



Erie County Association of School Boards

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ADVOCACY ALLIANCE MONTHLY
YOUR MONTHLY UPDATE

Dear ECASB Members,
With the legislative dinner behind us and the Capital Conference ahead, I have been working with small groups to schedule meetings with our legislators in their local offices before they head back to Albany in January.

I had a great conversation getting to know Dr. Capuana, the Erie 1 BOCES District Superintendent. He is featured in the Time to Talk column. And in a shameless advertisement for our NYSSBA & ECASB January 27th Breakfast, I have used AI to “write” a poem. Hopefully, it gives you a little holiday cheer.

Coming soon, as the new year begins, nominations for ECASB annual awards will open. Please be sure to watch your emails for more about the awards, but if you can’t wait, you can always go to the ECASB website and navigate to the awards page. There you will find information about each award and the nomination forms. There are many deserving people serving on our Boards of Education, serving as Superintendents, and serving as District Clerks, but we can’t recognize them if you don’t nominate them!

With the holiday season in full swing, I wish everyone a joyous few weeks filled with peace and goodwill.

With Holiday Cheer,
~Jane



Important Dates

Local Winter Legislative Conference (LWLC): Please email Jane (jsullivan@e1b.org) if you would like an appointment with your state legislator during LWLC.

- ⇒ ECASB Awards Nominations open January 2, 2024. Visit our ECASB.org website for more information.
- ⇒ Legislative Team Meeting, Jan. 18; 6:30-8:30 p.m. in room B1
- ⇒ Watch for information on a NYSSBA/ECASB joint event, scheduled for Jan. 27, 2024.

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time to talk



The Starting Point is the Students:

Dr. Michael Capuana's Advocacy Advice for School Board Members

I did not have to go far to find Dr. Michael Capuana. We met for our chat in his office at Erie 1 BOCES, just down the hall from the ECASB office. Dr. Capuana is the Erie 1 BOCES District Superintendent, a role he took over about 18 months ago. Born and raised locally, Dr. Capuana began his 21 year career in education, as an English teacher first in Buffalo Public Schools and then at Depew High School. He spoke about the leadership opportunities with which he was presented and how they helped him develop the skills that led him to his current position. While in Buffalo, he was part of a group that used a grant to build City Voices, City Visions, a digital storytelling and reading program that allowed kids to create original content on the one Mac computer in his classroom. In Depew, he was a leader in building the Freshman Academy. Both enabled him to develop a leadership mindset and ways to see education systems and how they can help a district create quality educational opportunities for students. Then 14 years ago, Dr. Capuana made the move to work at Erie 1 BOCES working in the alternative education at Northtowns Academy and at the East Ferry Detention Youth Center, which he emphasizes to have been an impactful experience. Working in alternative education and career education at the building level, he eventually moved into the district office in a variety of roles involved with special education,

CTE, workforce development and instructional services. When the opportunity for District Superintendent was presented, with all his experience, Dr. Capuana was a logical choice. As a teacher in leadership positions Dr. Capuana learned firsthand the importance of advocacy. He has remained in positions in which advocating has been an integral part of his job. He sees advocacy as necessary to answering the challenges of building community, supporting students, providing a voice for the underserved, and finding flexibility and supports for all students across the region regardless of whether the students are in a traditional classroom, a BOCES program, a special education classroom, or are adult learners changing careers. Dr. Capuana says, "I have always been involved in advocating for partnerships with our component districts and equitable access for kids across the community to have opportunities to engage with programs that are going to keep them on the path towards their next steps." To accomplish this, he has fought for resources and grant funding and has had conversations with school districts making sure services provided to them through BOCES were high quality. This often meant (and still means) working with local legislators to make sure they are clear on what BOCES does to support and be responsive to component districts and their students, faculty and staff. A BOCES District Superintendent has a unique role in that he or she serves as the commissioner of education's representative in his or her local region. Dr. Capuana is one of 37 District Superintendents in the state. He travels to Albany every month for a meeting with the other District Superintendents and then with the State Education Department for conversations with experts and leadership. The conversations are forward

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Time to Talk Continued

thinking, looking at what's coming to education, what reform agendas are going to be, and about types of situations and changes for which schools need to be prepared. Dr. Capuana also takes back to State Ed what the realities are in the district. He shares what superintendents and boards of education are working through, struggling with and need assistance with.

He spoke about the work he is currently doing to advocate for the school districts working through the challenges of the sudden influx of asylum-seeking families who have come to Western New York as just one example of his present-day advocacy efforts.

We also discussed what he sees as the main issues facing BOCES in terms of advocacy needs, and not surprisingly, several are priorities of ECASB as well. The first was about foundation aid and the formula. He says we need to be "maintaining and modernizing state aid that reflects the needs of the students that we are serving and the communities that we're working across." We must be advocating because the needs students have changed and will continue to do so.

