and technical education, training, and workforce development to the needs of employers, guiding program improvements and regional investment in talent pipelines as part of the Top State for Talent initiative.
- **Arizona:** The 2025–2028 Perkins V State Plan launches a robust statewide CTE Strategic Plan aimed at elevating program coordination, optimizing partnerships, expanding supports for special populations, and deepening engagement with local employers to ensure CTE alignment with labor market realities.

As these state-level conversations unfold, momentum for practical skills training, integrated service models, and strong employer/educator collaboration continues to accelerate. This provides a unique opportunity for ESAs as the connectors.

The **national landscape** further encourages alignment and expansion: The U.S. Departments of Labor, Commerce, and Education unveiled new plans to reach one million active apprenticeships and modernize systems in line with shifting labor demands, supported by renewed federal funding streams and calls for industry-driven approaches that begin career exploration as early as middle school. Advocacy groups spotlight the expansion of short-term credentials, employer partnerships, and digital modernization as critical strategies.

Integrated Systems and Data-Driven Accountability

Integrated approaches—breaking down silos between education, workforce, and social services—characterize many 2025 bills. States are investing in digital transformation, using shared data to drive public investment, increase transparency, and measure program ROI across agencies and regions.

Challenges and Opportunities for ESAs

Challenges:

- Fragmented funding and shifting accountability measures require ESAs to navigate complex cross-agency landscapes.
- Persistent gaps for underserved populations, especially regarding access and transportation, remain amid rapid policy shifts driven by technology.

- Adaptation to evolving federal initiatives, particularly around AI and digital transformation, demands agile, ongoing upskilling and professional development for ESA and CTE educators.

Opportunities:

- ESA leaders can harness new funding for apprenticeships, career pathways, and dual enrollment initiatives, leveraging partnerships to build robust regional ecosystems.
- Facilitation of employer-aligned regional collaborations positions ESAs as linchpins in integrated service delivery and workforce development.
- The growing emphasis on data and continuous feedback loops enables ESAs to lead quality improvements and drive evidence-based outcomes.

Recommendations for ESA Advocates

ESA advocates should prioritize:

- Monitoring new federal and state funding for career pathways, apprenticeship, and dual enrollment.
- Tracking legislative efforts to broaden access to credentialing and licensure for CTE students and educators.
- Supporting policies that advance data-driven accountability and regional employer partnerships as keys to successful workforce programming.

States are clearly moving toward **modern, integrated, and future-ready workforce development**, making this a pivotal moment for ESAs to drive regional collaboration, ensure equity, and strengthen outcomes for learners and communities.

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 2025 follows below.

[What a Changing State Budget and Policy Landscape Will Mean for K-12 Spending](#)

Education Week

[Despite Slow Growth, FY 2025 Exceeded Forecasts](#)

NASBO

[Iowa DOGE floats performance-based pay for teachers and eliminating IPERS for new state hires](#)

Iowa Public Radio

[Four-day school weeks are on the rise as Texas districts look for teacher perks on a tight budget](#)

Texas Tribune

[Public Schools in a Bind as Enrollment Declines and Choice Expands](#)

The Hill

[Trump's Big, Beautiful Bill: States Face Shortfalls on Eve of Changes](#)

Axios

[Work begins to review how Nebraska funds its 245 K-12 school districts, with possible tweaks](#)

Nebraska Examiner

[Michigan Lawmakers Strongly Divided on Budget](#)

WWMT News Channel 3

[Policy advisors on both sides advocate caution in repealing state income tax](#)

Savannah Morning News

[Opt In or Not? States Weigh Big Decision on Federal School Vouchers](#)

Education Week

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:

[These 4 trends are shaping the 2025-26 school year](#)

K-12 Dive

[ESU 13 Awarded Up to \\$2.2 Million to Boost Literacy in the Panhandle](#)

The Alliance Times Herald

[Some Fifteen Years After Disastrous Debut, Common Core Math Endures in Many States](#)

