

# ECASB

Erie County Association of School Boards

Vol. 3; Issue 6; February 2024

ADVOCACY ALLIANCE MONTHLY  
YOUR MONTHLY UPDATE

Dear ECASB Members,

Fourteen members of ECASB, spent Feb. 7th in Albany at the Capital Conference. What a day! Take a peek at [how the day began](#) (link and video capture thanks to Heather Jacobs (Iroquois). Make sure you read about the rest of the day in the recap on page 7.

And speaking of links, check out the new [legislative mapping tool](#) provided by NYSSBA! It is the culmination of months of work by five dedicated staff members at NYSSBA, replacing a very clunky excel sheet they used to maintain, according to NYSSBA's Grassroots Advocacy Manager and Governmental Relations Coordinator Danielle Grasso, our featured person in the Time to Talk column this month.

Also inside, you will find updates on legislative bills introduced since our last newsletter and a final report on our first ever local winter conference meetings.

February was jampacked with advocacy events so take a few minutes to sit back, relax, and catch up with the latest legislative news.

Yours in Advocacy,

~Jane



Members of ECASB on the Assembly floor with AMs Conrad and Burke.

Do you love the work  
someone is doing?  
Nominate them for  
An ECASB Award!

Important

- ⇒ ECASB Awards Nominations opened January 2, 2024. Visit our ECASB.org website for more information on making a nomination!
- ⇒ Legislative Team Meeting, March 14; 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. in B1
- ⇒ Delegate Assembly Meeting, Feb. 29
- ⇒ Prospective school board members to the prospective member workshop, March 23; 8-10:30 a.m.

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# time to talk

## Grasso' Grassroots Efforts:

*A chat with NYSSBA's Danielle Grasso*

**Danielle Grasso** is the Grassroots Advocacy Manager and Governmental Relations Coordinator at NYSSBA, a role she has held for the past few years.

Originally from Queens, Danielle received her bachelor's degree in political science from Siena College and master's in higher education administration from the College of St. Rose, graduating in 2012.

She originally planned to go to law school and even held an internship with the Attorney General, but realizing she wanted something different, her path led to a temporary job at Pace University after graduation. The position turned in to a real job working in graduate admissions. From there, she moved in to a position as the Administrative Manager at the Environmental Health Science Department at UAlbany's School of Public Health, where she stayed for six and a half years. She led the department's graduate student recruitment efforts, coordinated admissions events, and oversaw the day-to-day operations of the department.

She joined NYSSBA in March 2018 as a Governmental Relations Coordinator, and was promoted to include her grassroots title, a position that allows her to provide a valuable resource to school board members across the

state.

After meeting in person at the NYSSBA Capital Conference, Danielle and I visited by phone to talk in detail about the importance of building relationships and trust with legislators to advocate for public education priorities, the changes and challenges of the NYSSBA Business meeting, recruiting new board members, to advocacy efforts (as well as reenergizing veteran members' efforts), and the various resources NYSSBA supplies to its members.

Danielle shares that advocacy begins with the school board member learning the needs of the school district. From there, involvement becomes an investment, and a member determines the level of investment he or she wants to make. She says it can be as simple as staying current on the issues many districts face and learning the priorities of NYSSBA and ECASB. Both organizations have a website with an advocacy page you can visit.

Danielle has been expanding the advocacy efforts of NYSSBA, including creating a monthly newsletter and setting up virtual summer meetings with congressional leaders at the federal level. "Virtual COVID life has allowed virtual formats to become easier...and has allowed us to expand into summer federal events," Danielle explains while sharing the creation a liaison program expanding into the federal level for education advocacy, something that began just a few summers ago.

She has also been improving the accessibility of NYSSBA's resources, such as the legisla-

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# Time to Talk Continued...

tive mapping tool recently unveiled, making mapping legislative districts more user-friendly for members.

NYSSBA's Annual Business meeting is an important part of advocacy, as it is when the NYSSBA priorities are set. A few of the challenges faced this past year, were when 350 districts participated compared to the 220 districts that typically have participated in years past. A task force at NYSSBA has formed to look at practical solutions to keep the meetings open, inclusive and allow for all voices to be heard but find ways to keep the meeting from running for eight hours. A local Area 1 representative on the task force is Sweet Home CSD Board Member and ECASB Legislative Chair Scott Johnson.

Turning the conversation to discussing strategies for effective advocacy, Danielle stressed that "reviewing past advocacy endeavors is crucial. It sets the foundation for informed action." One of the best ways to make an impact is just to start building positive relationships with our local legislators. "We must build relationships," she urged, "forge connections beyond the confines of formal meetings."

