



Erie County Association of School Boards

Vol. 3; Issue 7; March 2024

ADVOCACY ALLIANCE MONTHLY
YOUR MONTHLY UPDATE

Dear ECASB Members,

After several very busy advocacy months, March is a bit slower. Phew! We still have to keep a close eye on things even though we might not be meeting regularly with our elected officials. Before we know it, May 11th will be here and we will gather for breakfast and a report from our local legislators about the year in Albany and the successes for public education. We will learn how our advocacy paid off, and where we can improve.

How about this weather! I keep telling myself this is normal for March, but I must admit I am glad I will be on Spring Break in Florida next week. If I can get the sun and warmth to follow me home, I will.

By late April, our weather should be delightful, so I hope you will plan to attend the 2nd Annual Road Rally. It is on Sat., April 27th. You can bring anyone you want from your district. You can even bring your spouse! Cars with at least three people make the best teams; one person can drive, one can read the clues and rules, and one can take the photos and keep track of the map. Watch *This Week at ECASB* for developing details.

In the meantime, relax and enjoy a conversation with a local legislator's staff member in our Time to Talk Column.

Yours in Advocacy,

~Jane

Take Note...

- ⇒ Prospective school board members workshop, March 23; 8-10:30 a.m.
- ⇒ Legislative Team Meeting, April 18; 6:30 p.m.-8:30 p.m. in B1
- ⇒ ECASB Road Rally – Sat., April 27 8:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Watch This Week at ECASB for details!
- ⇒ Legislative Wrap-up Breakfast is Sat., May 11 at The Columns. Save the date.

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time to talk

Inside with Peter Stuhlmiller:

A chat with Assemblyman William Conrad's Special Assistant

Peter Stuhlmiller currently serves as Special Assistant with primary focus on Legislation for Assemblyman William Conrad. He taught Social Studies, including Participation in Government and AP Government for over 30 years at Kenmore West. During his career, he had the pleasure of working with Assemblyman Conrad as a colleague. Peter says, "Teaching government certainly heightened my awareness and appreciation for how democracy works at the federal, state, and local level. Encouraging my students to participate by registering to vote, writing their legislators, and attending public policy meetings also required that I model those important civic behaviors as well." It is not coincidental, that he became active in his local teacher's union eventually being elected by the members to serve as President. He asserts, "In this role, I could more formally advocate for students and teachers in Albany as well as Washington DC. Public funding and regulatory policies play a huge role in defining the quality of our student's learning environment. Government strongly impacts the extent to which school districts can support the social, academic, and emotional needs of our diverse students." Peter sees that it was important to work with like minded stakeholders such as parent groups, school board members, support staff and administrator organizations to help amplify the voices of public education with government representatives. Once he retired from teaching

and serving as Union President, he was pleased to join Assemblyman Conrad's staff.

Working in a legislative office certainly has its challenges. Peter shares, "There are a multitude of competing interests around New York State. Each issue requires extensive research to truly understand the impact that a policy, program, or proposed bill may have on the residents of New York State. It also requires a close look at the extent to which a bill may impact our region – as compared to residents in other areas of the state." He adds, "Many bills may be well intentioned but could have unintended consequences that need to be vetted and discussed. Of course, what our office considers a priority may not be as important in rural areas or urban centers. Building capacity and support across the state, with like minded stakeholders, is crucial to successful public policy."

Peter reveals, "We have a highly professional staff, and each person is very effective at what they do. We work well as team. Bill Conrad is down to earth, has a great sense of humor as well as a passion for good government. These are the qualities that make my position interesting and rewarding."

I asked Peter about ways we, as Board of Education Members, can advance our understanding of advocacy and what our legislators need from us. He articulates that our outreach and advocacy needs to be aligned with timing in the budget building process. He says, "Usually, legislators are submitting their priorities to conference leadership by mid-February. In turn, the leadership prepares a one House bill that captures what it considers to be the Assembly priorities. It's critical that legislators hear from their school districts in advance of the February submission, especially if these issues are budgetary in nature." This is something we have heard be-

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Time to Talk Continued...

fore and one of the reasons our Legislative Team has started our legislative work immediately in September, to prepare for our Legislative Event with local legislators in November. This year we started our follow-up meetings locally in Western New York as well, in hopes to reinforce our message and relate personal stories of districts' needs.

I asked what the biggest issues facing our legislators is and how we, as Board members can help our legislators. Peter explains and asks, "The diverse voices advocating for public education often have overlapping priorities. It would be helpful if advocacy groups could work together and identify those issues that overlap – amplify, in a common voice. In other words, Can the ECASB work with E-NSSA, the NY-SUT Regional Office, AQE, and/or each of the state affiliates to leverage and amplify the same issues that appear in each group's legislative priorities?" He does recognize that there are other issues important to School Boards that are certainly not priorities with the Teacher unions – but many are, and he suggests it would be helpful if advocacy could come from a more united front – rather than operating in separate silos. He also shares an important key point to remember, "Wherever possible, the more data and research compiled to support advocacy the more helpful it is for legislators." So in your next meeting, keep notes of not just the story, but also the data that supports those stories.

I told Peter that our members often speak about the foundation aid funding issues and asked what his take is on this issue and if he thought we would see any kind of significant changes in the next three to five years? Peter suggests, "Certainly, using calculated wealth ratios as a major factor in determining a district's foundation aid needs to be examined. The challenge is to assure districts, - especially in light of the tax cap, that any corrections in the formula will not have a detrimental effect on individual districts."

