

The State Examiner: November 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 November 2024 will take a close look at November General Election results at the state-level and examine the implications for K-12 education.

2024 General Election & K-12 Education

The 2024 November General Election garnered a great deal of national attention due to the hotly contested and much analyzed Presidential race between the Trump-Vance and Harris-Walz tickets. But there was a lot at stake at the state level too, particularly for an issue like public education, which is a responsibility largely left to the states. As such, the November 2024 *State Examiner* will review the election results - including gubernatorial races, legislative contests, education leadership, and statewide ballot initiatives - and examine the potential implications for state governments and education advocates that seek to influence them.

Gubernatorial Races

Eleven states — Delaware, Indiana, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, North Carolina, North Dakota, Utah, Vermont, Washington and West Virginia — held gubernatorial races. The election results indicate a mix of incumbents retaining their positions and new governors being elected.

Why are races for the governors' mansions important to K-12 education? Beyond setting education policy and funding priorities by way of executive budget proposals, governors also get to appoint key leaders in many states. Newly elected governors in Delaware, Indiana, New Hampshire and Vermont each have the power to appoint the chief state school officer. Further, ten of the 11 states also have education governance structures wherein the governor appoints at least one member to the state board of education.

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So, what are the emerging policy priorities for top officeholders? According to an analysis by Education Commission of the States, Republican candidates prioritized school choice, parental involvement in education, local control, and school safety. Democratic candidates meanwhile emphasized education funding and finance, early childhood education, and student support services. Both parties share common ground on several issues including teacher recruitment and retention, workforce development through career and technical education, and improving access to quality education. These consensus priorities may also create opportunities for education advocates to advance common sense proposals in key priority areas of agreement.

Ultimately, there were no party changes in 11 executive office races; this has not happened in over two decades dating back to 2000. More significant shifts occurred in state legislatures.

Legislative Control

In the 50 states, there are 99 state legislative chambers altogether (Nebraska is unicameral). Across 44 states, 85 of those chambers held regular legislative elections in 2024. These elections were for 5,807 of the country's 7,386 state legislative seats (79%).

The election resulted in a continued division in legislative chambers across the states with Democrats making some modest inroads. Prior to the election, Republicans controlled the legislature in 28 states, Democrats in 19 and one state had a divided legislature. Post-election, 2025 will see 27 Republican-controlled legislatures, 17 Democratic and five divided. According to NCSL, split legislatures are now back up to the average over the past decade, moving past recent history of unified control. The high-water mark for split legislative chambers was in 1992 and 2000, when 16 state legislatures were split.

Ultimately, the overall party control result is 23 Republican trifectas (where one party controls the House, Senate and Office of the Governor), 15 Democratic trifectas, and 12 states with divided governments.

These realities reflect a balance of power that could affect legislative agendas moving forward. This division is critical as it may lead to increased partisan negotiations during lame duck sessions prior to the changes and the upcoming new legislative sessions set to begin in January 2025.

Education Leadership

Changes in state education leadership were prominent, with several states electing new education commissioners or superintendents.

In the four states with elections for chief state school officers, two new partisan and two incumbent nonpartisan leaders were elected. In Montana, Republican Susie Hedalen succeeds Republican Elise Arntzen, who was term-limited. In North Carolina, Democrat Mo Green ousted Republican Catherine Truitt. Nonpartisan, incumbent candidates were re-elected in North Dakota and Washington state.

State Boards of Education in nine states (Alabama, Colorado, Kansas, Michigan, Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, Texas, Utah, and D.C.) also held elections for 49 seats (37 partisan, 12 nonpartisan), with 23 incumbents and 26 members being new to their respective boards.

These leaders will play crucial roles in shaping educational policies and addressing issues such as funding, teacher recruitment, and curriculum standards. For instance, newly elected officials have highlighted priorities such as early childhood education and workforce development. These priorities are generally aligned to those of the governors and legislatures outlined above. Again, consensus and cross-party priorities may create opportunities for advancement and represent areas for educational service agencies (ESAs) to integrate themselves and their priorities.

Statewide Education Related Ballot Initiatives

In the 2024 elections, voters acted on 16 total ballot measures across 14 states – the highest number in 18 years. Eleven initiatives passed and five failed for a 68% passage rate. Among these issues voters approved seven out of twelve education-related ballot measures in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Florida, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, Rhode Island, and Utah.

Key outcomes included approval for funding measures aimed at improving educational facilities and resources. However, several school choice initiatives were defeated, indicating a potential shift in public sentiment regarding educational governance and funding strategies for school choice options.

