

The State Examiner: April 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 impacting educational service agencies and their client schools and districts. This month's report for April 2024 will examine broader education policy trends emerging early this year in statehouses across the country.

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Emerging K-12 Education Policy and Finance Trends in the United States

According to data collected by Education Commission of the States in partnership with NGA and NCSL, there are currently 2,074 education bills pending in state legislatures across the United States. Another 921 have been introduced and failed, and 254 have been enacted into law this legislative session. This means that, to date, approximately 8% of education-related bills introduced have been passed and enacted. Bills addressing student wellness and health, the teaching profession, and education finance have been the most prevalent.

As the first quarter of 2024 came to a close at the end of last month, certain policy themes and patterns were beginning to emerge that should give educators and education policy advocates a sense of the policy and funding issues of relevance that are likely to garner attention the remainder of this legislative session and through the end of the calendar year.

A review reveals the following key trends in K-12 education policy in the United States for 2024:

1. Continued momentum for high-quality reading grounded in the science of reading and an extension into a focus on high-quality math instruction grounded in the science of learning.
2. Increased parental control and restrictions on student access to social media and cell phones in schools.
3. Rapid expansion of school choice programs, especially education savings accounts (ESAs) that allow families to customize education.

4. Ongoing efforts to raise teacher pay and address teacher shortages, though with some political challenges.
5. Debates and policy challenges around the impact of artificial intelligence on education, including on standardized testing.
6. Declining enrollment in lower grades but rebounding enrollment in upper grades, leading to potential staffing and funding challenges for districts.
7. Growing interest in STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) education and personalized learning to promote a more comprehensive approach.
8. Policies to implement student-centered and competency-based learning models.
9. Governors highlighting the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education in their State of the State addresses.
10. Evolving approaches to how states count student enrollment for funding purposes; and
11. Increased focus on providing comprehensive school health services, including mental health support.

These trends were identified through a review of legislation that has been introduced, proposals within Governor's State of the State Addresses, agency rule making decisions, and public policy analysis.

These trends demonstrate that state policymakers are focused on addressing learning gaps, empowering families, strengthening pathways to college and careers, and supporting teachers. They also reveal an influx of partisan legislation on more controversial issues like parents bills of rights, transgender youth, bathroom designations and more designed to rally voters to the polls this fall. They also highlight ongoing challenges, such as the impact of technology, enrollment changes, choice expansion, and the lasting effects of the pandemic on education.

As an educational leader, and in one's related role as an education advocate, it is important to stay on top of emerging policy trends. It has been said, the legislatures react, they seldom lead. And what is happening in one state is surely likely to make it to others eventually.

Monitoring state legislatures and executive activities in the United States involves a combination of resources that provide legislative tracking, budget analysis, and political insights. Outlined below are eleven resources that can be valuable for these purposes:

- **State Legislative Websites:** This should be your first stop. Each state's legislative website is a primary resource for tracking legislative activities, including bill tracking, session schedules, and committee meetings. These sites often provide live streaming of legislative sessions.
- **National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL):** NCSL offers comprehensive resources for tracking state legislation, including databases that detail the status of bills across different states. It also provides analysis on a wide range of policy issues affecting states. Go to: <https://www.ncsl.org/>
- **Council of State Governments (CSG):** CSG provides tools and insights on state government operations, including fiscal analysis and policy developments. It serves as a forum for fostering intergovernmental cooperation among states and sharing best practices. Go to: <https://www.csg.org/>

- **National Association of State Budget Officials (NASBO):** NASBO. Go to: <https://www.nasbo.org/home>
- **Education Commission of the States (ECS):** ECS is a not-for-profit education policy research organization and think tank that partners closely with the fifty states. Among its reports and resources is a 50-state policy database as well as legislative monitoring tools. Go to: <https://www.ecs.org>
- **The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP):** CBPP focuses on fiscal policy and public programs that affect low- and moderate-income families and individuals. It provides in-depth analysis of state budget and tax policies. Go to: <https://www.cbpp.org/>
- **Ballotpedia:** Ballotpedia covers American politics at all levels of government with a focus on neutral, accurate, and comprehensive information about politics, elections, and policy. It includes detailed pages on state legislatures, budgets, and elections. Go to: https://ballotpedia.org/Main_Page
- **FollowTheMoney.org:** This site by the National Institute on Money in Politics collects comprehensive campaign finance data on state elections, providing insights into the financial influences on state politics and policy. Go to: <https://www.followthemoney.org>
- **Pew Charitable Trusts' State Fiscal Health:** Provides interactive tools and research that help understand state fiscal conditions and economic trends. Their resources are crucial for monitoring state budget processes and fiscal health. Go to: [State Fiscal Health | The Pew Charitable Trusts \(pewtrusts.org\)](https://www.pewtrusts.org/state-fiscal-health)
- **The Urban Institute's State and Local Finance Initiative:** This initiative provides data, analysis, and insights on state and local government fiscal and economic issues. It is particularly useful for understanding the broader implications of state policy decisions on economics and public finance. Go to: <https://www.urban.org/research-area/state-and-local-finance>
- **AESA:** AESA supports its members with both Federal advocacy and State-level advocacy resources. [The State Examiner](https://www.aesa.us/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. Each edition also includes advocacy tips to activate and empower members to be informed, effective education advocates. Go to: <https://www.aesa.us/>

