



Erie County Association of School Boards

Vol. 4; Issue 6; February 2025

ADVOCACY ALLIANCE MONTHLY

YOUR MONTHLY UPDATE

Dear Friends,

ECASB combined with the Niagara Orleans School Board Association (NOSBA) for a total of 23 people from WNY advocating for public schools on Feb. 12. We met with a total of eleven legislators during the day.

Our work is not done. As legislators continue to make decisions, it is important we follow up with post cards, emails and even phone calls to remind them of our priorities. One thing is very clear, a decision on cell phone policies is at the forefront of everyone’s conversations. Because ECASB still officially remains neutral on the issue, it is up to you to advocate for your districts position!

The other clear front runner of Albany talk is the impact the new federal government leadership will have on Education funding. It is important for you to contact your legislators and let them know how you hope short falls will be handled, ie use money for programing and scrap the mandates on electric buses with the federal grants likely to end.

With many more voices reiterating the conversations your 23 colleagues have started, we can make a difference! Your voice in these conversations is invaluable in conveying the needs and aspirations of our community, and it demonstrates the strength of our collective advocacy efforts.

Yours in Advocacy,

~Jane

Take Note...

- => Legislative Team Meeting-The next meeting is scheduled for March 20, 2025, from 6:30-8:30 p.m. This is the last Legislative Team Meeting for the 2024-2025 school year. Mark your calendar.
=> The Legislative Wrap-up Dinner is scheduled for May 22 at Creekside from 6-8 p.m. Be on the lookout for additional information in the coming months.
=> Mark you calendar for the ECASB Road Rally, held this year on April 26th. Its not too soon to form your car teams. Teams do not need to be from the same district! Feel free to mix and match. We will begin at the Erie 1 BOCES Campus, 355 Harlem Road.
=> Don't forget: Submit nominations for ECASB Awards. Nominations are accepted until March 3, so it is not too late to nominate a colleague from your board! Visit www.ecasb.org for more details.

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GLOBAL INSIGHTS IN A CONNECTED WORLD

IN THE NEWS

Links to interesting readings

Click on Links to go to the news source.

[Board of Regents Advances Budget and Legislative Priorities for the 2025-26 School Year](#)

[NY top school chief's secret \\$155K raise sparks outrage from GOP pols: 'Unwarranted and offensive'](#)

[Statement from Chancellor Lester Young and the NYS Board of Regents](#)

[Trump's Orders Tests Local Control of Schools](#)

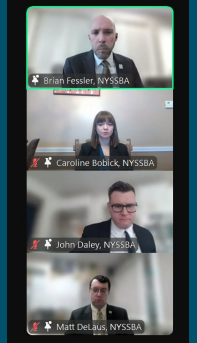
[American Student Reading Scores Dip to New Low](#)

[Sen. Gillibrand: If Trump defunds Dept. of Ed, N.Y. students with disabilities will lose support](#)



Virtual Capital Conference

On February 7, NYSSBA hosted the Capital Virtual Conference ahead of the in-person Lobby Day. The event gave all the opportunity to partake in learning the NYSSBA priorities and to hear directly from some key people across the state, lead by Brian Fessler, Chief Advocacy Officer; Caroline Bobick, Deputy Director of Governmental and External Relations; John Daley, Senior Governmental Relations Representative; and Matt DeLaus, Governmental Relations Counsel.



In the first session, participants heard directly from the governor's office from representatives Maria Fernandez and Terrance Pratt. Much of the conversation focused on free school lunches for students across the state, highlighting two basic points: 1. It is the most popular of the governors budget proposals and 2. it also looks at 30% of the resources being directly sourced from NYS vendors combining Universal Meals with Farm to School programs.

Fessler commended the governor's office for maintaining safe harmless funding for the budget this year and used that to talk about the recommendations from the Rockefeller Institute study, whose report was released in mid December, 2024. Pratt explained that the governor's budget proposal updates the foundation aid formula by replacing outdated poverty and economic measures with more current data, ensuring fair distribution of funds to school districts. The changes aim to fully fund foundation aid, reflecting actual operational costs without causing drastic funding shifts among districts. Pratt highlighted that New York's substantial investment in education re-

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Virtual Capital Conference Continued

mains sustainable, and ongoing discussions with lawmakers and advocacy groups will likely address further adjustments, including the regional cost index, over multiple years.

