

The State Examiner: December 2024

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.

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 December 2024 examines Parents' Bill of Rights legislation and related measures introduced in several states.

State legislative interest in exerting greater influence over curriculum and instruction elevated this area to one of the top policy priorities to watch in 2024, according to the Education Commission of the States. This development joined other critical focus areas, including career technical education, early learning, student health, high school reform, K-12 finance, and school choice

Parents' Bill of Rights

In recent years, state legislatures across the United States have been wrestling with the concept of "parents' rights" in education. This focus has led to a wave of proposed legislation, which seek to codify the role of parents in their children's education and school experiences in permanent law.

Parents' Bill of Rights legislation has been advanced across the country aided by organizations like the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC). ALEC has proposed several model policies that aim to expand parental rights and involvement in their children's education including a specific Parental Rights Amendment. This model constitutional amendment grants parents the right to direct the upbringing and education of their children. The amendment states, "The right of parents to direct the upbringing and education of their children shall not be infringed. The legislature shall have power to enforce, by appropriate legislation, the provisions of this section."

While not explicitly labeled as "Parents' Bill of Rights," other organizations and legislators have proposed similar concepts, including at the federal level, which have helped influence state-level conversations. For example, in 2023, Congressional House Republicans introduced a "Bill of Rights for Students and Parents," that would require schools to make curricula public, provide parents with a list of library books,

Inside this Edition

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

and offer a minimum of two parent-teacher meetings per year. Similarly, in 2021, U.S. Senator Josh Hawley had introduced a "Parents' Bill of Rights Act," that would prohibit nondisclosure agreements concerning curriculum, allow parents to make copies of classroom material, and require schools to have parents opt their children into extracurricular activities.

The push for these bills intensified during and in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, which highlighted various concerns about school policies, curriculum content, and the overall direction of public education. Proponents argue that these bills are necessary to ensure parents have a say in their children's education. Opponents, on the other hand, worry about potential impacts on educational quality, inclusivity, and government over-reach on an issue historically governed locally by elected boards of education.

Key aspects of these parents' bills of rights and related measures often include:

1. Increased transparency in curriculum and teaching materials,
2. Greater parental involvement in school decision-making processes,
3. Expanded school choice options,
4. Provisions for opting out of certain lessons or activities,
5. Posting of instructional materials online, and
6. Requirements that educators report any changes in student behavior, mental or behavioral health, and physical health.

As of 2024, a significant number of U.S. state legislatures have introduced and passed legislation related to Parents' Bill of Rights or similar parental rights measures. Here's an overview of the current policy environment:

Introduction of State Legislation

The introduction of Parents' Bill of Rights legislation has been widespread across the United States:

- In 2022, 85 bills were introduced in 26 states (7%).
- As of mid-March 2023, at least 32 states were considering Parents' Bill of Rights legislation.
- FutureEd identified 62 parental-rights bills that were introduced or pre-filed in the 2023 legislative season.
- According to Education Commission of the States Policy Watch List, 37 bills in 22 states were introduced in 2024 legislative session with three bills being enacted.

Passed Legislation

While many bills have been introduced, a smaller number have been passed into law:

- In 2022, six bills were signed into law—two in Florida, two in Arizona, and one each in Georgia and Louisiana.
- As of June 2023, 18 states have codified parental rights as fundamental in their state laws.
- Some states that have passed parental rights legislation or related measures include:
 - o Florida (2021)
 - o Alabama (2023)
 - o North Dakota (2023)
 - o Iowa (2023)

- Idaho (2024)
- New Hampshire (2024)
- Ohio (2024)

The three bills passed in 2024 represent an eight-percent passage rate. An abbreviated overview of each follows below:

- **Idaho (HB710):** Idaho's House Bill 710, effective July 1, 2024, requires public and school libraries to implement procedures for patrons to challenge content deemed inappropriate for minors. Libraries must review challenged materials within 60 days and potentially relocate or remove items considered "harmful to minors" or face fines and civil damages. The law has raised concerns about First Amendment rights and potential censorship.
- **New Hampshire (HB1312):** New Hampshire's House Bill 1312, effective September 17, 2024, expands parental notification requirements for curriculum materials related to human sexuality, sexual orientation, and gender identity. It prohibits school districts from adopting policies that would prevent staff from answering parents' questions about their child's mental, emotional, or physical health, sexuality, or changes in related services. The law aims to increase parental involvement and transparency in education.
- **Ohio (HB8):** Ohio's House Bill 8, passed in December 2024, requires school staff to notify parents of any changes in their child's mental, emotional, or physical health services, including counseling. It mandates parental notification for discussions related to LGBTQ+ identity, bans "sexuality content" in grades K-3, and requires age-appropriate content for other grades. The bill also includes provisions for religious instruction during school hours.

