**135th General Assembly**

**State Legislative Platform**

**2023-2024**

The Ohio Educational Service Center Association is committed to working in cooperation with school districts, allied educational organizations, state and local policy makers, and other stakeholders to promote and support educational reform efforts that provide for an efficient, effective and quality system of education that is fiscally and academically accountable and which prepares all students to achieve high levels of academic success regardless of where they live or attend school.

In so doing, OESCA’s legislative policy recommendations are based upon the following core policy principles:

* To advocate for the well-being of children as the basis of education policy decision making.
* To support safe and healthy learning environments that create a new culture of learning and meet the needs of all children regardless of where they live and attend school.
* To increase the State’s capacity to effectively and efficiently serve Ohio’s school districts and schools.
* To identify collaborative shared services opportunities that lead to systems improvements and cost savings at the state, regional and local levels that can be reinvested into the instructional process.
* To leverage inter-agency funding and relationships (including federal funds) to advance and insure coherent and aligned strategic policy priorities.
* To promote P-20 alignment with Ohio’s economic development strategic plan addressing how to align curriculum with jobs of the 21st century and beyond and build strategic bridges between school leaders, businesses and communities, and parents.
* To support state efforts to, “ensure each child is challenged to discover and learn, prepared to pursue a fulfilling post-high school path and empowered to become a resilient, lifelong learner who contributes to society.”

**Beliefs that Guide the Association’s Governmental Relations Activities**

* OESCA believes that high quality educational opportunities are the cornerstone of our democracy and are an integral part of the state’s economic development strategies.
* OESCA believes educational service centers provide (1) leadership to help all education professionals and students reach high standards of performance and (2) cost-efficient regional services.
* OESCA believes the Ohio Department of Education should maximize ESCs as their primary technical assistance and support partner by leveraging the existing system as intended under chapter 3312 of the Revised Code.
* OESCA believes ESC governing board membership should be publicly-elected and representative of the ESC client base and the communities served.
* OESCA believes adequate state resources must be focused on providing support for high quality educational opportunities.
* OESCA believes accountability for results is an important component of the service relationship between ESCs and their client schools, and between school districts and the state of Ohio.
* OESCA believes state fiscal and tax policies should reinforce the capacity of state government to adequately support essential state services including public education.
* OESCA believes cooperative efforts and shared services through ESCs will enhance local resources and create greater efficiencies and cost savings that can be reinvested into the classroom.
* OESCA believes high quality alternatives within the public school system are needed but must adhere to educational best practices and appropriate accountability systems.
* OESCA believes state recognition of the federal government’s designation of ESCs as Local Education Agencies (LEAs) can enable and enhance the leveraging of resources across Ohio’s statewide system of support.

**STATE FUNDING PRIORITIES**

1. Provide a rational, equitable and sustainable funding model for Educational Service Centers that leverages federal funds to maximize service levels and impact:
   1. Update the State Operating Subsidy funding model for Educational Service Centers based on the actual costs of running an educational service center and meeting statutory requirements.
   2. Review and recalibrate the ESC operating subsidy every four years.
   3. Develop a uniform, consistent, and standard methodology for reporting ESC expenditures.
   4. Designate ESCs as federal pass-through entities and leverage state and federal funding to provide technical assistance and support.
2. Provide ESCs with targeted state and federal funding support for special support programs outside the operating subsidy (e.g., SSTs, OTES/OPES, RDLs, Professional Development, PBIS and other whole child supports, and other priorities focused on equity).
3. Required the Ohio Department of Education to submit an annual report on funding of projects with and through Ohio’s educational service center and the ERSS.
4. Amend current statute and capital appropriation measures to ensure ESCs are eligible for facilities and capital improvement funding with a particular focus on ESC facilities that provide direct student services.
5. Increase funding for special education and related services informed by research and best practices including but not limited to the findings of the special education cost study by AIR on behalf of the Ohio Department of Education. Funding should be updated to reflect current, actual costs and be fully funded.
6. Provide funding to support Business Advisory Councils to convene education and business leaders to engage in intentional collaboration regarding a more responsive education system based on regional economic drivers and needs, more relevant learning experiences for students that include work-based learning opportunities and enduring partnerships between schools and local industries.