Danielle suggests that sometimes the best people to forge relationships with is the person who has the constant ear of the legislator: a staff member. It is not bad when a meeting is with a staffer instead of the legislator. You can even make an appointment specifically with the legislative director *instead* of the legislator, as the legislative director is usually on the right hand of a legislator and helps shape a legislator's position. They often see the perplexities of a bill and help the legislator make decisions about supporting and opposing specific issues and legislation. That person can interject and speak on your behalf, reminding legislators of your priorities when you are no longer there. Those are important moments you do not want to lose. "A personalized touch can ignite action," Danielle affirms, "Find out if you have a

common point of reference, a friend or neighbor in common, or a hobby they enjoy."

You do not have to go to Albany or Washington to advocate either. Danielle once again mentions the point that COVID made virtual meetings a normality, and even today, legislators and staffers will happily take a virtual call to meet with constituents. She later emphasizes again the importance of personalizing "take action emails" and other forms of communication to elected representatives, as they are more likely to be read by an intern or chief of staff. Using form letters gives volume of voice to an issue but the personalized letter gives the story and heart behind the voice.

Danielle indicated that more seasoned board member advocating for years on the same issues can become frustrated and indicated that we need to remember that persistence can pay off. "Persistence is paramount. We must continue efforts. The world of education advocacy is slow-moving and things are not going to happen quickly," she asserts. Sometimes it will take a few years, as was the case with the lottery bill, and sometimes it will take decades. You just cannot give up. "We can make a difference," she proclaimed. "We may have to say something a thousand times, but we must continue to say it, so it remains important to our legislators."

Whether you are new to advocacy or a seasoned veteran, Danielle recommends: 1. contact local representatives directly through email or phone to advocate for education funding, 2. send personalized emails to Chiefs of Staff, legislative directors, and other key staff members to ensure *their* attention and action on education issues, 3. personalize outreach to elected officials by sharing easy-to-understand information, always including your name and contact information, and 4. involve the full community in advocacy efforts. Danielle points out the school board members have something in common with

## Time to Talk Continued...

the legislators: “You are *all* elected officials.” Build on the relationship using the fact that you serve the same constituents!

Danielle and her team at NYSSBA help maintain momentum by providing legislators with consistent messaging, and organizing lobby days to meet with representatives. NYSSBA and ECASB can help you and your district build knowledge and relationships that can lead to more tailored solutions for specific districts.

You can learn more about advocacy and the many ways NYSSBA can aid you by visiting the advocacy liaison link at <https://www.nyssba.org/advocacy-legislation/become-an-advocacy-liaison/>.



Danielle Grasso poses in front of the Capital Building in Albany. Danielle is the NYSSBA Grassroots Advocacy Manager and Governmental Relations Coordinator

## Time to Take Action

### Local Winter Conference Final Report:

#### Senator Gallivan

ECASB Executive Director David Lowrey (Erie 2CC BOCES, and NYSSBA Area One Director), ECASB Treasurer Patrick Boyle (Frontier), ECASB Program Services Manager Jane Sullivan (Iroquois), Legislative Chair Scott Johnson (Sweet Home), Mary Jo Szucs (Holland), Dennis Priore (Clarence), James Voto (Frontier) and Tiffany Tangel (Frontier PTA Representative) attended a meeting with *Senator Gallivan* and his Community Liaison, *Karen Howard* in Senator Gallivan’s Transit Road, Elma office.

The hour was spent addressing the top four priorities of ECASB and then delving deeper into other issues. Senator Gallivan shares our concerns for the reformation of foundation aid. Our meeting was held prior to the proposed budget announcement, but after the announcement to include a massive overhaul of state public pools.

We also talked about the impact social media is having on student mental health and the need for increasing special education and SEL funding.

The scheduled meeting with Assemblyman Jonathan Rivera was canceled the day before it was to take place because the legislator learned Governor Hochul would be in Buffalo to address legislators on her proposed budget. As most of the attendees were from Frontier CSD, Davis Podkulski will be rescheduling that meeting.

### SAVE THE DATE:

Our Wrap-Up Breakfast will be held on Saturday, May 11. Watch for more information as we get closer to the event date.

# BILL ALERT

*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@e1b.org; she will set you up with an account umbrellaed under the ECASB Bill Track 50 subscription. Support is provided.*

## New Bills:

**A09183/S08524** (Zero Emission Buses)- Would authorize school districts to submit an opt-out waiver to the commissioner of education authorizing such districts to opt-out of certain zero-emission school bus requirements. There are no local sponsors. Take action! Consider sending “vote yes” ECASB postcards to our local legislators.