The conversation turned to the smart phone device ban being touted by the governor's office and Fessler asked for an update on the proposed policy. The discussion focused on the implementation of a "bell-to-bell" cell phone policy in schools, emphasizing that partial restrictions, such as banning phones only in classrooms, were ineffective. Schools found that phones continued to disrupt social and emotional well-being during non-instructional times, such as lunch and hallway periods. Full restrictions encouraged more face-to-face student interaction, and schools will be given flexibility in how to enforce the policy, whether through pouches, lockers, or designated spaces.

Fessler acknowledged the extensive collaboration between NYSSBA and the governor's office, crediting the governor for raising awareness of the issue through open dialogue and numerous meetings. Since the spring, cell phone policy has become a top priority alongside foundation aid and zero-emission buses. NYSSBA has supported districts with resources, workshops, and programming to facilitate local discussions on the policy. Fernandez highlighted that feedback from stakeholders led to important policy adjustments, including exemptions for medical needs, students with IEPs or 504 plans, and English language learners. Ongoing feedback will continue to shape the policy to best support student learning while addressing the challenges posed by cell phone use. The session concluded, in part, with a discussion about the pace and feasibility of the Zero Emission Bus Mandates where it became clear that the mandate is ultimately not going anywhere, but there does appear to be some sort of concession in the timeline on the horizon.

The morning continued with representatives and leadership from the State Education Department and the NYSSBA team also did a webinar on the budget.

The final session was a conversation with Senator Mayer and Assemblyman Benedetto. It began with comments on the governor's proposed budget in terms of foundation aid for schools.

Senator Mayer said, "You know this is probably the first year I didn't call up and sit with the governor's office for cutting school funding and threatening schools with something they could not accept. So it is a very good starting point and we very much appreciate that.

The 2% for everyone as a baseline is promising. I'd like to see a higher number myself. That's closer to what the actual CPI is, but I think it's a good start.

Senator Mayer discusses concerns about the current state funding for New York schools. Key issues include:

Inflation Adjustment: The law's inflationary adjustment is insufficient, particularly for New York City and suburban districts.

Regional Cost Index: Mayer suggests updating the regional cost index to more accurately reflect costs in regions like the Hudson Valley, New York City, and Long Island.

ENL Services: There's a lack of funding for districts with increasing numbers of English as a New Language (ENL) students.

Special Needs Students: The funding formula for special needs students needs more nuance to address growing demand.

Mental Health and Security: Mayer emphasizes the need for more support for mental health initiatives and security costs in schools.

Overall, while appreciating the progress made, Mayer expresses the need for further improvements in the funding model.

When pressed on the topic of cell phone policy, both Senator Mayer and Assemblyman Benedetto were non-committal, stating their individual conferences have yet to have open discussions, but they seemed in agreement that the issue was important and would have to be decided upon, with some sense that there needs to be a local component to the decision making. Senator Mayer also wanted to hear the voice of the students on the issue.

In-Person Capital Conference Report

Meeting Our Legislators In Albany

Erik Polkowski and Kristy Pingitore from Akron; Ed Schaefer from Cheektowaga; David Lowrey from Erie2CC BOCES, NYSSBA and ECASB; Mary Jo Szucs from Holland; Heather Becker and Jane Sullivan from Iroquois; Sabatino Cimato, Matt Chimera, Fred Floss, Paul Spors, Karen Whitelaw and Lee-Ann Vogt from Kenmore Town of Tonawanda; Kathleen Chiavetta, Mike Franey and Dan Pacos from Lake Shore; Kristin Schmutzler from City of Tonawanda; Lorene Barulich from West Seneca; Beth Pyskaty from Starpoint; and Leslie Tobin, Greg Neuman and Michael Ferraro from Lockport traveled to Albany for the February 12 NYSSBA In Person Lobby Day. Breaking into smaller groups, the WNY delegation from ECASB and NOSBA visiting with Assembly Members Patrick Chludzinski, Patrick Burke, Paul Bologna, Michael Benedetto, William Conrad, Karen McMahon and an aide from Stephen Hawley's office, as well as with Senators Gallivan, Ortt and Ryan. Assemblyman Morinello cancelled his appointment, Assemblyman DiPietro's office responded to our request for a meeting the day of the event and a time could not be arranged, and we postponed with Senator Mayer due to the impending weather. Jane was greeted in the lobby by Senator Mayer, whose schedule change made her unable to meet with our delegation. Already concerned about the weather returning to Buffalo, Senator Mayer apologized in person and, along with Jane and Legislative