**STATE POLICY PRIORITIES**

1. Utilize ESCs to enhance and improve communication, technical assistance and support for statewide education and education reform initiatives utilizing the ESCs and other components of Ohio Educational Regional Service System consistent with chapter 3312 of the Ohio Revised Code.
2. Utilize ESCs to deliver professional learning aligned with curriculum standards, state and local assessments, high-quality instructional materials, and state-level priorities identified by the Ohio General Assembly, Office of the Governor or State Board of Education and the Ohio Department of Education.
3. Direct ESCs to work with school districts, community schools, STEM schools, chartered nonpublic, and private schools in coordinating with state and local agencies, nonprofit and community action organizations, and others to develop plans and better coordinate preparedness, response and diversion strategies including continued education and educational support services focused on Planning/Preparedness, Response, and Revitalization related to school safety, public health, support for migrant and refugee populations, and other community-wide issues impacting students, families and schools.
4. Encourage interagency collaboration and leveraging of state and federal funds across state agencies for ESC-led or supported workforce development and related initiatives.
5. Build ESC capacity through Regional Data Leads to collect, analyze, and interpret data based on school and district needs – academically, operationally, and fiscally – to improve outcomes for students and schools.
6. Utilize ESCs to address educator and educator personnel shortages including but not limited to alternative routes to certification and “grow your own” programs.
7. Support mental health/behavioral health related services. State policy must acknowledge the importance of ensuring that schools, staff, and students have access to mental health support, services, and programs, including support for students to come to school ready to learn. Policy responses should include provision of mental health and trauma-informed services to young children (birth through kindergarten enrollment).
8. Include ESCs as appropriate to deploy Regional School-Based Healthcare and Mental Health clinics, and mobile clinics that can serve a wide range of schools and districts within their respective regions in partnership with regional healthcare systems. Efforts should leverage federal Medicaid funds and other resources and encourage interagency collaboration.
9. Utilize ESCs to support Community Revitalization efforts with education as a cornerstone/pillar for improvement. Leverage ESC Business Advisory Councils and related workforce initiatives to increase equitable access educational and service opportunities aligned to workforce needs for all students. Efforts should include partnerships with local nonprofits and community-based organizations as necessary and appropriate.

**FEDERAL POLICY INITIATIVES**

OESCA supports, and has adopted, the federal policy priorities of the Association of Educational Service Agencies (AESA) and its focus on equity in education and educational opportunities:

***FEDERAL PRIORITIES***

Responding to Student Need Due to Emergencies

AESA believes that the nation’s ESAs have a critical role in emergency preparedness, response, and revitalization. They continue to fulfill this role as ESAs and LEAs continue to address student needs in response to COVID-19. The federal response to emergencies must include the following:

* Mental health support and services for students, staff, and educators, allowing ESAs/LEAs and SEAs to help address serious trauma and mental health crises stemming from the pandemic. Remote/telehealth services must be fully reimbursable.
* Priority for ensuring states do not use emergency education dollars to backfill state budget cuts. Flexibility to state and local education agencies to temporarily suspend, reduce and/or redesign assessment and accountability.
* Flexibility for ESAs/LEAs and SEAs to expand, revise and modify their school/academic calendars to address learning acceleration (learning loss) best. This could include, but is not limited to, extended day, broader access to summer learning, expanded integration of online learning, hybrid learning, and year-round school, among others (and related guidance).
* Keeping schools open during emergencies is dependent upon the availability of ready and willing school personnel.

**Mental Health and Social/Emotional Readiness**

Policies must balance academic and non-academic factors in both the design and evaluation. The wellbeing and success of the whole child include social, emotional, behavioral, physical, and mental health. Schools and school policy must acknowledge the importance of ensuring that schools, staff, and students have access to mental health and SEL supports, services, and programs, including support for students to come to school ready to learn.

* Support a multi-pronged approach to federal policy relating to mental health and SEL. First, the policy should enable ESAs to engage both proactively and responsively, working as much to address and prevent as to resolve and mitigate. Second, federal policy must include investment via appropriations.
* Support increased investment in mental health-related programming, including increasing the reimbursement process’s effectiveness under Medicaid and investment in ESSA Title IV.
* Recognize that training for mental health and SEL-related support and programs should be available to mental health professionals and educators alike.
* Support continued investment in the 21st Century Community Learning Centers and reduce paperwork burden and access for new applicants.
* Support policies and resources aimed at increasing the prevalence of evidence-based social-emotional and mental health professional development opportunities for educators and staff.

**IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and Medicaid**

IDEA defines the role of the federal government in K-12 special education. The scope and severity of physical, cognitive, and emotional needs that ESAs and LEAs must address for the students they serve under IDEA continues to grow. Congress’ failure to fully fund IDEA represents an unfunded mandate on state and local communities that impacts our most vulnerable children and the ability of ESAs to implement the law. It was designed to level the playing field for a historically disadvantaged population, students with disabilities, to ensure equitable access to high-quality educational opportunities. Advocacy around IDEA will relate to the authorization of the underlying statute and the annual appropriations process.

