



AESA State Examiner

The State Examiner: May 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 May 2025 will examine emerging state policies on teaching the "*Success Sequence*."

The "Success Sequence" In K-12 Education: Trends, Debate and ESA Implications

As policymakers search for ways to break cycles of poverty and foster upward mobility, many states are turning to the "success sequence" as a new curricular initiative in K-12 education. While it may not currently be debated in every state, it is a policy trend worth noting and monitoring. This article summarizes the concept, recent legislative activity, organizational perspectives, and the implications for Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) and their client districts.

What Is the Success Sequence?

The "success sequence" prescribes a specific life path:

1. Graduate from high school
2. Obtain full-time employment or pursue postsecondary education

3. Marry before having children—ideally in that order

Proponents cite research showing that young adults who follow these steps are far less likely to experience poverty. One frequently cited statistic claims that 97% of millennials who complete all three steps avoid poverty in adulthood, regardless of racial or socioeconomic background.

Legislative Activity Across States

In the past year, several states have moved to require public schools to teach the success sequence:

- **Tennessee:** Passed a law in April 2025 mandating the sequence in family life education curricula starting in 2026–27.
- **Utah:** Recently enacted similar legislation, making the sequence a state priority.
- **Ohio:** Considering a bill that would require development of standards and a model curriculum on the sequence for grades 6–12.
- **Other States:** Kentucky, Texas, and Mississippi have introduced comparable proposals, with debates ongoing as of spring 2025.

These laws typically direct state education agencies to create evidence-based standards and model curricula, with local boards, parents, and educators involved in the review and adaptation process. In some states, instruction on the sequence is tied to graduation or family life/health education requirements.

Support and Opposition

- **Supporters:**
 - *Conservative think tanks* (e.g., Heritage Foundation, AEI, Institute for Family Studies) argue the sequence is a proven, nonpartisan strategy to reduce poverty and promote stable families.
 - *State policy groups* (e.g., Sutherland Institute, Texas Public Policy Foundation, Center for Christian Virtue) and some nonprofits integrate the sequence into youth programs, especially for at-risk students.
- **Critics:**
 - *Progressive policy groups* and some academics argue the sequence conflates correlation with causation, ignores structural barriers, and places excessive emphasis on individual choices.
 - *Education and advocacy organizations* warn the curriculum risks stigmatizing students from nontraditional families and oversimplifies the complex causes of poverty, such as inequities in education, housing, and healthcare.

Public Opinion and Political Dynamics

Surveys show broad support: 77% of Americans and 76% of parents favor teaching the success sequence in schools, with support cutting across racial, socioeconomic, and political groups. Support is strongest among conservatives, but many Democrats and independents also approve. Opposition is more pronounced among Democratic parents and progressive activists.

Alignment with Broader Policy Trends

Teaching the success sequence aligns with other state-level reforms emphasizing personal responsibility, family stability, and workforce readiness. It is often promoted alongside financial literacy, career and technical education, and abstinence or sexual risk avoidance curricula. The movement reflects a broader trend in “culture war” education policy, often drawing on model legislation from conservative advocacy groups. Other bills in this policy arena include religious release time, limits or prohibitions on DEI, parental bills of rights and more.

Implications for Educational Service Agencies (ESAs)

Legislation mandating the success sequence could carry significant implications for ESAs that provide direct student instruction as well as those that support districts with training, resources, and implementation of new mandates.

Opportunities:

- **Curriculum Development:** ESAs can help districts interpret mandates and create age-appropriate, culturally responsive materials.
- **Professional Development:** Leading training for educators, ESAs can ensure teachers deliver the material effectively and sensitively, addressing diverse student backgrounds and concerns.
- **Community Partnerships:** By collaborating with nonprofits and community organizations already teaching the sequence, ESAs can expand reach and leverage expertise.

Challenges:

- **Navigating Controversy:** The sequence is politically and culturally contentious. ESAs must engage communities, address concerns, and ensure the curriculum does not marginalize students from nontraditional families.
- **Consistency Across Districts:** Serving diverse districts, ESAs must balance consistent, high-quality implementation with local adaptation.
- **Capacity and Expertise:** ESAs may need to build new capacity or hire staff with expertise in family life education and culturally responsive teaching, especially in regions with limited resources.