**A09184/S07391** (Migrants)- Would prohibit the permanent or temporary housing of migrant populations in schoolhouses or on school grounds in districts outside of a city with a population of one million or more. Locally, it is sponsored by **Senator Borrello**.

**A09101** (School Days)- Would amend the education law and the retirement and social security law, in relation to increasing the required number of instructional days in a school year to two hundred. There is no local sponsor. Given the financial implications and the impact this bill would have on contracts, I did email the legislative director of the sponsoring Assemblyman who introduced the bill asking for clarification about the thought behind the bill. I have not received a response, but will try again.

**A08953/S08148** (Reporting Rules)- Would require each high school senior to complete the FAFSA, an application for TAP, or a waiver form; *requires schools to report data* on the rates of submission of FAFSA and TAP applications. Local sponsors are **Senators Kennedy and Ryan**.

**A08910** (Zero Emission Buses) Would establish a highway and depot charging needs evaluation to assist in achieving targets set forth by the climate leadership and community protection act, zero-emissions vehicle sales target and regulations, including the advanced clean truck, advanced clean cars II rules and the zero-emissions school bus mandate. There are no local sponsors.

**A05318/S08380** (Dignity for All) Updates provisions relating to dignity for all students including establishing the student suicide prevention act which includes curriculum and teacher training requirements designed to prevent student suicide with a focus on LGBTQ students; makes an appropriation therefore. There are no local sponsors.

**A06803/S08362** ( School Safety) Would provides an annual tax levy limit allowing for expenditures directly or indirectly related to school safety, including improving district wide emergency response plans, training staff and/or students on school safety and/or conflict mediation, installing and maintaining safety technology and software in school buildings, hiring school resource officers, acquiring emergency medical equipment, installing fencing around the perimeter of school grounds, installing bulletproof doors and windows, acquir-

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# Bill Alert Continued

ing and maintaining technology for expedited notification of local law enforcement during an emergency. There are no local sponsors.

**S08363**– (Pre-K Program) Would create a single, streamlined process whereby a facility or program operating both a pre-kindergarten program and a daycare program may apply for and receive any certification, licensing, or other requirement otherwise necessary to operate a pre-kindergarten program or daycare program under the laws of the state. There are no local sponsors.

**S08329**- (School Bus Rules) Relates to the passing of stopped school buses on divided highways; provides that vehicles traveling in the opposite direction of a school bus on such highway shall not have to stop if a physical barrier is present between the different directions of travel. There are no local sponsors.

**A08828/S07766**-(School Board Governance) Would require school boards to make the final decision on whether to keep, remove, or restrict access to an instructional material in a school library; establishes a review process for formal complaints concerning instructional materials that are the subject of complaints. It is locally sponsored by *Senator Borrello*.

**A08853/S07944** (School Safety) Would prohibit the use of biometric identifying technology in schools for any reason other than specified purposes. It is locally sponsored by *Assemblywoman Wallace*.

**A07788/S08327** (COVID Learning Loss) Establishes a pilot program to provide grants to local education providers to implement high-impact tutoring programs prioritizing low-income or underserved students to address student learning loss or unfinished learning resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. There is no local sponsor.

**S08571** (COVID Learning Loss) Establishes the task force on pandemic learning loss in New York state to assess the impact of remote learning on children's progress in various disciplines; requires a report; provides for the repeal of such provisions upon the expiration thereof.



## IN THE NEWS

### Articles that may interest you

[Changes in Aid Worry School Leaders](#)– Buffalo News, Jan. 21, 2024

[State Legislators Push Back at Proposed Aide](#)– Buffalo News, Jan. 28, 2024

[Our Kids are Not Alright](#)– Buffalo News/New York Times, Jan. 30, 2024

[Baskin Running for Kennedy](#) Seat– Buffalo News, Feb. 17, 2024

[Congressional District Lines](#)– Buffalo News, Feb. 16, 2024

[GOP Candidate for Higgins](#) Seat– Buffalo News, Feb. 22, 2024

## CAPITAL CONFERENCE REPORT

### Meeting Our Legislators in Albany

I accompanied thirteen members of ECASB who attended the NYSSBA sponsored Capital Conference, held on Feb. 7, in Albany.