* Strongly urge Congress to meet its commitment to provide 40% of the additional cost associated with educating students with disabilities. AESA supports full funding of IDEA in both the short-term (through annual appropriations) and long-term (through stand-alone legislation providing a path to meet the 40% commitment). In addition, AESA supports a long-term coordinated campaign to fully fund federal IDEA legislation.
* Protect Medicaid in schools. As part of their work in implementing IDEA, ESAs, and the schools they serve may provide Medicaid-eligible services and, as such, remain eligible to receive reimbursement. Support clarity to state agencies that federal policy currently allows schools and ESAs to seek and receive Medicaid reimbursement for school-based healthcare services, including mental health services, provided to students without an IEP.
* Support legislation and policy relief that will increase the effectiveness and efficiency of Medicaid in schools in terms of scope of access to students and paperwork/administrative burden to schools.
* Ensure appropriate mental health services in schools are reimbursable under Medicaid.

**Education Personnel Shortages**

ESAs and the schools they serve are constantly working to ensure they have effective employees. However, public school systems and ESAs currently face a nationwide education personnel shortage. AESA remains committed to the broader systemic conversation about education personnel shortages. AESA also supports a review and strengthening of educator retention patterns and pathways, both alternative and traditional, including analysis of high-needs schools and teacher diversity.

* Allow all prep/licensure candidates to be eligible for federal student loans and grants, including alternative licensure programs that meet rigorous standards.
* Enable ESAs to serve as educator licensing entities.
* Ensure flexibility of federal grants and loans for educators and educator candidates regardless of age or current school enrollment.
* Simplify the application and access procedures for the public service loan forgiveness programs.
* Protect and expand public service loan forgiveness programs for all educators and related service providers.
* Support incentives and programs to prepare, recruit, and retain high-quality educators through student loan forgiveness proposals, Public Service Loan Forgiveness, TEACH, Teacher Quality Partnership Grants, and Grow Your Own Program.
* Protect and preserve student aid (grants and loans) programs aimed at future educators and related service providers.
* Support federal higher education policy that accomplishes the following:
  + Ensures ESAs are eligible for grants.
  + Ensures ESAs coordinate collaboration with PK-16.
  + Supports programs that assist and develop students entering and completing college and post-secondary programs. ○ Ensures capacity of credentialed and specialized programs to support the pipeline of students into related service provider roles.
* Incentivize increased salaries for educators and related service providers in rural areas.
* Incentivize increased salaries for school health staff (e.g., mental health/SEL, school counselors, psychologists, nurses, and teachers of SWDs).
* Support policies aimed at increasing educator and related service providers’ diversity.
* Support full resolution to the educational impacts of federal immigration law, including mitigating any impact on school site safety, safety for students (enroute or in school), and its impact on educator and related service provider shortages.
* Take action to address the specific shortages of bus drivers and other pupil transportation service providers.

**Education Technology/E-Rate**

Education technology, including connectivity, equipment, and professional development for educators, is critical to AESA’s support of educational equity and opportunity. Therefore, AESA supports E-Rate and Lifeline as essential components of federal support for ESAs, schools, libraries, and the students they serve.

* Protect and expand funding, including continued opposition to any efforts to institute a funding cap or per-pupil allocation for E-Rate.
* Ensure implementation of the Universal Service Fund (USF) and its programs as distinct and independent programs not in competition with each other.
* Support expansion of E-Rate eligible services list to include cybersecurity protections and related expenses with appropriate additional funding support.
* Ensure funding to support ESAs in ongoing efforts to respond to cybersecurity threats and breaches, including technology, training, and infrastructure updates.
* Support FCC/USAC appointees who support E-Rate.
* Expand the scope of services from infrastructure to the classroom and the home for distance learning opportunities.
* Protect the ability of schools, libraries, and ESAs to continue to provide affordable, equitable access to broadband and content to students and ensure that federal policy allows 24-hour learners to have 24-hour access.
* Preserve vendors’ ability to recoup E-Rate discount funding on one-time, special construction costs, all in the first year of a contract.
* Support for continued investment in the connectivity fund to ensure students and staff have uninterrupted access in scenarios to support remote learning.
* Support leveraging additional program and funding streams to better address remaining middle and final mile challenges to connectivity.

**Student Data and Privacy**

Schools have always collected a wide range of data, from enrollment information and student performance to health and disciplinary records. This data allows educators, school leaders, and the community to have a glimpse at how the schools and students are doing and to inform teaching and learning. While increased data use can transform education by empowering students and teachers to expand learning in ways they couldn’t before the evolution of digital technology, it also has the potential to put sensitive student information at risk. Effective policies can help curtail some of the risks accompanying student data collection and ensure that data is used ethically to support learning.

