

AESA State Examiner

February 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.

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 February 2025 will examine emerging state policies on Open Enrollment.

Inside this Edition

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

School Choice and Open Enrollment

States across the country have introduced or proposed many new school choice policies over the past several years, including charter schools, vouchers, educational savings accounts (ESAs) and parent tax credit programs. But another approach to school choice, and one often less focused on, is open enrollment between and among traditional public school districts. Open enrollment is an integral part of many states' public school choice policies, and one that traditional public education interests often find less objectionable. But these policies allow a student to transfer to a public school of their choice and often carry their own challenges for public schools and those that serve and support them including ESAs. This article provides an overview of the current state of open enrollment laws, highlighting key trends and policy considerations, and explores opportunities for ESAs.

Legislative Activity on Open Enrollment

In the state legislative session ending December 2024, 54 bills were introduced in 19 states dealing with inter- or intra-district open enrollment according to data from State Net and the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL). For the two year-period, 2023-2024, 95 bills in 30 states were introduced with 14 passing for a 14.7% passage rate. States adopting new or revised laws included: California, Colorado,

Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Montana, New Mexico, Montana, Oklahoma, Texas, and West Virginia.

Open Enrollment Policies Across the United States: A 2025 Policy Update

Open enrollment policies continue to play a significant role in shaping public school choice across the United States. These policies allow students to transfer to public schools of their choice, either within their resident district (intradistrict) or to schools in other districts (interdistrict).

Intradistrict Open Enrollment

As of 2025, 29 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico have policies explicitly permitting intradistrict open enrollment. Of these:

- 19 states and the District of Columbia have mandatory intradistrict open enrollment policies
- 8 states have voluntary policies
- 3 states have policies that are both mandatory and voluntary

Interdistrict Open Enrollment

Interdistrict open enrollment is more widely adopted, with 43 states having policies permitting this type of transfer. The breakdown is as follows:

- 15 states have mandatory interdistrict open enrollment policies
- 19 states have voluntary policies
- 9 states have policies that are both mandatory and voluntary

Key Policy Considerations

Desegregation Provisions

Several states have incorporated desegregation provisions into their open enrollment policies. For example:

- Arkansas allows districts to reject transfer applications if accepting them would violate a court desegregation order
- California permits districts to prohibit transfers that would negatively impact court-ordered or voluntary desegregation plans
- Florida requires district policies to adhere to federal desegregation requirements and maintain racial and socioeconomic balance

Student Group Prioritization

Some states prioritize specific student groups in their open enrollment programs:

- California and Colorado prioritize students who qualify for free or reduced-price lunch and those in low-performing schools
- Florida mandates preferential treatment for children of active-duty military personnel in the controlled open enrollment process

Transportation Responsibility

Transportation remains a significant barrier to open enrollment, especially for low-income families. As of 2023:

- No state policies mandated that receiving districts provide transportation to open enrolled students
- Wisconsin reimburses parents for transporting their own children

Military-Connected Youth

Several states have developed policies specifically addressing the open enrollment needs of military children:

- Mississippi allows students living on military bases to enroll in any school district of their parents' choosing
- Oklahoma requires districts to have policies allowing for inter-district open enrollment and transfers for children of active-duty military personnel

Students in Foster Care

Some states have specific enrollment provisions for students in foster care, including enrollment priority and educational continuity.

The Role of ESAs in Supporting Implementation

As more states adopt or expand policies in this area, ESAs can play a crucial role in supporting client school districts with open enrollment requirements, offering expertise and resources in various areas including:

Transportation

ESAs can assist districts in developing cost-effective transportation solutions for open enrollment students. ESAs may:

- Coordinate inter-district transportation routes
- Provide guidance on reimbursement policies for parents transporting their children
- Help districts implement technology solutions for route optimization

Operations

In terms of operational support, ESAs can:

- Offer staff development and training on open enrollment procedures
- Assist in developing and implementing communication strategies for open enrollment periods
- Provide technological platforms for managing online enrollment processes