Attending the conference with me were Dave Lowrey-E2CC BOCES /ECASB Executive Director / NYSSBA Area 1 Director; Legislative Co-Chair Kathleen Chiavetta- Lake Shore (*Gallivan/ DiPietro*); Legislative Co-Chair Erik Polkowski- Akron (*Gallivan, Hawley, Norris, Ortt*); Mike Franey- Lake Shore (*Gallivan/ DiPietro*); Dan Pacos- Lake Shore Superintendent (*Gallivan/ DiPietro*); Heather Jacobs- Iroquois (*Gallivan/ DiPietro*); Sabatino Cimato- Ken-Ton Superintendent (*Ryan/Conrad*); Matt Chimera- Ken-Ton (*Ryan/Conrad*); Todd Marquart- Ken-Ton (*Ryan/Conrad*); LeAnn Vogt- Ken-Ton (*Ryan/Conrad*); Karen Whitelaw- Ken-Ton (*Ryan/Conrad*); Ed Schaefer- Cheek-towaga (*Kennedy/ Wallace*); and Mary Jo Szucs-Holland (*Gallivan/ DiPietro*).

Preparations began in late November, just after hosting the legislators for our priority-sharing Legislative Dinner. I scheduled appointments based on the attendees to the Capital Conference.

After hearing Governor Hochul's proposed budget and the elimination of the "hold-harmless" or "safe-harmless" from the budget plan, and after seeing the impact it has on our local WNY public schools, I reached out to make appointments with *Senator Shelley Mayer*, chair of the Senate Education Committee, and *Assemblyman Michael Benedetto*, chair of the Assembly Committee on Education, to be sure we started involving the Senate and Assembly Education committees on the push back against this proposal. I was encouraged by the response and acceptance of meeting times with both.

#### *The Virtual Conference: February 2, 2024*

The first step in preparing for the conference is to attend the virtual conference on Fri., Feb. 2. The event began with a conversation between NYSSBA Executive Director Robert Schneider and NYSUT President Melinda

Person, discussing the priorities NYSUT and NYSSBA have in common. The first issue discussed was the proposed budget and the elimination of "safe harmless funding." Another area that we are aligned in is staffing shortages and discussing what we can do collectively. The answer is "Fix Tier Six."

NYSSBA's General Counsel and Deputy Executive Director Jay Worona moderated the next segment, with senior staff members from the State Education Department. Topics discussed included of course, the "Hold Harmless" changes and the change in full funding, as well as the reform efforts that will help adjust certification system to strengthen and maintain teacher pipelines. Lastly, they discussed issue of literacy and struggling readers in New York state.

Brian Fessler, Matthew DeLaus, and Caroline Bobick hosted the next segment looking at the ins and outs of the governor's proposed budget and the impact it has on school funding, taking questions from the virtual participants.

In the final segment, Brian Fessler Moderated a conversation with *Senator Shelley Mayer* and *Assemblyman Michael Benedetto*. Both reacted with their thoughts about the budget package and the impact on school foundation aide. *Senator Mayer* shared that both Democrats and Republicans alike are "strongly opposed to what the governor did in this budget...the abruptness and the impact on some districts...these cuts are unsustainable." She adds, "we are going to be unified in fighting back" and will find the funds to make up the difference. "We are going to be on your side and will push back entirely on this proposal," she concludes.

Danielle Grasso also hosted a segment, which highlights some updates to the [NYSSBA Advocacy page](#), and demonstrated the new [legislative mapping tool](#). That was followed with some helpful hints for a successful Lobby Day on Feb. 7.

#### *The Lobby Day: February 7, 2024*

Entering the Legislative Building on Feb. 7th, I could see we were not the only group or-

## CAPITAL CONFERENCE REPORT

### Meeting Our Legislators in Albany Continued

ganized for advocacy. We checked in and started organizing our plan for the day, as the Assembly changed its schedule for the day, requiring us to adjust our legislator meeting schedule to accommodate their need to be in session that morning. At 9 a.m. our entire group gathered outside the Assembly chambers to meet *Assemblyman William Conrad*. He invited us in to be seated in the guest seating area, where we waited for session to begin. It gave us all a chance to also visit with *Assemblymen Patrick Burke, Stephen Hawley, and Andrew Goodell*.

At 9:30 Dave, Heather, Dan, Mike, Mary Jo, and I left the Assembly to attend a meeting with *Senator Patrick Gallivan*. In it the focus was the latest information on the Governor's proposed budget. Senator Gallivan assured us he is not in favor of the education cuts and will join others to push back and return the "hold harmless" funding.

Meanwhile, back in the Assembly, *AM Conrad* was introducing the group that had stayed behind. If you did not already view the clip from Dave's "This Week at ECASB" or from the link on page one, be sure to check it out. It was a genuinely exciting moment!