The 75

[School Districts Are Forging New Partnerships as Redistricting Task Force Ponders Consolidation](#)

Seven Days VT

[Statewide education group calls for overhaul of Wisconsin school report cards](#)

The Freeman

[As Alaska Legislature convenes education task force, lawmakers have different views of where to go](#)

Alaska Beacon

[Mississippi Needs to Consolidate More School Districts, Governor Says](#)

Mississippi Free Press

[\\$2.5M grant boosts after-school programs](#)

Fingerlakes.com

Micro Schools Growing in Popularity but State Regulations Not Keeping Up
Stateline

Ohio has more than two dozen microschools, but the state's dept. of education does not oversee them
Ohio Capital Journal

STATE & NATIONAL REPORTS IMPACTING EDUCATION

AESA monitors state and national reports 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 and survey results from the Economic Policy Institute, PDK, and All4Ed:

- **U.S. investment in public education is at risk: Vouchers, state budget austerity, and federal attacks on the Department of Education threaten children's futures.** This report from the Economic Policy Institute concludes that weak public K–12 education spending in the U.S. and the rising trend of attacks on public schools threaten our student futures. The last decade has seen a flurry of high-quality studies that show that increasing the level of spending per pupil would have reliable effects in boosting student achievement and closing various achievement gaps. Read [here](#).
- **National Survey Finds Declining Support for AI in K-12.** A [poll](#) by PDK found a 13 percent drop in support for using AI to prepare lesson plans, a 9 percent drop in support for AI as practice for standardized tests, and a 5 percent drop in support for students using it on homework. For full poll reports click [here](#).
- **Let's Measure Ready A 50-State Analysis of College, Career, Military, and Civic Readiness Indicators.** While nearly every state has some form of college and career readiness criteria for high school students, there are still areas for growth in how data on students' postsecondary readiness is collected, according to a July report from All4Ed and the Urban Institute. Though criteria vary depending on each state's priorities and goals, 42 states currently use at least one college and career readiness indicator in their school accountability systems. Accountability systems include both indicators and measures. View the report [here](#).

These reports matter for ESAs because they highlight important shifts and pressures in public education, like budget threats, changing views on technology, and new ways states track student readiness. By keeping up with these trends and staying involved, ESAs can do even more to help schools get fair funding, make smart choices about technology, and strengthen efforts that help students succeed. Being informed and engaged makes it easier for ESAs to support schools and students, no matter how the education landscape changes.

AUGUST 2025 MONTHLY ADVOCACY TIP

"Don't Overwhelm or Overstate" — Bring Clarity Out of Complexity

As educational advocates working on behalf of Educational Service Agencies (ESAs), our cause is vital—but our audience is just as important. Legislators are persistently bombarded by information, requests,

and statistics from many corners and various constituencies. In this article we explore why disciplined advocacy— “Don’t Overwhelm or Overstate”—is one of the most effective strategies for impactful, lasting state-level influence.

Why Less Is More in Advocacy

The temptation to address every issue at once or to flood legislators with mountains of statistics is strong, especially given the depth and breadth of ESA services. However, overwhelming a lawmaker with too many issues or exaggerated claims can result in them tuning out or questioning the credibility of the ESA you represent. Effective advocacy is about *strategic simplicity*: delivering clear, fact-based, and relevant messages that stick. And, importantly, knowing the current context and what matters most at any given time.

Strategies & Tactics

1. Prioritize and Organize Issues

- Before any legislative meeting or communication, identify your top one or two priority asks.
- Rank advocacy points by urgency and relevance to both ESA needs and current legislative agendas – play to *their* interests.
- Resist the urge to “mention everything;” instead, focus on the highest-impact issue for that interaction.

2. Stick to Data That Matters

- Select a handful of clear, up-to-date statistics or stories that directly tie to your “ask.”
 - Example: Instead of listing every ESA service, highlight one program’s outcomes tied to proposed legislation or a particular legislator’s area of interest.
- Use visual summaries (infographics, tables) sparingly to reinforce points, not to overwhelm.