Dr. Capuana sees we are at a unique point now when it comes to this advocacy piece: "What I anticipate happening is there's going to be a need to assess [the formula] and the way education aid is flowing throughout the state...full funding of foundation aid has been positive, but there's a conversation at the state level with both legislators and SED about how does that formula, if at all, get adjusted." His contention is, "if there is going to be a change to that formula it needs to be informed by the reality that schools are in and the needs of the students in those districts...that has changed in New York State and across the regions." As board members it is our responsibility to thoughtfully communicate back to our legislators.

It's not uncommon for schools in Western New York to be challenged with shortages in faculty and staff. Dr. Capuana is looking to find some solutions with anticipated reforms in certification that would open pathways for cross state reciprocity of certification areas. He also sees cooperation with higher education institutions

to encourage new teachers as an important piece of the puzzle; we need to recruit young people to the field again. Dr. Capuana also shared his thoughts on the "Fix Tier 6" initiative and other organized efforts for viable ways to recruit and retain new teachers, indicating that these are also important areas of focus.

The third advocacy area Erie 1 BOCES has in common with ECASB's priorities is student mental health, and Dr. Capuana is really proud of the work Erie 1 BOCES has started in the last year a half: "...we've started with the Western New York Smart Collaborative in partnership with Erie County...trying to make those systems a little less intimidating for families and kids to be able to access."

The final advocacy issue at the present time concerns expansion of the CTE and exceptional education programming. He shares, "We've been successful with the CTE opening our Cal Span to add additional space and capacity. The next one for us really is around special education and how we [Erie 1 BOCES] can develop programming and space that's going to continue to meet the needs of all of our students from across the region."

Dr. Capuana says, "I think advocacy is critical for board members." Focusing on what board members can and should do when preparing for advocating, Dr. Capuana stresses:



Dr. Capuana is pictured with one of the students and a teacher in the Auto Body program at one of the Erie 1 BOCES CTE programs.

Time to Talk Continued...

- Board Members need to make sure they are talking with their district administration to be sure they are educated on and understand the needs of the school district.

- Ask questions to garner information on the emerging trends to the school district.

- Understand what the impacts of trends and the response will be on classrooms and kids in their district.

- See the larger picture of what the field is going to be dealing with...trying to identify common advocacy points that as a board and as a district that you can support to improve achievement and engagement.

- Attend ECASB and NYSSBA programming to better understand issues and learn how to advocate.

Dr. Capuana credits his parents for beginning his passion for education. His upbringing was heavily focused on service and support. His parents were not teachers, but they recognized the importance of education and instilled that value in their son. Dr. Capuana also sees the value in connecting with kids: “I just love connecting with kids, and I love being around other educators. One of my favorite things is when I make sure I block time to go out and visit classrooms...the impact a teacher can have...it was teachers that brought that to life [in me].”



Dr. Capuana is pictured during a building visit to one of the 19 component districts in the Erie 1 BOCES district.

Time to Take Action

There are many opportunities for advocacy in the next few months. Be sure to add these to your calendar and let Jane Sullivan know when you plan to attend any of them by emailing her at jsullivan@e1b.org.

Local Winter Conference:

Senator Kennedy Staff: Thurs., Dec. 14; 3 p.m.; 37 Franklin St. on the 5th floor with Jessica LaFalce and Bob Brandon

Assemblywoman Wallace: Mon., Dec. 18; 3:45 p.m.; 2562 Walden Ave. Suite 102 in Cheektowaga.

Senator Gallivan: Thurs., Jan. 11; 3 p.m.; 2721 Transit Rd, Elma, NY 14059

NYSSBA Capital Conference:

Virtual Meeting on February 2 online. More information will come to your email from NYSSBA.

2024 In-person Capital Conference on Wednesday, February 7 in Albany. (Let Jane know you plan to attend by January 15 so she can set up meetings. If you are interested in the ECASB scholarship money given to a board member who wishes to attend but does not have district money needed to do so, please contact Dave Lowrey at dlowrey@e1b.org for an application.

Wrap-Up Breakfast on Saturday, May 11. Watch for more information 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:

A08258-Authorizes the state education department to contract for a program related to teacher recruitment and retention. Introduced on Nov. 15, it is locally sponsored by *Assemblyman William Conrad*.

A08306-Requires that instruction in financial literacy be provided to pupils in grades nine through twelve; establishes what should be included in such curriculum including the basics of financial planning, budgeting, borrowing, interest rates, and personal insurance policies. Introduced on Nov. 27, it has no local sponsor.

A08316-Requires new teachers applying for certification or a license including childhood education teachers, early education teachers, special education teachers, or reading specialists to have completed training for evidence-based reading instruction. Introduced on Nov. 27, it has no local sponsor.

