

# AESA State Examiner

March 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 will examine emerging state policies on educators and school staff.

## 2025 Legislative Activity

As the first quarter of 2025 legislative sessions across the United States closes, it's a good time to take stock of the policy and funding issues garnering the most attention in statehouses. To date, 3,396 education focused bills have been introduced in the 50 states and 2 U.S. territories. Of those introduced, 136 have already been passed and enacted for an initial 4% passage rate.

The top 5 policy areas addressed in introduced legislation include:

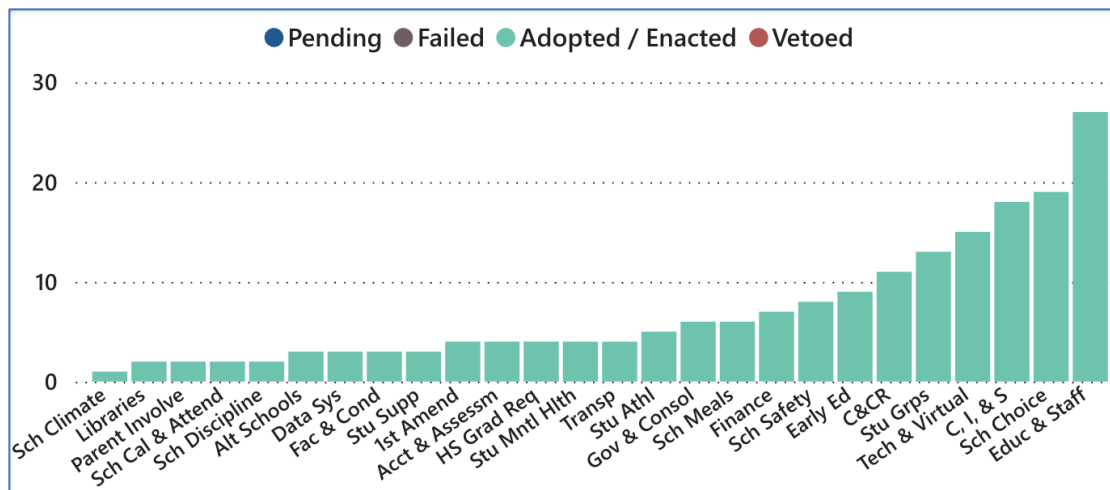
1. **Educators and School Staff** (681 introduced, 27 enacted)
2. **Curriculum, Instruction and Standards** (669 introduced, 18 enacted)
3. **School Choice** (462 introduced, 19 enacted)
4. **Technology in Schools and Virtual Learning** (354 introduced, 15 enacted)
5. **Student Groups** (257 introduced, 13 enacted)

### Inside this Edition

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

These top 5 areas are dominating the education policy debate, along with state budgets, and represent 71% of all education bills introduced to date. Not surprisingly, they also reflect the bills that have been passed and enacted to date.

A review of enacted legislation reveals that college and career readiness, early care and education and school safety follow closely behind as policy and funding priorities. These are also reflective of policy areas referenced in many Governors’ State of the State addresses.



### Educators and School Staff: Enacted Bills

As highlighted above, state legislatures across the United States have introduced numerous education bills focusing on educators and school staff. These efforts address teacher shortages, compensation, recruitment, retention, and professional development. The bills have focused on specific education professionals including teachers (566), followed by educational leaders (141), classified staff (79), and special service providers (57).

To date, 25 bills have been passed in 10 states including Arkansas (6), Idaho (2), Illinois (1), Kentucky (2), Michigan (1), North Dakota (2), South Dakota (2), Utah (4), Virginia (5), and Wyoming (1).

In states with ESAs, the educator-focused legislation aimed at improving teacher retention, diversifying the workforce, reducing financial barriers for aspiring educators, and ensuring transparency and equity in public education systems. Below is a state-by-state summary of the key provisions:

#### Arkansas

- **Novice Teacher Mentoring:** Amended requirements under the Teacher Excellence and Support System to mandate mentoring for all novice teachers employed at public schools. Teachers who completed a division-approved year-long residency are exempt from mentoring requirements.
- **Teacher Licensure and Assignment:** Updated licensure renewal rules to ensure teachers are assigned only to grades or subjects for which they are licensed or on an approved licensure plan. Districts may request long-term substitutes for specified periods.

- **Anti-Discrimination Measures:** Prohibited discrimination or preferential treatment by state entities based on race, sex, color, ethnicity, or national origin in employment, education, or procurement. Individuals can pursue civil action with potential awards and legal fee reimbursement. Repealed prior recruitment and retention plan provisions and amended the Critical Needs Teacher Scholarship Program.

### Illinois

- **Minority Teachers of Illinois Scholarship:** Affirmed the importance of this scholarship program to increase teacher workforce diversity. Urged continued administration by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission to support aspiring teachers of color.

### Kentucky

- **Student Teacher Stipend Program:** Established a stipend program to reduce financial barriers for students completing educator preparation programs. Restricted scholarships or promissory note cancellations for individuals in default on obligations under authority programs.

