

The State Examiner: July 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 (AESAs). 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 July 2024 delves into state-level legislation and policy trends, offering insights on what to expect when state legislatures reconvene this fall post-election. Additionally, we provide a forward look into the next legislative sessions in 2025.

Inside this Edition

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

Education Policy Trends and Looking Ahead

Summer recess is a good time to take stock in what has happened at statehouses in the respective states, examine how it aligns to organizational or network priorities, and plan forward for when legislatures reconvene.

In 2024, several key policy and funding trends have emerged in K-12 education across state legislatures in the United States. These trends reflect ongoing efforts to address learning gaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, remove barriers to learning, improve teacher recruitment and retention, expand school choice options, and adapt to new technological challenges including the effects of social media and the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI).

Key Trends

The following policy and funding trends emerged in the first half of 2024:

1. **High-Quality Reading and Math Instruction:** Many states are continuing to focus on improving early literacy and math skills. This includes adopting policies grounded in the science of reading and implementing comprehensive early literacy programs. For example, states like Florida, Indiana, Ohio, and Texas have banned the three-cueing method in favor of evidence-based reading instruction.
2. **Workforce Development and Career and Technical Education (CTE):** There is a significant push to align K-12 education with workforce needs. States are investing in career and technical

education programs to prepare students for high-demand jobs. For instance, Indiana's Career Scholarship Accounts provide high school students with funds for workforce training.

3. **Teacher Workforce:** Addressing teacher shortages remains a priority. States are implementing measures to attract and retain teachers, such as offering enhanced benefits, licensure changes, and professional development opportunities.
4. **School Choice:** School choice policies, including the expansion of Education Savings Accounts (ESAs) and voucher programs, continue to gain traction. These policies aim to provide families with more educational options and have been a significant focus in states like Arizona, Ohio and Florida. The impact of these policies on state budgets will be important to monitor.
5. **Mental Health and Well-being:** There is an increasing emphasis on student mental health, with states investing in mental health services and supports within schools. This includes funding for counselors and mental health programs to address the growing needs of students. On the fiscal side, it also includes efforts to include Medicaid in schools for eligible students impacted by mental health issues but not on IEPs.
6. **Educational Technology and AI:** The integration of artificial intelligence (AI) in education is a growing area of interest. Legislatures are exploring policies to support AI literacy and address the challenges posed by new technologies like ChatGPT.
7. **Funding Increases:** Many states are increasing funding for K-12 education to support various initiatives, including special education, student transportation, and school meals. For example, Georgia and Michigan have made significant investments in their K-12 education budgets. As fiscal conditions begin to soften and states tighten their belts this will be an important issue to monitor in the next sessions, particularly as state governments and schools near the federal fiscal cliff and the expiration of ESSER/ARPA era stimulus funding.

Common Themes

Several common themes emerge from these trends:

1. **Focus on Evidence-Based Practices:** There is a strong emphasis on adopting evidence-based instructional methods, particularly in reading and math.
2. **Addressing Workforce Needs:** Aligning education with workforce demands is a priority, reflected in the expansion of CTE programs and workforce development initiatives.
3. **Support for Teachers:** Efforts to improve teacher recruitment and retention are widespread, with states offering various incentives and professional development opportunities.
4. **Expanding Educational Options:** School choice remains a contentious but prominent issue, with many states expanding voucher programs and ESAs.
5. **Mental Health Prioritization:** The mental well-being of students is a critical focus, with increased funding and support for mental health services in schools.
6. **Technological Adaptation:** States are grappling with the implications of new technologies and are seeking to integrate AI literacy into the curriculum.

Issues to Monitor in 2024-2025

Given the trends and themes outlined above, as state legislatures reconvene in 2024-2025, several issues will be critical to monitor:

1. **Implementation of AI Policies:** How states incorporate AI literacy into their education systems and address the challenges posed by AI in the classroom. This includes counterbalancing efforts to minimize the effects of technology (cell phone bans and social media restrictions), while

simultaneously preparing students on the acceptable use of emerging, generative technologies like AI.