Together, these resources offer state-level education advocates a robust toolkit to monitor and analyze state legislative and executive activities impacting the nation's schools.

STATE BUDGET & FINANCE MONITORING

AESA monitors state level budget and finance news impacting preschool and primary and secondary education. The latest state budget and finance-related news for April 2024 follows below.

[Five State Fiscal Debates to Watch in 2024](#)

Pew

[Iowa Law Makers Pass Income Tax Cut & Budget Bills in Push to End Session](#)

Iowa Capital Dispatch

[Kemp Signs Legislation Establishing Another Voucher Program in Georgia](#)

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

[Federal Dollars Seek to Reverse Decline in Head Start Enrollment](#)

Route-Fifty.com

[Federal Dollars Seek to Reverse Decline in Head Start Enrollment](#)

Governing

[Ohio Governor Announces 85 Million in Federal Funds to Childcare Centers](#)

Dayton Daily News

[States Rethink Ambitious Projects as Tax Revenues Shrink and Pandemic Aid Ends](#)

Stateline

[Fiscal Survey of States](#)

With data gathered from all fifty state budget offices, this semi-annual report provides a narrative analysis of the fiscal condition of the states and data summaries of state general fund revenues, expenditures, and balances. The spring edition details governors' proposed budgets; the fall edition details enacted budgets.

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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:

[Percentage of Students with Autism on the Rise](#)

K12dive.com

[International Academy of Macomb Ranked Second Best High School in Michigan](#)

Macomb Daily

[PA Senator Secures Funding for School Safety Including IU](#)

Pennsylvania Senate

[Wisconsin District Test Scores Trending Upward with Support from CESA](#)

Plymouth Review

[Legislative Changes Impact AEA Staffing](#)

Times Republican

[District Superintendent Signals Continue Support From AEA](#)

East Central Iowa News

[East Central Ohio ESC Among Recipients of Teacher Credential Grants](#)

Business Journal Daily

[Capital Region BOCES Students Headed to Statewide Competition](#)

WNYT.com

NATIONAL REPORTS IMPACTING EDUCATION

AESA monitors 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 and national surveys from The University of Chicago, Stateline, Pew Research, and Education Commission of the States.

[Realizing the Promise of High Dosage Tutoring at Scale: Preliminary Evidence for the Field – University of Chicago/MDRC](#)

- This technical report outlines preliminary results from the Personalized Learning Initiative showing that high dosage tutoring can be scaled and can work – even when delivered in the aftermath of the pandemic and in diverse academic settings.

[School Voucher Proponents Spend Big to Overcome Rural Resistance](#)

- School choice programs have spread rapidly in recent years, aided by groups such as the American Federation for Children and Americans for Prosperity. As many as seventy-three programs have been implemented in thirty-two states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, including eleven with a comprehensive statewide reach and sixty-two that serve various portions of the population. This report examines data on campaign contributions and expenditures influencing school choice adoption.

[About Half of Americans Say Public K-12 Education is Going in the Wrong Direction](#)

- This Pew Research Center survey delves into public sentiment toward public education. More specifically, it highlights the reasons behind those who say the public education system is going in the wrong direction. Major concerns that rise to the top include not enough time on core academic subjects, teachers bringing personal political and social views into the classroom, and lack of funding and resources.

[Governors' Top Education Priorities In 2024 State of the State Addresses \(Updated\)](#)

- This updated report by Education Commission of the States (ECS) highlights the top education priorities of the nation's governors as outlined in their respective 2024 State of

the State addresses. These annual policy speeches offer time for new and incumbent governors to outline policy priorities and celebrate state accomplishments. Six top trends have emerged this year as outlined below:

- workforce development and career and technical education.
- K-12 funding.
- teacher workforce.
- early care and education.
- academic achievement and literacy; and
- physical and mental health.