Voters in Kentucky, Nebraska, and Colorado decisively rejected statewide ballot initiatives aimed at expanding school choice through mechanisms like vouchers or public funding for private schools. These defeats highlight growing public resistance to diverting taxpayer money from public schools to private education and offer lessons for other states considering similar measures.

The following is a brief overview of the school choice related ballot initiatives:

- **Kentucky (Amendment 2):** This proposed constitutional amendment sought to allow the legislature to allocate public funds to private and charter schools. It was overwhelmingly defeated, with nearly 65% of voters opposing it. The measure faced bipartisan criticism, particularly from rural communities concerned about draining resources from local public schools. Opponents, including teachers' unions and Democratic Governor Andy Beshear, emphasized the need to fully fund public education instead of diverting resources to private institutions.
- **Nebraska (Referendum on LB1402):** Voters repealed a law that would have allocated \$10 million annually for "opportunity scholarships," effectively a voucher program for private school tuition. Opponents argued that it would undermine public schools by redirecting state funds. The repeal passed with close to 60% of the vote, maintaining Nebraska's unique status as a state without charter schools or voucher programs. The campaign against the law was bolstered by grassroots organizing and widespread public concern about preserving funding for public education.
- **Colorado (Amendment 78):** This measure aimed to establish a constitutional right to school choice, allowing state funds to follow students to private or charter schools. It was narrowly defeated, with 51.9% voting against it. Critics highlighted concerns about privatization and the potential weakening of public schools, while proponents framed it as empowering parental choice.

So, what are the key takeaways for other states?

First, across all three states, voters expressed strong support for keeping taxpayer dollars within the public school system. Campaigns opposing these measures successfully framed them as threats to already underfunded public schools.

Second, there was bipartisan opposition. In traditionally conservative states like Kentucky and Nebraska, opposition to these measures extended beyond partisan lines. Rural communities, often Republican strongholds, resisted voucher programs out of fear they would disproportionately harm their local public schools.

Third, well-orchestrated advocacy campaigns are critical. Teachers' unions, educators, and coalitions of parents played a pivotal role in mobilizing voters against these initiatives. Their efforts included grassroots organizing, petition drives (as seen in Nebraska), and effective use of advertising to highlight the potential consequences of diverting funds from public education.

Lastly, school choice advocates remain undeterred. Despite their defeats, proponents of school choice remain undeterred in many states.

These results may suggest that future efforts will need to address voter concerns more directly—particularly around equity and accountability in private education. For other states considering similar policies, these outcomes underscore the importance of engaging with local communities and addressing fears about undermining public education systems. The defeats in Kentucky, Nebraska, and Colorado serve as a reminder that school choice remains a contentious issue with significant resistance among voters when tied to public funding for private institutions.

Implications for Lame Duck Sessions and New Legislative Sessions

As the 2024 elections conclude, lame duck legislative sessions may see heightened activity as outgoing legislators push through final measures before new members take office. This period could be crucial for advancing controversial or urgent legislation that may not survive under new leadership dynamics starting January 2025. The incoming governors and legislators will likely prioritize their campaign promises, which could lead to significant shifts in policy direction—especially concerning education funding and governance reforms.

In summary, the 2024 November General Election has set the stage for substantial changes in state governance, particularly in education policy. The outcomes will shape legislative agendas and executive priorities well into 2025, influencing how states address key issues such as educational equity, funding mechanisms, and overall governance structures. With turnover in legislatures, in the executive branch, and among educational leadership, education stakeholders may want to engage with newly elected and returning members early to educate them on key policy and funding priorities as part of an overall advocacy strategy.

Resources

For more information on enacted or pending legislation and issues coming from the states, check out the following resources:

- **Ballotpedia:** https://ballotpedia.org/Election_results,_2024
- **National Conference of State Legislatures:** <https://www.ncsl.org>
- **Education Commission of the States:** <https://www.ecs.org>

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 November 2024 follows below.

[Facing special education workforce shortage, Oregon to give special education teachers, paraeducators one-time stipends](#)

The Oregonian

[Georgia moves forward in creating voucher program for private and home schools](#)

Associated Press

[What state budget experts will watch for as Trump takes office](#)

Pluribus News

[What the election means for school funding in Washington state](#)

KUOW/NPR

[Gov. Evers announces \\$1 million in grants to address Wisconsin's teacher shortage](#)

Channel3000 News

[State budget prompts hiring freezes](#)

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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:

[3 states blunt school choice momentum](#)

Stateline

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

Daily Gazette

[More states are ditching exams as high school graduation requirements](#)

Associated Press

[Indiana bet big on tutoring for academic recovery. Will lawmakers save the programs when federal funds expire?](#)

Chalkbeat

[Collaboration is key to the Bucks IU preschool early intervention kindergarten transition process](#)

Bucks County Herald

[School districts face PERS payment increase](#)

The Nugget Newspaper

[Southern Ohio Educational Service Center's Business Advisory Council recognized for its efforts to strengthen workforce readiness for local students](#)

Highland County Press

[Ohio, governor aiming to cut number of chronically absent students in half over five years](#)

The Columbus Dispatch

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 *Education Next* and *The Center for American Progress*.