These various proposals and model legislation share common themes of increasing parental involvement, transparency in curriculum and school activities, and expanding school choice options.

Existing Statutes

While new bills, with more direct efforts by states to dictate local curriculum decisions (and enforce penalties), continue to be introduced and debated, it is important to understand that many states have existing statutes that support parental involvement in making educational decisions:

- At least 10 states have existing statutes that mention parental rights, with six of these having broad provisions.
- 18 states have state statutes that define and protect parental rights, including West Virginia, Michigan, Texas, Colorado, Nevada, Virginia, Kansas, Oklahoma, Arizona, Idaho, Utah, Wyoming, Florida, Montana, Georgia, North Dakota, Iowa, and Alabama.

Existing laws should not be ignored, nor should local district policies that support parental access and involvement, when discussing whether additional state oversight is needed.

What is on the Horizon?

It's important to note that the landscape of parental rights legislation is rapidly evolving, with new bills being introduced and considered regularly. With fewer than half of the states having adopted legislation, and a passage success rate of less than 10%, it is likely that bills of this nature will continue to be

introduced and debated in statehouses across the country. This is particularly true given its inclusion in Project 2025, a conservative proposal aimed at reducing the role of the federal government in education, which aids in keeping the debate alive at the state level. ESAs and education advocates in states that have not enacted such measures should continue monitoring the issue and be prepared to address the implications for students, schools and professionals.

STATE BUDGET & FINANCE MONITORING

AESA monitors state level budget and finance news impacting preschool and primary and secondary education. These curated articles 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 2024 follows below.

[NCSL: Tighter Budget, Workforce, AI Are 2025s Top Policy Trends](#)

Pluribus News

[Budget Pressures Could Impact K-12 Funding](#)

Capitol News Illinois

[Time is Running Out for State and Local Governments to Protect Pandemic Funds](#)

Governing

[State budget prompts hiring freezes](#)

KIRO7

[Feds Push Out Dollars for States' Digital Equity Efforts](#)

Route-fifty.com

[Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs asks Tom Horne to reverse automatic voucher reimbursement plan](#)

AZ Central

[State Legislators propose 15% to 25% tax rate for new states adopting internet gambling](#)

AP News

[Oregon Gov. Kotek, lawmakers say state needs to keep focus on housing, education, mental health](#)

Oregon Capital Chronicle

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:

[Senators Take First Steps to Rework New Jersey's School Funding Formula](#)

New Jersey Monitor

[Ohio Considers Plan to Shut Poor Performing Schools Automatically](#)

Governing

[SUNY Corning Community College and area BOCES hosts annual STEM Day to help students explore future study and career opportunities](#)

WENY News

[Grant Wood AEA Chief Administrator John Speer retiring](#)

The Gazette

[ESU 13 Receives \\$1 Million USDA Grant for Distance Learning](#)

Sidney Sun Telegraph

[Nebraska schools receive \\$10 million to boost safety, security infrastructure](#)

States Newsroom

[LGBTQ Ohioans and advocates are asking Gov. Mike DeWine to veto 'Don't Say Gay' bill](#)

States Newsroom

[Cutting absenteeism, boosting 3rd grade reading among Colorado education department's goals](#)

Chalkbeat Colorado

[School of Thought: Strengthening our public schools](#)

Daily Gazette

[Kentucky, Nebraska, Colorado Voters Rejected Private School Vouchers. Could They be on the Ohio Ballot Next?](#)

Cleveland.com

[Minnesota schools must report cybersecurity incidents under new law](#)

K12 Drive

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 two reports from National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO) and one from the Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE).

[Fall 2024 Fiscal Survey of States](#)

The National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO) released the *Fall 2024 Fiscal Survey of States*, which highlights states' enacted budgets for fiscal 2025. The report contains timely data for all 50 states, three territories, and the District of Columbia on general fund spending, revenue, ending balances, and rainy day funds for fiscal 2023 (actual), fiscal 2024 (preliminary

actual), and fiscal 2025 (enacted). [Visit the NASBO website](#) to download the full report and summary.

[NASBO State Expenditure Report](#)

The National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO) released the latest [State Expenditure Report](#) which includes data from estimated fiscal 2024, actual fiscal 2023, and actual fiscal 2022. 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.

[The State of the American Student: Fall 2024](#)

The Center for Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) released a report in the Fall of 2024 continuing to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on learning and education outcomes. As CRPE reported in [2022](#) and [2023](#), the COVID-19 pandemic and related school closures led to unprecedented academic setbacks for all American students. In their [third](#) State of the Student report, they turned their attention to how the pandemic impacted—and continues to impact—special populations.