### Michigan

- **Public School Academy Employment:** Allowed public school academies to employ or contract personnel necessary for operations, prescribe duties, and set compensation with authorizing body approval. Required academies to post information on their websites, including average salaries for new and veteran teachers.

### Utah

- **Stipends for Future Educators Grant Program:** Made student teachers eligible for stipends regardless of their institution but limited funding if other state program funds are received. Required annual cost reporting by the State Board of Education to the Legislative Fiscal Analyst.

### Bottom Line Conclusion & Action Steps

The year 2025 is poised to bring substantial legislative progress aimed at bolstering the educator workforce through innovative policies focused on recruitment, retention, and professional development. At the same time, proposed legislation addressing parental rights, prescriptive curricula, and restrictions on bargaining rights has emerged, raising concerns about potential impacts on the education system. Advocates must remain vigilant and actively engage in policy discussions to safeguard opportunities for building educator capacity and ensuring that every student has access to high-quality educators.

## 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 March 2025 follows below.

### [District leaders predict staff reductions if Medicaid funding is cut](#)

K-12 Drive

### [New school funding proposal in Colorado would soften the cuts for K-12](#)

CPR News

### [GOP-led states push for control of school aid as Trump promises a smaller federal role in education](#)

AP News

### [Trump's school choice push adds to momentum in statehouses](#)

Stateline News

### [DOGE efforts look different in the states](#)

Pluribus News

### [State Republicans Eager to Climb on Cost-Cutting Bandwagon](#)

New York Times

### [Where Are State DOGE Groups? A Map of Efficiency Initiatives](#)

Government Technology

### [Ohio House passes bill to scrap replacement levies. Will it lower property taxes?](#)

Columbus Dispatch

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

Indianapolis Star

### [Child tax credits, long a liberal priority, find favor in Republican states](#)

Stateline News

### [Georgia House passes \\$37.7 billion budget amid concerns over federal spending cuts](#)

WSB Radio News

### [CT governor, legislative leaders reach \\$40M special education funding deal. Here's what that means.](#)

Hartford Courant

## 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:

[High-tech data center opens at Region 16 in partnership with Duos Edge AI, FiberLight](#)

Amarillo Globe News

[21 States Sue Trump to Block Education Department Demolition](#)

Democracy Docket

[County Invests in Early Childhood Education: Supervisors provide key funding to help increase opportunities to enter the field](#)

County of San Mateo

[Ulster BOCES: Two new approaches that are transforming education](#)

District Administration

[Governor DeWine Recognizes Business-Education Partners for Connecting Students to Professional Skills and Real-World Experiences](#)

Office of the Governor

[What's at stake if Sacramento schools lose federal funding? A lot, leaders say](#)

The Sacramento Bee

[Governors Outline Education Plans in State of the State Addresses](#)

Governing

[Public schools must let private school students join their sports teams, Iowa bill says](#)

Des Moines Register

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

Stateline

[Oregon Governor Seeks More State Oversight of Schools](#)

Governing

[Virginia schools still struggling to fill critical teaching positions, new report finds](#)

Virginia Mercury

[Culture of Collaboration: LCISD Promotes Educational Growth Through Programs and Services to Local School Districts](#)

The County Press

## 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 the American Society of Civil Engineers, and RAND:

- **[Schools earn a 'D+' for infrastructure:](#)** According to the American Society of Civil Engineers' Infrastructure Report Card, many public school buildings are hitting their 50-year design life, requiring "comprehensive" upgrades and replacements to key facility systems. That means in the next year, "essential facility systems need comprehensive upgrades or replacements." Top among school infrastructure needs, the report said, are plumbing upgrades to address lead in drinking water and the installation of cooling systems amid rising temperatures.
- **[Microschools as an Emerging Education Model - Implications for Research and Evaluation:](#)** This new RAND study examines the impacts of microschools on student academic achievement. Microschools are an alternative to traditional schools for families who might be dissatisfied with local school options. Typically, *microschools* are defined as small, tuition-based schools (serving around 15 students) that are designed to offer a more personalized and flexible learning experience compared with traditional schools. Interest in microschools has grown steadily in recent years.

## MARCH 2025 MONTHLY ADVOCACY TIP

### Effective Advocacy: Working with State Legislative and Agency Staff

Advocacy is a crucial skill for Educational Service Agency leaders and staff to master in order to influence state education policy and effect positive change for their organizations and client schools and districts. This month's *State Examiner* advocacy tip provides guidance on working effectively with state legislative and agency staff, key players in the policymaking process.

Legislative staff often serve as information gatherers and key policy and political advisors to state lawmakers. But most importantly, legislative staff serve as gatekeepers to access and information. This makes these staff members critical connectors in achieving the desired policy outcomes. Importantly, these relationships may also provide advocates with opportunities to assist in drafting legislation, influencing policy discussions, and gaining insights into the current political and policymaking landscape in one's state. A strong rapport with staff not only increases the likelihood of advancing specific initiatives but also helps advocates position themselves as reliable resources for data and expertise.