April 2024 MONTHLY ADVOCACY TIP

State legislatures are incredibly active, introducing and enacting a considerable number of bills each year. In 2023 alone, statehouses across the United States introduced over 132,600 bills and enacted more than 30,800, displaying a much higher rate of policy debate and enactment compared to the federal level. This elevated level of activity offers educators numerous opportunities to influence educational policies and reforms. And the best way to do that is by showing up and being present at the statehouse. This month's advocacy tip focuses on organizing a day at the statehouse.

Effective Advocacy Tips: Planning A Successful Day at the Statehouse

Political wrangling that garners the most media attention tends to gravitate towards national legislation. However, the real action often happens at the state level, where laws can be more rapidly enacted and directly impact local communities. This is particularly true for issues like education that are a responsibility left to the states. For educators, understanding and participating in state-level advocacy is crucial, as it provides a platform to influence policies that directly affect student outcomes. Organizing a "Day at the Statehouse" empowers educators to engage directly with legislators and policymakers, fostering dialogue and influencing decisions that shape the future of education.

Outline below are key steps to organizing a successful day at the statehouse event:

- **Step 1: Preparing and Planning** - Begin by establishing clear goals for the advocacy day, such as advocating for increased education funding or specific policy reforms. Coordinate with fellow educators, education organizations, and community allies to maximize impact.
- **Step 2: Understand the Legislative Process** - Before planning a visit, it is essential for educators to familiarize themselves with the state legislative process. This includes knowing the legislative calendar, understanding how bills are passed, and identifying key committees and legislators involved in education policy.
- **Step 3: Schedule Meetings with Legislators** - Identifying and scheduling meetings with state legislators who serve on education committees or represent the districts where educators live, or work is crucial. Tools like your respective legislature's website and Ballotpedia can help educators find relevant information and contact details for their state legislators.

- **Step 4: Prepare Your Advocacy Message** - Educators should prepare a clear and concise advocacy message that outlines their concerns and what they hope to achieve. This might include specific policy changes, funding requests, or general support for educational initiatives. Prepare talking points and data to support your arguments, emphasizing the impact of policy decisions on students and schools. Never leave a meeting without making your “ask.”
- **Step 5: Build Coalitions** - Forming coalitions with other education groups or associations can strengthen the advocacy effort. Coalitions can provide a broader base of support and additional resources, making the advocacy more impactful.
- **Step 6: Media Outreach** - Amplify the advocacy day's message by engaging with local media outlets. Press releases, op-eds, and social media updates can raise awareness of key issues and generate public support for education advocacy efforts.
- **Step 7: Follow Up** - After the Day at the Statehouse, educators should follow up with the legislators they met. Thanking them for their time and reiterating key points from the meetings can help keep their issues on the legislators' agenda. Continuous engagement and updates on educational issues can maintain momentum, foster long-term relationships and support advocacy success.

To help facilitate planning, below is a sample agenda for an education advocacy day at the statehouse:

- **8:00 AM - 8:30 AM: Registration and Check-In**
Welcome attendees, distribute event materials and provide overview of the day's goals and schedule.
- **8:30 AM - 9:00 AM: Opening Remarks**
Introduction of key speakers and organizers.
- **9:00 AM - 9:45 AM: Keynote Address**
Prominent education expert or legislator discussing the importance of education advocacy.
- **10:00 AM – 11:45 AM: Panel Discussions**
Experts, educators, and policymakers discussing challenges and solutions in education policy.
- **12:00 PM - 1:00 PM: Networking Lunch**
An opportunity for attendees to connect and share insights.
- **1:15 PM - 2:15 PM: Advocacy Training**
Tips for effective communication with legislators and advocating for education reform.
- **2:30 PM - 4:00 PM: Meet Your Legislators**
Scheduled meetings with representatives to discuss education issues.
- **4:15 PM - 5:00 PM: Closing Session**
Summary of the day's discussions and call to action.
Thanking attendees for their participation and commitment to education advocacy.

- **5:00 PM: Event Conclusion**

Optional networking time for attendees who wish to continue conversations.

**Please note that specific session timings and topics can be adjusted based on the preferences and needs of your event.*

State-level advocacy empowers educators to shape the future of education policy and resource allocation. By organizing effective Days at the Statehouse, educators can engage directly with policymakers, leverage their expertise, and advocate for policies that support student success and teacher empowerment.

By showing up and standing up we can collectively create positive change in our education systems and ensure that every student has access to high-quality educational opportunities regardless of where they live and attend school. Start planning your day at the statehouse today!

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

STAY CONNECTED