Finances

ESAs can support districts financially by:

- Leveraging economies of scale to provide cost-effective services
- Assisting in budget planning for open enrollment impacts
- Offering guidance on funding allocation and reporting requirements

Academics and Student Achievement

To support student achievement in an open enrollment context, ESAs can:

- Serve as a link to other resource agencies, enhancing educational opportunities
- Provide specialized programming and services that individual districts may not be able to offer
- Assist in interpreting and providing feedback on education policies related to open enrollment

Planning and Implementation

ESAs can play a vital role in both planning and implementing open enrollment policies by:

- Offering expertise in policy interpretation and compliance
- Providing broad organizational support to districts
- Assisting in the development of transparent reporting systems for parents and lawmakers

Open enrollment policies continue to evolve across the United States, with states adopting various approaches to increase educational options for students. Key takeaways include:

- Most states (43) permit interdistrict open enrollment, while 29 states allow intradistrict transfers
- States are increasingly addressing specific needs of vulnerable student populations, such as military-connected youth and students in foster care
- Transportation remains a significant challenge in implementing effective open enrollment programs
- Desegregation considerations play a role in many states' open enrollment policies

As policymakers continue to refine these policies, balancing choice with equity and practical considerations will remain crucial in shaping the future of public school enrollment across the nation.

By leveraging their unique position and expertise, ESAs can help school districts navigate the complexities of open enrollment, ensuring smooth implementation and adherence to state requirements while maintaining a focus on educational quality and student success.

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 February 2025 follows below.

[Bill forcing schools to share property taxes with charters passes. But 40% of senators voted no](#)
Indianapolis Star

[Concerns mount over potential loss of Medicaid funds for schools](#)
K12Dive

[Red states pursue their own DOGE-style reforms](#)
The Hill

[State budget proposes slashing public school funding while increasing voucher funds](#)
Dayton Daily News

[Dozens of school leaders urge Colorado House speaker to adopt new funding formula despite error](#)
The Colorado Sun

[Gov. JB Pritzker stresses importance of federal education funding amid latest threats from](#)
The Chicago Tribune

[Gov. Abbott says he remains "very confident" school choice will pass this year](#)
CBS News Texas

[States and Cities Confront 'Unprecedented' Breadth of Trump's Federal Funding Freeze](#)

Governing

[Republican governors defend DOGE even as they face looming deficits](#)

Politico

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:

[Herkimer BOCES Adult Practical Nursing Program's Sim Lab Helps Students Learn Through Struggling](#)

The Daily Post

[State, local officials plan for potential immigration enforcement at schools](#)

Stateline

[Pennsylvania Launches Family Ambassador Pilot Program to Support Transition from Preschool Early Intervention to Kindergarten](#)

Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

[School cellphone bans spread across states, though enforcement could be tricky](#)

Stateline

[Special education enrollment climbs to nearly 8M](#)

K12Dive

[GOP-led lawsuit that could dismantle disability protections draws public backlash](#)

Stateline

[BOCE Educators Learn About Science of Reading](#)

The Post-Journal

[U.S. Education Department Threatens Yanking Funds from Schools that Use Race in Making Decisions](#)

Stateline

[Education Innovation in Focus at National Governors Association Winter Meeting](#)

National Governors Association

[Emergency notification system for childcare facilities proposed: ESUs to Assist](#)

Unicameral Update

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 from DataScience4Everyone, and the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies:

- [**State of The Field: Data Science and Data Literacy Education in US K-12**](#): This inaugural report marks the beginning of an annual series that will track progress, highlight innovations, and provide actionable insights for advancing data science and data literacy education. According to the report, around 277 schools across 104 districts offered data science education, with at least 139,000 students enrolled in data science courses during the 2023-2024 academic year, based on student enrollment data from state education agencies and learning content providers. This is just a fraction of the nearly 55 million students enrolled in public, private or charter schools.
- [**Black Student Parents' Access to Affordable Child Care Support at Community Colleges**](#): The issue brief, "[*Black Student Parents' Access to Affordable Child Care Support at Community Colleges*](#)," examines the CCAMPIS program to understand its impacts on Black student parents and offers legislative proposals for congressional reauthorization and adequate appropriations for this critical child care program.

