



Erie County Association of School Boards

Vol. 5; Issue 1; September 2025

## ADVOCACY ALLIANCE MONTHLY

YOUR MONTHLY UPDATE

Dear Friends,

I attended the Ultimate Night of Destruction at the Erie County Fair a few weeks ago and sat in the grand stand as six old full sized school buses rammed into one another in true demolition derby fashion. Several things came to mind. 1. I wonder if any of these buses used to be an Iroquois bus, since I am a former board member from that district. 2. How will the fair continue this years-old tradition once the only buses available will be electric...you certainly cannot purposely crash those. 3. Perhaps every district can keep their old diesel buses and each year we can create our own bus demolition derby as a fundraiser to purchase the aforementioned electric buses!

The electric bus mandate, while slowing down, is not off the advocacy table. This issue and many more will be our focus for the 2025-2026 school year on the Legislative Team.

I welcome you back to another year of Advocacy Alliance Monthly, your monthly newsletter of advocacy information published on the third Thursday of the month from September thru May.

Yours in Advocacy,

~Jane

### Take Note...

⇒ Mark your calendar for Legislative Team Meetings on Oct. 2, 2025; Jan. 22, 2026; & April 23, 2026.

⇒ Mark your calendar to attend, with details to follow in an *This Week at ECASB*:

Dinner with the Commissioner of Education, Oct. 7

Resolutions Dinner, Oct. 9

Dr. Rick Timbs Dinner, Oct. 16

Legislative Dessert Forum North, Nov. 13

Legislative Dessert Forum South, Nov. 20

Legislative Wrap-up Breakfast, May 2, 2026

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# IN THE NEWS

## Links to interesting readings

Click on Links to go to the news source.

[Congress passes national school voucher program, New York Times via Buffalo News– July 6](#)

[24 States file lawsuit over 6.8B withheld from education funds, New York Times via Buffalo News– July 15](#)

[How your tax dollars help legislators make ends meet, Buffalo News– July 15](#)

[Some legislators can't find the time to show up in Albany, Buffalo News– August 3](#)

[Hochul weighs redistricting...Buffalo News– August 5](#)

[Playing the Get-out-of-jail-free card, Tangle, August 8](#)

[Buffalo Teacher Tackles New Challenges as Regent, Buffalo News, Sept. 8](#)



## *In Memory of Linda Hoffman* *Reprint of September 2023 interview*

*Editor's Note: The following is a reprint of the interview Linda Hoffman. Linda was a longtime member of ECASB and passed away on August 2, 2025. She was a fierce advocate for public education.*

On the coldest day of the summer, August 23 [2023], I ordered loaded baked potato soup and a tuna melt at the Arts Café in Springville and sat down for lunch and a conversation with NYSSBA Area One Director Linda Hoffman. Linda is also a member of the Erie2CC BOCES Board. As we both enjoyed the meal, she told me about the restaurant and how it came to exist. She and her husband Marty, a retired pediatrician, are community owners of the Café, and Marty is currently the president of its board.

Linda also mentioned that it was quiet because it was auction day; everyone was presumably at the Springville Auction down the street. The auction happens every Wednesday and has been happening for nearly 100 years. Not long after, we saw an Amish man pulling a cart of sheep with his buggy on the way to the auction. You really get a sense of just how diverse the community is sitting in the window watching Main Street life.

We spoke about Linda's school board service and her advocacy for education. In her 40 plus years of experience, she thinks so much has changed.

I could not help but wonder what the biggest issues she faced, and I was not too surprised to hear that the foundation aid, roots of today's current issue, and unfunded and underfunded mandates were a problem for school boards even in the 1980s. I questioned why she thought so much has changed if the core issues remain. The wisdom she shares about the change in approach is valuable.