2. **Effectiveness of Early Literacy Programs:** The impact of new early literacy policies on student outcomes and whether states expand these initiatives. Math continues to be a challenge for many states, slower to rebound than literacy, yet policymakers grapple with how many initiatives schools and districts can wrestle with at one time.
3. **Teacher Workforce Solutions:** The success of measures aimed at addressing teacher shortages and improving teacher retention. This may include examinations of what is working, what is not and to what degree can new instructional delivery models assist including teletherapy, increased use of itinerant staff, and use of artificial intelligence.
4. **Expansion of School Choice:** The continued debate over school choice policies and their impact on public education funding and equity. Monitoring funding impact as well as equity and quality concerns will continue to be at the heart of these debates.
5. **Mental Health Initiatives:** The effectiveness of increased funding and support for student mental health services. This will likely include considerations for expanded school-based Medicaid services.
6. **Funding and Resource Allocation:** How states manage and allocate increased funding for K-12 education, particularly in areas like special education and student support services. This will be of critical importance as states wrestle with the federal funding cliff and the ongoing urge to cut taxes to spur economic growth and appeal to constituent concerns about the cost of living and related issues.

State legislatures will need to navigate these complex issues to ensure that educational policies effectively address the needs of students, teachers, and communities in the coming years.

A common axiom states, “legislatures react, they seldom lead.” And, what happens in one state often finds its way into policy discussions in other states. In this context, educational service agencies should consider how the consortia-based, shared services model inherent in their design can contribute to the effective (and efficient) delivery of high-quality education and educational support services in the areas highlighted above and other emerging policy and funding concerns voiced by their client districts and other stakeholders.

To monitor what is happening across state government explore the following resources:

- [Education Commission of the States](#)
- [National Governors Association](#)
- [National Association of State Boards of Education](#)
- [Council of State Governments](#)

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 July 2024 follows below.

[School vouchers were supposed to save taxpayer money. They blew a hole in Arizona’s budget](#)
Dallas News

[Stable but Slowing: State Revenues Start to Squeeze Policy Ambitions](#)

Governing

[Voters in Several States Can Cut — or Abolish — Property Taxes This Fall](#)

Governing

[Pa. lawmakers reach \\$47.6 billion budget deal with sweeping changes to public education](#)

Philadelphia Inquirer

[The \\$190B question: Did federal pandemic funds improve test scores?](#)

Route Fifty

[State Spending Will Slow for First Time in Years, Report Says](#)

EdWeek Market-Brief

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:

[Kim Reynolds says over 30,000 students approved for education savings accounts next year](#)

Des Moines Register

[Oklahoma Schools Required to Teach Bible Beginning in 2024-25](#)

K12Dive

[What is generative AI? Most of the public sector workforce doesn't know](#)

Route Fifty

[Flurry of 100+ new laws taking effect in Nebraska](#)

Nebraska Examiner

[State Grant Supports CCIU Program to Attract Students to Careers in Special Education](#)

Daily Local News

[Students from across NYS attend MOBOCES Pro Cooking Program](#)

Daily Sentinel

[Region One expanding dropout recovery program](#)

Valley Central Local News

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 National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), Gallup, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), and the National Association of State Budget Officials (NASBO):

[State Advances in Early Childhood Education Seed Plans for 2024](#)

This report by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) highlights significant strides made by states in 2023 towards universal pre-K, increased funding for early childhood educators, and improved early literacy and math instruction. Many states made significant strides in 2023. State boards of education can draw from a rich playbook of state policy actions in 2023 to inform their 2024 plans.

[The State of Schools Report: Insights to Inform Higher Education and K-12 Leaders \(2024\)](#)

Published by Gallup, this report provides insights on how teachers, students, parents, and the public feel about important issues facing K-12 and higher education in 2024. The Insights Education Leaders Need. Requires users to input information to download the report.

