



AESA State Examiner

The State Examiner: January 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 January 2025 will examine Governors' State of the State Addresses across the United States.

State of the State Addresses are important and strategic opportunities for Governors to use their bully pulpit to articulate the mission, vision and policy priorities of their respective administrations. These high-profile events are followed closely by executive budget proposals that serve as the primary implementation vehicle to advance those priorities.

State of these United States: What Are Governors Prioritizing for Education?

Each year since 2005, the Education Commission of the States has tracked, analyzed and identified trends in education policy accomplishments and proposals featured in governors' State of the State addresses. To access this resource, click [here](#). This month's *State Examiner* policy-focused article analyzes those twenty-six speeches delivered to date in 2025.

The chart below provides an overview of the common themes addressed so far in the State of the State addresses that have been delivered across different states.

Inside this Edition

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

The most frequently mentioned topics include education funding, workforce development, school choice, and early childhood education. Many states also emphasized technology in education, literacy initiatives, teacher support, and health and wellness programs.

State	School Choice	Education Funding	Technology	Literacy	Workforce Development	Early Childhood	Teacher Support	School Safety	Health & Wellness
Arizona	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Arkansas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Colorado	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓	
Connecticut		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓		✓
Georgia		✓						✓	✓
Hawaii		✓			✓		✓	✓	
Idaho	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Iowa	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Kansas	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓			✓
Kentucky		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Massachusetts		✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
Montana	✓		✓		✓		✓		
Nebraska		✓	✓						
Nevada	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	
New Hampshire	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓		
New Jersey		✓	✓		✓	✓			✓
New Mexico		✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓
New York		✓				✓			✓
North Dakota	✓	✓			✓	✓			✓
Oregon		✓		✓					✓
Rhode Island		✓			✓				✓
South Dakota	✓			✓	✓		✓		
Vermont		✓			✓		✓		
Virginia	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Washington					✓				✓
Wyoming	✓	✓			✓				
	50%	88%	38%	46%	77%	50%	50%	27%	54%

Upon closer analysis, particular trends also start to emerge when looking at how the priorities breakdown regionally and across party lines. First, is a breakdown of the trends and key observations by region:

1. **Midwest:**
 - Moderate focus on *School Choice* (4 states) and *Workforce Development* (4 states).
 - Strong emphasis on *Education Funding* (5 states).
 - Limited attention to *Health & Wellness* and *School Safety*.
2. **Northeast:**
 - Strong focus on *Education Funding* (6 states) and *Workforce Development* (6 states).
 - Moderate emphasis on *Technology* and *Literacy* (3 and 2 states, respectively).
 - Minimal attention to *School Safety*.
3. **South:**
 - Balanced focus across themes, with moderate emphasis on *School Choice*, *Education Funding*, and *Workforce Development* (3–5 states each).
 - Some attention to *Health & Wellness* and *School Safety* (2 states each).
4. **West:**
 - Leading region for addressing themes like *Education Funding* (10 states) and *Workforce Development* (10 states).

- High focus on *Literacy* (4 states) and *School Choice* (6 states).
- Greater attention to *School Safety* compared to other regions (3 states).

As one looks closer, regional patterns also begin to emerge:

- **Education Funding** is universally prioritized across all regions.
- The **West** stands out with a strong emphasis on multiple themes, including workforce development and school choice.
- The **Northeast** focuses heavily on workforce development but pays less attention to school safety.
- The **South** shows balanced coverage across most themes but lags in early childhood education.
- The **Midwest** has moderate engagement across themes but lacks focus on health and wellness.

The themes in the 2025 State of the State addresses also show notable variation based on the political party affiliation of the governors as highlighted in the table below:

Theme	Republican Governors	Democratic Governors
School Choice	Strong emphasis (e.g., Arizona, Iowa, South Dakota)	Limited focus, with some exceptions (e.g., Colorado)
Education Funding	Moderate focus, often tied to efficiency and accountability	High priority, with emphasis on equity and resource allocation
Technology in Schools	Moderate attention (e.g., Arkansas, Iowa)	Strong emphasis (e.g., Connecticut, Massachusetts)
Literacy Initiatives	Frequently highlighted (e.g., Idaho, Montana)	Moderate focus (e.g., New Mexico, Oregon)
Workforce Development	High priority across most Republican-led states	Equally emphasized in Democratic-led states
Early Childhood Education	Limited focus; mentioned in a few states (e.g., Kansas)	High priority in many states (e.g., New York, New Mexico)
Teacher Support	Moderate attention (e.g., Arkansas, Idaho)	Strong focus on teacher pay and professional development
School Safety	Strong focus in Republican-led states (e.g., Nevada, South Dakota)	Less frequently mentioned but addressed in select states
Health & Wellness	Moderate attention; often tied to mental health services in schools	High priority with broader initiatives for student wellness

This analysis reveals how these themes differ between states led by Republican and Democratic governors:

1. **Republican Governors:**

- Prioritize *school choice*, *literacy*, and *school safety*.
- Tend to frame education policies around parental rights and local control.
- Workforce development is a consistent theme but often tied to vocational training and partnerships with businesses.