Linda talks about her advocacy beginning with NYSSBA and ECASB. In 1985, ECASB and Monroe County would split the cost of renting a bus and school board members would go together to Albany to lobby for school issues. She describes how each member would be given information about each person they were going to meet. The information included not just the talking points like we do today, but also included information about the specific person they were meeting

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## In Memory of Linda Hoffman Continued

with. Things to mention included, things like their most recent golf win. The information packet also included topics not to bring up such as sports, because if you brought up sports to a specific legislator, it was all he wanted to speak about. It inevitably would lead to his, question “why aren’t the Catholic schools in section six?” The legislator wouldn’t listen to or discuss anything else after it. In those days, members were assigned a legislator and regular contact was made through the year to create more *personal* relationships. Linda was assigned to **Tom Reynolds**. She enjoyed working with him and describes him as “an interesting guy...he always forgave [Linda] for not being in the same [political] party that he was, because he said, ‘I know that you’re going to give me the straight dirt.’” She would share with **Reynolds** the impact of the decisions he and his colleagues in Albany had on the schools, and a lot of time it wasn’t positive. When **Reynolds** moved on to federal level, she was assigned to **Dan Burling** from Batavia. Even then, redistricting had a big impact on the seats and the areas covered.

Eventually she was assigned to **Dale Volker**. She says “That was very interesting because Dale was the granddaddy of all the Western New York coalition, and they called themselves that [regardless of being] Republican or Democrat. When they saw things that would affect this region, they would work together, which was really nice. And Dale kind of spearheaded that.” This coalition was not just legislators but also included board members and other regional stakeholders. We don’t have a legislator initiating this kind of conversation anymore. Linda and I did agree that we both can see a our current legislators who just might be on a path to have a similar community partnership. Linda says having information about the legislator really helped to break the ice and allowed for more meaningful building of relationships. I got a sense that there was less of a wall between legislators and school board members back then. If she had information about a legislator liking to fish for example, she could start off asking if he had gone on any good fishing trips recently and it would help make that personal connection which would presumably lead to a relationship with some trust.

They were not strangers to each other.

The bus trips helped the board members get to know each other well too, and they could share information that helped them be prepared with common issues and goals. Are you comfortable talking about special ed? There’s a special ed item in here.’ So we would get together and talk about our respective districts? How comfortable are you feeling about talking about this and that? There was preparation, planning and practice before lobbying.

Linda recognizes how Erie and Monroe counties were different from other counties at the time. Ours was more active and asked questions. Gaining a seat on the BOCES board in Chautauqua County, she learned they went to Albany to listen rather than ask questions. She came in and would ask questions. She did things the way she had already been doing them and eventually, those around her began to appreciate the dialogue her questions created.

Linda’s passion for advocacy comes from incidents that were happening within her district, but before that she was always reading newspapers and magazine op-eds and watching the news, paying attention to politics.

She believes “If you don’t speak up, you can’t change anything.” She was always around advocacy in some way or another.

As she entered board service, “I realized so many stupid things came out of Albany. You would occasionally sit there and say, what? Legislators would propose a bill and say there’s no financial impact... what they meant was there was no state financial impact. There was usually a financial impact in my district.” She wanted to hold legislators accountable and to recognize saying there was no financial impact was a lie.

One Saturday morning each month, there was also a legislative workshop with legislators. Part of the workshop was talking about legislation and the other part was learning about legal briefs. “Those

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## *In Memory of Linda Hoffman Continued*

of us who went to those...got a huge amount of information and personal development."

She learned from the ECASB award winners and award namesakes who came before her. It put her on a path to wanting to do more than she could at just the local level. She has a passion to "make things right. I want them to make sense...be sensible and not overbearing, and not step out of bounds." She wanted to protect the local level of control.

Linda says that today, it seems as though the local legislators are changing faster. Between legislators leaving office and redistricting the election areas, we have different people in different districts, and we must start all over building those relationships. Linda would like to see these relationships rebuilt and our local leaders to step up and form a new Western New York Coalition where the party isn't as important as banning together for the benefit of our region.

One thing Linda would like to see ECASB do is have a once-a-year meeting for anyone within the organization to get together and go through the NYSSBA resolutions prior to voting. It may be too late to organize something like that this year, but it is a good suggestion for the future.

One thing Linda stresses for newer board members is that board service automatically makes you a politician. You are part of the grassroots efforts. It isn't about going to a single monthly meeting. Serving on a Board of Education is so much more. She challenges members to be involved! --get on committees, help shape policy. You are a part of the whole big picture. You are where it comes from. She describes her belief: "Democracy rises from our grassroots. From our town and village governments and from school boards and county governments... these are the concrete pillars that hold everything up." It is our job to tell Albany when "they are killing our grass."