* Support reauthorization of FERPA to include clear and updated language aligned with existing laws and regulations that schools are following.
* Provide coherent and easy-to-understand guidance for parents and educators regarding FERPA, PPRA, and COPPA and their protection of student data privacy and security.
* Update definitions to address current realities, making it possible to protect data while ensuring appropriate student data use for legitimate educational needs.
* Secure joint guidance from the U.S. Depts. of Health and Human Services and Education regarding the overlap of HIPAA and FERPA laws.
* Oppose federal language that would restrict local education administrators and staff designees’ ability to share information with and from appropriate agencies as necessary.
* Support legislation that recognizes both schools and vendors (among others) have responsibilities related to student data and privacy and ensures that all players are held appropriately accountable.
* Data collected for and around education and students is multi-faceted and multi-functional. Therefore, federal policy addressing student data privacy cannot inhibit district access to data for student learning, safety and well-being, and district operations.

**Supporting Rural Education**

AESA supports federal policies and funding proposals to increase equity in student outcomes regardless of geographic location.

* Support increased investment in rural education services through the Rural Education Achievement Program (REAP) Title VI of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act.
* Secure Rural Schools provides funding for ESAs, schools, and communities that find a portion of their land unavailable for generating revenues or taxes, given the presence of federal lands. The presence of federal land means the community has reduced the ability to generate property taxes (a common source of funding for schools). SRS helps fill some of the void, funding that is especially critical in these rural communities, where a significant portion (sometimes nearing 90%!) of their land is federally held and not subject to normal state and local taxation.
  + Advocate for long-term dedicated SRS funding for 5-10 years.
  + Support retroactive appropriations to ensure no disruption in funding.

**Appropriations**

Public education represents one of our nation’s earliest forms of equitable access to public infrastructure and, as such, requires continued support and investment from the federal level. In addition, public education ensures that our nation’s students are prepared to be engaged community learners.

* Support significant fiscal investment designed to flexibly allow local education leaders to make decisions and implement the plans necessary to safely operate schools for students and staff.
* Oppose competitive allocations, including vouchers and tax schemes.
* Support prioritization of investment in federal flagship programs targeted via equity and opportunity, including ESSA Title I and IDEA.
* Oppose efforts to privatize federal investment in education since public funds should not be used for private purposes.
* Support increased investments in programs that support educator development and training (including ESSA Title II), mental health supports, education technology, and well-rounded education (including IDEA and ESSA Title IV).
* Federal funding supports education and education-adjacent programs, and those funds must flow through LEA/ESA-facing entities as closely as possible.
* Support equitable federal funding mechanisms, including critical federal programs like Title I and IDEA, as well as a commitment to research and revise alternative poverty indicators within federal education programs.
* Ensure ESAs are explicitly listed as eligible entities in federal education programs.

**Career and Technical Education**

ESAs work to ensure all students graduate college- and career-ready. CTE is the backbone of ESAs’ ability to prepare students for a career or additional career-specific training in the K12 setting.

* Provide and expand funding for career pathways for all students.
* Increase opportunities consistent with the expansion of dual enrollment, TRIO, and GEAR-up programs.
* Ensure equity of CTE opportunities by supporting rural and urban community college partnerships.
* Support the continuation of federal policies that allow ESAs to regionalize CTE to ensure opportunities for all students. Specifically, the federal government must continue to support consortiums through fiduciary, professional development, and stackable credentialing policies.
* Support ESAs leading the collaboration between multi-layered education systems and be the link between K-12, higher education, and career pathways.

**ESSA: Every Student Succeeds Act**

ESSA establishes a role for the federal government in K12 education. Designed to level the playing field for a historically disadvantaged population, students in poverty, ESSA was signed into law in 2015. It represents a significant return to the empowerment of state and local education agencies and education professionals related to education, program design, implementation, and students.

* Ensure ESAs continue to work with states to maximize flexibility in ESSA implementation.
* Support state plans that include a defined role for ESAs within their workbook/plan.
* Oppose the use of any voucher program, including but not limited to education scholarships, education savings accounts, and tuition tax credits.

**Inclusive Early Childhood Education**

Just as ESAs and the schools they serve must be ready for all the students they enroll, so must the students be ready (academically, emotionally, and socially) to learn.

* Protect and expand funding for Head Start, Early Head Start, and the Child Care and Development Block Grant.
* Provide access to robust early education (birth to age five), particularly for students in high need/low-income situations. It is a critical component of building a strong education continuum.
* Support mental health and trauma-informed services to young children (birth through kindergarten enrollment).