2. **Democratic Governors:**

- Emphasize *education funding*, *early childhood education*, and *teacher support*.
- Focus on equity in education access and resources.
- Workforce development is also a major theme but often tied to broader economic strategies like green jobs or technology sectors.

There are also regional patterns by party:

- In the **South**, Republican governors frequently highlight school choice and workforce development.
- In the **Northeast**, Democratic governors focus heavily on education funding and teacher support.
- The **West**, with a mix of party leadership, shows bipartisan emphasis on workforce development but diverges on school choice (Republican-led states) versus early childhood education (Democratic-led states).

This variation reflects the ideological priorities of each party, with Republicans generally focusing on individual choice and efficiency, while Democrats emphasize equity and systemic investment.

By analyzing these speeches, and comparing across states, education advocates can begin to identify regional trends in education policy, understand how political affiliations influence education priorities, and recognize emerging national education themes.

It can also assist in the preparation for legislative sessions as they begin across the United States. State of the State addresses typically set the tone for legislative sessions and education advocates can use this information to prepare testimony for upcoming committee hearings, develop targeted messaging for lawmakers, and mobilize grassroots support for key education issues.

AESA will continue to monitor and report on policy and funding priorities that emerge from the executive branches of state capitals to support members as they engage in education advocacy on behalf of their agencies and client schools and districts.

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 January 2025 follows below.

[Competing Forces Complicate State Education Funding](#)

Pew Trusts

[Texas budget writers prioritize school vouchers, teacher raises and border security in early drafts](#)

Associated Press

[In Tight Budget Year Pressure Builds to Boost Washington School Funding](#)

Washington State Standard

[Cutting services or raising taxes: State lawmakers weigh how to fill big budget gaps](#)

Stateline

[Iowa floats first state-level 'Department of Government Efficiency'](#)

Route-50

[Income Tax Cuts Advancing in Numerous State Capitals](#)

Forbes

[The Biggest Finance Issues to Watch in 2025](#)

Governing

[Ohio is in good economic shape headed into budget season](#)

Idea Stream

[Gov.-elect Bob Ferguson unveils \\$4 billion in cuts amid 'very significant budget shortfall'](#)

The Spokesman Review

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

Pluribus News

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

Governing

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:

[Pa. House committee advances bill on intermediate unit facility ownership](#)

Pennsylvania Capital Start

[Philadelphia wants to be a national AI in education model](#)

Route-50

[Librarians gain protections in some states as book bans soar](#)

Stateline

[Koteks State of the State Address Highlights Homelessness, Mental Health Support, Student Success](#)

KPTV

[Colorado Gov. Polis delivers State of the State address, focuses on housing, education](#)

CBS News

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

New Jersey Monitor

[Trump Orders Education Department to Guide States on Use of Federal Funds for School Choice](#)

Stateline

[Governor Katie Hobbs targets school voucher reform and accountability in State of the State Address](#)

AZPM

[6 trends that will shape K-12 in 2025](#)

K-12Dive

[Social media experts are skeptical about the power of new state laws](#)

Stateline

[MOESC Hosts SLP Mentorship Event](#)

Galion Inquirer

[CiTi BOCES Expands Distance Learning with USDA Grant](#)

Oswego County News Now

[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 NAEP Scores from the Nation's Report Card and National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), The Ohio Education Policy Institute (OEPI), and the National Association of State Budget Officials (NASBO).

[Results from the 2024 NAEP Reading and Mathematics Assessments at Grades 4 and 8](#)

According to results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), The Nation's Report Card shows that the nation's fourth- and eighth graders are not making the level of progress needed to regain lost ground during the pandemic. Grade 4 mathematics scores improved between 2022 and 2024, a two-point gain that follows a 5-point decline from 2019 to 2022. Eighth-grade scores in mathematics showed no significant change. The most notable challenges evident in the 2024 data are in reading comprehension. Reading scores dropped in both fourth and eighth grades since 2022, continuing declines first reported in 2019, before the pandemic. For more detail, read the [press release](#) or explore the results of the [mathematics](#) and [reading](#) assessments. The site also allows users to download [state specific profiles](#).

[Ohio Special Education Cost Analysis](#)

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the cost of providing special education services to Ohio public school students with disabilities. The study utilizes available data from the state of Ohio, local school districts and Educational Service Centers (ESC). It also uses and analyzes the information and insights contained in a 2022 special education cost study (*Special Education in Ohio: Best Practices, Costs, and Policy Implications*) mandated by the state of Ohio and prepared by the American Institutes for Research (AIR). OEPI is a not-for-profit research arm of the education community and is funded through dues from members ranging from school districts to statewide education organizations. These funds provide the resources necessary for the OEPI experts and consultants to conduct research, analyze data, and provide recommendations for solutions to state policy issues.