DECEMBER 2024 MONTHLY ADVOCACY TIP

When newly elected members enter statehouses across the country, they often require guidance and insight to navigate the complexities of the legislative process. This is an opportunity for education advocates. By establishing relationships with these lawmakers early, education advocates can help make sure that voices of the education community are heard. To successfully navigate these efforts, it is important to avoid simple mistakes that can derail effective advocacy campaigns. This month's article lays the groundwork for upcoming legislative sessions in the new year, reminding would-be-advocates of the top 10 "Do's and Don'ts of Effective Advocacy."

[Top 10 Do's and Don'ts of Effective State Advocacy for Educators](#)

As an educator, your voice matters in shaping education policy. Here are the top 10 do's and don'ts to help you become an effective advocate for public education at the state level:

Do's:

1. **Get informed:** Understand the issues, legislation, costs, and potential effects of funding and policies. Stay up to date on education-related bills in your state legislature. Be active in state associations and advocacy groups
2. **Build relationships:** Connect with lawmakers and their staff. Remember, they are regular people like you and me. Offer yourself as a resource on education matters. Be sure to connect with legislative staff – both office staff and caucus policy leads.
3. **Tell your story:** Share personal experiences from your classroom or school to illustrate the impact of policies on students and educators. Don't get mired in the data; be sure to use personal stories that resonate and evoke an emotional connection and response. This can be accomplished by getting policy makers into your buildings.

4. **Be clear and specific:** Know exactly what you want – your "ask" – and communicate it concisely. Also, know their position. Are they for you? Against you? Or, neutral? Having this knowledge will help your strategy and determine the appropriate tactics.
5. **Collaborate:** Join advocacy groups or your state's education association to amplify your voice and learn from others. Ensure coalitions share a similar mission and complimentary goals. There is always power in numbers.

Don'ts:

1. **Don't be unprepared:** Always do your homework before meeting with decision-makers. Know your facts and figures. If you do not have the answer, be sure to follow up in a timely manner.
2. **Don't argue:** Focus on persuasion rather than confrontation. Be respectful of your audience and their time. Do not take an approach that limits access. Agree to disagree and find common ground on issues of mutual concern.
3. **Don't advocate for unrealistic legislation:** Understand the broader context and focus on issues that have the greatest impact on student learning. This is true in budget matters as well. Focus on those things that are achievable knowing that policy making is incremental and you may need to come back later when the environment is more favorable.
4. **Don't ignore follow-up:** After meetings or communications, send thank-you notes and provide any additional information promised. Be a reliable resource policy makers can count on. They will continue to come back to you if you are able to deliver for them.
5. **Don't give up:** Advocacy is an ongoing process. If you don't succeed at first, try again. Persistence is key in effecting change.

Effective Advocacy Tactics

To maximize your impact:

- Touch base with your elected officials on a regular basis even when you do not need something specifically.
- Attend committee meetings and public forums to stay informed about regional and state education issues.
- Write op-eds or letters to the editor in local newspapers to raise awareness about important education topics.
- Use social media to share information and mobilize support for education initiatives.
- Participate in state-level education committees or task forces when opportunities arise.

Remember, educators have unique insights into the needs of students and schools. By engaging in effective advocacy, and avoiding simple mistakes, education advocates can help ensure that state-level decisions reflect the realities of the classroom and support high-quality public education for all students.

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

AESA OFFERS ADVOCACY WORKSHOPS

AESA offers three levels of workshops designed to enhance your understanding and effectiveness in state-level advocacy: the Three-Day Workshop, the One-Day Workshop, and Customized Presentations.

Three-Day Workshop

Objective: This in-depth, three-day workshop covers the essential aspects of state advocacy and lobbying, providing participants with the knowledge and skills needed to engage effectively in the state legislative and policy-making process.

Day 1: Understanding the State Legislative Landscape

Day 2: Navigating State Policy and Rulemaking

Day 3: Advocacy in Action

One Day Workshop

Objective: This condensed one-day workshop covers the essential aspects of state advocacy and lobbying, providing participants with a comprehensive overview of the state legislative process, budgeting, rule-making, and effective advocacy strategies.

All workshop sessions include specific learning objectives to ensure participants gain valuable insights in the available timeframe.

Customized Workshops and Presentations

You can rely on AESA to provide highly qualified, experienced speakers for presentations at your local or regional events. This approximately one-hour legislative update presentation will cover state politics, finance, and education policy with an added emphasis on effective advocacy embedded throughout. It can be customized as appropriate to a state's unique issues.

Please contact Joan Wade, AESA Executive Director, for more information.

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