[Education Culture Wars: Is This What Democracy Looks Like?](#)

Education Next

Recent battles over AP African American Studies courses in Florida and Arkansas have discouraged many, but could they be a sign of a healthy republic? Stakeholders in all democracies rightly argue about how to teach history, contending over which people, groups, and movements get left in and out of the national narrative, what events matter most, how to interpret them, and even whether history holds objective truths. In this journal article, the authors examine one of the latest flashpoints in education culture wars—the battle over the pilot AP African American Studies course in Arkansas. Read more [here](#).

[Workforce Development State Strategies: A 50-State Scan of Best Practices from Recent Action](#)

Center for American Progress

This report provides a summary of best practices across a 50-state scan of workforce development-related state legislation from the 2023 and 2024 legislative sessions. These efforts are broad and span policies aimed at expanding opportunities across states' diverse workforces. To read more go [here](#).

NOVEMBER 2024 MONTHLY ADVOCACY TIP

When newly elected members enter statehouses across the country, they often bring with them new ideas and fresh perspectives, but they also require guidance and insight to navigate the complexities of the legislative process. By establishing relationships with these lawmakers early, educators and education advocates can help make sure their critical issues are prioritized, that informed decisions are

made, and that voices of the education community are heard. This month's article provides guidance for AESA members on engaging new legislators early and building lasting relationships.

Engaging Newly Elected State Legislators

Across the United States of America, there are a total of **7,386 elected members** in state legislatures. Of these seats, **5,807** (or 79% of legislative seats) in 43 House Chambers and 42 Senate Chambers, along with Nebraska's unicameral legislature, were up for election in 2024. Among those elected, incumbents represented approximately **33.86%** of state legislators, while newly elected members accounted for about **66.14%** of the total. This turnover, driven by several factors including, but not limited to term limits and evolving partisan alignment, requires education stakeholders to continually engage and educate members of state legislatures.

To punctuate the point, of these elected state-level officials, approximately **6%** are educators or former educators. This percentage translates to about **445** individuals nationwide who have backgrounds in teaching or education roles. This means very few state legislators have first-hand, practical knowledge of education policy and funding issues. For many of them, the last time they were in a school may have been as students.

Key Steps to Building a Relationship with Newly Elected State Legislators

Effective advocacy for education and school funding issues requires a strategic approach when engaging with newly elected state legislators. Educational leaders can maximize their impact by following the key steps outlined below:

1. **Building Relationships:** Establishing a strong connection with legislators is crucial. Start by introducing yourself early in their term, ideally before the legislative session begins,
2. **Educating Through Stories and Data:** When meeting with legislators, focus on providing compelling evidence that illustrates how policy issues affect schools, staff, students, and constituents using personal anecdotes and key facts.
3. **Demonstrating Local Impact:** Help legislators understand the direct impact of education policies on their constituents.
4. **Maintaining Consistent Communication:** Advocacy is an ongoing process that requires regular engagement not just during critical votes.
5. **Leveraging Collective Power:** Collaborate with other education advocates to amplify your message by working with allied education associations and community organizations and participating in organized advocacy events.
6. **Utilizing Multiple Communication Channels:** Diversify your approach to reach multi-generational legislators effectively recognizing legislators and staff may access and consumer information differently; this can be townhall style meetings, social media, letter writing campaigns or phone calls.

90-Day Engagement Strategy

Initiating an advocacy plan and implementing the strategies above can be daunting. Particularly for those that don't do it often. Breaking it down into manageable chunks can help advocates establish a relationship, build rapport, and accelerate policy goals. Outlined below is a well-structured plan to engage new legislators that unfolds over a 90-day period.