Director Karen Reppy, agreed to postpone the meeting and arrange a Zoom call soon. She then graciously wished our team a safe trip home.

While teams visited the legislators, Jane spoke with NYSSBA Chief Advocacy Officer Brian Fessler, who shared event details. This is the third year of the event in its current format. Attendance is strong this year, though slightly lower than last year, when the threat to save harmless funding drew more participants. The local delegation did see an increase in ECASB members attending the Capital Conference.

"Bad news brings out more people," he noted. Fessler was pleased with this year's turnout and the number of legislators stopping by to greet attendees and take meetings. He added that the previous day was hectic with advocacy groups, while today felt more relaxed and friendly.

Many meetings focused on key priorities: Foundation Aid, staffing shortages, and zero-emission bus mandates. Legislators also sought feedback on the governor's proposed ban on cell phone use in schools. ECASB's Legislative Team, initially neutral on the issue in September, saw the need to take a stance in January. A letter was drafted based on feedback from committee members in attendance at the January Legislative Team meeting. The letter was drafted by Legislative Team Leaders with input from the Quick Response Team (QRT). However, not enough votes were cast before Lobby Day to change the neutral position.

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Lobby Day Conference Continued

Without a quorum of ECASB members voting, ECASB did not want to take an official position. The issue will be revisited in March, but for now, districts must advocate individually. Lobby Day discussions made clear that legislators aim to take action this budget season.

Another key discussion was the Zero Emission Bus Mandates and state grant funding, much of which comes from federal funds that may be cut by the new administration. Kathleen Chiavette made a point about this in the meeting with Senator Gallivan's Legislative Director Niko Ladopoulos. Implementation challenges, combined with this potential funding loss, have raised concerns about meeting the timeline. Days before Lobby Day, the governor expressed openness to renegotiating the timeline while maintaining the mandate. Districts may gain an extra year or two to begin bus purchases, but the governor's office remains committed to all New York school buses eventually being zero-emission.

Lobby Day attendees this year were pleased to see more meetings with the actual legislators. In year's past, we have often met with staff members. Meeting with staff members is never a bad thing, but it is great to see so many of the legislators willing to give us 20 to 30 minutes of their busy day to hear directly from us, and right after an election!

Between our local Winter Advocacy in December and our In Person Lobby Day, we have met with over 85% of our local legislators in person to share our priorities. All the legislators were interested and receptive to hearing about our platform.

This was especially true of the newly elected legislators, eager to learn all they can about our needs. Many of them have connections via family members to WNY public education. It is surprising how many of our legislators have a parent or a spouse who work in WNY Schools.

Several meetings were held with newly elected legislators, and we are off to a good start forming solid relationships with them

and their staff. Ken-Ton board members had a chance to talk to Assemblyman Patrick Chludzinski about CVA funding, a topic he knew little about. This highlights why it is so important to advocate to all our local legislators. We cannot expect them to know the issues automatically. They need to be made aware of the needs and how they can help address them. They need to be educated on the impact their decisions have on local school districts back home.

It is important to note that these new electees are from the minority party. Assemblyman Conrad has a concern which he shared during our local meeting. He maintains that the WNY legislative delegation remains close knit and works well together for the most part; however, with the loss of former Assemblywoman Monica Wallace, his job to fight for WNY in the majority has become a little tougher. Her voice was a powerful backing to his own and now it is gone. He sees this as problematic when debating in the majority caucus.

