



June 2025

## I. Introduction

The 2025 state-level legislative season is coming to a close, and there are emerging trends that impact Community Schools, family engagement, and related whole-child and youth development strategies. Over 60% of governors are promoting two or more education priorities, namely, **workforce alignment and career and technical education (CTE), education funding alternatives, school choice, and cell phone bans.**

Community Schools continue to be a state-level priority, with twelve state legislatures introducing bills to fund existing or new Community School initiatives. New Mexico's state legislature passed a law renaming its Community Schools grant fund after Dr. Jeannie Oakes, allowing implementation grants of up to \$150,000, and updating the framework to reflect current research. Moreover, 38 states are currently reviewing over 100 bills related to parent and family engagement, primarily focusing on the role of parents in their child's education.

## II. State Level Education Priorities

Governors are supporting cradle-to-career strategies, including pushing for better childcare options, expanded access to postsecondary education, and reexamining school funding formulas. States like California and Kentucky are calling for universal Pre-K. New Jersey made history by fully funding their school funding formula, and Vermont, Virginia, Missouri, and Nebraska announced intent to reform their public school funding formula. Iowa, Texas, Illinois, California, and Idaho are exploring pathways to allow community colleges to offer bachelor's degree programs. Currently, 28 states have cell phone restriction policies, with nine states implementing total bans on phones in the classroom. And, 21 states are working to expand support for school vouchers and education savings accounts (ESAs).

### III. State Policies: Regional Breakdown

#### Northeast

The prominent educational priorities in the Northeast included improving the education workforce, workforce readiness, and continuing to strongly support public education. For example:

- Rhode Island Governor Daniel McKee is leading an initiative to build community learning centers for students and families. In his FY2026 budget to the General Assembly, he asked to allocate \$40 million in state aid to Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and \$2.5 million in grants for out-of-school learning programs, which can be used to support the Community School strategy. Rhode Island House Bill 5976 allocated this sum and was referred to the House Finance Committee in April, where it is on hold for later consideration.
- In Delaware, Governor Matt Meyer, a former math teacher, advocated for reforming the state's education funding formula to better address students' individual needs, both inside and outside the classroom.
- Phil Scott, Vermont's Governor, called for school budgets to be set by the state instead of the school level. H.454 reflected Governor Scott's asks, dividing the state into five school districts. This bill passed both the Vermont House and Senate, and as of the first week of June, a Committee of Conference Report was released in efforts to reconcile the two bills.
- After proposing changes to the Blueprint for Maryland's Future to help close a budget shortfall, Governor Wes Moore worked with the state's lawmakers to avoid cutting \$1.6 billion over 4 years by adjusting the Blueprint spending to align with inflation starting in 2027.

#### West

The prominent educational priorities in the West included supporting public schools and expanding school choice initiatives. For example:

- As the Chair of the National Governors Association, Colorado Governor Jared Polis has launched the 2024-2025 initiative Let's Get Ready: Educating All Americans for Success, to prepare students for the new economy. Governor Polis also supports school choice to address public school shortages across Colorado.

## West (cont.)

- Gavin Newsom, California's Governor, is reaffirming his commitment to Community Schools, noting that Proposition 98, which guarantees a minimum funding level for K-12 and Community Colleges, is anticipated to be \$119.2 billion in fiscal year 2025. These dollars include \$300 million in grants for teacher recruitment and professional development programs, \$2.4 billion for transitional kindergarten, and an increase of \$138 million in per-pupil funding from the previous fiscal year. On May 7, it was announced that \$618 million was approved to support another 458 community schools. The budget is expected to be finalized and signed this summer.
- Arizona Governor Katie Hobbs has called for further accountability of ESAs, which the state instituted in 2022, in order to reduce spending.

## South

The leading educational priorities in the South were educational choice programs, expanding CTE, and increasing public education funding. For example:

- North Carolina's Governor, Josh Stein, proposed launching a bipartisan task force on Child Care and Early Education and proposed a \$4 billion public school bond. North Carolina Senate Bill 440, the 2025 Governor's Budget, was referred to the Senate Appropriations Committee in late March.
- Bill Lee, Tennessee's Governor, planned an additional \$580 million for public school investments, such as teacher pay increases and funding for summer learning programs. The House and Senate are currently considering different versions of the bill, including the governor's budgetary bill amendment, Tennessee School Accountability Act.
- States in the South widely support school choice programs. Texas, after decades of trying to expand school choice, passed Governor Greg Abbott's \$1 billion voucher program in May, designed to allow public dollars to "follow the student," including when the student enrolls in private school.
- Oklahoma's Governor, Kevin Stitt, continued his support for the state's use of public dollars to fund private, religious charter schools. The state's charter school policy came before the U.S. Supreme Court this session. The Supreme Court case, Oklahoma Charter School Board v. Drummond, was decided on May 22, in a 4-4 vote, upholding the Oklahoma Supreme Court ruling against religious charter schools.

## Midwest

The most prominent educational priorities in the Midwest were school and community partnerships, workforce readiness and CTE, and investing in early childhood development programs. For example:

- Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds advocated for an Early Childhood Care grant program (Senate Bill 445) that would enable community partnerships with schools for services like childcare. This could create opportunities for Community Schools in the state to develop new partnerships to serve the needs of their students and families. As of late April, SB445 passed the Iowa Senate and is now in the House. It was read and passed on file, meaning it has not yet been referred to a committee.
- Laura Kelly, Kansas's Governor, promoted the creation of the Office of Early Childhood with the goal of expanding access to programs in rural communities and improving the training of early childhood care providers. Kansas House Bill 2294, designed to create this office, passed the Kansas House and was referred to the Kansas Senate Committee on Public Health and Welfare in March.
- Nebraska's Governor, Jim Pillen, called for a blue-ribbon commission of experts to recommend a new school funding formula. Community Schools could use this opportunity to advocate for investments in the Full-Service Community School strategy. This commission was introduced in Nebraska Senate Bill LR189, which was referred to the Senate Education Committee in mid-May.
- Mike DeWine, Ohio's Governor, sought input from the state's superintendents to establish school-based health clinics in their districts. Ohioans in support of Community Schools (Community Learning Centers) could use this opportunity to foster partnerships with health providers to support their students and families.
- In North Dakota, Governor Kelly Armstrong advocated for the state to expand CTE, school choice, and parents' rights.

## IV. Conclusion

Across the country, there is bipartisan support for workforce readiness, which aligns with two of the Full-Service Community School essentials: expanded and enriched learning opportunities and rigorous community-connected classroom instruction. Moreover, several states are aiming to partner with community organizations, such as childcare providers and healthcare clinics. Governors are calling for changes in the school funding formula, establishing new offices or task forces aimed at improving access and quality of public education programs, and seeking to increase funding for public schools.

As the educational landscape evolves, IEL's educators, community partners, and state networks play a key role in shaping the path forward. Building relationships with local, state, and federal representatives fosters collaboration and progress. Sharing your community school's impact can help inform supportive policies. The time is now to work together with our networks and communities to sustain and progress the Community Schools movement. Reach out to your representatives to share your story or to start a conversation today!

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