When it comes to things we as board members need to know about advocacy, Peter says, "Our office appreciates the dedication and commitment that ECASB demonstrates in pro-

tecting the sound and basic education to which our students are entitled. Your efforts in the Assembly and Senate are significant. In the budget and legislative process we hope the governor's office is hearing your message with the same clarity and volume."

Finally, Peter concludes our interviewing sharing that, "Serving on the Board of Education can be a thankless job – that often can involve conflict – not to mention stress. We appreciate your sense of civitas – and stepping up to help shepherd your school district through some very challenging times."



Peter Stuhlmiller is the Special Assistant to Assemblyman William Conrad and can be reached at stuhlmillerp@nyassembly.gov

IN THE NEWS

Articles that may interest you



Click on the links below to get the latest Education News:

[Schools look at layoffs as funding woes mount](#)

Buffalo News, March 19, 2024

[Group urges state to reform FOIL and boost transparency](#)

Buffalo News, March 15, 2024

[GOP primary for rural Assembly seat heats up with endorsements, Caputo criticism](#)

Buffalo News, Dec. 2023

Time to Take Action

It is no secret that not all our local legislators are as engaged in education legislation as we would like. That doesn't mean they are not willing to work with us. Each legislator has received a copy of our legislative priorities. Sometimes, they may need more information. Legislators need to hear the stories behind our priorities. They need to learn and understand what is at stake.

I have begun to suspect that in some cases, the legislators become uncomfortable because education legislation is outside their wheelhouse. With this in mind, perhaps they just need some encouragement.

This spring and summer, I am going to begin looking into how our local legislators are voting on legislation specific to education. When I spot a legislator who votes in support of legislation that aligns with our priorities, I will reach out and ask our members to send "Thank You" notes to let them know they are already doing a good job.

The goal here is to make them comfortable engaging in education matters and to let them know that their constituents are paying attention. Who doesn't like to receive a note of thanks or encouragement?



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:

A09451/S01879 (District Personnel) - This bill modifies the education law in the state of New York to clarify who qualifies as the chief financial officer (CFO) in a school district. According to the proposed amendment, any official who reports directly to the Superintendent and holds appropriate certifications as required by the department may be considered as the CFO. These include but are not limited to, the assistant superintendent for business, school business administrator, school business officer, or any other similar official. The law would take effect from the first day of July following the date it is passed. There is no local sponsor.

A09492/S08740 (SRO) - This bill proposes that both public and nonpublic schools should have the authority to hire school resource officers to enhance public safety and security within school premises. School resource officers can include diverse roles like school safety officers or school security officers, all aiming to improve safety and security on school grounds. This act would apply to any cooperative educational service boards and public or nonpublic school districts, excluding city school districts in cities with a population exceeding one million. According to the bill, a school resource officer's primary role should be enhancing public safety and security through community policing techniques, investigative measures, and tactical preparedness. The act would take immediate effect if passed. There are no local sponsors.

A09371 (Curriculum) - This bill proposes an amendment to the education law to mandate the establishment of a domestic violence awareness curriculum for school districts. The curriculum's content would need to be age appropriate and adapted to different grade levels. It would be developed under the guidance of the commissioner in conjunction with domestic violence prevention and child and family services offices. The objective is to provide students with necessary skills, information, and support to enhance domestic violence awareness. The curriculum can be incorporated into the existing health curriculum or in any way found suitable by the school. The bill, if enacted, would come into effect on July 1, 2025. There is no same as the Senate bill and there are no local sponsors.

S08698/A00098 (Equipment Requirement) - is an act to amend the education law, in relation to requiring monthly inspections of all AED equipment. There are no local sponsors.

S08699 (Equipment Requirement) - is an act to amend the education law, in relation to requiring a yearly inspection of all audiological testing equipment. There is no local sponsor.

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A LETTER FROM SENATOR BORRELLO

Shared with CCSBA at their Legislative Dinner on March 20,

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March 20, 2024

Dear Friends,

Thank you for inviting me to this evening's event. It is something that I always look forward to and regret that this year I am unable to be there as the Senate is still in session in Albany.

However, please rest assured that I have been advocating for our schools and for the restoration of school funding that was cut from the Executive Budget as a result of the elimination of the "hold harmless" standard.

As you know, this provision has been a lifeline for our rural schools by ensuring stable funding, regardless of any changes in enrollment. Its abrupt elimination came without warning. It was immediately unacceptable to those of us who realized the consequences it would have for our students, teachers and communities.

I am glad to report that our Democratic colleagues shared our concerns and rejected the governor's changes in the Senate and Assembly budgets, which were passed last week. Under these plans, all school districts will receive a *minimum* three percent increase in aid. While the final budget must still be negotiated between the legislature and the governor, I am optimistic that the outcome will be in favor of our schools.

The Senate and Assembly budgets also contained \$1 million for a study of the foundation aid formula which I know is also a priority for the School Boards Association. It hasn't been updated in over a decade and no longer reflects the full cost of educating students. In my meetings with teachers and administrators over the past several months, they have all made the point that schools today are coping with an unprecedented range of student needs and challenges. From mental health services, before and after care, and family outreach and support, virtually all of our schools have become 'community schools' by default. We need a foundation aid formula that accounts for these realities.

My thanks go out to all the dedicated school board members and staff who are helping our schools navigate these challenges while delivering on their educational mission. Your efforts are an investment in our children and their futures. I can't think of anything more important.

Thank you all,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "George M. Borrello". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letters of the first and last names being capitalized and prominent.

Senator George Borrello
57th District