



Erie County Association of School Boards

Vol. 3; Issue 91 September 2023

ADVOCACY ALLIANCE MONTHLY YOUR MONTHLY UPDATE

Dear Members,

I attended the NYSSBA Leadership Conference in July and was introduced to the many things AI can do. I am now using Claude as my personal writing assistant. Claude has something to say:

Welcome back! I hope you all had a restful summer and are ready to dive back into the thrilling world of public education. As you know, nothing is more important than our children's futures. Well, besides maybe getting 18 holes in before happy hour. Am I right?

But seriously folks, as we embark on another school year, it's crucial we remember our calling as public servants. Educating the youth is a noble endeavor - when we're not being driven mad by their antics!

Here's to a year of helping our districts enlighten young minds and shape future leaders, as we cling to our last shreds of sanity. There will be trials and tribulations, but with dedication and teamwork, we can handle anything these rascallions and their parents throw our way. Now who wants to sneak into the teachers' lounge secret stash for an early happy hour? I won't tell if you won't!

Claude is certainly going to make things interesting this year.

Welcome Back Everyone!
Your Partner in Advocacy,
Jane

ECASB has an account with BillTrack50. Each Legislative Team member has access. If you would also like access, email Jane at jsullivan@e1b.org

Important Dates

- ⇒ Committee Meetings on Thursdays from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Delegates meet on Sept. 14, Legislative Team meets on Sept. 21 and Budget and Finance Meets on Sept. 28.
- ⇒ Encourage your district clerks to attend the District Clerk Workshop, Oct. 5 from 11:30 to 3:15 at Erie 1 BOCES in A-219.
- ⇒ Rick Timbs Dinner at The Columns on Oct. 12. Registration/Cash Bar is at 5:30, Dinner begins at 6 p.m. RSVP through your district clerk, who must RSVP for your district by Oct. 5.
- ⇒ Convention Fun– ECASB gets things started on Wed., Oct. 25 with a Kick Off cocktail party from 6:30-8:30 p.m. at Resurgence Brewing Co. Hope to see you there!

Our 2023-2024 Platinum Sponsors



time to talk

On the coldest day of the summer, August 23, 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 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 coali-

Our 2023-2024 Gold Sponsors



Leadership • Innovation • Commitment



tion, 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 inci-

dents 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 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."



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@elb.org; she will set you up with an account umbrellaed under the ECASB Bill Track 50 subscription. A basic training session held last year was recorded. If you would like to view the video, please email Jane. She can also do one-on-one training.

Look what the Governor Signed:

A06091/S01732-This bill, signed on Sept. 7, relates to student governments in secondary schools that have no districtwide or school building peer selected student government. There are no local legislators.

A00514/S05650-This bill, signed on Sept. 7, relates to expanding access to advanced courses to improve educational equity beginning with notification to parents and students on the benefits and opportunities offered as well as automatic enrollment opportunities. Local sponsor **Cystal Peoples-Stokes** is included among the statewide legislators sponsoring the bill.

A00068/S02140-This bill, signed on Sept. 6, directs the commissioner of education to issue guidance to school districts for developing programs to attract underrepresented candidates into the teaching profession and to identify funding available to school districts for such purposes. Local sponsors are **William Conrad** and **Joseph Giglio**. ***note*** This is an issue we have spoken to our legislators about. While it is just a step in helping find diverse teaching candidates, the key here is that it also looks at finding new ways to help districts fund programs. Anytime funding is linked to the bill, it is important to recognize it. Watch for the reports that SED will now generate.

Also, see the link in my email with a Buffalo News article about the bill the governor signed to make a new school holiday. There is also a link to a letter to the editor from Assemblyman William Conrad.

Here is what has been recently delivered to the Governor:

A07258/S04041-This bill replaces certain instances of the words handicapping conditions with disabilities in relation to children with disabilities. There are no local sponsors. It was delivered to the governor on Sept. 8.

A07037/S00209-This bill requires schools to provide teachers with written informational material on the use of epinephrine auto-injectors. There are no local sponsors. It was delivered to the governor on Sept. 7.

Here is an update on a bill we are interested in:

S07087-This bill provides for administration of certain funds for zero-emission school buses and supporting infrastructure by NYSEDA. There are no local sponsors and it does not have a companion bill. It did gain new sponsors from elsewhere in the state.



Our 2023-2024 Silver Sponsors