A08319 An act to amend the education law, in relation to declaring Pulaski Day a school holiday. Introduced on Nov. 27, it is sponsored locally by *Assemblyman Patrick Burke*.

A08320-An act to amend the education law, in relation to requiring certain teachers who provide literacy instruction obtain a literacy endorsement. Introduced on Nov. 27, it has no local sponsor.

A08404/S07751-Relates to providing additional reimbursement to school districts for expenses incurred as a result of an influx of migrant students entering the schools of the districts; directs the governor to submit chapter amendments to the Aid to Localities budget. It was introduced in the Senate on 11/15 and the Assembly on 12/13. There are no local sponsors.

Gaining Sponsors in the Senate:

S00089/A00351- Prohibits a town, city, or county industrial development agency from waiving taxes which would be received by a school district. This one was brought to our attention by *Senator Ryan* at our local meeting. Introduced last January, he is the Senator sponsor. The assembly bill is sponsored locally by *Assemblywoman Monica Wallace and Assemblyman Jonathan Rivera*.

S05986/A06807-Includes digital materials within school library materials. Introduced in May, *Senator Ryan* is now a local sponsor. The companion bill has no local sponsorship.

Gaining Sponsors in the Assembly:

A05538/S05955-Exempts books, magazines, pamphlets and other related items sold at a primary or secondary school facility or at a library at a book fair organized, hosted or sponsored by an organization established for educational purposes, including but not limited to a parent-teacher association, booster club, or a similar



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Bill Alert Continued

school-based association which supports school activities, or a friends of the library organization from sales and compensating use taxes. This bill was introduced in March by *Assemblyman Jonathan Rivera*. It has since crossed over to the senate in June. The senate bill has no local sponsorship.

A07525/S06880- Relates to annual professional performance reviews of teachers and principals; establishes an optional system of annual professional performance review plans; repeals provisions relating to streamlined removal procedures for teachers rated ineffective. First introduced in the Senate on May 12, it is locally sponsored by *Senators Patrick Gullivan, Tim Kennedy and Sean Ryan*. Introduced in the Assembly on May 25, it is now locally sponsored by *AMs Karen McMahon, Michael Norris and Monica Wallace*.

A08076-Creates a school budget tax cap exemption for expenditures resulting from settlements or jury awards for civil actions brought against school districts under the child victims act. Introduced on Sept. 27 by Assemblyman William Conrad and sponsored by *Assemblywomen Karen McMahon and Monica Wallace*, this bill picked up two non-local sponsors.

On The Governor Desk:

A03328/S07813- Improves the transportation of children with special needs to and from school; provides that bussing time shall not exceed one and one-half hours; provides a special needs liaison to work with each family with a child with special needs; makes related provisions. This was deliver to the Governor on 12/13. There are no local sponsors.

***Note to consider-**When a bill states that there is no impact to the budget, they mean the *state budget*. Too often bills turn out to have a considerable cost to taxpayers via their school budgets at the local level and would certainly be considered an impact. Its time to start asking legislators to recognize the costs they are passing on to our districts.*



IN THE NEWS

Articles that may interest you

By now, you must be aware that US Legislator Brian Higgins is stepping down from his seat in congress to take over as president of Shea's. Several articles from the Buffalo News discussed several names that have been considered to replace Representative Brian Higgins.

[Poloncarz wont run to replace Higgins.](#)

[Hochul facing veto decisions on numerous bills near year's end.](#)

[Martin to challenge DiPietro in GOP Assembly primary](#)

LEGISLATIVE LOCAL WINTER CONFERENCES

Something New This Year...

At the advice of Assemblyman William Conrad, who suggested we do more advocacy prior to legislators going back to Albany in January, we have started a new advocacy effort this winter: Legislative Local Winter Conferences. Legislative Team members and Board members interested in advocacy are invited to attend any of the conferences with our local legislators. If you did not sign up, it is not too late. Just email Jane at jsullivan@e1b.org and let her know you are interested in participating and if you have a specific legislator you would like to meet with. On Thursday, December 7, Scott Johnson, Sweet Home and ECASB Legislative Chair; Jane Sullivan, ECASB program services manager and Iroquois; Mark Manna, Williamsville; Sherry Steffans, Grand Island; and Karen Whitelaw, Ken-Ton, met with Senator Sean Ryan in his local office on the waterfront.

The meeting was very positive. The group spoke about teacher and staffing shortages, and Senator Ryan agrees that Tier 6 in the teacher retirement system at least needs to be looked at and we need to address the shortages. Finding creative solutions that include certification programs and ways to attract people to the field are necessary. Scott offered Assemblyman William Conrad's bill number A08258 on teacher recruitment and retention as an example of legislation ECASB supports and mentioned that it needs a senate companion bill.