30-Day Plan: Initial Engagement and Relationship Building

1. **Identify Key Legislators:** Use resources like the Secretary of State's Office or the House and Senate in your respective states to identify newly elected state legislators relevant to your district. External resources like Ballotpedia or NCSL can also be helpful. Gather relevant background and contact information and understand their committee assignments and policy interests.
2. **Establish Initial Contact:** Send introductory emails or letters to introduce yourself and your role in education. Include a brief overview of key education issues affecting your district. ESAs are often misunderstood organizations within the educational ecosystem – be prepared to give the “ESA 101” overview.
3. **Schedule Introductory Meetings:** Reach out to schedule meetings with legislators or their staff. Be clear about the purpose of the meeting and what you hope to discuss. Prepare a concise agenda focusing on relationship-building rather than specific policy asks. Building a relationship when you do not need anything can be critical to long-term success.
4. **Begin Building Relationships with Staff:** Forge connections with legislative staff, who are crucial in influencing the legislator's agenda. Executive assistants, schedulers, and legislative aides are key “gate keepers” and critical stakeholders; discount their importance at your own risk.

60-Day Plan: Educating and Informing

1. **Conduct Educational Sessions:** Organize briefings or workshops to educate legislators on the complexities of educational service agencies, school funding and other pressing education issues. Use data and personal stories to illustrate the impact of these issues.
2. **Provide Resources and Materials:** Share well-researched materials that outline key issues, supported by data and case studies. Offer to be a resource for ongoing education-related inquiries.
3. **Engage Through Multiple Channels:** Utilize social media to highlight ongoing educational initiatives and engage with legislators publicly. Encourage legislators to visit your ESA or schools in their districts to see firsthand the challenges and successes.

90-Day Plan: Advocacy and Ongoing Engagement

1. **Advocate for Specific Education Policy and Funding Priorities:** By day 90, you should have established enough rapport to begin advocating for specific policy changes or funding needs. Be specific in your requests, providing clear action items for legislators to consider. Do not just give updates, come with an “ask.” And, importantly, leaving knowing whether they are “for,” “against,” or “neutral” on the issue. It often comes down to counting votes and knowing where you stand.
2. **Maintain Consistent Communication:** Keep in touch with legislators through regular updates on educational developments and how legislative actions are impacting ESAs and your client

schools. Thank legislators for their support when they take actions beneficial to education. Do not just call when you need something and do not call just to complain.

3. **Evaluate and Adjust Strategies:** Assess the effectiveness of your engagement efforts by measuring outcomes such as legislative support or increased awareness of issues. Adjust strategies based on feedback from legislators and changes in the political landscape.

Evaluating Success

The last step above, evaluating and adjusting one's strategy, is important to long-term success. To assess the success of your engagement strategy with newly elected state legislators, it is essential to track specific metrics that reflect both the quality and effectiveness of your interactions. Below are a few, potential key metrics to monitor:

1. **Meeting Frequency and Attendance:**
 - Track the number of meetings held with legislators and their staff. Measure attendance rates for scheduled briefings or educational sessions.
2. **Legislative Interest and Inquiries:**
 - Monitor the number of follow-up questions or requests for additional information from legislators after meetings, and track any specific, expressed policy interests.
3. **Engagement in School Visits:**
 - Record how many legislators participated in school visits and assess their level of engagement during these visits.
4. **Social Media Interaction:**
 - Analyze engagement metrics on social media platforms and track mentions or interactions from legislators on social media.
5. **Participation in Advocacy Events:**
 - Measure attendance by legislators at organized advocacy events and evaluate their involvement in discussions or activities during these events.
6. **Support for Education Initiatives:**
 - Track any public statements made by legislators in support of education funding or policies. Monitor co-sponsorship of education bills that align with your advocacy goals.
7. **Communication Consistency:**
 - Assess the frequency and quality of communications sent to legislators, including newsletters, updates, and thank-you notes. Evaluate responses received from legislators.
8. **Media Coverage:**
 - Monitor local media coverage related to your advocacy efforts and any mentions of legislators' involvement. Evaluate how positively education issues are portrayed.

By tracking these metrics, educational leaders can gain valuable insights into the effectiveness of their engagement strategy with state legislators.

Ultimately, this structured approach seeks to support educational leaders to effectively engage with newly elected state legislators, fostering relationships that lead to informed decision-making and supportive policies for education. By following this 30-60-90 day plan, leaders can advocate successfully for critical education issues while building lasting partnerships.

AESA STATE ADVOCACY RESOURCES

State-level legislative advocacy plays a crucial role in shaping the educational landscape. While federal policies often set broad educational priorities, state legislatures hold significant power over the funding, governance, and standards that directly impact local schools and districts. AESA supports state-level advocacy by offering training through publications, workshops, and presentations, which can be customized for individual states.

AESA Advocacy Toolkit

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.

AESA 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.

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

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