The push to teach the success sequence presents both opportunities and challenges for ESAs and the schools and districts they serve. While they can play a pivotal role in curriculum development, training, and ensuring equity, ESAs must also navigate resource constraints, community sensitivities, and the need for coherent implementation across diverse districts. Proactive planning, stakeholder engagement, and a focus on supporting all students will be essential for ESAs to meet this new mandate effectively should it be implemented in their respective states.

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 May 2025 follows below.

[Colorado Schools to Receive \\$256 Million Funding Boost](#)

Channel 7 Denver (ABC)

[\\$8.5 Billion School Funding Package Passes Texas Senate](#)

Texas Tribune

[SC lawmakers pass \\$14B state budget with teacher raises, tax cuts and infrastructure funding](#)

WLTX News19 Columbia

[Rapidly Expanding School Voucher Programs Pinch State Budgets](#)

Stateline

[Gov. Hochul Signs FY 2026 Budget with Legislation for Education, Small Business and Mental Health Care](#)

WKTV.COM

[Governor Braun Signs Next Indiana Budget into Law](#)

Indiana Capital Chronicle

[States bear the brunt of House GOP Medicaid plan](#)

Politico

[State Revenue Forecasts Adjusted Downward \(Blog\)](#)

NASBO

[NASBO Summarizes Introduced and Enacted State Budgets \(Briefing\)](#)

NASBO

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

New York Times

[Your Tax Dollars Are at Risk: Why Pennsylvania Needs a Watchdog to Stop Wasteful Spending Now \(Editorial\)](#)

MyChesCo (Chester County, PA)

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:

[Michigan Lawmakers to Expand Classes Homeschoolers Can Take at Public Schools](#)

Michigan Advance

[NJ pushes phonics, other tweaks to boost K-3 reading skills](#)

NorthJersey.com

[How Medicaid Cuts Could Impact Early Intervention](#)

The 74

[How A Tennessee School District is Using AI to Address Literacy Gaps](#)

K12Dive

[Colorado's Blueprint for the Future of Education and Work](#)

Forbes

[Alaskan Legislators Overview Governor's Veto of Education Bill](#)

Alaska Public Media

[States Across Country Ban Cell Phones from Classrooms](#)

Pluribus News

[Private School Vouchers are Now Law in Texas](#)

Texas Tribune

[AI Regulation Facing Mounting Hurdles](#)

Pluribus News

[The U.S. Needs 430,000 New Construction Workers](#)

RAND

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 research papers from RAND and AESA's own *Perspectives Journal*:

- [**A New Agenda for School Safety Research**](#): This paper summarizes the challenges and future directions for K–12 school safety from a roundtable discussion hosted by RAND in September 2024.
- [**Pre-K Teacher Well-Being, Pay, and Intentions to Leave in 2024**](#): The authors compare pre-K teachers' responses with those of public kindergarten through grade 12 (K–12) teachers, elementary grade teachers, and similar working adults. The authors also examine responses for subgroups of pre-K teachers for whom one might expect to see variation in pay or working conditions, such as teachers who taught part-day classes and those who taught full-day classes, teachers who were special education teachers and those who were general education teachers, and teachers who worked in early childhood education–only buildings and those who worked in K–12 buildings.
- [**Showcasing the Transformative Impact of Educational Service Agencies**](#): AESA was featured in the [April 2025 issue](#) of *School Administrator*, the flagship publication of AASA, The School Superintendents Association. This national spotlight underscored the critical role that Educational Service Agencies (ESAs) play in strengthening the educational ecosystem across the United States. The article highlighted how ESAs meet the complex and evolving needs of schools, educators, and students. The published article included mention of several exemplary programs.

MAY 2025 MONTHLY ADVOCACY TIP

Making the Most of Legislative Visits: Refocusing the Conversation

As representatives of educational service agencies (ESAs), we regularly engage with legislators and state policymakers on issues that impact the future of our schools, students, and communities. Education always polls as one of the top three policy priorities for the public and, as a result, for elected officials. And, because it revolves around our youth and has a direct impact on our future workforce, it can also be an emotionally charged issue. Not surprisingly, these conversations can be highly rewarding, but they can also become tense, adversarial, or veer off course—especially when stakes are high and opinions differ.