Part of the conversation centered on zero emission buses. The Senator said take a deep breath...there are likely to be changes to the mandates and while there is not likely to be more funding coming, there may be other solutions in the works that will help. He also wants to see proposals coming from a different angle such as a program to help retrofit schools to be more energy efficient.

Sherry Steffans made a great plea on behalf of student mental health and Senator Ryan was attentive and engaged. He seemed open to fur-

ther ideas on programs to help and he clearly sees this as an issue far beyond just schools. From the questions he asked, he is looking at the issue of mental health as a multi-prong problem with solutions that need to be addressed both in school and in hospitals as well as workforce recruitment.

Scott Johnson talked about bill S01039, on the governor's desk. This bill about changing the way civil service employees are disciplined, making it similar to the tenure system used for instructional staff. Senator Ryan admitted not knowing anything about it but would certainly investigate it and do what he can.

At the end of the meeting, Senator Ryan gave us a pitch on one of his bills: S00089. It deals with IDA exclusions from school taxes. His initial look at the numbers suggest the amount of tax breaks businesses are getting is enormous. While this isn't a big issue from a district perspective, it could mean a lot to our residential stakeholders. The levy is a set number but if this bill were to pass, it would mean residents would see a decrease in taxes because businesses would now have to pay their share. There would no more school tax exemptions allowed in IDA/Pilots. I will continue to try to track down that bill number and keep you posted, and it is on the Bill Alert sheet this month.

There are several more meetings with local legislators in the coming days and weeks. Let Jane know if you wish to attend any of them.

Other scheduled meetings are as follows:

- Senator Timothy Kennedy Staff Members : Thursday, December 14 at 3 p.m.
- Assemblywoman Monica Wallace: Tuesday, December 19 at 3 p.m.
- Senator Patrick Gallivan: Thursday, January 11, 2024 at 3 p.m.

A LEGISLATIVE POEM

A PLUG FOR THE NYSSBA/ ECASB JANUARY 27 PROGRAM

Have you tried using AI yet? Are you interested about what it means for education k-12? Have you thought about how it can enhance your programming? What challenges does it bring? I used ChatGPT-Open AI to create the following poem. It took me less than a minute. I simply opened the app and wrote "Write an inspirational piece on advocating for education at the state level as a parody of 'T'was the Night Before Christmas," and in under 10 seconds the poem was written. Enjoy, and plan to attend the special program on January 27th. Dave will be sending details for this breakfast event to your email this week.

'Twas the night before legislation, when all through the state, Not a policymaker was stirring, not even a delegate. The budgets were drafted by committees with care, In hopes that education soon would be declared fair.

The students were nestled all snug in their beds, While visions of knowledge danced in their heads. And teachers in classrooms, and parents at home, Dreamed of a system where all could freely roam.

When out on the floor there arose such a clatter, Policymakers sprang from their seats to see what was the matter. Away to the podium, they flew in a flash, To discuss education, and cut through the clash.

The moon on the crest of the freshly passed bill, Gave the luster of hope to the schools on the hill. When, what to their wondering eyes should appear, But a vision of progress, bringing joy and cheer.

With a charismatic leader, so lively and quick, They knew in a moment it must be the pick. More rapid than eagles, the votes they came, And they whistled and shouted and called them by name.

"Now, Representatives! Now, Senators! Now, Advocates and Chiefs! On, Principals! On, Parents! On, Teachers and Beliefs! To the top of the capitol! To the halls of the dome! Now pass away, pass away, pass away, home!"

As dry leaves before the wild hurricane fly, When they meet with an obstacle, mount to the sky. So up to the statehouse, the coursers they flew, With a sleigh full of reforms, and the future anew.

And then, in a twinkling, they heard in the hall, The prancing and pawing of each eager thrall. As they drew in their breath, and were turning around, down the chimney St. Education came with a bound.

He was dressed all in wisdom, from his head to his foot, And his clothes were all tarnished with ashes and soot. A bundle of books he had flung on his back, And he looked like a scholar just opening his pack.

His eyes, how they twinkled! His dimples, how merry! His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry! His droll little mouth was drawn up like a bow, And the beard on his chin was as white as the snow.

The stump of a pen he held tight in his teeth, And the ink, it encircled his head like a wreath. He had a broad face and a round little belly, That shook when he laughed, like a bowl full of jelly.

He was wise and sagacious, a right jolly old elf, And they cheered when they saw him, in spite of themselves. A wink of his eye and a twist of his head, Soon gave them to know they had nothing to dread.

He spoke not a word, but went straight to his work, And filled all the classrooms, then turned with a jerk. And laying his finger aside of his nose, And giving a nod, up the chimney he rose! He sprang to his sleigh, to his team gave a whistle, And away they all flew like the down of a thistle. But they heard him exclaim, ere he drove out of sight, "Happy learning to all, and to all a good night!"