At 10 a.m., Kathleen, Erik, Ed, Heather, Mary Jo, and I visited with *Senator Mayer's* legislative director. Key points of discussion were the return of the "hold harmless" funds and issues regarding the zero-emission bus mandate. Her office made it clear that *Senator Mayer* supports the mandate, but is mindful of the costs and challenges. She is working at securing more funding and finding ways to fast-track grant applications with NYSERTA and other state organizations. Lake Shore has received a grant but is having trouble in the process with the State Education Department holding up plans in the state review process. One mantra of the day became 'the state cannot institute a financially burdensome mandate and then use a state agency to block successful completion of said mandate when grant funding is on the line.'

The 11 a.m. hour had the group split into multiple meetings. Some visited briefly with

*Senator Kennedy's Legislative Director* to discuss issues and leave behind the ECASB folder with our priorities. Others met with *AM Monica Wallace* in her office, and the last group visited the *AM Benedetto's* Chief of Staff. In each case, the priorities of ECASB districts and the opposing of the governor's cuts to the Education Budget were addressed.

At 12:30, the group again split into two groups to cover more ground, with some of us meeting with *Senator Robert Ort* and some meeting with *AM David DiPietro's* staff intern. Another group meet with *AM Michael Norris* at 1 p.m. Somewhere in there, Kathleen dropped off leave behind folders with the legislators we did not have appointments with, and Erik and Mary Jo went to *AM Hawley's* office just to drop off a folder, but instead were able to get a face-to-face impromptu meeting with him!

By 2 p.m., the group joined together again and met with *Senator Sean Ryan's* legislative director, ending the lobby day with one more round of priority sharing, and once again hearing the message that legislators will work together to push back on the Governor's education budget.

The day was successful. Our voices were carried to Albany and legislators did not disagree with our priorities, recognizing the many needs we have. Our work is not over. We must continue to write letters and postcards asking for legislation that favors equitable funding for public schools, relief from unfunded mandates, and help in handling student mental health and safety concerns. Please reach out to Jane at [jsullivan@e1b.org](mailto:jsullivan@e1b.org) for more information on upcoming events, to arrange meetings locally and for any help you need in getting started in advocating for your district.



## CAPITAL CONFERENCE REPORT

### Meeting Our Legislators in Albany Continued



Pictures from the day: The Capital Building, taken by Heather Jacobs as we began our day; Assemblyman Conrad introducing ECASB members to the Assembly Floor; ECASB members during the Floor recognition; Erik Polkowski, AM Hawley and Mary Jo Szucs in AM Hawley's office; and Mike Franey, David Lowrey, Senator Gallivan, Jane Sullivan and seated are Mary Jo Szucs and Heather Jacobs in Senator Gallivan's office.



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# A MESSAGE FROM SENATOR BORRELLO

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## Representing Erie 2 CC BOCES Districts

Dear Friends,

**I am writing to make you aware that Governor Hochul has proposed major changes to school funding in her Executive Budget that will result in devastating losses for at least half of the school districts in our state and district.**

The change is the elimination of a longstanding provision that ensures that no school district will receive less operating aid than it did the year before.

To make things worse, the governor is also looking to decrease foundation aid by using an inflation adjustment based on an eight-year average, rather than the current high inflation rate. This accounting scheme doesn't reflect today's economic reality and high cost of living, leaving school districts shortchanged.

**These budget changes have resulted in painful funding cuts to approximately half of the schools in the 57<sup>th</sup> Senate District, for a total loss of funding of approximately \$11 million.**

Unless this funding is restored, our students, teachers and local property taxpayers all stand to be hurt. That is unacceptable.

**In a \$233 billion proposed budget that increases state operating funds by \$5.9 billion, there are a lot of budget items that could have been cut or that shouldn't be funded at all, like:**

- **\$2.4 billion in funding for NYC for its self-created migrant crisis (*in addition to the \$2 billion we've already spent!*);**
- **\$150 million for swimming pools; and**
- **\$40 million for theft prevention because criminals run rampant in our state thanks to the policies of one-party rule.**

I will be fighting to restore school funding and equitable distribution to **ensure our kids have the educational resources they need** and to **protect our property taxpayers** from having to make up the state's shortfall.

The governor needs to get her priorities straight and leave our schools alone.

Sincerely,

George M. Borrello  
Senator, 57th District

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Fenton Building, Suite 302  
Jamestown, NY 14701  
716-664-4603

**Albany Office:**  
Room 707  
Legislative Office Building

**A letter above is shared with ECASB members. The letter was sent to constituents of Senator Borrello's office. The letter is shared with permission of Senator Borrello's office**