[Fiscal Survey of the States](#)

The National Association of State Budget Officers (NASBO) released the *Fall 2024 Fiscal Survey of States*, which highlights states' enacted budgets for fiscal 2024. 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.

[Outcome of Ballot Measures in the 2024 Elections](#)

Voters in 42 states and territories and the District of Columbia considered 153 ballot measures in this year's general election. The numbers are significantly higher than the 28 measures from last year, a common occurrence in a presidential year. NASBO explores these initiatives, their outcomes and potential budgetary impact on the states.

JANUARY 2025 MONTHLY ADVOCACY TIP

With the closeout of the 2024 legislative session calendar, education advocates enjoyed a brief respite over the holiday season before legislative bodies came roaring back to life this month with the swearing in of new members, State of the State addresses, release of executive budget proposals, and introduction or re-introduction of policy and funding bills, many of which may have a direct and substantial impact on educational service agencies and their Pre-k to 16 education and community partners.

Staying on top of the myriads of bills and administrative rules introduced, and understanding the potential impact, can be daunting. But, with the right tools, it's a discipline that can be learned and a skill that can be mastered. This is important for educational service agency leaders who are often looked to by their client schools and districts for insights, guidance, and understanding.

That is the focus of the January 2025 advocacy tip: bringing clarity out of complexity when identifying, monitoring and taking positions on legislative and administrative proposals.

Identifying Legislative or Administrative Proposals that Impact K-12 Education

Monitoring the website of the state legislature, governor, and executive agencies, and agency rule-making authorities in one's respective state is one way of monitoring bill introduction. Another resource is the nonpartisan agency providing drafting, fiscal, research, training, and other technical services to the legislature in one's state. Lastly, most states also have statehouse news bureaus that monitor and regularly report on happenings in and around state capitals. Familiarizing oneself with the resources in their state is an important first step in being an effective advocate.

Evaluating and Understanding Proposals

Educational service agencies play a crucial role in shaping education policy. Read proposed bills to fully understand them. This is important. Every reader may not be a leader, but every leader is a reader.

To effectively advocate for or against proposed legislation, it's essential to have a systematic approach for evaluation. The following four steps can help you assess bills, understand the potential impact on your agency and other stakeholders and prepare one to more deeply evaluate and establish positions on a particular proposed action.

Step 1: *Understand the Legislation*

- Read the full text of the bill
- Identify the key provisions and potential impacts
- Research the bill's sponsors and supporters

Step 2: **Assess Alignment with Agency Goals**

- Compare the bill's objectives with your agency's mission and values
- Evaluate how the legislation might affect your stakeholders (students, educators, schools)

Step 3: **Analyze Potential Consequences**

- Consider short-term and long-term effects on education quality
- Assess financial implications for schools and districts
- Evaluate implementation challenges and feasibility

Step 4: **Gather Stakeholder Input**

- Consult with member districts and educators
- Seek opinions from relevant experts in the field
- Consider public sentiment and community impact

Taking A Position: Tools of the Trade

Once advocates understand what a bill does, they can start to formulate positions. One way to organize and summarize what might otherwise be a complex exercise is the completion of [a simple decision-making rubric](#), using the following 2-step process.

Step 1: **Use the Evaluation Rubric**

To streamline your decision-making process, read the proposed action and carefully complete the following:

Criteria	Strongly Support (5)	Support (4)	Neutral (3)	Oppose (2)	Strongly Oppose (1)
Alignment with agency mission					
Aligns to or grants statutory authority					
Positive impact on students					
Financial feasibility					
Implementation practicality					
Stakeholder support					

Step 2: **Decide**

Based on your evaluation and rubric scores:

- 25-30 points: Consider strongly supporting the legislation
- 20-24 points: Consider supporting with potential amendments
- 15-19 points: Monitor the legislation closely
- 6-14 points: Consider opposing the legislation

Importantly, this template can be adapted further based on state-specific needs by adding or modifying criteria or adjusting performance levels to reflect local priorities. For example, if certain criteria are more critical than others (e.g., student impact vs. financial feasibility), assign weights to reflect their relative importance in the evaluation.

Advocate

The final step is to develop an action plan. This plan should at a minimum include the following components:

- Draft a position statement
- Identify key legislators to contact
- Prepare talking points for advocacy efforts
- Establish clear timelines and benchmarks to gauge the success of your campaign

By following this systematic approach and using the evaluation rubric, educational service agencies can make informed decisions about supporting or opposing proposed legislation, ensuring their advocacy efforts align with their mission and benefit their stakeholders.

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

