



*NYSSBA's Caroline Bobick hosted a virtual meeting with a staff member from Congressman Brian Higgins office on July 28, 2021. Those in attendance included Congressman Brian Higgins' Senior Policy Advisor Jessica Burnell included Lesley Battaglia (Ken-Ton UFSD Legislative Rep.) and me. NYSSBA hosts meeting with our federal legislators during the summer. NYSSBA always welcomes district advocates to attend the meetings.*

While many people are at the beach, hiking in the mountains, or at the airport, others are spending some free time chatting with legislators and their staff members advocating for local schools.

I enjoyed representing **ECASB** and **Iroquois**, As the Program Services Manager at ECASB, I am responsible for advocacy efforts on behalf of the organization. At Iroquois I serve as the Board President. The meeting on July 28th was a virtual meeting this year.. **Lesley Battaglia** from **Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda Union Free School District** and I joined **Jessica Burnell**, Senior Policy Advisor to Congressman Brian Higgins, along with **Caroline Bobick**, a Senior Governmental Relations Representative from New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA).

**Meet Congressman Brian Higgins**

**Brian Higgins is a member of the United States House of Representatives serving New York's 26th congressional district, which includes portions of Erie and Niagara Counties.**

**Social Media Platform Connections:**

- Twitter: <https://twitter.com/@RepBrianHiggins>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/RepBrianHiggins>
- YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/user/CongressmanHiggins>
- Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/repbrianhiggins/>
- Flickr: <https://www.flickr.com/photos/repbrianhiggins/>
- Pinterest: <https://pinterest.com/repbrianhiggins>



Caroline outlined talking points ahead of the meeting which included issues on Title I Funding, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), school meals, school safety, the Teacher Pipeline, the digital divide, and State and Local Tax Deductions (SALT-D). These talking points were merely an outline. We didn't necessarily stick to the script as it is important to relate how issues affect our individual districts. This is a chance for districts to tell their stories. .

Lesley and I both shared the ways our member districts are using the Federal Funds after a brief introduction on the topic from Caroline. We talked about the cost of staffing and remedial services needed in the



wake of learning loss from the pandemic. Lesley shared that administrators have stated that the process to gain some of the funds is difficult, calling it limiting and cumbersome.

I had the opportunity to talk about the increasing costs of school safety and security, such as costs associated with capital projects that address securing entranceways, installing locking systems and blue light systems, and the salaries of School Resource Officers (SROs). Parents need to know that when they send their children to school, the school is doing everything in their power to keep children safe.

Caroline shared, “one of our priorities last year was a big infrastructure package that did not advance for school district investments...the issue didn’t go away.”

Jessica confirmed, “We’ve heard from a number of folks...in various school districts...about infrastructure products. We have also heard about things like Title One over the past few years. There are all sorts of improvements we want to make, that need to be made both in terms of fi-

nancial capital projects, personnel and the ability to get the right folks into schools.” She added, “We keep pushing for these things, but they sometimes get stalled for one reason or another... Congressman Higgins has always been super, super supportive of Title One. We recognize the importance of Title One and the need for there to be an overall increase in that funding and also to be very mindful about how that funding is used.” We also talked about the free lunch program that ran during the pandemic and the support for a Universal Pre-K programs. Jessica indicated that Congressman Higgins is in full support of such things, but that “it is unfortunate that things like Universal Pre-K are not going to be in the final package.” She concluded, “There are incredibly dedicated advocates both within Congress and outside of Congress who are going to continue to push for things like that...we think the conversation around the expansion of universal Pre-K and those type of things will continue. The conversation isn’t over.”

### **Meet Senior Policy Advisor Jessica Burnell**

Jessica Burnell currently serves as Senior Policy Advisor to Congressman Brian Higgins (NY-26), a position she has held since March 2021.

In this role, she manages a legislative and policy portfolio that includes issues encompassing education, and she supports the Congressman’s work related to his position.

Jessica previously served as a health care fellow in the offices of Senator Michael Bennet and Senator Sherrod Brown as well as having served Congressman Higgins as the Health Policy Advisor from January 2019 to March 2021.

Prior to working on the Hill, Jessica was a Senior Research Assistant at the Duke-Robert J.



Margolis, MD Center for Health Policy at Duke University.

Jessica holds both a Bachelor of Arts in Economics and a Master of Public Administration degree from The George Washington University. She served as Editor-in-Chief of Volume 25 of Policy Perspectives, for which she received the Outstanding Student Leadership Award.