FEBRUARY 2025 MONTHLY ADVOCACY TIP

Tailoring Your Message for Bipartisan Support

In the ever changing and often emotionally charged political landscape of education funding and policy, Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) across America have emerged as a critical component of state-level educational infrastructure. This was particularly true during the COVID-19 pandemic and related school closures, and in the ensuing years when states worked in earnest to address learning recovery and related issues. However, ESAs remain largely misunderstood.

Securing increased funding and favorable education policies or rules for these agencies requires a nuanced approach, one that speaks to the priorities of both Democratic and Republican policymakers. For this reason, tailoring advocacy messages to resonate with diverse political audiences is critical to ensuring that the value of ESCs is understood and appreciated across party lines.

The Universal Appeal of ESAs

ESAs have demonstrated their worth through fiscal efficiency, operational excellence, academic support, and strong community relationships. Beyond financial benefits achieved through consortia-based models and economies of scale, ESAs serve as crucial partners in implementing statewide educational priorities at regional and local levels, offering a wide range of services from curriculum development to special education support, from early care and education to professional development, from cooperative purchasing to instructional coaching, and everything in between.

Crafting the Message for Democrats

When addressing Democratic policymakers, advocates for ESAs should consider emphasizing:

1. **Equity in Education**: ESAs play a vital role in expanding equitable access to resources across districts.

2. **Support for Public Schools:** The primary focus of ESAs on serving public school districts aligns with Democratic priorities.
3. **Cost-Effective Services:** By providing savings, ESAs allow more resources to be directed towards classrooms and student support.
4. **Special Education Support:** ESAs offer specialized services for students with special needs, promoting inclusive education.
5. **Professional Development:** The training provided by ESAs for educators supports the goal of enhancing teacher quality and effectiveness.
6. **Supporting Vulnerable Populations:** ESAs provide services related to incarcerated youth, dropout prevention and recovery, alternative education in lieu of suspension or expulsion, and students with behavioral health challenges.

Appealing to Republican Priorities

For Republican policymakers, the message should highlight:

1. **Fiscal Responsibility:** The significant cost savings and efficiency demonstrated by ESAs align with principles of responsible spending.
2. **Local Control:** ESAs' governance by locally elected boards supports the value of decentralized decision-making.
3. **Public-Private Partnerships:** ESAs' work with various school types, including charter and nonpublic schools, aligns with support for school choice.
4. **Reduced Bureaucracy:** The streamlining of services across districts potentially reduces administrative overhead.
5. **Business-like Efficiency:** The entrepreneurial approach of ESAs in their operations resonates with pro-business attitudes.
6. **Scalability & Sustainability:** ESAs are well-positioned to take statewide education initiatives to scale quickly and efficiently, utilizing cost-effective, consortia-based programming and staffing.

These key points will vary state by state and will require understanding one's understanding of their state's own political context.

The Power of Tailored Communications

By carefully crafting messages that speak to the specific priorities of each political party, advocates for ESAs can build a strong case for increased funding that appeals across the political aisle. This approach recognizes that while the core benefits of ESAs remain constant, the aspects that resonate most strongly may differ depending on the audience.

Understanding and addressing the unique concerns of each political party is crucial in advocating for ESAs. As the debate over education funding continues, the ability to effectively communicate the value of ESAs to both Democratic and Republican policymakers will be crucial. By highlighting how these agencies address key priorities for both parties - from educational equity to fiscal responsibility - advocates can build a compelling case for increased support that transcends political divides.

In conclusion, the success of ESAs depends not just on their proven track record of service and efficiency, but also on the ability of their supporters to effectively communicate their value to diverse political audiences. By tailoring advocacy messages to resonate with both Democratic and Republican priorities, ESAs can secure the bipartisan support necessary to continue their vital work in enhancing education across the country.

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

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