3. Avoid Hyperbole and Focus on Facts

- Refrain from exaggerating challenges or successes. Keep your emotions in check. Authenticity builds trust.
- Use verified data, cite reputable sources, and be prepared to provide backup documentation if asked.
- When sharing stories, choose those that are specific, recent, and relatable to the legislator’s district or priorities. This ties into knowing your legislator and building relationships

4. Ask and Listen

- Engage legislators with a concise question or call to action, leaving room for their input.
- Invite discussion by asking, “Which aspect of [ESA’s] work is most relevant for your district?” or “Where do you see a role for [ESA] in addressing your key priority areas?”

5. Prepare an “Elevator Pitch”

- Be ready to summarize your key issue in 30 seconds, focusing on what matters most.
- Have a short but more detailed follow-up ready if time permits (3 minutes).

Keeping it simple, focusing on what matters most, and sharing relatable stories or data aligned to legislator priorities will improve your chances of success. But a disciplined approach to advocacy also means tracking your progress.

Measuring Success

To ensure disciplined messaging is driving results, establish clear benchmarks:

Success Measure	Example Goal	Evaluation Method
Number of focused issue meetings	At least 90% of meetings address no more than two issues	Review meeting agendas and reports
Data cited per advocacy interaction	No more than three statistics or stories per meeting/email	Audit communication materials quarterly
Legislator response quality	Legislator recalls main point or follows up on a single issue	Review correspondence and meeting minutes
Post-meeting feedback	80% of advocates report feeling able to “stay on message”	Collect and analyze post-advocacy debrief surveys

Recommendations for ESA Advocates and Advocacy Teams

- Conduct pre-meeting briefings to establish meeting priorities and talking points.
- Use role-play activities to practice concise delivery and response to off-topic questions.
- Debrief after each engagement: Did you stay focused? Did the legislator engage on the chosen issue? Did you get a commitment? What are the next steps?
- Keep a log of legislator feedback to refine and focus future communications.

Conclusion: The Power of Precision

In state-level advocacy, **clarity is power**. By presenting clear, factual, and relevant information without overwhelming detail or overstatement, ESA advocates and statewide networks of ESAs can build credibility, maintain attention, and foster productive, trust-based relationships with legislators. Focused messaging is persuasive messaging.

Stay tuned for next month’s article, where we dive into leveraging powerful stories from the ESC frontline to deepen advocacy impact. Your engagement, grounded in knowledge, is what transforms policy aspirations into reality for educators and students.

ADVOCACY IN ACTION PRE-CONFERENCE

Before the main conference kicks off, we’re offering a special Pre-Conference Session on September 17, 2025, from 1:00-4:00 pm. This session will focus specifically on state-level advocacy, providing you with essential tools and insights to advocate effectively within your state.

Pre-Conference Highlights:

Session 1: Legislative Branch Education Priorities & Working with State Legislatures

Explore how emerging legislative priorities in statehouses across America are shaping state education agendas and how ESAs can effectively engage with legislative branch leaders to advance shared priorities.

Session 2: State Education Policy Trends & Working with State Education Agencies

Gain insights into emerging policy trends across the nation and learn how to partner with state education agencies to influence and implement effective policy.

Session 3: Advocacy Success Stories – A Panel Discussion

Join a lively panel of education leaders sharing firsthand stories of successful advocacy at the state and local level. Panelists represent a range of roles, including ESA leadership, lobbying, association management, and consulting.

Session 4: Advocacy in Action – Monitoring and Influencing State Policy

This session provides a toolkit for advocacy: learn how to monitor legislation, analyze policy implications, and craft strategic responses. Walk away with tangible tools to stay ahead of state policy changes and guide your agency's advocacy efforts.

To Attend:

When [registering](#) for the conference, be sure to add the \$100 Pre-Conference Session under the Additional Items section.

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

STAY CONNECTED