Likewise, a positive relationship with agency staff may secure stakeholder/interested party status as enacted statute is implemented through the policy and rule making process. With every law, agencies create administrative rules that facilitate the intent of the statute. Both staff relationships are equally influential as the "sausage is made" and one ignores that influence at their peril.

## Key Steps to Working with Staff

### ***Building Relationships***

Establishing strong relationships with legislative and agency staff is fundamental to successful advocacy. These staff members often serve as gatekeepers and key influencers in decision-making processes. To build these relationships:

- Identify and connect with office staff members who handle relevant issues and key committees with jurisdiction over your issues
- Establish relationships with caucus-level, policy and budget staff that often focus on policy areas of expertise and are career professionals with longevity
- Position yourself as a knowledgeable and dependable resource
- Maintain regular contact, especially when new data or information becomes available

### ***Effective Communication***

Clear and concise communication is essential when engaging with legislative and agency staff:

- Craft a clear, focused message about the issue at hand
- Prepare concise talking points and issue briefs (maximum 2 pages)
- Use data and personal stories to illustrate your points
- Distill information down to easily digestible formats like infographs
- Be prepared to explain how the issue affects constituents and the state

### ***Providing Value***

To be an effective advocate, offer valuable insights and assistance:

- Share evidence-based data to support your position
- Provide concrete examples and personal anecdotes
- Offer to find additional information if you don't have an immediate answer
- Suggest reasonable alternatives
- Be open to counterarguments and respond thoughtfully
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### ***Respecting Time and Process***

Understanding the constraints and processes of legislative and agency work is crucial:

- Build relationships before you need them
- Schedule appointments in advance, especially during busy legislative sessions
- Be brief and to the point in your communications
- Follow up after meetings with thank-you notes and any promised information
- Monitor the progress of legislative issues and assess your advocacy efforts

## Staff Advocacy Dos and Don'ts

Effective staff advocacy requires a thoughtful and strategic approach to building relationships and communicating your message. By following these key dos and don'ts, you can avoid costly mistakes and ensure your efforts are impactful, professional, and aligned with advocacy best practices.

### **Dos:**

1. Do learn about staff members' backgrounds and interests to personalize your approach
2. Do use personal stationery and time for advocacy activities
3. Do provide specific, actionable requests (e.g., support, oppose, or amend legislation)
4. Do maintain a year-round advocacy schedule, not just during legislative sessions
5. Do admit when you don't know something and offer to find the answer

### **Don'ts:**

1. Don't be argumentative or confrontational; remain calm and professional
2. Don't make promises you can't keep or exaggerate your position
3. Don't assume staff members know everything about your issue; provide context
4. Don't leave without clearly articulating the "ask"
5. Don't neglect to follow up after meetings or conversations

In conclusion, effective advocacy with state legislative and agency staff requires building strong relationships, communicating clearly, providing value, and respecting the legislative process. By following these guidelines and the dos and don'ts outlined above, ESA leaders and advocates can significantly enhance their advocacy efforts and increase their influence on state-level policy and budget decisions impacting K-12 education.

## UPCOMING AESA ADVOCACY WEBINARS

Navigating the ever-changing policy landscape is critical for ESAs to remain effective and influential. AESA is proud to present a three-part webinar series designed to equip ESA leaders with the knowledge and strategies to understand, build, and implement effective advocacy efforts!

### **Session 1 (April 29): Understanding & Influencing the Policy Context**

This session will provide clarity in a rapidly evolving policy environment, helping you interpret and influence decisions at the state and national levels.

- **Cut Through the Confusion** – Learn where to find reliable policy info and what it means for your ESA.
- **Look Ahead** – Use a forecasting tool to predict and prepare for policy changes.
- **Build Key Relationships** – Connect with legislators and state education leaders.
- **Practice Sharing Information** – Get tips on explaining policy issues clearly to others.

### **Session 2 (May 14): Building a Winning Advocacy Strategy to Maximize Impact**

Find Opportunities in Complexity – Discover how to turn policy challenges into wins for your ESA.

- **Break Through Bureaucracy** – Learn how to work effectively with state education leaders.



- **Find New Funding** – Explore creative ways to secure funding outside the usual sources.

### Session 3 (June 3): Turning Strategy into Action - Executing Your Advocacy Plan

- **Make the System Work for You** – Understand how to influence legislative decisions.
- **Meet with Legislators** – Learn how to advocate effectively in person.
- **Craft Your Message** – Perfect a short, powerful pitch to get your point across fast.

This webinar series will give you the tools to help shape education policy and funding for your ESA.

Each 90-minute session will begin at 2:00 pm Eastern (1 pm Central; 12 noon Mountain; 11 am Pacific; 10 am Alaska) Time. The workshop series price is \$250. Sessions will be recorded and shared with registered participants.

### 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@aesusa.us](mailto:info@aesusa.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@aesusa.us](mailto:info@aesusa.us)

### JOIN THE CONVERSATION