Linda sees the GAP Elimination as the biggest success in her years of advocacy. It required every stakeholder group to be aligned to get rid of it. But it's still on the books. Linda says, "I wanted it gone off the line. I wanted that line out of the budget. When you look at your districts state runs you'll see it there and they'll have a zero, but that doesn't

necessarily have to be a zero. You have to watch it." She firmly believes the next big issue will be conquered when all the stakeholders agree and come together again.

Her worst experience in advocacy was working with one particular legislator, who is now long gone. He was busy polishing his shoes during a meeting and seemingly ignored the team who came to his office to advocate for their district. He was simply rude. The runner up for the worst situation was going to Washington for a scheduled meeting only to have it cancelled. Apparently the legislator had double booked meetings. But as the group passed the legislator's office, he could be seen sitting at his desk reading a newspaper with his feet up on his desk.

When it comes to breaking the status quo of the foundation aid formula, no legislator wants to be the one representing the district that starts getting less with a new formula, so how do we get the updates that are sorely needed? Linda believes it will come from a new lawsuit brought against the state. She quips that her tombstone may include "legislation makes more work for the lawyers."

As newer board members, we must pick up the mantle and build relationships with our legislators. The new legislators need to be educated about the issues our districts face. They need to hear from us about the impact of the bills they pass. They need to realize that not all of those are good for public schools. They must fix the formula or face new lawsuits. Collaboration with the organizations for superintendents, NYSSBA, NYSUT, and ASBO are crucial. They must look at the zero-emissions bus mandate and realize the massive financial burden it places on the taxpayers.

Linda asks for everyone to get involved. "Read your packet; ask questions; and don't surprise the superintendent. Be respectful of your fellow board members, superintendent, teachers and local politicians. Come to ECASB evening workshops...at the very least go to [the NYSSBA] convention...find your passion and follow it..." and make sure the budget includes professional development for school board members. And finally, Linda advises when making decisions, ask yourself, "was this the best decision for the children in the district."

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# BILL ALERT PAGE

*ECASB uses Bill Track 50 for our bill tracking and advocacy needs. If you also have an interest in tracking bills, email Jane at JSullivan@elb.org; she will set you up with an account umbrellaed under the ECASB Bill Track 50 subscription. Support is provided.*

## The Next Legislative Session Highlighted Bills

This session does not begin populating new bills until January 2026. In the meantime, we are awaiting finalization of the last session's bills. One bill we watched closely was the Zero Emission Bus Mandate. It is a good example of what this summary page will look like in the future. Legislators begin submitting bills for pre-session support in the near future, and we will continue to monitor and report out the bills that have some significance to our region during the fall months.

**A07593 (Zero Emission Bus)** This bill would require entities selling zero-emission school buses to provide an independent range estimate to prospective purchasers; requires the office of general services to promulgate regulations and to provide zero-emission school bus manufacturers with a list of parties that may provide independent range verification. There is no local sponsor and there is not a companion bill at this time.

**S04748 (Zero Emission Bus)** This bill would eliminate the zero-emission school bus mandate; authorizes the New York state energy research and development authority conduct a study to determine the feasibility of converting school buses to zero-emission vehicles. Local Legislator George Borrello is a bill sponsor. There is no companion bill at this time.

Others to keep an eye on: **A09049 (Calculation of Foundation Aid)**, **S07892 (AI Instruction and Literacy)**, and **S02077 (telehealth service in school)**.

### Advocacy, A Poem

By Tricia Andrews

In the town of Clarence, where the school bells ring, A future waits for every child to sing. The halls are filled with dreams, both big and small, But without a voice, some dreams might fall.

For buildings old and programs that need more, Advocacy knocks on every door. It's parents, teachers, and a caring friend, Whose work for students never has an end.

They stand for arts, for books, for fields of green, For every student, for every scene. For better classrooms, and for updated tools, To give the best in Clarence's schools.

So let your voice be heard, your passion bright, To make their future shine with all its might. For in this town, a student's rising star, Depends on who we are and what we are.