As Dave mentioned in the last This Week at ECASB, many of the attendees met for dinner the evening before the Lobby Day and this gave us a good chance to talk about our priorities, our stories and share key talking points, so no matter who attended a meeting, the legislators all received the same messaging. Jane drove Heather, Beth and Kristin in her electric car and the charging of the vehicle halfway to the destination and the need to continue finding charging stations during the two-day trip certainly lent itself to some good talking points when it came to the Zero Bus Mandate discussions. The dinner also made it clear the changes at the Federal level will have an impact on our state-level discussions.

Lobby Day Photos



Photos on left from top to bottom:

Paul Spors, Matt Chimera, Kristin Schmutzler, Assemblyman William Conrad, Fred Floss, Karen Whitelaw and Lee-Ann Vogt in AM Conrad's office.

Kristin Schmutzler, Fred Floss and Lorene Barulich-standing; and Erik Polkowski seated with Assemblywoman Karen McMahon.

Kristy Pingitore, Erik Polkowski, Ed Schaefer, Kristin Schmutzler, Senator Robert Ortt, Leslie Tobin, Michael Ferraro, Beth Pyskaty, Lorene Barulich and Greg Neuman in Senator Ortt's conference room.

Paul Spors, Kristin Schmutzler, Lorene Barulich, Assemblyman Patrick Burke, Fred Floss, Karen Whitelaw, Lee-Ann Vogt and Matt Chimera in AM Burke's office.

Photo below:

Fred Floss, Sabatino Cimato, Matt Chimera, Lee-Ann Vogt, Heather Becker, Assemblyman Patrick Chludzinski, Mary Jo Szucs, Ed Schaefer, Karen Whitelaw, Erik Polkowski, Paul Spors, Lorene Barulich and Kristin Schmutzler in AM Chludzinski's office.



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The 2024-2025 Legislative Session Highlighted Bills

S00519-(Teacher Recruitment)- AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to establishing the underrepresented teachers of tomorrow teacher recruitment and retention program. This bill was introduced to the Senate on Jan. 8, 2025 and was immediately sent to committee. The committee has moved to cross it over on Feb. 12. It may be one to keep an eye on. There are no local sponsors and it does not have a companion bill as of publication.

S02631 (School Start Times)-AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to requiring public elementary schools to start no earlier than eight a.m. and public secondary schools to start no earlier than eight thirty a.m. This bill has advanced with a new print number. If you have your eye on this, be sure to check the updates. There is no local sponsor and it does not have a companion bill as of publication.

S04137 (Community Schools) Relates to establishing full-service community schools to improve student outcomes through a systematic effort designed to coordinate educational programs with essential health, mental health and enrichment services and facilitate parental involvement in their children's education. There are no local sponsors or companion bills at publication.

S04279 (Staffing) Allows a person with a master's of social work degree who meets certain requirements to file to be licensed within one year after the effective date of this act. There is no local sponsor or companion bill at publication.

S04496 (Women in Sports) Protects women's sports in middle school and high school from unfair competition. There is no local sponsor, but there is a companion bill in the Assembly.

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***More Assembly Bills to check out:
Bill Number/ Issue Raised***

A00109 Financial Literacy

A00129 Rename GED

A00250 Education Equity Act

A00703 SRO Funding

A01041 Immigration Reimbursements

A01080 Water Instruction K-12

A01088 Career Education

A01660 Teacher Continuing Ed on Mental Health

A01771 State Aid Reduction based on Audit Results

A01842 Teacher Education on Mental Health

A02279 Education Equity and Choice Act

A02307 SRO Funding

A02545 Foundation Aid Funding Formula

A03430 BOCES Salary Restrictions

A03581 Financial Literacy

A04024 Telehealth in Schools

A04394 Omnibus Learning for Work Act

A04446 Regional High School

A04512 Telehealth Funding

A04663 NYS School Safety and Security Act

A05610 Amistad Commission

**Next month, the highlight will be on bills proposed
in the New York State Senate.**