So, how can we, as advocates, skillfully pivot when things get off track and refocus these conversations to ensure our voices are heard and our goals remain clear? That is the focus of this month's State Examiner advocacy tip.

Advocacy Strategies for Productive Dialogue with State Policymakers

Outlined below are proven strategies for turning challenging moments into opportunities for connection and progress.

1. Stay Grounded in Your Purpose

When a conversation becomes tense or drifts off topic, gently but confidently steer it back to your core purpose. Begin by restating your shared goal: improving outcomes for students. For example:

"I appreciate your perspective, and I want to make sure we stay focused on what's best for our students and schools. Let's revisit how this proposal supports that goal."

This approach signals respect for the policymaker's views while reminding everyone of the common ground.

2. Listen Actively and Validate Concerns

Tension often arises when people feel unheard. If a legislator becomes defensive or hostile, pause and listen. Paraphrase their concerns to show you understand:

"It sounds like you're worried about the budget impact. That's a valid concern, and it's important we address it."

Acknowledging their viewpoint can diffuse defensiveness and reopen the door to constructive dialogue.

3. Ask Clarifying Questions

If the conversation veers off track, use open-ended questions to gently guide it back:

- *"Can you help me understand how this relates to our discussion on student mental health?"*
- *"What are your main priorities for this session, and how can our proposal align with them?"*

Questions like these foster collaboration and demonstrate your willingness to engage on their terms, while nudging the conversation toward your advocacy goals.

4. Share Stories and Data

When discussions become heated or abstract, anchor the conversation in real-world impact. Share a brief, compelling story from your region or a data point that illustrates the stakes and how your proposal will positively impact outcomes:

"Let me share how this program changed outcomes for students in our county last year..."

Personal stories and relevant data can humanize the issue and remind policymakers why your advocacy matters.

5. Maintain Professionalism and Composure

No matter how intense the conversation becomes, model the civility and respect you want to see. Take a breath, keep your tone calm, and avoid personalizing disagreements. If emotions run high, suggest a brief pause or offer to continue the discussion at another time:

"I value this dialogue, and I want to make sure we're both able to share our thoughts fully. Would you like to take a short break and reconvene?"

6. Agree to Disagree

It is likely you may reach impasse on an issue or be unable to find consensus around a particular policy priority or issue area.:

"I'm not sure this is an area where we'll be able to reach agreement. Let's shift our focus to another area that we all recognize as challenging."

This approach will keep the conversation from bogging down and impacting the ability to reach agreement on consensus issues; take the wins where you can get them and live to fight another day.

7. Summarize and Redirect

If the conversation is off topic, summarize what's been discussed and redirect:

"We've covered several important issues today. To ensure we make the most of our time, could we return to the proposal's main points and next steps?"

This technique acknowledges the breadth of discussion while refocusing attention.

8. Follow Up Thoughtfully

After a challenging meeting, send a follow-up note thanking the policymaker for their time and reiterating your key points. This reinforces your message and leaves the door open for continued collaboration.

Despite popular opinion and public cynicism, effective advocacy and even retail lobbying are relational, not transactional activities. And, importantly, advocacy is not just about making your case—it's about building relationships and finding common ground, even in difficult conversations. By staying focused, listening actively, and responding with empathy and professionalism, you can transform tense or off-track discussions into productive partnerships that benefit your ESA, client schools and districts, and, ultimately, the students and families they serve.

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! This webinar series gives ESA advocates the tools to help shape education policy and funding for their ESA.

The first two sessions were held April 29 (Understanding & Influencing the Policy Context) and May 14 (Building a Winning Advocacy Strategy to Maximize Impact). The third and final session will be held June 3 (details below).

Session 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.

The 90-minute session will begin at 2:00 pm Eastern (1 pm Central; 12 noon Mountain; 11 am Pacific; 10 am Alaska) Time. Contact [Ann Fiene](#) if you would like to register for this single session.

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