*Editor's Note: Author Tricia Andrews, Clarence CSD Board of Education Member, wrote this poem as an entry for the 2025 Summer Spectacular advocacy contest.*

# Advocacy Summer Contest Letter

**Editor's Note:** The following letter was written as an entry for the Summer Advocacy Contest. It is a good example of a letter you could write on behalf of your district!

The Honorable Patrick M. Gallivan  
Legislative Office Building  
Room 311  
Albany, NY 12247

**Subject: The Urgent Need for Increased Mental Health Funding for New York Students**

Dear Senator Gallivan,

I am writing to you today as a concerned resident and as a Clarence School Board Trustee, deeply committed to the well-being and future of our state's students. I urge you to support and advocate for a substantial increase in state funding for mental health services within our public schools. The current mental health crisis among New York's youth demands a more robust and immediate response from our legislature.

Recent data from the New York State Office of Mental Health and the New York State PTA paints a troubling picture. From 2011 to 2021, the rate of teen girls who persistently felt sad or hopeless increased from 36% to an alarming 57%. In the same period, those who seriously considered attempting suicide rose from 16% to 22%. These statistics underscore a profound and worsening mental health crisis that affects every student, family, and community in our state.

While recent initiatives, such as the expansion of school-based mental health clinics, are commendable, they do not fully address the systemic issues. A recent State Comptroller Audit found that 50% of New York schools do not meet the recommended ratio of one school psychologist for every 500 students. Our schools are critically understaffed, leaving dedicated teachers and administrators to handle complex mental health needs without the necessary clinical support. This places an undue burden on staff and fails to provide students with the professional care they desperately need.

Increased funding is not just a matter of compassion; it is a critical investment in our state's future. When students have access to adequate mental health support, they show improved academic performance, better attendance, and increased emotional resilience. Providing these services early can also lead to long-term savings by reducing the need for more intensive and costly interventions later in life. A mentally healthy student body is the foundation of a prosperous and productive society.

I respectfully ask that you use your influence to champion legislation that allocates more significant and sustained funding for mental health resources in our schools. This includes funds to hire more school psychologists, social workers, and counselors to meet nationally accepted standards, as well as resources for comprehensive mental health education and early intervention programs.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this urgent matter. I am hopeful that with your leadership, we can work together to ensure that every New York student has the support they need to learn, grow, and thrive.

Sincerely,

Tricia Andrews

# Advocacy Summer Contest Letter

**Editor's Note: The following letter was written as an entry for the Summer Advocacy Contest. It is a good example of a letter you could write on behalf of your district!**

Dear Commissioner Rosa,

I am writing to you today as a concerned resident and advocate for the students, taxpayers, and communities of New York State. I am asking the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to reconsider and reverse the mandate requiring school districts to transition to an all-electric bus fleet by 2035, with a deadline for all new bus purchases to be electric by 2027.

While the environmental goals of this legislation are commendable, the current mandate presents an overwhelming and unrealistic financial burden on our school districts. The cost of a single electric bus is more than double that of a traditional diesel bus, and this does not account for the significant and often unbudgeted expenses of installing charging infrastructure and upgrading electrical service. Reports from various school districts across the state have highlighted that these infrastructure costs could reach into the tens of millions of dollars for a single district.

This mandate is a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to account for the unique challenges faced by rural and geographically expansive districts. The limited range of electric buses, particularly in colder climates, and the long distances of some bus routes raise serious logistical questions about their viability. Furthermore, the statewide electrical grid may not have the capacity to support the widespread charging needs of a fully electrified fleet, risking service disruptions.

As this is, in effect, an unfunded mandate, districts will be forced to choose between raising taxes on local residents or cutting essential educational programs and services for students. Neither of these options is acceptable. We believe that state and federal incentives are not sufficient to close the significant funding gap and that forcing school districts into this position is detrimental to our educational system.

A more pragmatic and collaborative approach would be to offer incentives rather than mandates. This would allow districts to transition at a pace that is fiscally and logistically feasible for their individual communities. Several legislators have even introduced bills to allow for opt-out waivers, recognizing the impracticalities of the current law.

I urge you and the NYSED to listen to the concerns of school district leaders, parents, and taxpayers across the state. I ask that you use your authority to recommend a full reversal of the current electric bus mandate.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this critical matter.

Sincerely,

Tricia Andrews