[Report on the Condition of Education 2024](#)

This report by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides key findings on various topics in education, including enrollment trends, student demographics, and expenditures in public elementary and secondary schools.

[National Association of State Budget Officers \(NASBO\) Fiscal Survey of States \(2024\)](#)

This annual report provides comprehensive data on state general fund spending and revenue trends. The latest report highlights a significant shift in state budgets for fiscal year 2025, with total general fund spending expected to decline by over 6% compared to fiscal 2024 levels. This marks a major change from the recent years of surging revenue and record spending.

The reports listed above offer valuable insights into the current state and future directions of early childhood and K-12 education, covering a wide range of topics from policy advancements to industry trends and challenges. Insights into state budget conditions will also equip educational service agencies and other education stakeholders with the information necessary to inform budget advocacy efforts in state budget discussions replete with competing interests but finite resources.

JULY 2024 MONTHLY ADVOCACY TIP

As state legislatures across the country enter their summer recess, now is an ideal time for organizations to conduct a thorough mid- or post-legislative session review of their advocacy efforts. This critical assessment allows you to evaluate progress, refine strategies, and prepare for upcoming legislative challenges. The July 2024 advocacy tip explores why this review is essential and how to make the most of it.

Conducting a Legislative Mid- or Post-Session Review

Why Conduct a Legislative Session Review?

- **Measure Progress:** A comprehensive review allows you to assess how well your organization advanced its legislative priorities during the session. By comparing your goals to actual outcomes, you can gauge the effectiveness of your advocacy efforts.
- **Identify Successes and Challenges:** Analyzing your legislative wins and setbacks provides valuable insights into what strategies worked well and where improvements are needed. This information is crucial for refining your approach in future sessions.
- **Prepare for Future Sessions:** With many state legislatures reconvening in early 2025, now is the time to start planning for the next session. Use the insights gained from your review to develop a robust strategy for upcoming legislative priorities.

Best Practices for Conducting Your Review

- **Gather Relevant Data:** Collect all pertinent information, including bill statuses, voting records, and any feedback received from legislators or coalition partners.
- **Engage Stakeholders:** Involve your team, board members, and key supporters in the review process. Their diverse perspectives can provide valuable insights and ideas for improvement.
- **Analyze Advocacy Tactics:** Evaluate the effectiveness of various advocacy methods used, such as grassroots mobilization, direct lobbying, or media outreach. Determine which tactics yielded the best results and why.
- **Review Communication Strategies:** Assess the impact of your messaging and communication channels. Did your newsletters, social media posts, and other outreach efforts effectively engage supporters and influence decision-makers?
- **Identify Lessons Learned:** Document key takeaways from the session, including unexpected challenges, successful collaborations, and missed opportunities. These insights will be invaluable for future planning.

Looking Ahead

Use the findings from your review to start planning for the next legislative session. Consider the following steps:

- Refine your legislative agenda based on this year's outcomes and emerging issues in your field.
- Strengthen relationships with key legislators and their staff during the off-session period (this may include new candidates to office in an election year).
- Develop new advocacy strategies or enhance existing ones to address identified gaps.

- Plan for early engagement in the next session, as many state legislatures will convene in January 2025, and advocates will not only want to re-establish relationships with returning incumbents but also educate new members of the legislature on their issues.

By conducting a thorough mid- or post-legislative session review, your organization or statewide network of ESAs can celebrate its successes, learn from challenges, and position itself for even greater impact in future legislative sessions. This analysis, particularly in an election year, should also be forward looking and consider the implications of the November elections and their impact on policy and funding priorities (they can impact lame duck sessions as well as new legislative sessions that start in January 2025). This proactive approach ensures that ESA advocacy efforts remain focused, effective, and aligned with organizational or network mission and goals.

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

